

**Submission on Productivity Commission inquiry**

**Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Industry**

NSW Aboriginal Culture, Heritage & Arts Association Inc (ACHAA) is the Peak Body for Aboriginal community-controlled cultural spaces including Cultural Centres, Knowledge Centres, Language Centres, Galleries, Museums and Keeping Places. ACHAA is the only member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) focussed solely on arts, culture and heritage. ACHAA has 17 core members (Aboriginal community-owned, managed and operated not-for-profit centres). Each has been developed in response to its own community’s arts, culture and heritage aspirations and needs, not in response to a government program. As such, each is unique and does not conform to the conventional and dominant Art Centre model found in most other states and territories. Typically, these cultural centres (used for simplicity as a collective term) hold collections of cultural objects and often more recent records such as family history archives and photographs. These collections and associated knowledge are the basis of their cultural authority, enhanced by Elders and others in their communities. Most centres work with local Aboriginal visual artists through exhibitions and sales. Some also have workshop spaces and programming for artists. They might also work in other artforms such as dance (dance groups development and presentation), written and spoken word (language and story-telling, including sky stories/astronomy) and even music (at festivals and markets, openings and other community events). Their extended areas as community focussed centres and meeting places might include festivals and markets, sites of significance and environmental work, including bush foods; programs with Elders, youth (including youth at risk) and children (including formal programs both incursions and excursions), early childhood/day care, health (one core member gallery is an extension of the local Aboriginal Medical Service) and education both formal and informal, including life-long learning. At least one core member cultural centre is a Registered Training Organisation, while two other cultural centres are extension of the local Aboriginal Housing Co-operative. Another has a gallery, Keeping Place and sculpture park and also runs a radio station broadcasting to a large regional footprint in local languages. Much of this exemplifies the holistic approach of Aboriginal culture and intended whole-of-Government approach intended in the previous national policy Creative Australia ie so ACHAA is in a position to speak to this. ACHAA also has 22 Associate Members (non-voting so it remains an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation). Most of these are non-Aboriginal organisations including most of the Sydney-based State Cultural Institutions, LGA’s with public galleries/centres with Aboriginal staff and/or collections and NSW Regional Arts member areas with Aboriginal galleries and staff plus a couple of Aboriginal organisations moving towards establishing their own cultural space.

**Please note due to time and resource constraints, the following is submitted from ACHAA recent submission on the National Cultural Policy a week ago (submitted 22/08/22):**

As the peak body in NSW for Aboriginal arts, culture and heritage, ACHAA would emphasise the need to create a level playing field in the south-east with the rest of mainland Aboriginal Australia, particularly in NSW which has the highest population and concentrations of Aboriginal people. Our unique cultures, languages and artistic expressions in NSW are strong but there is still much to do in maintenance and development before we can claim equality in recognition, respect and celebration with the rest of the country. Typically in NSW our ACHAA members, as arts, collections and cultural spaces do not fit the Federally-based usage and definition of Art Centres. They were not created as part of a government program and this term not only impedes our sector’s development by perpetuating the paradigm that Aboriginal culture exists beyond the south-eastern states. A National Cultural Policy needs to recognise ACHAA’s membership of community-controlled Cultural Centres, Knowledge Centres, Languages Centres, Museums, Galleries and Keeping Places typically have cultural object collections and work primarily with visual artists (as well as dance, music, written and spoken word and festivals) and are commonly referred by us as Cultural Centres, not Art Centres. Embracing the term Art and Cultural Centres in reference to Federal policy, resourcing initiatives and funding would be a start towards equity.

As a community-controlled sector, only two of ACHAA’s core 17 Members in the community-controlled sector have non-Aboriginal staff as managers and they are working to develop Aboriginal staff management. This speaks to the urgent need for more employment, training and development funding and opportunities for Aboriginal arts workers. In NSW there is an urgent shortage of suitably experienced Aboriginal arts workers across the community-controlled cultural centres, the regional and urban LGA public galleries and museums and the Sydney Cultural Institutions. We do not have an arts strategy and funded program for this that mirrors the successful Media Ring Group, nor do the range of courses, Leadership Programs and initiatives such as Solid Ground and ArtsReady match our needs. All of these, are developed and managed (with First Nations input) in non-Indigenous Institutions. ACHAA’s Board has recently moved to address this gap by taking the lead in the development and implementation with partners on an Aboriginal employment and training program that addresses the urgent need in our community-controlled sector and the broader NSW non-Indigenous arts, culture and heritage sector seeking Aboriginal arts workers. It is a development from our strategic plan to partner with a Registered Training Organisation but we have yet to seek funding and resources for research, modelling, consultation and implementation.

