

# **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE ARTS IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN  
AT KARRATHA  
ON MONDAY, 28 JULY 2003**

### **SESSION 2**

#### **Members**

**Mr D.A. Templeman (Chairman)**  
**Mr L. Graham (Deputy Chairman)**  
**Mr J.N. Hyde**  
**Mr A.P. O’Gorman**  
**Ms S.E. Walker**

[10.10 am]

**MURRAY, MS ROSE MARIE**

**Arts Development Officer,**

**Pilbara Arts Crafts and Design Aboriginal Corporation,**

**examined:**

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN (Mr L. Graham):** Thank you for coming today Rose. I have to go through some formal procedures with you at the start. This committee hearing is a proceeding of the Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the House itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. I see that you have completed the "Details of Witness" form. Do you understand the notes that were attached to it?

**Ms Murray:** Yes.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

**Ms Murray:** Yes.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** We will now drop all the formalities and go on. This hearing is being recorded. I would appreciate you taking us through what the Pilbara Arts Crafts and Design Aboriginal Corporation is and what the courthouse arts project involves, how it developed and the stage it is now at.

**Ms Murray:** PACDAC was formed about four years ago. It is an Aboriginal corporation led by a volunteer committee of Aboriginal adult people who live in the Pilbara. The corporation is based in Port Hedland at the moment and its membership goes right throughout the Pilbara. We have members who live in places such as Parnngurr and Punmu. Some members are from Roebourne, Port Hedland and South Hedland. The role of the organisation is to develop regional indigenous art. It is about the nurturing and sharing of culture. It is about giving information to people to help them empower themselves, so that if they are involved in the arts and craft industry, they can feel in control of what they are doing. It is also about nurturing and growing an arts and crafts industry that is mindful of Aboriginal cultural protocols in the Pilbara. They are probably the most important things that we do.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Is there anything else like it in the Pilbara ?

**Ms Murray:** No. No other group has a regional focus. Everybody else is working within a couple of kilometres of their office. People are pretty much localised.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Does it involve just visual arts, or performing arts as well?

**Ms Murray:** It involves visual arts at this stage. However, if people were to come and ask for help, we would give them help. For instance, if a person did not have access to a phone and wanted to ring Broome to find out about recording a compact disc, or if someone wanted help with writing a submission for the different art forms, we would give them a bit of a hand and a referral, because in many of the towns there is nobody else. If you are doing these arts sorts of jobs, you sometimes have to be a jack-of-all-trades. Also, people walk in off the street with a question. They might ask about music, but within their family structure they might have artists. How you treat that person and how you make them welcome is really crucial.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** One of your roles is to do some of the administration, such as filling out forms and helping groups and individuals with that sort of thing. Are those applications for Country Arts WA and arts council funding?

**Ms Murray:** Yes, for funding from the Australia Council for the Arts, Country Arts WA and ArtsWA. It could involve telling people to go to their local shire to access funds. Sometimes it is a matter of sitting with people and filling in the application, and sometimes it involves writing it. At other times we just give them a referral and tell them to speak to the project officer or to send me a draft for me to make comment. I wear another hat. I am on the board of Country Arts WA. I sit on a funding panel. Therefore, I do not want to have anything to do with those applications. If I did, those applications could turn up at the panel and I would have to declare my interest and walk away, so it is better for me to step back and tell them to ring the project officer direct and to wish them good luck. Generally board members ask me questions such as, "What about this mob in Marble Bar? Are they really working with the community or are they doing it for themselves?" I can then say that I have been to the community and have done this and this with the group, and that I feel they are making a genuine contribution.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I will ask about the forms again. It might be a hard question for you to answer as you are on the Country Arts WA board, but are all the forms difficult or are they reasonably easy? Is there any uniformity between the forms of the Australia Council, Country Arts WA and for whatever other grants people apply for?

**Ms Murray:** Work needs to be done on simplifying them. The different forms ask a lot of very similar questions, but do so in different ways and in different formats. It can sometimes be confusing with the budget side of things. One lot may want it filled out differently from another lot. To me, and it does not matter in which area you work, the best community development work occurs when you can get the raw data from the person who is most affected. If the homeless can fill in the form rather than several tiers of people, you are getting the truth. The simpler the forms can be, the better. Sometimes those forms are not written to make things easy for people. More work definitely needs to be done on them. There is no question about that; that is true. Country Arts WA has reviewed its forms and will continue to do so. One of the things about having Aboriginal people more involved at the panel level and on the board is that we actually take that argument up with administration and the organisation, because many Aboriginal adults in our area are not literate. One reason that Aboriginal people are not in the higher and more responsible jobs is that a higher level of literacy and politicking is required. We need to find inroads for people both up and down. That will stop them.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Do some of these forms contain information that in your view is irrelevant? Do some forms ask for things that make you wonder why they need to know that, and make you think that such questions could be chucked out?

