

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 9 August 2007

Federal Government changes threaten our livelihoods – from work to welfare

A peak representative body for Indigenous artists, meeting in Darwin today, has widely condemned federal government changes to CDEP and the Northern Territory permit system.

The Executive members of ANKAAA say there has been no communication about the details of these changes.

"It seems that a community development program that was based on getting people from welfare to work is now being used to get people from work back to welfare," said ANKAAA Chair Richard Birrinbirrin*.

ANKAAA is the peak advocacy and resource agency for Indigenous art and craft centres in the Top End and Kimberley region, with more than 2500 members and 41 art centres.

"We don't understand why our livelihoods are being threatened like this," Mr Birrinbirrin said.

"For years we have actively shared our art and culture with the wider community and have developed successful long term partnerships with all the key stakeholders and businesses in the broader arts, export and tourism sectors.

"Most importantly, this has been done within a framework of mutual respect that meets the needs of all involved and not through outside and imposed regulations that we are now seeing," he said.

The ANKAAA Executive has requested the NT Minister for Arts, Ms Marion Scrymgour, to pass on their concerns and distress about the scrapping of CDEP and permits to visit Aboriginal communities, to members of the Australian Parliament when she is in Canberra tomorrow.

"We are dismayed and confused at how these changes have been introduced. There's been no information or consultation with our members or communities.
"Why, when our sector is so often referred to by government as a model success story that significantly contributes to the wider economy, are they removing the very things that have supported our achievements?"

**Richard Birrinbirrin, from Bulabula Arts at Ramingining, starred in the film Ten Canoes, and is a leading ambassador for Aboriginal culture.*

"Nearly all of our art centre workers and artists rely on CDEP payments which have supported jobs in art centres for the past 20 years. Due to years of under-funding of Indigenous education, many of our people are not job ready and some never will be. They do have meaningful work though; their job is the expression and teaching of our culture.

"For the past 25 years we have built up the Indigenous arts industry which has included investment of our incomes as artists into infrastructure for our art centres within our communities.

"For years we have been asking the government to also invest through our ABA funds – which are our mining royalty money - to grow our businesses. It is criminal that they are now using these ABA funds to compensate us, Aboriginal land owners, for their land grab.

"Further, the scrapping of permits just doesn't make sense. If this is all meant to protect our children and stop the grog, why open up our communities to whoever wants to come in? We have spent years sharing culture and helping people to understand how to buy art the right way and understand our sacred places and stories, but now we'll have no control.

"The recent Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Arts highlighted the extent of exploitation of Aboriginal artists, yet here is the government lifting permit controls so Aboriginal art centres and artists will be further preyed upon by unscrupulous dealers.

"We're often the major focus of visitors, but how can we run a business and be able to work if we have hordes of visitors descending on us?

"We are just feeling confused and betrayed," Mr Birrinbirrin said.

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For further information, contact ANKAAA's acting Executive Officer, Vokili Shiell – 0417614555 or 08 8981 6134
Executive members Araluen Maymuru and Cyril Kerinauia are available for comment this afternoon.

Further references:

ANKAAA web site: www.ankaaa.org.au

ANKAAA's submission to Senate Inquiry

www.apf.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/Indigenous_arts/submissions/sublist.html

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