

# AYRBURN SCREEN HUB REPORT

## DAVE GIBSON

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### Executive Summary

1. Queenstown, Wanaka and the wider Otago and Southland region have a large number of excellent and diverse filming locations. There is a long and consistent track record of screen productions choosing to come and shoot in the region.
2. However the region is under-resourced in regard to screen infrastructure. Consequently some productions choose to shoot elsewhere in the country or may not even come to New Zealand. Productions that come, spend less time and money in the area because of the lack of studios, support buildings and accommodation.
3. The nature of the Ayrburn proposal, which is a film and television studio with associated offices, workshops and accommodation (Screen Hub), would meet the needs of a variety of productions. This can be expected to result in more screen productions happening in New Zealand and higher film and television production expenditure in the Queenstown Lakes and wider Otago/ Southland region.

### My credentials

4. I have been a screen producer since the mid 1970's with producer or executive producer credits on over 100 projects which include a range of television dramas, documentaries, comedies and feature films. A producer is the key figure who secures the funding, hires the cast and crew, manages the budget and oversees the production. They also guide creative decisions and coordinate marketing. They are involved from concept development through to the final release.
  5. I was the founder and CEO of the Gibson Group in Wellington which is the oldest independent screen production company in New Zealand and one of the most prolific.
  6. In 2014 I took up a four year contract as CEO of the New Zealand Film Commission, which funds New Zealand feature films and oversees the New Zealand Screen Production Rebate. Since then I have been a screen consultant and mentor on a number of film and TV projects.
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7. I was the inaugural Chairman of the Screen Producers Association (SPADA), a board member of Toi Whakaari ( The New Zealand Drama School) and WellingtonNZ (The Wellington economic agency). I was also Chair of Project Blue Sky, which in 1998 successfully won a High Court case in Australia around the exclusion of New Zealand films and television projects under the Closer Economic Relations agreement, CER.
8. I received an ONZM for services to the film and television industry in 2012. A list of many of my projects can be found on the International Movie Database [Dave Gibson - IMDb](#).
9. I have read and abide by the Environment Court Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses Practice Note 2023. Where this report relies on information provided by other experts, this is outlined within the report.

## **Introduction**

10. This report provides an overview of the screen production industry in New Zealand including the size and growth of the industry. It outlines why productions choose to shoot in New Zealand and specifically why in the Queenstown Lakes District and wider Otago/Southland region.
11. It then looks at the barriers to productions coming to film in the region and why the region has not attracted a larger proportion of the screen industry activity and spend.
12. The report then comments on how the Ayrburn Screen Hub proposal responds to these issues and considers the benefits to the region.

## **Overview of TV and film production industry in New Zealand**

13. The types of productions which are relevant to the Ayrburn Screen Hub proposal are what is known as “scripted”, in other words not documentaries and reality shows. These productions include:
  - TV drama for domestic networks
  - TV drama for international streamers
  - Domestic films
  - International films
  - TV Commercials.
14. A brief description follows with an indication of how they are financed.

Note: The New Zealand Screen Production Rebate (NZSPR) provides rebates on Qualifying New Zealand Production Expenditure (QNZPE). It has become a mainstay financing tool for both domestic (40% rebate) and international (20% rebate) productions.

### ***Domestic TV drama***

15. These are normally originated and driven by a domestic production company such as Great Southern, South Pacific Pictures or Screentime. There are a number of TV drama series being produced in New Zealand for TVNZ and Sky. Examples of recent productions are One Lane Bridge, Under the Vines, A Remarkable Place to Die and The Gone. These series are generally financed by contributions from the domestic TV network, NZ on Air, overseas distribution advances (against foreign sales) and the NZSPR of 40%.



### ***TV dramas primarily for an overseas streamer or network***

16. Examples of these which have been shot in New Zealand are Hercules, Xena, Power Rangers, Sweet Tooth, Mr Corman and the Lord of the Rings TV series. Finance is generally from an offshore production company, TV network or streamer such as Netflix, Amazon or Apple alongside the international NZSPR of 20%.

### ***Domestic Feature films***

17. These are generally New Zealand stories produced by NZ producers. Examples are Hunt for the Wilderpeople, Once Were Warriors, Whale Rider, The World's Fastest Indian and more recently Bookworm, The Mountain and The Convert.



18. Most domestic feature films will have finance from the New Zealand Film Commission and the domestic NZSPR of 40%, as well as an advance from an Australasian film distributor and/or overseas sales agent.

