



Canberra ACT 0200 Australia



PROFESSOR JON ALTMAN
DIRECTOR
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Hanna Neumann Bldg #21

Senator Alan Eggleston (*Chair*)
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector

Dear Senator Eggleston

I would like to make submission to your Inquiry based on long-term academic and policy research and curatorial experience in the Indigenous visual art sector. I begin by noting that this Inquiry is addressing issues facing the extraordinarily diverse and complex Indigenous visual arts sector that is nevertheless one of the outstanding successes of arts policy making and patronage in Australia since the early 1970s.

By way of background, I provide information on three key policy engagements with the Indigenous arts sector. I first started researching Indigenous art in 1979–80 when undertaking doctoral research in Arnhem Land. Subsequently, I was engaged in 1981 as a consultant by Dr Timothy Pascoe in his research for the Australia Council (Improving Focus and Efficiency in the Marketing of Aboriginal Artifacts). In 1988–89, I chaired a national review of the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry with fellow reviewers Peter Yu and Chris McGuigan. This review was notable for its nation-wide consultations, 114 submissions (publicly available) and for providing the blue print for a national strategic approach that was adopted by ATSIC in 1992 as the National Arts and Crafts Industry Support Strategy (NACISS). This review is also notable for the similarity in its terms of reference to those addressed by this Inquiry. In 2003, I undertook a short three month assignment to develop an arts strategy for the Northern Territory. This assignment again included wide ranging consultations and attracted 32 submissions (see Attachment 1); it provided the blueprint for the current Northern Territory Indigenous Arts Strategy *Building Strong Arts Business*.

I provide this background in part to disclose my long-term interest in the development of the Indigenous visual arts sector. I also do so in part because in this submission I want to draw on evidence from two documents that I attach. The first 'Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy for the Northern Territory: Issues paper for consultations' has been published as *CAEPR Working Paper No. 22/2003* and is available at both the CAEPR and Arts NT websites. It is referred to as Attachment 1. The second 'Brokering Aboriginal art: A critical perspective on marketing, institutions and the state' was delivered as the Kenneth Myer Lecture in Arts and Entertainment Management in April 2005 and is available at both the CAEPR and Deakin University websites. It is referred to as Attachment 2.

My submission is structured as follows. I begin with making a few observations about the current overarching Indigenous affairs policy context. I then provide some synoptic commentary on each of your seven terms of reference, attempting to provide pointers where research has been previously undertaken so as to assist your committee in its deliberations. I next make a number of recommendations for your Committee's consideration before providing a very brief conclusion.

The current policy context

While there has been considerable research and consultancy focus on the Indigenous visual arts sector in recent years, this is the first Inquiry conducted under the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs introduced in 2004 that focus on joined up government, mutual obligation, shared responsibility and mainstreaming. This is clearly a very different policy environment from that termed self determination and self management in existence when existing Indigenous arts policy was created.

There is a contemporary dominant policy discourse promulgated by the government of the day that focuses on historic (and bipartisan) failure in the last 30 years. This contestable view, whether right or wrong, cannot be readily applied to the Indigenous visual arts sector that has seen sustainable growth and national and international acclaim over the same period. As part of the current policy discourse there is also an attempt to discredit and dismiss past policies and programs. This would clearly be a mistake as policy and program settings in the arts have clearly generated successful outcomes.

It is noteworthy too that while the new arrangements seek a whole-of-federal government approach, as well as bilateral cooperation with the States and Territories, this was a fundamental aim of Industry Strategy recommended in the 1989 review. A national strategic and coordinated approach delivered by a regional support network was of fundamental importance to NACISS administered by the now defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Arguably, the sustainability of the sector over the last 15 years has been the product of sustained support, although resource constraints meant that there were winners and losers. Indeed much of the policy challenge that needs to be addressed is how to provide opportunity to the currently un- or under-resourced to replicate the opportunity and positive arts outcomes experienced by those adequately resourced.

