



**Submission from Warlayirti Artists Aboriginal Corporation, Balgo for the
Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector**

October 2006

Terms of Reference:

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

Number of artists: 400 on the books, 200 regularly paint

Annual turn over: 2005-2006 Financial year- \$ 2.1 million

Number of outstations or size of area the Art centre represents artists: – 200km square area taking in 3 communities of Billiluna, Mulan and Balgo and the outstation- Kearney Range.

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

Percentage of returns to artists through sales in last financial year: 60 % of each sale goes to the artist

Income from sales to artists: \$ 1.2 million

Social and cultural activities undertaken by Art Centre other than sales of artwork:

The operation of Warlayirti Artists Cultural Centre(a additional arm of the Art Centre) includes, back to country trips, making of wooden tools and support for traditional mens activities. Currently the Culture Centre is home to a 3 year photography , video and new media project which involves intergenerational storytelling via young people filming older people, translations of stories (community members are paid as translators). This project will move towards outcomes such as exhibitions of photography and screenings of video and

creation of video product which is located in the culture centre for both local community and cultural tourism. The Culture Centre also hosts community celebrations such as NAIDOC and any other special cultural events the community wants to hold. In addition staff often take community elders on hunting trips in their own time on weekends.

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

Sustainability is a core operational and strategic goal which informs everything we do, from how we support staff, to how we manage artists payments within a very strong welfare climate, to how we develop artists careers. One of the strengths of the Art Centres model is that is that they are driven by 'community investment'- investment and commitment to artist careers, investment in the welfare of artists of families, an investment in keeping money within the local region/ community and an investment in the long term sustainability of the organisation to keep on supporting artists and their communities for the years to come. While sometimes the short term returns for artists can seem small compared to direct selling to dealers/ walk bys, the longterm gains and the broader family, community and cultural gains are very strong. Managing the short and longterm issues are key factors to the success of the art centre model.

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

Current Infrastructure position :Current purpose built Art Centre built- 1999, Culture Centre 2001

Infrastructure priorities: Expanding and developing current spaces and verandahs to create more painting spaces and a new multimedia space. Use the current building more effectively and efficiently (ie. Replace current lights with LED's to reduce power usage and heat levels). Perform maintenance to an aging building.

Funding sources utilised to secure infrastructure: Currently seeking State government funds to expand existing art centre

Issues surrounding infrastructure: Cost of labour/ freight due to isolation and community having a difficult history which can put contractors off working here.

(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;

We are currently doing some advocating for art centre rights and values via media releases seeking editorial in Australian Art Collector and any other times that come up where staff are interviewed.

With the Committee we have also developed a Photographic Policy which lays out when people want photos of them and/ or their artwork photographed and reasons why they do/ don't want this. A fascinating activity which draws out artists level of knowledge about unscrupulous activity and how they understand how photographs of their work can contribute to bad dealings.

CDEP reforms are having positive and negative effects for us at the Art Centre. The reforms are encouraging more people to come into the art centre and paint. Negative- often they want a quick buck and if their paintings aren't good they don't sell quickly and because of this we also suspect that a couple of people are taking boards and selling them privately in Halls Creek which is problematic on so many levels. There is also increased pressure on staff to have more boards and sell more and more work and more people humbugging us for money. Positive- is that people are being forced to use their skill set to earn money and if we can manage the demand and work closely to ensure the products are of a high standard then they will be rewarded for their enterprise.

(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;

Whole of Government State, territory and Commonwealth, sharing funding responsibilities across the Industry not just from DCITA etc

We've pretty much hit up all levels of government in the time I've been here and many of them from different perspectives- skills development, infrastructure costs, airfares, cultural celebrations, employment of specialised artists, staff professional development, business outcomes and commercialisation- from our experience things seem pretty OK- of course more funding bodies/ programs like Lottery West would be great-flexible, funds equipment, capacity building etc

(g) future opportunities for further growth of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector, including through further developing international markets.

Austrade could be more practically helpful- they need to have a funding program to fund a number of airfares, overseas accomadation while art centres are developing international links and export opportunities.