

Screen Australia announces \$3 million for 13 documentaries

Thursday 22 August 2024: Screen Australia has announced 11 documentaries through the Producer Program and two through the Commissioned Program that will share in \$3 million of production funding.

Among the projects is SBS docuseries *The Secret DNA of Us*, discovering hidden collective DNA throughout Australian neighbourhoods; *We Are Jeni*, documenting Jeni Hayes and her network of 2,500 alternative personalities' mission to seek justice; *Mockbuster*, following writer/director Anthony Frith, tasked by notorious US production house, The Asylum to create a feature-length mockbuster; and *Yurlu | Country* following Banjima man Maitland Parker as he fights for his scarred lands to be rehabilitated.

Screen Australia Head of Documentary **Richard Huddleston** said, "I am thrilled that this funding will support a rich array of documentary producers; from emerging and established filmmakers to internationally award-winning artists and our leading investigative journalists. The mix of genres, the subjects they explore as well as the creative approaches are equally rich and will appeal to a diverse range of Australian and international audiences."

This announcement includes the remainder of projects funded in the 2023/24 financial year during which Screen Australia funded **\$12.4 million** across 100+ projects for production, development and initiatives, including [Fresh Cuts](#) with AIDC. This represented 51% of all documentary applications received in 2023-2024.

Screen Australia has supported a number of thought-provoking and captivating documentaries that found critical acclaim and audience connection at home and on the world stage throughout the 2023/24 financial year. These include *Harley & Katya* winning an International Emmy®, *This Is Going to Be Big* screening at the Hot Docs Festival in Canada, *Hot Potato: The Story of the Wiggles* premiering at the inaugural SXSW Sydney, and *John Farnham: Finding The Voice* becoming Australia's highest grossing feature length documentary of all-time and Australia's number 1 box office hit of 2023.

Projects supported through the Producer Program are:

- **Edge of Life:** This feature film follows two Melbourne doctors using a synthetic version of the naturally occurring psychedelic, psilocybin, to assist patients in palliative care who are experiencing anxiety at end-of-life - achieving remarkable results but opening doorways to questions they struggle to answer. *Edge of Life* explores whether the world's oldest cultures, and those most familiar with these 'medicines', have valuable insights on one of the most essential aspects of human life - its end. It is from world renowned and two-time Emmy award winning artist/writer/director Lynette Wallworth ([Awavena](#), [Tender](#), [Collisions](#)) and writer Chief Tashka Yawanawa, with Jo-anne McGowan and Jennifer Peedom of [Harley & Katya](#) and [River](#) producing and executive producing respectively. Financed in association with Screen NSW and the Shark Island Foundation, with support from the Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund and the Australian National University. Local distribution by Kismet and international sales by K2/MGM.
- **Hard as Puck:** This observational feature-length documentary follows a squad of Australian Para Ice Hockey players as they vie for a place on the first ever Australian team who hope to make it to the World Championships. With everything stacked against them and the sport itself, nothing will stop these athletes from showing up on game day. *Hard as Puck* is from director Isaac Elliot ([Maverix](#)), producers Chanel Bowen and Noel Smyth ([Gloriavale](#)) and executive producer Rebecca Bignell ([Blueback](#)). Financed in association with Screenwest and Lotterywest.
- **Make it Look Real:** A feature film that gives unique access into how intimate scenes in film and TV are created. Intimacy coordinator Claire Warden guides actors through sex scenes on a film set, negotiating the director's vision whilst understanding the physical and psychological needs of the performers - with a documentary crew filming her every move. *Make it Look Real* is from writer/director Kate Blackmore ([The Art of Collecting](#)), producers Bethany Bruce ([The Art of Collecting](#)) and Daniel Joyce ([Endangered Generation?](#)), and executive producers Bridget Ikin



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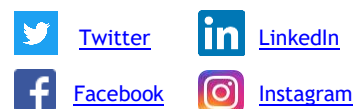


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([Sherpa](#)) and Emma Cooper ([Penguin Bloom](#)). Financed in association with Projector Films, with support from Screen NSW and the Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund.

