

7 August 2019

[REDACTED]
AUCKLAND

by email [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information request and response

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act ("OIA") dated 26 July 2019. I am sorry that your project did not secure funding. As we said in our 18 July 2019 funding letter:

This was the first round of our financial year. As you know, due to feedback from both platforms and producers, we tried to limit the amount spent in this round to allow for more a consistent rate of commissioning across the year. We earmarked roughly \$16m for Scripted content and \$9m for Factual content.

In total we received 71 eligible Scripted and Factual production applications seeking a combined total of over \$44.9 million.

All applications were considered individually by a group of assessors. A series of assessment meetings were then held, where each application was discussed and assessed against NZ On Air's funding criteria. The Funding team then prepared funding recommendations, based on the strength of individual proposals and the overall spread of applications both in this round and those previously funded.

These recommendations were then discussed and finalised by the NZ On Air Staff Investment Committee and Board. Successful applications present a diverse range of quality content that serves a wide range of New Zealand audiences on a variety of platforms.

Unfortunately we are unable to offer funding for [REDACTED]. Given the demands on our funding and the strength of other production applications in this round we could not give this project sufficient priority for support at this time.

Glenn Usmar also explained in your phone conversation with him that [REDACTED] could be re-submitted at a later funding round if it retained the support of [REDACTED] or another appropriate platform. You may wish to resubmit the project to a future round (projects can be submitted twice). I am happy to discuss this with you. In short, the July funding round saw a high demand for funds and there were several projects looking at 15 March on the table. We chose to prioritise projects commemorating the first anniversary, especially those made with the involvement of the Muslim community from content creatives that had clear links with that community.

You have requested:

- all documents of any kind including assessment notes, internal memos, emails, minutes of assessment meetings and notes of any discussion relating to my [REDACTED] proposal

- *the assessment committee's recommendation to the Board and include any summary of my proposal and any reasons given for or against supporting given documentary.*
- *the minutes of the Board meeting relating to the consideration of my documentary [REDACTED] [REDACTED] proposal plus any records of emails letters, notes of telephone conversations whether kept in physical or electronic form about any aspect of the proposal in the possession of any Board member*

I have attached the following:

- the recommendation paper to the Staff Investment Committee (with redactions for other declined applications. Details of successful application are not redacted because these are in the public domain).
- extracts from the SIC and Board meeting minutes

With regard to your third bullet point, no Board member has any information about this proposal.

You have also asked the following questions and our response is under each one.

1. *Was there any aspect of the [REDACTED] proposal which made it ineligible for funding consideration? If so what was it?*
No. The project was eligible.
2. *Did any aspect of the [REDACTED] proposal fail to meet NZ On Air's Funding Criteria? If so, what was the identified failure?*
The proposal met the criteria.
3. *Was the full [REDACTED] proposal read by all members of the team? If not, how many team members actually read the full proposal including the appendix?*
Two assigned assessors and the Head of Funding. All members of the Staff Investment Committee (SIC). See our three-stage assessment process detail [here](#).
4. *Was my [REDACTED] proposal regarded as eligible for the Quality Journalism category of factual programming? If not why not?*
It was eligible.
5. *How many members of the assessment team watched the supporting video [REDACTED] ?*
At least one of the two.
6. *How many of the team watched the supporting video at least to the interview with Psychiatrist Prof Paul Mullen covering the issue of the dilemma facing journalists of writing about narcissistic individuals?*
At least one of the two.
7. *Were the board members given the full proposal and supporting material to read? If not, why not? If so, how many read the proposal and viewed the supporting video?*
No. As the proposal sought less than \$1 million, the decision was made by the SIC.
8. *In the past year how many proposals have been recommended to the board by the assessment team? How many of those recommendations have been overturned by the board?*
Our annual report will list the successful proposals which number in the hundreds. A relatively small number (those over \$1m) are determined by the Board. We cannot recall a recent Board decision that was contrary to a staff recommendation but it does happen.
9. *Was the Prime Minister's statement that she would never utter the name of the offender of the Christchurch Mosque killings ever discussed at an assessment meeting or board meeting?*

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If so please supply any record of the contents and context of any such conversation by any board member or member of the assessment team.

No.

10. *This question relates to sections 39 (b) and (c) of the Broadcasting Act 1989 regarding how the Commission must take into consideration “the potential size of the audience likely to benefit from the project to which the proposal relates; and.....the extent of the likely benefit to the consumers of broadcasting services affected by the project in relation to the cost of the project “. From my conversation with Glenn I understand that the documentary proposal Nine Bullets was only supported by the Stuff Platform. If that is correct, then what objective measures (video analytics not site circulation) were used to compare the reach of Stuff with the combined audience reach of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] ?*

NZ On Air is platform-neutral and supports content on a wide range of platforms to serve many different audiences. The size of the anticipated audience is one criteria of many that we assess. Previous funded content on Stuff has performed well and it is a platform we are happy to consider as a supporting platform for appropriate content.

11. *How many members of the assessment team have been involved in the creation of a documentary production either as an executive producer, producer or director?*

None. Some are former broadcast executives; others have specialist media studies, evaluation, and scriptwriting skills.

12. *How many eligible feature length (72 mins +) and Commercial hour documentary proposals were received in the last round and how many were funded?*

We received 14 applications for single documentaries (including two docudramas); of these six were longer than a commercial hour. Six single documentaries were funded; of these three (including two docudramas) were longer than a commercial hour. More details about funded projects are in our [July newsletter](#).

13. *If my own long form documentary was not the only one rejected in the last round please provide the topics of the other rejected documentaries.*

We do not disclose details of projects that did not receive funding. This is because they may receive funding in future rounds, or from other investors, and publication of this information may affect the likelihood of future success.

