

Speech by Shirley McPherson

Challenges Faced by Indigenous Creative Enterprises

Monday, 10 August, Session 16 Shelter 4

10.30 a.m.

Garma Festival of Traditional Culture

Gulkula, Gove Peninsula,

Arnhem Land, NT.

Session to be chaired by Leanne Caton, Director Indigenous Economic Development, NT Government

Thank you Leanne for your kind introduction.

It is a great pleasure to be here this morning and I would like to thank organisers for the opportunity to address this session.

I am a Yamatji woman, from Western Australia and out of respect for cultural protocols I recognise and thank the Yolngu people - the Traditional Owners of the country on whose land we are meeting today.

We must never forget that the Traditional Owners have had responsibility for looking after this country for thousands of years and I pay my respects to current day descendents of the Yolngu people.

As the Chairperson of the Indigenous Land Corporation, I have been asked to talk about the challenges faced by Indigenous creative enterprises.

The ILC is an Australian Government independent statutory authority established to provide social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits to Indigenous people by assisting them to acquire land and manage Indigenous-held land.

In acquiring land and managing Indigenous-held land the ILC Board has made it clear that these areas of general benefit – social, cultural, environmental and economic - have two key factors which link them – the ability of land to also provide training and employment outcomes and in doing so encourage sustainable economic development.

Unfortunately for Indigenous people, there is a belief in some sectors that simple acquisition of land is the only outcome which is required.

The ILC does not agree with this view.

The ILC Board, and indeed many other Indigenous organizations and communities, take a more holistic view of land ownership and land management and believe that sustainable economic outcomes are not mutually exclusive from the need to protect culturally or environmentally significant areas.

An example of this are the concerns that many Indigenous people in Northern Queensland hold about moves to protect wild rivers without properly consulting them about what effect this would have on socio-economic development opportunities into the future.

Indigenous creative enterprises exist in many and varied established sectors - visual and performing arts, music, film, design and broadcasting - come readily to mind.

But, there are also other sectors where Indigenous creative enterprises are undergoing rapid development such as cultural tourism, the environment and land management.

Given the ILC's legislatively mandated focus on land, I would like to speak about these developing sectors and the challenges faced by Indigenous creative enterprises within them.

They include issues related to governance and capacity development, training and employment, infrastructure and ongoing support.

During my address I would like to share some case studies with you to emphasise the points I am making.

As I have said, the challenges are many.

One of the key challenges faced by Indigenous creative enterprises is the long-standing problem of having a permanent base and proper facilities to work from.

Having a permanent base and proper facilities allows Indigenous creative enterprises to be established on a sound footing, planning for future growth and development can be undertaken, networks and partnerships strengthened and increased training and employment opportunities created.

CASE STUDY 1: TANGENTYERE ARTISTS

The situation regarding Tangentyere Artists in Alice Springs is a perfect case in point.

Tangentyere Artists currently runs in-house and outreach services for around 400 registered town-camp and community artists from an incredibly cramped office inside Tangentyere Council.

The ILC has purchased a block of land in Alice Springs' Fogarty Street so that Tangentyere Artists can build a proper, dedicated arts studio, improve its support for Central Australian Indigenous artists, and tackle the problems unscrupulous art dealers cause.

The centre will also create employment and training opportunities for Indigenous artists.

Town centre artists are frequently in exploitative relationships with unethical commercial interests who under-value their works.

The new centre will house studio and gallery space, offices and production support rooms, and will be open for any Indigenous artist in the Alice Springs region to come and work without humbug.

To promote the development of the ethical art market, it will also be used for sales, open days, and cultural tourism events.

With the new centre, Tangentyere Artists estimates that over time 30-40 artists will earn enough to leave the welfare system and some will earn substantial incomes.

The studio will also employ 12 artists, and each year help 10 to study arts, arts administration and media.

The ILC has adopted a similar approach, of assisting Indigenous creative enterprises to establish a proper home base, in other areas of Australia.

CASE STUDY 2: KOORI RADIO

In Sydney, Koori Radio has struggled with substandard and uncertain broadcasting and administration facilities for years.

In 2005 the ILC inherited the old Black Theatre site in Redfern following the abolition of ATSIC.

For Years Koori Radio had operated from a disused hospital building at Marrickville with a leaky roof.

Now the ILC has constructed a modern, multi-purpose building on the historic site.

The three-storey building has retail space on the ground floor, office accommodation on the second and a purpose-built radio station and recording studios for Gadigal Information Services, the local broadcaster of Koori Radio 93.7 FM, on the third.

The site is now delivering long-term benefits to the Indigenous community and providing badly-needed modern premises for Koori Radio.

Assisting Indigenous communities to establish creative industries on Indigenous-held land also poses many challenges.

The ILC believes that a lack of investment in skills and development capital has restricted opportunities for Aboriginal land owners to establish their own viable businesses.

Putting Indigenous-held land back into production, while at the same time protecting cultural and environmental values need not be mutually exclusive aims.

CASE STUDY 3: WALIBURRU STATION

At Waliburru Station in the NT, formerly known as Hodgson Downs, the ILC has assisted the local community, Traditional Owners and rangers to develop a creative enterprise which is successfully marrying economic, cultural and environmental needs.

The ILC has signed a grazing licence agreement on Waliburru with Traditional Owners and the NLC, training and employing people living at Minyerri community, located on the station.

In 1995, Hodgson Downs was granted to Alawa 1 Aboriginal Land Trust under the NT Land Rights Act.

