

**Torres Strait Regional Authority
(Gab Titui Cultural Centre)**

Submission to

Senate Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Sector

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is a Commonwealth statutory authority established in 1994 and governed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005. The TSRA through the portfolio area of the Arts and Culture provides funds to promote develop and support the Torres Strait region's Indigenous people in their involvement with traditional/modern artistic and cultural activities. TSRA also aims to promote awareness of the contribution made by the region's Indigenous art, culture and history to the wider Australian and international community. Under the auspices of this authority, Gab Titui Cultural Centre's primary function is to provide a place for cultural revitalization and promotion of the culture and arts of the Torres Straits. The Centre provides gallery and workshop spaces, a cultural keeping place and a retail outlet for local arts and crafts products.

This submission by the Torres Strait Regional Authority is prompted by the need to recognize the unique culture and style of Torres Strait visual arts and crafts, and is based in part on the proceedings and outcomes of a Visual Arts Strategy workshop held on Thursday Island in May, 2005.

Terms of Reference

a) The Current Size and Scale of Australia's Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Sector
Gab Titui, on Thursday Island presents the works of approximately 55 Torres Strait artists in the Gallery and Gift shop at the Cultural Centre. Many of these artworks and crafts are bought outright by the centre with others held on a consignment sale basis. In addition to the Cultural Centre on Thursday Island, there are two community art centres in the Torres Strait. Darnley Arts and Crafts Centre is based at the Darnley State School on Erub Island and was jointly funded by Education Queensland, TSRA and Darnley Island Council. The Kubin Art Centre on Moa Island was opened in 2006 and funded by the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation (50 000) and TSRA (300 000) with an in-kind contribution by Kubin Island Council, and the donation of building space from Islander Business Industry Services (IBIS).

b) The Economic, Social and Cultural Benefits of the Sector

As identified in the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy (2005), the visual arts and crafts sector can play an important role in preserving and protecting all aspects of Torres Strait Island culture as well as contributing significantly towards the overall economic sustainability of the region through employment opportunities. Other benefits include the maintenance of cultural heritage and the education of the general public about the Torres Strait culture.

c) The Overall financial, cultural and artistic sustainability of the Sector

With an anticipated increase in tourism to the Torres Strait targeted at both the national and international markets, there is continued funding through the TSRA and other government agencies e.g. Dept of State Development, DOTARS, QLD Arts, Australian Arts Council, Tourism Qld and Tourism Australia, to ensure the sustainability and expansion of the cultural and artistic sector.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority operating budget for wages, advertising, exhibitions and the running of the Gab Titui Cultural Centre is in the vicinity of \$400 000. Funding of \$45 000 was granted from the Australian Arts Council with additional funds from TSRA giving a total of \$60 000 for a mentor to mentor the trainees employed at the Cultural Centre. A grant was received from Arts Queensland Indigenous Regional Arts Development fund for \$25 000. This has been matched by \$25 000 from TSRA. Also a grant for \$60 000 from Arts Queensland and an additional \$25000 from the Australian Arts Council has been gained to fund an Arts Development Officer.

d) The current and likely future priority infrastructure needs of the Sector

Like many other areas involved with Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft sector, distance in the Torres Strait is a prohibiting factor. Current and future infrastructure needs include:

- Plans for new and improved art centre infrastructure including workshop spaces and opportunities for mobile facilities that could be moved from one Island community to another;
- The resolution of transportation issues through partnerships with transport providers and Government, and
- Identifying technology needs and solutions for art making e.g. laser equipment for shell working, and access to CAD programs and training.

e) Opportunities for Strategies and Mechanisms to Improve the Sector's Practices, Capacity and Sustainability (including Unethical Conduct)

Through the visual arts forum a number of strategies were suggested to improve the Torres Strait art and crafts industry. These include focusing on the areas of maintaining and recording traditional skills and knowledge, teaching and promoting cultural knowledge, and increasing the levels of participation in arts and crafts in young people through:

- Maintaining and recording traditional skills and knowledge through engaging elders to teach protocols and endorse the use of images in designs;
- Respecting and understanding of what knowledge can and cannot be shared through artwork with respect to individual communities' law and lore. A related issue is that of intellectual property and copyright. A possibility is to develop a Torres Strait Island Art label or Certificate of Authenticity to guarantee authenticity.
- Increasing the levels of participation in Torres Strait Art from young people through developing arts and cultural programs for primary and high school students during holidays, including artist in residence schemes.

- Celebrating and promoting cultural events through creating access to cultural festivals and exchanges for artists-e.g. traditional skills with contemporary applications.
- Identifying appropriate partners in the commercial arts industry.
- Improving the knowledge and understanding of all aspects of Torres Strait Islander art to all potential markets.
- Increasing the number of exhibitions and promotional opportunities for Torres Strait Islander art and crafts.
- Improving the documentation of Torres Strait Islander Art and artists, images and stories through the creation of catalogues, and access to digital and technical resources.
- Improving access to reasonable cost and high quality materials.
- To take the opportunity to involve the elders of communities.

The visual art and craft industry of the Torres Strait could also enhance capacity and sustainability through greater professional skills development including:

- An analysis of the training needs of Torres Strait Islander artists and artworkers and identifying and developing training programs. Relevant areas of training may include intellectual property and copyright, contractual law, workplace health and safety, governance, business and financial planning, marketing and media relationships, and developing grant applications, and
- Negotiating opportunities with TAFE for flexible delivery of programs and the development of a dedicated arts training program.

f) 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

A key factor for increasing the effectiveness of existing government programs is to ensure a co-coordinated approach from all agencies. This could be achieved through:

- Implementing the Report and Plan for the Development of Torres Strait Arts, which looks at the overall Torres Strait Arts industry and from which local plans can be based on specific artist and community needs.
- Developing a coordinated 'whole of government' approach from all departments identified with the Arts/Crafts sector.
- Developing a whole of community approach to the teaching and promotion of cultural knowledge/arts. The potential role for schools being able to assist in art production through access to new technology and equipment should be recognized. Successful strategies for cultural integration in education (e.g. Darnley State School) could be promoted to all schools in the Torres Strait.

g) Future opportunities for further growth of Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector including developing International markets

At the Visual Arts Forum in the Torres Strait, it was recognized that there is a need to identify and understand different market segments, and improve the knowledge of the

National and international art industry, art practice and market trends. Strategies could include creating opportunities for skills exchanges and mentoring opportunities between artists and elders throughout the Torres Strait, and between Torres Strait Islander and mainland based Australian and international artists. Within the tourism segment there exists opportunities for expansion into markets eg. Artists in Residence on visiting cruise ships and approaching travel organizations to organise tour visits to appreciate the arts and culture of the Torres Strait.