From an arts, and arguably from other, perspectives, there are potential problems with the new arrangements and some recent policy changes. Historically and today there has been much inter-connectivity between robust Indigenous arts practice and land rights and native title, outstations living, and access to income support, especially from the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme. This is primarily because much arts practice occurs on land Aboriginal people own ('on country') or is inspired by land-linked politics of representation. It is also because while the arts provide one of few means to engage with the market in remote outstations and township settings, few Indigenous artists (like non-Indigenous artists) can achieve economic independence via arts practice alone. In the absence of other

forms of part-time paid work that is accessed by Australian artists generally¹, the income support elements of the work-for-the-dole CDEP scheme is crucially important to the viability of this sector. Whatever one's views on changes to land rights law, CDEP policy, or the viability of outstations, their links to sustainable arts practice has to be recognized. If this Inquiry is to champion the Indigenous visual arts sector it will need to consider the apparent lack of a cohesive and consistent policy framework in Indigenous affairs today despite the whole-of-government rhetoric.

Finally, in Indigenous affairs policy generally and also in the arts there is too much focus on rural and remote settings where only 30 per cent of the Indigenous population resides. There is no doubt that paid Indigenous artists have historically resided predominantly in these areas as documented for example in the 1989 Industry Review when over 50 per cent of producers were enumerated in the NT.² However, some recent statistics from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2002 suggest that this geographic distribution might have changed. In 2002, an estimated 45,332 Indigenous people aged over 15 years participated in arts and crafts, with an estimated 13,872 being paid. Interestingly, there was little interstate variation in participation rates (varying from a low 11.4% in Tasmania and the ACT combined to a high of 20.9% in South Australia). However, there was marked variation in those paid for their participation varying from 67.6% in the NT to 15.4% in NSW).³ This suggests that in situations where arts infrastructure has been long-established (see Attachment 2) paid Indigenous arts practice is more likely to flourish.

Brief commentary on Inquiry Terms of Reference

In the following section, I attempt to provide some commentary on each of the Inquiry's seven terms of reference. I recognize that many of the issues raised are complex, but also recognize that there is a tradeoff between readability and detailed comprehensiveness.

The current size and scale of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector

Estimating the size and scale of the sector is extraordinarily difficult and can yield highly variable results. An initial problem is defining the sector: is the Indigenous visual arts sector that proportion of the total visual arts sector that comprises Indigenous artists, and if so, what instruments exist to make such an enumeration? Such a definition might also ignore Indigenous ownership of whole or retail outlets or joint ownership of such outlets. And what measures should be used to estimate size and scale. Dollars returns to artists is problematic because the size of the sector is understated while overall Indigenous art turnover is equally problematic because much of the value added accrues to non-Indigenous people owing to the number of

¹ David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, *Don't Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia* (The Australia Council, Sydney, 2003).

² Jon Altman (chair) *The Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry: Report of the Review Committee* (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1989, p. 34).

³ Jon Altman, Geoff Buchanan and Nicholas Biddle 'The real "real" economy in remote Australia' in B. Hunter (ed.) *Assessing the Evidence on Indigenous Socio-economic Outcomes: A Focus on the 2002 NATSISS* (ANU E Press, Canberra, 2006, 139–152). See also Cultural Ministers Council Statistical Working Group, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Involvement in arts and culture* (Australia's Culture No. 16, DCITA, Canberra, 2006).

functional levels in different parts of the industry.⁴ This is most clearly evident when art from a remote community is marketed through a commercial gallery in a southern city. There is almost no data on Indigenous arts exports either purchased in Australia or exported for international sale.

Available data are at best guesstimates, hence in Attachment 1, an estimated national value of Indigenous visual art sales of between \$100 million and \$300 million is suggested, although it is noted that this includes manufactured product, all hopefully licenced. A figure of 5,000 to 6,000 Indigenous visual artists has been used for the past 15 years based on a mix of rigorous quantification from community-based art centre data bases to very arbitrary estimates of urban-based practising Indigenous artists.

As noted above, the official NATSISS 2002 suggests that there may be over 13,000 paid Indigenous visual artists. This figure though can be contrasted with the official 2001 Census that indicates that only 1,500 Indigenous people were employed in creative arts occupations, with an estimated 786 in visual arts and crafts occupations.

