



Lights, camera, action... film maker George Friend is back on Kokoda track

# Kokoda man is back on track

**G**OLD Coast film maker, producer and ex-army officer George Friend, who has been fighting a war of his own for the past 18 months, has finally kicked down the door that slammed shut on independent film makers in September 2001.

Mr Friend, who was advised of the problem in April 2002 by his lawyer, soon realised that the refundable tax offset legislation designed to give offshore investors incentives to back Australian films had one fundamental flaw.

It prevented all film makers/producers from accessing the incentive scheme if they had a provisional certificate. In other words, those who have certification to operate in Australia.

"The claim was we were 'double dipping' to have access to both the Australian and international market. It was a fundamental flaw that halted all negotiations with my investors, destroying the nine years of work it took to get to that point," Mr Friend said.

Mr Friend, who owns Rising Sun Films, has spent more than 11 years working on the feature film *Kokoda!*, a film which follows the story of two veterans of the Kokoda Track, one Australian and one Japanese, whose lives once again are drawn back to Papua New Guinea, where they relive the events.

"My ambition is to create a commercial, mainstream theatrical ex-

perience that reveals the iconic events of the Kokoda trail in World War II.

"This film will not only educate generations of Australians about the Kokoda Track, it will ensure that the veterans get the credit they deserve," he said.

A former army officer, Mr Friend developed an interest in Kokoda in 1989 when he toured the track about which he later developed a documentary entitled *Kokoda — The Bloody Track*.

The documentary won international acclaim on Discovery Channel and Australian television, igniting his passion to create a feature film on one of the key turning points in Australia's history.

With investors secured and production planning under way, all of Mr Friend's work was placed in jeopardy when the flaw was discovered, but thanks to continuous support from federal MPs Margaret May (McPherson) and Steven Ciobo (Moncrieff), and co-operation from Senator Helen Coonan and Senator Rod Kemp, it has been rectified.

"I'm elated about the changes. It's a landmark decision, most definitely a turning point in history and, although I've been left a bit battle scarred, I am back in the saddle. They can keep knocking me down but I won't lie down."

"Usually it would take more than two-and-a-half years to change legisla-

tion but, thanks to Margaret May, Steven Ciobo, and Senators Helen Coonan and Rod Kemp, it has been done," Mr Friend said.

Steven Ciobo, has been very supportive of the changes and believes it was imperative to the film industry, in particular on the Gold Coast, to have such opportunities.

"I am committed to help grow the Coast's film and television industry by nurturing the creativity and initiative of our artists and entrepreneurs, creating employment opportunities and strengthening its economic impact in the region," Mr Ciobo said.

The new changes are expected to generate fantastic opportunities for Australian film makers, paving the way for a bright and prosperous future, with more Australian films entering the market.

"The industry at the moment is constantly evolving, and film festivals that are giving kids the opportunity to break into the industry and gain experience is vastly different from years ago. It's constantly evolving and this new tax incentive will encourage offshore investors to pay attention and invest in Australian films," Mr Friend said.

Mr Friend, whose script for the film was written by renowned Australian writer John Dixon, author of the script for *The Man from Snowy River One and Two* has undergone up to five drafts but the film is

ready to be produced and will be in the market soon enough.


"My greatest joy is to entertain, to produce, to capture the attention of audiences and send out a message. After all, film is the best medium to deliver a message and as a film maker that is a big responsibility," Mr Friend said.

For aspiring film makers and producers, Mr Friend has these words of advice,

"Hold on to your vision, stay true to it, do whatever it takes both here and overseas, look at yourself and the things you aim to achieve, while also being aware of the reality of industry."

"It is a competitive and complex market but now that this door has been wrenched open, the Australian Film Industry can try to make significant progress, with all this talent finally having the opportunity to be revealed," he said.

— JESSICA HALLS



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