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'Baywatch' site decision expected on Monday

Cost will determine whether Hawaii is chosen over Australia

By Tim Ryan
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"Bay Day" may be Monday.

That's when "Baywatch" producers could announce whether to relocate the production to Oahu -- or Australia -- for at least two years.

Executive Producer Greg Bonann, co-executive producer and writer Maurice Hurley, and Syd Vinnedge, senior executive vice president of North American productions for Pearson TV, continued yesterday inspecting film locations and a sound stage at the Hawaii Film Studio at Diamond Head.

The deciding factor -- as always in Hawaii -- is the cost of filming here, which is about 30 percent more than on the mainland. It's even more than that when compared to Australia, which is competing strongly to get the show.

Television series filmed here the last few years, including "Fantasy Island" and "Wind on Water," have cost well over \$1.5 million an episode.

Hawaii state, county, labor and visitor industry officials have been scrambling for several days to come up with a financial incentive package that would largely offset Hawaii's higher costs and persuade "Baywatch" to film here.

Still being hammered out are agreements from local labor unions -- the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 665, and the Teamsters -- for lower wages and other concessions.

If "Baywatch" films here the company would bring only about 20 key employees from Los Angeles and hire at least 150 locals. IATSE provides most of the crew for film and television productions while the Teamsters provide the drivers.

The guaranteed 44 episodes -- 22 each season for the two years -- will have the production spend about \$34 million, or \$780,000 an episode. In the first year of production alone, producers will spend at least \$20 million because so much infrastructure needs to be built, including a massive water tank at the Hawaii Film Studio, where underwater filming is done.

Production companies sometimes spend as much as 60 percent of their budgets in Hawaii, state film officials have said. But any deal between the state and "Baywatch" will have to include the name Hawaii in the show title, producer Bonann confirmed.

Lobbying for Hawaii have been Gov. Ben Cayetano; Mayor Jeremy Harris; Tony Vericella, president of the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau; Joe Blanco, Cayetano's executive assistant; Al and April Masini, who produced for Hawaii last year's "Miss Universe Pageant"; Hawaii Film Office manager Georgette Deemer; Honolulu film liaison Walea Constantinou and IATSE's Burns.