Since 2002 the Cultural Ministers Council Statistical Working Group has considered options to estimate the size and scale of the sector, but outcomes to date have been limited. The instruments available to the ABS to estimate the sector are clearly quite limited and so more accurate estimation would either require a special survey or extremely resource intensive research, as undertaken, for example, by the Arts and Crafts Centre Story project.⁵

It is unclear if the enormous effort required would generate robust data sets or what role such data sets might play in evidence-based policy formulation.

The economic, social and cultural benefits of the sector

The arguments outlining the economic, social and cultural benefits of the sector have been well rehearsed in the literature, although it is probably important to conceptually differentiate artists, communities, regions and the nation, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests groups. Such differentiation though is not intended to imply an absence of inter-dependence because the sector is fundamentally intercultural and linked to the global economy. Similarly, it is important to differentiate direct benefits (mainly accrued by those who produce and market the art) and indirect and induced benefits (to other sectors like hospitality, tourism, etc, but also to artists). The latter are far more difficult to calculate than the former.

In Attachment 1 (p.12) it is documented how investment in arts infrastructure generates positive financial returns to artists by a factor that ranges from 1: 1.5 to 1: 4.3. There are not many investments in Indigenous affairs that generate such high

⁴ Jon Altman, Boyd Hunter, Sally Ward and Felicity Wright, 'The Indigenous visual arts industry' in Jon Altman and Sally Ward (eds) *Competition and Consumer Issues for Indigenous Australians* (ACCC, Canberra, 2002, 64–101). This is also available online as *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 235*.

⁵ Flick Wright, *The Arts and Crafts Centre Story: A Survey of Thirty-Nine Aboriginal Community Art and Craft Centres in Remote Australia, Vol. 1, Report* (ATSIC, Canberra, 1999) and Flick Wright and Frances Morphy (eds), *The Arts and Crafts Centre Story: A Survey of Thirty-Nine Aboriginal Community Art and Craft Centres in Remote Australia, Vol. 2, Summary and Recommendations* (ATSIC, Canberra, 2000).

direct returns. More importantly perhaps, in remote communities where inactivity is largely recognized as a major cause of social malaise, active engagement in the arts provides a means to enhance individual and community social health. Counter to some views, there is also evidence that people who reside at outstations enjoy better health status than people in larger townships; in so far as arts practice is undertaken to a greater extent at outstations, near sources of raw material and artistic inspiration, there are indirect health benefits from arts engagement.

In Attachment 1 (p.13) some of the indirect or spin-off benefits of the Indigenous arts sector are outlined. These include domestic and inbound tourism, as well as less well recognized natural and cultural resource management activities that generate biodiversity conservation benefits.

The overall cultural benefits to the nation are clearly evident in public arts institutions and their exhibitions programs, as well as in the international cultural diplomacy so clearly evident in projects like the Musée du Quai Branley commission in Paris.

Two overarching observations can be made here. First, the spin-off benefits from the Indigenous arts sector are a form of positive externality. This in turn means that the beneficiary pays principle is difficult to apply. Indeed it is only the most direct beneficiaries, the artists, who make a direct contribution to the running costs of the sector. In Attachment 1 (p.12) it is demonstrated that while NACISS provided \$1.15 million in arts centre operational support to ANKAAA members, artists themselves contributed a higher \$2.55 million to the operating costs of their centres. Artists cross-subsidised freeloader indirect beneficiaries. Second, the bundling of economic, social and cultural benefits from the sector is quite appropriate. It demonstrates at once that the sector is inter-linked and that it cannot just be viewed from a narrow business perspective. The public patronage of the sector generates benefits well beyond the immediate Indigenous artist interest group.

The overall financial, cultural and artistic sustainability of the sector

Concerns about the sustainability of the sector have been articulated since enhanced engagement with the market began in the 1970s (see Attachment 2). And yet there has only been evidence that the sector is not just sustainable, but that it is also efflorescing as new art styles and art communities emerge. From a social sciences perspective, the term cultural sustainability is problematic because while there are people who are Indigenous and recognized as such by an Indigenous authorizing community there will be cultural sustainability because 'culture' refers to the shared values and beliefs shared by a group that informs their every day (in this case artistic) practice. There is sometimes a misguided concern that precolonial material culture forms are disappearing or changing, but then by definition production of visual art for the market is a postcolonial project.

