

SENATE INQUIRY

INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFT SECTOR

Art Centre Funding, CDEP Reform and the effect on indigenous art practice and art centre operations.

Further to the Waringarri Aboriginal Arts initial submission to the Inquiry and issues raised during discussions at the hearings regarding the adverse effects of the CDEP Reform on indigenous arts practice and indigenous owned art centre operations, the following emphasizes our key concerns.

The new CDEP reforms which will contribute to reductions in art centre funding have the potential to damage the Indigenous arts industry.

The continued and sustainable operation of indigenous arts practice and indigenous owned art centre enterprises relies on funding and wages being made available to ensure that:

1. Art centres have sufficient staff in order to operate and continue the success of the industry
2. Indigenous people have the opportunity to participate in employment that embraces indigenous cultural practice
3. Local indigenous employees are available to assist art centres with local information and interpretation of knowledge to promote cross cultural understanding within the arts and tourism industries
4. Young people have an opportunity to be involved in learning both cultural and business practice
5. Indigenous operated organizations can continue to develop skills, knowledge and capacity to be successful and sustainable enterprises
6. Indigenous artists and art centre workers in remote Australia (where the cost of living is extremely high and the opportunity for employment alternatives is limited) are fully supported and engaged in meaningful activity

Art Centre Funding and Long Term Viability of the Indigenous Arts Industry

It is evident that the role of art centres and the factors that contribute to their success has not been well understood by government. Unrealistic pressures on art centres to become economically self-sustaining in the short term will lead to the diminution of the Australian Indigenous arts industry. Certain closure of a number of centres is likely in the longer term, if recognition is not given to the real funding requirements of these important community based employers.

Recognising financial success as the only measure of an art centre's viability is also to ignore the many social and economic benefits that flow from art centre activity, and to limit development potential for financial and artistic success in the future.

Given the relative scale of the economic and social benefits flowing from the remote area Aboriginal Arts Industry, government investment has been small compared with investment in other program areas that have yielded lesser results. Rather than

penalize art centres for their success, funding bodies must acknowledge that an ongoing investment in art centres is required in order to ensure the long term success of the 'industry'. The reasons for this are many and complex, and I will not attempt to explain them here.

As the Senate Committee should now be aware, art centres play a significant community development role. The importance and benefits of art centres is lost in a purely economic analysis. The Government has a real responsibility to continue support of community development organizations if it is to achieve its long term goals in relation to employment, well being and sustainability of indigenous communities.

Many industries receive a range of benefits from government to grow and support economic development within Australia. Art centres have proven capacity to contribute significantly, not only to remote economies but to the broader economy of Australia's arts and tourism industries. As stated above, art centres have already been incredibly successful with a relatively modest investment by government (relative to other government programs for indigenous communities). We urge the Senate Committee and Government to seriously consider the potential real benefits that would occur given an ongoing investment in art centres.

Integral to the essential question of art centre funding, are two related issues that warrant further consideration and exploration by the Senate Committee:

- The impact of CDEP Reforms
- CDEP support for artists

CDEP Reform - Real Jobs in Art Centres

The indigenous arts industry contributes significantly to indigenous employment in remote Australia, facilitating capacity building and engagement in meaningful activity, as well as contributing to health and well being for many indigenous communities. In the absence of alternative training and development opportunities for emerging artists and arts administrators in remote areas, art centres require recognition through significant funding of these and related roles crucial to the growth of the industry.

Artists and art centres are currently working with commitment to establish and sustain effective enterprises that support both cultural practice and economic outcomes. However, the sustainability of indigenous arts practice and art centre operations will be adversely affected by the current CDEP Reform, in the absence of further measures and funding provided to address the gaps created by the reform.

In the case of art centres based in remote area towns the impact of CDEP Reform needs to be urgently addressed – before 30 June when current employees who have been on CDEP for 12 months are forced to register for Job Network, despite them being gainfully employed by the art centre.

Waringarri Aboriginal Arts currently has 7 CDEP positions for art centre workers in the areas of art materials supply, freight and packing, grounds and maintenance,

gallery assistance and administration support. Without these positions the current and growing success of the centre would be jeopardized. We do not receive sufficient funding from any other source to pay for these positions. Staffing levels provided by CDEP positions have, therefore, contributed significantly to successful operations.

Art Centres like Waringarri Aboriginal Arts are a CDEP success story where the initial goals intended for the program have been effectively achieved. Yet for Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, which is situated on the edge of the township of Kununurra, the application of the CDEP reform may mean that current participants will not be protected by the remote communities ruling despite limited employment options for artists within the township.

Therefore, in the spirit of “whole of government” reforms, it needs to be recognized that such positions should be funded as real jobs.

If the Australian government is seriously committed to fostering indigenous employment in remote areas, it needs to understand the role of art centres as, among other things, community based training and transitional organizations. Short term training programs like STEP (funded by DEWR) may be appropriate for new trainee positions, but are not appropriate for long term art centre employees (funded by CDEP until June 30) who should be paid appropriately for their roles and who should receive greater security of employment and employee entitlements.

Art Centres also provide meaningful forms of employment for community members who, while they may not qualify for disability or aged pensions, are unlikely to find mainstream employment for many reasons, including education levels, numeracy and literacy skills, their age (affecting their ability to gain such skills), and not least the cultural divide between mainstream employers and the community.

<p>Recommendation: Funds should be allocated to support real jobs in art centres that have been previously subsidized by CDEP.</p>

Artists and CDEP

Artists, who are currently engaged in the complex and meaningful activity of arts practice, including the development of independent incomes, are often without skills for other forms of available employment within the community. Their engagement however, significantly gives back in sales commissions to a range of community development and capacity building activities supported by the art centre.

These people are often highly skilled in non-mainstream ways and are critically important in the development of innovative organizations such as art centres.

<p>Recommendation : CDEP should continue to be made available for community service organizations such as art centres, including those based in towns, to support meaningful ‘community development activities’ such as arts based practices.</p>
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Conclusion

Continuing financial support from government will assist indigenous owned community based art centres make a transition to independent sustainability and assist individual artists with the opportunity to develop increased economic independence from welfare.

However, to remove the financial support previously provided by CDEP from the artists who sustain the industry and contribute to income generation within their communities, as well as to remove valuable art centre staff positions funded through CDEP, will significantly destabilize art centre operations and demoralize the many communities that are highly committed to the success of these enterprises.

Without providing an alternative to CDEP or a “whole of government” approach to the sustainability of the indigenous arts industry, artists and art centre workers who are currently committed to engagement in meaningful activity and providing income generation for individuals, their families and their communities may end up being returned to a position of welfare reliance, discriminated against because of a devaluation of indigenous cultural activity and policies that are not flexible enough to continue the support of indigenous success.

<p>We ask that the committee commit to considering the recommendations made above and to pursuing ways in which continued funding for artists and art centre workers be maintained if not by the current CDEP funds then by an alternative that recognizes and values the contribution of indigenous people within this industry.</p>
