

5 September 2015

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS REFERENCES COMMITTEE
PO Box 6100,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT

To whom it may concern

Re: Inquiry into the future of Australia's video game development industry

I have responded to your terms of reference based on absolutely no experience other than being a member of the general public with an interest in the gaming industry.

Yours sincerely

Robert Marshall

1. How Australia can best set regulatory and taxation frameworks that will allow the local video game development industry to grow and fully meet its potential as a substantial employer?

Video game development is an “Art” much like the music industry and film industry. Much in the same vein there never seems to be much of a middle ground, either your work is popular and big budgeted or you are an indie developer working off personal funding or crowd sourcing platforms like kick starter. Therefore I'd believe that the local video game development industry should be treated as such, adopting similar taxation frameworks that allow for the uncertainty of their industry.

2. How Australia can attract video game companies to set up development operations in Australia and employ local staff?

Australia would find it difficult to attract existing operations or convince upcoming operations to stay rather than set up shop overseas for a few reasons.

Firstly, our internet speeds are some of the worst in the world, the decision to go copper rather than fibre was a bad one, to put it bluntly. Not only do developers need to transfer large files for testing between systems over the internet often and rather quickly, but also the online sales would rely on feeding out digital distributions on sub par speeds; not mentioning the connectivity between players in a large selection of games these days.

Secondly, Australia has a reputation of censoring video games. Rather than seeing them as an art form with a wide adult market, it seems that the governing representatives responsible can't see past the idea that games are for kids.

Thirdly, it is widely known around the world that despite scrapping our opportunity for quality internet at reasonable speeds, the government is still planning to staple on a digital goods tax on all video games sold in Australia. This will subsequently hike up the price on indie games or force developers to drop the price to stimulate distribution.

To attract operations in Australia, these issues would have to be addressed.

Also, industries such as film and music are offered Art grants; Video game development used to be akin to this too, but the fund has recently been scrapped. Setting up these sort of grants might also produce some stimulation.

3. How export opportunities from Australia's local video game industry can be maximised?

Video games are distributed mostly via digital means these days. Platforms like Steam, Windows store, Android... Even consoles are offering this service these days. So the best way to gain export opportunities would be similar things as I mentioned above; provide a stable faster internet service, rethink digital gst, address dogma of Australian games being denied artistic freedom. These things are key, and I think would apply to other industries aside from game development too. We are moving into a digital world, and the loss of acquisition of physical items is probably a good thing for the generations to come.

4. Any other related matters?

If you read this, despite me being one single person of no business or influence, no experience other than what I read from developers themselves before playing their games, I'd like to say thank-you for letting my voice be heard.