

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Office of the Status of Women

# **Women's business**

**Report of the  
Aboriginal Women's Task Force**

by  
Phyllis Daylight and Mary Johnstone

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# Preface

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The scope of this report is indicated by its Terms of Reference.

## Terms of Reference

- To inquire into the involvement of Aboriginal women in land rights, culture, health, housing, education, employment, legal aid, child welfare (with particular reference to adoption and fostering of Aboriginal children).
- To seek to have Aboriginal women identify their critical needs in those areas.
- To make recommendations to the Commonwealth on what action may be taken.

Our team of thirteen women had twelve months to consult with Aboriginal women across Australia. During this time we were able to identify a wide range of needs among Aboriginal women living in diverse conditions. Because of the broad scope, some issues raised in the report require further development through on-going consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women.

Our consultations focused on women as part of the broad Aboriginal community and the report reflects their views and needs from that perspective.

There are particular groups of Aboriginal women whose problems need further investigation. These include young women whose traditional deference to older women during our consultations meant their voices were rarely raised, as well as women in institutions such as prisons or girls' homes to whom we did not have access, and women who work in government bureaucracies and their agencies whose anxiety to tell us about the groups they serve took precedence over expressing their own needs.

We also suggest that similar consultations take place with Torres Strait Island women and South Sea Island women resident in Australia. Whilst we did meet with a small number of Torres Strait and South Sea Island women we believe that their different cultural values mean that their views and needs are not necessarily the same as those of Aboriginal women.

During our travels we became increasingly aware that separating the issues of health, housing, education, employment, legal aid, child care, land rights and culture was almost impossible. The organisation of the material in the report reflects this.

We also knew that the opinions expressed by the women were from their perspective as recipients of government policies and programs. In many instances views expressed are evidence that what the users



ultimately receive differs from what the policies and programs were intended to deliver. Many readers of this report may conclude that the views expressed are rather negative. Nonetheless we are confident that this report is an accurate representation of how the majority of women who spoke with us view their world—a world in which daily they must contend with racism; struggle not for quality of life but for survival; and somehow maintain the strength and inner fortitude to keep on trying.

Their hopes and determination for improvement in all facets of their daily lives are demonstrated by their willingness to share with us so frankly so much of their struggle.

In keeping with our view that we wanted to give back to women and communities something in return for the information that was so generously given to us, we have included a description of Commonwealth and State government housing, welfare and other human services responsibilities. We hope that Aboriginal women wherever they live will find it helpful.

The report is divided into three sections. The first includes a summary of the main findings, the recommendations and a list of places visited. The second is the main body of the report, which concentrates on Aboriginal women and what they had to say about their families, their difficulties, themselves and their needs. The third section contains the appendixes and includes a description of the consultative process and the staff involved, an historical backdrop to the Task Force and the Administration of Aboriginal Affairs 1788–1985, a Guide to the Commonwealth Government's Responsibilities in the Administration of Aboriginal Affairs and finally selected statistics.

We are profoundly grateful to all the Aboriginal women who, in our too short consultations with them, welcomed us and shared with us. We are particularly grateful to Patsy Salam, Marjorie Wymarra, Ellie Gaffney, Lillian Bush, Connie Bush, Mabel Bond and Chrissie Bell, without whose enthusiasm, support and encouragement the work of the Task Force in the early stages would have been much more difficult.

This report is the first of its kind for Government and represents what must be only the beginning of a heightened awareness of the way in which Aboriginal women live, provide and care for families and perceive the world. If governments are to deliver appropriate and adequate services and programs to Aboriginal women they must increase this awareness through continued consultations with Aboriginal women.

The benefits of having Aboriginal women consulting with their own people are perhaps best summed up in their own words: 'You do realise that we would not be telling you these things if you were not Aboriginal women', a statement repeated many times.

The women took full advantage of the Commonwealth Government specifically asking for their views for the first time. They saw the Task Force team as providing a direct link with the Government, especially as we were located within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. This, and our Aboriginality, seem to have allayed some of their doubts and resentments about government and bureaucratic interferences in their lives.

We always made it very clear to the women we spoke with that this was their inquiry, that it belonged to them. Our reports, and those of the regional co-ordinators, on women's views are the basis of this report. It will, we hope, highlight to governments and authorities the value of obtaining directly the views of Aboriginal and Islander women.

To all those women who spoke with us we would like to say thank you. Not just for the information but for the personal advice and support you gave us.

*Phyllis Daylight*  
Phyllis Daylight

*M. Johnstone*  
Mary Johnstone

July 1985



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# Acknowledgments

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It now seems such a long time ago that we began work on this project. So many women sat, talked and shared their views with us, so many communities were visited, so many women and men gave their time, energy and expertise and now so many words have been written.

We would like to thank all those people who contributed to this, the first report commissioned by the Commonwealth Government on the views of Aboriginal and Islander women throughout Australia.

There are a number of people whom we would like to thank specifically.

Mary Sexton without whose persistence this project probably would not have materialised.

All the members of our Support Group for their invaluable individual and collective expertise — Eleanor Bourke, Pearl Duncan, Flo Grant, Marcia Langton, Merle Jackomos, Margaret Wirrpanda, Gloria Brennan,<sup>1</sup> Janet Layton, Alexis Omond, Pat Turner, Jackie Huggins.

All the Regional Co-ordinators for their efforts in gathering material which was central to the compilation of this report — Vicki Nangala-Tippett, Patricia Walkington, Ada Branfield, Glynis Sibosado, Jocelyn Mallie, Margaret Packanen, Louise Corpus, Beverley Muir, Karen Barry, Thomasisha Passmore-Skelly, Gwen Ridgeway. (See Appendix 1)



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1. Sadly, Gloria Brennan died in November 1985. We loved working with her and we will miss her greatly.



Our families and those of the Regional Co-ordinators who not only supported and encouraged us but who also took on additional responsibilities during our extended periods away from home.

Lois O'Donoghue, Gloria Brennan, Margaret Valadian, Natasha McNamara, Josie Crawshaw, Dawn Allen, Margot Weir, Jane Morrison, Helen Ross, Diane Bell, and Carol Cooper for willingly giving of their time and advice.

The members of the then National Aboriginal Conference and their staff who provided support and resources when we were consulting in their electorates.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs for assisting us with publicity and resources.

The networks of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Associations and the National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Service all of whom facilitated contact with many communities.

Hazel Hawke for her support at our National Conference.

Pat Croft for making available her wealth of experience as our editor.

Carol Burman for her efforts in typing the many drafts of the report.

Michaela Richards for preparing Appendixes 4 and 5.

The staff of the Office of the Status of Women.

The staff of Office Services Division and the Finance Section of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

For their assistance in providing photographs, Black Women in Focus, the Australian Information Service, Ruth Lipscombe and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations.

Jeannie Devitt for photographs of women from the Utopia community, N.T.

Helen Ross for her photographs of women and houses from Halls Creek, Warmun and Kundat Djaru communities, W.A.

And finally, Senator the Hon. Susan Ryan, Minister for Education and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, for her interest and support throughout the project.

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# Abbreviations

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ABSEC	Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme
ADC	Aboriginal Development Commission
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AHA	Aboriginal Housing Association
APHIP	Aboriginal Public Health Improvement Program
AHL	Aboriginal Hostels Ltd
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
AWARE	Aboriginal Women's Alcohol Recovery Establishment
BCHS	Black Community Housing Service
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CEP	Community Employment Program
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCW	Department of Community Welfare
FCAATSI	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
IPTAAS	Isolated Patients Travel and Assistance Program
NAC	National Aboriginal Conference
NACC	National Aboriginal Consultative Committee
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NAEDC	National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee
NAIHO	National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation
NESA	National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals
OWA	Office of Women's Affairs
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
TAP	Training for Aboriginals Program
TCAP	Town Campers Assistance Program

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# Places visited by Members of the Task Force

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## Tasmania

Hobart	Burnie	Flinders Island
Launceston	Triabrunna	Cape Barren Island

## New South Wales/ACT

Sydney	Walgett	Tumut
Tamworth	Broken Hill	Deniliquin
Wagga Wagga	Hay	Narrandera
Albury	Bourke	Yass
Queanbeyan	Moree	Wreck Bay
Batemans Bay	Nowra	Balranald
Port Macquarie	Moruya	Canberra
Menindee	Cowra	Mungindi

## South Australia

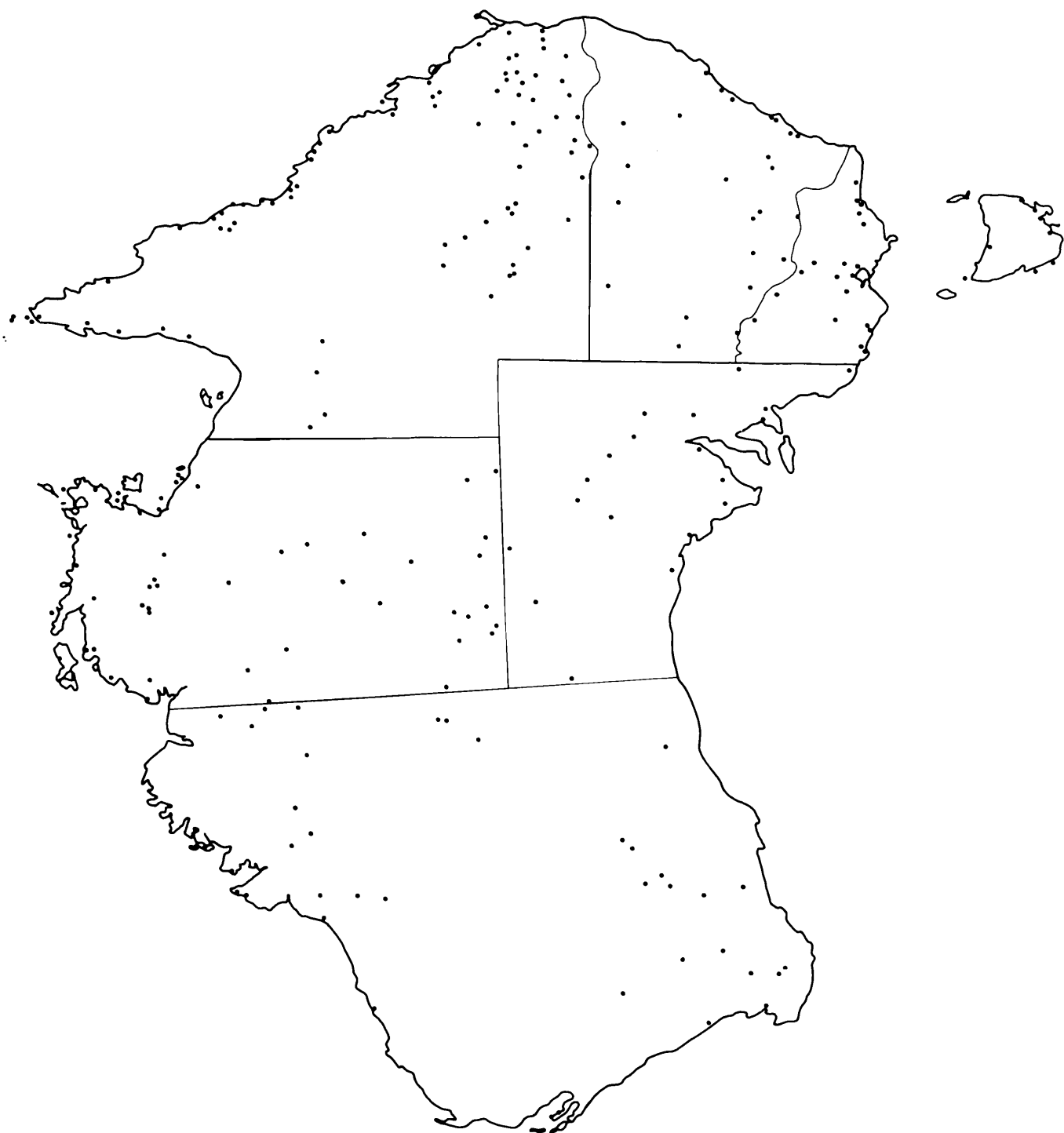
Adelaide	Ernabella	Maree
Whyalla	Berri	Port Lincoln
Mt Gambier	Nepabunna	Murray Bridge
Port Augusta	Oodnadatta	Ceduna/Poverty Flat
Leigh Creek	Coober Pedy	Yalata
William Creek		