There are two main preconditions for the sustainability of the sector.

The first is that in many situations sustainability is contingent on appropriate community-controlled arts infrastructure. As argued in both Attachments 1 and 2, the model that has proved to be extremely cost effective is the community-controlled art centre that provides an arts brokerage service especially to remote (in a geographical or cultural sense) Indigenous artists. This model is highly dependent in turn on highly

skilled and motivated arts advisors who work as intercultural mediators between artist and the market. There is some evidence from both turnover and vacancy statistics that there may be a bottleneck in the availability of appropriately skilled arts sector professionals which might limit the potential growth of the sector. It is important to note that the community-based art centre model can be extremely effective in both urban and remote contexts.

Another factor that might influence the sustainability of the sector is the demand side, something that can be overlooked after over a decade of economic growth. Any economic downturn that results either in a decline in tourism-linked sales or in less expenditure in the primary and secondary fine art markets could have an impact on the sector, as could a change in purchaser preferences.

The challenge for the Inquiry is to provide a framework that provides realistic arts patronage to the sector that might include arts marketing and promotion in Australia and offshore. There are indications, as will be highlighted below, that the stagnation (or possible decline) of NACISS funding in real terms may have deleterious effects on the sector. This will certainly be the case if any strategy to grow the sector was not matched by appropriate growth in arts patronage support.

The second critical sustainability issue is income support for artists. On average, irrespective of arts effort, few artists can make a living wage from their arts practice. This is the case for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. For many Indigenous artists other work is undertaken in the customary sector of the economy (in harvesting wildlife, for example), in meeting ceremonial commitments or in undertaking part-time work in the services sector. All this non-arts work is dependent on some form of income support, with the CDEP being the main source of this in the last 15 years. On average, as shown in Attachment 1, artists only earned about \$1400 each per annum from arts practice. Non-Indigenous artists often undertake other income-earning work to maintain their livelihoods, but such opportunities are rarely available to Indigenous artists, especially if located beyond the reach of labour markets.

Proposed changes to the CDEP scheme that would see its disappearance in metropolitan and urban centres could have major impacts on the sustainability of arts practice in such areas.⁶ Even in rural and remote regions, pressure on CDEP organizations to exit participants into mainstream work could have deleterious impacts on the visual arts sector, both in terms of artist outputs and in terms of employment of art centre support staff.

Much of the sustainability and growth of the sector from the establishment of NACISS in 1991–92 to the present occurred under ATSIC's stewardship. Recurrent arts infrastructure support was provided on a regular basis to about 40 art centres Australia wide and CDEP income was available to several thousand artists, especially those living at remote outstations beyond the mainstream labour market. The sustainability of the Indigenous visual arts sector remains contingent on such infrastructural and income support.

⁶ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Indigenous Potential meets Economic Opportunity*, Discussion Paper, November 2006.

The current and likely future priority infrastructure needs of the sector

The infrastructure needs of the sector need to differentiate between recurrent and capital requirements. In the 1989 Review it was recommended that a capital fund be established with an annual allocation of \$1 million per annum (then 23% of the proposed Industry Support Strategy allocation) so that the physical infrastructure needs of art centres could be systematically met. ATSIC did not implement this recommendation and did not quarantine resources in a national strategic way to meet capital requirements as it did with recurrent requirements. Instead, the capital infrastructure needs of the sector came from the Regional Arts and Culture Strategy (RACS) on ad hoc grants application and availability of surplus bases. Physical infrastructure, as noted by James Cowan in a report prepared for then Minister for the Arts Senator Alston, needed to also consider housing for art centre staff.⁷

There is now an emerging capital infrastructure backlog that needs to be accurately quantified and urgently addressed. As the sector has moved onto a more professional footing, many art centres now undertake a diversity of functions that include collecting, documenting, preserving, marketing, displaying, retailing, wholesaling, transporting and e-selling art, much of which is fragile, all of which needs to be displayed with artistic integrity. Some art centres are also actively involved in training arts workers and assisting in arts development and the introduction of new media like print-making. In the tropics, art centres need to be air-conditioned and storage areas need to be pest free. The days when a multi-million dollar arts enterprise could be run from a corrugated-iron shed are gone, and yet many art centres still have grossly inadequate facilities. This is especially problematic as centres look to attract inbound tourists so that sales can occur locally and returns to artists can be maximized. In some cases there are also occupational health and safety implications associated with inadequate facilities.