ACHAA is also a member of NSW CAPO which through National CAPO is the signatory to the Closing Agreement and its priority reform areas, in conjunction with all levels of Government. ACHAA asserts that because of these priority areas an Aboriginal Peak Body should be supported to lead the development and implementation of a First Nations employment and training program for our arts, culture and heritage sector. Further to this, as the Peak Body in NSW for Aboriginal arts, culture and heritage ACHAA itself is drastically under-resourced. While we have diversified our programming funding sources during Covid (from primarily Create NSW to include Australia Council, NSW Aboriginal Land Councils and IVAIS for website development), we have not yet applied for nor received organisational or programming funding, having to cross the threshold of successful grants acquitted with any one funding body. Staffing resources since the inception of ACHAA have been provided by Museums & Galleries of NSW Aboriginal staff, equivalent to one full-time position across servicing both organisations. ACHAA’s strategic plan seeks the organisation to be an independent peak body by 1 July 2023 but the demands on ACHAA’s services as an emergent Peak Body in the past 18 months means resourcing, particularly staffing is urgently required.

Particularly, in the digital realm, our ACHAA members are concerned and want Digital Sovereignty. That is, in this context, they are the primary sources of knowledge and storytelling. ACHAA’s website development will include space for member centres to share this knowledge from securely-stored collection management systems within their own community-controlled facilities. The website is being developed by a First Nations web development and hosting company which, additionally uses an Australian-based only server network. In the true sense of sovereignty, members have made it clear they do not want this information, however secure it may be, passing through overseas located severs. Neither do they want it stored as a primary shared data source on a Cultural Institution or Government Department server within a secure “community section” as had been modelled. Also knowledge sharing between Cultural Institutions and the community-controlled sector needs to equivalent, tangible and measurable, like our bartering systems, and not one-way ie into the Cultural Institution. The work on Indigenous Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (ICIP) needs to give equal weight to this. Digital knowledge and storytelling informed by this need to be protected and controlled through the community-controlled sector first and foremost. A uniformly agreed IP sharing digital labelling system would be a start, similar to the work done on Authenticity Labels for Aboriginal art. Fake Aboriginal art and systemic rip offs of Aboriginal artists (the huge disparities between wholesale and retail prices) needs to be stopped in the physical realms before it can be controlled in the digital realm.

Alongside this would be national recommendations on a payment system for heritage knowledge-sharing (particularly from Elders) with Government Departments, Cultural Institutions and LGA public museums and galleries.

NSW, during and post Covid, experiences strong regional visitation. This is evident in feedback from ACHAA;s Cultural Centre members. For some these members, demand for tours for large groups of their exhibitions places stress on staff who primary roles are elsewhere - NSW has no representation at the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair. ACHAA will apply through IVAIS to co-ordinate across its members for a stall next year, following funding via DAAF from IVAIS this year. Such funding needs to consider the vast distances between Sydney and our regional and remote area members for freighting and the competitive nature of a (Darwin-based) fair for return freighting. There was also no NSW finalist, and not for the first time, in the Telstra Nation Indigenous Art Award. - In other words, reaching audiences must be co ordinated alongside enhancing product and resourcing the community-controlled cultural centre sector. - Selling Aboriginal art online is a growing market and ACHAA’s new website will feature a gallery/shop stocked by member centres themselves from artworks, merchandise, prints, books etc by their local artists, using a vendor marketplace software as used by DAAF. We will begin trialling Australia-wide only, as this is a complex operation requiring digital expertise and we are learning as we go. Further trusted, digital entrepreneurial mentoring – and from a preferred First Nations organisation - as we move into international sales in 2023 is needed and for the training of an additional staff member.

Submitted By

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