



*Opposite
Helen Milminydjarrk,
Helen Ganalmirriwuy
and Margaret Rarru
from the Milingimbi
Art and Culture centre,
weaving dilly bags and
baskets from pandanus
tree, bush string and
natural dye*

*This page
Yolngu woodworker
Terrence Baker with
Rob Chrisfield, a
furniture-making
veteran who now lives
on Milingimbi Island*

Despite the accolades, White, who plans on having less to do with the business as it finds its feet, feels that Manapan can do more. Together with his Milingimbi colleagues, he's embarked on an ambitious plan to get the Government to place a piece of Manapan furniture in Australian embassies around the world. Naturally, Manapan would benefit financially from such a move. But it's more than a cunning business strategy.

The Government has spent countless millions on programs aimed at improving the livelihoods of Indigenous people – often to little or no effect. In the eyes of Manapan's leadership, by diverting some of that money into a little furniture operation, the government wouldn't just be exporting Australian art around the world; it'd be taking practical steps to improve employment opportunities in Milingimbi, and highlighting the benefits of creative, cross-cultural enterprises over more traditional, charity-driven ventures.

Yolngu elder and Manapan Chairperson Keith Lapalung agrees that the success of Manapan is bigger than just business. "It's hope. Manapan provides a seed for the Indigenous peoples of Milingimbi to rise up and strengthen. There is demand, there is desire, and there are needs for Manapan furniture."

There are all of these things. But as of writing, Manapan has received no orders from any of the Australian embassies around the world. At this early stage in the campaign, it's unclear whether anyone high up in the Government has even seen one of its pieces, let alone comprehended the opportunity they represent. Still, the folk behind Manapan remain hopeful things might change.

"The Government should share what is made in Milingimbi with the nations and embassies around the world," Lapalung says. "Because we are the real 'closing the gap'. We are the real reconciliation. And we are the real progress." •