## Northern Territory

Alice Springs	Maningrida	Willowra
Darwin	Yirrkala	Kalambulba
Katherine	Groote Eylandt	Djembere outstation
Tennant Creek	Finke	via Mataranka
One Mile Dam	Ali-Curang	Elliott
Knuckeyes Lagoon	Port Keats	Daly River
Kalano	Beswick Station	Bamyili
Rock Hole	Lajamanu	Waugit Reserve
Uluru	Ngukurr	Snake Bay
Belyuen	Docker River	Numbulwar
Bathurst Island	Yuendumu	Borrooloola
Palurumpi	Daguragu	Oenpelli
Milikapiti	Bagot	

## Western Australia

Perth	Port Hedland	Kununurra
Broome	Katanning	Noonkanbah
Derby/Mowanjum	Fitzroy Crossing	Looma
Kalgoorlie	Halls Creek	Yule River



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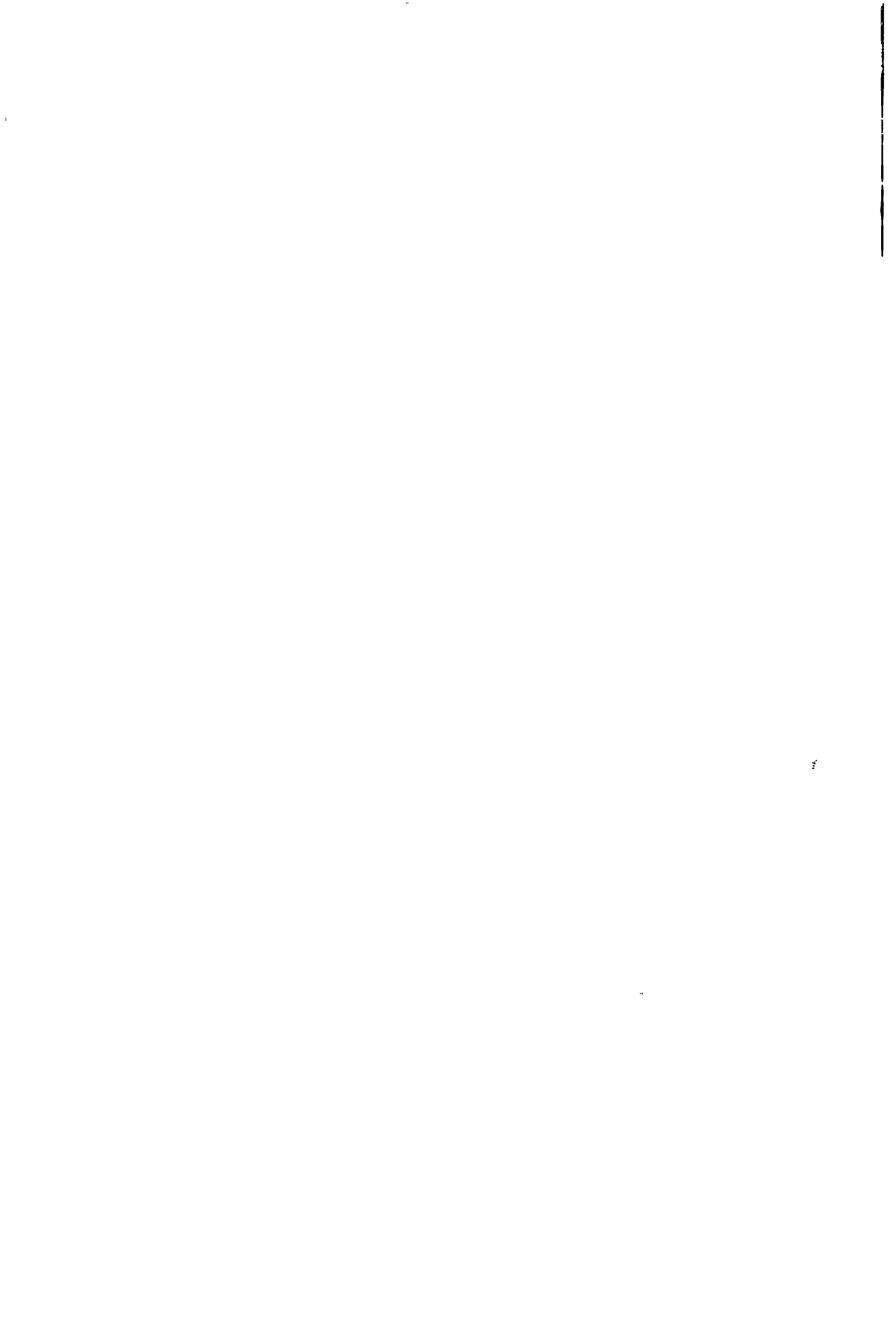
Beagle Bay	Bunbury	Marribank
Lombadina	Turkey Creek	Laverton
One Arm Point	Warburton	Mt Margaret
Narrogin	Coolgardie	Menzies
Esperance	La Grange	Blackstone
		Jamieson

**Queensland and  
Torres Strait Islands**

Cairns	Ayr	Cloncurry
Brisbane	Bowen	Tambo
Townsville	Proserpine	Morven
Rockhampton	St Laurence	Mitchell
Toowoomba	Innisfail	Roma
Ipswich	Atherton	Dalby
Mackay	Murgon	Bungunya
Tully	Wandoan	Talwood
Murray Upper	Taroom	Thallon
Kennedy	Kingaroy	Dirranbandi
Eidsvold	Theodore	Bollon
Munduberen	Maryborough	Cunnamulla
Gayndh	Warwick	Quilpie
Aurukun	Goondiwindi	Bundaberg
Yarrabah	Inglewood	Cherbourg
Lockhardt	Charleville	Chinchilla
Edward River	Augathella	Windorah
Kowanyama	Blackall	St George
Thursday Island	Barcaldine	Surat
Palm Island	Longreach	Meandarra
Mornington Island	Julia Creek	Woorabinda
Hopevale	Mt Isa	Miles
Bamaga	Camooweal	Baralaba
Cardwell	Mareeba	Banana
Ingham	Cooktown	
	Weipa South	

**Victoria**

Melbourne	Echuca	Portland
Dandenong	Robinvale	Heywood
Geelong	Swan Hill	Orbost
Ballarat	Morwell	Healesville
Shepparton	Bairnsdale	Lake Tyers
Bendigo	Framlingham	
Horsham	Warrnambool	



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# Summary of findings

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## **Aboriginal people's place in society**

Few Aboriginal and Islander people today live in the way their ancestors did. The changes that have occurred since 1788 have affected the size and structure of their population, the places and ways in which they live, their economy, their health and their relationships within the family. They have had to learn to live within a non-Aboriginal society in which they are regarded as less than equal and denied basic human rights.

Aboriginal people generally have a lower social and economic status than the wider Australian community. There are many reasons for this situation and over the years a number of inquiries have sought to determine ways to improve the status of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people must be the most widely researched group in Australian society. Aboriginal people are now asking—How many more books have to be written about the high imprisonment rates (believed to be among the highest in Western society) of Aboriginal people? How many more studies need to be carried out on the substandard housing conditions in which Aboriginal people are forced to live? How many more Aboriginal children have to be removed from their families; be ignored by the education system; be ill-equipped to compete in the labour market and end up in dole queues? How much more rhetoric will be needed between white people, even at the highest level of the political and legal systems, before the one body that has the resources and the finances and the power to make inroads into the injustices—the Commonwealth Government—takes positive action?

But women have never before been consulted by a Commonwealth Government. This report is an important and unique contribution to the Government's state of knowledge about the needs and views of Aboriginal women.

The Terms of Reference of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force specified that it consult with as many women as possible, spread over as wide a geographical area as possible.

Everywhere we went, however, we and the Regional Co-ordinators observed the outstanding significance of the role of women in both family and community affairs. Despite all the vicissitudes of the last 200 years they remain the nurturers and teachers of the young, both their own and those they foster. In particular it is the women who are responsible for teaching young children about their Aboriginal identity.

In traditional times both parents (and the extended family) shared the responsibilities for raising the young children. As the children grew older ceremonial education of young girls was organised by the women according to kinship ties; that of the boys, by the men. The parallel roles of food providers and child raisers and the separate ceremonies and land

ownership of women and men formed the basis of a complementary and balanced social structure.

Where ceremonial practices no longer exist the major responsibility for the children of both sexes and all ages has fallen on the women, though both sexes still retain some of their traditional values and practices.

These values are passed from one generation to another. Though some are discarded completely, others remain, either held strongly or with modification or adaptations, depending to a large extent on the amount of contact with and internalisation of other value systems.

These responsibilities place the women under considerable stress as they contend with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal influences.

The benefit of having Aboriginal women consult with other Aboriginal and Islander women has been immense. This report relies upon their views. The Task Force team, however, has merely scratched the surface and our major recommendation is that consultations with Aboriginal and Islander women needs to be an integral part of any governmental consultation processes with Aboriginals in the future. Women's position within their own communities is such that to ignore their input would be to ignore a whole range of experience and knowledge.

Women's roles in the Aboriginal extended family are vitally significant and much respected. Their roles as mothers, aunts, sisters and grandmothers encompass the responsibility for the raising, care and discipline of children. Families revolve around the women and depend upon them to counter outside influences and maintain the strength and togetherness of their families. The women are also heavily relied upon for the continuation of Aboriginal values and practices within their family. This is despite rapid changes both within the family unit and in the wider society.

They must carry out their difficult tasks within an overall environment which exacts heavy tolls on their health, strength, dignity and self esteem.

For many, overcrowded living conditions are a way of life. There are never enough houses and it is not unusual to find family members spanning three or four generations under the one small roof. Given the rights, obligations and reciprocal expectations of the family, the small and substandard housing that most Aboriginal people are forced to occupy is inappropriate. Bigger and more costly accommodation is generally not an option since most exist on low incomes whether they have a job or not.

Women ensure that clothes, food and sleeping arrangements are provided for all the family members residing with them. Stress and tension are ever present because the struggle is accompanied by low incomes, little education or training, and unemployment. Drug and alcohol abuse, poor health and early deaths are all too often the result for those who cannot cope with the continual pressure which affects all members of the family.

The women often feel powerless to do anything about their children's schooling, employment prospects and futures. These children without sympathetic intervention are destined to continue the cycle as they become adults.

Husbands must also bear the pressures along with their wives and children. Many men have to leave their home and community to travel to other areas in search of employment.

Increasingly the struggle to obtain employment results in anxiety and tensions which in turn often leads to alcohol abuse and crime. The imprisonment rate of Aboriginal men and women is disproportionately high, placing further strain on the household.



All of the issues the Task Force investigated under our Terms of Reference are interwoven. To refer to education, for example, is almost impossible without any knowledge of living conditions at home, health, unemployment and various characteristics of Aboriginal society today.

We also knew that communities are not necessarily homogeneous and that traditional behaviour patterns still dictate relationships within communities. These behaviour patterns can have a major effect on the provision and utilisation of services in non-homogeneous communities.

- People will not use a service where by doing so they will come in contact with people who, by their law, they are not allowed to associate with.
- It is essential that policy makers and program administrators are aware of the impact of Aboriginal law on usage of services in non-homogeneous communities.

The 1981 census shows the Aboriginal population as 159 897. In all States it is far less urbanised than the Australian population as a whole. Fewer than 20 per cent live in major urban areas (compared with 63 per cent of the general population) and 42 per cent live in centres with a population of fewer than 1000 people.

