



THE VIC REPORT

IF'S GUIDE TO VICTORIA



Hangin' Rock, Macedon Ranges.

VICTORIAN VISION

Jackie Keast talks to the newly appointed Film Victoria CEO Caroline Pitcher about her vision for the agency going forward, and how she hopes to guide the Victorian screen industry through the challenges and opportunities of a global market.

While Victoria has long been one of Australia's key production hubs, the 2016-17 financial year was a record breaker for state funding agency Film Victoria – with \$230.5 million worth of production expenditure generated out of the 84 film, television and games projects it backed. Over half of that spend was due to production of television drama titles like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Wentworth*, *Glitch*, *Offspring*, and HBO's *The Leftovers* (season 3). Indeed, TV drama has long been the staple of the Victorian industry, with BBC's *The Cry* also recently shooting in Melbourne, as well as SBS's AACTA-awarding winning *Sunshine*.

However, Victoria also captures a sizeable share of the feature film production market in Australia, with recent films shot in the state including The Spierig brothers' *Winchester*, Leigh Whannell's *Upgrade*, Chinese co-pro *The Longest Shot*, and Clayton and Shane Jacobson's *Brothers' Nest*. In the pipeline this year are Rachel Griffiths' Michelle Payne biopic *Ride Like a Girl*, Kim Farrant's *Angel of Mine*, Guy Pearce's feature directorial debut *Poor Boy* and Justin Kurzel's *True History of the Kelly Gang*.



Loch Ard Gorge.

Future production outlook continues to look promising as well, with the government allocating an extra \$8.4 million to attract production to the state in the recent 2018-19 state budget.

Newly minted Film Victoria CEO Caroline Pitcher took over the reins from Jenni Tosi in December. She tells IF she has benefitted from joining the agency at a time where it is efficient, robust and well supported by the state government.

"We're on solid footing. That's really good for me, because it means I can start with the wheels already turning and build on the good work that Film Victoria has been already able to achieve over the last few years."

BUILDING A RESILIENT INDUSTRY

While Pitcher was most recently general manager of commercial and public engagement at Melbourne's Federation Square, she is no stranger to the screen industry.

She sat on the Film Victoria board for five years, and her CV includes time as the national GM of film and television post-production at Deluxe; director, marketing and enterprise at Omnilab Media; CEO of Ausfilm and GM of Film Victoria's Melbourne Film Office.

"It's been a really diverse training ground for me over the last 12 years. It has always been since I've worked in the film and television industry a career goal of mine to be the CEO of Film Victoria. So I've consciously embedded myself in areas that would give me the skill sets and experiences that would help prepare me for this role."

In particular, she describes her time at Deluxe and Omnilab as an "in the trenches experience", that gave her insight into the creative and financial challenges of putting a production together, and the demands placed on support businesses. Her time at the helm of Ausfilm from 2007 to 2010 also gave her an opportunity to engage and build relationships with international players – relationships she maintains today and feels will bring great advantage to Film Victoria.

And while the state is arguably on the front foot, with the Film Victoria board has begun mapping out a strategic process for the organisation which looks to tackle some of the key issues facing the collective industry into the future.

"My job is to ensure that I have a fantastic, productive and professional relationship with government that is complementary to their policymaking and is transferrable to developing a really successful and resilient industry going forward over the years.

"They're focused on one outcome, and that is cultural and creative capital... That builds jobs and creates expenditure, but it also focuses on creative acclaim and a cultural voice that we want to have globally."

Within the strategy, Pitcher says there are a number of key focuses, including continued support for projects with the potential for commercial success, developing and supporting emerging talent, and building and growing screen businesses in Victoria both in number and commercial capability.

Asked which Victorian productions companies the industry should look to, Pitcher lists Princess Pictures for the diversity of its content, Every Cloud Productions for its success in monetising the *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* franchise across a variety of platforms, including a video game and a feature film, and Matchbox for its mentorship of different producers.

