



Visual Arts and Design Section

Office for the Arts

GPO Box 2154

CANBERRA ACT 2601

Attention: The Honourable Paul Fletcher,

RE: Response to the consultation paper on “Growing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry” from the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation Ltd

Contact Name: Claire Summers

Organisation name: Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation Ltd (DAAFF)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

To the Honourable Minister Fletcher,

My name is Claire Summers and I am the Executive Director of the [Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation](http://www.daaf.com.au) (DAAFF). I was excited to watch the address from the National Gallery of Australia regarding the consultation paper for “Growing Indigenous Arts Industry”. Our Chair, Franchesca Cubillo (who is also the Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the NGA), was delighted to meet with you after the presentation. She has encouraged me to share some of our remarkable achievements from the 2020 online Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair and to provide your office with insights from our learnings that could contribute to this consultation paper.

www.daaf.com.au

www.ifp.org.au

The **Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF)** celebrates the rich cultural and artistic diversity of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Centres. DAAF is the only national event of its kind and has secured a reputation as one of the country's most significant and internationally recognised arts events. The Fair also provides visitors with a genuine opportunity to meet Indigenous artists, performers, and Arts Workers from some of the most remote regions of Australia.

In a usual year, DAAF is held in Darwin, on Larrakia Country, and brings together artists and arts lovers in a shared passion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. But this was not a usual year - DAAF went digital in 2020! The online Fair sought to enable anyone, anywhere, to ethically purchase artwork direct from Indigenous-owned Art Centres across Australia.

The online platform was built in under three months by the small (1 x full-time, 3 x part-time, 1 x casual staff members and 3 x contractors) but enthusiastic DAAFF team. Despite being under-resourced, the Foundation has continued to grow the outcomes of Indigenous artists and Art Centres year after year, and despite all odds, 2020 was no different!

We are very proud to share the following outcomes:

- DAAF hosted **69 participating Art Centres**
- *The participating Art Centres collectively represented 1,335 artists*
- *6,118 unique artworks were uploaded to the Fair website for the public to purchase*
- *More than **\$2.6 million in sales** was generated. **100% of the sales went directly back to the Art Centres and their communities.** Over the past six years, DAAF has generated over **\$13.6 million** for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art sector.*
- *44,784 unique visitors with 72% stating that this was the first time they had visited the Fair*
- Presentation of a vibrant online public program which included 5 x Artist Masterclass workshops, 2 x Indigenous Food Experiences, 3 x Artist Talks, 2 x Cultural Performances, 3 x Lunchtime Concerts, 2 x Artist Demonstrations
- DAAF achieved **310 pieces of editorial coverage** providing **112,295,450** opportunities for people to see messaging relating to DAAF and the inaugural National Indigenous Fashion Awards; 85 articles were from international media (USA, Canada, Europe)

In addition to the online DAAF, the Foundation also delivered the following events and programs in 2020:

- **"Cultural Keepers" (DAAFF Indigenous Curators Program and Symposium)** - This program has been run in conjunction with DAAF since 2017, and so it was again in 2020, but in a digital format. The program welcomed 33 First Nations curators to come together and discuss the future of the industry. They also mentored and worked with the Art Centres at the DAAF digital bump in and throughout the event. In 2020, we also welcomed three international curators to the program.
- **"Country to Couture" (DAAFF Fashion Show)** - With the previous success of Country to Couture, and the momentum in the Indigenous fashion space, DAAFF once again, reimagined the format of the event delivery. A VIP runway event was held at George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens on 3rd December 2020. The lineup featured collections from: Ngali (featuring artist Lindsay Malay from Warmun Art Centre), Warlukurlangu Aboriginal Corporation, Anindilyakwa Arts, Ikuntji Artists,

Liandra Swim and Bima Wear. The event was filmed to enable a special screening event in 2021 in Melbourne, and a national broadcast on NITV on 22 January 2021.

