



PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Exhibit 19

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Bec Mac: Hi. Bec Mac here for the Fake Art Harms campaign. And don't forget: submissions are due this Friday, 3 November, so, if you haven't got online and put your submission in, now's the time. And I'm with some amazing people here. I'm with Alethea Beetson, who you all would know—and, if not, you should—and Emily Wells. How are you?

Emily Wells: Very good, thank you.

Bec Mac: And Alethea, how are you going?

Alethea Beetson: I am excellent, thanks.

Bec Mac: Now, you are busy with Digi Youth Arts. A new show's up. What's happening? Tell us all about it.

Alethea Beetson: We have a new show opening here at La Boite next week. It's a showcase of a new Australian work with young people's experiences from Inala and Stradbroke Island. It's called *Losing It*. It's on Thursday the ninth, Friday the 10th and Saturday the 11th. And it's basically a show about love and loss and growing up as a young Indigenous or first nations person in Brisbane, whether it's on Straddie or at Inala. And so we get to have a lot of fun, as they do, but then we actually show some of the other serious things that they have to go through, and we get to put formal dresses on stage, so that's always fun.

Bec Mac: Fantastic! And how great to bring those two communities together! Like, are you—what's your role in it, Emily?

Emily Wells: So I'm very lucky in this that I just get to rock up to rehearsals and basically spend the whole day having fun with the kids, so I'm very fortunate that I get to do that, and it is really great just getting to see these two different communities come together and just literally put kids in a room to have fun.

Bec Mac: Yes. Now, we're here to talk about the Fake Art Harms campaign. From your experience and what you've seen, how does fake impact—fake art impact—on the community, Alethea?

Alethea Beetson: I think it's, again, an example where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lose income and they lose remuneration for their work. It also highlights where I think legislation and the law doesn't fully understand our cultural property rights and how that is very much a copyright issue. Speaking, obviously, I'm no lawyer, but I'm aware that—so, for example, we've been doing a lot of work with *unsettle*, which is a project at the Queensland Museum looking at collections, and we've looked at collections all around the world, whether it's online or, obviously, in the physical collections where we're working with. And there's examples in the collections that look at those souvenir wares. And so I remember seeing an eggcup that had a shield painted on it, and that shield was borrowed in the sixties, I think, or fifties from a design that someone had seen in a museum collection, by a non-Indigenous person. And that particular design would have very specific meaning and is ultimately a copyright for a particular family or clan group. So I think it's harmful in a cultural way, and then it's also harmful if we're looking at, I guess, the business side of Aboriginal art as well.

Bec Mac: Yes, so big economic impacts as well. Now, from your perspective, what do you see as the impacts on the community?

Emily Wells: I definitely see it, actually—not only all of the economic impacts, like you said, but it definitely goes further than that. And I think it actually takes away, I guess, a lot of inspiration, a lot of drive for people to actually create their cultural art and to actually put their culture into art, because, you know, you see examples of it being taken away and that there's actually—if you put your art out there, you are at risk of it being appropriated and you're at risk of it being taken away. So I think it actually has a really drastic impact on artists and on young people that might want to create art, so I think it's really important that we shift that conversation to show that you can actually create your art and that we are going to try and provide a safe space for you to do so.

Bec Mac: Yes, it's ultimately disempowering in a way.

Emily Wells: Definitely, yeah—taking away a lot of the drive and, you know, potentially some of the dreams of our Indigenous young people to put their art on display and feel that that's a safe thing to do. So I think it's really important that we tackle it.

Bec Mac: Yeah, that's a really good point. Now, do you think—like, so it's a parliamentary inquiry. How crucial is this to be legislated so that these laws can protect the artists and the culture?

Alethea Beetson: Yeah. So I suppose Emily and I have been talking about this a little bit throughout our various work and obviously in the lead-up to today. And so, through our work, we're behind the scenes teaching young artists like our young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island artists, and we're making sure that they follow protocols and that they're only putting work out there that is their culture and links to them. So we're kind of doing our part, but we can do our part inside our community. There is a need for—because, if we look at the history of the appropriation of, I guess, cultural art within Australia, a lot of it has been linked to, I guess, tourism and souvenir work and this desire, like, *Australiana* and appropriating it into that. So I feel like we can do what

we can inside our community, but we can't control that vast majority out there. So that legislation is vital to being able to help us keep doing what we're doing and then stopping that from happening.