However, Pitcher's focus isn't just on film and television businesses and talent. One particular sector where she's keen to step up Film Vic's support is in digital games. In particular, she aims to see already established start-ups grow to mid-size and enter new markets.

"We have long supported the development of games and the development of games



Melbourne CBD.

companies that are owned and operated in Victoria,” says Pitcher.

“Those games companies have flourished over the years and have become good, robust small businesses. The challenge and opportunity for us now is: how do we navigate a future for those businesses in which they can continue to grow, employ people in high-end, valuable creative jobs and continue to own their own IP?”

A GLOBAL MARKET

According to Pitcher, one of Film Victoria’s biggest strengths is that it’s always been agile to the ever-changing needs of the industry.

With that in mind, she states that her number one focus as CEO is making sure the agency continues



FremantleMedia Australia's crew filming in Clunes at Hanging Rock.

RECENT/UPCOMING VICTORIAN PRODUCTIONS:

- Ride Like a Girl
- The Blake Mysteries
- Judy and Punch
- True History of the Kelly Gang
- Angel of Mine
- Nowhere Boys (Season 4)
- The Cry
- Upgrade
- Brothers' Nest
- Picnic at Hanging Rock
- Poor Boy
- Sunshine

to deliver programs and support which address the current challenges and opportunities that exist within the global marketplace.

Pitcher believes there is at present true interest in Australian IP and storytelling from overseas buyers, and therefore, enormous opportunity to develop local stories with international sales potential.

“We have a development challenge in that. That’s where we need to focus on supporting our writers to be able to be developing such stories, as well as matching our producers with international streaming services, such as the likes of Netflix and so on, to see what market opportunities there are.”

She singles out FremantleMedia’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* – which shot at a number of historical locations around Labassa, Werribee Mansion, Wattle Park Chalet and Ripponlea last year – as a great example of a local project with international appeal.

The series, commissioned by Foxtel, was sold to Amazon Prime Video in the US last July, in what Foxtel director of television Brian Walsh called “the largest US commercial deal ever for an Australian television series.” Since then, the six-parter has gone on to sell to the BBC, France’s Canal+, Sky’s premium entertainment channel SoHo in New Zealand, and Deutsche Television’s EntertainTV in Germany.

However, Pitcher recognises that the landscape for TV drama is incredibly competitive, and budgets ever-squeezed.

One measure that she says worked well to ensure a consistent pipeline of TV work for the state was Film Victoria and the ABC’s recently concluded slate funding program, the Victorian Content Initiative. It supported the likes of *Back In Very Small Business*, *Jack Irish* season two, the fourth season of *Nowhere Boys*, *My Year 7 Life*, the fifth season and the telemovie

of *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*, *Newton’s Law*, *Mustangs FC*, *Ronny Chieng: International Student*, *Please Like Me* season four, *Glitch*’s second season, among several others, including four series yet to be publicly announced. The recent Victorian state budget has provided funding for Film Victoria to continue to partner with the ABC or establish a new partnership with another major market player prepared to commit to a pipeline of production in the state.

BUILDING TALENT

Building talent through tailored support – particularly for people early in their careers – is another key focus for Pitcher as CEO.

A strong pool of writers, directors, producers and actors will help to ensure Victoria remains a contender in terms of production attraction. In turn it will also mean it stays an attractive place to live and work for those creatives – who have international opportunities, says Pitcher.

“We have to make sure we, as a state organisation – working collaboratively with other states and the Federal Government – provide an economic environment in which they can flourish.”

Pitcher says a range of talent development and attachment programs have helped in this regard – Film Vic has delivered 21 placements this financial year, with another five currently being negotiated, and 25 placements.

Within these talent development programs, Pitcher says it’s crucial to be mindful of diversity and equal opportunity.

