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Committee Secretary  
Senate Environment, Communications, Information technology and the Arts  
References Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Committee

## **SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFT SECTOR**

The mission of the West Australian Department of Industry and Resources (DOIR) is to advance the responsible development of industry and resources for the benefit of Western Australians. Through our Aboriginal Economic Development Division (AED) the department provides leadership and innovation in Indigenous economic development and two of our projects involve Indigenous arts and crafts, focusing on community art centres.

AED is concerned and involved with many of the aspects covered by this inquiry and would, therefore, like to submit a number of opinions based on the areas being considered by the Committee.

**(a) Current size and scale of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector.**

No comment.

**(b) The economic, social and cultural benefits of the sector.**

AED recognises the significant benefits to Indigenous communities through the arts and craft sector. AED acknowledges that for these benefits to be enduring, economic, cultural and social factors need to develop simultaneously. This mutuality requires strategies that are implemented by different agencies in both State and Commonwealth government; the requisite levels of coordination are not occurring currently, with significant gaps in services and great variability in the quality of services.

For example, art centres – at a core level – balance the commercial and the cultural: DCITA's NACISS (National Art and Craft Industry Support Scheme) and ICS (Indigenous Cultural Support) are the only programs that are flexible enough to recognise these often contradictory elements – though the funding amounts are inadequate and, when compared to other industry assistance packages, miniscule. The flip-side to the commercial and cultural role of art centres is that they are seen by some agencies (such as Indigenous Business Australia, the Indigenous Land Corporation etc) that support commercial activities as being unsuitable, due to their non-profit, developmental role. The reverse also applies; some agencies that support cultural and social wellbeing programs, reject art centre partnerships, because of the commercial successes.

Similarly, art centres provide effective, formal and informal training – yet are often excluded from relevant support program; this inability by many funding programs to respond to the complex circumstances of remote community development is a profound hindrance. Additionally, the timeframes of much agency support – whether government or NGO – is also disconnected from community reality. Art centres are required to implement 2-4 year business plans; yet none receive funding for more than 12 months, with many funding programs operating on still shorter time frames. Successful programs in remote communities are those that operate on long-term timeframes – years, not months.

Art centres' single greatest funding need is the support of core operations and staff salaries. Again, DCITA's two programs are virtually the only programs that allow salaries and operational costs.

Appropriate strategies and improved coordination can improve direct income to artists and their families through sales, indirect income through jobs supporting the Indigenous arts industry, major offset benefits in communities resulting in a reduction in government expenditures on welfare, health, justice and law and order and a growth in community cohesiveness, community identity, cultural development, self expression and self worth. These factors are the essence of every healthy community.

Aboriginal visual and cultural expression is Australia's truly unique and international 'brand', used in countless situations – from sporting events to tourism promotion to powerful notions of identity and history. However, there is a profound disconnect between the consumption of Aboriginal cultural expression and community reality. This is more complex than simple comparisons between the poverty and marginalisation of many of Australia's finest artists and their communities (though this is a profoundly important issue) and broader Australian society. There are intricate issues of education, history, language and participation that contribute to the gulf between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. One of the key ingredients to art centres' success is their ability to provide a culturally-appropriate setting, creating equality in all the cross-cultural negotiations that connect art, enterprise and economic success. No other state-sponsored initiatives have delivered comparable outcomes.

In the long history of remote Aboriginal communities, particularly desert communities, there is an acute record of failure. Basic services, such as health, education and justice, have struggled for stability and effectiveness; the success of art centres stands in astonishing contrast to these failures. In the toughest of imaginable enterprise environments, art centres have, over the long term, given the most marginalised populations in Australia access to the only form of independent, non-welfare income, employment, training, access to a small-business culture and, in the creation of an enterprise connected to global markets, built leadership, opportunity and self esteem for many. The economic returns are impressive, with art centres returning millions of dollars of income; however, these returns are connected directly to the cultural and social wellbeing of artists. Successful Aboriginal art springs from access to country, cultural stability, a supportive community structure and the recruitment and retention of quality staff; the dynamism of Aboriginal art is fuelled almost exclusively by those artists whose lives remain connected to country, family and community. Art centres that succeed in the long term balance the commercial and the socio-cultural, recognising that art – and the community benefits that flow from it - is not and cannot be just about sales.