Aboriginal people live in a number of different types of communities: remote areas on Aboriginal land where entry is restricted, remote or isolated places, town camps on the outskirts of built-up areas, missions and reserves, rural and urban areas and communities on commercial enterprises such as pastoral properties or mining operations.

The age distribution of the Aboriginal population is also very different from that of the overall Australian population. In 1981, 44.8 per cent of Aboriginals were under 15 years of age compared with 25.1 per cent of the Australian population.

Our major findings, in summary form, are:

## **Lack of information**

Our realisation that among Aboriginal women there is an overall lack of detailed information about existing government services and programs was perhaps the most outstanding finding of the Task Force's consultations. The women we spoke with were unsure of how to deal with governments: where or how to secure funding for various projects; where or how to gather information about and to apply for benefits; the relationship between various Commonwealth and State bodies.

This general lack of knowledge stems from:

- the complex nature of many of the issues;
- the way in which government departments, agencies and organisations disseminate information;
- the lack of awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of Aboriginal women on the part of public servants (which is a reflection of their backgrounds); and
- the women's lack of confidence in making inquiries to white counter staff.

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## **Self-determination**

*AR/S*

The desire of Aboriginal women to control their own lives and to become independent of the welfare system was raised repeatedly. They told us that they are not satisfied with having to rely on some form of welfare

benefit for their livelihood. More importantly they are tired of being expected to accept without question such an existence. They want better opportunities for themselves so they can ensure that their children will have options to this cycle of dependency. They want restored their spiritual, economic and social base, lost when Europeans took their land.

For many Aboriginals inalienable title to their lands is the basis of their struggle for self-management. For others improved health, educational and employment prospects will go a long way to achieving self-management.

Aboriginal women and men often cannot demonstrate their intelligence, capability and reliability because they are treated as though they cannot take responsibility or make decisions. They are expected to be happy with policies and programs designed in the main by non-Aboriginals, to suit Australia-wide policy needs rather than those of individual communities. Furthermore, they are not given the opportunity to adapt and modify programs so that they will suit the diverse needs of the users. It is essential for positive steps to be taken by involving Aboriginals in the development and administration of policy and programs if they are to have any real choice about their future.

Aboriginal women and men want the opportunity to determine what is best for their future and that of future generations. To do so they want the latitude to decide how they will achieve their identified goals. They realise that along the way mistakes will be made *but* they want the right to find their own solutions. They know that they have the potential to develop expertise in their chosen fields and that it will take time before progress is evident.

Moreover, they want their right to make decisions in accordance with their traditions, chosen way of life and cultural identity to be recognised on an equal footing with all other Australians'. The degree to which Aboriginals achieve self-management will depend on the power they have to control their spiritual, economic and social development in a manner that is not determined by others such as mining companies or pastoralists.

The Federal Government is committed to the right of Aboriginals to determine their own lives. All the Aboriginal people are asking is that the Government empower them to do so.

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## **Housing**

Housing was, without question, the most discussed of all the issues. The women's definitions of accommodation covered a variety of structures from wind breaks with communal kitchens and ablution blocks to the conventional house.

We found that many women living in houses built to the white housing model of three bedrooms, lounge, kitchen and so on, had not been encouraged by the providers (of housing) to develop a design which would best suit their needs. Similarly the option for women living in camps or temporary shelters was seen as the conventional three-bedroom house.

For many women the provision of such houses presented as many problems as it solved.

The main findings were:

- shortage of housing is chronic;
- design and size are not suitable for Aboriginal culture or the extended family living arrangements of Aboriginal people;
- maintenance is poor or non-existent;

- there are long waiting lists for State housing;
- private housing is generally not an option because of high rental and discrimination;
- cost of living in houses caused stress when coupled with low incomes—paying for rent, power, gas, furnishings and water is a major difficulty especially for those women on pensions and benefits, and those who have recently moved into rented houses.

All of the above lead to overcrowding, and, together with the lack of basic facilities, all contribute to high levels of stress and low level of health, and have an adverse effect on the children's ability to study.

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## Education

Differences in cultural values between the home and school manifest themselves on the very first day of school. The gaps in learning begin then and widen as Aboriginal children progress through schooling. Aboriginal women said that they needed to become more involved in their children's schooling but given their own poor experience with school their reticence is hardly surprising. The women recognised that their children's experience of school is to a large extent the same as their own. Their confidence is low and they have not been encouraged to feel comfortable or welcome in the schools.

The main findings were:

- *Staff*
  - More sensitive teachers who have had training in Aboriginal culture and society were needed. Some teachers address Aboriginal girls by derogatory and offensive names, often with a sexual connotation.
  - More Aboriginal staff in school (teachers, home/school liaison officers, counsellors) would alleviate some of the difficulties children and parents are facing, by breaking down misunderstanding and prejudice and providing appropriate role models.
- *Aboriginal cultural studies*
  - These should be compulsory in all schools.
  - They would benefit both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.
  - They must be developed and taught by Aboriginal people wherever possible.
- *Language*
  - Differences exist between the language in the home and the school; need for assistance in learning English is essential.
  - Aboriginal languages should be taught in schools along with French, German, Indonesian, etc.
- *Literature and textbooks*
  - Literature and textbooks which are largely designed for a white mono-cultural society have no real relevance to Aboriginal children.
- *Police harassment in schools*
  - There were reports in some areas of children being taken from school by police during school hours without parents or some other Aboriginal person present.
- *Peer group pressure*
  - To achieve at school often means to become alienated from others in the group.

- *Cost of schooling*
  - Children are ridiculed because of lack of money.
  - The Aboriginal school grant and tutors scheme should be available for primary as well as secondary age school children (damage is already done and the gap too wide by the time the child reaches high school age).
- *Adult education*
  - This would serve to increase the number of educated women who can serve as role models.
  - The lack of accommodation and child care facilities are a major stumbling block for those who have to live away from home to study.
  - Support systems, e.g. enclaves, significantly assist in increasing participation in tertiary education.

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## Health

We found most women were unwilling to disclose information about their own health and generally the discussions centred around health services. They argued:

- More Aboriginal women health workers would overcome some of the reticent to seek medical attention and allow women to speak openly about their health needs.
- There was a lack of accommodation or co-ordinated health services for women from rural or remote areas who must seek medical attention for themselves and their families in urban centres.

In remote areas some women must leave home up to six weeks before the birth of their children. They experience loneliness, and more importantly cultural isolation, especially when they speak little English.

- Accommodation is not provided for family.
- Traditional law is not taken into account at this important occasion.
- Non-Aboriginal men are present at the birth which is traditionally women's business.

Even though many women have had large families they feel that their knowledge of the reproductive cycle is inadequate and therefore do not feel confident to pass on to their daughters what they do know.

- Aboriginal women despair for the number of young women having babies.
- Schools or medical centres should make sex education programs available.

Limited access to nutritious food contributes significantly to the poor state of health of Aboriginal people. Trying to raise a family on a low income means that there is often not enough wholesome food in the home. Women in remote areas are particularly affected because of the higher cost of living. Traditional food collection is not always an option and women are at the mercy of shopkeepers who often take advantage of their monopoly situation.

Women were concerned about the care of old people. On a number of occasions they said that:

- Care of old people was difficult because of family breakdown, shortage of accommodation and low incomes.
- For the old people hospitalisation could be very traumatic especially for those who have not had much experience with health care outside

their remote communities and who speak and understand little English.

Alcohol abuse and the ever-increasing alcohol dependence of young and old, women and men, became a recurring theme in discussions on health. The social implications as well the physical effects were constantly discussed:

- Women are victims of their own habits as well as the drinking habits of their family.
- Alcohol abuse is directly related to the increase in domestic violence.
- Women are the victims of alcohol related crimes such as rape and murder.
- Children are neglected.
- Children should be taught the effect of drug and alcohol abuse.
- Information about the effects of alcohol abuse on unborn babies should be made available to young women especially.

There is increasing concern amongst women and men about petrol sniffing. They see their young people dying, or walking around as though heavily drugged, and often feel powerless to help them. The causes are very complex and the social milieu must be considered when dealing with the petrol sniffing habits of young Aboriginal children. The erratic and often violent behaviour of young sniffers has caused changes to social patterns.

- Because it is a recent phenomenon there is no traditional way to deal with petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities although the Pitjatjantjara people are taking positive steps to handle the problem.
- Although the effects of petrol sniffing have been well documented, little research has been undertaken on its specific effects on Aboriginal children.
- More recreational facilities for young people was considered to be one answer.

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## Care of children

The care of children is of major importance to Aboriginal women: their roles include that of mother, grandmother, sister and aunt.

Child care practices are firmly based on traditional ways. Discipline and teaching of children is shared by the extended family and the children belong to all the family members rather than to the biological parents alone. This concept of belonging is also extended to the wider Aboriginal community. To be 'grown up' (brought up) by a member of the extended family is not an unusual occurrence amongst Aboriginal families.

Fostering and adoption are therefore viewed differently by Aboriginal people.

The main findings were:

- Aboriginal women who still speak their own language and continue traditional practices are concerned that their children are losing traditional skills and language.
- Aboriginal values and ways of doing things should continue despite changes to the family unit.
- The special problems of teenagers need to be addressed.
- Child care centres that are culturally appropriate, convenient and inexpensive are needed.

- Multi-purpose centres that would provide recreation facilities for young people, child care facilities, information, resources and counsellors are all necessary.
- Aboriginal women want to see changes to the various States' fostering and adoption legislation that would:
  - ensure that fostering and adoption of Aboriginal and Islander children to non-Aboriginal people ceases immediately;
  - give Aboriginal and Islander people the responsibility for placing children into foster care or with adoptive parents;
  - ensure that siblings are not separated;
  - ensure that the children know who their families are.

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## Employment

Unemployment rather than employment was the issue discussed. Most Aboriginal women live on pensions and benefits rather than paid employment—this is a matter of necessity not choice, given high unemployment levels, generally low education levels and the lack of job opportunities in some areas. Life on a permanently low income offers little hope for the future. For many Aboriginal people there are limited prospects for employment given the lack of education qualifications and stereotyping of Aboriginals as dirty, lazy and unreliable.

The difficulties of competing for jobs are compounded when:

- circumstantial evidence suggests that small business owners prefer to employ Aboriginals with light coloured skin;
- the public sector, a major employer of Aboriginals, persists with selections processes which effectively deter Aboriginals from demonstrating their suitability for positions—e.g. selection criteria, even for identified positions, give bureaucratic expertise precedence over Aboriginality; panel members are ignorant of Aboriginal languages or Aboriginal English; Aboriginal panel members are lacking; and inappropriate language such as departmental jargon is used.
- the barriers caused by the use of English as a second language by Aboriginals is not generally appreciated.

Those Aboriginal people who do obtain employment are often placed in menial positions. In those government departments with Aboriginal affairs sections/responsibilities/services few Aboriginal people are in decision-making or policy development positions. Those few who are successful and have important, highly paid positions with high profiles run the risk of alienation from their families and the Aboriginal community if they do not ensure that their commitments to career, family and community do not clash. Many are perceived by the Aboriginal community as having lost touch with their people and as being 'too flash'.

According to many women much of the content of education programs and training schemes needs to be altered to reflect the current economic climate:

- Education systems do not prepare young people for the reality of widespread unemployment.
- Low expectations of school place young people at the bottom of the class and later see them unemployed or in the lowest paid jobs.
- Young people are losing the initiative to work and the pressure on families to support them is increasing.

- Training is needed so that Aboriginal people are more competitive in the labour market.
- Special steps are needed within the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio and its agencies so that the representation of Aboriginal women is increased, and Aboriginal people can take over those positions that are currently held by non-Aboriginal people.

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## Legal aid

Most Aboriginal families have had direct and bad experiences with the legal system, and the high incidence of crime amongst Aboriginal people reflects, among other things, differences in values between them and the legal system. Police officers are feared and resented because of discrimination, harassment, assaults and deaths in prison cells.

