

An Indigenous Arts Strategy for the Northern Territory: Recommended Framework

**Professor Jon Altman
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University, Canberra**

Preamble

The Martin Labor Government was voted into office with an election commitment to develop a broad Arts Support Framework for the Northern Territory and a more focused Arts Support Strategy for the Indigenous Arts Sector. Much of the impetus for a specific focus on the Indigenous arts sector is driven by a policy view that its growth will enhance Indigenous economic development. Paradoxically, Indigenous Territorians are very highly engaged in the NT arts sector, but have a low engagement with the mainstream NT economy. This apparent paradox can be explained in a number of ways:

- Most Indigenous Territorians reside in rural and remote regions distant from mainstream economic opportunity
- An estimated 70% of Indigenous Territorians live on Aboriginal land, 'on country', and this provides an important inspiration for artistic practice
- For these people, there are few other opportunities for market engagement and for many there is a strong match between cultural priorities and arts practice as economic activity.

This generalisation does not mean that Indigenous Territorians residing in urban centres do not participate in arts practice. Not only is there urban-based arts practice, but there is also a high degree of movement of artists between rural and remote and urban situations.

The broad policy challenge for the NT Government is to develop a strategic approach that will facilitate an enhanced Indigenous arts engagement to improve Indigenous economic and social development. This broad approach is predicated on the following observations:

- A high degree of Indigenous arts engagement is closely linked with robust arts infrastructure
- There are significant regional variations in both arts engagement and arts infrastructure, with some regions being relatively under-resourced
- Different Indigenous art forms are at a different stage of development, with Indigenous visual arts being the most commercially developed and sustainable
- Involvement in the Indigenous arts sector has social and cultural benefits, as well as economic benefit, for Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

Policy Imperatives

The NT Government's focus on an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* is arguably driven by two critical policy imperatives. First, the Indigenous arts sector is one of indisputable success, where Indigenous cultural distinctiveness and arts excellence has created a significant comparative advantage both for arts practitioners and more generally for the Territory. Such success has to be supported to ensure sustainability and to facilitate growth.

Second, this is an area where there is undeniable mesh between Indigenous aspirations and NT government policy goals. Because Indigenous arts practice is predicated on robust and distinctive

Indigenous cultural practices, it is a critical element of contemporary Indigenous identity. Indigenous Territorians are keen to maintain and grow their economic and cultural competitive advantage in this sector. There is a recognition that this will be dependent on maintaining the integrity of arts practice, of expanding the marketability of all art forms, and on strong arts infrastructure. There is little contestation that the contemporary Indigenous arts sector is inter-cultural and that its inter-generational sustainability will be enhanced by appropriate market engagement.

Some History

In an Indigenous policy environment where there is current and considerable debate about policy success and failure, it is undeniable that the growth of Indigenous Territorians engagement with the arts has been a success. This success has been mainly concentrated in the visual arts where there has been very rapid growth in the last 30 years. In the early 1970s, Indigenous visual arts were regarded as largely ethnographic, ‘tribal curios’; now at the beginning of the 21st Century this art has evolved to a point where it is nationally and internationally recognised as an exceptional fine art movement. Today, some individual Indigenous artists have a profile, within their own lifetimes, in the secondary fine arts market and internationally. Arguably, this rapid transformation of ethnographic to fine art and the Indigenous visual arts penetration of global fine arts markets is unprecedented anywhere—the 1980s acceptance of Indigenous art as contemporary fine art was a breakthrough.

What is more, the movement is not static, it is vibrant and expanding, with new arts communities and innovative contemporary styles. The growth of Indigenous visual arts is not confined to fine art, much art that is distinctly Indigenous and has integrity makes important contributions to tourist art. The efflorescence of Indigenous arts is a celebration for Indigenous arts practitioners of many things—land rights and associated political statements, the outstations movement and living on country, cultural robustness and distinct identity. It is also a means for several thousand Indigenous Territorians to either make a living or at least supplement limited employment and income generating opportunities.