The peoples' historical connections with pastoralism was a key driver for people to acquire the station, but their enthusiasm also stemmed from their need to protect and maintain land's cultural landscape.

The ILC, employing people from Minyerri, has now established essential infrastructure, including over 120km of new fencing, sheds, water points, access roads and a homestead precinct including staff and visitor accommodation.

While the project is about cattle, community members strongly support their ranger program, and see that as growing as the station develops.

The clearances for station infrastructure were facilitated by senior Traditional Owners working with an Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (NT) anthropologist. This work resulted in significant protection of sacred country, and perhaps as importantly the transfer of important cultural knowledge from senior custodians to younger custodians.

Traditional owners have also formulated a land management plan with the Minyerri Rangers, and now there is the capacity to implement a cooperative set of arrangements for weed, feral animal and fire management with rangers and rangers working together.

A key part of the project is the succession arrangements that are incorporated into the Waliburru Development Plan, where traditional owners are taking on the capacity building tasks that will support them taking control of their business by 2018.

This model of using land sustainably to create a new enterprise to provide new training and employment opportunities while at the same building the capacity of the community, is also being adopted at Gunbalanya.

CASE STUDY 5: GUNBALUNYA

In an agreement with Gunbalanya Meat Supply Pty Ltd and the Northern Land Council, the ILC will spend \$3.1 million over 15 years to upgrade and manage the community-owned meatworks business and floodplain grazing enterprises at Gunbalanya.

The injection of ILC funding will see the Gunbalanya cattle herd grow from 1,000 to 7,000 head, an increase in employment in pastoral and abattoir jobs and active involvement by the Gunbalanya community in the live export cattle trade.

Traditional Owners have welcomed the effort by the ILC to create a new enterprise within the community.

Under the new agreement, the ILC will fund significant building and infrastructure works, including construction of a larger, modern abattoir, accommodation quarters, new water infrastructure, and 178 kilometres of new fencing.

The ILC will also finance development of the cattle herd and capacity building to ensure the enterprise can be managed viably and sustainably once ownership and operation of the business is divested back to the community.

With ILC assistance, a total of 800 km² of land – including 250 km² of black soil floodplain – will be fenced off as grazing pasture, with the overall stock carrying capacity of the property to increase to 9,400 head.

Young stock will be sourced from other ILC properties at Strangways/East Elsey and Waliburru, and grown and finished at Gunbalanya.

The positive outcomes of this project for the local community extend far beyond the profits generated by the commercial business.

The Gunbalanya pastoral and meatworks operations will provide job-ready training for local people and will initially employ 28 Indigenous people.

As the enterprise develops over the years, it is expected to provide significant and growing employment opportunities for people in the community.

The flow-on social and community benefits that these opportunities for large-scale employment and skill development will bring, will be wide-reaching.

Gunbalanya Meats has a key role to play in improving the supply of fresh, more affordable food to remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

The meatworks will supply inexpensive, high quality beef and buffalo meat to community stores servicing around 11,000 Indigenous people in Arnhem Land and the island communities east of Darwin.

The proximity of the meatworks to these markets means that meat can be provided at a much cheaper cost than is the case currently, with most meat products transported from interstate.

COLLABORATIONS

Developing ongoing networks and lasting collaborations is another of the challenges facing Indigenous creative enterprises.

Creative industries need support to establish themselves, invest in employment and training and develop their business model.

In today's world, no one agency has the physical and financial resources to support large-scale projects on its own, so collaboration becomes a key consideration if sustainable benefits are to be achieved.

CASE STUDY 6: LMED & IPAs

An example of how collaborations are shaping much of the ILC's work is the Land Management for Economic Development project in the Northern Territory.

This is a joint initiative between key Northern Territory and Australian Government agencies, the Northern Land Council and the ILC to address invasive weed, fire and feral animal issues, animal disease monitoring and degraded site rehabilitation while building local Indigenous landholders' capacity through training and job creation.

The project involves a number of Top End Indigenous communities with a focus on natural resource management training.

Utilising the skills acquired through this training, some Indigenous land management groups established under the strategy have now developed their own enterprises. This has included winning contracts for environmental management work and Indigenous people have derived full or part-time contract employment from these enterprise activities.

Similarly, the Indigenous Protected Areas program is helping NT communities to develop low scale, environmentally sustainable creative enterprises.

Valuable work is being done in exploring complementary avenues for economic development through ecotourism, traditional economies such as controlled wildlife harvesting, bush food collection and general public visitation.

Since 2003 the ILC has had an MoU with the Australian Government's Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to work collaboratively and strategically to achieve land management and environmental benefits for Indigenous landholders.

The agreement is delivering social, cultural, and environmental benefits to Aboriginal landowners in priority bioregions, including the protection of country and sites of significance while at the same time providing badly-needed training and employment opportunities and meaningful social activities.

Indigenous landholders want to pursue cultural and natural resource opportunities and utilise their land as a viable environmental resource.

This is especially important where the land has historically provided limited conventional business opportunities.

The ILC actively supports the program because it agrees with the aim of meshing Indigenous cultural values with mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives.

Closing remarks:

In my address today I have attempted to explore the variety of Indigenous creative enterprises that currently exist or are under development and some of the challenges they face.

Those challenges include issues of governance and capacity development, training and employment, infrastructure and ongoing support to name a few.

But, we should never let those challenges overwhelm us, as the work we are all doing to maintain and strengthen culture, connection to country and economic development, is vital to this generation and generations to come.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who is working with Indigenous people to build a brighter and more sustainable future through creative enterprises.

Thank you.