On a national basis Aboriginal people represent less than 2 per cent of the Australian population yet their imprisonment rate is fourteen times that of the total population.<sup>1</sup> An Aboriginal person is much more likely to be arrested, more likely to plead guilty, less likely to be able to afford bail and more likely to receive a prison sentence rather than a fine when convicted. Incarceration is mainly for petty offences and consequently many Aboriginal people have long criminal records.

Conflict between common and traditional Aboriginal law creates confusion for many. Behaviour which is acceptable on Aboriginal reserves or communities is in many cases chargeable under common law outside these environments.

Major findings here are:

- Insufficient legal aid staff are available to deal with civil matters or to run education programs about the law.
- Some young people view prison terms as holidays rather than deterrents.
- Aboriginal people often do not understand the terms used in legal documents and are placed at a disadvantage.
- Non-Aboriginal parole officers responsible for dealing with Aboriginal offenders should be taught the different cultural perspectives and history of Aboriginal people thereby better facilitating rehabilitation.
- Alcohol-related crimes such as murder, rape and assault are of very great concern to the Aboriginal women we spoke with.

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## Land rights

Few women spoke about land rights in any more than a general way. They see land rights as a major way to achieve self-esteem, dignity and self-determination and maintain the integrity of Aboriginal culture.

While this was a widely held view accepted without question, the issue was too complex to speak about in the short time allowed to the Task Force; discussing day-to-day matters of survival took priority.

Those who did speak on this issue made these major points:

- Women are custodians who have rights and responsibilities for land along with the men and they should be recognised.

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1. Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *Aboriginal Social Indicators 1984*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984, p. 50.

- Government agencies should use simple, understandable language when disseminating information about land rights.
  - Women should be consulted before decisions are made on matters relating to land rights.
  - Women should be represented on land councils around the country.
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## **Culture**

This issue is encompassed in the whole report and therefore is not treated as a separate issue. The maintenance of cultural practices, language, art and values are intertwined with the struggle for better housing, education, health, child care, employment, legal aid and land rights legislation that recognises the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

When women spoke to us about the issues of importance to them they were concerned about the dignity and survival of Aboriginal Australians.



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# Recommendations

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## 1. General

- 1.1 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs report annually to both the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Prime Minister on the impact of policies and programs on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women.
- 1.2 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs establish a branch responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women paying particular attention to the impact of its own policies and programs on women.
- 1.3 *That* the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet establish an identified position, at the Senior Adviser level, in the Office of the Status of Women for an Aboriginal Women's Adviser to follow up the implementation of the recommendations of this report.
- 1.4 *That* all government departments administering programs and services which are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people ensure that linguistically and culturally appropriate information about government programs be widely distributed, specifically that electronic media such as radio, cassettes, television and video should be used and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women and men must be involved in the preparation of such information, which must be available at community level.
- 1.5 *That* all government departments responsible for developing policy and programs which are used by Aboriginal and Island people ensure those policies and programs are adaptable to the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women according to geographic location.

## 2. Consultations

- 2.1 *That* each department and authority directly involved in providing services to and/or administering programs for Aboriginal people develop immediately in consultation with the Office of the Status of Women guidelines and mechanisms to facilitate on-going effective consultation with women at regional, State and Commonwealth levels. In all such consultations, women be included and Aboriginal women be employed to seek the views of women.

## 3. Housing

- 3.1 *That* the Department of Housing and Construction, the Aboriginal Development Commission, Aboriginal Hostels Limited and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, in consultation with the State

Aboriginal Housing Boards and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, develop a strategy by June 1987 to overcome the housing shortage (currently approximately 18 000 dwellings) in the Aboriginal community.

- 3.1.1 *That* such a strategy aim to rationalise the funding arrangements for all Commonwealth-provided housing for Aboriginals so that the current inefficiencies caused by the lack of rolling funding, by multiple funding sources and by the current practice of providing 'off-the-shelf' designs regardless of the user's needs or climatic conditions are removed.
- 3.1.2 *That* representatives of individual housing associations and Aboriginal women should be involved in the development of the strategy to ensure that it meets the social, cultural, economic and physical needs of women and their families.
- 3.2 *That* as an International Year of Shelter for the Homeless initiative the Department of Housing and Construction jointly with the Aboriginal Development Commission, Aboriginal Hostels Limited and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs develop, by the end of 1987, a range of house designs for inclusion in the strategy to overcome the housing shortage.
- 3.2.1 *That* the designs be developed in consultation with Aboriginal women and men.
- 3.2.2 *That* such designs provide for the cultural needs of Aboriginal people and as far as possible be able to be constructed by communities using local materials.
- 3.3 *That* the Aboriginal Development Commission and all other authorities responsible for providing housing to Aboriginal people employ appropriately trained Aboriginal housing liaison officers in all local Offices by 1987 to facilitate effective communications between communities and housing designers on the design, siting and orientation of houses.
- 3.4 *That* the Departments of Aboriginal Affairs and Housing and Construction and the Aboriginal Development Commission offer, as an integral part of the provision of housing to Aboriginal people, courses in effective household management.
- 3.4.1 *That* such courses cover budgeting, use of essential services such as electricity and water, and entitlements to government and community based services such as rental rebate and child care.
- 3.4.2 *That* these courses recognise the existing housekeeping skills of the clients and be controlled by Aboriginal staff.
- 3.4.3 *That* the Women's Units in the Departments of Aboriginal Affairs and Housing and Construction be consulted in the development and delivery of these courses.

#### **4. Education**

- 4.1 *That* the recommendation to establish an Aboriginal Education Program detailed in the First Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education July 1984, *Funding Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, be acted upon as a matter of priority.
- 4.2 *That* the Commonwealth Government establish a program of financial assistance for Aboriginal primary school children.

- 4.3 *That* the Curriculum Development Centre within the Commonwealth Schools Commission, in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee, accelerate the program to revise school textbooks and develop reading materials relevant to the lives of Aboriginal children.
- 4.4 *That* the Commonwealth make funds available for the development, delivery and on-going evaluation of tutoring programs for Aboriginal primary school children.
- 4.5 *That* the Commonwealth Schools Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs maintain and extend, on an ongoing basis, the services provided by Aboriginal home/school liaison officers.
- 4.6 *That* the Commonwealth Minister for Education and the National Aboriginal Education Committee commission a major study into the underlying causes of high levels of absenteeism and low retention rates of Aboriginal children in primary and secondary schools, paying particular attention to any State-based differentials.
- 4.7 *That* the Commonwealth provide increased resources for programs to advise Aboriginal children and their parents about the benefits of completing high school and of active parental participation in education.
- 4.8 *That* the relevant State authorities, in consultation with State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and local communities, examine curricula, particularly for schools in remote areas, with a view to increasing their relevance to local employment opportunities.
- 4.9 *That* the Commonwealth Schools Commission, in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, provide funds for bilingual/bicultural education programs where these are sought by Aboriginal communities.
- 4.10 *That* State and Territory departments of education ensure that English is taught to Aboriginal children for whom it is not their first language by teachers with appropriate training in teaching English as a second language.
- 4.11 *That* State and Territory departments of education develop guidelines for Aboriginal studies and include Aboriginal studies in all annual programs of in-service training by 1987.
- 4.12 *That* the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission encourage all teacher training institutions to include a compulsory unit in Aboriginal studies in all courses.
- 4.13 *That* Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, in consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, introduce measures to ensure that by 1990 one thousand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are employed in schools.
- 4.14 *That* the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission encourage tertiary institutions to establish Aboriginal task forces and enclaves in all areas of tertiary education.
- 4.15 *That* the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Office of the Status of Women produce and distribute widely a special guide to

tertiary education for Aboriginal women for each State and Territory.

## 5. Health

- 5.1 *That all actions on health meet the standards set by the World Health Organisation in its policy paper, *Health for all by the year 2000*.*
- 5.2 *That the Commonwealth Government increase funding for Aboriginal-controlled medical services.*
- 5.3 *That the Commonwealth Government's re-direction of funds from State Health authorities to Aboriginal-controlled medical services be accelerated.*
- 5.4 *That the Commonwealth Department of Health, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation develop a national strategy which in association with economic measures will raise the standard of health of Aboriginal and Islander people to the same level as that of other Australians, paying particular attention to accurate national statistics on mortality and morbidity rates. This strategy should be implemented by 1988.*
  - 5.4.1 *That as an interim measure these three organisations develop culturally appropriate health education programs particularly in obstetrics, maternal and child health, management of stress-related illnesses, substance and alcohol abuse and sexually transmitted diseases.*
- 5.5 *That the Department of Aboriginal Affairs increase funds to accelerate major capital works projects so that all remote Aboriginal communities have essential services such as water supply, waste disposal, sewerage, power, roads and communications by 1995.*
- 5.6 *That the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in co-operation with the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation and other relevant authorities develop a policy on all aspects of Aboriginal women's health and begin implementation of the policy in 1987.*
- 5.7 *That the National Aboriginal Education Committee in consultation with the National Aboriginal Islander Health Organisation, the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, Schools of Medicine and Nurse Training Institutions develop a strategy to increase the number of Aboriginal doctors and nurses.*
- 5.8 *That the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission in consultation with the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation design units for the curricula for health professionals which would sensitise them to the cultural needs of Aboriginal women, particularly in respect of family planning, sex education and related matters.*
- 5.9 *That State and territory health authorities give serious consideration to the establishment of culturally appropriate birthing centres in communities with a significant number of Aboriginal patients and the employment of Aboriginal hospital liaison officers who can also interpret for patients in hospitals with a significant*

number of Aboriginal patients, such as Alice Springs, Moree and Broome.

- 5.10 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Commonwealth Department of Health develop a special program of support services for Aboriginal people requiring medical treatment away from their home communities.
- 5.11 *That* the Commonwealth Department of Health, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Australian Foundation of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence evaluate existing alcohol rehabilitation programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, noting the particular needs of Aboriginal women, by 1988.
- 5.12 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs allocate additional funds to each Aboriginal Medical Service to establish a women's clinic which would provide a full range of services on women's health issues. Child care should also be provided during clinic hours to encourage women to use the clinic on their own behalf.

## **6. Fostering and adoption**

- 6.1 *That* all State and territory governments seriously consider enacting legislation based on the guidelines previously endorsed that support the Aboriginal placement principle that no Aboriginal child is adopted or fostered without the involvement of an Aboriginal Child Care Agency.
- 6.2 *That* the Commonwealth Government take over responsibility for fostering and adoption of Aboriginal children should the states not comply with recommendation 6.1 by 1987.
- 6.2.1 *That* legislative change should be developed in consultation with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.
- 6.3 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs allocate funds to Aboriginal-controlled organisations such as Aboriginal Child Care Agencies to facilitate the reunion of Aboriginal people who were forcibly removed from their families.
- 6.4 *That* the Commonwealth Government through the Office of Child Care employ Aboriginal women to develop an outreach program to Aboriginal communities on the Children's Services Program and provide government funding and subsidies for such services.
- 6.5 *That* the Department of Social Security ensure that entitlements such as Family Allowance and Mothers/ Guardians Allowance are paid to informal guardians and foster parents.
- 6.5.1 *That* sufficient number of Aboriginal liaison officers be employed to ensure that culturally appropriate information about these entitlements is widely available to Aboriginal women.
- 6.6 *That* State and Territory Social Welfare departments seriously consider the advice of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies in all decisions on the fostering or adoption of Aboriginal children.
- 6.6.1 *That* particular attention be given to any decision which would take a child out of an existing arrangement.
- 6.6.2 *That* wherever possible siblings be fostered or adopted within the same extended group or in close geographical proximity so that they can maintain contact.

