

Hi, my name is Ian Thomson,

Sadly I'm unable to attend this morning, and I'll explain my reasons a little later, but firstly I'd like to thank the committee for allowing me to share my concerns via email.

I have serious concerns about Clauses 15-17, and 21-23 of the financial Measures (2015) Act. In short, the proposed changes to the Film Industries Tax Credit.

I am not from around here, but a skilled immigrant from Australia.

I have worked in Film and Television in Australia since 1999 as a Boom Operator (person who helps collect dialog on film sets by setting up hidden microphones, and swinging a microphone around on a very long pole during the take)

I received my permanent residency in late 2013, but my first nova scotian experience was in 2011.

The nova-scotian film industry was so busy in 2011 that there was a country-wide search for a skilled boom operator to work on the first full season of the CBC comedy series Mr D.

As luck would have it, I was living in Vancouver, BC on a work/holiday visa. My name was put forward by a connection I'd met on set and I was contracted for the season in Halifax.

Obviously, there was no tax credit collected on a percentage of my wages, as I was not a NS resident. There was however a whole bunch of money spent locally in Halifax, on my accommodation, food, and transport. I ended up using a pretty high percentage of my own wages on food, and tourist activities. All that money stayed in NS

Towards the end of our shooting schedule I had to return to Australia to work on a large-budget film (The Great Gatsby) and while I thought highly of Halifax, and NS; figured that my time here was over.

Fast forward to 2012, and yet again Mr D. is unable to find a local boom operator with enough experience.

I was contacted, and we forged ahead with a temporary worker visa.

Yet again, no tax rebate on wages – plenty of local spending on accommodation, travel, food and local tourist activities. All that money stayed in NS

It's at that time that I noticed NS had a negative population growth – I was pursuing immigration to BC, and made the switch to NS.

The Greater Halifax Group supported my application for Provincial nomination of permanent residency – I was skilled, NS “needed” me...

In 2013, I was a Provincial Nominee (and would be paying taxes at the end of the year), however, as I was not yet a permanent resident, the third season of Mr D, and a second production (Beethovens Treasure) were both unable to claim a tax credit on my wages.

I paid for my move to canada, tens-of-thousands of dollars out of my own pocket to get here, purchase a car, pay for my own accommodation, bring my work tools etc. All this money stayed in NS.

But I was finally a Permanent resident.

In 2014 – we had one of the busiest years in film on record – I worked on the Book of Negroes, Trailer park boys, Mr D (season 4), and parts of Haven (season 5), with a few Commercials for good measure.

In my personal life, I proposed to my partner, we purchased a house close to her work in Chester, and we married on a beach in Hubbards.

The sudden and confusing changes to the film tax credit have thrown our lives into chaos.

While other film workers are still mobile enough to move provinces, My wife is in the final stages of negotiation to purchase the vet-clinic she works at, and as such, I can't just up and move.

My life is here in NS, and I'll have to throw away those valuable skills I've spent years acquiring.

The reason I wasn't able to present in front of the committee this morning, is that I'm meeting with NSCC to discuss a return to school and re-training, I don't know what I'll be able to re-train as... But I'll have to find ways of maintaining my share of the household income.

On a less personal note, I have serious concerns that the finance department has made a very ill-informed decision, as even the pre-budget speculation caused massive disruption to the industry.

Productions were placed on hold, some have cancelled, and no-one has any idea of what the future will bring.

Finance appear to be using very outdated and narrow data-sets, from either 2004 or 2008 - not showing the true cost/benefit to the province.

I just can't understand the reasoning behind the proposed changes.

How is it possible to show the public a "savings" of \$18M (\$24M spent in 2014 to the proposed \$6M in 2015) when the consequence of making this change is a "loss" of over \$100M in economic spending in the province?

The spin-offs of this \$100+M spent in province don't show up in the data collected by finance, yet it provides income to so many nova scotian business's and tax payers.

This \$100+M of economic spending in NS just won't happen if the tax credit is substantially changed – the productions will simply shoot elsewhere.

I have to question, what happens when you remove that \$100+M?

What happens when thousands of film workers are suddenly unemployed? Do they file for government assistance? Do they re-train? What about the smaller amount of taxes collected from their new "minimum-wage" jobs that they'll have to take to make their mortgage payments?

It all seems like a political move - to make the public think that there is (false) progress, at the expense of a few thousand jobs and loss of an industry that took 25 years to build.

I respectfully ask that you consider the full ramifications of such an uninformed change to this sector.

Please note that any “discussions” between Government and screen industry representatives have appeared so one-sided that the Screen reps were simply forced to take the “best” available option presented to them. This new option (if capped) would prevent any growth in an industry that was trucking along bringing many millions of dollars into the province, and doing so in a very “green” way.

I haven't even touched on the cultural loss that comes from merging an “arts” department into a “business” one.

How does a business agency, with no experience in making films, help film makers?

What can we do about it?

As I see it, the best advice would be to retain the pre-existing credit, capitalise on a lower USD exchange rate, and try to repair the damage already done.

Then move forward with a proper study to make informed changes.

Sincerely,

Ian Thomson

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area, obscuring the name and any handwritten notes or dates that might have been present.