

Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into the growing presence of inauthentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'style' art and products and merchandise for sale across Australia

28 June 2018

Division/Agency: Consumer and Corporations Policy Division/Treasury
Topic: Inauthentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'style' art
MP: Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Question 1:

Mr SNOWDON: We're finding it very difficult to get a valuation of what Indigenous art and craft actually is worth. Do you have any idea?

Ms Vincent: To the Australian economy? I'm sorry, I don't know. We didn't prepare that.

Mr SNOWDON: You didn't do those sums before you got here?

Ms Vincent: No, sorry.

Mr SNOWDON: Anyway, that's a question for you on notice: if there's any work in Treasury that could guide us in that direction that would be very useful.

Ms Vincent: I'm happy to take that on notice and get back to you.

Answer:

Mr Snowdon requested figures on the monetary value of Indigenous art and craft.

Treasury does not have this data, although undertook inquiries with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Communications and the Arts.

Treasury notes '[Arts Nation – An Overview of Australian Arts](#)' (Australian Government, Council for the Arts, 2015) contains information on art sales generated by remote Indigenous art centres in 2008-12 and Indigenous artwork sold through auctions:

Art production is the main source of commercial income for many remote communities with art centres. Between 2008 and 2012, remote Indigenous art centres generated around \$53 million in art sales, with \$30 million paid to artists. Around 40 percent of art sales are reinvested in the art centres, which are community hubs. ...

Art centre production has changed over the last decade, with a higher volume of works produced, and more of lower price. Increased supply of art works has contributed to falling profits for art centres and artists are getting lower returns for their work. But there are signs that the decline in art centre sales is slowing.

This corresponds to signs of recovery in the secondary visual art market, in which contemporary and heritage artworks are resold. Auction sales of Indigenous visual artworks reached around \$11 million in 2013, up from \$8 million in 2011 and 2012. However, sales remain well below the record total of \$26 million set in 2007.

The research underpinning the art sales figures in remote Indigenous art centres in the Arts Nation report¹ is also noted in research cited by Ninti One as part of its submission to the inquiry ([*The Economy of Place - A Place in the Economy: A value chain study of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art sector*](#)).

Treasury is unaware of a more recent study which provides the dollar value of authentic indigenous art and craft in remote Indigenous art centres, or across the economy.

Question 2:

CHAIR: One of the problems we've had is that the sales of Indigenous items are mixed in with the whole sales figures for those kinds of shops. And while we estimate that it's worth a significant amount of money—it's much easier to collect that information from the arts centres, because it's all authentic material, it's less easy to grapple with for those shops; however, the turnover is significant. There's a belief in community that there's a significant loss to community because of these other items, but we've got no numbers to be able to run with that.

Mr SNOWDON: And people say their intellectual property has been stolen, regardless of whatever else happens, by copying images. That's a problem.

Ms Vincent: We are happy to take that question on notice. I understand that it actually may be difficult to get you a figure, but we'll certainly do what we can.

Mr SNOWDON: One figure we've heard is 80 per cent of the total sale of Aboriginal art and craft was dodgy. So you're going to go down to the airports and pick up the inauthentic art.

CHAIR: And it's difficult to know whether that 80 per cent is based on the dollar value or on the item numbers.

Mr SNOWDON: I think you'll probably find you haven't got that information, but it would be useful if you've got anything.

Ms Vincent: We're happy to see what we can do, definitely.

Answer:

Mr Snowdon requested figures on the percentage of Indigenous style art and craft sold in Australia that is not made by Indigenous artists.

Treasury does not have data on the extent to which Indigenous style art is, or is not produced, by Indigenous artists. Treasury understands some stakeholders have suggested that up to 80 per cent of Indigenous style art and craft sold in certain souvenir stores visited by those stakeholders were not made by Indigenous artists.²

¹ Woodhead A and Acker T 2014, The Art Economies Value Chain reports: Synthesis, CRCREP Research Report CR004, Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.

² <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/04/05/cultural-genocide-flood-fake-art-threatens-indigenous-artists-and-communities>,

'In an effort to measure the scale of the problem Gabrielle Sullivan from Indigenous Art Code and Robin Ayres from Arts Law went on a mystery shop of souvenir stores across Australia in 2016, buying boomerangs, keyrings, bullroarers and other merchandise. They estimated that 80 per cent of the souvenirs they came across were fake.'