## **7. Employment**

- 7.1 *That the Aboriginal Development Commission and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations develop, in consultation with Aboriginal women, community-based courses to teach administrative, entrepreneurial, business, technical and other skills to meet needs identified by the Aboriginal community.*
- 7.2 *That the Aboriginal Development Commission, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations and the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce ensure that Aboriginal women are not discriminated against in access to finance and expert assistance in establishing business ventures and co-operatives.*
- 7.3 *That the Aboriginal Development Commission in conjunction with the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the Office of the Status of Women, the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce and the Women's Unit in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs develop, within twelve months, an information package for Aboriginal women on the establishment of new enterprises and co-operatives.*
- 7.4 *That the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations develop more effective outreach programs in consultation with Aboriginal women, to ensure that Aboriginal women and girls have full access to available training programs including those in non-traditional areas of employment.*
- 7.4.1 *That the department ensure that its Equal Employment Opportunity Program is successfully developed to improve the representation of Aboriginal women and men among Commonwealth Employment Service officers, particularly among officers dealing directly with the public.*
- 7.4.2 *That the department ensure that all components of its Training for Aboriginals Program are developed in consultation with Aboriginal women and men, are evaluated regularly and promote quality of training rather than quantity of trainees.*
- 7.5 *That the Commonwealth Public Service Board should make positive efforts to broaden the employment opportunities available to Aboriginal women and girls, particularly in 'non-traditional' occupations (e.g. motor mechanics) and potential growth occupations.*
- 7.6 *That all Commonwealth Government departments which provide services to Aboriginal people take active steps to ensure that Aboriginal people are employed, particularly in areas servicing Aboriginal communities. These departments should report regularly to the Public Service Board on the geographic deployment of Aboriginal staff.*
- 7.7 *That the National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee promote employment in the private sector for Aboriginal women through a national campaign.*

## **8. Crime, punishment and legal aid**

- 8.1 *That the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in consultation with State Ministers of Police consider the implementation of the resolutions of the Aborigines and Criminal Justice seminar*

sponsored by the Australian Institute of Criminology in September 1983.

- 8.2 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs take the necessary action to amend the existing Charter of the Aboriginal Legal Services, by the end of 1986, so that the Aboriginal Legal Services broaden their function beyond defending criminal matters to include legal work.
- 8.2.1 *That* the department allocate additional funds to each Aboriginal Legal Service to enable it to provide a service to Aboriginal clients in civil cases; employ a full-time education officer to develop and deliver legal education programs with particular attention being paid to the needs of women and young people; provide training in Aboriginal culture and customs to all their non-Aboriginal employees.
- 8.3 *That* the State and territory Ministers of Police give serious consideration to including Aboriginal Studies as a compulsory unit in all induction courses and in-service training for all police officers.
- 8.3.1 *That* where police officers are to be assigned to Aboriginal communities they undertake a special induction course, developed in consultation with that local community.
- 8.3.2 *That* the selection criteria for placement of police officers in areas with large Aboriginal populations include an understanding of Aboriginal culture and customs.
- 8.4 *That* the Federal and State Attorneys-General consider the development of in-service training courses or similar instruction in Aboriginal culture and customs for all judges and magistrates. Such courses should devote particular attention to the position of Aboriginal women as traditional custodians of law and land.
- 8.5 *That* State and territory governments seriously consider ensuring that the professional and administrative staffs of all prison and probation and parole agencies comprise Aboriginal staff to at least the same proportion as Aboriginals are in the general population by the year 1990.
- 8.5.1 *That* when advertising for Aboriginal correctional staff maximum use is made of Aboriginal organisations such as Aboriginal Legal Services.
- 8.5.2 *That* selection criteria for employment of Aboriginal correctional staff not automatically exclude those with a criminal record.
- 8.5.3 *That* greater use be made of Aboriginal field officers in government departments to assist communication between Aboriginal prisoners and correctional staff.
- 8.5.4 *That* alternatives to imprisonment, such as community service orders and probation, are specifically considered by judges and magistrates in respect of Aboriginals to overcome the disproportionate number of Aboriginals imprisoned for petty offences.
- 8.5.5 *That*, whenever possible, Aboriginals sentenced under community service order schemes work for Aboriginal organisations.

## **9. Land rights**

- 9.1 *That* Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and other interested parties such as pastoral and mining companies consult

- with both Aboriginal women and men on all matters relating to land rights and sacred sites.
- 9.2 *That* the Federation of Land Councils and individual Aboriginal Land Councils provide the mechanisms to facilitate consultations with Aboriginal women, by Commonwealth, State and territory governments and other interested parties, in all matters relating to land rights and sacred sites.
- 9.3 *That* Commonwealth, State and territory governments seriously consider framing new or amending existing legislation to specifically allocate a role to Aboriginal Land Councils in all land rights legislation.
- 9.3.1 *That* Commonwealth, State and territory governments seriously consider, when framing new or amending existing land rights legislation, giving particular attention to the participation of women in the decision-making process in Aboriginal Land Councils and women's access to membership of Aboriginal Land Councils. Such legislative changes should be framed in consultation with Aboriginal women.
- 9.3.2 *That* Commonwealth, State and territory governments in consultation with Aboriginal Land Councils ensure that all legislation and legislative proposals relating to land rights be readily available, disseminated widely and be in language that is easily understood by all sectors of the Aboriginal community.
- 9.4 *That* each Aboriginal Land Council develop and implement a policy on Aboriginal women's needs paying specific attention to women's participation in the decision-making process of the Land Council and women's access to membership of the Land Council.

## **10. Culture**

- 10.1 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Arts Board provide assistance annually to enable Aboriginal women throughout Australia to participate fully in ceremonies and cultural activities on a local, regional or national scale and
- 10.1.1 *That* the department purchase appropriate vehicles to be owned by Aboriginal women's groups, to enable them to practise their traditional skills. Such funding should include a training component which covers, where necessary, driving lessons and vehicle maintenance.
- 10.2 *That* the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies increase the number of projects on Aboriginal women, especially by Aboriginal women.
- 10.3 *That* the Australian Bicentennial Authority develop and implement, in consultation with Aboriginal community-based organisations and groups, an effective national public awareness program, as the prerequisite to any bicentennial activities, so that Australians as a whole recognise the importance of Aboriginal culture in multicultural Australia.

## **11. Community services**

- 11.1 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as a Bicentennial project in consultation with the Department of Community Services fund the establishment of multi-purpose centres to meet the identified needs of the Aboriginal communities by the end of 1988.



Such centres could provide the focus for a range of facilities including child care, recreational activities for youth and elderly, cultural activities and provide a base for various departmental officers who regularly provide a service to the community.

11.2 *That* proposals for the Youth Services Development Program include adequate provision for improving young Aboriginal women and men's access to community-based recreational, sporting and support services.

11.2.1 *That* the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Department of Community Services provide adequate resources to community-initiated pilot programs to identify ways of preventing petrol sniffing and other substance abuse and for rehabilitation programs. Information about effective programs should be made generally available to other Aboriginal communities.

11.3 *That* the Department of Community Services ensure that services to cater for the needs of Aboriginal frail, elderly and disabled people who live in rural and remote Aboriginal communities are developed within the new Home and Community Care Program.

Aboriginal Hostels Ltd and community organisations should be funded to establish culturally appropriate homes for the aged in those communities where there is an identified need established by the community.

11.4 *That* the Aboriginal Women's Unit in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in consultation with the Department of Community Services initiate and maintain contact with all refuges funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program with a view to developing strategies to enable such centres to provide appropriate services to Aboriginal women.

These strategies should include training of refuge workers and liaison with Aboriginal organisations.

11.5 *That* the Aboriginal Women's Unit in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs initiate contact with Rape Crisis Centres with the view to developing strategies to enable such centres to provide appropriate services to Aboriginal women.

11.6 *That* the Department of Community Services in consultation with Aboriginal Hostels Ltd establish, with funds from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, halfway houses to assist the transition of Aboriginal people from institutions back into the community.

Such halfway houses should be established in areas where the Aboriginal community has established that there is a need for them.



# Aboriginal women today

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European contact over the past 198 years has resulted in continuing trauma for Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal population of Australia pre-contact was thought to have numbered over 300 000, widely dispersed into over 500 linguistic and territorial groups. From 1788 onwards the clashes between the two cultures were disastrous for Aboriginals. The population fell rapidly. Introduced diseases such as measles, smallpox and venereal disease wreaked havoc because Aboriginal people had no immunity to them; the invasion of their land meant that Aboriginal people were deprived of sources of food and access to water; despite valiant resistance to the invaders they were eventually overwhelmed by the white population and their guns.

By 1933 the Aboriginal population was reduced to about one-fifth of its original size.

These people were dispossessed and dispersed; forced to live on the fringes of European society or on missions or reserves they were denied access to full or equal participation in the wider society and denied rights in their own land.

Public policy towards Aboriginal people has moved through several stages. Coupled with the unofficial destruction of them and their culture was the official policy of protection. This policy continued for over a century, based on the premise that the Aboriginals were a dwindling savage race and the aim was to 'smooth the dying pillow'.<sup>1</sup> By the 1930s the policy had shifted to one of assimilation, aimed at assimilating mixed-race Aboriginals into mainstream society and segregating full-blood Aboriginals in reserves. The intention of the assimilation policy was clearly put in a statement by Commonwealth and State authorities at the 1961 Native Welfare Conference titled 'One People'.

The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians.

The policy clearly reflected that Aboriginals were not consulted about their future.

The continual demands by Aboriginals for the recognition of their rights as human beings and a full and equal members of Australian society were actively supported by a small number of non-Aboriginals. This pressure, together with changes in community and international attitudes, led to the government holding a referendum in 1967. The Australian

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1. C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Vol. 1 of *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1970, p. 103.

electorate resoundingly voted to give the Commonwealth Government concurrent powers, with the States, to legislate in Aboriginal affairs. Following the referendum the policy shifted to integration and in the 1970s to self-determination and self-management.

Aboriginal women everywhere are striving for control of their own affairs; however the impact of European contact is ever present.

After 197 years of white settlement, this is the statistical profile of the descendants of the people who have lived in this country for at least 40 000 years: an infant mortality rate three or four times greater than that of all Australians; life expectancy about 20 years less than that of all Australians; a median family income slightly more than half of that of other Australians; an unemployment rate that has tripled since 1971 to be four times that of other Australians; a disproportionate number uneducated, undereducated and imprisoned. Then there is the fact that they continue to be the victims of an astonishing legal fiction—that the land when Captain Cook 'discovered' it was 'terra nullius', no one's land.<sup>2</sup>

Today they have to contend with the many disadvantages that confront Aboriginal people as well as the twin obstacles of racism and sexism. Nonetheless, during our consultations we met or were told about Aboriginal women who have been successful in a variety of ways. They all in their own way found the strength and motivation to succeed in their chosen areas.

Some of them participate in the international community either in furtherance of their chosen careers or as representatives of their people at international meetings. Their contributions reflect credit to Aboriginal people. To mention a few: Thancoupic—potter, Justine Saunders—actor, Evonne Cawley—tennis player, Marcia Ella—netball, Marcia Langton—represented Aboriginal people at a United Nations meeting in Geneva. Still others have travelled overseas to learn about other indigenous peoples through the Aboriginal Overseas Study Grant Scheme—to mention just two, Gloria Brennan and Gracelyn Smallwood. May O'Brien received a Churchill Fellowship. Girlie Ingomar, Joanne Willmott, Kathy Craigie, Ellie Gaffney and Sharon Firebrace attended the U.N. Decade for Women forum in Nairobi in 1985.