### ***International films shot in New Zealand***

19. The most well known would be Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit and of course Avatar which is ongoing. Also parts of films such as Mission: Impossible Fallout, A Wrinkle In Time, Pete's Dragon, Light between Oceans, Walking with Dinosaurs and Alien Covenant which incidentally were all shot in the south of the South Island. These films are generally financed by Hollywood studios or streamers, normally include A list actors and benefit from the NZSPR of 20%.

### ***TV Commercials***

20. Over the last few years there has been a drop in the number of high end commercials being shot in New Zealand for domestic and offshore advertisers. This is because of the drop in "free to air" TV audiences and the growth of streamers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney +. There are still TV commercials being shot, but less than ten years ago.
21. In the last few months these commercials were shot in the Queenstown Lakes area: One New Zealand - Lets Get Connected , McDonalds - The Great Cup Odyssey, KFC - Brand, Cancer Society - The 1 in 3 could be me. TV commercials generally need offices, workshops and accommodation rather than studios.
22. The five divisions above are not entirely cut and dry. There are combinations and permutations such as official co-productions. New Zealand has co-production treaties with 17 countries. Some feature films are now being financed and shown by streamers rather than debuting in cinemas. Content plays on a variety of platforms and earns income over a number of years. Gaming and GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives & Museums) companies also occasionally shoot live footage elements in studio facilities.

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## Why do international commercials, dramas and films choose to film in New Zealand?

23. This can be due to a combination of factors, including:
- A particular location or a variety of locations. New Zealand is known for its diversity of locations that are often close to each other
  - Reverse seasonality. For example, productions may need to shoot a winter sequence when it is summer in their hemisphere. This can apply particularly for television commercials where they work ahead with a winter looking commercial for a winter launch in the Northern Hemisphere
  - Some good studios, facilities and equipment (mainly North Island)
  - Strong technical crew - New Zealand crews are well regarded
  - Flexible work conditions for crew
  - English as the main language (an obvious asset)
  - Stable government with no corruption
  - Key personnel such as Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, Jane Campion and James Cameron live in NZ and have the status to drive decisions leading to some large scale projects
  - Key talent for a proposed international TV commercial might be in the country for a sports/cultural event or another screen project. eg: Jason Momoa and Benedict Cumberbatch both filmed commercials while in New Zealand on feature film shoots
  - Favourable exchange rate
  - The international NZSPR subsidy which returns 20% of the studio's or network's spend in New Zealand after the project is completed.
24. Conversely factors which work against those productions choosing to come to New Zealand include:
- Limited facilities
  - In some situations costs here could be higher versus say Eastern Europe, South Africa or South America
  - Unfavourable exchange rate
  - New Zealand studios are sometimes booked out
  - Some other countries' incentives might be more attractive
  - Key talent, particularly actors, might not want to travel to New Zealand for an extended length of time
  - Seasonality might work against the project
  - Issues obtaining work visas in a timely manner.

## Where do productions currently film in New Zealand?

25. Generally the script will have a setting that comes from the story. If it is largely inside, then a set can be built in a studio close to where most crew and cast are based (currently probably Auckland or Wellington). If the script is more location based then they might choose to travel to an area further away for filming.
26. However, most productions have a mix of interior and exterior locations, so the location of the studio becomes a key factor in the decision regarding the base of the production. If the studio is close to locations, there are obvious benefits, especially in regard to travel time, accommodation, weather cover, etc.
27. Weather cover is important in choosing the production base. All productions create a shooting schedule that tries to rationalise the order of filming scenes in order to minimise the use of expensive actors, locations or equipment. It is also common for the schedule to try and shoot exterior scenes early on in the hope of having good weather. But at the same time the schedule should ideally have some interior scenes on standby in a studio in case of rain. If a production was considering coming to the Otago Southland region, they would ideally have some interior studio scenes on standby in case of bad weather.
28. As an example, the New Zealand feature film *Mahana* (2016) was set on the North Island East Coast, but the costs involved meant it was shot closer to Auckland where there was a strong crew and actor base and a studio for some interior filming.

## How big is the New Zealand Screen Production industry?

29. The industry does not have its own data collection system but given that most films and drama series access the NZSPR, production expenditure can be easily accessed, although the numbers lag somewhat behind because they are not reported until the production is completed.
30. In 2022 the respected consultancy company Olsberg SPI, based in London, wrote a report *Economic Impact of the New Zealand Aotearoa Screen Production Sector* which was a study commissioned by the New Zealand Film Commission on the impact of the screen rebate (then known as a grant). **(Appendix #B1).**
31. This study reported that expenditure rose from \$336 million in 2014/15 to \$985 million in 2020/21.