The current problem is that there is no dedicated fund to provide physical infrastructure grants or grant/loan mixes to art centres and commercial finance is not readily available because most art centres are not-for-profit mixed commercial/cultural, rather than mainstream commercial, enterprises. Building art centres for successful enterprises can be extremely costly in remote regions; a modest but appropriate structure for one art centre in Arnhem Land is estimated to cost \$4 million to construct. A challenge for the Inquiry is to recommend the establishment of an appropriate capital fund to meet physical infrastructure backlogs, as well as current and future needs.

The recurrent NACISS budget also needs to grow to meet the current and future needs of the sector. Since 1991–92 the NACISS budget has declined in real terms,⁸ while the number of art centres has expanded. This has created an environment where program funding has been clawed back from apparently commercially successful centres creating a situation of moral hazard whereby incentives to succeed have been undermined. Furthermore, clawback of NACISS funding has created an environment

⁷ James Cowan, Report on Art Centre management in the Top End, centre, the Kimberley and North Queensland with special reference to the role of Art Coordinators in Art Centre management, January 2003.

⁸ \$4 million in June 1992 was equivalent to \$5.75 million in June 2006 according to CPI changes that moved from 107.3 in June 1992 to 154.3 in June 2006.

where artists have been increasingly taxed to finance the operation of their centres with at times deleterious outcomes that are discussed below. Most art centres need to be recognized as mixed commercial and cultural/social enterprises that will require ongoing subvention for the foreseeable future. This is not to say that some will not become financially independent of the state, but the majority will not. This will be especially be the case for those art centres who have several hundred members and have policies to purchase all art for social and cultural, as well as economic, objectives.

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

The Indigenous visual arts sector is diverse and clearly some art centres operate more effectively than others. Effectiveness can be influenced by structural factors, like the location of an arts centre or by its organizational and governance history. Geographic remoteness which forms a part of the missing market argument for state arts patronage can actually provide a buffer from unethical or unscrupulous dealers, so being close to a ready market, like in Alice Springs, might create problems associated with opaque conduct. Despite some recent views to the contrary⁹, the existence of a permit system does assist to limit incursions by informal, and usually unaccountable, art dealers onto Aboriginal-owned land.

The onus to improve art centre performance lies as much with state agencies as it does with art centres. For example, the NACISS grants assessment process remains a mystery to many art centres, few receive feedback on onerous performance indicator information or business plans that they provide, it is unclear if DCITA has the arts expertise to assess applications, and the annual grants application round provides a poor platform for multi-year business development planning. In short, given that most art centres are under-staffed, it would be very helpful to reduce the red tape so as to allow art centre staff to focus on their myriad duties.¹⁰

Numerous reports have highlighted how pivotal arts advisers are to the sustainability of art centres, but insufficient attention is paid to how good arts advisers might be retained, if not by particular art centres then by the sector.

A major emerging problem is that the pressures for art centres to be commercial, based on a poor understanding of their diverse roles, is probably exacerbating unscrupulous and unethical behaviour. As noted earlier, artists already make significant contributions to the running costs of their centres via its markup policy. This policy is generally applied as a percentage so that it operates as a highly progressive tax regime. If operational support to centres is reduced, the impost on artists increases and some of the top artists can be tempted to operate outside their community-based arts infrastructure for better individual returns. While there is

⁹ Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Access to Aboriginal Land under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act – Time for Change? Discussion Paper, October 2006, FACSIA, Canberra.

¹⁰ A recently-released report *Red Tape Evaluation in Selected Indigenous Communities, Final Report to the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination* (Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd, May 2006) suggests that administrative hurdles may have increased rather than decreased under the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs generally.

clearly artist agency in such choice, artists are left vulnerable to exploitation because private dealers do not have the same requirement to be transparent as incorporated community organizations. State patronage of art centres might be the best means to reduce unethical practice as the required transparency of art centre practice (to artists and funders) is a distinct benefit of public funding.