**Ms Murray:** I have found the forms that I deal with fairly relevant. There are some basic things about why a project is being done, who will be working with the project, and what the group or individual will be left with at the end of the project. They are pretty basic questions and they should be couched in pretty basic terms. Sometimes you are faced with 40 applications to deal with, which requires a fair amount of reading. You have to thin it down and give a person a fair chance. They have to be pretty specific.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** It sounds as though you are in a position in which funding will be ongoing.

**Ms Murray:** No.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** How does your funding operate? Through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission?

**Ms Murray:** As far as I know, ATSIC does not fund anybody in the Pilbara for more than one year. I suspect that that compares very badly with other regions around Australia. Come May we panic about our funding and wonder whether we will get anything or nothing. That is the way we live. That is the way most Aboriginal staff who work in non-government organisations live. I have lived like that for a long time. It is appalling for the worker and their family and it is appalling for the organisation, because we have proven ourselves but do not really get to do long-term projects. It is really difficult. People talk about attracting cocktail funding, but the reality is that funding is also itsy-bitsy and is provided for only a limited time. How can you argue with somebody about a decent amount of funding when core funding will last for only the next six months? It is a bit nerve-racking.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** How is that preventing you from running long-term projects? Do you just not bother planning something such as an annual or biannual festival?

**Ms Murray:** You could not. We only ever run things for up to a year. I suppose the most long-term thing that we have done is that PACDAC, with the Town of Port Hedland, bought the old courthouse in Port Hedland at which it has created an arts base, a retail and exhibition space and an information point. For that to occur, the Town of Port Hedland had to be quite brave. We had to develop a joint venture agreement, which was vetted by ATSIC. The agreement contains outs in case it does not go well or the partnership does not work. It has been a very successful joint venture. I have a presentation that I could go through quickly and talk to you about if you would like.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Yes please Rose.

**Ms Murray:** This presentation was developed for the annual local government awards. The Department of Transport and Regional Services was looking for councils that were providing partnerships with indigenous organisations. There was only ever one winner in this category, but they actually broke the boundaries and gave out two awards because what the Town of Port Hedland and PACDAC had achieved went outside the scale. We were pleased about that. It is called a courthouse art centre and gallery and we won the national award in 2002. It was a rural award for excellence and we won the category for strengthening indigenous communities. The first thing we told them was that the Pilbara is huge and that this is the region we are working in. We explained how many people live in the region. The Pilbara is 20 per cent of the State of Western Australia and is twice the size of Victoria. We explained that the town has 13 500 people, with a high multicultural base, and that the local industry is based around the iron ore industry. The town of Port Hedland is situated on an inlet and the area is called Marrapikurrinya. That area will hopefully be represented in a mosaic sundial soon. We have funding from the Australia Council to get the artists to work with a leading mosaic artist in Perth, but when we went to get the money to make it we were knocked back. It is always itsy-bitsy. We have the development money but where is the making up money? We have trouble with that. Now we have to apply for more rounds of money and go back to industry to try to get the money. It was a great opportunity for two young indigenous artists to learn how to do community consultation and turn that into a dream.

Aboriginal unemployment in our town is very high. The unemployment rate in the Pilbara was 4.9 per cent in 2000. At the same time, the unemployment rate for indigenous people was 21 per cent. If the community development employment projects were taken out, that rate would actually have been 42 per cent. We talked about Aboriginal demographics in our area. We have a high indigenous population, as you would be aware. The Australia Council talked about the popularity of indigenous art and that there had been a 377 per cent increase in the number of indigenous works sold through auction between 1988 and 1998, and a 336 per cent increase in the value of those works during that period. There has been a huge shift in value and interest. Unlike the Kimberley, our close neighbours, that certainly has not been developed in our area. There are huge cultural tourism opportunities in our area. People are coming through the area. In 1999, 1.6 per cent of Pilbara's economic activity was worth about \$183 million. It has been said that for every \$1 million

spent on tourism, 12 jobs are created, whereas if that same amount is spent in the mining industry, 0.5 jobs are created. There is huge interest in cultural tourism. We have been able to take an exhibition from the Parngurr people on the Canning Stock Route. They brought their oil paintings into Hedland and that exhibition is now touring the State as part of Art on the Move. A new art form has been created. They had never painted in oils. That group was the last group of people from Western Australia to actually walk in from the desert in the 1960s. The group was made up of 18 members of the Taylor family. That family in particular featured in that exhibition. On Friday Waaka Taylor was awarded the Cossack art award. It is extraordinary. These people came in from the desert. Waaka, in particular, is an older man. Sadly, they lost one young boy in a tragic accident. He was an artist, aged 19, and he died a couple of months ago. His work is touring. That occurred because of social problems, because of a lack of things to do and because of the huge shift that communities are going through.