32. Figures for 22/23 and 23/24 have been sourced from New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) reports: (**Appendix #B2 and Appendix #B3**)  
2022/23 \$788 million (flow through in reporting from Covid period) .  
2023/24 \$1,410 million.
33. In recent years around 87% of expenditure was on international projects that originated and were presumably largely financed from outside New Zealand. The proportion of expenditure attributable to New Zealand productions has risen from 9% nine years ago to around 13%.
34. The number of New Zealand productions accessing the NZSPR also increased over the period and this trend will likely continue since the government's recent adjustment of the criteria allowing domestic TV productions to access both the rebate and NZOA funding.
35. The Olsberg report and numbers sourced from the NZSPR do not include TV commercials and any screen production that might be associated with gaming. The TV commercial producers group APA are unfortunately not able to accurately estimate the production expenditure of their members.
36. In the 2022/23 year The New Zealand Game Developers Association reported that NZ game studios earned \$434.4m. (**Appendix #B4**) Game development and its potential is touched upon later in this report.

### What is the Queenstown Lakes region's share of New Zealand's screen production activity?

37. There are no regional expenditure figures available for film or drama series. Historically large film productions have come to the Queenstown Lakes region to film on location and have then returned to a studio base in Auckland, Wellington or back overseas to continue filming. This is due to the lack of facilities in the region. Their spend in the Queenstown Lakes region is a percentage of their overall production budget and is not differentiated in any reports.
38. As an example the Walt Disney Production Pete's Dragon spent \$87 million in New Zealand. They shot the majority of exterior sequences in the Southland/Otago area but then relocated to Wellington to complete filming in the studio space available there. It is not possible to identify the percentage split between Southland /Otago and Wellington. It is likely that, if there were studios available in Queenstown, the film could have been kept entirely in the region.

39. Spend in the Queenstown Lakes area for TV commercials is also difficult to track because of commercial sensitivity. Film Otago Southland can access some crew numbers and budget scale from data associated with filming permits and their own questionnaires but the budget information is only provided in bands. In the 2023/24 year, from the data available, I have surmised there were 19 TV commercials tracked. They had an average shooting crew size of 24 and an average budget of around \$375,000. **(Appendix #B5)**
40. 17 of the 93 Games Studios in New Zealand are based in Otago. **(Appendix #B4)** It is likely that almost all of these are in Dunedin.

### Why do productions film in the Otago/Southland region?

41. In a nutshell, the primary reason is the scenery. The Otago/Southland region has a number of amazing and diverse scenic locations, most of them easy to get to and within moderate travel time from accommodation.



You can be in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Switzerland, Montana, Alaska or Antarctica, all places that have been doubled here. And of course a variety of fantasy and sci-fi worlds too.



42. From a location point of view, Queenstown Lakes is seen as the jewel in New Zealand's crown. Other parts of New Zealand have some similar locations but Queenstown Lakes and its surrounding districts have more spectacular versions and most importantly a large number and wide diversity – all not far from a major international airport.



**Given the locations in the region, why do productions spend less time and money in Otago/Southland than might be expected:**

43. There are three main reasons:
  - The lack of a good sized studio for film sets and wet weather cover
  - No associated support infrastructure of offices and workshops
  - Accommodation availability.
44. These reasons have come up in commentary from industry colleagues and support my own industry observations and experience (**refer Appendix A**).
45. In discussion with industry practitioners, support buildings and the Hub approach are seen as critical. The industry does not just want a studio. They also want associated buildings, creating a hub that can be both a one stop shop for filming and film related activities as well as a base to head out to locations from.
46. The Hub also needs to be flexible so that different size jobs can be accommodated. That flexibility would mean that potentially multiple projects could be carried out in the Hub at the same time with temporary separation.
47. If the Hub includes accommodation on site, with restaurants and a gym close by, then this is a massive bonus. Crew and actor accommodation for the large numbers associated with filming has been an issue for years in Queenstown and the surrounding area.

**How does the Ayrburn Screen Hub proposal address these issues?**

48. Firstly the studios will provide the wet weather cover that's been missing. The size of the studios is good, with one at 2,000 sq metres and the other at 1170 sq metres. With a couple of larger exceptions, this is in line with the size of the studios in Auckland and Wellington. The studios will make the region attractive for productions to stay longer because they will have an interior shooting option. But it will also mean that a production which would not have considered the Queenstown Lakes region may now consider it.
49. The Screen Hub concept has been designed with input from experienced art director Ken Turner. (**Appendix #B7**) Part of the industry for 25 years, his credits include Lord of the Rings, Avatar, Ghost in the Shell and Top of the Lake. He is based in Queenstown and has worked throughout New Zealand in most of the existing studios. He is currently working on a large budget film, War Machine, shooting its locations in the Queenstown Lakes region.

