

INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS INQUIRY

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

Waringarri Aboriginal Arts is situated in Miriwoong traditional country at Kununurra in the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia.

50 – 60 artists are registered from 10 communities in an area covering approximately 121,000 square kilometers. In addition to artists positions exist for 7 art centre support workers who are being trained in art centre operations and management.

Age range of artists is from 10 – 80 years (predominant age range 40 – 75) Age range of art centre support workers is currently 19 – 30 years

Annual Turnover has increased from \$88000.00 in 2001-2002 to \$500,000.00 in 2005 – 2006. During 2005-2006 \$307266.00 was paid to artists.

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

Waringarri Aboriginal Arts provides artists with an increased opportunity for economic independence and essential financial contribution to their families in an area of remote Australia where alternative means of accessing employment/income are minimal and the cost of living significantly higher than the rest of Australia.

Despite Waringarri Aboriginal Arts being situated in proximity of the Kununurra township employment issues in remote Australia remain scarce. The benefits of participating at the art centre not only supports employment and income generation but significantly provides the opportunity to work within both a cultural context and a self governed enterprise. Socially the art centre provides a positive, cohesive and supported environment for all participating individuals.

By fostering contemporary and cultural arts practice, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts supports individual artistic development, market exploration and product development possibilities that may not be possible in an environment that was solely profit driven.

Most artists at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts are currently CDEP participants. Amongst the senior artists a number are receiving the aged pension. The Art Centre also provides several positions for indigenous workers (employed through the local CDEP scheme) to assist and support artists and the operation of the centre. Waringarri Aboriginal Arts has a particular focus on training local indigenous people in art centre operations and management. After an initial trial period all art centre workers receive additional payments from art centre funds to “top up” their CDEP wages to meet award levels. Skill development and training is available and ongoing for all workers.

Social benefits of participation at the art centre are broad ranging and include:

- Intergenerational interaction,
- Cross cultural interaction,
- Pride in community ownership,
- Community development and education both in cultural practice and enterprise development,
- safe drug and alcohol free activity,

- Individual support for artists in a range of needs including referrals to health care, financial support, legal etc. (Many artists have limited numeracy and literacy skills and require the support of the art centre to assist with these general/interpretative needs),
- Social support for seniors
- Self Esteem
- Financial Independence
- Career Development
- Integrity

Cultural maintenance is a key benefit of the art centre supporting not only the continuation of cultural practice and learning for young people but also providing education and an opportunity for increased understanding of indigenous cultural/world views for the broader community. Maintenance of cultural practice is also recognized by the community as a significant contributor in sustaining a cohesive and socially healthy community.

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

The sustainability of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts pivots on two key factors:

1. The continuation of quality arts practice

The continuation of quality arts practice relies on the confidence of artists to participate. Confidence is achieved by a number of factors which includes a tangible financial outcome as well as individual recognition and the appreciation of cultural value. The production of quality artworks is supported by the cohesive and encouraging environment of the art centre that maintains integrity for artists and exists in an environment where cultural knowledge is shared. The sharing of this knowledge and the opportunity to participate along side senior artists is also essential for the development of new and young artists.

In addition, the art centre provides an atmosphere that recognizes and respects the context of Indigenous arts practice. Income generated from less than scrupulous dealers is a compromise to the broader issues of why indigenous people engage in the arts. Quality art is produced with an overriding sense of cultural integrity. To compromise this by forcing artists into economic dependence on artwork sales positions artists in a degraded cultural context producing less than quality artwork and contributes to racial misunderstandings by the broader community.

2. The continuation of financially supported positions for artists and art centre support workers

Changes to CDEP will adversely affect both the operations of the art centre and the opportunity for local indigenous people to access training and employment opportunities within the art sector. The benefits and pride associated with working in a self governed organization will be diminished.

Waringarri Aboriginal Arts has a constitutional focus on providing employment and training opportunities for local indigenous people. Young people are encouraged to participate at the art centre as support workers and are provided with the opportunity to increase skills and knowledge in art centre operations and management. Currently 6 positions exist as administration, art materials supply, freight and packing, and gallery sales assistants. These positions are funded through the local CDEP scheme with "Top Up" payments to meet award levels. With the proposed changes to CDEP these positions will be jeopardized since the twelve month cut off of each CDEP placement does not allow sufficient time to adequately train staff. It

would be reasonable to assume that training positions need at least two years period in order to achieve skills levels required for the performance of most art centre positions. Training in these positions enhances the opportunity for young indigenous people to achieve success in a range of future employment options that may be made available both within and outside the sector. A case by case arrangement should be put in place that acknowledges positive achievements and employment successes.

Artists who are currently receiving CDEP payments will also be placed in a difficult position since arts practice is a committed activity often taking a number of years to achieve reasonable success. Practicing artists will be made more vulnerable in a difficult economic environment where both their arts practice and cultural maintenance are not supported. This is more likely to contribute to an environment where unscrupulous dealers can take advantage of artists with "cash money payments". Without CDEP or an appropriate funding alternative Waringarri Aboriginal Arts is unlikely to be able to continue on its current path of success and sustainability. Continued support for artist and art worker positions in the next three to five years is required to ensure sufficient profits to meet our own expenses.

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

The following key infrastructure requirements are paramount:

Vehicle Replacement: The current Troop Carrier was purchased in 1996 with funds for Lottery West. A new vehicle now needs to be purchased or leased. A trailer is also required for the collection of raw materials. The vehicle is used for the carriage of artists for field trips, arts activity and meetings as well as the transport of artworks. In remote Australia it is essential that a 4wd vehicle is accessible.

Facility Upgrade: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts gallery was established in 1988. A new building was added in 1999. Unfortunately this facility due to a funding shortfall was not completed and requires refurbishment to meet our current and future workshop, office and storage needs. Funding has been secured for an architectural scoping study to address the best option for the required completion. Additional funds will be required to complete then necessary upgrade to the facility. Fencing and security requirements will need to be addressed in this upgrade.

(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;

Assistance is required from the ACCC or other relevant body to address the unscrupulous dealings of local operators who misrepresent artists, misappropriate and fraudulently copy artworks. It is socially and economically difficult for Waringarri Aboriginal Arts to address this issue as an individual organization within a local community.

Public Awareness programs which assist the general public to be better informed in the appraisals and purchasing of indigenous art.

The Industry needs to adopt and standardize:

- Best Practice guidelines
- Ethical Practice
- Implement standardized wages, salary and conditions guidelines across art centres

Continued funding assistance to develop governance and best practice community development strategies

Continued funding support to allow for the employment and training of artists and art centre workers

Whole of government approach that works to recognize and understand art centres as multi service delivery organizations which significantly contribute to the economy as well as addressing social and cultural values.

(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; and

While there is a good range of funding programs available to support skill development opportunities for artists in Australia. This needs to be continued with a view to the increasing numbers of arts practitioners.

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

Austrade's continued focus on strategies to promote Indigenous art internationally to be improved with closer collaboration with the peak body arts organizations (ANKAAA and DESART) and the art centres.

Continued support for peak body organizations (ANKAAA and DESART) to assist with promotion of Indigenous arts practice, advocacy for art centres and networking opportunities for artists and art centre workers.

Future opportunities need to address the issues raised by indigenous artists that impact on the cultural understanding and integrity as much as economic development.