

Jilamara Arts and Craft Association  
Milikapiti, Melville Island

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Phone: [REDACTED]



**JILAMARA**  
Arts & Craft Association

22 May 2026

Minister Tony Burke  
Federal Minister for the Arts  
Office for the Arts  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications,  
Sport and the Arts

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Dear Minister Burke

I am writing on behalf of the Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association board of directors. Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association is a community-controlled Aboriginal art and culture centre located at Milikapiti Community and established in 1989. It currently supports 60 member artists, arts workers and cultural leaders.

For over nearly 40 years, we have supported our members to maintain and share culture while creating meaningful employment and income opportunities, strengthening community life and contributing to Australia's nationally and internationally recognised Indigenous art and culture sector.

Over the last 50 years, the remote and regional Aboriginal art and culture sector has produced one of the world's unique contemporary art movements. Today the Australian Indigenous art industry generates over \$250 million annually.

While Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association does the important work of producing and selling artwork, our role goes much further. Our work is central to passing cultural knowledge between generations. The centre contributes to community health and wellbeing, youth engagement, aged and disability care and heritage. It provides opportunities for employment, education, skills development and cultural tourism. Strong culture is the foundation of strong communities and a thriving art movement.

Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association is on Wulirankuwu Country on the north coast of Melville Island overlooking the Arafura Sea. It is a small community that celebrates family, culture and art-making. The art centre is the cultural hub of the community and houses working studios, wood carving and screen-printing workshops, the architecturally designed Kutuwulumu Gallery, Wurrungura digital archive and the Muluwurri Museum.

The term Jilamara describes "design" based on ceremonial ochre markings on the body. Reimagining these styles at the art centre has fostered a dynamic creative field for maintaining Tiwi knowledge, as well as sharing and celebrating contemporary living culture. These performative foundations have directed the organisation's course for decades, from its origins in translating jilamara design to screen-printed garments as an adult education centre in the 1980s to producing major exhibition outcomes as an indigenous governed art centre in more recent decades.

**"From body it moved onto bark and then canvas, silk, printing and now we are moving into digital. Culture is evolving with time." - Colin Heenan-Puruntatameri, 2019**

Through workshops, training and representation Jilamara members of diverse abilities are supported to build careers as internationally renowned artists. In the community, the art centre is also an important place for local school children to learn through culture classes and for many generations of Tiwi people to build bright futures.

Recent significant public outcomes for contemporary Jilamara artists include participation in 2025 Art Basel Hong Kong, Frieze No. 9 Cork St London, Indigenous Visions at 2024 Venice Biennale, the 2024 Adelaide and Sydney Biennales, The National 4: Australian Art Now and The Armory Show: New York in 2023, 2022 Sydney Contemporary and Melbourne Art Fairs, YOYI! Care, Repair, Heal at Gropius Bau in Berlin, UNLEARNING AUSTRALIA at SeMA Seoul South Korea, NIRIN: the 22<sup>nd</sup> Biennale of Sydney, and a significant contribution to TIWI an exhibition and publication by NGV Australia in 2021.

Artwork by Jilamara artists are held in major collections around the world including the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of NSW, Queensland Art Gallery, Art Gallery of South Australia, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Arty Gallery of Western Australia, University of Melbourne, University of New South Wales, University of Newcastle, Commonwealth Institute (UK), Gantner Myer Collection (Aus), Wesfarmers Collection (Aus), Artbank (Aus), Gordon & Marilyn Darling Collection (Aus), Levi-Kaplan Collection (USA), The British Museum (UK), Utrecht Aboriginal Art Museum (NL), Musée du quai Branly (Fr), The Fowler Museum, UCLA (USA), The Israel Museum (Il), Kulge-Ruhe (USA) and Fondation Opale (Sw).

While our achievements are significant, they are increasingly difficult to sustain under current funding and policy settings.

To continue this work into the future, there are several key areas where greater support is needed.

### **Core funding**

Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association is experiencing significant increases in operating costs which impact our viability. These include insurance, infrastructure and vehicle maintenance, freight for essential materials, staff travel, fuel and council rates. These basic costs have risen sharply since 2020 due to the pandemic and global economic pressures.

As a remote art and culture centre, our basic operating costs are around 40% higher than those of urban organisations (Australian Council of Social Services). This gap continues to grow and is acutely felt by our organisation. For example in the last couple of years our insurance costs have more than doubled and all our costs are skyrocketing.

Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) is the only stable operating funding source for art centres and it has not kept pace with rising costs. As a result, Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association requires a significant increase to maintain its core operations.

In the past, IVAIS core funding has been sufficient to cover key operational costs, including the manager's salary and administrative expenses such as accounting, auditing, rates, royalties and utilities. In the current environment, it only partially covers the manager's salary.

Recommendation:

- Increase IVAIS funding to stabilise the sector – we estimate our centre requires an additional \$260,000 in core operational funding per year to continue operating sustainably. We need our IVAIS funding to be indexed with CPI.
- Art centres need funds for safe, secure and maintained staff housing. Without significant funds for staff housing we are at risk of increased staffing loss and turnover.

### **Staffing and career pathways**

Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association faces ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining qualified local and relocating staff.