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50. Secondly the Screen Hub design provides support buildings for productions ranging in scale from moderate domestic drama series to major offshore financed films. From discussions with Ken Turner and the project architect Jessie Sutherland I understand that the proposal includes the following essential Hub elements in addition to the two main studios:
- A variety of different size offices (suitable for production, locations, art, wardrobe, hair, construction, data, special effects and post production including editing)
  - Workshops /workrooms (for art department, wardrobe, rigging, stunts, special effects, camera, steel and prop fabrication, special effects and construction department)
  - Dressing rooms and rehearsal spaces
  - Backlot space (flexible outdoor areas for anything from shooting outdoor sets and green screens to parking spaces for crew, technical trucks and catering).
51. The Screen Hub is designed so that two different productions can be accommodated simultaneously with appropriate separation. This provides flexibility in the size of productions that can be accommodated.
52. Thirdly the Hub includes crew and cast accommodation with 201 units with 247 beds. (Note: film crews don't share rooms due to the length of jobs.) Accommodation in the Queenstown Lakes is in short supply, so having worker accommodation on site makes the Screen Hub offering particularly attractive. I would anticipate domestic dramas, films and television commercials with crew and cast sizes of up to say 80 or 100 people would not fill the accommodation. But international films and series often have crews well in excess of 200 and the onsite accommodation would be a major attraction.
53. The current design shows a variety of offerings including studio accommodation with kitchens, a definite attraction for those workers. The inclusion of a wellness centre and gym is good for people staying longer. There are also four restaurants in the nearby Ayrburn hospitality precinct with a fifth planned.
54. If producers are looking to locate their production in the Queenstown Lakes region they need to know that accommodation will be available at the Screen Hub. Larger projects with bigger crews and budgets will generally have a longer lead time than say television commercials, which often confirm only weeks before filming.
55. Ayrburn appears to clearly understand the necessary and positive link between the accommodation and the studios with associated facilities. Although there will be some periods when the accommodation can be made available to the public to offset

operating costs, I understand from the applicant that a good proportion of rooms (on a sliding scale) will be held open for producers wishing to book facilities at the Screen Hub.

**Once the Screen Hub is completed, what is the likely increase in revenue for the region?**

56. Feedback from producers and production companies indicates that a Screen Hub will definitely increase the number of productions shooting in the region and how long they stay there. Estimating the consequential additional spend in the region is difficult due to uncertainty about how many, and what type, of screen productions would use the Screen Hub in any particular year. However, it is possible to construct a matrix of the type of jobs that could shoot in the area and what they might spend in the region.
57. In 2023/24 New Zealand screen production expenditure was \$1,410 million. **(Appendix B#1,2,3)** There are seasons of domestic drama series spending around \$9 million and domestic television movies around \$3 million. There are major international drama series like Sweet Tooth spending \$69 million on their second season and Amazon spent \$532 million on the first season of the Lord of the Rings television series. International films shooting here can have budgets up to \$90 or \$100 million, with Avatar well in excess of that. Television commercials can spend anything from \$ 50,000 to a million dollars plus.
58. The following is a matrix of possibilities for the first full year after opening:
  - a. One domestic drama series.  
Budget \$10 million, area spend \$4 million
  - b. One domestic telemovie  
Budget \$3 million, area spend \$1.5 million
  - c. One offshore financed TV series  
Budget \$60 million, area spend \$30 million
  - d. One offshore financed film  
Budget \$50 million, area spend \$25 million
  - e. Several TV commercials, mostly from offshore as line productions - area spend \$5million.
59. If there was one domestic film or series and one offshore financed film or TV series plus the TV commercials spend one could expect a domestic regional area spend between \$31.5 million and \$39 million. If the Gods were on your side (and the Screen Hub can

accommodate all of the above) those numbers could be added together and achieve \$65.5 million domestic regional area spend. This would be just under 5% of the recent annual NZ spend.

60. Area spend is a combination of direct (domestic crew and providers who are primarily screen industry contractors or companies) and indirect spend (hotels, vehicle rental, hospitality and companies such as Mitre10, Placemakers, Dart Engineering, Sign it Signs, Hirepool and Kennards).
61. The split between direct and indirect spend defined in the paragraph above can vary on projects, but the Olsberg 2023 report took an actual medium budget drama series and came up with a 40 direct /60 indirect split of the below the line costs.
62. Below the line costs exclude the producers, directors, script and marque actors, who are unlikely to be area spend. The below the line elements of a budget can be between 70 and 90 % of the full budget. But for the purposes of this report the more relevant concept is the area spend which could be apportioned in the same 40 direct/60 indirect split.
63. Another study, by Oxford Economics (**Appendix #B9**) analysed the New Zealand spend on Season One of Sweet Tooth of \$46 million. The direct spend was 46% and the indirect spend 54%.
64. It is worth noting there has obviously been enough confidence in both the Wellington and Auckland market for new studios to be built recently at Lane Street and X3 plus additional studios being added to Auckland Film Studios and Studio West.

