

ABORIGINAL ART — KIMBERLEY

Grievance

MS J. FARRER (Kimberley) [9.48 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Culture and the Arts. I have been concerned for many years that the art and stories held by Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region, and across the state, are not being adequately recognised and protected. This can be seen through the current practices of buying and selling art that I have seen, and the ongoing commercial exploitation of this art for little or no return to these artists and communities. The importance of our art and stories to Aboriginal culture and communities is fundamental to our cultural existence, our wellbeing and our future economic prosperity. However, I have witnessed many occasions when the recognition and proper protection of the artworks and stories held by Aboriginal artists and communities have not been adequately undertaken, whether this is at the point of sale, often informally for cash on the side of the road or under a tree in town; through the representation of “fake art” in shops and souvenir outlets; or through the ongoing commercial exploitation of an artwork for which there is no return for the artists and their communities. This undervaluing of Aboriginal art and culture and the lack of protection of artists’ copyright and intellectual property leads to a breakdown in the economic and social wellbeing of Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region and elsewhere in the state. Our communities are facing significant challenges, with high levels of unemployment and record rates of youth suicide. The financial return that artists could receive from not just the sale of their artwork, but also the ability to use their artworks to produce other products for ongoing commercial returns, such as fabric prints, would help address these issues through building greater financial independence and cultural pride.

Aboriginal art centres play an important role in supporting and protecting Aboriginal artists and their work. There are nearly 30 recognised Aboriginal art centres across the state, with 10 within the Kimberley region. These art centres provide a space for artists and community members to come and practice their artwork and to produce other products, such as souvenirs for tourists and designs for fabrics for other items. This is important in ensuring that Aboriginal artwork and cultural property is recognised and protected from exploitation, and that communities are able to maintain ownership and control of the stories they wish to share. Most of these artworks are done through the stories that people tell. A significant piece of history goes with it. However, not all artwork is created and sold within art centres, with a large amount of work sold by individual artists in the towns, roadhouses and communities across the state.

I want to know what the government is doing through its program and through its partnership with federal and local governments, firstly, to support Aboriginal artists and communities through the protection of their artworks and intellectual property; secondly, to support Aboriginal art centres to develop the skills and know-how to produce other products from these artworks, such as fabrics, prints, souvenirs and other items, to bring greater finances to the artists and their communities; and, thirdly, to recognise the importance of Aboriginal art and culture and the role it plays in supporting the wellbeing, cultural strength and identity of, and greater economic independence for, Aboriginal communities across the state.

The issue of languages has been in my heart for a long time. These are all connected. As we have seen over time, a lot of the methods of how we deal with things in our culture and the way we do things have been broken up and separated, but they are all bound together as one with the land. The stories that people produce are stories of their own travels, where they have come from and how far they have gone, whether it is from one end of Australia to the other. We talk about the songlines and everything else—that is all connected. That goes into artwork. Thank you.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Culture and the Arts) [9.53 am]: I thank the member for Kimberley for this grievance. It is very, very important. I acknowledge her passion and deep interest in this matter, and the importance of recognising Indigenous culture. The ability to maintain ownership and control of intellectual property—that is what we are talking about; the intellectual property of these Indigenous artists—has the potential, as the member has highlighted, to bring greater benefits to those artists and their communities. It also helps to strengthen the cultural identity of the communities in which those artists live, and builds greater economic and social outcomes for the broader community.

Since becoming Minister for Culture and the Arts, I have taken a keen interest in supporting Aboriginal art. We recognise that this not only enhances the benefits to and wellbeing of artists and their families and communities, but also offers great opportunities to share the stories exhibited through the artworks of those artists to a broader audience and, from an economic perspective, to deliver those economic benefits directly back to the artists and the communities in which those pieces of artwork are created. One of my first visits as minister after the 2017 election was to the *Revealed* exhibition, which has taken place annually for the past 10 years at the Fremantle Arts Centre. This exhibition focuses particularly on emerging Indigenous artists, with many from the member for Kimberley’s region, the Pilbara and the desert community area. That started from humble beginnings 10 years ago, but recent figures from this year’s event, which was only a month ago, show that there has been more than \$600 000 in sales,

which goes directly back to those artists. That is tremendous, but the exhibition also makes sure that those artists and their work are exposed to a broader audience in Perth. That is a very important component.