The Basis for Success

Public funding of the arts in Australia only began in earnest in the early 1970s with the establishment of the Australia Council. Indigenous arts success has been greatly facilitated by a distinct form of public arts funding that was initially auspiced by the then Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council. The crucial early forms of arts infrastructure were community-based and controlled art centres, arts institutions that mediated inter-culturally between arts practitioners, typically residing at remote communities, and the arts market prominent in southern metropolitan centres. This was augmented by an extensive publicly-funded national and international exhibitions program which often donated works to public arts institutions to help seed interest in collecting Australian Indigenous art. This historic support of Indigenous, mainly visual, arts development predated NT self-government and therefore was mainly Commonwealth-sourced.

In the last two decades there have been changes. While historical legacy and the small size of the NT has meant that public support of Indigenous arts has remained primarily a Commonwealth domain, there has been a diversification of funding sources, with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) established in 1990 being the major player in Indigenous arts support in the NT. Since the establishment of ATSIC’s National Arts and Crafts Industry Support Strategy in the early 1990s, this program has primarily supported community-based art centres, while support from the Australia Council, primarily from its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board (ATSIAB) but also from other art form Boards, has focused either on individual artists or on supporting regional or Territory-wide arts infrastructure like the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) and Desart.

At times there have been joint funding arrangements and other institutions, like the work-for-the-dole Community Development Employment Projects scheme administered by ATSIC, have been important in providing a degree of income support to Indigenous artists. But in the visual arts at least the fundamentals have remained the same, the community-controlled arts centres have remained the critical factor in arts success, something well documented in an important three volume study *The Art and Craft Centre Story* published by ATSIC in 1999 and 2000.

Another important change has been tourism growth with over a million interstate and inbound visitors coming to the NT annually. This has seen a geographic diversification of the commercial arts sector, although southern capital cities remain very important as an outlet for high end Indigenous fine art.

Broadening the Ambit

The appended Issues Paper ‘Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy for the Northern Territory’ documents the significance of Indigenous arts to Indigenous artists and their communities, to the Territory and to the nation from available statistical sources. These statistics will not be repeated here, suffice to say that the sector could be worth as much as \$100 million and there may be over 5,000 Indigenous participants. Furthermore, there are important spin-off benefits to other sectors, mainly tourism, from Indigenous arts, with NT Tourist Commission research consistently showing that Indigenous art and culture is a major tourism drawcard.

An *Indigenous Arts Strategy* sponsored and supported by the NT Government must seek to do three broad things:

- Ensure that the NT Government and its agencies take a major and appropriate leadership role in supporting the Indigenous arts sector or at the very least coordinating the interactions of NT agencies with the sector and the Commonwealth
- Aim to broaden the very positive development of the NT Indigenous visual arts sector over the last 30 years, much of it community-based, to other art forms including performance arts, music, literature, film and television, and multi-media. In this aim it is recognised that some art forms are more amenable to Indigenous-specific arts support than others
- Aim, simultaneously, and in recognition of the national interest in the NT Indigenous arts sector, to ensure that important Commonwealth support of the sector is maintained to ensure growth and sustainability especially given the disproportionate size of the Indigenous arts sector vis-à-vis the NT population.

Strategy Making Advice

This Discussion Paper is the final output from a consultancy commissioned by the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs (DCDSCA), managed by Arts NT and undertaken by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University, Canberra. The consultancy began in March 2003 and principally sought the input of an independent expert to mediate between the NT Indigenous arts community and arts policy makers and bureaucracies at the Territory and Commonwealth levels. The steps in the provision of advice on the development of an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* for the NT were as follows:

- Development of an Issues Paper for stakeholder consultations 3 March to 17 April
- Call for submissions 14 March with a notional closing date of 31 March subsequently extended, on request, to 7 April

- Distribution of Issues Paper for consideration by over 100 art sector and NT and Commonwealth agency stakeholders
- Stakeholder consultations in Alice Springs on 28 April (with arts sector) and in Darwin on 1 May (with NT agencies) and on 2 May (with arts sector) in three Indigenous Art Strategy Development Forums
- Interim Confidential Report to Arts NT on 11 May 2003 just before the Federal Budget and announcement of Myer Report funding initiatives.