### Looking forward

65. The Ayrburn Screen Hub will have advantages in that it will be a more comprehensive offering than elsewhere in New Zealand (well thought out hub space, accommodation, hospitality, gym and wellness centre). The Screen Hub will attract an increased number of productions to the region and almost certainly increase the scale and budget level of the productions.
66. Recently a major US financed film, War Machine, was shot largely in Melbourne studios, where it was reported to have injected A\$73 million into the Victorian economy (**Appendix #B8**). However, it has relocated cast and crew to Queenstown for three weeks filming on Queenstown Hill, Kawarau River and in Poolburn (as Afghanistan).

- 67. It is possible that this type of film could choose to shoot longer or even entirely in Queenstown, if the Screen Hub was here.
- 68. Once the Screen Hub is built I would expect there to be an increase in the number of screen workers based in the region. At the moment it is estimated that there are around 250 screen workers in the wider Otago Southland region. **(Appendix #B6)** Most are freelance contractors and some of them also work contracts in Auckland, Wellington and occasionally offshore. They will be more likely to work at home and their numbers are likely to increase.
- 69. The Screen Hub may also attract non-traditional film/TV work. Game Development companies occasionally shoot live action elements in studios. The New Zealand Game Developers Association reported that NZ game studios earned \$434.4m in the year to 31 March 2023, of which 95% came from high-value exports. **(Appendix #B4)**
- 70. There is already an association with the screen industry via Weta Workshop and Weta Digital and a lot of cross sector personnel movement and industry collaboration. For example the Wellington Paranormal game is based on the popular TV series. Both sectors use similar technologies such as Unreal Engine.
- 71. The GLAM industry could also use the hub/studio. GLAM in this instance refers to installations in Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums. Increasingly these institutions, such as Te Papa, are exhibiting their assets and exhibits in modern digital formats. Some New Zealand companies such as Gibson Group and Story Inc. are producing high budget work for international clients. Some of that involves studio filming.

## Conclusion

- 72. The Queenstown Lakes and wider Otago/Southland region is under-resourced in regard to screen infrastructure. Consequently some productions choose to shoot elsewhere in the country or may not even come to New Zealand. Productions that come, spend less time and money in the area because of the lack of studios, support buildings and accommodation.
- 73. The nature of the Ayrburn proposal, as a Screen Hub, would meet the needs of a variety of productions.
- 74. The Hub can be expected to result in more screen productions happening in New Zealand and significantly higher film and television production expenditure in the Queenstown Lakes and wider Otago/Southland region.



## **Appendix A Industry commentary and support**

**Phil Smith** ( Great Southern Television) one of the largest producers of content in New Zealand in a Crux video “Deep South - Lights, Camera, ..... Studio?”

*I believe they're coming here because they want to shoot this incredible landscape that they've seen on Power of the Dog or Top of the Lake.*

*So they want to shoot outside.*

*But Queenstown needs weather cover. We need a sound stage where we can go when it rains.*

*We need a production village where we can do art, do make up, laundry, production offices and editing.*

*Ideally all in one place .*

*So yes a studio of some scale here.*

*When talking of filming One Lane Bridge (his company's production),*

*We could not find one building to put our staff into, we ended up scattered around the district.*

**Anthony Deaker** from Film Otago Southland talking about studios in the South Island in the same Crux video:

*People say “ studio” and they think of a big box with the lighting rig and trucks driving in and out but we need Facilities as well*

*...what we don't have and what we desperately need is offices, yards and workshops.*

*A production coming in to make use of our epic locations needs a base.*

Please find below letters of support from:

**Annie Weston**

**Paul Yates**

**Phil Turner**

**Lisa Chatfield**

**Ken Turner**

# GODMOTHER

Monday 28 October 2024

To whom it may concern,

I lived in Queenstown for 23 years working as a Line Producer and Production Manager. Throughout this period I worked on a variety of formats with a range of different budgets: TVC's, films, TV series, stills etc.

I am currently working as the Line Producer on a USD \$100m TV series shooting out of Kumeu Film Studios in Auckland with location shoots in the lower South Island. We have 1116 crew onboarded so far and we have a 50/50 split between locations and stage.

The Southern Lakes District has a proven track record of attracting local and international films due to its proximity to a large number of diverse and amazing locations. However it's lacking the facilities to support this location-based work.