I will provide some background on the issue of authenticity. I highlight that the support of Aboriginal art practices and the protection of Aboriginal art goes across state and federal governments and through joint advocacy and programs of support. As Minister for Culture and the Arts in Western Australia, I sit on the Meeting of Cultural Ministers with my counterparts from the federal government and other states and territories. The protection of Aboriginal artists and communities from the impact of fake art has been a key point on the MCM agenda. This is a very real issue. We have to not only protect the authenticity of artists' work, but also make sure that there is no exploitation of that authenticity. At our last meeting in October 2018, the MCM endorsed additional support to the Indigenous Art Code in order to better protect ethical art dealing and take action in response to inauthentic Indigenous-style products. The Indigenous Art Code, the Arts Law Centre of Australia and the national Copyright Agency launched the Fake Art Harms Culture campaign in 2016 to raise awareness of the issue of fake art. The organisers of that campaign found that up to 80 per cent of products sold as Indigenous art in tourist outlets and souvenir stores were not authentic, and were often mass-produced outside of Australia. That is amazing—80 per cent! When people from other parts of the world want to take home with them some Indigenous art, quite often they are taking home inauthentic Indigenous product. This has been recognised by tourism ministers, who discussed the issue as the Australian Standing Committee on Tourism in June last year. A further resolution was taken to reduce the appropriation of Aboriginal art in the tourism market.

I am very pleased that an election commitment of federal Labor is to prioritise action of the Legislative and Governance Consumer Affairs Forum—the forum for all state, territory and commonwealth ministers responsible for consumer affairs—and ensure a national approach to policy development to protect First Nation artists and consumers across the country. I am really hoping for a federal Labor government, because this issue would be taken up at the highest level. The commitment would also allow ongoing recognition of the importance of this issue for Aboriginal people, and the steps required to resolve it.

As the member knows, I was in Kalgoorlie at the beginning of the week to launch the government's budget commitment to arts and culture in regional Western Australia. The regional arts and culture investment program was designed to create jobs, stimulate economic development and tourism, and improve social cohesion through arts in Western Australia. It is a funding commitment of almost \$20 million over four years to regional WA. This commitment of almost \$5 million a year by the McGowan government is complemented by our \$8 million regional exhibition touring boost for visual arts and \$750 000 to support the attraction of visitors to regional museums and collections. This commitment by the McGowan government is the biggest ever commitment to supporting arts and culture activity in regional Western Australia. It is very significant.

There is a particular stream focused on strengthening Aboriginal arts. I am very proud of this, because this recognises the importance of the issue the member has highlighted to me today in her grievance. Strengthening Aboriginal arts will support the sustainability of Western Australia's valued Aboriginal arts centres. The member highlighted that 10 of the 30 Aboriginal arts centres are in the Kimberley, and they are well known and revered for the quality of their product. This program will support and provide opportunities for artists through those Aboriginal art centres to share their stories through new works. The program will recognise the value of arts activities to individuals, families and communities. The stream will provide a suite of initiatives to strengthen the practice of Aboriginal creatives in Western Australia.

The second stream will invest in the development of Aboriginal art centres, for which the member has been asking for a long time, to support their viability as they move into the next phase of development and sustainability. It will also invest in opportunities for Aboriginal artists and in opportunities for the broader community to engage with Aboriginal cultural content. This stream will increase Aboriginal training and employment opportunities in the sector and will support Aboriginal governance and business capacity. The second stream will also deliver support through two programs, the Aboriginal business development program and the Aboriginal arts commissioning fund, which are both very, very important.

We have strong support for our commitment to the regional arts program. The member for Kimberley's advocacy is critical to that, and I am pleased to finish by saying that as part of our regional arts fund, \$100 000 will go to the return of the Stompin' Ground festival, which the member has advocated for strongly, to be delivered by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre. That is great news, and I thank the member for Kimberley so much for her advocacy on behalf of her community.