Art centres are efficient enterprises; for a small level of government investment, they return enormous social, cultural and economic benefits. However, the costs and challenges of running a remote area business are enormous. Available funding for art centres has remained almost static over the previous 12 years. The current DCITA funding program that offers core operational funding to the great majority of art centres (NACISS) has *national* funding of \$4million, unchanged since the mid 1990s and despite a more-than-doubling of art centres operating.

State agencies have an equally important role to play. Those agencies need more flexible programs or financial assistance schemes, working in concert with federal programs, rather than relying completely on anonymous and isolated funding rounds. In Western Australia, a semi-formal grouping of ArtsWA (Department of Culture and the Arts, AED (Department of Industry and Resources) and DCITA meet regularly to coordinate responses and build partnerships. Other agencies (Country ArtsWA etc) also participate as appropriate. While the funding approach of each agency is different, considerable benefits in program delivery have resulted from this cooperation.

Governments must expand the financial pie for arts/enterprise development and to work collaboratively and responsively to continue growing Aboriginal art centres and the many benefits they offer. This will require agencies to be more flexible in aligning their objectives with community and industry requirements. There may be differences between economic, social and cultural development but they are part and parcel of the same solution. This collaboration must prioritise art centre development by agencies instead of trying to be all things to all people and places – a difficult task compounded by the political pressures to address all regions sooner rather than later.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement the remaining recommendations of DCITA's 2004 report: *Indigenous Art Centres: Strategy and Action Plan*.
- Increase funding amounts and flexibility of core funding programs. Index the funding programs. Focus on core needs – HR requirements and operational support.
- Establish triennial funding programs with established art centres.
- Establish a body to review the aggregate national funding requirements and establish a level of operational funding with States, through the Bilateral Agreement process.
- Expand the collaboration of State/Commonwealth indigenous art industry groups such as that in WA, to all States. Provide a template of cooperation built on easing pressures (bureaucratic and administrative) on art centres, leaving the onus on agencies to collaborate.

### **(c) The overall financial, cultural and artistic sustainability of the sector.**

The sustainability of the Aboriginal art sector is enormously complex and interrelated, crossing layers of commerce, equity and development and linked to political and social responses to Aboriginal issues and the future of remote communities. There is also one overriding and straightforward element fuelling the production of the Aboriginal art that is presented as a national icon: access to country.

The great majority of the art works and iconography consumed as 'Aboriginal art' is produced in Australia's remotest and poorest communities. These communities have access to country, though marginalised in every other respect.

There is considerable speculation as to the future of these communities – and any resulting population shift will have a dramatic impact on access to country and continuity of the culture that powers Aboriginal art.

The current changes to the CDEP program will also have a heavy impact on art centres and their communities. High quality, long term art centres do not have artists on CDEP, but many rely on CDEP workers for a wide range of operational tasks, usually paying a 'top-up' wage to create realistic salary. With the lack of employment in remote communities and few realistic 'welfare to work' opportunities, CDEP offers an important link and a realistic prospect of employment and training.

Art centres are built on a non-profit basis, returning maximum benefits to artists. They have almost no capacity to offer full time employment and training to CDEP workers; indeed, most art centres struggle to meet the salary costs of existing staff.

The work load at art centres is phenomenal; most coordinators work 70-80 hours per week, often more. With such high demands on staff time to simply meet core activities, there is little time to spare for staff training and other non-core roles. While the majority of art centre managers are dedicated and highly effective, many have gaps in the necessary skills, are often working alone in a stressful environment and are called upon to negotiate complex, inter-cultural issues. The result is that attracting and retaining quality staff is extremely difficult – yet it is the quality of the staff that determines the stability of an art centre.