With offices, workshops, weather cover sets and crew (due to lack of accommodation) being scattered around the area it's not an easy place to organise a production. Compounding this is the cost of real estate and the premium put on short-term leases – if we can even find the space.

Currently productions hire hotel rooms and villas as production offices because of this. Workshops and storage (often belonging to the crew) and wet weather cover sheds are sourced on an ad hoc basis and as a result facilities are spread across the basin.

A film hub would provide the facilities to support the film industry and also help grow it – larger jobs need larger facilities.

Once large productions have shot their location sequences in Queenstown they go back to their main studio base to complete the rest of the job.

A film hub of scale would allow entire studio-based productions to be shot there and also provide weather cover and facilities for location-based crews.

Once there is a more viable sustainable pipeline of work in the area more film industry crew would base themselves out of Queenstown.

The ideal starting point for such a venture would be a large wet weather cover shed which could be a multi venue space – then as productions utilise the facilities they'd add as needed to the infrastructure.

More important initially are the other supporting facilities such as:

- Production Offices
- Department Offices
- Costume Workshop including Laundry & Breakdown
- Hair, Makeup, Prosthetic Workshops
- Construction, Paint, Plaster, Steel Fabrication Workshops

Props & Set Dec Storage & Fabrication  
Lighting, Grip & Rigging Storage  
Stunts Training & Rehearsal  
Parking  
Backlot Options eg: Forest, Snow  
Crew & Cast Accommodation

There will always be a range of different sized productions coming to the region with differing needs.

At one end of the scale a large production may need to take over the entire facility. At the other end a smaller or location-only based production may only need a portion of the facilities such as offices, workshops, accommodation, and a small area to shoot weather cover.

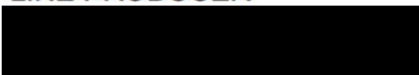
Due to the varying requirements it's important to have the option of a flexible shared space facility. Film crews from all over the world are used to sharing facilities.

The proposed Ayrburn film hub would provide the facilities that the region is lacking and make it an easier and more appealing place for a production to film in. Build it and they will come.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Annie Weston.

Annie Weston  
LINE PRODUCER

A black rectangular box redacting contact information, likely a phone number or email address.

**December 15, 2024**

To whom it may concern

Over the last 3 years, I've produced two seasons of the hit local TV series *Under The Vines* for Libertine Pictures. The series screens locally on TVNZ and internationally on Acorn TV and features Rebecca Gibney as a fish-out-of-water Sydney socialite who inherits a struggling vineyard in Central Otago. The show is specifically set in Otago's wine region and makes excellent use of its stunning scenery. For both series, I've spent about 4 months in the Queenstown/Central Otago region with the shoots themselves lasting 10 weeks or 50 shoot days. For both series we shot for 3 weeks in and around Queenstown, and 7 weeks at our hero vineyard Black Ridge Winery just outside Clyde. Shooting in Queenstown is an absolute pleasure with every shot looking picture postcard perfect. The only drawback on both occasions was the lack of a purpose-built production office and art/costume department facility in the region. For Season 2 (shot in early 2022), we had to base our production office at the conference room of the Holiday Inn Remarkables Park in Frankton near Queenstown airport. We managed to secure a good deal due to Covid border lockdown at the time, but being a conference room, it wasn't exactly perfect for our needs and the costume department had to take over a small conference room at the adjoining Wyndham Hotel. For Season 2 (shot in late 2023), the borders were open and tourism picking up, so basing at a hotel was now cost-preclusive and conference spaces booked out. I instead managed to find some vacant office space above some shops in the Remarkables Park shopping precinct. Though it served our purposes, it was small and less than ideal, especially for the costume department who had to load costumes in and out of an upstairs space. Accommodation costs had also increased by around 30% between series with covid restrictions easing. The increased cost was an issue for us on our mid-sized budget which didn't increase between seasons.

So the idea of a film and TV production hub with offices, studio, workshop and accommodation onsite at Ayrburn would have been perfect for us. It would have resolved all of the issues listed above, from having a purpose-built production office with plenty of tailor-made spaces, to having workshop areas for art and costume departments, not to mention plenty of parking. And though we never had a need for studio space on *Under The Vines* with everything shot on location, having studio space available could have been a useful option for us on a few occasions. And I know it would have been hugely beneficial to other productions shooting around the same time as us. Cast and crew accommodation on site would also have been a very useful to us. On *Vines 3* about 85% of our crew and 100% of our cast were out-of-towners. Having crew staying in one place would be fantastic logistically and foster more of a team and social spirit which was a big part of both *Vines* shoots. Crew were often spread far and wide so social interaction in downtime was often tricky.