2. Editorial, *Age*, 13 September 1985.

While much remains to be done to improve the employment situation for Aboriginal women generally, it is worth recording what some Aboriginal women have already achieved in the professions, the bureaucracy, the arts and voluntary organisations. Their achievements signal the wealth of potential as yet untapped among Aboriginal women: Margot Weir (Williams)—the first Aboriginal graduate from a tertiary institution, 1959; Pat O'Shane—the first Aboriginal lawyer, 1976, and the first Aboriginal to be appointed as Secretary of a government ministry 1982; Marcia Langton—the first Aboriginal to graduate with first class honours as an anthropologist, 1984; Lois O'Donoghue—the first Aboriginal woman to be awarded Australian of the Year 1985; Margaret Valadian—pioneer in Aboriginal education; Shirley McPherson—Chairperson Aboriginal Development Commission 1983; Kathy Mills—the Northern Lands Council 1984; Thomasisha Passmore—the Western Australian Parole Board 1984. The many more include Mary-Anne Bin Salik, Eve Fresl, Maureen Watson, Mum Shirl, Nessie Skuta, Merle Jackomos, Natasha McNamara, Margaret Mallard, Val Mackay, Eva Geia, Elizabeth Hoffman, Maddie McIntosh, Nora Bindul, Girlie Ingomar, Hyllus Maris, Myra Watson, Montjara Wilson, Edna Barolits, Mirium-Rose Ungemurr, Rhonda Calma, Kay Mundine, who have all demonstrated their success in their chosen fields.

Elsie Roughsey, Margaret Tucker and Ida West have successfully published autobiographies; Kath Walker's poetry has been widely published; Maureen Watson has succeeded in writing and acting.

Freda Glynn, Betty Colling, May Katona, Flo Grant, Cheryl Schramm and Ellie Gaffney are amongst the women who have been active in establishing some twenty-three Aboriginal radio programs in either public or college-based broadcasting stations around the country.

The Aboriginal Women's Arts Festival organised by Black Women in Focus in Adelaide in February 1985 revealed to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community the extent, quality and diversity of Aboriginal women's involvement in all forms of art.

The Black Theatre in Sydney has provided an arena in which women have been able to develop their talents in traditional and non-traditional forms.



Perhaps the involvement and dedication of Aboriginal women is most valuable in the community-based and community-controlled Aboriginal organisations. Thousands of Aboriginal women are involved at all levels, performing all tasks in Aboriginal organisations around the country. These women often, like women of other backgrounds, give their time, expertise and support voluntarily. Their motivation: they know that the future of their people is in their hands.

Many of the women who spoke with us were involved in Aboriginal organisations which provide services for particular needs. Thus, Murrawina in Sydney and Woochoperun in Cairns provide a range of services for Aboriginal children; AWARE (Aboriginal Women's Alcohol Recovery Establishment) in Melbourne provides services for Aboriginal women who are dependent on alcohol.

Many others are involved in the establishing and day-to-day running of forty-five Aboriginal community-based and controlled medical services around the country. Each Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) is assisted, when necessary, by the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (NAIHO), an umbrella organisation that offers invaluable support and advice to the individual AMS. The national convenor, secretary and chairperson of NAIHO are women.

Women also play a significant role in other umbrella organisations, such as the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) where ten of the twenty members are women, and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), which assists communities to establish their own child care programs. Of the seven national committee members six are women.

In other places women have established their own committees for a variety of purposes: The Aboriginal Women's Resource Centre in Darwin; the Pitjatjantjara Women's Council, Alice Springs; the Black Australian Women's Movement of Western Australia, Perth; Black Women in Focus, Adelaide; The Aboriginal Women's Advancement League, Western Division, Sydney, Warringah Aboriginal Women's Group, metropolitan area, Sydney to name just a few. These groups discuss the issues that affect them and their communities and actively try to improve conditions. These women support each other in developing strategies best suited to the community in which they live.

This involvement and achievement is significant but much more needs to be done.

Some women draw strength from their traditional culture. They still practise their own ceremonies, song and dance and speak the language of the group to which they belong. Others do not have ready access to their traditional group. They often do not know their language group, cultural traditions or family history and consequently many of the traditional practices have been lost or severely modified.

Generally, the more urbanised women have not lost their sense of Aboriginality; they feel themselves to be and identify themselves as Aboriginal. Nor does their identification necessarily depend upon physical features or skin colour. Rather, it has to do with shared experiences, sharing the same relatives (even on a national basis), stories, background, history, oppression, discrimination and a host of other things. For most it provides a comfortable feeling of belonging and pride.

Aboriginal people who do not have dark skin, hair or eyes face a dual problem: of acceptance of their Aboriginality by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society alike. A Tasmanian woman who spoke to the Task Force on this issue said that 'the battle is made even harder when

state governments—past and present—maintain that there are no Aboriginal people in the State’.

Social conditions today may also put many Aboriginal women under stress. Thus, mixed marriage partnerships sometimes place pressures on women to conform to non-Aboriginal values and way of life and to reject their Aboriginal identity.

Aboriginal women know that if they can express themselves clearly and confidently in standard English then they are considered (by non-Aboriginal people) to be articulate, educated and worth listening to. Those who have difficulty expressing themselves in the ‘accepted’ way are all too often brushed aside. For these women the task of communicating with non-Aboriginal people can be frustrating. They feel themselves inadequate and so are unwilling to express their concerns to administrators, teachers, medical practitioners and so on.

Certainly none of this reticence was evident when Aboriginal women spoke to the Task Force. The knowledge that they were speaking with other black women who were not being critical of their use of language has meant open and honest information sharing.







## Women and their children

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One of Aboriginal women's greatest fears is that their children will lose their cultural values and beliefs and not identify strongly enough with Aboriginal society to counter other cultural influences that are constantly present. One woman explained her concerns this way:

As in other societies children are vitally important. For us they are our future and hope. We cannot afford to lose our most precious resource. It is necessary that we instill in them a sense of pride in their history and culture so that they too have the chance, like other Australians, of knowing who they are and why.

Those women who still practise their traditional way of life are very worried at the increasing use of English rather than their own Aboriginal languages. Speaking partly their Aboriginal language and partly English is not acceptable to many. They feel they must 'do something' before it is too late.

Glynis Sibosado, the regional co-ordinator in Broome, reported of women in the Kimberley region:

It was most concerning for the Munja women that the children were not speaking their own language when they were being spoken to by their parents. The Munja women felt that they would like to see more Aboriginal women speaking their own language and felt that this should extend to all children as well.

The loss of traditional skills is another worry. Women have commented that the reasons are twofold—the children are no longer interested in making things they can buy from a store and the women are not passing on their knowledge. One explanation for this came from Mornington Island:

These skills [such as making bags from plaited grass] should be like tradition. We sat with older women, we would watch and were taught while we were watching, asking questions. Now these skills are not being passed down. We just haven't got the time. Time is needed to travel further and further away from home for the things we need.

Children are the responsibility of the entire family rather than to the biological parents alone. Many Aboriginal people have been 'grown up' by members of the family other than their biological mother and father and this practice of growing up children is still very widespread today. Often it is the children's grandparents who carry out the growing up. They also are very important members of the family unit and are heavily relied upon to play a large part in child rearing. As a result of the children being encouraged to think and have responsibility at a very early age, they have a large degree of personal autonomy.

Because Aboriginal history is an oral one, the older people passed on the traditions of their people from generation to generation. Accordingly, the role of old people did not diminish but rather was strengthened as they got older. Theirs was a position that was respected. Generally their opinions were sought after, listened to, and accepted.



Often women rear children alone. They do so for many different reasons. Some prefer to live on their own, caring for one or more children. The high mortality rate of the Aboriginal male population and the high proportion of Aboriginal men in prison who have recurring sentences mean that some women have no choice. Aboriginal mothers, especially young ones, often live with their mothers, so they and their children place extra burdens on the family, adding to what may already be overcrowded living conditions.

Overcrowding may also be worsened by unwanted pregnancies. Aboriginal women are reluctant to talk about the reproductive cycle to their daughters, who may become pregnant as a result of ignorance of any preventive measures that could have been taken or because they have been too 'shame' to ask.

Sometimes young women leave their children with their parents and return only to visit; they may be too young to accept the huge responsibility of raising children, or they may just want to escape.

On Mornington Island women talked about the difficulties they were having with some young mothers:

There are some families, girls, who go out [out of the community], who maybe go out [for] dental treatment or maybe for a rodeo [which looks] good so they stay out there. This is where they meet up with Europeans [and] their kids are not accepted. . . . So the kids come back to their grandmothers, or their aunts or uncles. [There is] more freedom and more choice out there with what they do.

Whatever the reason for young women's departure from the family circle for however long, the children continue to grow up within the extended family. 'Fostering' therefore has a different meaning for Aboriginal people. Often there is no attempt to legalise the arrangements through the courts because it is the family who is involved. There is a reluctance to use the 'white man's law' to give legal guardianship to members of a family to whom the children already belong. People are also reluctant to admit that the mother has left the child in someone else's care because of the long history of children being removed and placed into institutions by welfare officers. Another factor is the Aboriginal people's different cultural view of child care. Such a mother would be seen by non-Aboriginal people as 'no good' or 'unworthy'. In fact, she is acting in a culturally acceptable way given the rights and obligations that Aboriginal families share.

Many women the Task Force spoke with had either brought up or were bringing up children this way. But the practice of growing up children, whatever the relationship, can have its disadvantages. One woman from Ngukurr had this to say.

She [the mother] is coming back soon to collect my grandson. I don't want to let him go. I've had him since he was a baby and she went away to work. She's getting married now and they want him back. He's four now and I don't know what to do. She's still drinking too much even though she says she's not.

When we left, the woman was speaking about taking the matter to the courts. It was the last option for her. She was desperate and this was the only way she knew of to deal with these events. We could only refer her to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Association, which has experience with cases such as this.

## Fostering and adoption

In the past there were many attempts by the colonists to take what rightfully belonged to Aboriginal people. One of the most devastating for Aboriginal women was the forced removal of children.

A woman from Darwin recalled how Aboriginal mothers painted their children of Aboriginal descent with charcoal to disguise their skin colour and thereby prevent their capture.

The mother certainly had no rights. They were in the wrong for having a mixed race baby. They were largely uneducated, impoverished and voiceless, unaware of any rights to their child so the child was lost to them, sometimes forever. They were completely shut off from the child's 'new' life and were not informed of their children's welfare or even their whereabouts . . . There are many such sad and poignant stories about these things that will take a long time to erase from people's memories.<sup>1</sup>

Not much has changed in the past 198 years. Aboriginal people are still having to contend with their children being taken away. Margaret (Lilardia) Tucker's autobiography (*If Everyone Cared*) contains a heart-rending account of how she, her sister, and another child were dragged from school by the police, to be sent for training as domestic servants. The children were aged between 11 and 13. They were taken in accordance with the Aboriginal Protection Board's directions, without their parents' consent or knowledge. Even in the 1960s there were reports of similar acts in Framlingham, and in 1985 there were similar reports from Queensland.

Concern about current fostering and adoption practices was expressed at the first national conference on adoption held in Sydney in 1976.

Any Aboriginal child growing up in Australian society today will be confronted by racism. His best weapons against entrenched prejudice are a pride in his Aboriginal identity and cultural heritage and strong support from other members of the Aboriginal community. We members believe that the only way in which an Aboriginal child who is removed from the care of his parents can develop a strong identity and learn to cope with racism is through placement in an environment which reinforces the social and cultural values characteristic of Aboriginal society. We believe that white families are unable to provide such a supportive environment. We therefore call for an end to the placement of Aboriginal children with white families by white adoption officers. We assert that placement of Aboriginal children (whether for adoption or foster care) should be the sole prerogative of the Aboriginal people. Only they are in a position to determine what is in the best interests of the Aboriginal child. Criteria relating to material possessions and wealth are no substitute for love, pride in the Aboriginal identity and relationships with other Aborigines in the black community.<sup>2</sup>

These concerns are still current today.

One regional co-ordinator related the story of a married couple who had both been taken from their parents when they were children. They lived quite separate lives until they met, married and had children. The Aboriginal woman was in her thirties when the couple found out that they were sister and brother. She was devastated by the news and has now left the community, her husband and children, to live an isolated life full of guilt and shame for the relationship she had lived in for so long.



1. J. Tomlinson, 'Fostering and Adoption Territory Style', *Social Alternatives*, 2, 2, 1981, pp. 43-7.

2. E. Somerlad, 'Homes for Blacks: Aboriginal Community and Adoption' in C. Picton (ed.), *Proceedings of the First Australian Conference on Adoption*, Sydney, 1976.