The next set of questions relate more generally to the method by which eligible proposals are assessed.

- A. *How do the assessors record and report their individual views? Is it by a secret voting process at any stage or simply in open meeting?*

After an initial discussion involving all the funding team, assessors prepare a recommendations paper that is reviewed by the Head of Funding, then submitted either to SIC or through the Chief Executive to the Board. Assessors talk to their recommendations; there is no secret voting process. A fuller explanation of our assessment process is [here](#).

- B. *Is there a decision grid to help each assessor reach a judgement about a proposal? For example, are points awarded for certain categories eg. the strength of the business case. If so, please supply a copy of that decision grid. If not, what guidelines, if any, are the assessors given? Do these guidelines exist in any written or electronic form and if so please supply a copy of them.*

We use nine investment principles. They are set out in our [Funding Strategy](#) and separately [here](#).

- C. *If there is no common decision grid in place how do the individual members of the assessment team arrive at their individual decision and collective decisions as to whether a proposal should be supported or not?*

See above. A fuller explanation of our assessment process is [here](#).

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- D. *Is the nature of the content of a documentary proposal evaluated as part of the assessment process? If so, are there any guidelines assessors must consider when making their individual recommendations? Please supply these guidelines if they exist.*
See above.
- E. *Does “liking” or “not liking” the content of a proposed documentary play any part in the decision-making process either by individuals or by the team as a whole?*
No. See above.
- F. *Over the last year have any public or private opinions and statements made by any member of the government (including the Prime Minister) on issues facing the nation, played any part in the assessment team’s discussion surrounding the suitability of a proposal for funding? If so, please explain whose opinion was discussed where, when and why and any documentation of what was said at any such discussion.*
No. NZ On Air is an agency that is arm’s length from the Government.
- G. *In the past year how often have assessors been divided in their opinion over the merits of one proposal over another (a) not at all (b) occasionally (c) frequently (d) very frequently*
Each proposal is debated at length and assessors frequently have different initial views. The purpose of the debate is to reach agreement on a set of outcomes.
- H. *Are the individual opinions of the assessors given equal weight in the final recommendation to the board? If not why not?*
During the assessment process yes. From those debates a collective recommendation is made, with a note if there are key areas that warrant particular discussion, which often arise from assessments.

If so, what process is in place to make sure the opinion of a junior member of staff does not feel pressured to comply with the opinion of a senior member of staff on whom any aspect of their job may depend?
By using the investment principles framework noted above and by encouraging an environment that welcomes discussion and debate.
- I. *What involvement do board members have, if any, in the assessment meetings?*
None. The Chair may observe but does not participate in SIC meetings. Only funding team members are present during the assessment process.
- J. *Were any members of the board present at the last assessor’s meeting when my [REDACTED] proposal was discussed?*
The Chair observed at the SIC meeting.
- K. *If the answer to question J is yes, please supply any notes in any form taken by that person or persons in regard to the assessment process.*
No notes were taken by the Chair. The Chair attended as an observer to get an appreciation of the size and scope of the round in its entirety.
- L. *Your letter states that in the last round 9 million dollars was allocated to factual content. What counts as Factual Content? Are Events, Lifestyle Series, Short Form documentaries (and series) and Long Form documentaries all lumped into same category when deciding on factual projects? If so please answer Question M immediately below.*
There are four funding streams in the NZ Media Fund, of which Factual is one. Factual content can include a wide range of content. Factual investments are guided by the [Factual Roadmap](#).

If not, please indicate how much money (amount and proportion of the \$9 million) was allocated to each factual content area prior to reaching a final recommendation to present to the board.

We do not record decisions in this way. However we will report on the successful outcomes for each of the four factual investment priorities set out in the roadmap (Premier Stories, Many Perspectives, Fresh Opportunities, and Quality Journalism) in our next annual report (2019/20).

- M. Given the differences between types of factual content eg. Event and Long Form Documentary, what decision grid, if any, do the assessors use in deciding between the merits of say a short-term event and a documentary with a long shelf life? Please supply such a decision grid and /or guideline if they exist.*

This type of grid is not used.

If such a decision grid does not exist, please detail the factors considered by the assessment team, individually and as a group and the process whereby fairness is applied when deciding between, say, funding an event versus a long form documentary.

The investment principles are set out in the funding strategy documents referred to above.

- N. Is shelf life considered to be an important factor when considering the funding of a long form documentary? If not why not?*

In some cases. It depends on the subject but can be a desirable aspect of an application.

- O. Given the provisions of the Bill of Rights to ensure freedom of expression and opinion what review process (internal or board initiated) is in place to guard against systemic decision-making bias, of any kind, by an individual or the group in making funding decisions?*

As noted above we operate a collective decision making process involving many people for both SIC and Board decisions; open discussion is encouraged.

- P. In regard to the Key Personnel section of Factual funding applications. Is there a directive or any understood/agreed policy in place of giving funding preference to younger directors and producers, over older directors and producers? If so why?*

No.

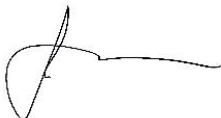
- Q. Does the platform, or combination of platforms, supporting a factual production influence the assessment group's funding recommendation? If so, what is the hierarchy of preferred broadcasters and platforms?*

There is no hierarchy of platforms. The size of potential audience that a platform is likely to deliver, compared to the amount of funding sought, is one aspect of our consideration.

You have the right to refer this response to the Ombudsman if you are dissatisfied with it. More information on how to do this is [here](#). NZ On Air proactively releases information in accordance with the Government's commitment to the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan. This includes publishing responses to requests for information under the OIA. Please note that this response (with your name removed) will be published on the NZ On Air website shortly and will remain on our website for 12 months.

Thank you for your interest in our work.

Yours sincerely



Jane Wrightson
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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