All in all, I'd be hugely supportive of a film and TV production hub at Ayrburn. Its central location is an ideal place to base a production such as *Under The Vine*, not to mention the access to restaurants and other amenities at Ayrburn itself and with Arrowtown and Millbrook just up the road. Ken Turner who was involved in the design of Ayrburn was also our Production Designer on *Vines 2*, so he is well aware of the needs of film and TV production in the region at every level. We're hoping to bring another season of *Vines* back to the region in late 2025 which is likely too soon to see the benefit of such a facility, but if built, I for one would look at bringing other productions to the region. I sincerely hope it gets built and wish the venture every success.

Ngā mihi

Paul Yates

**Producer**

***Under The Vines – Seasons 2 and 3***



Hello

Very happy to endorse the proposed Ayrburn Film Hub.

I have lived in Queenstown for 40 years and worked as a Location/Scout Manager for over 30 years and have likely worked on 450+ jobs at a range of different budgets.

My role in a production primarily consists of finding the right location, the management planning of the location (often multiple locations) and implementing all aspects of access for filming.

A location manager is often one of the first people that a production gets in touch with when scouting for locations and there are lots of jobs that have looked at filming here in the Queenstown area but have decided against it in part due to the lack of suitable facilities such as studios, workshops, weather cover spaces, offices and accommodation for crew. A lot of jobs that do film in and around Queenstown/Otago for location shooting will then go back to a studio space either somewhere else in New Zealand or overseas to build the sets required.

A studio or similar film hub based in Queenstown would have huge benefits for the region by simply increasing the amount of time that these production companies remain in the area equating to financial benefits to the area. And it's pretty obvious why productions want to come here - this region does exhibit the most spectacular and pronounced versions of landscapes New Zealand has to offer and these can easily then double as overseas locations.

This film hub would provide a long time due facility.

Regards



Phil Turner  
Location Manager  
The Search



**From:** Lisa Chatfield [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Support for TV/film production studios in Queenstown

**Date:** 18 December 2024

Kia ora Dave,

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to discuss the proposal from Winton development to build a multi-purpose screen production facility at Ayrburn, between Queenstown and Arrowtown.

I was a key part of the producing team for season two and three of the Great Southern Film and Television / TVNZ series *One Lane Bridge*, which filmed in Queenstown in early 2021 and mid-2022. The Queenstown region has phenomenal natural beauty and a variety of landscapes within a short distance which make it a much sought after filming location. It's also a town that cast and crew love to spend their downtime in - enjoying both the natural surroundings and the hospitality - so it was a joy to be based in the area for 4 / 6 months each time.

Although both seasons of *One Lane Bridge* were (sadly) made a little easier due to covid keeping borders closed and tourists out we still struggled to find key spaces - primarily production offices, art department and wardrobe workrooms and storage spaces, and studio space to build our key set.

*One Lane Bridge* was a premium NZ drama - so a high budget for local drama but a small budget compared to international film and television which frequently come to Queenstown. However because we were a local show we were also focused on doing ALL of the production work locally - spending several months in pre-production and 10 weeks shooting in the area. This meant bringing in some crew and almost all of the cast to be based in Queenstown for the length of production. We were "lucky" in both series because accommodation was relatively attainable and affordable within our budget due to covid. However we were very aware that season 1 of *One Lane Bridge* was made pre-covid and had a significantly harder time finding a production base, and the cost and availability of accommodation dominated their budget.

Having discussed what Ayrburn are proposing I can see the following strengths for the screen sector:

- A base for the practical requirements of making a series in Queenstown - offices, storage, work rooms, building spaces, parking.
- Accessibility - away from the traffic of town.
- Distance from the airport / town noise.
- Studio space - of a good size but not too large. The safety net of studio space as weather patterns become more variable will only become more essential.
- Accommodation at scale and hospitality area on site.

I see the key strength for the facility overall being its flexibility of use which means that the site is not dependent on screen work. I agree that having a functional facility for production will definitely make the area more attractive to producers - particularly as carbon footprint management grows so being able to base longer in Queenstown will be important.

But the work will still be intermittent so it is reassuring to see that the development has a realistic approach to enabling screen work, without being wholly dependent on it.

Winton choosing to consult with Ken Turner also shows a practical and collaborative approach to developing a site that will meet screen sector needs and create opportunities to secure additional business into both Ayrburn and the wider region. Ken has genuinely worked on every kind of screen production possible and so his insight into how production works is highly informed.

I look forward to hearing more about how this development progresses.