- **Mockbuster:** This feature film follows writer/director Anthony Frith as he navigates the world of notorious US production house, The Asylum, known for producing "mockbusters" - low-budget films created to exploit the publicity of upcoming major releases. In *Mockbuster*, The Asylum have tasked Anthony to direct a feature-length mockbuster in Australia with only a micro-budget and a six-day shoot - a challenge that will push him and his crew to their limits. The film is from Frith ([Lessons From A Middle Class Artist](#)), writer/producer Sandy Cameron ([Sam Klemke's Time Machine](#)) and producers David Elliot-Jones ([Clean](#)) and Naomi Ball ([Who I Am](#)). Financed in association with the South Australian Film Corporation, the Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund, Giant Pictures and VicScreen.
- **Phenomena:** In *Phenomena*, art and science collide on a psychedelic odyssey through the patterns of nature that sets out to reveal the wonders of the universe – and our relationship with it. A filmmaker is struck by the big questions, and propelled by curiosity into a journey of discovery. Through experiments and awe-inspiring details, he follows the patterns of nature down the rabbit hole, revealing the elements that make us, the forces that shape us, and the mechanisms at the foundation of our experience. It is written, directed and produced by Josef Gatti, produced by Rob Innes ([Unerased](#)), with Jessica Harrop (*Fire of Love*) executive producing. It is co-produced with Sandbox Films and financed in association with VicScreen.
- **Queens of Concrete:** Shot over seven years, this coming-of-age feature-length documentary chronicles Hayley, Ava and Charlotte's journey from childhood to adulthood as they follow their dreams to qualify for the first ever Australian Olympic skateboarding team for the 2020 games. They each wrestle with their own definition of success and find balance between the people they want to be, and the adults they are being turned into. From director Eliza Cox who is also producing alongside Gena Riess, Oscar Ascencio and CJ Welsh ([Disclosure](#)), with Anna Kaplan ([Rachel's Farm](#)) executive producing. Financed in association with VicScreen, with support from the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) Premiere Fund.
- **Sentient:** This feature-length documentary takes audiences behind locked doors of high security laboratories and into the world of those who experiment on animals. *Sentient* is a meditation on the connections between the human race and the animals we use for research and explores the consequences of animal testing - both on the animals, and the moral injury or compassion fatigue suffered by the people who do it. *Sentient* is from writer/director Tony Jones ([Revelation](#)) and producer Ivan O'Mahoney ([Firestarter - The Story of Bangarra](#)).
- **Spreadsheet Champions:** In this feature-length documentary, students from around the world compete in the greatest competition most people have never heard of, the Spreadsheet World Championships. *Spreadsheet Champions* follows six students from different countries as they compete in the Microsoft Office Championships' most difficult and prestigious category, Excel. Kristina Kraskov and Anna Charalambous of [Suburban Legends](#) are directing and producing respectively, with Charlotte Wheaton and Nick Batzias also producing, whose credits include [Ellis Park](#) and [The Australian Dream](#). Financed in association with the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) Premiere Fund and VicScreen. Local distribution by Madman Entertainment.
- **Untitled Mental as Anything Documentary:** A feature film for theatrical release via Bonsai Films and broadcast on the Seven Network about the extraordinary rise of iconic Australian band Mental As Anything through their infectious pop sound and creative journey that has left an indelible mark on Australia's music and art celebrating suburban Australia. It is from writer/director Matthew Walker ([I'm Wanita](#)) and producers Carolina Sorensen ([Midnight Oil: The Hardest Line](#), [I'm Wanita](#)) and Susanne Morrison ([Facing Monsters](#)). Frank Chidiac ([Facing Monsters](#); [Days Like These](#)) and Martin Fabinyi ([Midnight Oil: The Hardest Line](#); [John Farnham: Finding The Voice](#)) are executive producing. A Beyond Entertainment Production in association with People Productions. Financed with support

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from Screen NSW. International sales by Banijay Rights, with post, digital and visual effects supported by Screen NSW.

- **We are Jeni:** This feature-length documentary for SBS tracks the remarkable journey of Jeni Haynes who created a vast network of 2,500 alternate personalities to survive extreme trauma that she endured since infancy. *We Are Jeni* is from directors Mariel Thomas ([Better Date Than Never](#), [War on Waste](#)) and Akhim Dev ([The Children In The Pictures](#)), producer Simon Nasht ([The Children In The Pictures](#)) and Sara Kozac. Financed with support from Philanthropy via the Shark Island Foundation.
- **Yurlu | Country:** This feature-length documentary takes viewers into the remote red gorges of the Pilbara in Western Australia and its rich Banjima history with elder Maitland Parker. This stunning landscape is also scarred by Australia's very own Chernobyl - the largest contaminated site in the Southern Hemisphere where asbestos has made the area inaccessible. *Yurlu | Country* is Maitland's last stand to protect his family, culture and to write his final chapter as he fights for his homeland's rehabilitation. Writing/directing/producing is Yaara Bou Melhem ([Unseen Skies](#), [The Whiteley Art Scandal](#)) with Maitland Parker also writing/executive producing and Lisa Main producing. Executive produced by Chris Kamen ([Franklin](#)), it is financed in association with the Martidja Banyjima, with support from Screen NSW and the Shark Island Institute. Bonsai Films is distributing locally.

The projects funded through the Commissioned Program are:

- **Headliners:** In this series for the ABC, Elly-May Barnes with the support of her rock legend dad Jimmy Barnes, leads a quest to create two bands of musicians living with a disability - simultaneously exposing the lack of visibility, access and inclusivity for some of Australia's talented musicians and performers. The series is from producer Kate Paul ([Am I Perfect?](#)) and executive producer Penny McWhirter ([RPA](#), [Life on the Outside](#)). It has received major production investment from the ABC, with support from Screen NSW. Banijay Rights is managing international sales.
- **The Secret DNA of Us:** From executive producer Josie Mason Campbell ([This is Going to be Big](#)) and Sophie Meyrick ([Tony Armstrong's Extraordinary Things](#)), *The Secret DNA of Us* presents an eye-opening exploration of Australia through mass DNA testing. *The Secret DNA of Us* has received major production investment from SBS and is financed with support from Screen NSW.

The full list of documentary blocklines is available [here](#).

The latest projects funded for documentary development are available [here](#).

ABOUT DOCUMENTARY FUNDING AT SCREEN AUSTRALIA

The [Documentary Producer program](#) is designed to give producers the foundational funding required to leverage their projects creatively and commercially. It must have a clear path to audience but marketplace attachment is not required at the application stage.

The [Documentary Commissioned program](#) is designed to support the production of a diverse range of quality projects for television broadcast, Streaming Video on Demand (SVOD) or similar. It must offer a compelling vision with a clear and enduring cultural value, and have a local presale with a minimum license fee at application stage.

The [Documentary Development program](#) aims to assist documentary makers in achieving planned outcomes for the development of their projects. Screen Australia also supports documentary projects through targeted initiatives such as [Fresh Cuts](#) with the Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC).

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