This incident is a direct result of the policy of removing children from their mothers, placing them in institutions and keeping siblings separated from each other and their relatives. The increasing trend of Aboriginal people to search for their lost relatives will not, we hope, unearth too many distressing cases like this one.

At a meeting in Brisbane a woman who is involved with the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Association said:

Even though there may be a unit developed in the [Queensland] Department of Children's Services, the power of the decision making still remains in the hands of whites. They still say where our kids go, even though we have an Aboriginal Child Care Agency set up to try to look after the needs of Aboriginal and Islander children. They still make the decision about whether they'll refer the children to us or not. I mean, all those kids that are going through there, we don't know half of them, and there's no power we've got that will make them open up their files to us so we can begin to work with those children. So there has to be something in legislation in order for us to gain hold of the decision-making power over our kids.

Aboriginal women around Australia told us that they want all non-Aboriginal fostering and adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to cease immediately.

As one woman said:

No black children should be given to a white family. The background of the black family who is going to adopt should be looked into, so that the child will have the best of care.

A woman from Moree told us of her attempts to foster an Aboriginal child.

I rang up [the New South Wales Department of] Youth and Community Services about becoming a foster parent. I know they have got to look at your background and everything like that but the lady on the telephone said I would have no chance because I was in a Housing Commission house. That's all she could think of. Everyone lives in a Housing Commission house. Very few *Murries* [Aboriginal people] own their houses.

You have to go through all that criteria that non-Aboriginal people have. You have got to have your husband in work, the 3-bedroom house with plenty of space, all that sort of stuff. What we want Children's Services to accept is that is not our way. The kids haven't got a home, we'll take them in. It doesn't matter that we might not have the same sort of house that other people have but the most important thing is that they are with an Aboriginal family and that they are getting the sort of environment that they are used to and they need.

We want to be able to say to Children's Services and whoever else that runs it, we want the rules changed for Aboriginal people.

Two examples of the insensitive approach to fostering and adoption of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children come from Mackay in Queensland. We were told about two women health service workers who arrived just in time to save some children from being taken away from their family.

The Children's Services had brought the car in and were ready to put the children in the car when the two health workers arrived. Nobody knew what was going on or knew that the Children's Services representatives were in town.

Another woman explained how she had to fight the Children's Services to prevent them taking five children from the community.

Their mother and father were alcoholics and separated . . . there were plenty of people in the community who were only too willing to look after the children. I won my fight, but there should be more blacks employed in the

Children's Services, because black people understand each other and know how to communicate with black children.

Aboriginal people stress the importance of children remaining close to their people and of families not being split up. As a woman from Queensland said,

Where there are four or five children in a family, the Department should not be allowed to separate them. They should be given to a couple who is willing to take them all together. Blood relatives and cousins should have first priority in fostering and adoption of the black children. The parent(s) of the child(ren) whether fostered or adopted should be allowed visiting rights. There should be a time limit to the fostering out of the children.

The women we spoke to also shared with us their ideas on how fostering and adoption should be handled. Their first criterion was that there should be carefully selected Aboriginal Welfare officers aware of the history of Aboriginal people. They would know what it is like to grow up as part of an Aboriginal family, and they would be able to represent Aboriginal viewpoints based on their own experiences. They would also understand why Aboriginal people feel so unhappy with the present system. These people are needed at all levels, from policy development to field operators, according to the women we spoke with.

The consequences of inappropriate fostering and adoption are immense for Aboriginal children. Unless the adoptive or foster parents are sensitive to their cultural needs, then the children grow up with mixed feelings about who they are and where they come from. They will not know what it is to be black but will still be called black by others, leaving them confused about their identity. This is especially damaging emotionally when the children are in their early 'teens. Just the process of growing up is difficult enough at this time of their lives without such an added dimension. They feel unhappy and insecure not knowing where they belong —aware that they are not white yet not being able to deal with being anything else. The end result is that they are separated from the people who can help them most and give them that sense of belonging.

The Task Force spoke with many women who were growing up members of their family but were not receiving any pensions or benefits, even though they had had children in their care for some time.

We received many reports of this from the Northern Territory. Aboriginal women who do not speak English as their first language have particular difficulty understanding the requirements of the Department of Social Security. The grandmothers who have children in their care are unsure of their financial rights. People claimed that they 'didn't know their rights properly about kids'. One woman told us she has had a grandchild in her care for a year but has not received family allowance.<sup>3</sup> Nor was she aware of the Aboriginal liaison officers in the Department of Social Security who would assist her to sort out any entitlement she might have. They visit remote communities, usually on a quarterly basis, to assist people with lodgment of claims for benefits.

Many women spoke about the financial difficulties of caring for extra children without additional support. As one woman said, 'After we have bought tucker there is no money left for clothes'.



3. Family allowances are paid by the Department of Social Security each month to mothers for every child aged 16 or under. For a grandmother to receive the allowance, the mother or the grandmother would have to notify the Department that the grandmother had assumed custody, care and control of the child.

Women complained that a woman from the Department of Social Security in Katherine comes out and gets people to fill in forms and that's the last they hear; no money comes forth. Now, when she visits Ngukarr, they call her 'the fill-in form lady'.

Another woman has a grandson in her care but the mother is getting the family allowance money. The woman does not want her daughter to get in trouble but she needs the money now that she has the child. Other children belonging to the young mother are in the care of their father's people but the grandmother worries and wants all the kids together in her care, partly because she believes the children should be together, partly because their father's people move about too much and so the children's education is suffering.




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### **The wider Aboriginal community**

The raising, care and discipline of children by the family is often extended to the wider Aboriginal community. Generally there is the feeling that children belong to everybody and in a large gathering children are the responsibility of all, be they female or male, young or old.

In traditionally oriented communities people live close to each other. Kinship ties with concomitant obligations and rights govern every aspect of their lives; a group of people sitting together under a tree would include only those who are of the correct relationships. For instance, a woman would not be sitting with a group if her son-in-law was present. They must avoid each other according to their law.

The protocol of avoidance is also practised by children. They are taught these and other relationship rules as well as survival skills by authority figures within the group. Depending on the sex of the child these authority figures would include biological mother and/or father; aunt or uncle (the relationship of these people is as mother and/or father and can be real or classificatory), cousins and siblings and grandparents, real or classificatory. This complex and intricate kinship system is mostly still practised. Many families who no longer observe these rules fully nevertheless have family ties firmly based on these traditions.

The movement of children between their relatives is a convenient and accepted practice that provides the children with the opportunity to learn many aspects of the traditional way of life.

Where people do not have members of their extended family living in close proximity, the traditional child raising and care practices (in which grandparents and other extended family members play an important role) is not available. In a fragmented society where Aboriginal people—through necessity, by persuasion or by force—have had to adopt a way of life which does not reflect their values, aspirations or expectations, the care of children becomes difficult.

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### **Child care outside the family**

Everywhere women expressed the need for Aboriginal day care centres.

In north Queensland the women told us:

We would like to see a day care centre in the community for the simple reason that a woman wants to go down to town for the weekly shopping, she has five small children whom she has been leaving with grandma. Now grandma is

getting too old to cope with the children so the woman has to look for someone else to look after the children.

Maybe grandma would like to go to town too. It would be hard to find someone to babysit as most other women have four or five children of their own to look after.

In existing child care centres children have no contact with Aboriginal culture and, the women stated, the cost of sending children to these centres was a big inhibiting factor. Women from Yass said that while Aboriginal children can attend, most of the parents could not afford to pay the fees. They said they would like their own centre.

Many of the women are disadvantaged by living in areas where there are no local child care services and cost of transport to and from the nearest centre is beyond their means. As one woman from the south-west of Western Australia said:

There has to be a multi-purpose play centre staffed by a trainee kindy aide who is fully funded by a Government source; the parents cannot afford the payments. At present funding for such centres is as scarce as 'crow's teeth'. We have a pre-school group which was started by the mums. We have a teacher who comes in three times a week and we meet with the Coolingah kindy in Katanning once a week.

The big problem is funding. We were funded for one term by the Schools Commission, but we cannot get funding for the teacher and the aide. We are expected to take our children 44 km to the nearest pre-school which means getting them up to catch a bus at 7.45 am and then finding someone to pick them up at 11.30 am. This means having a car or finding someone with transport, plus fuel money.

We want our own community group where the mums are nearby and can help with the learning of their children.

Throughout our consultations we spoke with women who were concerned about the differences in cultural values their children must face when they begin their formal education. They were concerned about the differences in the learning environments at home and at school. On issues such as discipline, authority, personal relationships, values and attitudes towards property, time and so on, they insisted that the importance of the Aboriginal perspective must be taken into account in school programs. These differences usually do not arise if Aboriginal children are attending an Aboriginal-controlled school. Unfortunately, for the majority of Aboriginal children this is not an option.

They go to schools that cater for non-Aboriginal children. The majority are taught by non-Aboriginal teachers. They see and hear little about their own cultural background. They watch video and television programs that show very little about their own way of life. Like children everywhere, they wish to conform, but they find that conforming brings conflicts within themselves and at home.

Generally women, whether in remote, rural or urban locations, expressed similar views about the needs of their children attending schools. They talked about attendance, language, peer group pressure, the need for sensitive and understanding teachers, more Aboriginal and Islander teachers and Aboriginal and Island cultural studies in schools.

Everywhere we went we spoke with women who were concerned about their children's poor attendance or participation at school. They realised the need for their children to obtain education but also recognised that the present system was not working for them.



For many Aboriginal women their own experience of school was no different from that of their children today. They can easily identify with their children's feelings.

In her book, Hazel McKellar recounts some of her experiences:

My main memories of school is fighting all the way through—fighting with girls and boys. They always referred to us as 'gins' from the camp.<sup>4</sup>

Name calling by non-Aboriginal school children is still a big part of Aboriginal children's school days. Many women have said that they are 'fed up' with being summoned to the school for this reason. They are also 'fed up' with being told that it is their child who is to blame for every conflict.

The name calling and conflicts are not restricted to children. There are numerous accounts of young girls being called 'molls', 'sluts', 'whores', 'black bitches' and 'gins' by teachers as well. Members of the Task Force team have at some time during their school years been subjected to the same treatment from teachers and other students. Other names such as 'blacks', 'boongs', 'coons' and 'Abos' are also common. Couple these with offensive and obscene swear words and it is not surprising that Aboriginal and Islander students become aggressive, uncommunicative and unco-operative with school staff and students. Many young boys are pushed to such limits of frustration that their only option is to lash out and hit those people responsible—often teachers. They often will not stand by as they watch sisters, cousins and friends treated poorly.

Many teachers show little understanding of Aboriginal people, as another excerpt from Hazel McKellar's book indicates:

I got into trouble with the domestic science teacher. She had asked us to do an assignment on the colour scheme of our home. I couldn't do it so she kept me in. I just sat there—I suppose I was rather stubborn. I tried to tell her we were only living in a one-roomed shack with a bough-shed and goat pen out the back. It was just built out of rusty kerosene tins nailed together. The bough-shed was only covered with gum leaves and we only had an old wood stove in the kitchen part, and a table to eat off. We had no chairs, only kerosene tins. In the back was like a big bedroom partitioned off with a piece of calico—the kids slept in one half while Mum and Dad slept in the other. That was in the winter, but in the summer we camped anywhere on the flat.

The teacher kept me till five o'clock but I wouldn't do it. Of course I couldn't do it and I wasn't telling a lie.

Cooking lessons also showed teacher failure to understand the Aboriginal way of sharing:

We also had problems on cooking days. The teacher would only allow you to cook a certain quantity and you would know in your heart that it wouldn't be fair. The little quantity you would have prepared wouldn't go around the family, so your family never got to try out your samples of cooking. You would beg your teacher to double the quantity but she would say it wouldn't be a success, yet our mother and aunties were doing it all the time.

