



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, HE Mr Graeme Wilson

**Introductory remarks at Tropfest film screening
19 March 2014**

Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to tonight's screening of selected films from the *Tropfest* short film festival. Tropfest is one of Australia's most iconic cultural events, and it is also the largest short film festival in the world. We are lucky to have with us tonight the Managing Director of Tropfest, Mr Michael Laverty, who is visiting South Africa to showcase the festival to South African audiences in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Excitingly, he is also exploring the possibility of setting up an African version of the Tropfest competition. I'll hand you over to Michael in a moment so he can tell you more about Tropfest and the films you are going to be seeing tonight.

Before doing so, I'd like to say a few words about how this film festival fits into the context of the broader Australia-South Africa relationship.

It is a very exciting time to be Australia's High Commissioner to South Africa, particularly with Australia taking on important international responsibilities such as our 2013-14 membership of the UN Security Council, our presidency of the G20 this year and our chairing of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for the next two years. These responsibilities open up many new opportunities for bilateral cooperation.

We of course also have a substantial trade and investment relationship, and I'm very pleased that we have recently inaugurated an *Australian Business Chamber of Commerce for southern Africa* (ABCSA), which will be an important mechanism for increasing these ties. ABCSA's membership will draw on the large number of Australian mining companies that have business interests in southern Africa, as well as a range of businesses in other sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure and education. Businesses based in southern Africa with interests in Australia are also welcome to join. If anyone in the audience would like further details about the Chamber, please contact our Austrade (Australian Trade Commission) office in Johannesburg in the first instance.

In addition to these strong trade and investment ties, the bilateral relationship is underpinned by extensive people-to-people links. I'm very pleased that some of these links are being highlighted during this year's 20th anniversary of democracy celebrations. For example, while the Australian and South African cricket teams went to battle in the Third Test match in Cape Town, a number of official events took place on the sidelines to commemorate the strong and growing bilateral relationship.

We also have a full calendar of cultural events this year, including an outreach program aimed at encouraging young students to get excited about science and particularly the amazing Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope, and a photographic exhibition that will highlight Australia's significant historical links with South Africa, including the Australian Government's leadership role in pursuing financial sanctions and sports boycotts during the anti-apartheid struggle.

Finally - just for any budding filmmakers in the audience - I'd like to briefly mention the Australia-South Africa film co-production agreement. The agreement aims to encourage bilateral cooperation in film-making by streamlining some of the administrative and funding issues surrounding

film-making. Practical benefits for film-makers include being able to access a range of funding and tax benefits, simplified immigration requirements, and duty free importation of film equipment.

The agreement provides some fantastic opportunities for Australian and South African film-makers to pool their creative and financial resources and we are very keen to see the first official 'co-productions' coming through the pipeline. Anyone interested in obtaining further information about the program can contact me or my public diplomacy officer, Natalie Mendelsohn, after tonight's screening.

Thank you. I'd now like to introduce Mr Michael Laverty, Managing Director of Tropfest, to say a few words before we start tonight's screening.