Assistant Minister for Economic Development
Question Time Briefs
September 2021

Ref No	Page number	Title	Status	Reason for Exemption
1	2	Location Incentive Scheme – Screen Canberra	Full	n/a
2	5	Investment into Academy of Interactive Entertainment Soundstage and the Virtual Studio	Full	n/a
3	7	Planning COVID safe events	Full	n/a

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM21/52136

Portfolio: Economic Development

ISSUE: Location Incentive Scheme – Screen Canberra

Communications, media and engagement implications

- Inside Film Magazine reported the ACT Government is establishing the Canberra Screen Attraction Fund pilot scheme, offering location incentives of up to 10 per cent for productions that spend more than $2 million in the ACT. (Source: if.com.au, *ACT Government announces new production facility*, 17 August 2021)
- ABC reported about the construction of the sound stage space in Watson which will help to attract talent to Canberra. It was also reported that the AIE's budget submission requested the ACT Government to contribute $450,000 towards soundproofing and rigging lights for the project. (Source: ABC, *Film industry makes bold pitch for Canberra to be Australia's next hub for producing feature films*, 9 July 2021)
- The RiotAct reported on the building of the sounds stage by the Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) and Screen Canberra. This will also be accessible to students to complete projects and gain production experience. (Source: The RiotAct, *Lights, action – Canberra! How the ACT is building a local film industry*, 17 July 2021)
- The success of Liam Neeson's film *Blacklight*, parts of which were shot in Canberra, in January generated hope that the ACT could attract further large screen productions.
- *Blacklight* provided Canberra an opportunity to host an international film production where local crew were able to gain experience and develop their skills. The US$34.7 million production helped to boost Canberra's local economy with a spend of over $2 million on local jobs, accommodation and hospitality.
- The development of a new studio space and a location incentive means Canberra is now more competitive in the Australian screen landscape, at a time when there is a strong pipeline of international productions in Australia, for example the Marvel franchise.

Key Information

- These investments in the screen industry are a part of the ACT Government's ambition to position Canberra as a key location for screen production, building local talent and sharing Canberra's unique stories and places.

Location Incentive

- All Australian states and territories except ACT and Tasmania provide grant incentives to attract high budget film productions to their jurisdiction.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	09/09/2021	
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- In June 2021, the Chief Minister agreed to the repurposing of $500,000 of Events ACT 2020-21 base funding for the establishment of a Location Incentive Scheme that will enable a proof of concept to be undertaken in 2021-22.
- The establishment of the Scheme will enhance ACT's competitiveness against other states and territories in attracting large budget film productions.
- The Location Incentive Scheme will be admistered by Screen Canberra, which will retain $50,000 of the fund for the admistration of the Scheme. $450,000 will be available for direct grants to productions wishing to film in the ACT.
- Screen Canberra has proposed to change the name of the Location Incentive to 'Canberra Screen Attraction Fund'
- The Canberra Screen Fund will also be renamed Canberra Screen Investment Fund to make a clear distinction between it and the Screen Attraction Fund.

<u>New Sound Stage</u>

- The Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) has announced plans to build a state-of-the-art sound stage and virtual production studio in Canberra.
- ACT Government is investing a total of $839,400 in both the sound stage and virtual effects studio. The Academy of Interactive Entertainment will also contribute significant funding towards the project and will operate the facility once completed.
- A new studio will help to attract high-quality film and TV productions, build local industry capability and could help inject millions into the economy. It will also provide a significant opportunity for local acting, directing and film production professionals in Canberra.

<u>Creative Industries</u>

- The ACT Government is working with the University of Canberra on the development of the creative industries in Canberra.
- The University of Canberra is currently undertaking a research program on ACT creative industries which is jointly funded by the University and the ACT Government.
- The research program aims to conduct an environmental, social and policy assessment of the creative industries in the ACT as a necessary step in building capability in the creative industries sector in the ACT.
- The findings from the ACT creative industries research program will help inform the development of the Government's creative industries policy and strategy.

