Dear Dave,

As a key stakeholder in the New Zealand short film industry, we and our colleagues on the Show Me Shorts Film Festival Trust Board are making a submission to you on behalf of the people we serve: This includes the community of New Zealand short film makers, but is primarily the New Zealand public, who Show Me Shorts was created for.

We have a number of key points of concern that we raise below, as well as some key areas where we commend the ideas of the NZFC team. Should you wish to discuss any of the points we raise in more detail, we would be happy to meet with you or discuss by phone, so don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Ideas We Support:
- We recognise that the transition between short and feature filmmaking is an issue for filmmakers seeking a career in the industry, and appreciate the effort to address this issue.
- We support the initiative to include documentary short film projects in consideration for short film funding from the NZFC. A greater variety of projects not only fulfills growing audience appetite for variety, but also encourages development of diverse voices.
- As an entrepreneurial organisation we see the value in allowing filmmakers to pitch projects “up to $70,000”, rather than exclusively at the level of $70,000. This allows for different kinds of projects, and encourages filmmakers to think about their budget in terms of what resources they have available and what is best for their film, rather than seeing the $70,00 as a target to reach.

Areas Of Concern:

IT’S NOT BROKEN

New Zealand is acknowledged as a world leader in making short films. We are the country after France to have the most short films screen [edit: in competition] at Cannes. The current short film funding structures provided by the NZFC are working. The short films made under this scheme have a high success rate of being accepted for local and international festivals. So why fix what isn’t broken? The risk is that changing these
structures not only won't help transition short film makers to feature films, but that it will negatively impact the filmmaking ecology in NZ as well as our international reputation.

We believe the linear pathway view of short films solely as a stepping stone to features is not only out of step with international trends, but damaging to the health of the New Zealand film industry. Filmmakers are artists, and artists don’t follow a set path. Many of them work in other fields and allowing them a diverse range of interests and projects is what keeps them inspired to create the kind of original, relevant and contemporary work that audiences want to see.

Although the NZFC has always treated short film as calling card, it has also recognised the cultural and creative value of short film. We understand that your position is to view short films as a stepping stone to feature films, and that this isn’t happening in the numbers the NZFC Board would like. The feature film sector of the industry is in trouble. Fewer New Zealand feature films are being made and exhibited, while more short films are being made and exhibited. We suggest that the problem is not with the current short film funding structure, which has proven to be successful, and that the NZFC should look elsewhere for how to fix the ailing feature film arena - if indeed you believe it is possible to fix this audience-driven international trend.

**DECREASING DIVERSITY**

Placing restrictions on the career trajectory of aspiring filmmakers by imposing a linear pathway is damaging to their creativity. More frighteningly, this restriction also risks leading to a decrease in the number and diversity of voices experimenting in the short film medium.

The EP funding structure has nourished originality and diversity by allowing devolved funding away from bureaucratic structures and protocols where creative decisions and risk-taking can more easily happen. Show Me Shorts strongly advocates for the NZFC to keep the EP structure. Research on the NZFC's approach to short and feature film development and production suggests that the independent status of the EPs has worked well (* see references below).

Show Me Shorts expresses concern at the inclusion of trailers, 'taste tapes' and scenes from feature films into the same funding pool that is currently available for short film funding. These kind of projects would be better suited to receive funding from feature film development. As opposed to including documentary and animation short films (which we support), adding these kind of projects to compete for the same funding as short films, means less short films will get made. There is no evidence to suggest New Zealand audiences want to see more promo videos, trailers and scenes from potential films in development. There is, however, clear data to support increasing demand for short films. Making fewer short films does not make sense in this context.

**CASE STUDIES**

Show Me Shorts would like to point out that using Taika Waititi as an example of the NZFC assisting with the transition of filmmakers from shorts to features is problematic. Taika made a great short film that garnered recognition and was celebrated as a work of art in itself (Academy Award nomination). The recognition that followed for Taika was a direct result of his success with the short film, not from his plans for future feature films. Had the pressure been on him while he was working on his short film to think about making a short that served as a calling card for his feature film (and to have a team in place to make that feature), he may not have had the focus and attention to create such
an iconic short film. Having a feature film idea in development is no guarantee of success either. Taika’s story indicates that you can’t fully predict success. Supporting talent that expresses compelling original ideas is the only way forward. There is always going to be an element of uncertainty in selecting which filmmakers to support.

Some of New Zealand’s top short film makers have made several excellent short films without a clear plan or immediate intention to make feature films. Many have experimented with several shorts before exploring feature filmmaking, e.g. Paul Campion, Mark Alibiston & Louis Sutherland. Some of our best and most prolific short film makers have never made a feature film, e.g. James Cunningham, Zia Mandviwalla and Michelle Savill. Some have gone on to make feature films but realised that their skills are better suited to the short film medium e.g. Grant Lahood. Does this mean that their iconic short films have no value without the features? We think not. Under the proposed new scheme, these are voices that would not have received the level of support from the NZFC that enabled them to produce many of our most iconic and critically acclaimed NZ short films. Their absence would lead to an impoverished NZ cinema.

SHORT FILM ECOLOGY

Film is a medium undergoing dramatic change currently in terms of technology and audience consumption. There is little evidence of strategic thought in this consultation paper about how the funding and production of New Zealand short films fits within the wider international storytelling marketplace.

The main problems with this consultation paper stem from the ongoing NZFC focus on short film production instead of considering the wider short film ecology. New Zealanders make a great number of good short films, but distribution opportunities are limited. We find it strange that there is no mention here of support for helping short films reach audiences. Without fostering connections between films and audiences, the NZFC risks creating films in a vacuum.

There is a surprising lack of mention of transmedia, online distribution platforms or web series in this consultation paper. All of which, are now important options for filmmakers to explore if they choose. We would like to see the NZFC research the links between these mediums and short films.

In conclusion:

Premiere Pathways is a fantastic idea, but NOT at the expense of a dedicated short film fund - it should not replace Premiere Shorts. Before making such a drastic change, we recommend the NZFC consider the potential impact on the quality of short film making in NZ and our international reputation in this sphere. Reduced output of a lesser quality and the resulting drop in our international standing could hinder our filmmakers’ international opportunities.

If you are concerned about the commercial success of our films, listen to your market. New Zealanders are watching short films in increasing numbers and feature films in decreasing numbers. We suggest adjusting funding accordingly.

Finally, we express our disappointment that the team at the NZFC did not better publicise this consultation paper. We hope this was merely a reflection of their desire to move forward quickly and respond to changes in the marketplace with regard to creating and consuming films, rather than a sign that the NZFC does not take short film seriously.
The rest of the world looks to New Zealand as a leader in short film production and it would be a shame to squander that hard-won international respect.

We look forward to participating in the planned industry focus groups regarding this consultation paper. Please contact us when you have dates and locations confirmed.

Warm regards,

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