

## National Cultural Policy Submission

### Indigenous Fashion Projects, a program of the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation

This submission shares the exciting story of what is happening in First Nations fashion and textile practice, its huge potential for growth, its need for support, and its importance to the cultural development of Australia.

Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation (DAAFF) is an Indigenous owned and governed organisation with membership of more than 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Centres and many thousands of artists, designers and other creatives. The Indigenous Fashion Projects (IFP) program was started in 2020 in response to the exploding need from our First Nations stakeholders to support them in their ambitions and growing practice and enterprise in the fashion and textiles industry.

Submission prepared by: [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

#### Responses:

1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation
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2. What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

1. First Nations

Challenges:

- Lack of business development support and best practice understanding for First Nations artists and designers in relation to fashion and textiles.
- Protection of First Nations' intellectual property and agency in the fashion and textile industry.
- Difficulties in connecting with fashion industry networks and resources, including supply chain, distribution and promotion opportunities.
- Limited access to fashion industry education and skills development, particularly for young people and remote communities. Most First Nations creatives are self-taught and have not had access to opportunities for development, such as formal education, internships and access to markets.
- Pathways for development for First Nations creatives in the fashion and textiles industry are almost non-existent.

Opportunities:

- To share and protect First Nations culture and community through building fashion and textile practice and enterprise for artists and designers.
- To educate all Australians in First Nations culture and history through fashion and textiles.
- Wearing First Nations fashion gives non-Indigenous people an opportunity to share the responsibility of truth telling, education and advocacy.
- First Nations art and fashion can be a powerful tool in the expression of Australia's national identity.

- To realise the fast growing opportunities for First Nations creatives across the \$27.2b fashion industry in Australia as well as globally, through supporting capability development, promotion and the building of strong networks.
- To support the building of creative enterprises and jobs in regional and remote First Nations communities.
- For the broader fashion industry to lead in sustainable and ethical practice by learning from and aligning with First Nations wisdom, ways of being and sustainable practice in maintaining responsibilities to Country.
- To support the growth of First Nations artists and designers in fashion by developing a new way of education that is focused in community and Indigenous Knowledge systems.
- To continue the building of best practice and growth frameworks in First Nations art and design, including creative practice, intellectual property, business, legal and government support.
- The current emerging fashion and textiles practitioners and the organisations supporting them are starting to pave the way for future generations.

## 2. A Place for Every Story

### Challenges:

- First Nations' stories and histories have always been underrepresented in the Australian fashion industry, both in products that are sold and in representation in the workforce.
- The large fashion industry should reflect the culture of its place and this is not currently the case for First Nations Australians.

### Opportunities

- Creativity is at the core of First Nations beingness. Thousands of generations of dance, song, design, crafting and adornment is First Nations culture and way of life. Support toward First Nations creativity supports First Nations identity and ways of being.
- Support for First Nations creative practice supports self determination and capacity to participate in the economy through naturally culturally expressive activity. It embraces the unique identity of First Nations people, empowering and restoring value to our First Peoples and providing opportunities for healing the extensive trauma.
- The current emerging First Nations fashion sector is driven by artists, emerging designers and communities and has the opportunity to address the problems of underrepresentation.
- Fashion allows for the sharing of the diversity of artistic expression from different Indigenous nations from all parts of the continent.
- Wearing First Nations fashion gives non-Indigenous people an opportunity to share the responsibility of truth telling, education and advocacy.
- Fashion consumers in Australia and overseas are quickly learning about the stories, culture and creativity of First Nations practitioners and are engaging with the emerging sector.

## 3. The Centrality of the Artist

### Challenges:

- Ensuring that artists' and designers' legal and commercial rights and opportunities are protected, for example Indigenous cultural intellectual property
- Protecting the voice of the artist through the creative and development processes as well as in the distribution, sale and ongoing post-sale use of the work.

### Opportunities:

- In the emerging First Nations fashion and textiles sector the artist and designer are central to creative practice and also to the reason it is growing in popularity with consumers and the media.
- The agency of the creative must be protected through supporting the artist, education of the industry, and regulation.
- Ongoing support for the development of formal protection of Indigenous Knowledge at organisations such as IP Australia.

- Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects program, with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts has been working on understanding best practice of First Nations art and design in the fashion industry with many learnings. These include drafting of agreements, engagement processes, cultural protocols and education. This work is a starting point and needs to continue. It will underpin the sustained success of the sector.

#### 4. Strong Institutions

##### Challenges:

- Current support for the First Nations fashion and textile sector is very small.
- The current funding of the First Nations creative sector needs a full review (Australia Council for the Arts and Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support) to incorporate textile and fashion design projects and organisations into their programs.
- There are very few organisations outside of Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects program that are supporting the growth of the First Nations fashion and textiles sector, and funding of these is almost non-existent.

