



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

**Helping Older Australians Enjoy the Movies: Accessible cinema
June 25, 2008 – Federal Parliament – House of Representatives**

I am very pleased to announce that the Government will commit \$350,000 in one-off funding to expand access to the cinema for some of the 4 million Australians with a hearing impairment – many of them of course are older Australians.

And this plan is called: “***Helping Older Australians Enjoy the Movies: Accessible Cinema***”

We all know about the population shift and that within 50 years, the proportion of the population over 65 will have tripled.

This plan is a part of the Federal Government’s commitment to a greater focus on positive and active ageing.

It’s part of our wider agenda to promote social inclusion and participation, as well as reducing social isolation.

Many older Australians have told me that indeed they want to share in the enjoyment and pleasure of going to the movies with their grandchildren during the school holidays but they can’t of course enjoy the films because they are unable to hear them.

So this plan is about allowing people with hearing impairments to enjoy really great blockbusters like Get Smart or Kung Fu Panda and enjoy them with their grandchildren at the movies.

I want to be able to help throw open even more doors in Australian cinemas to people with hearing impairments.

And for some of course this may be the first film, they have been to seen in years.

One in six Australians have a hearing loss; and this is projected to increase to one in four by 2050¹.

Currently, Australian Hearing confirms that over half the population aged between 60 and 70 have a hearing loss.

This increases to 70 per cent for those over the age of 70.

¹ Access Economics report 2006

And what is more staggering is that more than half of Australia's farmers are likely to suffer from premature hearing loss through their work.

And of course the Australian Government is committed to helping older people maintain their independence and keeping them connected to their communities.

So that's why the Department of Health and Ageing will be working together with the Independent Cinema Association of Australia and Media Access Australia to enable greater access to regional and independent cinemas to those with a hearing impairment.

The partnership between Independent Cinema Association of Australia and Media Access Australia builds on their work with cinemas and consumers that aim to make cinemas accessible to those that are hearing impaired.

In mid-2007 the USA had more than 830 accessible cinemas, representing about 15 per cent of locations and one accessible cinema for every 357,000 people.

The United Kingdom had more than 250 cinemas, representing nearly 38 per cent of locations.

That's one accessible cinema for every 243,000 people.

New Zealand has three accessible cinemas but with captions only, representing three per cent of locations.

That is one accessible cinema for every 1.4 million people.

And in 2001, The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission forged an agreement that with Hoyts, Greater Union and Village that specifies three sessions a week of captioned films in 10 locations nationally.

These locations are in eight capital cities plus Glendale in Newcastle and Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast.

And this only represents two per cent of cinemas in Australia being accessible.

And this followed a case with the Human Rights Commission and a Perth gentleman.

So of course regional cinemas, although keen to implement accessible cinema sessions, have lower profit margins compared to metropolitan multiplexes.

The cost for the purchase of accessible equipment is a financial expense that many regional cinemas will struggle to meet.

So today's announcement of \$350,000 in funding will allow Australia to more than double its current access to cinemas with a very strong focus on regional, suburban and independent cinemas.

There is of course a long way to go but this is the first step.

This seed funding provides a one-off injection, but I am hopeful that cinemas all over the country will realise the commercial gains that are possible by catering for this very fast growing demographic.

It is hoped “***Helping Older Australians Enjoy the Movies: Accessible Cinema*** will encourage the major commercial chains to further expand their AD (audio description) and captioning programs.

This morning, I wrote to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and Graeme Innes, Human Rights Commissioner and Commissioner Responsible for Disability Discrimination advising him and the organisation of the decision.

This funding will allow 12 cinemas to be fitted out with the DTS Cinema Subtitling System, including transmitters and headsets for audio description that enables the audio description and captioning.

Further to this, today’s announcement allows those with hearing and vision impairment of course to share social and family experiences, which were only limited before to 10 cinemas in Australia, and this of course brings the total down to 22.

This also brings to line with the Australian Film Finance Corporation commitment that from 1 July 2007 all Australian features funded by the FFC will be captioned.

This means of course more people would be able to see Australian films.

And of course captioning is the reproduction of a soundtrack in text format. Similar to subtitles captions are a transcription of the entire soundtrack, including sound effects, into the same language.

Audio description or AD is a service where additional commentary is provided to narrate the visual elements of a movie.

And of course AD guides the listener with concise, objective descriptions of new scenes, settings, costumes, body language, and 'sight gags', all spoken between existing portions of dialogue.

On a final note, can I say I was pleased to hear and to point out that there were indeed many patrons this morning (Wednesday June 25) at captioned screenings of *Sex and the City* which played in Brisbane, Darwin, Sydney, Adelaide and Maroochydore.

I would also like to note that the next film screening at those locations is indeed the *Incredible Hulk* showing this Friday and Sunday, so indeed many people will be able to enjoy it and more people across Australia will be able to enjoy films with this special funding.

In closing, if I can also table a release from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission welcoming this funding announcement and the difference that it will make to people’s lives in terms of accessing the cinema.