

NATIONAL CDEP ARTS CENTRES ACTION GROUP
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May we draw your attention to the potentially adverse effects of the removal of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) on the Australian Indigenous art industry. CDEP has been abolished in urban areas and is in the process of being removed in the Northern Territory. The Aboriginal arts industry is critically dependent for support from the CDEP scheme in a number of ways: CDEP organisations provide services and support, there are CDEP-paid workers in art centres, and CDEP provides income support for artists, the majority of whom cannot earn enough from their arts practice alone.

The Government's stated policy objective is to support the NT intervention, 'moving people into jobs, improving services and infrastructure, and providing longer term support to build better communities' and 'implement quarantining of Aboriginal incomes'.¹ However in the case of art centres we submit the following:

- Artists are already employed, typically as self-employed individuals or as members of an enterprise in which the work of higher earning artists contributes to running costs of the whole.
- Moving to one of the alternatives offered Work For Dole or a STEPERS programme, is a move to unemployment and a retrograde step for artists and for artworkers employed in supervisory positions. Work for the Dole will require these people to be engaged in activities like cleaning the communities rather than formal arts production and arts management.
- This will set back the planned progression towards a business model that many art centres have in place already.
- Reduction of artists' base pay rate, and the move to WFD or STEPERS, will add to the power of carpetbaggers who are recognised as an existing threat to the industry.
- Reduction of incomes across the board will put more pressure on artists, many of whom are grandmothers, and many of whom are elderly, thereby further reducing individual community capacity to contribute to the Indigenous arts industry
- There is the potential to lose qualified arts centre managers who are unlikely to become WFD supervisors
- Some smaller art centres have already closed.

¹ *Jobs Careers Future Northern Territory Responses Presentation.ppt* Australian Government September 2007

Background

The internationally recognised Australian Indigenous arts movement drives an industry that returns an estimated \$200 - \$500 million to the Australian economy annually². The Indigenous arts industry generates income and contributes to the economy for artists and their families, galleries, dealers and other retailers. Artists themselves contribute to the wider economy through income tax and GST. The Indigenous arts industry contributes to related industries such as transport and distribution networks, motor vehicle sales, manufacturing and paint products, tourism (especially in remote Australia), the Australian export market, and local remote economies through the re-distribution of artists' income.

The CDEP has been a critical component of the success of the industry, affecting a majority of Top End art centres, and many art centres in Central Australia, South Australia and Western Australia³. However some art centres are now under threat because this component is being withdrawn without the capacity to properly plan the transition. In urban areas a number of art centres have closed.

Our submission

We request policy –makers to consider CDEP-funded Art centres in the context of the Indigenous arts industry and not in the context of an unsuccessful CDEP programme. We ask:

1. That the Government stay its decision to abolish CDEP in art centres around Australia. Such a decision is inconsistent with explicit recommendations contained in the *Indigenous Art –Securing the Future 2007* (Report of the Senate Enquiry) that recommended the maintenance of CDEP. Further, it will have negative and long lasting impacts on Indigenous artists and the entire industry.
2. That the current situation requires urgent Ministerial intervention in particular communities affected by CDEP changes in the Northern Territory to ensure that the current confusion and disruption is addressed and artist and arts worker positions are maintained.
3. We call for a review and reconsideration of the round of CDEP closures in urban situations around Australia in 2007 to assess the impact on participants, organisations and communities and the feasibility of reinstatement.

² Indigenous Art – Securing the Future Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector Commonwealth of Australia 20 June 2007 2.17 ff.

³ Please see Attachment

4. That successful art centres developed through CDEP must be recognised and supported as a model for developing art enterprises and contributing to a significant national industry.
5. That the situation demands a methodical and consultative review of CDEP-funded art centres to identify and implement sound operational structures and resource needs for these entities as they move towards business models.
6. That the government and opposition honour all the recommendations of the June 2007 Senate Inquiry *Indigenous Art – Securing the Future*, including the employment of indigenous arts workers in art centres as essential jobs.
7. We submit that in any discussions of modifications to CDEP it is timely to consider a separate Arts enterprise support program, perhaps administered by DCITA, *around Australia* to cater for enterprise development in regional towns and in communities. Such a program could include a base pay rate for artists and artworkers, capital and operational funding. We feel this would be in line with the Senate Inquiry Recommendation 11 – *“The committee recommends that the Commonwealth pursue the conversion of CDEP funded positions in Art Centres into properly funded jobs, taking an approach similar to the 2007 – 08 Budget initiative in other portfolio areas; and that this initiative be independent of future NACIS program funding.*
 We submit that such a program would have these features:
 - a. Income and continued training for Aboriginal people employed in developing enterprises that have genuine community benefit
 - b. Inclusion of art production and other enterprises as essential activities on communities
 - c. An examination of tax thresholds to encourage Aboriginal people to remain in paid employment
8. That the Aboriginal arts sector and its representatives work cooperatively with all levels of government to create and implement sound policy that will strengthen and contribute to the sustainability of the highly successful and world renowned Indigenous art industry.
9. That government through its actions and policies demonstrates a commitment to recognising and respecting the unique and highly valued role that Indigenous artists play in Australia’s national cultural life.

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