Some direct consultations were undertaken as a part of the process during visitation to the NT between 27 April and 8 May; in Darwin with ATSIAB and in Canberra with ATSIC, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) and ATSIAB and with the federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

This final report provides recommendations for an Indigenous arts support strategy. It is to be considered jointly with the appended and more data-rich Issues Paper 'Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy for the Northern Territory'.

Policy Principles

The development of any arts strategy can be predicated on numerous principles, some that can be very hard to either implement or monitor. The following few policy principles have been selected to guide my approach, in part because of their significance, in part because of their correlation with other developments in Australian public administration:

- It is recognised that the cultural cannot be discretely differentiated from the commercial or the economic from the non-economic in developing a coherent Indigenous arts policy framework. This is a difficulty that is not just limited to Indigenous arts, but also to the arts more generally. Nevertheless, quantification of tangible arts outcomes provides an important means to leverage public investments in the arts
- The contemporary public policy environment requires that the Australian public get good value for publicly-funded investments, that distribution of public funding is equitable, transparent and accountable. Information in Table 2 of the appended Issues Paper shows that the returns from public investment in Indigenous visual arts have always been high
- There is a renewed focus on the role that whole of government cooperation and coordination can play in facilitating policy and program administration. At the Indigenous Economic Forum in Alice Springs in March 2003, the NT Government made a commitment to facilitate and simplify Indigenous development interactions with bureaucratic and regulatory complexity
- There is similarly a Commonwealth/State recognition of the need to coordinate intergovernmental program administration in Indigenous affairs, a principle being piloted in Indigenous Community Coordination Pilots. There is a need for enhanced bilateral, and possibly multilateral, agreements and coordination
- There is a need for a shift from focusing on inputs only to focus on outputs, outcomes and the interaction between inputs and outcomes (= effectiveness). It is recognised in saying this that some outcomes are more tangible and easier to measure than others and that there is still an excessive focus on inputs in public funding of the arts
- There is a need for the scrupulous retention of the arms length principle in public funding of the arts—funding can facilitate arts production, collection and marketing and can assist with market research and arts training, but cannot seek to influence actual artistic practice

- There is a national interest in the NT Indigenous arts sector because it is so prominent in the identity and representation of Australia and because it is so unusually significant. For example, the Myer *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry* (released in 2002) estimates that 25% of all Australian visual artists and 75% of all Indigenous visual artists reside in the NT.

Emerging Issues

A number of issues have emerged as important potential barriers to the sustainable growth of the Indigenous arts sector in the NT:

- The basis of visual arts success, namely ongoing operational support of community based arts organisations can also be the basis for potential failure if this support is unstable or does not provide organisations a secure multi-year planning and support framework. The opportunity cost of such instability in recent years has not been calculated, but is undoubtedly significant
- The remoteness and small size of many Indigenous communities means that community based arts infrastructure can be fragile, with high staff turnover and lack of succession planning being particularly problematic. There is a need for human resource support and associated organisational strengthening
- There are under-resourced regions, some of which have historically been very productive, and unsupported art forms some of which would benefit from operational needs-based support. Conversely, there is historic evidence that arts infrastructure quickly generates arts outcomes
- There is a lack of industry vertical integration, particularly between artists and manufacturers of licenced (and in some cases unlicensed) arts products. Manufactured products are generally produced by non-Indigenous businesses
- Much value-adding occurs outside the Indigenous arts sector and outside the NT, particularly when visual art is exported and sold by commercial galleries interstate and overseas. This though has some benefit in terms of enhancing Indigenous fine art reputation
- The future sustainability and growth of the sector will require maintenance of NT Indigenous comparative advantage, something that could be jeopardized by interstate or overseas imitations, unless clearly labelled
- There is a risk that commercial unconscionable conduct could raise questions about the authenticity of Indigenous art, especially material products, and associated loss of consumer confidence and market demand.