Ngā mihi,

Lisa

Lisa Chatfield | Producer | [REDACTED]

**Ken Turner, Art Director/Production Designer**

To Whom it may concern,

My Name is Ken Turner, I have been working in the film industry predominantly as an Art Director/Production Designer for over 40 years. For 35 years I have been based in Queenstown. In this time, I have worked in most of the studios in NZ whilst on a large range of productions with varying scale and budgets. A list of some of the productions I have worked on are listed at the end of this letter.\*

In the region, there is a lack of:

- Appropriately sized studio buildings to build and film sets and use for weather cover.
- Supporting buildings and infrastructure, such as Workshops, storage, offices, and exterior shooting and laydown area.
- Worker accommodation, which is currently challenging for a production to organise.

The lack of facilities creates a logistical barrier to productions coming to the region to shoot. I have worked on a number of different productions in the planning and budgeting phase, that would have preferred to film in Queenstown. However, they have decided to go elsewhere, because of the lack of appropriate facilities in the region.

The Ayrburn screen hub seeks to provide the facilities that the region is lacking.

I have worked with the applicant to plan and review the layout of the screen hub from a practical and operational point of view, so it meets the real-world requirements and realities of a production filming in the region.

I have drawn on my experience of working in studios around New Zealand to review the practical and operational aspects such as:

- The sizes, orientation and proximity of buildings
- How the internal layouts of the buildings will operate in practical terms
- The ratio of studio, workshop and office space
- The ratio of buildings to backlot space
- The ratio of accommodation to production space

Film work in the region is varying compared to Auckland and Wellington, which is where the current studio options are. A facility in this region needs to cater for the unique opportunities and constraints the film industry faces here in Queenstown and the greater Otago / Southland region.

Due to the varied nature of the industry here, a facility must meet the needs of different budgets, scales and ratios of location vs studio sequences. To achieve this, the hub has been designed to be flexible to accommodate large, medium and small scale productions or even multiple productions at once. In addition to this, office space has been designed in such a way that it can be scaled to fit the requirements of a production.

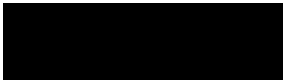
The ratio of the auxiliary buildings, such as workshops, workrooms, storage etc and the stages are generally equal - This is reflective of that in the current NZ studios.

As a reality of the variation in the film industry, sometimes aspects of the Screen Hub will not be in use. With this in mind, and to add resilience into the proposal a large portion of the production offices can be converted to short term visitor accommodation. The Current mode of operation for a production filming in Queenstown is to book short term accommodation rooms within or in close proximity to where the crew are being accommodated for their offices. The proposal seeks to reverse this and prioritise the film office function of the building over the accommodation function.

The Ayrburn Screen Hub has been designed thoughtfully in response to the local requirements of the film industry with genuine input from local and international expertise. The Ayrburn screen hub will be a world class facility that will undoubtedly increase film activity in the region.

\*The below is selection of locally shot films I have worked on: War Machine, East of Eden, Sweet Tooth, Under the Vines, One Lane Bridge, Power of the Dog, A Wrinkle in Time, Pete's Dragon, Mission Impossible 6 Fallout, Walking with Dinosaurs, Slow West, Lord of the Rings, Hobbit, The Chronicles of Narnia, Wolverine, Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, 1000BC, World's Fastest Indian, Two Little Boys, Erebus, Beyond the Edge, Absolutely Fabulous, Vertical Limits, Tracker.

**Ken Turner**



**5 December 2024**

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## Appendix B Research Sources

**#B1** Economic Impact of the New Zealand Aotearoa Screen Production Sector.

A study for the New Zealand Film Commission by Olsberg SPI July 2022.

[Economic Impact of the New Zealand Aotearoa Screen Production Sector](#)

**#B2** Approved Screen Rebates International

[Approved Screen Production Rebates - International Productions](#)

**#B3** Approved Screen Rebates Domestic

[Approved Screen Production Rebates - New Zealand Productions](#)

**#B4** NZ Interactive Media Industry Survey 2023

[NZ Interactive Media Industry Survey 2023 - NZGDA](#)

**#B5** TVC information has been sourced from Film Otago Southland. It comes from permit applications associated with locations on Council, DoC or LINZ land, (excl. private land).

**#B6** Infometrics identifies 326 people as being employed in the Information Media Services Industry in the Queenstown Lakes District but this category includes publishing, motion picture, sound recording activities and broadcasting. The Film Otago Southland database contains 254 established people with established credits.

**#B7** IMDb link for Ken Turner's filmography [Ken Turner - IMDb](#)

**#B8** War machine Australian spend [Feature film War Machine sets up camp in Victoria](#)

**#B9** Oxford Economics Report on Sweet Tooth [Oxford Economics Report on Sweet Tooth](#)

### Disclaimer

Prepared by Dave Gibson for Ayrburn.

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