One of the most powerful outcomes that art centres offer is that of participation; in environments of marginalisation and exclusion, art centres are a high-participation model and offer a way for artists to access knowledge, skills and support otherwise unavailable in a remote community. For example, artists, through an art centre, have access to savings and financial planning options (including wills and superannuation), support for critical family needs (eg, funeral times, ordering coffins etc), basic compliance services (eg, paying a licence fee or a traffic fine) and equitably participating in a national and international business, including planning, strategic decisions and governance processes.

One of the most critical issues for an art centres' stability and performance is the quality of its operational systems and accountability, extending to the quality of their governance processes. Art centres with a participatory governance structure and quality systems of accountability and reporting consistently out-perform (and outlast) art centres with poor processes. These centres also deliver a far more rounded range of community outcomes.

Governance training in a cross-cultural, cross-language environment is challenging and slow. AED, with other agencies, has been supporting a long term governance training program in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of Western Australia. This has grown from delivering (translated) learning about executive committee roles and responsibilities to the point now where artists and their executives are taking a leading role in the strategic direction of their centres, participating in governance processes in other agencies (eg community council, regional bodies etc), educating new artists directly and creating valuable role models and community leaders. Governance training (and compliance) should be a high priority for all agency participation with art centres.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognise, incorporate and fund the vital cultural links that inform the production of Aboriginal art – access to country and supportive community structures – through established or new funding partnerships.
- Mandate governance training, artists' participation and processes for art centres. Programs and funding to be additional to existing services.
- Acknowledge and address the needs of attracting and retaining art centre staff (details in section e, below)

**(d) The current and likely future priority infrastructure needs of the sector.**

In common with the broader priorities and needs of remote communities, art centres have significant infrastructure needs. Many art centres are operating with very poor physical assets that fail basic OH&S, building safety and workplace safety standards.

Magnifying these challenges are the costs of remote area capital works, with per-square metre building costs the highest in Australia.

There are very few sources of capital funding for art centres and those centres that do secure funds for a major upgrade do so with a combination of funding put together over a year or more – the project design, management and construction can then easily add another year until the building is constructed. As non-profit organisations, art centres have extremely limited capacity to contribute to (let alone self fund) any capital works project. Several key funding agencies have a requirement for significant applicant contributions and/or have limits on the amount of government funding – these conditions rule out art centres (and most remote community organisations).

There is a great variability of funding opportunities, according to which state art centres are in. Western Australia has a significant number of funding avenues (and larger amounts) than are available to centres who are located across the SA or NT border, irrespective of the social/cultural alliances of the centres. Many art centres are located in facilities owned by the community, resulting in insecurity of tenure. Even those centres with their 'own' buildings often have uncertain tenure and title – a result of dysfunction in many community administrations.

Quality art centres recruit and retain quality staff – and one of the biggest hurdles for both emerging and established art centres is staff accommodation. The output and achievements of art centres could be greatly increased with extra staff to handle the daunting workload; however, the absence of staff accommodation means that most centres are restricted to a single fulltime employee and the limited art-centre-relevant skills of many community residents means local recruitment options are few. The limited funding available makes for an invidious choice for art centres: whether to use the limited capital funding available for staff accommodation or for art centre facilities.

Vehicles are the third critical element of art centre infrastructure. A safe, dependable vehicle is vital to an art centre – it is an indispensable tool to support every area of art centre operations. Remote communities are also very demanding on vehicles, so repair and maintenance costs are higher and vehicle life shorter. The same inflexibilities of funding agencies and the limitations on art centre capacity apply to vehicle funding as to buildings, though some larger art centres are now using a vehicle replacement fund to ease the process.

