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Adelaide Kerald
Numbulwar Numburindi Arts

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This submission can be published

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 **Numbulwar Numburindi Arts** artists. Numbulwar Numburindi Arts is a community-controlled Aboriginal art and culture centre located at Numbulwar and established in 2019. It currently supports 35 member artists, arts workers and cultural leaders.

For over 7 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 Numbulwar Numburindi Arts 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.

ABOUT US

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts supports intergenerational transfer of weaving techniques, natural dye knowledge and cultural stories connected to **Country**, while also providing a safe and welcoming community space that strengthens wellbeing, pride and social connection.

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts works closely with key stakeholders including Numburindi Corporation Limited, local schools, the Numbulwar Rangers, health and aged care services, youth programs and regional arts organisations. One successful partnership is its ongoing collaboration with the **Numbulwar Rangers**, who collect ghost nets and marine debris from local coastlines that artists transform into major woven sculptures and contemporary fibre works, combining environmental care with cultural practice and economic opportunity.

While Numbulwar is a **closed remote community** with restricted access and located far from major tourist routes, the majority of Numbulwar Numburindi Arts' activities take place outside the community through regional and national partnerships. Therefore, partnered with organisations such as the Australian Design Centre, Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation and the Art Gallery of South Australia through exhibitions, workshops and public programs including Tarnanthi, Sydney Craft Week and Melbourne Fashion Week.

Internationally, the centre's "**Reconnect, Protect and Promote**" initiative has created impactful cultural exchange projects with institutions including Fondation Opale in Switzerland and the Wereldmuseum in the Netherlands, reconnecting community members with cultural collections held overseas while promoting contemporary Numbulwar artists and advocating for cultural preservation and ethical museum relationships.

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

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts is located in a very remote region of southeast Arnhem Land and is only accessible by air for much of the year due to seasonal road closures. Like many remote art centres, we are experiencing significant increases in **operating costs** that directly impact our long-term viability. These include rising insurance premiums, infrastructure and vehicle maintenance, freight for essential materials and artworks, staff travel, fuel, and council rates for community accommodation. Since 2020, these core operational costs have increased sharply due to the impacts of the pandemic, inflation and broader global economic pressures, placing additional strain on the sustainability of remote arts practice and service delivery.

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, a 80 cm x 80 cm box of artworks from Numbulwar to Darwin went from \$80 to \$124 with Auspost (only mail service available). During the wet season, charter flights to the closest commercial airport in Groote Eylandt went from \$650 to \$950 for artists travel and during the dry season, the bus from Darwin went from \$250 last year to \$320 in July 2026.

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

In the past, IVAIS core funding has been sufficient to cover key operational costs, including the manager's salary and two indigenous artworkers. In the current environment, it only partially covers the manager's and one artworker's salary.

Recommendation:

- Increase IVAIS funding to stabilise the sector – we estimate our centre requires an additional \$115,500.00 in core operational funding per year to continue operating sustainably

Staffing and career pathways

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts faces ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining qualified local and relocating staff.

Recruitment and retention remain major challenges for Numbulwar Numburindi Arts due to our remote location, a limited pool of skilled candidates and the rising costs associated with remote employment. The art centre faces ongoing difficulties recruiting experienced managerial staff and providing adequate training and professional development pathways for current local Aboriginal staff to progress into leadership roles.

Limited staff housing within the community is also a significant issue - we are currently unable to accommodate our manager and studio coordinator in Numbulwar, which directly affects our ability to attract, support and retain staff long term.

In addition, the workload of the organisation has increased substantially in recent years due to growing administrative, governance, reporting and business development requirements, placing additional pressure on a small remote team with limited operational capacity.

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

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts relies heavily on the leadership, cultural knowledge and availability of senior artists and cultural practitioners to operate with cultural integrity. Senior

artists play a central role in teaching and mentoring emerging artists, passing on weaving techniques, language, cultural stories and knowledge connected to Country, while also contributing to exhibition development and collaborations with national and international institutions. Despite their essential contribution, the art centre is not structurally funded to support this work outside of occasional project funding.

Many senior artists who have taught multiple generations of young people - often without consistent pay - continue to live below the poverty line and face ongoing economic hardship, food insecurity and associated long-term health impacts.

In response to these financial pressures, some active artists are required to take employment in other community services, reducing the time they can dedicate to cultural practice and arts activities.

Ensuring a more stable income for senior artists would recognise their vital role as cultural authorities, educators and community leaders, while supporting the continuation of cultural knowledge and artistic practice across generations.

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

Infrastructure and climate change

Fit-for-purpose infrastructure - including buildings, staff housing, vehicles and digital systems - is essential to the operations and long-term sustainability of Numbulwar Numburindi Arts.

Areas of particular need include secure and cyclone-resistant studio and storage spaces, reliable staff accommodation within the community, appropriate vehicles for travel on unsealed roads and Country visits, and improved digital systems to support cataloguing, communications, online sales and digital archiving projects. Due to the remoteness of Numbulwar and seasonal isolation, maintaining and replacing infrastructure is costly and logistically complex.

Climate change presents an immediate and ongoing risk to Numbulwar Numburindi Arts. The region has already experienced significant impacts from flooding and cyclones, including the major evacuation of the community in April 2026 during cyclone Narelle, damage to the art centre building and the cancellation of a planned art centre exchange with Groote Eylandt. These events also caused substantial increases in travel and operational costs. Adaptation and investment in resilient infrastructure are essential to ensure the centre can continue operating safely and sustainably into the future. At the same time, the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters have contributed to rising insurance premiums, difficulties insuring

assets and infrastructure, and the growing risk of operating 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

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts plays a dual role in supporting the production of contemporary art while also caring for and protecting cultural material. The centre is an important place for maintaining community access to cultural heritage, stories, language and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

In recent years, our art centre has begun developing digital archiving and cultural preservation initiatives to reconnect community members with historical collections held in museums and institutions across Australia and internationally. This includes research into collections connected to Numbulwar, digital documentation projects and partnerships with organisations such as the Wereldmuseum in the Netherlands, Fondation Opale in Switzerland and Australian collecting institutions. The centre has also undertaken professional development and knowledge-sharing opportunities around digital keeping places and community-led archiving through collaborations with organisations including Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre.

At the same time, Numbulwar Numburindi Arts is experiencing growing demand to work with national and international collecting institutions. This includes contributing to culturally safe and respectful exhibitions and research projects, facilitating conversations around the return of sacred objects and ancestors, reconnecting artists and families with historical cultural materials, and ensuring appropriate documentation and interpretation of collections connected to community. While this work is deeply important for cultural preservation and self-determination, it places increasing pressure on the centre's limited staffing, operational capacity and resources.

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 repatriation processes
- Invest in Aboriginal-led approaches to collections management, including culturally appropriate storage, digital infrastructure and access protocols

CLOSING STATEMENT

Numbulwar Numburindi Arts 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, Desert, 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,

Reginald Numamurdirdi
Chairperson

Board of directors of Numburindi Corporation Limited
Artworker and Masterweaver
Numbulwar Numburindi Arts

Janette Murrungun
Treasurer
Board of directors of Numburindi C
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Adelaide Kerald
Art Centre Manager
Numbulwar Numburindi Arts