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Dr. Ian Holland
Secretary
Environment Communication Technology and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
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Senate Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous Visual Arts and Crafts Sector.

Dear Dr Holland,

For background on who I am and where I've gathered the information to comment for this submission, please read my newsletter enclosed in pdf. I authorise distribution of the Newsletter to the Senate Committee Inquiry members, and anyone else you may wish to send it to.

Working with and for, indigenous people in north west Australia for the last 22 years or so - combining health, art and aviation - I've had the privilege to work with Traditional Owners (TO's), artists, health workers, community members and friends in over 30 communities in the north west of Australia on an ongoing basis. I welcome the Senate inquiry.

a). **What's the problem?** Artists being ripped off. Art purchasers being ripped off. Art Centres, ethical dealers and gallerists struggling for viability, for a start.

b). **Why do we have the problem?** Because artists are on the back foot re. bad health, bad nutrition, bad housing, bad literacy and numeracy in western ways, bad literacy and numeracy for westerners in Indigenous ways. A struggle with the 'Money Story' so lack of choice given the overall poor resources in the communities. Economic relief, no matter how temporary when an opportunity arises, takes some of the huge pressure off artists because of this dire lack of resources. Morally and ethically bad art dealers, and some collectors, know their low payment offers exploit people's situation. There is no law against it. There is little or no paper trail.

Art purchasers, especially if new, are gullable to slippery sales talk, dubious price structure and poor provenance.

c). **Why are art centres, ethical dealers and gallerists struggling for viability?**

Because an artists' hard earned profile is scuppered by unethical art dealing practice. These dealers approach artists outside of their professional arrangement (often the community art centre) once the painter has become well known and is earning well. Art centres, ethical dealers and gallerists find themselves supporting the artist by charging the correct amount but lower priced work is found on sale, or sold, by these unethical dealers. The market becomes confused and the artists profile comes down.

3. The overall financial, cultural and artistic sustainability of the sector

d). The Globe shaking advent of Australia's Indigenous art, appreciated by an increasingly wide audience now that it's radiating out on transportable mediums, is knocking the socks off international art world. Rightly so and more to come. The visual

language, cultural communication, traditional/ contemporary abstraction condensing what's real into recognised dialogue, crossing untold borders, is being interpreted avidly. There is a depth and clarity where words to describe Australia's indigenous art accurately are yet to be found. There is immense potential for sustainability of the sector. Indigenous health is vital.

e). Having an art dealers accreditation is a sound idea. Renewed yearly.

4. The current and likely future priority infrastructure needs of the sector.

f). We need a holistic government approach to improve health, housing and education. I mean billions more dollars devoted consistently over 20 years in a secured program. A program ensuring continuity of input and improvements instead of stop start stabs at projects.

g). IMPORTANT. Action be directed in accordance with each language group's elders/ TO's/ committee. What may be appropriate in one T/O's area needn't be so in another, even if close by.

h). For another start everyone, including artists, need fresh food. Should people from outside communities be employed for critical positions such as CEO's and Store Managers then lets have a bank of community development trained non racist staff on hand who actually like the locals and bring in what is healthy and good. People with health awareness, management and education skills to provide a professional service. And fresh food is basic service - the miserable specimens seen on semi barren shelves is outrageous. A bank of people who happily work with locals to hand on responsibility instead of the stream of incompetents who've been extracting funds for themselves, delivering out of date food supplies and pocketing profits for years. And hand out cheap paintnig materials for their own gain - people who when caught simply get another CEO or Store Manager job in another community.

i). Let's build houses enough to house people fairly. Let's have the means to cope with the required plumbing and trainers and trainees to keep systems - or cisterns - running. Let's build more clinics and renal dialysis units and staff them and train more health workers - who do a brilliant job. Let's have access to well equipped, well staffed, bi & multi lingual schools for our children's education - and I mean all our children's - in indigenous and non indigenous ways. With health, language and western literacy people will not only have the chance to live to a civil life expectancy and flourish in their chosen profession, but stop being vulnerable to exploitation when their profession is successful. This is the crux of the art market issue.

5. Opportunities for the strategies and mechanisms that the sector could adopt to improve it's practices, capacity and sustainability, including to deal with unscrupulous or unethical conduct

j). Artists of course are free to choose whom ever they wish to represent them. At the moment the art centre model, with it's strengths and weaknesses, is the main sound structure by which artists often feel best serviced, I believe, for fair dealing, transparency and joint decision making. Indeed art centres are often one of the very few resources in the community for earning an income or accessing facilities. Let's fund these entities properly. Adequate staffing is essential. Secured long term funding so that people can get on with the work at hand by having the facilities and equipment necessary and not forever distracted with viability issues.

k). What happened to Felicity Wrights recommendations in her comprehensive, well researched 1999 ATSIIC report 'The Art Centre Story'? Very very few recommendations were implemented. Why?

l). Successes in recent governance training and 'Money Story' programs (such as held at

Warlayirti Artists recently) should not be overlooked. Demonstrated was real progress in terms of artists interaction, decision making and self protection in the robust art market. The fact that art centre structures who co-ordinate such pragmatic learning programs struggle interminably with under staffing, multi tasking, financial juggling, pressured unbearably by stressed remote community needs whilst precious hours - days - are spent on funding applications to simply keep the doors open - is shattering.

m.) How to deal with unscrupulous or unethical conduct? Exposure.

Ideally educate collectors, curators and new dealers so that they are aware of pit falls in the art market in the first place.

6. Opportunities for existing government support programs for indigenous visual art and crafts to be more effectively targeted to improve the sector's capacity and future sustainability

n). Briefly - Lets get artist's ABN numbers sorted out aswell as tax eligibility. To do this would mean recognition, literacy, infrastructure, more employment to service this infrastructure and accountability. With accountability plans can be built and directions taken, if chosen.

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

o.) We need more financial and advisory support with marketing and exporting indigenous art. This includes negotiating the swampland of customs, taxes and duties when exporting and reimporting for international exhibitions, selling or not. Austrade are helpful. More assistance would be useful in the necessities and negotiations of other countries requirements. Often too much time is spent in this area through too few precedents rather than the project at hand.

To summarise:

p). In 2001, seeing very little progress in health or resources since the earlier time working with people in remote communities in the mid 80's, I saw Mr Wolfensohn in Washington when he was president of The World Bank. I asked him what was happening in other remote areas around the world and what was the answer to improving conditions. He said 5 things:

1. Do no harm.
2. Get people who can assist be aware of the situation.
3. Get them to do something about it.
4. Increase the resources in the community.
5. So that people have choice to maintain culture, go western way, or both.

Well. Where are we? As a Nation I believe we are still staring at number 1. The success of the Indigenous Visual Arts and Crafts Sector, in my opinion, means doing all we can to get to number 5.

Thank you, Helen

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