

Hollywood eyes Cape's R430m film studios

CEO Dekker off to meet bosses in LA

HELEN BAMFORD

THE R430 MILLION Cape Town Film Studios taking shape near Faure are attracting the attention of Hollywood heavyweights.

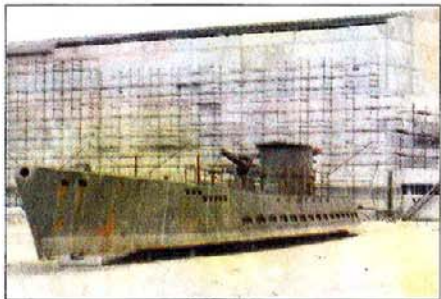
Chief executive officer Nico Dekker flew to Los Angeles yesterday for meetings with the major studios.

"I'm working with the South African consulate in Hollywood and have done an interview with the LA Times," he said before his departure.

Dekker said there had been an upsurge in interest in South Africa following the success of *District 9* and in anticipation of *Invictus*, Clint Eastwood's latest film starring Matt Damon as Francois Pienaar and Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela, due for release next month.

Backed by producer Anant Singh of Videovision Entertainment and e.tv's Marcel Golding, the custom-built, Hollywood-style studios are expected to be in operation by September next year. Dekker said he hoped it would become a base for the South African film industry, which was "very fractured" at present.

Several international



TOP NOTCH: Cape Town Film Studios near Faure. The submarine was used in filming *Sinking of the Laconia*.

PICTURE: JEFFREY ABRAHAMS



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feature films are being shot in the city, including a joint German and BBC production of the World War II drama *Sinking of the Laconia*, but the industry has been hit by the recession.

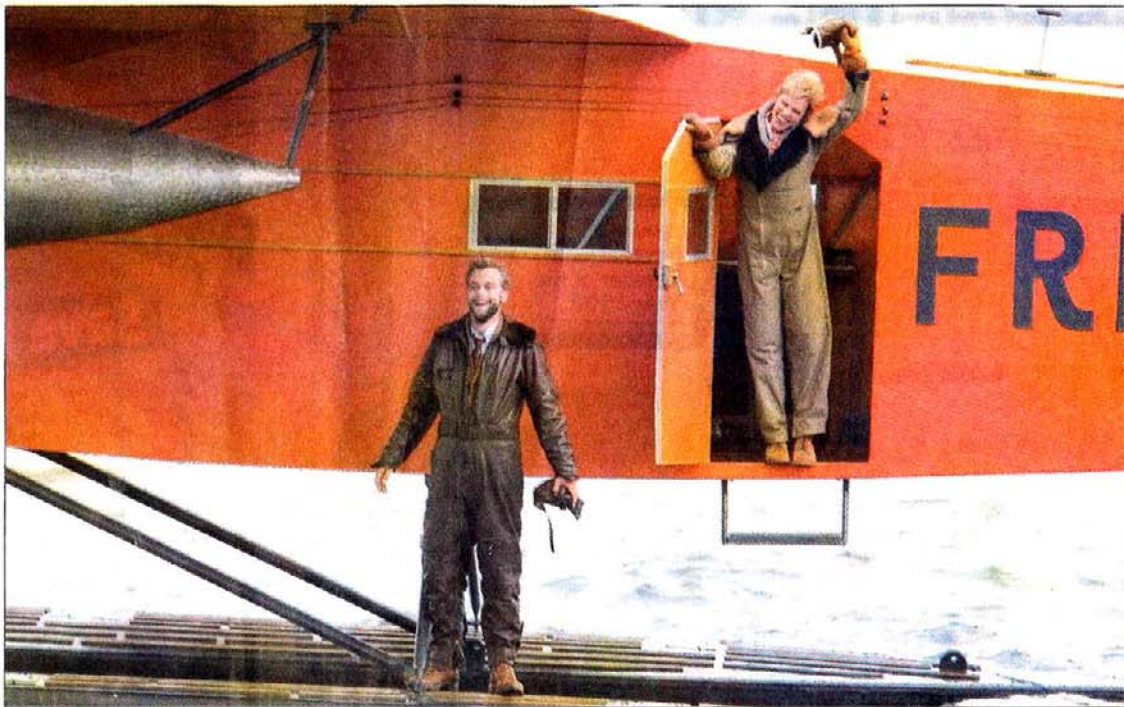
Philip Key of production company Moonlighting said it was becoming harder to confirm jobs because of the

exchange rate.

"Last year we were working on R9.50 to the dollar; now it is R7.50."

But though the rand had strengthened, other countries had become more expensive.

Eastern Europe and South America are South Africa's main competitors, but Key said film-makers came here because of the efficient crew base and the cosmopolitan nature of the population, which made it ideal to cast from different cultures.



HOLLYWOOD STAR: Hilary Swank, pictured with Joe Anderson, shot scenes for the film *Amelia*, about legendary aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart, with Moonlighting Films in and around Cape Town, the Eastern Cape and Rand Airport, Johannesburg, over three weeks.

PICTURE: FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AVALON PICTURES

Moonlighting was recently involved in the shooting of *Invictus* as well as *Amelia*, about legendary aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart, starring Hilary Swank, Richard Gere and Ewan McGregor.

Bobby Amm, the executive officer of the Commercial Producers' Association of South Africa, said they were concerned about the substantial increase in permit fees recently announced by South African National Parks, which had shot up by between

300 to 1 000 percent.

Some of the popular sites for filming in Cape Town are Sandy Bay, Table Mountain, Silvermine, Boulders, Cape Point and Noordhoek Beach. Fees for commercial films or adverts for very large crews – more than 30 vehicles or 60 people – will run at R20 000 a day, compared to the previous R6 800 a day.

Amm said it was becoming very expensive and they were expecting a tough season because of the recession.

"We've noticed a decrease

in work across the board, both in Cape Town and Joburg."

She said there were challenges and uncertainty around locations during the World Cup, when parts of the city would be declared no-go zones by Fifa.

Last year the City of Cape Town's Film Office was accused of being hostile to the industry, and inefficient.

Among the complaints were that more and more locations were off limits and that resources such as traffic officers were never available.

There was also criticism that location bookings were jotted down on a white board, rather than being done online.

Sources said this year things had improved but there was still a long way to go.

Mansoor Mohamed, the City's executive director for economic, social development and tourism, said a web-based locations permit system had been completed earlier this year but the industry felt this should only be implemented after the festive season.

A dedicated events unit

under the safety and security department had been approved by the City of Cape Town and was being set up.

Mohamed said a locations sub-committee consisting of industry stakeholders, including the Cape Film Commission and the city, had been created to look at constructive solutions to industry challenges and concerns.

This sub-committee would raise the issue of permit hikes with South African National Parks, he said.