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- The research program on ACT creative industries will cost $267,300 and the ACT Government has agreed to contribute 50 per cent of the cost at $133,650. This funding has been reallocated from Study Canberra, which has reduced its Canberra-based activity owing to the pandemic.

Background Information

- ACT Labor's Policy Position Statement committed to "working with Screen Canberra and the screen industry on the creation of a location incentive scheme to attract high value screen production with an economic impact of more than $4 million".
- On 8 June 2021, your Chief of Staff provided email advice that both you and the Chief Minister were supportive of an option that would set $2 million as the minimum qualifying spend for screen projects, and a range between 5 and 10 per cent of the minimum spend to be applied base on a range impact criterion. There was also support for ten per cent ($50,000) of the available funds to be set aside for administrative costs associated with delivering the scheme.
- The Business & Innovation team have been working with Screen Canberra to establish funding guidelines for the Location Incentive Scheme. There is advice currently being prepared for your consideration regarding these guidelines.

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/52137

Portfolio: Economic Development

ISSUE: Investment into Academy of Interactive Entertainment Soundstage and the Virtual Studio

Communications, media and engagement implications

- On 12 August 2021, the ACT Government announced an investment of $839,400 in the new state-of-the-art Sound Stage and Film Plus Virtual Production Studio screen production infrastructure that will be developed by the Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) in Canberra. https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7381900/fresh-investment-for-sound-stage-production-studio-in-screen-boost/
- Having a sound stage and virtual production studio in the ACT will allow Screen Canberra and the local film industry to bolster local production, attract new projects to Canberra and increase the duration existing productions' stay in Canberra. This will significantly contribute towards retaining talent in the ACT and growing new jobs such as acting and production crew opportunities.
- Additionally, AIE will use the facilities to deliver the world's first training courses and accreditation in virtual production. This further enhances their national and international leadership in digital, gaming and production training and serves as an additional reason to attract students and industry professionals to study in Canberra.
- As the Territory emerges from the pandemic, the ACT Government's priority is to develop sectors of our economy that can drive jobs growth, such as the creative industries. Sustained investment in the creative industries is yielding results as evidenced by the $200 million AIE campus redevelopment project in Watson and the major screen production Blacklight's highly technical car chase sequence filmed in the centre of Canberra in January 2021, that generated over $2 million for our local economy. This is testament to the city's developing capability as a skilled and capable screen production location.
- Of the total ACT Government commitment, $450,000 was allocated to the establishment of the Sound Stage, which will leverage a further $600,000 from AIE, taking the total investment in the infrastructure to $1.05 million.
- The remaining $389,400 ACT Government commitment was allocated to the establishment of the Film Plus Virtual Studio and the related virtual production courses in Canberra. AIE will co- invest approximately $4.6 million, taking the total investment in the virtual production studio to around $5 million. The infrastructure and virtual production technology will create new opportunities, including demand for expertise in this emerging field and new career pathways.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Key Information

- The sound stage and virtual production studio were supported by the ACT Government through the Future Jobs Fund and Priority Investment Program respectively.
- The aim of the Future Jobs Fund is to grow the economy by strategically investing in projects that attract talent and increase the number of high value jobs in the ACT. The Priority Investment Program - Jobs and Economic Recovery Round was part of the ACT Government's response to economic challenges in 2020-21 and it supported ACT-based businesses to create jobs and become more competitive and sustainable.
- Both the Virtual Production Studio and Sound Stage will be co-located. The AIE will temporarily lease a suitable large space of approximately 2,000 sqm, plus several meeting rooms to support productions and teaching, until a more permanent facility can be built as part of AIE's $200 million campus renewal project in Watson.

Background Information

What is a Sound Stage?

- A sound stage is a large sound-proof production hall that is often used to film inside for screen productions. Screen Canberra will consult with the film and TV industry to ensure the design of the sound stage meets the requirements of the industry.

What is Virtual Production Studio?