The size, type and flexibility of infrastructure funding should be overhauled to respond to the reality of needs – and the amount of funding needs to be increased, with partnerships in both funding and delivery with State agencies.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish an art centre infrastructure fund, in partnership with State governments and agencies (dollar-for-dollar), but assessed and administered through existing systems. Fund to be indexed, with an annual program of funding of \$6million (Commonwealth, with matching State contributions)
- Art centre business plans incorporate the ‘three-kings’ of infrastructure: studio/office space; staff accommodation; vehicle and to address the (part) self-funding of a vehicle replacement program.
- Negotiate an MOU between each art centre and community which secures studio and accommodation space, rental, maintenance etc.
- Provide legal advice to identify title and ownership of art centre assets and guide the development of art centre-community MOU.
- Introduce use of native title changes and processes to secure tenure for art centres – ie; negotiate with community councils for ‘exclusivity’.

**(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.**

This submission has, in various places, raised a range of critical issues facing art centres, and by direct link, the wellbeing of the sector. Some of the strategies art centres need to employ to improve their sustainability are internal: improved governance, better systems and accountability and stronger HR processes. However, many of the strategies and requirements for a robust Aboriginal art sector are external. Art centres are, on the whole, efficient, well run and enormously powerful community-based enterprises. The pressure on art centres usually stems from their intersection with external demands, whether of the marketplace or of government or NGO agencies.

Specific initiatives that would improve the sector’s wellbeing:

- Implement improved responsiveness and increased amounts of government support (detailed above)
- Implement realistic timelines for funding, whether project or operational (detailed above)
- Key personnel and agencies to work more closely with program managers from agencies such as DCITA and meet art centres annually in a remote location.

- Establish and implement a best-practice set of standards that guides funding agency and art centre partnerships, with key competencies in:
  - financial structures (budgets, artists payments, reporting and accountability etc)
  - HR (contracts, performance review, recruitment)
  - art production (materials, documentation, handling and archiving)
  - operational systems (cataloguing and stock control, IT, accounting, meetings)
  - structure (separately incorporation, membership)
  - training (staff training, artists development, governance)
  - commercial (exhibitions schedule, contracts)
  - arts development and product development
- Replace many existing DCITA (and other) agency reporting and compliance arrangements (KPI's = key performance indicators) with the above competencies
- Introduce a program of training and skilling of art centre staff: using an orientation process and an agreed, industry standard training/competency program for new and current staff
- Establish links (through internships etc) with universities and other graduate schools to attract staff into art centres (and other remote community roles), to gain skills and grow the 'gene pool' of candidates for managers.
- Consider establishment of an Indigenous arts industry regulatory review panel to consider appeals from artists, art centre coordinators and community councils.

## UNETHICAL PRACTICES

Unethical and unconscionable conduct has been a part of the Aboriginal art industry virtually since the first commercial dealings in the industry. The basic premise has not changed over time: unscrupulous people, using an unequal relationship as a tool to enrich themselves, at the expense of Aboriginal artists. The power relationship that enables this to occur is due to the enormous language and cultural gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia, the different value systems of these cultures and the poverty of many Aboriginal Australians.

Numerous art centres in WA have been affected by unethical practices – to the point of threatening the existence of the art centre and feeding enormous anxiety and mistrust in the community. Art centres in Irrunytju (Wingellina), Kiwirrkurra (Papunya Tula Artists), Warmun (Warmun Art Centre), Kununurra (Waringarri Arts), Warakurna (Warakurna Artists), Fitzroy Crossing (Mangkaja Arts), Balgo (Warlayirti Artists) and Bidyadanga (Yulparija Artists) are among the WA enterprises that have been impacted. The most recent example is Irrunytju, where the forces of unethical commercial practice have contributed to a fractured community, no accountability, accusations of unethical practice within the community and artists excluded from processes and their enterprise.

The greatest negative impact of market forces is in unethical practice and unconscionable conduct – the appalling trade practices often characterized as



‘carpetbagging’. The boom in prices, the rarity of quality artwork and the lack of accountability in the industry has emboldened commercial forces to target artists directly. This in itself is not the problem; it is the lack of regulation, the absence of accountability, the undermining of community organisations and processes and the overwhelming inevitability of the artist being ‘ripped off’ that is the core of the problem. Allied to this is the non-existent possibility of being caught or held to account.