The art centre idea came from cultural planning and things like that. PACDAC has been working with the shire. The sale of the courthouse was an opportunity. We begged the State Government to give it to us for free, so that we could get other money to do other things. Instead, we had to buy it, so that was sad for us. The State Government argued that it was because the replacement building had cost so much. That was a great disappointment. Many friends had helped lobby, but to no avail. PACDAC and council have been working together over many issues over time and many other Aboriginal people have been doing that as well. We have been able to get the 1946 strike sculpture made for our town centre, which educates everybody, through Australia Council and other funds. We had the bravery to start the little shop venture because the Pilbara Development Commission lent us a shopfront for a few months. We moved in when I was a community development employment projects textile worker, and we took some work there. We had a lot of success. People were very interested in our local wares. That gave us the bravery to ask ATSIC to buy half the building and DOTARS, through the Pilbara Area Consultative Committee, to also help via the council. There were some challenges for council. What if PACDAC was never funded again? There were issues about how long it would take for the building to be purchased. There were challenges for PACDAC in terms of working with the council. There were issues of paternalism - of big brother and great bureaucracy versus a tiny struggling community organisation. There was the issue of the tiny volunteer sector. Most Aboriginal people in our area who are on committees are on five committees. They are generally juggling families as well, and it is very difficult for them to carry these organisations, but somehow they do. The legal documents that we signed were scary. We do not have legal training. Those were some of the issues.

[10.30 am]

We ended up, as I said, with a grant from ATSIC of \$114 000, for the purchase. We ended up with funding of \$60 000 from the regional arts fund and Country Arts towards the centre coordinator for the first year. It was funded again in the second year, by a lesser amount. Then we have funding from various organisations to run projects, and there has been some corporate money for different issues as well. It has been important for us to have a legal agreement, and to work towards having 50 per cent indigenous and 50 per cent non-indigenous work. That will take time, because people are living in poverty. You cannot put economic claims on indigenous people and say they must be economically sustainable in two years, when you know that 80 per cent or so of small businesses collapse in two years. When you are dealing with people in poverty, that is an unreal thing to do. It must be subsidised, but you must also show that you are trying to do your own thing. For instance, in running workshops, the user pays a little bit, and studios are rented whenever possible. Some of those things are happening. In 2002-03, we had sales to the value of \$38 000, and we earned workshop fees, studio rent and venue hire to the value of \$24 000. We have had \$2 600 in donations, by passing around a tin. Between the two years, we have had a 45 per cent increase in income generation and, importantly, 66.7 per cent of the art sold in the past 12 months was Pilbara Aboriginal art. The retail area has only been set up for the past six months, so this sets a very good

precedent. Because PACDAC is regional and the shire is local, one of the things we have tried to do is to share the things people are making. Some of the Cossack work has come up; we have taken some of the Karijini work. We have taken Port Hedland and Newman work to Cossack, so there is that free-flowing thing.

I am hoping in September to talk with all the visitor centres about the cultural protocol. We cannot have the commercialisation of Aboriginal art and craft if it is not authentic. You must be true to your local area, and give people opportunities to get their work up to the grade. We have a marketing and promotions person, courtesy of the PACC, and that position will finish in three weeks time. She has been able to label the work beautifully, and to get the background work for the web site done. She has been able to help us get more professional. That sort of position is very important. I have no administrative support. I do a regional job, with one wage and no permanent car. I do not have funding for a vehicle to do the job, so I put it all together with bits and pieces, hiring a car for a few months and doing what I can. It is tough out there.

The retail area and the presenters want to do the right thing. There is no easy formula for working with indigenous groups across the board. We are just telling people to try to form those personal relationships, work with older people and young people; and not to tack Aboriginal stuff on the end, to tick the indigenous box. Aboriginal people should be seriously involved at a management and planning level. The work should be taken out of the safe space to where Aboriginal people are. For the first time in the Country Arts touring menu for performances, there are people who are able to go bush with a suitcase and present a performance. These are big changes. We want that inclusiveness, and we want to keep encouraging it. The importance of promoting contemporary indigenous culture is very important. We know now that many people are interested in our works, and that is good for group self-esteem and for people feeling better about themselves. In mental health, the arts are a fantastic vehicle; keeping people out of jail and giving them a sense of pride. There are many examples of that in the Pilbara.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** That is an offshoot, not something you set out to do. Is that just something that happens, or is it what you set out to do as well, in terms of keeping people out of jail and those other community development issues that you raised?