- **The Inaugural National Indigenous Fashion Awards (NIFA)**

Celebrating achievements across six categories, the NIFA was filmed on country and launched as a national broadcast on 5th August 2020 via NITV. Playing to some 50,000 thousand viewers via social media channels such as DAAFF, Marie Claire, Country Road and NITV, the NIFA came to life in a completely unexpected and beautiful way. It is now available to view on SBS On Demand.

- **Indigenous Fashion Projects (IFP)**

<https://www.ifp.org.au/>

DAAFF has been at the forefront of the Indigenous fashion space since the inaugural DAAFF Fashion show in 2016 (now *Country to Couture*). DAAFF has listened to our Art Centre membership and undertaken a vast consultation process with the Indigenous fashion sector, Indigenous art sector and the mainstream fashion sector to carefully and considerately put together *Indigenous Fashion Projects or IFP*.

The strategy for IFP was developed with the purpose of growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander textile and fashion design practice and enterprise. It is deeply rooted in preservation and the promotion of culture and in developing capabilities, connections and opportunities in the textile and fashion industry for Indigenous Australians. This is achieved through a number of development programs that have started or are planned, and these are supported by our headline events.

Our development programs have kicked off with our **Pathways Program** for emerging Indigenous fashion designers. This is supported by David Jones and a number of Australia's leading designers. The purpose of the program is to support the designers in the growth of their labels, through industry workshops and mentoring. We are also well underway with a number of other programs, ranging from connecting high school students to industry opportunities, developing the capability and capacity of the sector and facilitating meaningful and safe collaborations.

DAAFF acknowledges the four themes outlined in the consultation paper: sustainable growth, capacity building, access to market and legal protections. DAAFF contributes to all four themes through our different programs, with a key focus on **access to market**. The following summarises DAAFF's key learnings and observations during the digital pivot of 2020, and how this has shaped our vision of how we can contribute to the growth of Indigenous visual arts in both the immediate and long term future.

Learning about the current digital agility and logistical capability of Art Centres:

- Human resources are so limited in Art Centres that marketing activities and sales opportunities can be neglected due to other pressing matters.
- Art Centres marketing and sales skills vary considerably, and, generally speaking, have no staff committed full-time to the creation and implementation of marketing activities.
- Generally there is a lack of skills in creating and maintaining digital assets (includes photography, websites, social media platforms, electronic direct mail). Image quality and optimization was one of DAAFF's key challenges

www.daaf.com.au

www.ifp.org.au

- Protecting cultural IP was a huge area of concern for peak bodies as the platform was being built, DAAFF therefore ensured that training was provided in protecting IP in the digital space.
- Cyber security knowledge was negligible and most Art Centres had no processes in place to protect themselves
- Art Centres overwhelmingly reported that preparing for the digital Fair was intense and isolating desk work. A number of Art Centres outsourced the upload of imagery and the management of the online portal. They also advised that it was incredibly time consuming and recommended that the portal needs to link to the SAM database
- DAAFF was concerned that Arts Worker participation significantly dropped (around 40%) which was surprising given that the online Fair did not require travel, and it was thought that participation would increase.
- Many Art Centres had problems with internet connectivity which made image uploads difficult and time consuming. During the Fair, communication with customers was at times haphazard
- DAAFF needs to iron out functionality issues with the online platform to ensure it is more user friendly and efficient
- One of the greatest disadvantages to the online Fair was that networking opportunities were not possible online - business contacts made better at the physical Fair. Most Art Centres reported little to no new business relationships being developed throughout the online Fair.
- Sales overall were exceptional and the digital platform allowed the general public to access the Art Centres much more efficiently. This included international visitation which significantly increased in 2020.
- *The 2020 DAAF Art Centre Feedback Survey results are available upon request*

Moving forward: Capacity building, skills development, a national sales platform and international development

Overall, the online DAAF, along with our other events and programs, was a huge success. All Art Centres have supported the idea of maintaining the platform, and use it to develop the event further. DAAFF also openly shared learnings with other Indigenous art fairs including Revealed, AIATSIS, and Tarnanthi, and was the only platform that custom built a platform, not just links to Art Centre's websites.

