



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP AT THE AUSTRALIAN FILM INSTITUTE AWARDS PRESENTATION, SYDNEY, 5 NOVEMBER 1993

I am delighted to be here tonight with friends in film and television to celebrate another year of spectacular achievement for the industry.

Another year of success and confidence.

As an Australian I'm very proud that we have a world class film and television industry which produces world class material. And with it an event such as the AFI awards to recognise it.

I know that over recent times, and particularly in the light of the nominations for Best Film this year, we've had a bit of a debate about what an Australian film looks like.

About whether you have to have a gum tree rather than a fir tree in it. Or sun, sand and surf. And a little snow - or in Vincent's case, a lot of snow.

About whether its got to be packed with people who are recognisably Australian, and, if so, who is. About whether its still OK to do period pieces

I know that this is more than a matter of taste or fashion and I welcome the debate.

In fact, as you've probably noticed, I welcome most debates about our cultural identity, and none more so than in this industry which is so crucial to our cultural development.

And that I think is the important point.

This industry is crucial to our cultural development.

We need it - and we can't do without it.

Other countries can, of course, produce films, indeed excellent films, for Australians to see. And to learn from.

But that is a very different matter.

The simple fact is that no other country can produce Australian films. Or Australian television programs.

Nor can they acquire the ability to do so. It's not something they can be educated to or grow into. It's certainly not something they can buy or we can sell.

No-one else can give Australians (or indeed the rest of the world) the perspectives that our filmmakers do.

That is why we have to make sure that Australians don't lose creative control over the things that help us and future generations to understand what it means to be Australian.

Why we have to make sure that the revolution in communications technology serves our cultural needs, rather than sit back and allow the globalisation of the telecommunications market to set our cultural agenda for us.

Globalisation can of course work in our favour too. It can create opportunities for our films to be seen more widely.

And as films such as *Strictly Ballroom* and *the Heartbreak Kid*, among others, show, we can go on making, dare I say it, distinctly Australian films, which the global market will pick up. Films which are not hung up on categorization or ideological purity.

Australians must retain the capacity to show ourselves to the world and to tell the world our stories - the ones that we want to tell. The ones that we should tell.

But this does not preclude our filmmakers from exploring other parts of the world. We don't have a monopoly on insight into the human condition. There are lots of things out there for us to learn. And to tell others about.

Nor should it preclude us from attracting other filmmakers to Australia to make their films, or from pursuing new co-operative arrangements, particularly within our region.

When I was in China earlier this year, I was fortunate to be able to visit the Beijing Film Studio, and meet Chen Kaige. Filmmakers such as Chen are at the front of liberal change in China. It would be good to see our industry working cooperatively with them.

We need such things to keep the industry flourishing. So we can provide Australians and many others with what they clearly want to see.

While this Government will always be ready to assist in the process, it cannot nor should not be responsible for maintaining the critical mass the industry needs to survive.

But I can assure you that we will continue to be a strong supporter and keep looking for new and better ways to help.

I congratulate the AFI and everyone involved for the great show tonight. I congratulate the ABC for televising it. Most of all, I congratulate the industry for its successes over the last year and I look forward eagerly to the triumphs that are sure to come.

Thank you.