

Jennifer Herd, Indigenous Visual Arts & Craft Sector SUBMISSION

– INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS & CRAFT SECTOR

Committee Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References
Committee
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Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to make a submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous Visual Arts and Crafts Sector. Having been engaged in the Aboriginal Arts and Cultural industry for at least the past 11 years at Griffith University as a lecturer and as an Aboriginal artist myself I am well placed to comment on some issues within Australia's indigenous arts industry. As a teacher I have a particular interest and a commitment to the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. My comments will be directed at practices that I believe are damaging to the industry and make some recommendations as to how these might best be remedied.

I believe that this inquiry is well-timed, and that the indigenous arts and crafts sector represents not only a significant economic achievement, but is also an area of activity and pride that is increasingly essential to both the indigenous community and to Australia's identity. The Indigenous Australian Arts Industry is a fast growing industry in Australia. It is a significant part of our national heritage and is certainly worthy of serious study in terms of research in the visual arts and cultural industry.

It is equally well known that Australia's indigenous visual arts and craft sector has done very well over recent years and combined with overseas trade it is now worth approximately \$200 million to Australia in export earnings per year. The Government should be proud of the achievements of the Indigenous visual arts industry, especially what has been accomplished in Queensland in just a few short years.

The set up of Queensland's Indigenous Arts Media and Export Agency was a great start for gaining support for Queensland's Indigenous Artists. It was a welcome addition to what services were already being offered to Aboriginal urban and remote communities in the region. Much more work needs to be done though, to make real strides for Aboriginal artists in remote and urban centres. We should also be mindful of the way that artists work in both urban and remote centres.

Economic support of Aboriginal artists in urban centres around Queensland has not been given the level of support or attention that more remote communities have and this point needs to be acknowledged. There is a strong perception that urban artists have more access to art industry services. This is not the case, many urban artists lack skill, education, financial means and exhibiting opportunities as do artists in remote centres.

Queensland does not have the kind of infrastructure and support that has been afforded Aboriginal artists of the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and South Australian artists with the exception of Lockart River and Arakun and more recently Mornington Island

Community Art Centres. Of course these communities are deserving and their remoteness makes them worthy, but remoteness should not be the measure by which rules and guidelines on financial support are made.

There is already the perception is that there is less equality when it comes to funding support for Aboriginal artists living and working in the urban centres. The dilemma for urban Aboriginal artists in Queensland is how do we fit into a framework that is set up for people who live in remote communities and/or where funding is supplied to centres for non-Indigenous bureaucrats and art advisors to micro manage artists and their centres for them.

A more strategic approach and more infrastructure needs to be put forward for artists and groups and organisations to gain art centre status for future. Both urban and remote communities need to be considered equally here. While ever there remains inequality in Aboriginal people there will be a need for service and infrastructure needs to support Aboriginal people and their aims for a better quality of life. The Performing, Creative and Visual arts and Crafts is one way that Aboriginal people can achieve a way forward.

Under the international human rights (2006) Aboriginal groups claim that indigenous people have two different forms of rights:

The rights of all citizens to health, housing, education, job opportunities, power, and water.

Recognition of their status as indigenous peoples and their special rights relating to land, laws, customs and self determination.

Of the human rights outlined here, many Aboriginal people still do not have these most basic rights.

Supporting programs of education that understands recognises and supports Aboriginal Art and Culture and its people has to be a fundamental and vital concern for government.

Outcomes for students have been positive with many realising their goal of becoming practicing artists. Many of our students have gone on to become curators or taken up roles in education involving teaching the arts in schools. Apart from the obvious and significant contributions to the nations national heritage the visual arts offers options and pathways for indigenous peoples who as a result of government policies of the past need the support of the arts industry.

There are a number of galleries and tourist shops in South East Queensland and also Far North Queensland that are engaged in practices referred to above that are practiced within the indigenous arts industry, especially in Queensland's high profile tourist Centres. These are some of the most common practices referred to in the Altmann Report of (2001).

- Paying Indigenous artists unfairly including paying in alcohol, drugs and claiming costs of travel materials without providing artists with detailed accounts.
- Bringing Aboriginal artists from their communities to paint artworks, for sale in city galleries, without providing proper wages, care or food.
- Sale of Fakes and forged works
- Non - Indigenous artists creating 'Indigenous - style art' and passing it off as if it were produced by Indigenous artists – eg: didgeridoos painted by backpackers
- Non - Indigenous people make 'Indigenous' craft souvenirs: ACCC v Australia Icon
- Falsely stating the origin of products selling mass produced products from overseas as authentic Indigenous craft

- Market stalls, Galleries and shops and tourist outlets selling fake Indigenous art and craft made overseas, but sold as 'authentic', bamboo didgeridoos, and Indonesia produced wooden boomerangs). Buyer's are not made aware that the item is not authentic and that it was mass produced rather than hand crafted.

