

A PROPOSAL FOR THE SETTING UP
OF THE
MALTA FILM COMMISSION OFFICE

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The evolution of film commission work

Back in the 1970's, as more production companies began to look beyond the limits of a regular production centre for realistic and varied locations, more countries were beginning to see the need for production co-ordination liaison. They were also keenly aware of the economic benefits brought by film and video production companies to their areas.

Around the world the services of film commissions have grown and so have their marketing efforts. From advertising to direct mail to the well-produced "Locations" trade show, where they can inform producers of their vast array of services, film commissions reach industry decision-makers where they live.

Today there are more than 200 commissions in 19 countries, all devoted in the business of facilitating on-location film and television activity which generates billions of dollars annually.

Why a Malta Film Commission?

There is a strong growing need for a film commission office in Malta.

The local film industry is presently a *servicing* industry - providing facilities to foreign producers. Before the construction of the Rinella tank, film shooting in Malta had been going on for quite a number of years but 1964 remains the year marking the founding of the Malta Film Facilities and the beginning of a new 'organised' manner by which film services are offered to foreign producers.

This company, later becoming the parastatal company called Mediterranean Film Studios, made various attempts in the past in assuming the unofficial role of a film liaison office, arranging location and working permits and trying to cut through beaurocratic red tape. A great deal of film liaison has also been made by independant location managers employed directly by foreign producers. However, the fact remains that there is no entity of any sort in Malta which looks after the producer's needs in a professional way in the *national interests* of the local film industry.

MFS has always been a limited company with it's first priority being to financially break-even due to high running costs, often quoting incredible figures which do not make Malta very competitive with other countries. As a result of this and also due to some past political manoeuvring Malta cannot be proud of it's reputation overseas where film shooting is concerned. The privatisation of MFS in 1995, however promising it may be, has made the profit-seeking urge of the company grow only stronger. In all fairness this may only be expected from any private enterprise.

There is therefore a great need for a government body to provide, without fee as a profit motive, core services, including (a) location scouting assistance, (b) liaison services with

industry facilities and services (c) augmented research, and (d) liaison to and among the community, production companies and government.

Below is an important requirement for Malta's membership into the Association of Film Commissions, which in itself shows why a national body is required to look after the national interests.

“A film commission must avoid conflicts of interest between the official duties and services of the film commission office and the private financial interests of the film commissioner and the film commission employees. Such persons must avoid employment by or significant financial holdings in production companies, vendor or service business which provide commercial products or services in film and television production. Similarly, the film commission must not be or controlled by a labor union, private for-profit business organisation or proprietary commercial entity.”

Services

A Malta Film Commission would provide foreign producers a gamut of free services, from scouting locations to trouble-shooting with local officials and helping cut through all the paperwork and bureaucratic red tape. The aim of this commission would be to provide hard economic incentives, such as tax rebates and hotel discounts for location scouts. It would also offer free services like research for screenwriters or liaison work with local government agencies.

Structure and Responsibilities

The Malta Film Commission, as other commissions world-wide, would be set up by various government departments and agencies, such as the National Tourism Organisation, the Ministry of Economics and Industry, the Ministry of Culture, MDC, the Chambers of Commerce and the Department of Information.

It's primary responsibility would be to attract film and video productions to Malta in order to accrue locally-realised benefits from hiring local crews and talent, renting local equipment, using hotel rooms, rental cars, catering services or any number of goods and services supplied on location.

While attracting business to the Maltese islands, the commission would also attract visitors. Film scenes at a particular location are in themselves “soft-sell” vehicles that also promote that location as a desirable site for future tourism and industry.

There is one goal in common with all commissions: to attract filmmakers and videographers to their respective regions by providing services that an out-of-town producer would be hard-pressed to acquire without their assistance. As the 21st century

approaches rapidly and on-location production expands world-wide, the benefits of working with film commissions are sure to increase to meet global production demands.

The goals of the Malta Film Commission

The ultimate aim of the Malta Film Commission is to generate a greater income in the Maltese economy through foreign film or TV shooting..

The Commission would therefore create incentives to foreign producers by:

- (i) Facilitating on-location film and television production activity by handling all necessary permits and liaison with government authorities.
- (ii) Organising visits for foreign producers, negotiating hotel discounts and tax rebates during their stay, and offering free recces around the Maltese islands.
- (iii) Developing a relationship of trust with foreign producers by presenting them all information about all local facilities and talent available in a totally unbiased way and in the sole interests of the producer.
- (iv) The formation of an extensive database of pictures of locations in Malta which could easily be sent by e-mail to inquiring companies and also act as a quick-reference library.

The Commission would also promote film shooting in Malta by:

- (i) Participation in the on-location trade show "Locations" which is held at the Los Angeles Convention Centre, which represents over 300 locations world-wide and is attended by over 6,000 delegates.
- (ii) Representation in the SUNDANCE Film Festival through the Association of Film Commissioners International.
- (iii) Representation in the CANNES Film Festival through the Association Of Film Commissioners International.
- (iv) Participation in the IFP/EAST (Independent Features Project) Reception.
- (v) Advertising in leading film journals
- (vi) Setting up a website on the internet dedicated solely to film shooting in Malta.
- (vii) Publishing a list of local facilities and services every two years.

Whilst offering incentives to producers, the Malta Film Commission would also look after the interests of local talent and local servicing companies by:

- (i) Making known to producers all local talent which could form a local professional support crew;
- (ii) Encouraging the employment of local trainees where possible;
- (iii) Ensuring that the production company has adequate insurance cover;

The Malta Film Commission would also endeavour into any activity which may promote film co-productions agreements entered into by the state or the private sector.

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