



PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Exhibit 16

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Videos.](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/The_growing_presence_of_inauthentic_Aboriginal_and_Torres_Strait_Islander_style_art_and_craft/Videos)

Gabrielle Sullivan: Hey, Dennis, can you just introduce yourself.

Dennis Stokes: My name's Dennis Stokes. I'm the EO of Mimi Arts in Katherine.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yes, and you know I'm Gabrielle Sullivan.

Dennis Stokes: I know who you are.

Gabrielle Sullivan: I'm the CEO of the Indigenous Art Code. And, yeah, I'd just be interested if you can tell us a little bit about what's happening in Katherine with the products that you make and sell and some of the other businesses in town.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, look, well, I mean, we have about 300 artists—about 50 that are there regularly. We are making a lot of products on site. We don't do any printing; it's all hand painted, so there's never anything that's the same.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yes.

Dennis Stokes: And we're producing a lot of works there that are from the region, and we sell that as ethical buying and ethical selling, and that's what the focus of Mimi is.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Okay, and you were saying that, you know, a lot of the product you sell, there's no price difference between the authentic—

Dennis Stokes: No, no.

Gabrielle Sullivan: product and fake product.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah. I mean, we make a lot of product so that it's affordable to tourists, because we have a lot of grey nomads coming through and a lot of backpackers who want something quite small that they can carry but affordable as well—

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yes.

Dennis Stokes: because they don't have a lot of money. So we are making those sorts of products, but then we tend to find that they'll go out to another gallery or store within town and buy something that's made in China or Indonesia. And we're trying to work with these people to say: 'Well, why are you doing that? Why would you not want the authentic in your store instead of something coming from somewhere else?'

Gabrielle Sullivan: And what's their response?

Dennis Stokes: I don't think it's budging them at all. It's just sort of—they look at you and, I mean, I think there's a lot of other factors there: like we mentioned before, profit margins and things like that.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Oh, like profit margins on something like this?

Dennis Stokes: Yeah. I mean, yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: You know, and you look at this and know that it's from Indonesia.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, I can look at that and just go, 'That's not real,' you know. And—

Gabrielle Sullivan: And I can as well.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: But if a tourist sees that, with 'Australia, hand made'—

Dennis Stokes: Yeah. Look, I think they're duping the tourists too, because they don't want something that's fake; they want something that's real. But, if they don't know what's real and what's not, there's no way that can be helped. I mean, we get a lot of tourists come in and, as soon as they find out that our stuff is authentic, they would rather purchase that than get something else that's just come off the boat. Yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah, okay. And I know last year, when we were in Katherine at the ANKAAA AGM and we had the discussion around these products—

Dennis Stokes: Yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: some of the old people there especially were very disturbed around some of the fake items that were for sale.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: And they were even shocked—

Dennis Stokes: Yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: that you could buy those things in shops.

Dennis Stokes: That's right.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Can you talk about that a bit.

Dennis Stokes: There was a particular item. We won't mention what it was, but it's very traditional. It's used in men's ceremonies. Women aren't allowed to look at it or even touch it. So, when people are walking into a store and they see those items, it can be quite harmful, and it affects them in quite a way. I mean, I've literally seen somebody become very sick because she saw something, and she said, 'I can't look at that,' and was physically ill.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah.

Dennis Stokes: So it's harmful to those communities.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah, and, I mean, I guess lots of people living in some of the more isolated parts of the country probably don't even know that these shops in Cairns and the Rocks and the markets—

Dennis Stokes: No.

Gabrielle Sullivan: are full of those very items.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, we saw that reaction.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yes.

Dennis Stokes: It was a huge reaction when it was shown.

Gabrielle Sullivan: And that had a real impact on me. Like, I knew people cared about that level of fear.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, there was fear attached to it. So yeah. I think it's interesting, and I think there needs to be more education from the wider community as to what can be done and what can't as well, because you're not dealing with art; you're actually dealing with people's culture.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah.

Dennis Stokes: And it's their way of life, so it's not about money for the communities. I mean, it brings in money. It helps communities, but it's about the culture first.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah. I know a few people sort of criticise the code even for going into this area, because it's looking at stuff that is sold in the tourist market, but I just say that, for lots of these artists and people, they're not differentiating between a painting that's worth \$10,000 and a boomerang that they might sell for \$50.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, they both have—

Gabrielle Sullivan: And that's our labels that we put on art.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, that's right.

Gabrielle Sullivan: It's culture.

Dennis Stokes: Yeah.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah.

Dennis Stokes: That thing that's cheaper has just as much significance as the painting that cost \$10,000.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah. And, yeah, I think that's important—

Dennis Stokes: Yeah, some people—

Gabrielle Sullivan: to remember.

Dennis Stokes: To remember that, yes.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah. And can I just ask you, finally, what you think about Bob Katter introducing the legislation to change the Australian Consumer Law to make it illegal to sell fake Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander product.

Dennis Stokes: Look, I think it's great. Whether it gets up or not we don't know, but I think it's a start, and it's the start of people being educated that this is what's going on out there. I mean, once we stop that trade, there's going to be better economic development for communities, because most of the art centres are the lifeline of those communities. That's where everyone goes. That's keeping culture alive, and it brings in that economic benefit.

Gabrielle Sullivan: Yeah.