There are many instances of artists and commercial operators working directly and for mutual benefit. There is no single model (art centre or otherwise) that works in all situations; there is however, an overwhelming case for equity – the unequal power relationships at work in many Aboriginal artists’ dealings with the commercial sector give this equity a moral, ethical and human rights foundation. The onus must be on commercial operators to be accountable and prove their equitable dealings – they hold all the cards. Art centres do this on a daily basis. Through art centre reporting processes, governance structures, accounts and audits, agency reports and review mechanisms, art centres give excellent levels of accountability.

Galleries, dealers, buyers and collectors are intrinsic to the success of Aboriginal art. However, the number of these commercial operators who are now operating in an ethically dubious and/or unaccountable manner is growing. There will always be operators who work on the fringes, targeting artists caught in the social dysfunction of regional centres and interested in nothing other than quick returns on works of poor quality. The disturbing growth, however, is in ‘higher’ level operators targeting high profile, successful artists and, sometimes, whole communities.

No commercial operator (despite any claims of working for the benefit of the whole community) works with a new, unheralded community, developing artists and an artistic profile, nor do they work with young and emerging artists. The focus is solely on high-profile, high profit artists. The tactics vary, but are always odious. The first target are the old, frail artists, who speak, read or understand little or no English, the second target are their families (in particular younger members, to whom the artists have cultural obligations to ‘provide’), swayed with promises of cars, money and other goods. ‘Carpetbaggers’ are also adept at targeting artists and families when these artists visit centres such as Alice Springs for health reasons, such as dialysis. Many operators have ‘painting sheds’ in such places, specifically to induce artists to stay and paint.

The cross-cultural complexities of the situation are enormous and will only be dealt with by a range of initiatives working together – though, realistically, there is little likelihood of unethical practice being stamped out. However, considerable changes are possible with an education and consumer awareness campaign.

The pressure points in the industry exist at the ‘first’ level of the industry – where Aboriginal artists first engage with the marketplace and at the ‘top’ level, where end consumers are buying their works from galleries and other public dealers. The focus of a campaign against unethical practice should target these two key ‘pressure points’ in the industry by: giving consumers information to guide their

decisions at the point of sale, and; in fortifying trade practices laws and the enforcement of those laws.

Copyright and authenticity issues have far lesser negative impacts on Aboriginal artists. With long-established laws to enforce breaches, the number and type of copyright and authenticity breaches is insignificant when compared to the unethical practices dominating the industry and probably no greater than in the broader arts market.

The profits and operating zone of unethical commercial operators is focussed on sourcing works as cheaply as possible and selling them as expensively as possible; this is where the greatest number of breaches are occurring, a practice that is rare in the non-Aboriginal art sector.

The one area where copyright, intellectual and/or moral rights are poorly enforced is in the 'merchandising' sector – the ubiquitous t-shirts, hats and souvenirs. This sector is by far the largest slice of the Aboriginal art industry<sup>1</sup> – and, it appears, very little of this manufactured product has any Aboriginal input or control. The number of 'Indonesian boomerangs' and 'backpacker didgeridoos', all using Aboriginal imagery and iconography, with no acknowledgement of (and probably no payment to) the artist is significant, far outweighing the genuine products available. This creates a false perception as to the volume and value of Aboriginal art and craft that is produced; in reality, genuine product is rare and finite – a fact that should be celebrated.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Formalise cooperation and coordinate activities between State and Federal agencies whose mandate covers trade practices.
- Move voluntary codes of conduct towards a mandatory code of conduct.
- Improve enforcement capabilities of relevant agencies.
- Consider a gallery accreditation program. However, do not replicate the failures of previous 'authenticity programs' with their attempts to classify artworks as 'authentic' or 'not-authentic'. The focus should be on showcasing commercial operators who operate in a publicly acknowledged and accountable way, in partnership with Aboriginal artists and their enterprises.
- Implement a cohesive consumer education and awareness program, in partnership with key industry representatives. This campaign should target specific layers of the overall industry, including international tourists and the fine art market. Use a range of media, from publications and postcards to information for in-bound travellers.
- Acknowledge the high levels of accountability of art centres and the benefits that their state-supported partnerships have brought.
- Use art centre provenance practices (documentation, certificates, record keeping etc) as a best-practice example to guide industry standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Several studies have tried to quantify the size of the industry; however, all research has struggled with this issue. A 2002 report prepared for the Cultural Minister's Council, *The Indigenous Art and Craft Market*, provides some figures, estimating the total industry at up to \$300million, with art centre sourced product at around \$12million. The secondary market is estimated at \$70-80million, leaving manufactured product dominating the industry.