Better resourcing will improve situations where there is unethical or unconscionable conduct, but it might not eliminate it because artists will always have the option to sell their work beyond the ambit of monopolistic art centres. This is a complex issue that probably receives more attention in the popular news media than it warrants. Certainly it can be ameliorated through public education of the sellers and buyers with brochures such as produced by ANKAAA and Arts NT (*Purchasing Australian Aboriginal Art: A Consumer Guide*) being important. While regulation will never eliminate unconscionable conduct it is important that the ACCC and State and Territory fair trading regimes remain vigilant and that clear breachers of the Trade Practices Act are prosecuted. Unfortunately, Indigenous artists may be reluctant to participate in prosecutions under the TPA if they have been complicit in unconscionable conduct, sometimes for very basic reasons like lacking access to banking facilities and needing to trade informally to gain access to cash.

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

The history of the last 30 years suggests that the instruments available via existing support programs can improve the sector's capacity and future sustainability if made more widely available. This in itself creates a challenge because even existing art centres are facing difficulties recruiting staff that can effectively play the complex intercultural role mediating between Indigenous artists and the western arts market.

Existing programs, especially NACISS, need to be far more streamlined so that well-performing art centres can be targeted for support, success should be rewarded. Many of the better art centres are developing very effective information and financial management systems, effective stock control and proactive marketing and exhibiting strategies: their business-like approach would welcome outcomes based support. Considerable energy has been expended in finding the appropriate formula to ensure equitable needs based funding across art centres and some of the options suggested could be re-examined.¹¹ The bottom line is that many of these efforts have been undertaken in a static funding environment whereas there is clearly pressure to increase the overall NACISS allocation to fund new art centres and to fund capital backlogs and current and future needs.

The 1989 Industry Review aimed to provide an overarching national strategic approach to art centre funding that saw inter-agency collaboration in providing joined up arts governance. Today, there is probably greater opportunity to ensure such an approach via bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories that could enhance and share the cost of investing in a growing

¹¹ See for example, Kingsley Palmer, Community Based Art and Craft Centres: Funding Formulas, Funding Models and Benchmarking, A discussion paper prepared for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, March 2000 and Duncan Peppercorn, Benchmarking and funding models for indigenous Arts Centres, Report to DoCITA, ATSIS and the Australia Council, November 2003.

sector. After all, both levels of government benefit directly and indirectly from a robust Indigenous visual arts sector. It is important though that the critical arts funding principle of arms-length support remains paramount; and it is also important that community-based arts centre performance is judged on arts outcomes rather than some spurious behavioural outcomes that are being embedded in some (as yet unmonitored) shared responsibility agreements.

Future opportunities for further growth of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector, including through further developing international markets

Predicting the future growth of the Indigenous visual arts sector is risky, although one of the lessons of the past thirty years has been that audience appreciation can be influenced by arts education. However, the Indigenous visual arts sector remains relatively young and it is important that arts supply that has integrity and authenticity is secured before excessive marketing is undertaken. It is certainly the case that demand will be determined by the market, although there are clearly areas where expansion can be encouraged, for example, in the tourist market where authentic Indigenous tourist art could replace imported or locally-manufactured imitations. Unfortunately, market forces and globalization sometimes result in cheap substitutes being too competitive with local Indigenous products, especially in the area of fibre art.¹²

The main area for potential growth might be in regions that have lacked arts infrastructure support to date and in providing support to urban Indigenous arts practitioners who have lacked appropriate support organizations and strategies (see Attachment 2).¹³ International markets are developing, especially in Europe, for fine Indigenous art, but any thought of expanding overseas should consider the relative benefits and costs of selling via the internet or to inbound visitors versus overseas exhibiting.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the Committee's consideration:

Recommendation 1: There is a need to recognize that the existing support model has had a 30-year history and an outstanding track record. While this is not to preclude alternate support models, the role of the community-controlled art centre model in the development and sustainability of the Indigenous visual arts sector must be recognized at a time when public and policy discourse is discrediting all past practice.

Recommendation 2: It is imperative to recognize that most Indigenous visual arts practice and enterprise mix cultural and commercial objectives. Consequently a narrow business perspective is inappropriate for assessment of this form of venture. Sector outcomes measurement should incorporate economic, social and cultural indicators.

