

NINTI ONE REMOTE ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART ECONOMIES PROJECT

POLICY BRIEFING KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Art centres are one of the few long-term success stories in remote communities, generating self-employment, non-welfare income, cultural pride and making a profound contribution to Australia's identity.
- ▶ Around 14,000 remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have created artistic, economic and social returns, overwhelmingly through the services of around 90 art centres.
- ▶ A majority of remote art centres are financially fragile, with short-term non-Indigenous management.
- ▶ Artistic and commercial success is uneven, across gender, age, location and production.
- ▶ A rebuilding phase is underway and needs further encouragement. However, growth in art centres and art production has not been matched by demand.
- ▶ While sales are improving after steep falls, the supply chain is characterised by a lack of trust and cautious buyer behaviour.

Background

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies Project analysed the production, marketing and sale of art from remote-area artists into commercial art markets. Related and important areas such as human resources and ebusiness were also researched. With an overall aim of contributing to the future of the remote art sector and its contribution to economic participation, this research identified both challenges and opportunities.

This briefing gives a snapshot of key issues and policy implications from research that took place between 2011 and 2014. Findings are drawn from data, time and ideas provided by over 200 art centres, art businesses, individuals and funding agencies.



Martumili artists, Ngamaru Bidu, Kumpaya Girgiba and Ngalangka Nola Taylor stand in front of one their big paintings. Photo courtesy of Martumili Artists.



Scope and scale of the art economy

Key issues

- ▶ Over the decade to 2012, the production of art from remote Australia increased, as has the number of artists and art centres. Art sales increased significantly in the mid-2000s, before falling again from around 2008.
- ▶ Paintings dominate, with over 90% of market share.
- ▶ Art centre sales in 2012 are about the same as in 2004; however, around 40% more artworks are being produced to generate these sales. This has seen the average price of paintings almost halved since their peak in 2005.
- ▶ The art market is focussed on smaller, lower-priced artworks. Nearly 90% of all artworks sold for under \$1000, while the average price for larger and more expensive artworks have fallen the furthest.

Potential responses and policy considerations

- ▶ Focus on excellence – operationally and artistically.
- ▶ Rebalance supply and demand by encouraging strategic levels of production, improved quality control and market development.

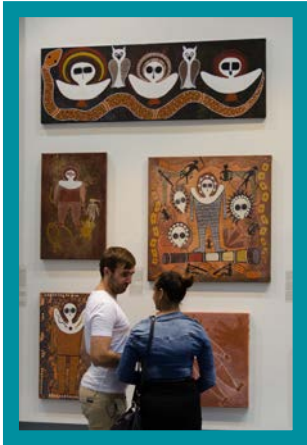


Kim Petersen, Liddy Napanangka Walker, artworker Sara Diana at Warlukurlangu Artists. Photo courtesy of Kim Petersen.

Art Centres

Key issues

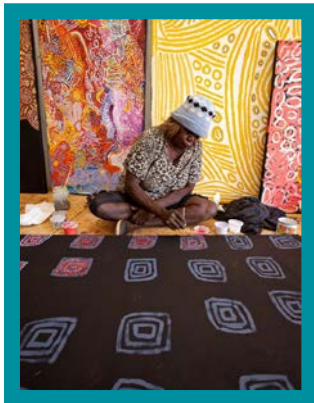
- ▶ Art centres represent a rare, long-term success in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. They have been a feature of remote communities since the 1970s and have made a major contribution to Australia's cultural and creative landscape.
- ▶ Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers is now a major government priority. The associated funding and policy is changing the nature of how art centres operate.



