



1941

National Film Unit established

(Archives NZ, n.d.)

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The National Film Unit was established in August 1941 as a result of a Cabinet decision to provide film publicity of New Zealand's war effort.

Government involvement in film making had begun on a regular basis in 1923 with the formation of a publicity office attached to the Department of Internal Affairs. Scenic "shorts" and travelogues were produced for local and overseas tourist promotion. A private company "Filmcraft Ltd" was contracted to process these movies, and it built the Miramar Film Studios in 1928.

In 1930 the Publicity Office became part of the new Department of Industry and Commerce, Tourist and Publicity. The department acquired Filmcraft's interest in the Miramar Studios, which were to become the first home of the National Film Unit.

The inauguration of the National Film Unit marked a change in policy to that of its predecessor. The object was to make films for New Zealand consumption, to provide information on the country's war achievements. The unit produced a regular information newsreel entitled "Weekly Review".

In policy matters the Film Unit was answerable to the wartime Director of Publicity attached to the Prime Minister's Department, while the administration of the studios remained in the control of the Department of Industry and Commerce, Tourist and Publicity. In 1946 the National Film Unit became part of the Information Section of the Prime Minister's Department. The "Weekly Review" continued after the war, and the Unit also began making documentaries concerning national problems and undertakings, as well as films to the order of various government departments.

A major change in administrative control occurred in 1950 when the National Film Unit became part of the Publicity Division of an expanded Department of Tourist and Publicity. It was required to become a self contained trading unit and to compete with private enterprise.

Production of the **Weekly Review** ceased in August 1950 after allegations that it was politically biased. Four hundred and sixty episodes in all were produced. In 1952 a monthly magazine film entitled **Pictorial Parade** was first screened and this became the Unit's main output until production ceased in 1971. The Unit also made documentaries at the request of government departments, films for national organisations, as well as many important films on its own initiative.

Increasingly, private companies used the Unit's laboratories to process their work. This section became the Film Unit's biggest single revenue-earning operation.

The National Film Unit moved to a new studio complex in Lower Hutt in 1978.

The Unit consisted of seven main sections by 1990: Production, Laboratory, Facilities, Video Services, Technical Services, Marketing and Administration/Finance.

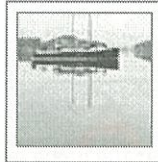
The role of the National Film Unit by 1990 was to provide commercial services which met the needs of government and the private sector in the fields of film and video production and sales, film and video processing, production services, and film consultancy services.

The State Services Commission's Video Unit was merged with the National Film Unit in November 1988.

National Archives, Wellington took over responsibility for the restoration and preservation of the National Film Unit's extensive archival film collection in 1988.

In 1988 the Government announced its intention to sell the National Film Unit. The sale occurred in March 1990.

1. New Zealand Official Yearbook, 1946
2. Directory of Official Information, 1987
3. American Cinematographer, Vol 60, No. 3, March 1979
4. Cinema Papers [chapter by Clive Sowry], May-June 1980
5. New Zealand's Heritage, Part 93
6. The New Zealand Book of Events [film chapter by Clive Sowry], 1986
7. File: TO 49/87/10 Establishment of the National Film Unit, 1942-46
8. File: TO 48/31 Amalgamation of Publicity Department with Tourist Department, 1950
9. New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department Annual Report, 1987



Photos and Movie Stills

Behind the scenes pictures and movie stills throughout the history of the National Film Unit.

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