- A virtual production studio consists of a large Light Emitting Diode (LED) screen that can be used to create any kind of scene – such as a desert, snowy mountain, Mars or an office – with the click of a button. This technology has been used in productions such as Disney's The Mandalorian. Filmmakers that understand how to use virtual production have a huge advantage and there is increasing demand for filmmakers with virtual production skills. The studio that will be established in Canberra will also support AIE's delivery of a new course in Film and Virtual Production, which will commence in 2022.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM21/52138

Portfolio: Economic Development

ISSUE: Planning COVID safe events

Windows to the World

Communications, media and engagement implications

- The format and dates for Windows to the World 2021 have not been publicly announced.
- The official launch had been proposed to be at Floriade in the week of 20 September 2021.
- Engagement had occurred across the Canberra diplomatic community in the preparation and planning for the event.
- There have been no recent media enquiries specific to the event, however there have been general queries on the delivery of events due to the current COVID-19 outbreak.

Talking Points

- Due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak in the Territory and many other parts of the country, Windows to the World will not go ahead in 2021 and will be postponed to October 2022.
- The format of the event, with multiple concurrent activities, presents a substantial cumulative COVID-19 risk due to gathering of people, large crowd sizes, and movement across multiple sites.
- Many Embassies and Diplomatic Missions have expressed their interest to be involved in a postponed event.
- It is proposed for the work already undertaken for 2021 to be utilised in 2022 to ensure the benefit of current planning efforts are retained.

Key Information

- Windows to the World open days had been approved and scheduled for 16 and 17 October 2021 with an additional showcase expo scheduled to be held at Floriade from 11 September until 10 October 2021.
- As at July 30 2021, a total of 37 Embassies had expressed an interest to be involved in the open day program of activities with an additional 13 smaller Embassies and Diplomatic Missions expressing an interest to be in the showcase expo.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	07/09/2021
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- The 2021 approved event plan ran a condensed open day program over the two days to create vibrant precincts across Yarralumla, Deakin and O'Malley and permitted larger Embassies to support smaller missions within the defined visitor precincts.
- Individual Embassies put planning for their open day activities on hold when the Territory went into lockdown on 12 August 2021.
- In considering the cancellation, the event steering committee utilised the Event Scenario Planning Matrix which identifies risk and possible contingencies in the event of active cases in the ACT.
- Key stakeholders have been consulted on the decision to postpone the event, including the Office of the Chief Health Officer, the Office for International Engagement, the participating Diplomatic Missions, VisitCanberra staff, ACT Policing, and the Security Investigations Diplomatic Liaison within the Australian Federal Police.

Canberra Nara Candle Festival

Communications, media and engagement implications

- The format and dates for the Canberra Nara Candle Festival 2021 have not been publicly announced.
- The 2021 marketing strategy that was being developed to support the event, was placed on hold when the Territory went into lockdown.
- Engagement had occurred with the Nara Sister City Committee in the preparation and planning for the event.
- There have been no recent media enquiries specific to the event, however there have been general queries on the delivery of events due to the current COVID-19 outbreak.

Talking Points

- The Canberra Nara Candle Festival has been cancelled for 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim will be for the event to return to its traditional format in 2022.
- The event format by its nature causes attendee chokepoints due to the candle pathway and it cannot be run safely in the current climate.
- Nara Tokae Festival in Japan has also been cancelled for 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Information

- Canberra Nara Candle Festival was proposed to take place on 30 October 2021, returning to the traditional location of Lennox Gardens and run in a similar format to

previous years, other than for 2020, that saw the event transition to a small Embassy-based event due to COVID operating challenges.

- The event format for 2021 had been developed to include a high attendance of Canberran's for the candle lighting activity and included workshops, music and food vendors.
- The Canberra Nara Sister City Committee has been consulted and is supportive of the event cancellation. The committee includes representatives from the Embassy of Japan, the Burley Griffin Rotary Club, the Australia-Japan Society, and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate of the ACT Government.