



MEDIA RELEASE

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SCRIPTWRITERS FILE LEGAL CASE FOR FAIR SHARE OF FILM AND TV ROYALTIES

Australian scriptwriters have launched a multi-million-dollar legal case against Screenrights, the organisation the Australian Government authorises to collect royalties in the film and television industry.

The case was filed in the Federal Court of Australia by the 2,600-member Australian Writers' Guild and the AWG Authorship Collecting Society on 3 March. The first court date is 5 April.

Scriptwriters say that instead of protecting them, Screenrights - which was established in 1990 to collect and distribute royalties paid by educational and other users of Australian films and TV programs – may have misdirected possibly tens of millions of dollars in royalties that should have been paid to writers over the past two decades.

Based on Screenrights' own figures, they appear to have collected over \$50 million in script royalties over the past 20 years, yet AWG's Australian members may have received as little \$350,000.

The case alleges Screenrights also engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct by claiming it was representing scriptwriters when it was not.

The Writers' Guild President, Oscar-nominated writer Jan Sardi said scriptwriters were forced to take legal action through their representative industry bodies after years of negotiation and attempts to resolve the matter got them nowhere.

"This case is about fairness," said Sardi. "It's about scriptwriters – who are at the very centre of our film and TV industry – being treated fairly and getting the royalties that they are rightfully entitled to."

AWG Past President Tim Pye, who has written some of Australia's most popular and critically acclaimed television programs - *Sea Change* and *Love Child* – said Screenrights was set up to reward creators but was not doing so fairly.

"I have been writing for more than 30 years non-stop and I've never received a dollar from

Screenrights. What is now clear is that the system rewards some people but not others. Screenrights knows the system is biased and broken for scriptwriters but will not fix it," he said.

Declarations are being sought from the Federal Court that Screenrights has committed numerous breaches of trust and breaches of statutory duties, that it engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct under the Australian Consumer Law and that its actions wrongfully interfered with contractual relations between scriptwriters and producers.

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