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## AUSTRALIA : DEFENDING THE OCEAN – GHOSTNET SCULPTURES

**Aquarium de Paris, 5 april to 15 august 2017**

**17.06.01**

**Sid Bruce Short Joe - Speech**



I want to acknowledge the traditional landowners of Paris past and present.

I want to thank Stephane Jacob and Suzanne O'Connell for all their hard work and belief in our people and art. I want to thank the aquarium staff for hanging our show. They have done an incredible job. I want to thank the Australian Embassy in Paris for their support as well as Arts Queensland. Many people worked to make this happen. I thank you all.

My name is Syd Bruce Ornkoo Munwoonko Kemthan. This is my real traditional name. This is my fresh water and salt water name. I am of the Wik liyanh tribe and language. I am a fresh water man.

One of my earliest memories is sitting on my grandfather's lap. I remember moving my fingers over his scars. My old people would scar themselves. The scars showed he was an initiated man. Being initiated meant he knew his song lines and how to survive on country; land and sea. It meant he was responsible to be a care-taker of country.

When I was a boy we spent many months living the bush living the old ways learning traditional knowledge. I slept in a humpy which is a simple house made of palm leaves and branches. I remember those days as being some of my best. Our way of life was based on country and full of meaning.

I come from Pormpuraaw.

Pormpuraaw means entrance way to a humpy or house in Thaayorre language.

The crocodile and the fish named barramundi are the totems for this place. That means they own this country and the people that live there belong to them.

It is a beautiful place on the Gulf of Carpentaria Queensland surrounded by unspoiled land and sea filled with fish, birds and animals.

I speak 9 indigenous languages plus English. We have no word for art in my language. Art is a new language for me to share my culture and knowledge passed down from the old ones. For my people we had the law and all these things were one country, language, culture and art.

Ghost nets are a terrible form of pollution. Ghost Nets are damaged fishing nets illegally thrown overboard into the ocean rather than being taken back to land and disposed of properly. This form of pollution is completely preventable. We take this terrible form of pollution and try to make beautiful and meaningful artwork out of it. Our artwork educates people about the environmental impact caused.

Our people always eat the fish we catch. We do not kill them without reason. In addition to fish ghost nets kill sea turtles, dolphins, whales and marine animals many endangered species.

When I was young man we had many sawfish in our waters. I call this fish Kampainyinh in my language. This is a very important fish to our culture. Now this fish is gone from our waters never seen any. A part of our cultural identity is gone. This fish is more than something to eat. It is our totem or spiritual being. It connects my culture and me to the environment. It is part of me and I am part of it. I want to see this important fish living in our waters again.

Fish and animals are our totems. For me they are my ancestors and define which country I belong to. A totem is what my people become when we die. They are part of us and we are part of them. We celebrate them with song and dance.

All the people of the world are connected to the environment.

Those people that throw nets over the side of their fishing boats or pollute the environment in other ways have forgotten their connection. The connection is still there but they do not realize it. Their practices are misguided based on ignorance, laziness or greed. We all need to look after land and sea. No matter where we live or what nation we belong to the oceans belong to all of us and are all connected.

I am delighted and honored to be here tonight sharing my culture with you. I hope we can all join together and work together with one goal; that is "To Defend our oceans". We are all the same people wanting to do the right thing for our future generations.

# Australie : la défense des océans sculptures en «Ghostnet»



Steven Kepper, «Pieuve» 2016  
© Photo : Pormpuraaw Art & Culture Centre

Œuvres réalisées par les artistes du Pormpuraaw Art & Culture Centre  
sous la direction de Paul Jakubowski.

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Exposition réalisée sous le haut-patronage de  
S. E. M. Stephen Brady, Ambassadeur d'Australie en France,  
avec le soutien du Département des Arts du Queensland (Australie)

Remerciements à  
Tea Dietterich, Béatrice Hedde, Brigitte Saby,  
Alexandra Moussay et Robin Perdriolle.