Making Good NT Arts and Economic Policy

As noted above, the NT Government is quite legitimately looking to enhance its role in facilitating the development of the Indigenous arts sector in the NT by meshing good cultural policy with good development policy. But in doing so it faces some structural hurdles including the following:

- The NT population is small, representing just over 1% of Australia's population; this creates problems of market size and commercial viability particularly for art forms that are for NT consumption
- The Indigenous population of the NT, 29% of the total, is dispersed, many communities are small and governance arrangements are often fractured
- There is a historical legacy of excessive reliance on the Commonwealth for public support of Indigenous arts

- There is a historical legacy of NT under-investment in the Indigenous arts sector, especially in Indigenous specific programs, both directly through funding of the sector and indirectly through NT agency in-kind support for sector initiatives.

An Indigenous Arts Strategy for the NT

The policy and political imperatives for an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* for the NT have been outlined above—the Strategy is principally about enhancing NT investments in the Indigenous arts sector, but this will need to occur in both a systematic and incremental way if it is to be effective. The *Indigenous Arts Strategy* will seek to proactively promote what NT agencies can do to grow and sustain the Indigenous arts sector, while highlighting what the arts can do for Indigenous people, communities, the Territory, and the nation.

Coincidentally, the development of an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* is occurring at a time when there are opportunities for the NT Government to enter bilateral arrangements with the Commonwealth that could enhance overall financial support to the Indigenous arts sector. One clear opportunity is in the federal budget allocation of 4 years funding to support implementation of Myer Report recommendations. These resources are available for the visual arts, but given that Myer estimated 25% of Australia's visual artists are in the NT there is clearly a case for a large portion of this new support to flow to the NT. A potential impediment is the Commonwealth's requirement for matching NT Government funding, something that is potentially problematic and inequitable given the NT's limited revenue raising capacity and cost disabilities (both clearly recognised by the Commonwealth Grants Commission). Another opportunity is associated with the impending division of ATSIC into ATSIC and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) from 1 July 2003, outcomes from the ATSIC Review currently underway, and the possibility that the National Arts and Crafts Industry Support Strategy funding will be allocated both multi-year and on a systematic performance-linked basis.

As noted in the Issues Paper growing the Indigenous arts sector will not provide a miracle economic cure to Indigenous disadvantage, but enhanced sector investment will be a low-risk means to make a very real and positive difference, support what is currently working, and invest in what history indicates is likely to work both economically and socially in the future. Whether this is in fact the case cannot be guaranteed and an important element of the Strategy must be to track progress and outcomes over time both for possible Strategy modification and advocacy purposes.

In the Issues Paper attached it was proposed that the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* includes three broad elements as follows:

- A whole-of-NT Government coordinated approach to equitably resource the sector and ensure that a range of new and emerging economic and social strategies being developed by the Martin Government mesh with the *Indigenous Arts Strategy*
- An intergovernmental brokerage role to ensure that there is a coordinated NT/Commonwealth approach to the Indigenous arts sector that facilitates access to arts support opportunities, in large measure because of the national significance of the sector
- A direct Indigenous arts support role for a specialist Indigenous Arts Unit within Arts NT that will proactively assist the Indigenous arts sector with communications and brokerage.

These three roles cannot be separated because they are clearly interdependent; to make a difference an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* will need to do all three in an effective and accountable way. Initially, the

Strategy will require strategic investments especially in Strategy implementation infrastructure and in some Indigenous-specific areas. But with time and strategic brokerage, the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* may be part-funded from enhanced Commonwealth investments (from a variety of sources) and from Arts NT funding on the basis of performance and transparent contestability.

Strategy Infrastructure

An *Indigenous Arts Strategy* will need upfront investments for Strategy implementation and maintenance infrastructure. There are three components to this infrastructure that will need to be introduced in a staged manner, but eventually and in a relatively short time, all will be needed. It is imperative that the NT Government makes an overarching commitment to invest in a Strategy infrastructure framework in its entirety, because history suggests that partial implementation can have high longer term opportunity costs that significantly exceed up-front investments.