- Elevate trade practices and unethical conduct awareness programs and training to, at a minimum, match the copyright and authenticity programs currently underway, through agencies such as ArtsLaw and the Australia Council.
- Highlight the 'manufactured product' sector of the market, with legal and trade practices scrutiny.
- Consider an enforcement campaign with the labelling, branding and presentation of manufactured product.
- In partnership with agencies such as Customs, enforce copyright, intellectual property and moral rights with imported 'Aboriginal' products.
- Extend the consumer awareness campaign to address the 'manufactured product' market sectors.

**(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.**

As indicated in earlier responses, there is a great need for government support programs to be overhauled and modernised; links to state programs made more robust, more directly linking funding programs with actual needs (especially with operational/salaries requirement), recognition of the "cultural" for success in the "commercial", funding durations of more than 12 months and fundamentally, a major boost to funding for both operational and capital programs.

An important opportunity within both existing and improved support programs is a form of 'accreditation'. The art centre industry is now long established and sophisticated. While there are regional and specific differences, many of the building blocks of successful centres are common. These 'building blocks' should be built into the funding partnerships with government and made part of a grant compliance process, with benefits accruing for strong performance and achievements across a realistic range of indicators for art centres of different sizes and circumstances. This accreditation can also be linked to ongoing compliance with proposed Indigenous arts industry standards.

For example, the separate incorporation of art centres is important to long term development and growth; it would appear a straightforward grant condition to request an emerging art centre to become separately incorporated over the life of a funding partnership. A more developed art centre would be expected to (and funded for) deliver governance training, for example. The basic competencies of best-practice art centre operations can be determined through consultations with representative bodies and other agencies. Core areas to be included are outlined above.

The involvement of other government (federal or state) agencies with specific skills would also be of great benefit. To date, the 'whole of government' notion has delivered few benefits to remote communities or art centres, nor has the consolidation of services into ICC's. For example, when an art centre signs an SRA, the contract offered by the ICC is unrelated to the documentation that the art centre applied with. And if the

SRA is with two (or more) agencies, the art centre is required to report separately to each agency, using different templates and KPI's. This exponential growth in paperwork diminishes all parties seeking better arts enterprise and community development outcomes.

One aspect of government support that is a constant issue with art centres are the 'external' demands. Art centres are often the only functioning agency in a community, coupled with a high profile and an attractive, accessible setting, art centres are often the 'target' of government and NGO agencies who see the art centre as a means to engage with individuals and the community. The great majority of these requests see no funding or support attached, adding to the workload of the centre. An example of this is with taxation. Art centres are regularly expected to offer taxation advice or services to artists or help with an artist's Centrelink compliance, with no support, training, funding or understanding of the circumstances.

There are numerous philanthropic agencies operating in Australia. However, very few of these agencies have partnerships with remote area artists of their enterprises. One example of this is ABAF (Australia Business Arts Foundation), which, to our knowledge has had no partnerships with any remote area art centres.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement the findings of the National Indigenous Consumer Strategy relating to the art industry.
- Change funding parameters for agencies such as IBA to encourage them to work with not-for-profit organisations such as art centres.
- Broker better links with philanthropical organisations.