**Ms Murray:** It is all part and parcel. When you recognise that the incarceration rate in the Pilbara and around Australia is so appalling, it is just a natural offshoot. The really strange thing is that some people only have the mind space to develop their art when they get to jail. The bigger questions are what happens in the jail with that art, how it is being taught, whether the cultural protocols are being met, and what happens financially with the work. Hopefully that is being mentioned in the inquiries into the prison system.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Can you tell us a bit about the relationship between your organisation and your local council?

**Ms Murray:** Yes. It started off with Aboriginal people in our area making deputations and seeing individuals whenever there was a council issue. That would have happened over a number of years. For myself, I was asked to help in some consultations with a mainstream project. We happened to have an excellent community development funding officer, Michelle Mackenzie, and some other excellent staff and a couple of people on council who have a social justice agenda. At least one has an arts agenda. We have had a couple of Aboriginal council members for the past couple of years, and they have made a very big difference. I encourage indigenous people to stand for council, because that is where you get the change, and to develop working relationships with the staff. It was a big effort for them to have found money and convinced council members without a big backlash from residents about council money going into purchasing a building for arts and crafts, knowing that indigenous people were a solid part of that. I am not saying that all the council members are totally convinced, but increasingly they are becoming convinced. I am not saying that all the council members have even set foot in our venue, or that they attend every opening, but over

time we are getting there. You cannot leave it just to goodwill; you have to invite everybody to come along to cultural awareness days, and make it a normal part of living in the Pilbara, that everybody does cultural awareness on indigenous issues, because it is a fact of life in the Pilbara. People should have a basic understanding of the poverty and other issues out there.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Does the council have a cultural or arts plan, that you know of?

**Ms Murray:** Yes, definitely. We worked on the cultural plan a number of years ago, and we got that reviewed last year. All of us involved in it discovered that we had achieved our cultural plan. That was an amazing feat. Tim Muirhead led us through that. We told him how we worked in Port Hedland. No consultant comes in without handing over skills. We set it up so that they trained a number of us to go out and work with our own little groups, and then we fed it back in and that became the cultural plan. We had Charmaine Papertree Green working with a group of under-10 footballers, finding out what they wanted for their cultural plan. What would make their life happier in Port Hedland, besides sport? We had people going out on site and working with minors. People worked with their own groups, and it was very successful. Now we have reviewed that cultural plan and set some more benchmarks. I know that has not been the case throughout the Pilbara. There have been some screaming disasters, which is a shame. I am hoping that this Country Arts conference we have been to over the last couple of days will enthuse people to go back out and get back on board.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Would you have advanced with your programs as far as you have without the support of the local council?

**Ms Murray:** We would never have been able to purchase the building, and buildings are big issues in mining towns, because there is such a lack of them. So, as a new organisation without much of a track record, there is no way that ATSIC could have afforded to back us with that amount of money.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Can we just have a bit of a chat about that, because one of the matters that comes up continually is the question of funding, how you get funded, and the letters of support syndrome. It seems as though it does not matter a tinker's cuss whether you are any good at doing what you do or you have a track record of being good at what you do, unless you have the 30 formal letters of support hanging off it. A new organisation starting out, albeit with skilled and experienced people has next to no chance. Is that fair comment?

**Ms Murray:** No, I disagree. For me, I can see it from the point of view of a person who writes applications, of one who receives them and sits on a panel, and of one who has done arts policy work, albeit one who is very new at this game. Three or four years in this game is nothing. However, I have a long history of doing community development work in the Pilbara, and my family is very much affected by those decisions. How else can you verify that these things are happening; that this artist will actually work with you; and that you did actually speak with Aboriginal teenagers about those issues? It is an opportunity for those skateboard kids to have somebody ask them what they really want to do, and to write a letter saying what they want to say. The next time you do it, they will write their own letter. It shows them what the process is. It is not that I will write the submission and then hide it, so that those people who are affected by it will never see it. You must be able to show them the letter that they have signed. It is a two-way street. That proof is crucial.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** I guess what you are putting to us - these are my words, not yours, so you may not agree - is that the submission process is part and parcel of the community development component of the arts.