- ▶ The current distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers needs to be better allocated and in response to art centre needs.
- ▶ The lack of enforcement of the arts worker program conditions is distorting the operations of some art centres.
- ▶ Majority of art centres are reliant on the attraction, retention and quality of management staff recruited into the community. Average two-to-three year tenure and limited number and quality of applicants is often disruptive.
- ▶ Funding, particularly from the Commonwealth, has been crucial. However, the funding dependence of art centres has increased over time; this is in part driven by the focus on and support for Indigenous employment.
- ▶ The financial circumstances of many art centres is fragile, with falling profitability.
- ▶ Sales are dominated by a few larger art centres, with around a dozen longer-running art centres generating around 70% of total sales. These centres are less reliant on funding, with one third or less of their income from grants.
- ▶ Most art centres are micro-enterprises; almost 60% have total sales of less than \$250,000 and one third generate \$150,000 or less in annual sales.
- ▶ Many of these small art centres are heavily dependent on funding, with 70% or more of their income from grants.
- ▶ Since 2011/12, many regions have seen some modest sales growth after years of decline.
- ▶ Despite the isolation and marginalisation of many communities in the western desert, Kimberley, Arnhem Land and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara regions, almost all of Australia's highest performing art centres are located there.

Potential responses and policy considerations

- ▶ Critically review the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support funding to refocus the program in response to contemporary circumstances.
- ▶ Set realistic performance indicators and consider what 'viability' looks like for art centres, recognising that a majority are social enterprises or welfare-focussed.
- ▶ Critically review the Indigenous Employment Initiative to better align the program aims and its implementation and ensure the distribution of the program reflects the scale of need and activity across the art centre network.
- ▶ Rebalance the arts worker employment program, so it supports, not competes with art production.



Artists

Key issues

- ▶ 70% of artists are women and they produce around 80% of all artworks.
- ▶ Artists over 55 years account for 31% of all artists, but generate 55% of sales.
- ▶ Nearly three-quarters of artists make only limited income from art sales. Only 5.4% of artists receive what could be called a wage – \$100,000 or more over their entire careers.
- ▶ Older artists (over 67 years old) have had the largest fall in sales – over 50%.

Potential responses and policy considerations

- ▶ Recognise the important contribution to livelihood and wellbeing provided to elderly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by art centres.
- ▶ Encourage and support intergenerational and young artist activities.

Art businesses, including art centres

Key issues

- ▶ Both private and public art businesses report that they have found it hard to make a profit, due to the combined effects of falling sales, oversupply, unstable market conditions, changing policy and consumer caution.
- ▶ Art businesses have some confidence in the future, expecting sales to grow. However, detailed information on the scope and scale of private art businesses is limited, resulting in limited knowledge of the multiplier effect of this crucial sector.
- ▶ Significant resource and logistical challenges in developing new products.
- ▶ Lack of trust in key commercial relationships.
- ▶ Inconsistent documentation and provenance records of artworks.



Audiences at *the Revealed: Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia* exhibition.



Potential responses and policy considerations

- ▶ Encourage and support innovation and collaboration in product diversification.
- ▶ Promote the commercial art market.
- ▶ Facilitate stronger linkages between art centres and commercial galleries.
- ▶ Respond to industry concerns regarding key areas of legislation – superannuation, resale royalty and cultural heritage.
- ▶ Seek better information about private art businesses; the Australian Bureau of Statistics should improve data collection of this sector to ensure an accurate understanding of the scope and scale of commercial activity.

Consumers

Key issues

- ▶ Australia is – and will remain – the primary market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.
- ▶ International markets are – and will remain – the traditional markets of the USA and some European countries. For international opportunities to be properly realised, significant integrated effort in market development is essential.
- ▶ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art ‘brand’ is widely recognised but has been damaged.
- ▶ Oversupply, pricing and quality issues have created buyer doubt and concern.
- ▶ Confusion over provenance practices and certification.
- ▶ Less than 10% of buyers spend more than \$2000 – most spend less than \$500.



An artist arranging their *punu* (carvings) ready for sale in Papulankutja community. Photo by Tim Acker



- Potential responses and policy considerations
- ▶ Consumer education initiatives to help rebuild the 'brand' and consumer confidence.
- ▶ Support industry initiatives to improve communication of, and practices around provenance, documentation and artist/community/commercial relationships.
- ▶ Focus any international marketing initiatives on the traditional markets of the USA and some European countries. Such programs require significant investment and an integrated program if international opportunities are to be properly realised.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies

