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It is disappointing, given the recognition of Indigenous culture and wider questions of race and ethnicity, that *Creative Nation* does not contain specific audiovisual or new technologies funding to support increased direct engagement by Indigenous people with these new communications forms. As Michael Meadows wrote recently '...there is a great need to examine or re-examine options for Indigenous empowerment.' He points out, 'although an Indigenous broadcasting policy was negotiated in 1993, a guaranteed line of funding remains uncertain'¹¹. *Creative Nation* has not corrected this situation.

Stepping Off Point

Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to take up the Prime Minister's expressed hope that the release of *Creative Nation* may one day be looked back upon as the day we entered a post colonial period. This can be achieved by engaging in, and developing the debate about the cultural issues being flagged in *Creative Nation*.

This debate about the details of comprehensive and diverse expressions of cultural issues can only emerge from an on-going and broadly-based community debate. Such a debate could usefully inform further directions for public policy and expenditure.

If this is to happen we must treat *Creative Nation* as a stepping off point rather than a specific policy end point in itself. □

1 Creative Nation Statement, 1994, p 43.

2 Ibid, p.48.

3 Ibid, p 49.

4 Ibid, p 49.

5 Ibid, p15.

6 Ibid, p 15.

7 Ibid, p 65.

8 Ibid, p 9.

9 Ibid, p 5.

10 Ibid, p 9.

11 Michael Meadows, 'The Way People Want to Talk: Indigenous Media production in Australia & Canada' in Media Information Australia, No 73 August 1994, p 71.

Multimedia's Mixed Messages

'A dynamic multimedia industry will go a long way to ensuring that we have a stake in the new communications order - yet retain our distinctly Australian culture.'

Hon Michael Lee MP
Minister for Communications and the Arts

If the first Multimedia Forum, held in Sydney on 8 March, is anything to go by, the Government is aiming for a very high stake in the 'new communications order'. Australia is positioning itself to be a world leader in developing multimedia applications.

In his keynote speech, Communications Minister Michael Lee outlined the factors contributing to Australia's prospects. These are the existing skills base in the arts and the information technology industries, our competitive education and training system, a technologically advanced communications infrastructure and the competitive advantage of the English language.

But the Minister did not mention that our English language culture, construed as market advantage in terms of export, is also our key weakness in the domestic market with the rapid proliferation and distribution of US content on broadband technologies.

Exports

The Government is putting much store by the forecasts of the *Commerce in Content* report prepared by the consulting firm Cutler and Company for the Department of Industry Science and Technology and the Broadband Services Expert Group. Multimedia exports worth more than \$200 million within two years and up to \$3 billion by the year 2000 are predicted and it's clear that the Government regards its \$84 million as seeding investment

The two biggest initiatives are the Australian Multimedia Enterprise (AME) and the six Co-operative Multimedia Centres (CMCs).

Investment

The AME is a \$45 million initiative which is to be a wholly-owned Government company operating as 'a value added venture capitalist' according to Gwen Andrews, Head of the Department of Communications and the Arts' Film and Multimedia Branch. Its role is a straightforward one of investment in the development and commercialisation of multimedia product.

The AME will be incorporated this month and its six to eight-member Board is yet to be announced. Andrews said its directors have skills and expertise in finance, multimedia, publishing, film production and distribution, and information technology.

The CMCs program is where there is the most palpable activity. The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) is in the business of 'brokering marriages and bumping heads together' according to one of its senior project officers. The CMCs are to be collaborative enterprises between the education sector and the multimedia industry. In Sydney alone there are up to six emerging consortia which will compete for recognition and funding. The negotiations are proceeding apace, with proposals due for submission to DEET by 21 April.

The CMCs are supposed to be financially self-sufficient after three years but will initially rely on 'cash and kind' support from consortia members, over and above Government support. At the first Forum it emerged that the CMCs would be denied income from actually developing and

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producing any multimedia titles. The final guidelines issued last month, no longer envisaged the CMCs supporting the production of educational multimedia titles. The CMCs will provide education and training services, access to equipment, and specialised advice in product evaluation and intellectual property management. The existing commercial multimedia industry apparently made a convincing case to Government about the industry displacement threat of subsidising production of titles.

Industry Body

What is the existing multimedia industry and who represents the players? The Australasian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association (AIMIA) has existed since 1992, long before interactive multimedia became a buzzword and began to attract the interest of the publishing, film, arts and entertainment sectors, and the Government. AIMIA appears to have significant influence and standing before Government and predictably, a burgeoning membership. It is, and aims to stay, the principal industry body with objectives covering industry development and professional standards in ethics and business.

New Content Creators

How readily will the industry take on the influx of skills, talent and personnel from related arts and entertainment industries - the new independent content creators? The uneasy tension between industry development strategies and the cultural policy objectives of *Creative Nation* will certainly contribute to a 'dynamic industry' but it remains to be seen to what extent commercialisation will deliver quality and diversity, and fully engage creative potential.

The AME will support the development and commercialisation of big budget/high value product and the Australian Film Commission (AFC) will have a mere \$5.25 million over four years to support title development at the lower budget independent producer end of the market.

The development of an innovative Australian production base is critical to the establishment of local and international markets for cultural and economic reasons. Who pulls the policy levers and what the mechanisms are allowed to deliver is vital. □

Barry Melville

CREATIVE NATION'S MULTIMEDIA MONEY POTS AT A GLANCE

Total package	\$84m	Over 4 years
The Australian Multimedia Enterprise (overseen by DOCA)	\$45m	A wholly owned Govt company to provide finance for development and distribution of titles
Cooperative Multimedia Centres (overseen by DEET)	\$20.3m	Collaborative enterprises between the education and training sectors and private and public organisations
The 'Australian on CD' Program (overseen by DOCA and a cultural organisations panel)	\$7m (over 2 years)	Direct support for 10 CD-ROMs that focus on national cultural institutions
The Multimedia Forums (overseen by DIST and DOCA)	\$3.9m	A national program of sector and State-based forums to discuss industry issues
Film agencies assistance:		
AFC	\$5.2m	For development projects
ACTF	\$0.7m	For educational projects
AFTRS	\$0.95m	For advanced professional training

Legend:

ACTF	Australian Children's Television Foundation	DEET	Department of Employment, Education & Training
AFC	Australian Film Commission	DIST	Department of Industry, Science and Technology
AFTRS	Australian Film, Television and Radio School	DOCA	Department of Communications & the Arts