



**WARAKURNA  
ARTISTS**

Dr Ian Holland  
Secretary  
Australian Senate  
Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

5<sup>th</sup> February 2007

Dear Dr Ian Holland,

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

This letter contains artists' remarks about their art centre. The individuals quoted would be happy to speak to you directly if you would like further clarification and information.

Warakurna Artists Aboriginal Corporation is fully owned and governed by Yarnangu people. It is one of the newest such enterprise in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands opening in March 2005 and has quickly become the heart of the community and a constant hive of activity.

Warakurna is a remote desert community of 120 people situated approximately 8 hours west of Alice Springs on the edge of the Gibson Desert. In common with all remote Indigenous communities there are limited opportunities for accessing services and employment due to significant social, cultural and geographical barriers. Warakurna Artists is a culturally appropriate and sustainable enterprise generating social and economic benefits.

In 2005, approximately six months after the opening of Warakurna Artists, Ngaanyatjarra Regional Arts Development Officer Tim Pearn, conducted a survey to gauge the impact of the new art centre (please see samples faxed). The surveys revealed that in six months the art

centre had contributed to the decrease in numbers of people visiting the clinic and improved mental health, relieved boredom, increased school attendance, created work opportunities and training, built community pride and the extra income generated increased access to white goods, quality clothing and food.

In late 2006, Warakurna Artists Executive Committee, artists and manager met to talk about the impact of 'private dealing' on Yarnangu owned and operated enterprises such as Warakurna Artists in Ngaanyatjarra lands. The artists also discussed the impact and potential risk of private gallery owner, John Ioannou (Agathon Galleries) who was appointed to the position of 'manager' of Irrunytju Arts in 2006 to their enterprise.

One of the artists revealed to Edwina that John Ioannou had approached her elderly and famous mother, asking her to paint for him in Alice Springs. The family had said 'no' and insisted that their mother stay with Warakurna Artists. The elderly artist was told that she was an important person at Warakurna Artists and that she needed to stay in country and teach her children and grandchildren her stories and that her stories would be lost if she painted in Alice Springs. The daughter of the artist also said that "the stories are in our computer and on paper with a photograph". The art centre had been selling her paintings for good money and had worked hard for her mother. She said her mother could save and look after her money and she was protected from family pressures.

Manager, Edwina Circuit and the Executive Committee Chairwomen, Eunice Porter explained to the artists that it was time to make a choice about their art centre, they either remain loyal and protect their business and/or if not, risked losing their enterprise. The candid conversation revealed how passionate the artists were about their art centre and the importance of protecting Yarnangu owned and governed enterprises. They were not just worried for their enterprise but also other art centres in the region as quoted below.

Eunice Porter explains the importance of working together with other Yarnangu owned and operated art centres and the importance of the Western Desert Mob coalition (please see attachments). "You know we all have to work under one wiltja (shelter). These are our businesses. They are here for our future. We have to teach our children our culture, language and stories. We are learning how to run a business and learning white fella way and teaching them Yarnangu way. We are creating a bridge, learning together. We are not worried for



money; we know we are growing, steady, steady. This place is making us happy, we have something to do”.

Young artist Mark Golding said “this enterprise is more than money; we have to keep it going. I know about artists going to Alice Springs and pressure on those old people. We can’t let that happen, we will lose our culture and it’s no good in Alice, everyone drinks too much and gets in trouble and sick. The paintings the old people paint, they are our memories. My paintings are a hand of friendship to you, I want to stay in my country forever, we are Australian, one people and this is a way the white fellas can learn about our culture’.

In communities where domestic violence and tensions occur due to over crowding in houses and acute poverty, art centres are often the only escape from these day to day life difficulties. Judith Chambers, Warakurna Artists Treasurer, explains “the art centre is our place. Before it opened there was no where for us to meet, we can paint and be happy and have a cup of tea”.

There is a significant difference between privately-owned art businesses and community-owned and managed art centres. Warakurna Artists is an aboriginal-owned and governed art business, with transparent operations and where 65 per cent of the art proceeds return directly to the artist and the remainder is reinvested into the art centre's business. Put simply, art centres are not just about supplying beautiful and culturally significant paintings to the fine art market they are also about community development and sustainability. In fact, good community art centres know that the wellbeing of the community is a key part of their activity.

Yours sincerely,

Edwina Circuitt  
Manager  
Warakurna Artists

Please find the following documents faxed: Ngaanyatjarra Regional Arts Surveys,  
Ngaanyatjarra Health comments, Western Desert Press releases.