The first investment that will have minimal direct cost, but workload implications, will be in a NT governmental *Indigenous Arts Strategy* Implementation Working Group. Such an inter-agency grouping could be convened even before the public release of the Strategy. The key aim of this Group would be to bring together key NT agencies to work collaboratively in growing and sustaining the Indigenous arts sector. The *Indigenous Arts Strategy* Development Forum held in Darwin on 1 May 2003 indicated that the following core agencies would be critical to the Strategy:

- Arts NT (a part of DCDSCA) to ensure a Strong Indigenous Arts Sector that meshes with the NT Arts Policy Framework ‘Investing in the Arts in the Northern Territory’ (released in November 2002)
- The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to ensure vibrant links between the Arts and Education—Creativity in Life-long Learning, but also with employment, training and research
- DCDSCA to link Strong Arts to *Building Stronger Regions—Stronger Futures* (strategy released in May 2003) via community capacity building
- NTTC to link Strong Arts to Strong Tourism and especially the Indigenous Cultural Tourism Strategy, currently under development
- The Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development (DBIRD) to link Strong Arts to Industry Development and particularly to *Building Stronger Territory Trade* (strategy released in 2002)
- The Office of Indigenous Policy in the Department of the Chief Minister to ensure whole-of-government coordination.

Other NT agencies could be added to this core group on an on-needs basis. For example, the Department of Justice could participate on issues associated with protection of intellectual property or consumer protection in the arts.

The next step would be the formation of a Specialist Indigenous Arts Unit within Arts NT. The size of this group would depend on the extent of its responsibilities, it is recommended that initially the group consist of three staff, two in Darwin and one in Alice Springs, with Darwin staff having a division between visual and other art forms and the Alice Springs staff member being an arts generalist. If Arts NT takes a significant role in administering Commonwealth visual arts funding in the NT it is likely that an additional visual art specialist will be required both in Darwin and in Alice Springs bringing the size of the Indigenous Arts Unit to five. It is essential that staff with Indigenous arts expertise are recruited to this Unit—it will be an important and unprecedented element of the Strategy.

The third step would be the establishment of an Indigenous Arts Advisory Board that would provide expert advice to both the Specialist Indigenous Arts Unit and to the Implementation Working Group. Such an Advisory Board would need to be constituted with a rolling membership that represents all art forms, all industry sectors and all regions. The main criteria for appointment onto the Board would be arts expertise, so readily available within existing arts organisations and the private sector in the NT. Clearly owing to the small size of the NT, it will be important to ensure that appropriate disclosure of interest procedures are established to ensure no conflict of interest. The exact constitution of this Advisory Board will need fine-tuning as the range of programs administered by Arts NT are defined and negotiated with Commonwealth agencies.

At least once a year, all three groups should meet jointly to review progress in implementing the Strategy and to consider outcomes to either highlight Strategy achievements or to fine tune the Strategy. On a bi-annual basis the Advisory Board should meet with the Indigenous Arts Unit to advise on perceived industry needs and funding priorities.

Necessary Actions

All Indigenous arts sector stakeholders will need to be actively engaged in implementing and prioritising *Indigenous Arts Strategy* actions. An early task for the Indigenous Arts Unit will be to incorporate key priorities into an Action Plan that identifies actions, allocates responsibilities, stipulates time lines, and defines a framework for measuring outcomes. The following 10 proposed actions are indicative of the activities that should be priorities embedded within the Strategy:

