

## Kalgoorlie hopes to reinvent itself with a new film

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**Kalgoorlie locals are hoping a new feature film to be shot on location there will help it shake off its reputation as a wild west town of gold, grog and girls.**

Internationally acclaimed director Fred Schepisi has signed on to direct a multi-million dollar budget film set in the heart of the Goldfields.

'The Drowner' is based on Western Australian author Robert Drewe's multi-award winning novel about engineer C Y O'Connor's quest to build a water pipeline at the turn of the 20th century to supply fresh water to the pioneer town.

The film is backed by Mel Gibson's Icon Productions, has an international distribution deal and, according to its producer, a number of A list Hollywood actors are interested.

WA born producer Stephen Van Mil says Kalgoorlie-Boulder and its surrounding desert landscape will be a central character within the film.

"We are creating an epic film here," he said.

"It is in the same sphere of films like 'Lawrence of Arabia', 'The English Patient' and 'There Will Be Blood.'

"In each of those films, landscape was everything."

Mr Van Mil says the film will be deliberately showcasing the Goldfields region to the world.

"I'm very excited about the long-term benefits and the tourism opportunities that will eventuate," he said.

"In Northern Africa tourism went through the roof after 'The English Patient' came out and most particularly in New Zealand after 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy.

Despite its specific location Mr Van Mil says it is a film which will resonate with a world-wide audience.

"This could have been the opening up of California, this could have been the opening up of Europe, it just happens to be set in Western Australia and we still have the landscape the buildings and the artefacts there to showcase," he said.

"I think Kalgoorlie has generally suffered from tourism only being generated from the Super Pit gold mine, the skimpies and the brothels.

"I think it is high time that image changed."

### **New image**

Its an image that the city's tourism industry is also keen to shake.

City Councillor and pub owner Laurie Ayres, who is a financial backer of the film, says for a number of years the city has been trying to change pre-conceived ideas about the region; that it is a modern day mining town devoid of culture.

"We've had real trouble getting exposure for the Goldfields and showing what it truly is and what it means to WA," he said.

"Before the Gold rush in the 1890s, WA only had about 50,000 people. It was the migration to the gold rush which created WA."

Mr Ayres says the the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme, which is still in use today, has been largely overlooked by the general public.

"The pipe is recognised along with the Snowy Mountains Scheme and the Sydney Harbour Bridge as the one of the most significant engineering feats in Australia."

Mr Ayres says the film will provide the perfect launching pad for the region to showcase its unique history and modern day attractions.

"A lot of people see Kalgoorlie as a dot on the map. We can change the way people see Kalgoorlie, as not just seeing it as a modern day mining town.

"WA is very coastal centric - people seem to be entrapped in the South West lifestyle, when really it is no different than Perth. We have something completely different.

"We have Lake Ballard, abandoned ghost towns, the Mining Hall of Fame, amazing landscapes which run for miles and the Western Woodlands."

Mr Ayres says the buildings on Burt Street in Boulder are recognised by experts as some of the best preserved examples of colonial and post-colonial architecture in Australia.

### **Bad rap**

Earlier this year, reality TV show, Kalgoorlie Cops, received wide spread media attention.

The show, which followed police patrols around Kalgoorlie's wild night life, drew particular ire from the city's council, which thought it played up to old stereotypes and clichés of the city.

"There is the history of the four Gs; the grog, the gambling, the gold and the girls, which has stuck," Mr Ayres says.

"I think the media picks up on the storyline of those attributes."

Mr Ayres says the film will help the local tourism industry use the city's past to appeal, to tourists who want a unique experience.

Slideshow: Photo 1 of 2



**PHOTO:** Author Robert Drewe and film producer Stephen Van Mil in the Goldfields

**MAP:** [Kalgoorlie 6430](#)

Sarah Monahan is the Destination Public Relations Manager for Tourism Western Australia.

Ms Monahan helped set up the international tourism advertising campaign which aligned itself with Baz Luhrmann's 'Australia' movie in 2008.

She says having a particular region feature in a large scale movie provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to promote the local tourism industry.

"In the tourism season in Kununurra and Broome [where the film was shot] after the movie 'Australia' came out, the visitor centres reported their highest ever numbers," she said.

"It has a lot more impact when people can get engaged in a movie and fall in love with it - then they want to see the destination.

"Rather than just seeing an offer on a brochure, if you can make that emotional connection, it's a lot more likely to be successful.

Ms Monahan says the tourist boom created by 'Australia' could also be realised in the Goldfields.

"It's a massive opportunity for the Goldfields to showcase its enormous, rich history," she said.

"Just for example, tour operators will actually be able to do tours associated with the movie and the places and the history that were filmed in it."

Mr Van Mil says its these tangible links with the city's past, which will resonate with audiences and potential tourists.

"I think people will get very excited that by the end of the film it will be made clear that the pipeline which was built by O'Connor in the early 1900s, is still in operation and still pumping water out to the Goldfields and all those buildings and those artefacts are all still there," he said.

"We get asked frequently, why would someone in the United States, England or Europe want to watch a story about a Western Australian pipeline or the West Australian gold rush?

"It's a universal story. It's about gold, it's about water, and the essence of this film is it's about romance and they are all universal themes."

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