¹² Tim Acker and Jon Altman, 'It's all Art, but still we have a fibre problem: Economic Reality, Contested Value and Aboriginal Art', paper presented at the Selling Yarns: Australian Indigenous textiles and Good Business in the 21st Century Conference, 13–14 August 2006, Darwin.

¹³ See Brenda Croft, 'Boomalli: From little things big things grow', in Luke Taylor (ed.) *Painting the Land Story* (National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 97–118) for the history and development of a Sydney-based Indigenous arts cooperative.

Recommendation 3: While unethical and unscrupulous conduct cannot be tolerated, it is unlikely that adequate regulatory instruments can be devised to eliminate such practice. Existing regulatory instruments like the Trade Practices Act and the ACCC should be used where possible. But such conduct will be effectively ameliorated by appropriate investment in arts infrastructure and public education.

Recommendation 4: The Indigenous visual arts sector is an important success that should be properly resourced because it generates economic, social and cultural benefits to Indigenous artists and wider spin-off benefits to other industries and the nation. It is imperative that the lag in NACISS support that began under ATSIC in the 1990s is quickly rectified. A recurrent program of only \$15 million per annum (inflation-proofed) could provide adequate support to about 100 art centres Australia-wide.

Recommendation 5: There is an urgent need for a quarantined capital fund to support the physical infrastructure needs of existing and future arts centre. This is another area where inadequate support has created development bottlenecks. It is imperative that in communities where there are extreme housing and infrastructure shortfalls, visual art sector needs are not in direct competition with other community needs. A capital fund with an allocation of \$5–10 million per annum should be established with priorities established after a sector-wide needs survey. As with Indigenous housing and infrastructure needs generally, immediate investment will ensure that current backlogs and future needs do not spiral out of fiscal reach.

Recommendation 6: The pivotal role of art centre staff as inter-cultural mediators should be recognized and the difficulties inherent in this occupation should be adequately remunerated. The important role of regional support organizations like ANKAAA and Desart in providing support to smaller art centres (including training, IT support and locums) should be recognized and appropriately resourced.

Recommendation 7: There is growing evidence that the recent rhetoric of whole of government has not always translated to coordinated practice. It is important that the policies and programs of pivotal importance to the Indigenous visual arts sector operate in unison. It is also important that if DCITA remains the Indigenous visual arts patronage agency, it recruits staff with Indigenous arts administration expertise and develop an appropriate regional network to manage the now renamed NACIS program.

Recommendation 8: It would be useful to use this Inquiry as an instrument to make a contribution to the education of the Australian public about the Indigenous visual arts sector and its sustainability and success.

Conclusion

This submission and its two attachments argue that the Indigenous visual arts sector is an important success from the last 30 years that needs to be recognized, lauded and championed. The extent of this success needs to be realistically appraised, the Indigenous visual arts sector will not be the panacea for Indigenous disadvantage, but it is making an important contribution particularly in regions where there are few alternative avenues for market engagement. The evidence base indicates that the sector is sustainable and generates economic, social and cultural benefits to

practitioners, as well as to regions, industries and the nation. But this is a mixed commercial and cultural sector and policy realism suggests that the sector will need ongoing arts patronage and most artists will need some form of income support to supplement their earned arts income. Available statistics suggest that there is capacity to expand this sector, but such expansion needs to be undertaken in a systematic national strategic manner. It is imperative that the successful in the sector are rewarded with realistic and appropriate support so as to provide an aspirational 'flagship' model for emerging art centres and practitioners to seek to emulate, not merely covet. The development of arts infrastructure and capacity over time has been and remains of crucial importance to sector sustainability.

This submission is somewhat lengthier than originally anticipated, but the issues are complex; if any require further elaboration, I would be happy to provide additional evidence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR

16 November 2006

Attachments:

- 1 'Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy for the Northern Territory: Issues paper for consultations' [available at: <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/WP/CAEPRWP22.pdf>]
- 2 'Brokering Aboriginal art: A critical perspective on marketing, institutions and the state' [available at: http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/topical/Altman_myer_2005.pdf]