

**Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's  
Indigenous visual arts and craft sector.  
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**Current Roles:**  
**Assistant Manager, Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation**  
**Ramingining, Central Arnhem Land, NT.**  
**Associate Producer, *Ten Canoes***

**I have worked with Indigenous peoples of the Top End of the Northern  
Territory since 1985**

## Addressing (some of) the Terms of Reference

- (a) the current size and scale of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector;

The current size and scale of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector is difficult to estimate. If we looked at the current size and scale of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector in terms of the marketing of indigenous art (ie in its economic form), then there would be a radical miscalculation in its size and scale, due to the number of products sold on the market which are not made by indigenous artists, That is, the actual number of practitioners is disproportionate to the dollar value. There is much "Indigenous visual art and craft" in the market place that has not been made, nor licensed, by an indigenous artist.

When engaged as a Visiting Research Fellow with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies to up-date the indigenous artists database<sup>1</sup> it was by pure chance that the number of artists published in the database was equal to Altman's estimate of the number of practitioners. That number was 5,500. Vast areas of the continent were unable to be visited (due to budget limitations), and many entries in the database did not meet the publication criteria. That was about 15 years ago. There has been an exponential growth in the number of practitioners since then.

In those days there were about 40 Art Centres in total. Now, in 2006, ANKAAA services some 38 Art Centres itself. I do not know the number of Art Centres serviced by Desart, nor the number of independent Art Centres.

- (b) the economic, social and cultural benefits of the sector;

There has been a growth in the Census figures in the number of indigenous people claiming to be artists, which is about identity. This demonstrates social and cultural benefits of the sector. Indigenous people are proud to be artists.

The constitution of Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation (BAAC) expressly states that 1% of its annual turnover is for a sick artists fund. That is, when artists are ill and unable to paint (ie make their income), the art centre provides financial and economic resources to those artists.

In Ramingining, income from art making is the major source of external income for the community and its members. This is not a mining royalty recipient

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<sup>1</sup> This project was as a recommendation of the Altman report and was carried out from 1993-1994. A full copy of this database NATSIVAD (National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Visual Artists' Database) is held by AIATSIS.

community. Art making provides enormous social and cultural benefits. When women go bush to collect their raw materials, it is a day of hunting and gathering, while teaching the children as everyone feasts on bush tucker.

(c) the overall financial, cultural and artistic sustainability of the sector;

The “new investors” in Australia's Indigenous visual art are typically female, aged 25-45, with a good income and a highly organized lifestyle. In a sense, these, and other investors are driving the market. That there are even “new investors” in aboriginal art says a lot in itself. There is too much “market driven” made art.

(d) the current and likely future priority infrastructure needs of the sector;

Adequate staff housing in communities is a must.

Building Repairs & Maintenance should be funded. Otherwise where does this money come from? Until the building reaches a major state of disrepair, then vast sums are needed. Government should cover the Insurance component of Art Centres expenses. For BAAC our insurance is in the \$30,000 per annum bracket, which includes public liability.

(e) opportunities for strategies and mechanisms that the sector could adopt to improve its practices, capacity and sustainability, including to deal with unscrupulous or unethical conduct;

Proper policing of the Permit system for entry into Aboriginal Land would help to keep some of the “carpet baggers’ out. Unscrupulous or unethical conduct as I see it, is of concern for “fashion” aspects of Aboriginal Art. In that forgery to make a quick buck is a game some people play. Art from Ramingining does not fall into this category (yet) as it is “unfashionable” ie it is not dot painting, nor Kimberley style. Imagery from here is naturalistic representations of plants and animals and has not been “copied’ to a great extent. However there have been a number of Copyright cases where the art was “borrowed” and used in another commercial capacity by unscrupulous peoples of unethical conduct.

(f) opportunities for existing government support programs for Indigenous visual arts and crafts to be more effectively targeted to improve the sector's capacity and future sustainability;

There ought to be more money for projects and programmes to be delivered direct to Indigenous artists. Since ATSIC, and now DCITA have taken over the operational funding for Art Centres, the emphasis is on economic outcomes and other such performance indicators. The “money story” has become the driving imperative. Bula’bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation, by virtue of its constitution is a not-for-profit organization, with any surplus monies (beyond that held in trust) to be returned to its members. That is, in being driven by the push to

profit, the nature and services provided by BAAC are being dictated by government and no longer by the members, nor the Constitution.