Bec Mac: Yeah, particularly if it's coming down to imports from other nations as well. So that's—you can't control that, but we can as a government and a people.

Alethea Beetson: Yes.

Bec Mac: Yeah. What do you think, Emily?

Emily Wells: I think that it's really important that we—as you said, in our work always, I guess, we're trying to operate as an Indigenous arts organisation and we're, I guess, trying to figure out how we operate within the wider industry as well. And so I think it's really important, in terms of the legislation, that, you know, it's come to a point where we have to, I guess, respond in that way. We have to get legislation to help with these issues, but there also has to be, I think, some consideration from the legislation to actually, I guess, recognise the Indigenous people's ways of working and how we've operated for so many thousands of years. So I think it has to come from both sides.

Bec Mac: Yeah, and it's a deeper conversation around culture and community and heritage and 60,000 years of culture, I guess, yeah?

Emily Wells: Yeah, it definitely goes much further than just, you know recent times.

Alethea Beetson: And I think it shows that people genuinely value it for what it is and where it comes from.

Bec Mac: Yeah.

Alethea Beetson: Yes, and that's how to be truly proud of the deep tapestry of story in this country.

Bec Mac: Yeah. So what can we do more to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to produce genuine art and culture and craft?

Alethea Beetson: Support those artists across all art forms. Like, I know that—you know, we all know the AusCo report showed that most of Australia saw Indigenous art as being important, but then attendance or visitation to where it's being exhibited or performed was lower. So I think it's really important that we support the artists who are making Indigenous art from a place of having agency to make that art, and I think also there is—and I'm sure there's websites and various other people that could list what to do, but when you are purchasing art, particularly in this context, making sure that you look into that and make sure that it is from an artist and that there's no other layers to that that have led to it being in a shop where it shouldn't be.

Bec Mac: Yes, totally. What about you, Emily? What do you think we can do?

Emily Wells: I think it comes back to that empowerment, I think, and creating safe spaces for artists and, I guess—yeah, making sure there's a real solid support for them to, you know, not stop creating their art but, I guess, recognise this as, I guess, yet another roadblock. It's not the end of the road, but it's just a roadblock that we have to work through and get through together.

Bec Mac: Yes. And then, in the bigger picture of things, as a community what can we do to just stop fake art happening, do you think, Alethea? I mean, you kind of answered in your last question. Is there anything else you want to add in on that?

Alethea Beetson: Yeah. This is just why the legislation is important, so that we have something there that can stop that, because we can only do what we can do. And I think, yeah, it comes—a lot of these big ideas, whether we're looking at sustainability for the environment, whether we're looking at fake art. There's what the community needs to do, but then there's what we as individuals need to take on. So I think it's about, as an individual, going, 'Well, what can I do?' And, if it's as simple as participating in this inquiry or, if you purchase art, as simple as making sure you're looking into the ethics of that. And so, for us as individuals, we're going to keep doing what we're doing as well and advocating in this space, so it's just setting an individual goal.

Bec Mac: Yes. So take note: get in and put your submission in. Ha, ha, ha!

Emily Wells: Definitely, yeah. I will be, so—

Bec Mac: Well, this is yours, so we've done it for you, babes.

Emily Wells: Yes.

Bec Mac: Whoo! Ha, ha!

Emily Wells: Yeah, I think it's something that Alethea's spoken about many, many times and something that sticks through to me with all the work that we do is that we're not doing the work for the children of today but we're doing it for our children's children and our children's children—literally taking your words.

Bec Mac: Ha, ha, ha!

Emily Wells: But it's really important that we recognise that this isn't just an issue for today, but if we want our children's children's children to be able to recognise and, you know, experience some of their authentic art from 60,000 years ago then we really need to recognise it as an issue for not only today but something that's really going to impact all of the future generations.

Bec Mac: Yes, of all Australians, to know who we are.

Emily Wells: Yeah, exactly, and to recognise, I guess, where our art comes from too.

Bec Mac: Absolutely. So thank you so much. And, quickly, when's the show on again?

Alethea Beetson: *Losing It*, La Boite Theatre, Thursday the ninth, Friday the 10th and Saturday the 11th.

Bec Mac: Come and check it out. It's going to be awesome. Thank you.