

To: Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee

Re: Inquiry into forestry and mining operations on the Tiwi islands.

With specific reference to the highlighted terms of reference:

"e. an examination of the prospects for alternative economic development opportunities and impediments for the Tiwi Islands including sale and **promotion of cultural products, community development activities**, land and sea management, and opportunities for involvement in future carbon trading and emissions offsets schemes; and

f. **any related matters.**"

Dear Committee Members,

My submission concerns a request for consideration of support for a community development activity that is in itself promotion of a cultural product.

Music, in particular, singing, is an intrinsic part of everyday life and culture for the Tiwi, and is not merely an adjunct to activities like forestry and mining - it will be a deeply related matter, as it is for all things.

The name of the project is *Ngarukuruwala*, ("we sing songs") and it is a musical collaboration between the Wangatunga strong women's group of Nguiu, on Bathurst Island, and some Sydney-based jazz musicians. It has already resulted in appearances at the 2007 Darwin Festival, the 2008 Message Sticks Festival at the Sydney Opera House, at the Art Gallery of NSW and the World Youth Day celebrations at Barangaroo. Their CD won Best Traditional Recording at the Northern Territory Indigenous Music Awards in 2008.

Ngarukuruwala first came to my attention through family involvement at both the Sydney and Tiwi ends of the project. I have since become an enthusiastic audience member for their celebratory music and joyous and informative performances.

Through direct contact with the group when in Sydney, and through anecdotal evidence since, I have become aware of the growing community benefit that this unique cultural collaboration is bringing to its participants; a growth in personal self-esteem and collective empowerment is just the beginning. The Tiwi participants are the Strong Women's Group - they are of the older generation, respected by the community, and often responsible for younger community members on a daily and practical basis. Their name speaks for itself in terms of the community development that the women are in a position to initiate or, at the very least, influence positively.

For example, the group is currently trying to raise the funds to perform at the Tiwi AFL Grand Final, a day that is traditionally one to which hundreds of mainland visitors go, in order to promote the musical culture of the islands alongside the growing popularity of the football. As the football has created an important and successful source of role models and ambition for young Tiwi boys, the renewed interest in song through the female elders' involvement in *Ngarukuruwala* has the potential to do the same for young Tiwi girls.

The corollary is the promotion of Tiwi culture, both contemporary and traditional (and the corresponding revelation that there is little division between these from a Tiwi point of view), to non-indigenous, urban-dwelling Australians. *Ngarukuruwala* is already a cultural product - people have paid to see their performances and buy their CD, and the potential for this commercial and cultural exchange is only limited by lack of financial support.

So far, this financial support has been hard-won; modest one-off government grants and small scale private donation. The women and their collaborators have projects immediately in hand which they will not be able to bring to fruition without more reliable financial, and on the island, practical support. Even internet access and the cost of transport has an impact on their ability to continue when the collaboration involves a remote community and distant urban personnel trying to come together. They have been invited to play at National Gallery of Victoria, at Melbourne University and to appear on ABC television's *Spicks and Specks*. Their current financial position is a serious impediment to the group's being able to take up any of these invitations.

I would be pleased if the Committee saw fit to consider *Ngarukuruwala* in its deliberations, in reference to supporting it as a community development activity and assisting promotion of it as a cultural product.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Press.