##### Opportunities:

- Develop governance models that draw from and integrate culturally appropriate, innovative, and two way governance models.
- The opportunity for growth in First Nations fashion and textile enterprise is very large.
- Art and cultural institutions are increasingly acquiring First Nations textiles and fashion items for their collections.
- There are some strong and progressive organisations, such as Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects program, who have been supporting the sector for some years and with appropriate funding are well placed to have an even larger impact on the growth of the sector.
- Working with local First Nations communities and organisations (e.g. Art Centres and community groups) can leverage investment and Government business grants for quick and sustainable growth.

#### 5. Reaching the Audience

##### Challenges:

- To connect non-Indigenous Australians with the work, culture, stories and history of First Nations artists and designers through fashion.
- To safely promote First Nations creativity to the global fashion audience.

##### Opportunities:

- It is through events, showcases, development programs, digital platforms and the media that we at Indigenous Fashion Projects (IFP) connect to the various audiences for First Nations fashion and textiles. Our audiences are threefold; our First Nations key stakeholders, the fashion industry, and the broader Australian and international community.
- IFP has already initiated a number of sector building activities. There is a lot of room for growth of these and investment is needed. Following are some of the main activities that we have started:
  - Indigenous Fashion Projects' key events are: Country to Couture, an annual headline fashion runway celebrating First Nations culture and creativity through fashion; the National Indigenous Fashion Awards, an annual national awards ceremony that recognises and supports achievement in the sector; IFP at Australian Fashion Week, an international fashion runway where we support the commercial development of Australia's most promising fashion labels.
  - Indigenous Fashion Projects' key development programs are; Pathways Program, an ongoing development program for First Nations fashion labels with support from industry leaders and specialists; Best Practice project, which is developing foundational understanding of how to support the growth of First Nations creatives in the fashion industry.

- Indigenous Fashion Projects has developed a website, [ifp.org.au](http://ifp.org.au), to share information and to host a learning centre for the dissemination of the learnings gained through the various projects and to bring people and organisations together.
- Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects program is in the early stages of building a digital platform to support artists, Art Centres and designers to build digital skills across their practice in order to reach their potential in the fashion market. This includes in design and development, supply chain management, retailing and promotion.
- This new platform also has the potential to collectively promote the work of First Nations creatives, drawing in consumers to engage with and purchase works and products, and, to be a space for knowledge sharing and learning about culture.
- Initiate a program to promote Australia's First Nations fashion creatives overseas, building international relationships, conducting research and developing a strategy to enable international connections for First Nations artists, Art Centres, designers and other creatives in the fashion sector.

**3. Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:**

**1. First Nations**

Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation (DAAFF) is an Indigenous owned and governed organisation with membership of more than 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Centres and many thousands of artists, designers and other creatives. The Indigenous Fashion Projects (IFP) program was started in 2020 in response to the exploding need from our First Nations stakeholders to support them in their ambitions and growing practice and enterprise in the fashion and textiles industry.

IFP was founded with the challenge to address the gaps that were identified through broad consultation with First Nations textile and fashion creatives. These were:

- Lack of business development support and best practice understanding across the sector.
- Difficulties in connecting with industry networks and resources, including supply chain, distribution and promotion opportunities.
- Limited access to industry education and skills development, particularly for young people.
- Protecting and developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community.

IFP undertakes a number of headline First Nations fashion events each year; Country to Couture, the National Indigenous Fashion Awards (NIFA) and Australian Fashion Week. We also support the sector through a number of development programs, including our Pathways Program for First Nations designers and our Best Practice program for foundational support. We have also engaged a very strong network of industry partners in this work.

Fashion is a potential game-changer for First Nations communities because it has the potential to create employment and earn income for a wide range of people; artists, designers, models, stylists and photographers to name a few. It is also a creative outlet and commercial opportunity that has the potential to allow for the practitioner's agency to be maintained throughout.

**2. A Place for Every Story**

It is vital for Australia's cultural maturity that our First Nations stories are able to be told and that they are heard. We have found through our many events and our development programs that fashion is a powerful vehicle for telling First Nations stories.

**3. The Centrality of the Artist**

First Nations artists, designers and other creatives are central to the development of their fashion practice, through the telling of their stories, culture, the connection to country and community, and truth-telling of the history of Australia.

#### 4. Strong Institutions

Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects is solely focused on the growth of the practice and enterprise of Australia's First Nations peoples in the fashion and textiles sector. This includes promotion, development programs, and education and information sharing platforms. All can be seen at [www.ifp.org.au](http://www.ifp.org.au).

#### 5. Reaching the Audience

The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects connects with our First Nations key stakeholders, the fashion industry and the broader Australian and international community. There are many different ways that we connect with them, through one-to-one engagement, our headline fashion events, our development programs and our online resources and education. It is important to the development of the sector that what we have started is able to continue to develop.

4. We may use some of your words as part of the National Cultural Policy Report. If we do, how would you like us to attribute your words? (tick your choice of attribution and complete the fields if applicable) - YES

**Names:** [REDACTED]

**Organisation (if applicable):** Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation's Indigenous Fashion Projects

**Contact (email or phone):** [REDACTED]