- ***Championing Indigenous Arts.*** There is an urgent need, as outlined above, for NT agencies to consider how the Indigenous arts sector can be supported so as to mesh with other government priorities including the Investing in the Arts policy framework. This action will mainly require in-kind investments by NT agencies. In undertaking this task it is important that NT Government investments in the Indigenous arts sector are enhanced without jeopardising Commonwealth investments.
- ***Profiling Indigenous Arts.*** There is a need to provide adequate profile to Indigenous arts in promotions of the NT. Major events like the annual Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, now in its 20th year, should be enhanced as showcases of Indigenous arts and linked to other emerging festivals and cultural events. There is a need to mesh Indigenous performing arts and music events with NT festivals, with the possibility of Indigenous music and dance performance awards to be considered. Corporate sponsorship of such awards should be pursued. Options for expanding the market, in association with NTTC marketing activity and as a part of DBIRD's export strategy, should be vigorously pursued.
- ***Brokering for Indigenous Arts.*** There is a need for the Indigenous Arts Unit to act as a broker or agent for the Indigenous arts sector, especially in dealings with the Commonwealth. This might require a distinction between visual and other art forms given dedicated Commonwealth resourcing of Myer Report implementation in the 2003 Federal Budget and foreshadowed changes to ATSIAC's program administration. The possibility that the NT Government could act as an agent for ATSIAC in administering the National Arts and Crafts Industry Support Strategy and the Regional Arts and Culture Support program in the NT should be explored. The Indigenous Arts Unit should actively seek program funding for the Indigenous arts sector from the ATSIAB of the Australia Council and DCITA's programs. Options for bilateral and multilateral funding agreements should be examined. The potential for brokering with the

private and philanthropic sectors for arts support, despite the small size of the NT, should not be overlooked.

- ***Strengthening Indigenous Arts Infrastructure.*** There was concern expressed in submissions and Forums that existing Indigenous arts infrastructure, especially at remote communities remains both pivotal to visual arts success yet extremely fragile owing to excessive workloads and poor resourcing. The *Indigenous Arts Strategy* will seek means to strengthen art infrastructure, both by advocating for greater support stability, but also by assisting the sector identify ways to enhance effective board governance, business planning, professional arts practice and the human resources base. Such assistance should not just be limited to sourcing funding, but also to finding appropriate on-site training options for Indigenous and non-Indigenous arts workers and art centre governing bodies. The delivery of human resource support could be provided at the regional levels auspiced by organisations like ANKAAA or Desart.
- ***Strengthening Indigenous Arts Practice.*** There is a need for a greater mesh between the arts and education at all levels—numbers alone suggest that many Indigenous kids will pursue careers in Indigenous arts, yet there seems to be limited recognition of this fact within the education sector. There is a potential formal role for high profile Indigenous artists at schools from the pre-school and primary level onwards, to enhance Indigenous arts interactions with students both in communities and urban settings. There is clearly considerable demand for the delivery of arts training modules on-site in a variety of art forms, but there is a lack of match between demand and supply. Opportunities for enhanced arts collaborations, some already undertaken between the vocational education and university sectors, need to be pursued. There is a need for realistic recognition that vocational training investments will generate employment and income for artists, but not necessarily full-time jobs in many Indigenous contexts and for many artists.
- ***Investing in Unresourced Regions.*** There is a need for some strategic investments to be made in regional arts development officers in areas that are currently unresourced. Needs could be assessed in part via the *Building Stronger Regions—Stronger Futures* strategy. History suggests that such strategic investments will generate economic and social returns much as public funding of Indigenous visual arts since the 1970s has resulted in a robust and sustainable industry today.
- ***Incubating Under-resourced Art Forms.*** There is a need for expert assessments to be made of appropriate options to incubate and support currently under-resourced Indigenous art forms such as literature, music, performing art and multi-media. These art forms may experience particular difficulties owing to NT diseconomies of small scale. Each may require the formation of innovative and hybrid arts support infrastructure, possibly linked to mainstream arts infrastructure, that provides a mix of developmental, marketing, and grants and opportunity identification support. Past NT Government funding neglect may also need to be overcome—some successful arts organisations that have historically been supported on an operational basis by the Commonwealth are now seeking options for equitable resourcing on a competitive performance linked basis by the NT or at least NT support fallback options.
- ***Protecting NT Indigenous Arts Comparative Advantage.*** There are strong incentives for the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* to seek to protect the NT's comparative advantage in Indigenous arts. In general, the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* will seek to do this by growing the products and the markets and strengthening arts infrastructure to encourage arts excellence and cultural integrity. But at times there may be need for legal recourse, particularly in protecting producer intellectual property and consumer rights. This might be an especially appropriate role for the Strategy given that the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs has given the NT lead agency

status in pursuing the objective of consumer (and producer) protection for Indigenous Australians. Both the Department of Justice and NT Fair Trading may play a role here. Regional and community-based arts organisations may also need advice on authenticity labelling and protection of intellectual property.

