

– Personal Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

I am currently working within the remote Aboriginal arts sector in Western Australia and have spent the past years working directly inside the operational realities of a community-owned Aboriginal art centre on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

From my perspective, one of the biggest disconnects in national cultural discussions is that remote Aboriginal art centres are still often viewed primarily as arts organisations, when in reality they operate as cultural infrastructure, economic infrastructure and community infrastructure simultaneously.

Remote art centres are expected to deliver professional exhibitions, artist development, licensing, freight logistics, governance compliance, reporting, financial management, digital systems, marketing, tourism engagement and community outcomes all at once, often with extremely limited staffing and infrastructure.

IVAIS funding remains absolutely essential to the survival of many remote Aboriginal art centres. However, current IVAIS operational funding levels are no longer keeping pace with the actual cost of operating remotely.

The cost of fuel, freight, staffing, accommodation, insurance, vehicles, telecommunications and compliance has increased dramatically in recent years. At the same time, remote art centres are expected to operate at increasingly professional standards with expanding administrative and governance responsibilities.

One of the biggest issues I believe the sector is facing is workforce sustainability.

Many remote arts workers are effectively carrying multiple full-time roles simultaneously. Managers and staff are often handling logistics, freight coordination, grant writing, artist support, exhibition development, governance, IT troubleshooting, licensing, social media, sales and operational problem-solving all within the same week.

There are very few people willing or able to sustain this long term, particularly given the housing shortages and operational pressures in remote communities.

Housing has become one of the single biggest barriers to sustaining remote Aboriginal art centres. Without secure and appropriate housing, organisations struggle to recruit and retain experienced staff. In many cases, organisations are forced into expensive private leasing arrangements simply to maintain minimum operational capacity.

I believe future IVAIS and national cultural policy settings need to recognise housing as essential cultural infrastructure for remote arts organisations.

Another issue that is often overlooked is the enormous logistical burden placed on remote organisations. Remote art centres travel thousands of kilometres to attend exhibitions, art fairs, training opportunities and industry events that are critical for artist income and sector

sustainability. These costs and pressures are rarely reflected properly within funding structures.

Despite these challenges, remote Aboriginal art centres remain one of Australia's strongest cultural success stories.

They support intergenerational transfer of knowledge, maintain language and cultural practice, generate artist income, create employment pathways and allow culture to remain strong on Country while participating in contemporary national and international economies.

I would like to see the new National Cultural Policy place greater emphasis on long-term operational sustainability for remote Aboriginal art centres, particularly through strengthened IVAIS operational funding, workforce development, housing support and recognition of remote art centres as essential national cultural infrastructure.

Another issue that deserves greater attention within national cultural discussions is the speed at which remote communities are being forced to adapt to external economic, technological and social systems that often conflict with longstanding cultural structures and collective ways of operating.

Across many remote communities, there has been an enormous shift within only a few generations from highly collective cultural and kinship-based systems into highly individualised economic systems driven by wages, welfare, banking, digital technology, social media and consumer markets.

At the same time, communities are increasingly exposed to poor-quality food systems, high-cost living, aggressive commercial influence and rapid technological change without equivalent investment in culturally appropriate education, financial literacy, wellbeing support or long-term community-led development.

These pressures are not simply economic issues. They directly affect cultural continuity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, community governance structures and social cohesion.

I also believe there needs to be greater recognition of the broader social and economic pressures impacting remote communities and cultural sustainability.

Many remote communities are increasingly exposed to intense consumer pressures and rapid technological change while having very limited access to affordable, durable and repairable goods or long-term infrastructure investment.

In remote Australia, poor-quality products, high transport costs and limited repair services often create a cycle where vehicles, appliances, electronics and household goods are continually discarded and replaced rather than repaired. Large amounts of waste accumulate in communities while the actual capacity for local maintenance, repair skills and sustainable infrastructure remains extremely limited.

These pressures are further intensified by extreme climate conditions and remoteness, which rapidly degrade vehicles, housing, infrastructure and equipment while significantly increasing replacement and maintenance costs.

At the same time, younger generations are growing up within a highly commercialised digital environment where expectations around money, consumption and modern lifestyles are increasing rapidly, often without equivalent opportunities for stable employment or long-term economic participation.

These pressures place enormous strain on communities, families and cultural systems.

In many remote Aboriginal communities, longstanding systems of collective responsibility and kinship now operate alongside highly individualised and consumer-driven economic systems. The speed of this transition within only a few generations has created significant social and cultural pressure.

Remote Aboriginal art centres are among the few long-term community-controlled institutions still creating meaningful cultural, social and economic participation within many remote communities.

Strengthening these organisations is not simply an arts investment. It is an investment in cultural continuity, governance, intergenerational knowledge transfer, local economies and community resilience across remote Australia.