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

Further growth in Indigenous arts is determined by a wide range of factors, many outside of the control of artists, art centres and agencies. Primary among these are market forces, both national and international. Despite many predictions over the years of Indigenous arts' demise, the primary and secondary market have continued to boom, across all layers of the industry.

There are clear supply and demand issues at work in art centres. High quality work is constantly in demand, with waiting lists for leading artists and more demand than supply; this reflects the true rarity and value of Aboriginal art.

Art and craft works by emerging artists is where art centres (and their partners) need to focus future efforts and resources. This is one of the most fundamental differences between art centres and 'carpetbaggers' –

the willingness to commit to long term support and development of community-wide issues, not just selling the works of high profile artists.

The demographics of the Aboriginal population, with a significant bulge in numbers under 30 is also a compelling reason for art centres to work with their funding partners to support programs targeted at young and emerging artists.

For lower priced, 'tourist' art and craft, market forces are the reverse of those at the high value, fine-art end. Supply exceeds demand and the actual numbers of art/craft produced is also higher. At this level of the market, remote area producers are competing with manufactured and mass-produced goods (most with negligible Indigenous input or benefit) and the costs of production for remote producers makes competition or market equity impossible.

The Department of Industry and Resources believes (and has focussed its Indigenous art centres program accordingly) that supply issues are where programs and funding are most effective and where the need is greatest. There are many well established mechanisms and highly skilled people and agencies whose focus is the demand side of the sector – few of which require funding support.

A key example of this is exports. While exports of Aboriginal art/craft products are often mooted and Austrade (among others) spend considerable funds on supporting this, the actual benefits are few. Artworks sold overseas do not sell for more, though the costs are far greater and demand for the already in-demand artists increases. DoIR acknowledges there is considerable cultural awareness, educational and promotional value in such events – but that such events should be presented and funded as such. International and export events have negligible direct economic benefits in communities<sup>2</sup> and should not draw funds or support from the critical end of the industry – the support of artistic, cultural and commercial aspirations and development in remote communities.

There is considerable scope to improve the profile of, and returns for, the craft sector. A long history of marketing and promotion of art (paintings) has paid off; similar successes could be had with concerted development of craft (sculpture, fibre, glass, carving etc) and working with artists, art centres and the industry to educate and promote craft as 'fine-art', not only as artefacts or souvenirs.

The marketing and branding of Aboriginal art and craft to reflect its rarity and preciousness and to educate the market on the story 'behind the art' would be a significant contributor to the ongoing growth of the industry.

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<sup>2</sup> DoIR acknowledges there are benefits in 'export programs' in developing a global market, however, this market is focussed almost exclusively on the elite level artists. This reinforces the fact that a large proportion of the Aboriginal art industry is carried by a small number of successful, but elderly artists, already in high demand. The supply and demand issue is already in these artists' favour and exports have limited commercial efficacy and has minimal impact on the needs of emerging and young artists.

Global campaigns such as 'fair-trade' are a model that could be adapted to inform buyers (at different market levels) of the connections between a finished painting and the community from which the painting came.

Much of the interest in Aboriginal art is built on the 'difference' and the cultural continuity of the work and its makers. These qualities should be brought to the fore and made central to the presentation of Aboriginal art and craft – not only creating a profound point of difference to unethical practices but also reinforcing the rarity of genuine (rather than manufactured and imitated) art and craft product.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Redesign programs and funding to focus on the 'supply-side', which are art centres and artists support. Demand-side programs, in particular, exports, should not be a priority. Such programs should be left to commercial operators. The only exception is for iconic events and showcases, where the full range of artistic, cultural, social and commercial elements can be presented.
- Using established – but currently unconnected – agencies (such as Object and FORM, both contemporary craft/design organisations, museums and other institutions) to develop a long-term strategy for growing the non-painting profile and quality of Aboriginal creative expression.
- Introduce a program of public education and market awareness (as detailed above).

Yours sincerely

Duncan Ord  
Director, Aboriginal Economic Development

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