- ***Retaining NT Indigenous Arts Talent.*** An unusual aspect of Indigenous arts practice is that so many artists remain resident in the NT, even when successful. This is especially the case for visual artists who can, and arguably must, practice on country—lack of migration reflects the strength of attachment both to country and social and kin networks. For other Indigenous artists, actors and dancers in particular, the absence of NT opportunity requires movement interstate. Such movement can be very positive for artistic and professional development, but represents a drain of talent from the NT. This is especially evident, for example, in the high profile of NT-sourced Indigenous curatorial expertise in public art institutions interstate. Options should be considered both for retaining Indigenous talent in the NT or for luring it back (especially in late career) for new roles in teaching and mentoring emerging artists.
- ***Tracking Performance Effectively.*** While there is much rhetoric about outputs and outcomes measurement in public administration, there is a dearth of reliable information about all aspects of Indigenous arts and official statistics are notoriously unreliable. While the best arts organisations can provide comprehensive information about their performance, there are limited opportunities for benchmarking in the absence of sector-wide statistics. This is an issue about which Arts NT is well aware with its lead agency role in the Cultural Ministers Council Statistical Working Group on valuing Indigenous visual arts and craft nationally. There is an urgent need for enhanced investments in data collection and research—in the development of appropriate outcomes measurement instruments—so that the performance of the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* can be monitored over time. There are opportunities for commissioning such research in collaboration with Charles Darwin University (CDU) as a part of the emerging NT Government/CDU partnership memorandum that identifies robust Indigenous economic futures as a priority area for applied research. The availability of reliable information would assist in championing, profiling and brokering for the Indigenous arts sector. It would also assist the Indigenous arts sector to undertake effective arts advocacy on its own behalf like other industry groups.

Implementation Timeline and Timing

There are important reasons for an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* to be implemented as soon as possible, with some negotiations especially with Commonwealth agencies to even precede the anticipated launch of the Strategy in late 2003—the current policy and political opportunities to secure resources for the sector are too significant to countenance delay.

It is important that the Strategy is implemented in a timely and systematic manner that sees new Strategy infrastructure established and bedded down. A formal start date of 1 January 2004 may be appropriate.

Some of the proposed actions outlined above will need strategic new investments by the NT, bilateral and possibly multi-lateral support agreements, in-kind allocations and, with time, performance based re-allocations. Clearly some of these actions will be partially dependent on Commonwealth agencies and in the case of both the ATSIC Review and Myer Review implementations might require protracted negotiations. While this is recognised, it is also likely that a better profiling and championing of NT Indigenous arts will fast-track some of these processes.

The overarching time frame for the Strategy should be a minimum of six years with review on progress after three—there is little point in developing a Strategy that looks for longer-term funding stability linked to performance within a shorter time frame. Given that the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* will represent an innovative commitment by the NT to develop an overarching support framework for Indigenous arts there is no need to stipulate an end point to the Strategy.

Evaluation Framework and Governance

Evaluating performance in the arts generally is difficult and the Indigenous arts sector shares this difficulty. Part of the problem, as noted above, is practical, there are few accurate data on arts outputs and outcomes are difficult to narrowly define. There are additional conceptual difficulties in differentiating tangible from intangible and short-term from long-term outputs and outcomes. Clearly, distinctions can be made between sector wide performance, by art form, and the performance of individual artists and community-based organisations.

At the sector wide level, it is important to concentrate on the tangibles, on the industry-like features of the arts that can be quantified. Such aggregate data will be important for Indigenous arts sector advocacy by both Indigenous interests and government agencies. Some such information is generated, for example, in annual tourism surveys that allow tracking of estimated tourist expenditure on Indigenous arts. At the community level, performance indicators can be more broadly defined and actively negotiated—there is potential for the development of both quantitative and qualitative indicators. What is often missing in such contexts is capacity and resourcing to collect and analyse information and to maintain accurate records over time.