DAAFF was also approached by a business investor immediately after the Fair, who recognised the success of the platform and felt that with the right business model, it could be a lucrative platform with international reach. DAAFF, however, has no intention of profiteering from the sale of artwork, and will maintain its commitment to returning 100% of sales back to Art Centres - this is important for the sustainable growth of the sector. It will however create a fee-for-service business model with the intention of being self sustainable within five years.

In December 2020, DAAFF was approached by the Ian Potter Foundation, who too recognised DAAFF's leadership in the sales and marketing of Indigenous art, as well as the ambitious and successful digital pivot, and invited the Foundation (after the EOIs had closed) to submit an application to grow its digital presence, provide capacity building opportunities and develop international markets.

Please find below an outline of the four year initiative that DAAFF is developing in consultation with Art Centres, Peak Bodies, the Indigenous Art Code, and other Indigenous visual art stakeholders. This summarises how we feel we can contribute to the themes outline in the consultation paper

There are three pillars to the initiative, the key activities, include:

www.daaf.com.au

www.ifp.org.au

1. Marketing support and skills development for Art Centres

- Provide bi-annual online training to Art Centre (managers and Arts Workers) about best practices for online marketing by creating a custom made online training program
- Create a hub of marketing specialists who can support the Art Centre in areas where they identify they have a gap. DAAFF would like to work with the government to set up a grant program where Art Centres can apply for marketing services and DAAFF can match them with consultants. Supply Nation will be consulted with to identify Indigenous specialists nationally. It is a priority that this program leads to as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job pathways as possible. Ensuring that new skills remain in the community, for community, is also paramount.
- Work with universities on programs/courses that can offer Arts Workers micro credits, that can lead to future qualifications.
- Form partnerships with corporate organisations who can provide internships and/or secondments to communities to assist in skills development

2. A national digital platform

- Create a national platform that provides a constantly activated space to purchase art from Art Centres (and possibly independent artists in the future) with a focus on helping to launch new and emerging artists to the market
- Provide a space for commercial galleries (with Indigenous Art Code membership) to advertise their exhibitions
- Include a thought leadership space which welcomes artists, curators, and industry leaders to publish papers, opinions, reviews, and research
- Host digital art fairs including DAAF, and others
- Curate exhibitions with accompanying digital public program
- A space to host short films made by Art Centres and DAAFF.
- A space to connect to Indigenous tourism packages
- Provide a forum for industry news including Art Centre stories, updates from the sector (such as Arts Law, Copyright Agency, Indigenous Art Code, public institutions)

3. International relationship building and marketing

- Research piece on developing international markets in using both physical and digital platforms, which includes ways to create networking opportunities in a digital environment
- Work with Australia Council for the Arts, Austrade, and Tourism Australia to develop International delegations of buyers and stakeholders that can visit DAAF each year
- Build relationships and networks with international First Nations curators, connecting them to Art Centres and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators via the Cultural Keepers (DAAFF Indigenous Curators Program & Symposium) and digital networking platforms
- Create and implement a 3 year international development strategy to market Indigenous Art Centres and DAAFF's digital and physical platforms

DAAFF is an organisation that has a national footprint, yet is grounded at the grassroots level with close and trusting relationships with Art Centres. We feel that we are a leading organisation in the marketing space and can significantly contribute to the growth of the Indigenous visual arts sector. We have tirelessly consulted with our Art Centre members, and feel that the information provided in this submission is a true reflection of current needs of Art Centres, as well as their future sales and promotional aspirations in both the digital and physical worlds we now operate in.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this submission further.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Claire Summers', with a horizontal line underneath.

Claire Summers
DAAFF Executive Director