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Report: Film industry crucial to Nova Scotia economy

A report on the economics of the screen industry in Nova Scotia confirms what filmmakers have been saying all along – “we can’t afford not to have a film industry in Nova Scotia,” says writer-director Michael Melski.

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Rob Cotterill, who has worked as an assistant director on the TV series Trailer Park Boys, says

By ANDREA NEMETZ and MICHAEL GORMAN Local Xpress

A report on the economics of the screen industry in Nova Scotia confirms what filmmakers have been saying all along – “we can’t afford not to have a film industry in Nova Scotia,” says writer-director Michael Melski.

Screen Nova Scotia and the Canadian Media Producers Association hired PwC to conduct the first comprehensive economic study of Nova Scotia’s film industry since 2008.

“This report finally provides an unbiased analysis of the value of the screen industry in our province,” Marc Almon, chairman of Screen Nova Scotia, said in a news release. “The film industry is a net benefit for Nova Scotia. When you compare the \$24 million in tax credits to the \$180 million in GDP, that’s a ratio of 7 (to) 1.”

Among other findings in the report are:

- the industry employed 3,200 people in 2014, with an average salary of \$43,000. About 1,600 of those jobs were full-time equivalents and 1,600 were indirect jobs.
- the industry has had steady growth over the past two decades, and local production share increased to 88 per cent in 2014 from 56 per cent in 2010.
- individuals working in the screen industry are relatively young, highly educated, entrepreneurial and more likely to have moved to the province from elsewhere compared with the overall provincial labour force.

At Province House on Thursday, Premier Stephen McNeil said despite the contents of the new report, he wasn’t open to making changes to the existing system.

“I think it’s fair, it’s there and I’m looking forward to people using it.

“We believe we have a fund that is fair. It’s a 25 per cent all-in spend. We have to make investments in a health-care facility, we have to make investments in daycare, we need to make sure that vulnerable citizens are being looked after, we need to make investments in classrooms. It’s a balance, and we believe we’ve been fair across the board.”

The Screen Nova Scotia and Canadian Media Producers Association commissioned the first comprehensive economic study of Nova Scotia’s film industry since 2008, obtained by the Local XPress.

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In April 2015, the province eliminated the Nova Scotia film industry tax credit that had no set limit and replaced it with the Film and Television Production Incentive Fund that has a \$10-million annual budget.

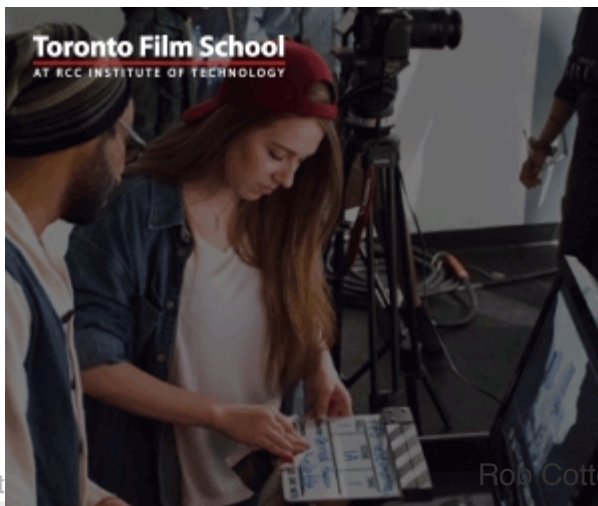
The premier said he doesn't think the decision killed the province's film industry.

Tory Leader Jamie Baillie disagreed.

"There's 3,000 jobs at stake here. (The premier) has a duty to know what the benefits are. He's obviously looked at the cost, but it's the benefits and the jobs that really matter here. I think it's disgraceful that he won't even look to see what benefits have been lost."

NDP  Leader Gary Burrill said the premier's position is "a kind of intransigence that borders on arrogance and speaks of the same type of poor judgment which led to this very poor decision in the first place."

Burrill said the report proves the government exhibited "colossally poor judgment" in ending the tax credit, that it should be immediately reinstated and that the government owes an apology to the industry and people involved.



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Rob Cotterill, who has worked as an assistant director on the TV series Trailer Park Boys, Call Me Fitz, Seed and Mr.

D, agrees.

“The PwC report makes it abundantly clear the film incentive has to be dismantled and the tax credit reinstated, and it has to happen immediately. Otherwise, we will have no more projects this year.”

Cotterill, who began working in the industry in Nova Scotia in 2004 after moving from New Brunswick, says the study shows that 50 per cent of the people working in the industry, including himself, are in the 25-to-45 age bracket.

“These are not the people you want to drive out of the province.”

He would prefer to stay in Nova Scotia but is pondering a move to Toronto, like many of his friends in the industry who have pulled up stakes.

Melski, who is in post-production on his third feature film, *The Child Remains*, called the change to the tax credit “irresponsible” and said a lot more people are being affected by the cuts than just the filmmakers.

“Small businesses that I’ve dealt with in production are feeling the revenue decline intensely.”

A Cape Breton native now living in Halifax, Melski has been working in the industry for 18 years and accessed the incentive fund to make *The Child Remains*.

“The incentive fund is a step in the right direction. Screen Nova Scotia has asked for necessary changes to make it more user-friendly. There are many steps remaining to make the fund viable both within and outside the province.”

Movies are still being made, but because the money available has been reduced, the number of crew members a filmmaker can hire has declined and the production values on the films are negatively affected, Melski says.

“I sold both my (previous) films (*Growing Op* and *Charlie Zone*) around the world. The less money we have, the less competitive we will be with places like the U.S., England and Australia.”

Cotterill and Melski are frustrated that the premier hasn't even read the report.

Melski said a lot more people are being affected by the cuts than McNeil wants to admit.

"If Stephen McNeil doesn't know that, I'm pretty sure the electorate will let him know."


When the government's decision to reverse planned changes to the seniors Pharmacare program is contrasted with its firm stance on the changes to the film tax credit, Baillie said it's clear what is at play.

“These things are being made as political decisions. They’re not being made in the best interest of our economy or jobs or the province; they’re political decisions. Seniors spoke up, and he was scared off. I think he should stop being so stubborn on the jobs in the film industry and actually make an economic decision and not a political one.”

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