

**GUEDE Moise (COMP)**

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**From:** TheFlicks@aol.com  
**Sent:** 27 July 2011 14:38  
**To:** COMP STATE AID GREFFE  
**Subject:** HT2950\_reply\_from\_citizen  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Red  
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**From: The Anthony Williams Consultancy**

I am a sole practitioner with 40 years experience in the film industry, and in recent years have acted as consultant to a range of public and private organisations in relation to cinema exhibition. These include MEDIA Salles. More information about my credentials can be supplied if required.

Films made for a cinema release remain the prime means by which any country can retain its cultural identity in cinema, and reflect its cultural diversity. This is particular important as in most countries cinema screens are dominated by American films.

Successful national films have a disproportionate impact of cinema admissions and are critical to the health of cinema exhibition. A successful national film also has more chance in obtaining relatively significant exposure in other countries than one that is not popular in its own country.

Film production economics are such that the cost of a film can rarely be recovered in its own country and most national films (except American ones) will not earn sufficient money in other countries to make up the difference. Some form of national support is therefore needed if a viable production sector is to be maintained. DVD is no longer the revenue source it has been and the theatrical box office has again become the most important revenue stream.

The test for the success of national production support must be a mixture of artistic merit and audience approval. There is no point in making films that nobody wants to see. Film has always been a mixture of art and commerce and even cultural objectives must recognise this.

There can be a justification for supporting a small number of films purely for cultural promotion reasons, accepting that they will only be shown in contexts such as film festivals but will be influential within this context. Films are, however, a mass market medium and should aim to reach the widest possible audience. This does not mean reaching for the lowest common denominator.

National film production can only thrive if there is the infrastructure to support it, which means studios, facility companies, equipment and skilled technicians. Such an infrastructure can often only be maintained if it services non-national films or co-productions as well as national ones. There is therefore justification in having mechanisms which encourage inward production investment. Public funding for major commercial films should though not be replacing available private funding.

It must however, be recognised that film production is global and European countries may be competing not just (or not even) with each other but countries in other continents. Trying to control the so called subsidy race is a valid objective but finding how this can be achieved is a major challenge. Insisting on a cultural element (with a common definition) would seem to be a sensible start and the suggestions in paragraph 37 of the issues paper should be explored.

**Section 3.4**

I consider that the Cinema Communication should be extended to specifically include support for cinema exhibition. Films are made to be seen in cinemas and the economics of cinemas other than multiplex or multi-screen cinemas in major population centres, especially in rural areas, are often, if not usually, precarious. If film culture - including popular film culture - is to be made accessible to a national population this may well mean subsidy is required. Currently this is focussed on the issues surrounding digital cinema but small cinemas may well need financial help in other ways.

Cinemas are often a key community element and can be the heart of a small town. Unless they are

sustained many will close and any form of film culture will no longer be available. Their admissions will largely or completely disappear. Screenings in non-cinema premises are an inadequate substitute. Very few cinemas are able to survive on specialist film programmes, including featuring films from other European countries. They need a series of commercial films to act as a form of subsidy for their cultural ambitions. There is therefore a cultural as well as social justification for providing financial support for cinemas which show a wide range of commercial films, as well as film production. This social justification for cinema should therefore also be an eligible factor in assessing state aid and any rules requiring such cinema to show European films (national or otherwise) should not be onerous but sensible and proportional. Small cinemas in rural areas should not be expected to show large percentages of such films.

### **Section 3.5 and 3.8**

The switch to digital projection is enabling cinemas to show audio-visual content that is not made primarily for cinema exhibition, chiefly theatrical productions such as opera. Some content is live but much is recorded and this wider definition of audio-visual content should be recognised as a legitimate function of cinemas.

Digital projection and digital film making have extended the range of films that can be made and shown in cinemas as well as on other digital platforms. It must be recognised that just because someone can use a cheap digital camera and editing package on their home computer does not mean they are or ever will be a competent film maker. Digital cinema should not be a route to mediocrity and aid should be very selective and aim to encourage and support work of quality and artistry.

Innovation and experimentation should be a support criteria but I do not see any need to provide aid for 3D production. 3D films are not universally liked - or accessible for many sight reasons - and entirely able to be self-financing. 3D is a specialist sector best left to commercial cinema.

### **Para 57**

Consideration should be given to retaining the majority of the world's film archive on film rather than attempt to digitise everything. 35mm film is still the only proven archival medium and therefore 35mm laboratory, editing and projection facilities should be maintained indefinitely. For over 100 years films were made on 35mm film and designed to be seen in cinemas. These films should always be available in this way to future generations.

### **Other**

An increasing number of European countries have accepted that public funding is necessary if the switch to digital projection is not to force cinemas to close. This switch has been forced on cinemas by the major Hollywood studios and the only way that some can afford to switch to digital projection is with state or public aid.

**Anthony Williams**

27th July 2011