The issue of evaluation is frequently linked to an absence of business planning at the arts organisation level and an absence of incentive to plan given short-funding cycles, often annual and project based, and given a lack of clarity between performance and support. Part of the problem here can be policy views that short-term financial success automatically converts to long term economic viability, a mistaken view that can jeopardise the future of some arts organisations where continuing operational support might be needed despite revenue growth. It is imperative that within the *Indigenous Arts Strategy* there is clarity on this issue and that if support is to be withdrawn from an arts organisation that this is undertaken in a transparent and systematic manner, with appropriate planning lead times.

This is fundamentally an issue of governance and accountability. It is important that Indigenous arts organisations have robust governance and associated internal and external accountability—there is a need for governance training and institutional strengthening. But it is equally important that funding agencies also have sound program administration governance that is open to scrutiny—good governance is not just for arts organisations, it is also for arts funders, there is a need for ‘two-way’ accountability. In a similar vein it is important that appropriate incentive structures are established so that arts success is rewarded and celebrated and not fiscally penalised. This is clearly a difficult issue and one that the three levels of an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* infrastructure—Implementation Working Group, Indigenous Arts Unit and Advisory Board—should actively address. Success in Indigenous policy is not that common that it can be jeopardised.

Changing Tack—Championing Indigenous Arts

The development of an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* is a timely intervention by the NT Government that seeks to establish a support framework for Indigenous arts that aims to ensure sustainability of success and overall growth of the sector. While the Strategy is embedded within the overall NT Arts Support Framework it is also innovative and unique, it changes the language of Indigenous arts support in the NT and demonstrates national leadership. Such a championing of Indigenous arts is quite appropriate

because the NT is a national leader in this area and because elements of Indigenous cultural heritage that are embodied in the arts are such a significant part of Territory identity and its marketability. The proposed *Indigenous Arts Strategy* proactively seeks to support the sustainability and growth of the Indigenous arts sector because it is clearly working and because there are important positive spin-offs, economic and social, to Indigenous and other Territorians. The Strategy realistically recognises though that this is arts business that is typically dependent everywhere on public support. It is also predicated on ongoing funding alliances with the Commonwealth because there is national, as well as Territory, interest in a robust Indigenous arts sector. Indigenous arts is an area where the NT has unique comparative advantage, a strong Indigenous arts sector will make significant contributions, not just for Indigenous economic and social development, but for the Territory as a whole. The time is right, for a range of economic and policy reasons, for enhanced Territory investment, promotion and championing of the Indigenous arts sector.

Acknowledgements

I have undertaken research on the Indigenous arts sector, especially the visual arts, since 1980. The sector has grown and matured enormously in the past two decades and undertaking this project has highlighted to me the extent to which all stakeholders are committed to negotiate for positive and productive outcomes for the sector. There is a growing recognition that while elements of Indigenous arts practice are for Indigenous people only, and aspects of the sector are primarily the domain of non-Indigenous people, this is fundamentally an inter-cultural enterprise that is dependent on inter-cultural collaborations. I would like to thank all stakeholders who made submissions to the development of the Strategy including some brief submissions that were provided on my request after the consultation phase as supplementary submissions. The three *Indigenous Arts Strategy* Development Forums convened in the NT were conducted in an extremely productive, robust and constructive manner that really made this assignment enjoyable and worthwhile.

I would also like to thank staff of Arts NT, DCITA, ATSIAB and ATSIC for their assistance and my colleagues Sally Ward and Chris Fondum for considerable assistance and Christine Colton of Arts NT for facilitating the submissions invitation and consultation processes. I cannot pretend that my ongoing collaborations with Maningrida Arts and Culture (and Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation) that began in 1979 have not influenced my thinking, but over the years I have also had the privilege of working with, and learning from, many other art centres both in the NT and elsewhere. My many collaborations with Flick Wright have assisted me greatly. Ultimately though, the shape of the recommended framework for an *Indigenous Arts Strategy* for the NT, as presented here, remains my sole responsibility.