Film Victoria’s 2017-2020 strategic plan set out various aims relating to gender equity, diversity and inclusiveness. Included in that was a five year goal to have at least 50 per cent female writers, directors and producers across all film and television production it funds. It has already achieved that in the first half 2017-18, with 54 per cent of all writers, directors and producers on funded projects women.

“While a topline figure like that can look like progress is being made, it hides some of the areas of great need that will continue to require strategic intervention. For example, while producers of funded productions were predominantly women, only a third of those productions had women writers.

“That is why Film Victoria is taking a long-term approach and investing heavily in development of both people and projects to address this imbalance.



‘Sunshine’.

For instance, of the projects funded for development in the first half of 17/18, 60 per cent involved women writers, and 66 per cent involved women directors.

“Additionally in the skills/career development area over that same period, 90 per cent of our professional placements have gone to women. We believe this focus on female talent should flow through to increase the number of projects with female writers, directors and producers attached.”

ATTRACTING PRODUCTION

While Film Victoria has a cultural imperative to support Australian stories for a local audience, a balance of local and international production is key in maintaining a stable industry, says Pitcher.

In its submissions to the various inquiries into the screen industry over the past year, the Victorian Government has advocated for a permanent uplift to the Location Offset to a more competitive level, in order to create a sustainable workflow for crews, studios, vendors and facilities, and for changes to the offset legislation to introduce television pilots as an eligible format.

It has argued that footloose television is a growing market that Australia would be well-placed to capitalise on, noting attracting a television pilot will usually mean that the series will be produced in the same country if greenlit.

KEY LOCATIONS

- Melbourne CBD
- Macedon Ranges
- You Yangs
- Great Ocean Road
- Yarra Valley
- Mornington Peninsula
- Mount Buller and Mount Hotham



‘The Longest Shot’.

When it comes to production attraction, Pitcher believes there is a sweet spot in Victoria for servicing projects that intend to spend around \$50-\$60 million in the state.

“We have five sound stages here in Victoria. That sound stage capacity is less than half of what for instance, is available up on the Gold Coast or at Fox Studios.

“So we really focus on our niche, which is television... and feature films which spend about \$50 million or less in our state – so that when we do work with potential leads, we know exactly what we’re aiming for and where to find them.”

Not competing with New South Wales or Queensland for tentpole studio films has enabled Film Victoria to balance the local market at the same time, says Pitcher.

Film Victoria is also working to maintain strong a pipeline of international visual effects work in Australia. The Melbourne-based VFX maestros Iloura (recently merged with Method) have recently worked on *Game of Thrones* season seven, and *Luma Spider-Man: Homecoming*.

FILM VICTORIA INCENTIVES AT A GLANCE

PRODUCTION INCENTIVE ATTRACTION FUND (PIAF)

- Grant that aims to attract footloose feature film and TV projects
- Minimum qualifying threshold \$3.5 million
- TV pilots that do not meet the threshold and reality programs that spend a minimum of \$5 million on approved elements will be considered on a case-by-case basis
- Low budget international productions may be eligible if they employ up to three key Victorian production personnel to provide local knowledge/expertise during filming; they may be also be eligible for assistance towards accommodation, travel and living-away-from-home expensive for international directions living in Victoria during post-production

PIAF PDV

- Grant that aims to attract footloose feature and TV projects to use post, digital and visual effects facilities. It is for projects only utilising PDV facilities - those undertaking production in addition to post should refer to the PIAF.
- Minimum qualifying threshold \$1 million.
- Low budget international productions which do not meet the threshold, may on a case-by-case basis be eligible for some financial assistance where it is deemed the benefits of a project may align with broader state government objectives

REGIONAL LOCATION ASSISTANCE FUND (RLAF)

- Grant to encourage local, interstate and international film and TV productions to locate in regional Victoria.
- Minimum qualifying expenditure \$100,000
- RLAF may form part of the project’s finance plan but will need to be cashflowed by producers as the grant is not payable in full until final delivery



Set construction on ‘Winchester’.

Photo: Ben King