**Ms Murray:** Absolutely. There is an issue of accountability, and an issue of handing over skills. It is too easy for those who have the well-paid jobs to do it all and walk around saying "Look at me; look at the project I did." If you have not handed over a skill, an understanding or a knowledge

base, so what? It just props you up in that job. We want those artists, those kids, those people, to be able to get those jobs if they choose to do it, and not shut the doors on them in terms of skilling up. I do appreciate the fact that you can fall into the habit of doing the form letter and just getting the signature, but it is forcing that arts group, administrator or volunteer committee to at least go out and have the conversation. In the indigenous sector that is very important when so many are not that literate.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** I was at the same conference you attended, and you were a star player. There was some discussion yesterday morning about the regional arts officer-type, permanently funded bureaucratic position. I do not say that in a judgmental way, but with my tongue firmly in my cheek. The model they drew on in the conversation was the Department of Sport and Recreation, with a regional manager, and then an officer and then administrative staff. There seemed to be a lot of support for that in the room. Have you got a view on that?

[10.45 am]

**Ms Murray:** I can talk only from the point of view of watching Gabrielle Sullivan work - a worker who is not from the Pilbara and is a non-indigenous person. She was plonked in Newman and is doing excellent work. As a lone person, if she did not have on-ground support, she would be battling. She has quickly developed a network. We have all said that we are an e-mail and a phone call away. She has done the cultural awareness training and all the things we have asked of her. I think it is a good thing to have an arts worker who can get her head around not only her own department's funding but also other funding, and be able to hand out the information. I think it is very crucial. If you did a mud map of how many arts-funded positions there are in this State, where they are, who funds them and what is their continuity, you would see that we are really light on. I do not know. There is a lot of development work too in skilling up and promotion, as well as eventually getting our work seen in other places. It is a huge task. In some ways we are 20 years behind other States.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Some of the other States have those sorts of positions. Is there a risk of that sort of position becoming the bureaucratic bottleneck for everything related to arts in the region?

**Ms Murray:** In that if you do not go through there, you will not get the money?

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** If you do not go to that regional arts person, you cannot get any Australia Council for the Arts or Country Arts WA funding or whatever; and there might be good reasons that people do not want to go to that person.

**Ms Murray:** I think you always have to be careful of that, and you always have to leave it out. You must leave it open. To me, that person is a conduit. He or she gives you information and support, no matter who you are. There will be people who may not want to work with me either. That is just the way it is. You always have to give people opportunities to make that choice. You cannot be like that.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** How high should we put that risk? I am sure you heard the comments at the conference. As I said, the committee has looked at other States, and there is absolutely no doubt that the pressure is coming for the creation of those sorts of positions. I am not convinced yet, and I believe there are a couple of issues. One of them is just how high we should put the risk of that bureaucratic control over arts funding in the region. Should we put it at the bottom end of the scale or should people be really aware of it? Where does it sit?

**Ms Murray:** I am not really sure either. All I know is that there are just not enough funds and not enough bodies out there who can write the submissions and access things for people. I think it is a really good time to seriously look at it.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** We are getting towards the end of the time allocated for your evidence. Is there anything other than what you have said that you would like to guide us towards?



This is part of our thinking process, if you like. It is when we collect a lot of evidence, input and thinking for the committee. Is there anything else or any obvious traps that you think we could walk into that you can counsel us about?

**Ms Murray:** I think it is a very fine line between the economic outcomes of indigenous art and craft. I had an experience the other day when, by good luck, I walked down Todd Street, Alice Springs. As I walked down the street, I had a very clear feeling that I did not want to be part of that. That really helped.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Can you tell us why? I have done that.

**Ms Murray:** Because if you do that walk, you will see a lot of mass-produced commercialisation of indigenous art. To me, it is just a tragedy, and there is not much that has much integrity. Then when you go into a couple of them - for instance, Papunya Tula, and there is another one called Mbantua - you know, just by walking in there, that they actually work closely with the artists, and they have an integrity about them. I do not want to ever get into that commercial scene. Of course, as tourists come through, they will want to buy the thing that costs under \$100 or under \$25 and is portable. That is okay; we can do that. However, we should not lose focus; the important thing is integrity. We must stop the rip-offs. We must encourage people to stop selling their work for grog and for fuel money. Sometimes people are selling their work for tucker money. You will not stop them doing that. We are talking about serious poverty issues, and all points in between.

**The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Thanks, Rose. We appreciate your evidence very much. Just before you go, I must tell you that what you have just said will be transcribed and posted to you. You will then get a period in which to comment and make corrections. That will then come back to us and form part of our record, and we will post you a copy of our report.