The visual arts is one of the last frontiers for Aboriginal people, it is our heritage and our shared national heritage. If we allow these practices to go on unchecked we will destroy what is left of our culture. These practices need to be stopped and the only way to stop this is through legislation to make everyone accountable for the damage that is being done to the industry

Sustainability and improvement for the sector can be achieved through adequate training and education. So far our program is the only program at any Australian University that offers a program of study in the visual arts with both theory and practice for Aboriginal artists. The program is taught by Aboriginal lecturers who are practicing artists themselves. There is an opportunity for government to support what is already being done and proven to be working and assist us through further funding initiatives to improve the capacity of Australia's Indigenous artists and their earning potential. Current programs and centres offering training need ongoing support. Particularly courses that are supported by the community, such as CAIA that has been operating for 10 years.

Summary of the CAIA Program

In 1995, Griffith University began a course that was unique to university offerings around Australia, the Bachelor of Visual Arts in Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art. The course centres around Indigenous Australian student's research into their own culture and looks at the way those cultures continue to be viable in a rapidly changing society. Because of the cultural research base of the course and its success, Griffith University is well placed to extend and build upon the range of activities already offered in Indigenous Australian Art studies within the university.

Queensland College of Art /Griffith University has accrued significant experience in Indigenous Australian education initiatives over the past several years. Queensland College of Art is renowned for training Indigenous artists of the calibre of Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennett, and Ron Hurley and more recent high profile graduates such as Vernon Ah Kee.

The main aim of the program is:

to facilitate Indigenous students to obtain a degree in visual arts while working within a framework of Indigenous culture which runs throughout the program itself. The program is planned in accordance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and philosophies, and teaching respects the various cultural obligations and laws regarding ways in which techniques and images should be used. It is designed to prepare Indigenous Australians for practice as professional artists, and is structured for flexible delivery to school leavers through to mature aged students."

[QCA Program Planner]

The program is unique and is the only one of its kind in anywhere in Australia. In order to grow the industry and reach more people we need support to offer new approaches and new ways of offering the program so that it reaches and compliments the work currently handled by the TAFE sector in far North Qld.

The course has the capacity to increase its offerings to remote communities in partnership with other education and training organisations, such as JCU. CAIA have proved to some degree that there is an interest in educational programs of this nature by and for Aboriginal people. We have always had up to 10-15 people start each year but the Program needs much more promotion and money spent on marketing the program to gain the course more interest. Each year funding access is reduced and work liability is even more increased.

Recommendations,

- Funding support for at an appropriate level.
- Fully funded program, to support the financial needs of the program, staffing and student resources, guest speakers program, paints and material resources, as well as e.g. computers and access to new media at an appropriate level. This has been increasingly under resourced.
- Permanent Scholarship and program places for up to 20 Indigenous artists a year. So that artists are not continually under threat of being cut off from Abstudy or Austudy financially.
- Scholarship funding to be ongoing over 3-p to a 4th honours year based on performance to be determined by the University and the Program.
- Ongoing scholarships to MVA and DVA levels where appropriate.

Further Reviews Into the Impact of ABSTUDY Policy Changes, initiated by a former minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, in March 2004.

The report notes some Government measures over recent years to improve outcomes for Indigenous people, and identifies a number of emerging themes that may be useful in guiding future policy directions.

- Monitoring and evaluation arrangements for ABSTUDY could be improved.
- Awareness of, access to and delivery of ABSTUDY programmes has been problematic, particularly in more remote areas.
- There may be opportunities to target ABSTUDY allowances better, including incentives oriented towards course completion.
- Better targeted access courses to develop the basic skills needed for university may help expand the pool of Indigenous people with capacity to undertake higher education.
- Aspirational targets for Indigenous higher education participation and completion need to be supplemented with achievable milestones.

Author(s) Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group, DEST

The inquiry should review all the recommendations made in the past several years by various Indigenous Australian and industry stakeholders reports and in particular to:

- Deal with the practices eluded to and consult with key industry stakeholders how to best stop the, rip off's.
- Make serious attempts to develop strategies, and mechanisms through a series of community consultations and think tanks that the industry can adopt to improve unscrupulous and unethical conduct;
- Support of current programs and centres offering training with improved and ongoing financial support.
- Ensure suitable accommodation and community support for students away from home are vital considerations

AVCC Submission to the Review into the Impact of ABSTUDY Policy Changes that Came Into Effect in 2000. The availability of ABSTUDY and other income support arrangements is a factor of great significance to the participation of Indigenous students in higher education. A 1990 study of Indigenous performance in Western Australian universities found that the financial capacity to study was an important 'resilience factor' for Indigenous retention and achievement.

It was agreed that financial difficulties including ABSTUDY issues impacted negatively on student retention and their success at study. It is also important to acknowledge that the number of individuals supported at least in part by an ABSTUDY (or similar) grant is often greater than just the individual student concerned. Family members, other than just the student, also "live" from the ABSTUDY grant, at least in part. The decline in the amount of ABSTUDY support available to any one student, although relatively small in itself, is often of significance to the family group concerned and becomes the trigger which can precipitate the withdrawal of the student from their course of study.

The Recommendations of The 4th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts Conference Report, June 2002 p. 39 referring to Commercial issues funding and marketing, need particular attention.

Recommendation 4. A greater proportion of government funding should be targeted towards the visual arts.

Recommendation 5. That the Federal and State funding bodies, particularly Australia Council approach the Cultural Ministry Council to bring about more equitable funding regime and a coherent national policy for Indigenous arts, culture and heritage.

End of Submission.
27 th of November, 2006.