Recruitment and retention is difficult due to a limited pool of skilled candidates, a lack of resources to support local Aboriginal staff into leadership roles, inadequate staff housing and the inability to offer competitive wages.

Some of the issues we face include recruitment of skilled managerial staff, no training or support programs for managerial staff, competition with other service providers for skilled local staff, limited staff housing, which affects your centre's ability to hire or retain staff (local or relocating). Unsustainable increase in workload as a result of increased administrative and business requirements.

Recommendations:

- Invest in a Remote Art and Culture Centre Workforce Development Plan that focuses on pathways for managers, arts workers, board directors and cultural leaders
- Develop a National Art and Culture Centre Infrastructure Fund, with minimum standards for climate appropriate, safe, fit-for-purpose buildings, housing, vehicles and digital systems

### **Artists' livelihoods**

Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association relies on the leadership, knowledge and availability of senior artists and cultural practitioners to work with cultural integrity, teaching and mentoring emerging artists, developing exhibitions and collaborating with national and international institutions.

Senior artists play a vital role in keeping knowledge alive through teaching future generations. Our art and culture centre is not funded to pay for this work, except through occasional projects. Many artists who have taught multiple generations of young artists, largely without pay, live below the poverty line. Without superannuation or accumulated wealth, they face ongoing economic hardship, food insecurity and associated chronic health impacts.

There are countless examples of this situation and applies to most of our senior artists.

Ensuring a stable income for senior artists would recognise their role as community leaders, educators and cultural authorities. It would acknowledge their ongoing cultural, social and economic contributions beyond traditional retirement age.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Basic Income for Artists (BIA) program to provide an unconditional fortnightly stipend for recognised senior remote and regional Aboriginal artists and cultural practitioners
- Create a stipend fund for senior artists and cultural practitioners
- Create a Basic Income (ASI) program for all practicing artists in Australia

## **Infrastructure and climate change**

Fit-for-purpose infrastructure (buildings, housing, vehicles and digital systems) are essential to our centre's operations. Areas of particular need include: a climate control and cyclone grade museum / keeping place including storage, education, conservation, digital archiving, performance and presentation spaces.

Climate change presents an immediate and ongoing risk to Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association. The Tiwi Community has already been significantly affected by cyclones and sea levels rising, resulting in damage to infrastructure, disruption to programs, increased operating costs.

Adaptation and investment in appropriate infrastructure are essential to ensure the centre can continue operating into the future.

The increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters have also led to rising insurance premiums, assets becoming uninsurable, the need to operate without adequate insurance coverage.

Recommendations:

- Develop a National Art and Culture Centre Infrastructure Fund, with minimum standards for climate appropriate, safe, fit-for-purpose buildings, housing, vehicles and digital systems
- Establish a government-backed insurance program to protect remote art and culture centres from climate-related risks

## **Cultural heritage**

Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association plays a dual role in supporting the production of contemporary art while also caring for cultural material. Its role is vital to maintaining community access to cultural heritage and Indigenous intellectual property. Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association is also home to the Muluwurri Museum. The only 100% Tiwi controlled keeping place, where we care for a significant collection of historic Tiwi artwork, artefacts and repatriated objects. Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association and Muluwurri Museum manage Wurrungura Digital Archive and Multi-media centre, a key part of this program is facilitating access to historic recordings and photographs of family. Through these programs we regularly partner with organisations including University of Melbourne, Charles Darwin University and

Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. We also have two arts workers currently enrolling in a Masters of Conservation at the University of Melbourne.

The centre is also experiencing growing demand to work with national and international collecting institutions. This includes supporting culturally safe and respectful exhibitions and research, facilitating the return of sacred objects and ancestors and ensuring the appropriate documentation of cultural materials. While this is important, it adds to the increasing pressure on the centre's current organisational and staff capacity.

#### Recommendations:

- Invest in a Remote Art and Culture Centre Workforce Development Plan which specifically builds local skills in archiving, conservation and digital preservation
- Formally recognise remote art and culture centres as custodians of community collections and partners in repatriation and repatriations processes
- Invest in Aboriginal-led approaches to collections management, including culturally appropriate storage, digital infrastructure and access protocols

Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association supports ANKA, the peak body representing Aboriginal art and culture centres across Arnhem Land, the Kimberley, Darwin–Katherine and the Tiwi Islands and the national alliance of art and culture centre peak bodies' (AACHWA, ANKA, Desart, IACA and Ku Arts) call for a long-term, coordinated approach to strengthening the sector.

Every day, our centre sees how culture, employment, community wellbeing and education are interconnected through our work. Art and culture centres are uniquely placed to bring all these things together. This work must be properly recognised and supported through Australian Government policy.

Regional and remote Aboriginal artists and art and culture centres must have a central place in a strong National Cultural Policy. They are essential to Pillar 1 – First Nations First, the foundational pillar of the Australian Government's current Revive National Cultural Policy. Remote art practice delivers significant cultural, social and economic benefits for communities and contributes far beyond its scale to Australia's cultural standing internationally.

Kind regards

Hannah Raisin  
Art Centre Manager  
Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association

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