

Carla Hicks

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT
2600

Dear Madams and Sirs,

Herewith I would like to submit a comment regarding the Senate Inquiry into Forestry, Mining and economic opportunity on the Tiwi Islands.

Over the past eight years, from 2001 and ongoing, I continually filmed on the Tiwi Islands for European and US television, as well as for the archive of the Tiwi Islands' people. The latter is pro bono work. During that process my colleagues and I compiled around 117 hours of footage from the Tiwi Islands. 94 hours of it are owned by the Tiwi people.

The footage includes areas such as: the work of the Tiwi Land Rangers, the Tiwi Marine Rangers, the four Art Centres [including painting, pottery, carving], post funeral ceremonies, traditional songs and dances, different church rituals and celebrations, famous mission station and museum, house building by Tiwi people, forestry work by Tiwi people, canoe building by Tiwi people, monitoring work by Tiwi people and Land Council of different turtle species, the finding of sacred sites, TITEB graduations, activities for diabetes prevention, collecting mangrove food, football training Tiwi Bombers, numerous events during the development of the Tiwi College, journeys to Seagull Island and Vernon Islands, travels of Tiwi Islanders after invitation to Hobart and throughout New Zealand, providing fishing huts for recreational fishermen and tourists, numerous forums and meetings on the Tiwi Islands and in Darwin, numerous official visitors from the mainland, responses to the intervention, beaches, rivers, creeks, waterfalls, plants, animals, bush- and forestland and its landscapes and the every day life on the Tiwi Islands.

During that filming, the process of making pictures and conducting interviews, I never came across any rejecting remarks of any Tiwi people, on or off camera, regarding the development of the forest or rutile mining for this matter.

In the contrary, the footage shows a broad variety of Tiwi people, their reason and ideas trying to carefully develop very few parts of their land towards further use of it. But there are discussions how to solve problems and how to avoid mistakes.

The footage expresses the Tiwi involvement in economic development: planting and pruning trees in the forest, several meetings with investors such as Great Southern and Matilda Minerals, meetings with former potential investors as Austral Fisheries. In group and Land Council meetings the Tiwi people discussed openly the modi of distributing royalties from the forest or other businesses on the islands. One very important result of those open talks was the decision to financially support the planning and development of the Tiwi College in Pickertaramoore [the location of the former headquarter of the Tiwi forest].

The footage shows further more the inherited and active care of the Tiwi people for their Land and Sea, the knowledge of their environment. They express their desire and the need to use and manage it and their experience of lacking government support to do so.

By far the most often expressed need amongst the Tiwi people during the on and off camera work is the need for "real jobs" on the islands, followed by their frustration about the dependency on welfare money and the destructive nature of those circumstances for the Tiwi society and the Tiwi traditions.

I would like to conclude with a personal remark.

As a television journalist, born in East Germany and working since 1993 on worldwide assignments, I have observed in recent years in the Northern Territory and nationwide a rather well organized media campaign against the forestry and other progressive activities on the Tiwi Islands aiming to influence public opinions against any developments on the islands. Superficial and unbalanced reporting by mostly inexperienced journalists, clearly set up by interest groups, lifted three or four Tiwi voices [always the same ones, including their local member] above a majority of the Tiwi people and their traditional owners. Those voices were carefully not broadcasted or printed, probably not recorded at all.

As a journalist I question the process and motive of that media campaign. And it is very obvious that neither the Tiwi people themselves nor their main organisations have the human or financial resources to counter those campaigns.

I submit in this case as a witness of producing the body of documents mentioned above, which show the Tiwi are amongst the most active, thoughtful and successful groups in pursuing economic opportunities for their people I have come across in my personnel and professional life.

Yours sincerely

Carla Hicks
International Press Journalist (1993)

11th March 2009

Signed hardcopy of this submission has been posted.