During the Task Force consultations in Western Australia a 15-year-old girl attended a meeting with her mother and related a recent school experience:

I wanted to continue my schooling but the teacher said to me 'You're fifteen, you're old enough to have babies. You should stay at home and do that. Isn't that what all your people do?'



4. *Matya-Mundu A History of Aboriginal People of South-West Queensland*, Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association, Cunnamulla, 1984.



In New South Wales a woman told us that her daughter was pushed by a teacher while doing exercises during a physical education lesson. She was on crutches with a broken leg. To prove physical assault was impossible, school authorities quickly erected a protective screen around the teacher, who maintained that the young girl was being dishonest. The girl's mother was not sure of her rights. She was encouraged to take the matter further by others at the meeting.

Another example also comes from New South Wales. A young girl who has a chronic medical condition had reached school leaving age in early 1984. She had over the years taken time off from school to go to Sydney for medical treatment. Her mother explained that she was always meticulous about writing notes to the school after any absence. When the girl went back to school on the last occasion her teacher said that she was 'only making it up'. The teacher added that she was 'lying and being lazy and didn't really want to come to school'. Her mother was so incensed about the way her daughter had been treated that she readily agreed to her daughter's request to stay at home.

Given their often terrible experiences, many women stated that it was difficult to insist that their children attend school regularly. The implications for further education and employment are obvious.

Many women said that the language used by teachers in schools was not appropriate. A large number of Aboriginal and Islander children do not speak English as their first language. Nor for most is the English used in the home the same as the English used in the classroom. Consequently Aboriginal and Islander children have great difficulty in understanding their lessons. For them the language used in teaching acts as a barrier to learning. At a meeting in south-west Western Australia women said:

*Noongar* [Aboriginal] children have the lowest learning group amongst the white schools. *Noongar* children at some stage in their school days have had to repeat a year down and this doesn't do any good to themselves and to students around them. It's not that the children don't want to learn. It is the language that is a barrier, because the kids speak entirely differently at home than they would at school. The teacher doesn't understand and the children don't understand as well. This is a very big problem and no research has been done, we have started to research but can't get money to carry on. One of these things that we can [do to] overcome the barrier at pre-school is that the mums and children can learn together. What we really need is money to run community kindies and this will also help the mums in employment.

We as mums need education and it must be done within our community with our children. Because learning goes back to the home and the parents, if they don't know our children have a very poor start in our schools.



## Literature in schools

School literature is another stumbling block for Aboriginal and Islander children. For example, reading books for young children show pictures of a nuclear white family—mother, father, two children, a dog, the family car, backyard swimming pool, carpets and so on. Yet this is not the way of life of the Aboriginal people nor is this their family life. History books do not give a true account of Aboriginal history. Children are told at school that their ancestors were 'primitive savages' who went 'walkabout' all the time or they are told about the 'black radicals' of these days. But most Aboriginal children would be taught at home about the proud, independent people they descend from. They would also be told stories of babies being taken from mothers by Europeans; about life on missions or



reserves; inequalities and discrimination. Many would see and experience these things in their everyday life. They may also be taught the paramount importance of human relationships and the relative insignificance of material possessions for happiness and peace of mind. Some would be told about the struggle for land rights, the Tent Embassy outside Parliament House, Canberra, in 1974 and about the women and men who protested there. They perhaps would hear about the freedom marches and about their own folk heroines and heroes. Certainly little of these things is taught or mentioned at school.

One woman summed up the views expressed by many when she said, 'Aboriginal culture should be taught in all schools because we would like the white community to learn as well'. Many women said that unless Aboriginal culture was taught in the schools their children would lose their pride in themselves as Aboriginals. To learn at home is not enough. Too many gaps exist between what is taught at home and what is taught at school. It is these gaps that make it difficult for Aboriginal and Islander children to see the relevance of school.

Another woman from South Australia said:

Children in school have been whitewashed, they have been programmed to think the white way which in some ways is good but the children lose their culture and their language. Okay we have got this education now what happens? You know, fair enough its a cruel world and those kids here today are our future. In another five or ten years they are probably going to lose their identity.

The women felt that wherever possible Aboriginal people should teach their own culture in school.

They argued that for too long the positive features of Aboriginal society had not been taught in schools and this failure has resulted in the general denigration of the Aboriginal place in Australian history.

The absence of Aboriginal culture in education has two profound effects.

One is to deny to Aboriginal and Islander children their place in society and that of their ancestors. Their sense of continuity and pride in a rich cultural heritage have not been acknowledged. They are confused about their identity and alienated from a system that (in theory) espouses equal opportunity for all. For these children the education system is failing and this is evident in the low participation rates, the early drop out rates and the low levels of achievement.

The second effect of this lop-sided, incomplete education is on the non-indigenous children who are denied a knowledge and appreciation of a culture as rich as their own which has existed in this country for at least 40,000 years. They are deprived of a basis for understanding and accepting differences as legitimate.

Many women stated that schools do not prepare their children for employment either within their community or away from it. As one woman put it:

What we would like to see is a more practical education, educate them towards the things around here, like nurse aides. Then those who are brighter than the other children, they should be encouraged to go and be qualified nurses.

Many women said that teachers should not be expected to teach their children unless they had undertaken special training in Aboriginal culture.

In several communities women complained that their children were taught by teachers in their first year out of college with limited experience and no special training in Aboriginal culture.

As one mother from Thursday Island said, 'I would not try to teach in a school in France without a knowledge of the culture or the language'.

The women said that more Aboriginal and Islander teachers would alleviate some of the difficulties their children experienced. Such teachers would also provide the students with role models and help break down misunderstanding and prejudice on the part of other members of the staff.

Another suggestion put forward by women in Western Australia as a way to have more say in their children's education was to have more Aboriginal school counsellors and/or liaison officers officially appointed. The women said they would be able to talk things over with Aboriginal staff who would then be able to assist them in expressing their views to the school.

The need for more Aboriginal official staff in schools was clearly demonstrated at a meeting in Queensland where police harassment was raised:

The primary schools should also have counsellors full-time. There has been a lot of police harassment in the schools both primary and secondary. The police have been going to the schools and taking children away, down to the station for questioning, without the parents or the legal aid officer knowing anything about it. The police took a child down to the station and had him fingerprinted but did not have him charged. The legal aid officer went down to the station to tell the police that if they didn't have a charge, they had to tear up the fingerprints. There should be full-time counsellors at the primary and secondary schools. The acting counsellor at the secondary school comes under the heading of teacher's aide, getting a teacher's aide wage, but doing the job of a liaison counsellor.

At another meeting elsewhere in Queensland women said they too were having similar experiences:

Police harassment at the schools . . . has got to stop. The police know well enough their rights and they have no right whatsoever to go into a school ground and take a child from the school unless a black liaison officer or the child's parents is with that child.

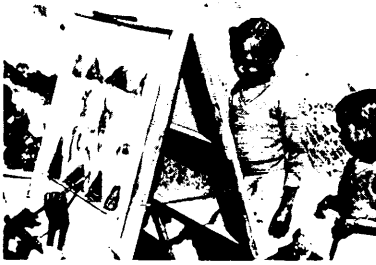
The women told us that if any minor crimes are committed it is always the Aboriginal youths who are questioned first by police.

Women in western New South Wales believed that one way of overcoming the barriers mentioned above would be to become more involved in their children's education through participating in school committees. They were not involved in committees, they said, because they were not confident about speaking up at meetings. One woman said, 'I feel that my way of saying things is not as articulate as the whites and so they do not take any notice of me'.

We visited several communities in southern Australia where Aboriginal communities had established their own school committees. These allow the women to speak up in a forum in which they feel comfortable. They discuss issues and come up with an agreed point of view which elected representatives then put to the general school committee. These spokespersons change from time to time to enable everyone to gain experience in speaking at public meetings. The most important benefit of the separate committee is that the spokespersons go to the meetings with the benefit of prior discussion and the support of the other committee members.

One resource available to parents is the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in each state. (These bodies give direction to the NAEC, which in turn advises the Commonwealth Government on Aboriginal education.) The AECG is available to take further action on





issues which are proving difficult to handle at a local level and Aboriginal parents often seek its assistance to sort out problems with their children's schooling. Recently, for example, in a country town in New South Wales the Aboriginal parents took all their high school students out of school because of harassment by students and teachers. The AECG was able to liaise between the school and the parents and arranged for an Aboriginal educator to be employed. The situation at the school has improved markedly.

Aboriginals have also become involved in schools as teachers, teacher aides and by teaching Aboriginal culture classes, thus providing a point of identification for Aboriginal children and parents, and a link between the home and school environments.

Many women said that the cost of sending children to school was a big worry, especially as their families are usually large and their incomes low. Women told us of their feelings of sadness and helplessness when their children were ridiculed because they did not have the proper uniforms or money for lunches or excursions.

The Commonwealth Department of Education provides assistance for secondary school students (details are given later in this section); many women, however, talked about the need for assistance at primary school level.

At a meeting in central Queensland women said when talking about the children's primary school education:

We're concerned at the lack of assistance for the children aged between six years and twelve years. We feel that any person with more than one child is unable to meet the costs of uniforms, books etc. as required by the schools.

Women in central Australia expressed similar views on their children's education. They suggested that the grant money given to high school students should also be available for primary school children:

Primary school students should also be entitled to get the grant money. Their education is just as important and dear as the secondary schools. We have to pay for a new set of books each year just like the secondary schools besides uniforms, shoes, ports, etc. There should be tutors and a guidance officer in the primary schools. They need the help at the bottom not in the middle of their learning period.

They also suggested that any assistance should take account of inflation:

The grant money is not enough. With inflation these days everything should go up, even the grant money. Bus fares, books, uniforms, food etc. go up all the time.

In Western Australia, too, women said:

The primary school students should also receive the grant too, because their books and clothes for each year are getting very expensive, especially for a woman on the pension with three or four little ones going to school.

Considering that 59.9 per cent (37 688) of Aboriginal school age children are in the primary school age group (5–12 years) the requests for assistance are understandable.<sup>5</sup>

In an effort to remove the financial obstacles to the participation of Aboriginal students in high school the Commonwealth introduced the Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (ABSEC) in 1970. Its aim is to assist Aboriginals to raise the general levels of their education and skills.

Under the grant the following assistance is available from the Commonwealth Department of Education:

5. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census.

- Junior High: \$445.94 living allowance per year to parents  
 \$330 book and clothing allowance per year to parents  
 \$1.50 per week personal allowance to students
- Senior High: \$636.90 living allowance per year to parents  
 \$400 book and clothing allowance per year to parents  
 \$3.00 per week personal allowance to students

Government school library and book fees are paid for both junior and senior high school students and non-government school fees are subsidised up to \$150 per year.

Since ABSEC was introduced retention rates have improved: in September 1982 there were 19 964 students receiving the grant compared to 14 848 in 1977. Whether this increase can be attributed solely to the grant is not easily determined. Professor Betty Watts attempted to do so in 1976 but she found difficulty in assessing its outcome because of the short time it had then been in operation and the lack of data on conditions before it began.

Very few Aboriginal and Islander students ever sit for Matriculation or Higher School Certificate examinations. The retention rates for all Australian high school students are among the lowest for industrialised Western countries. While 90 per cent of students who enter high school go on to Year Ten, only 40 per cent remain to do Year Twelve. For Aboriginal students the retention rate is even lower. In 1982 72 per cent entered Year Ten; only 10 per cent remained to enter Year Twelve. In that year 521 Aboriginal students were in Year Twelve, 392 attempted Year Twelve examinations and 143 successfully passed.

Additional tutoring is available for Aboriginal secondary school students under a Commonwealth Government scheme.

The tutoring system works well in places where there is a large number of qualified tutors to choose from. Difficulties arise where there is no choice of tutors. In smaller centres the tutors are often teachers from the school.

Many women argued that tutors should also be available for primary school children. At a meeting in Queensland women said:

The tutoring system went the wrong way, it should have started off in primary school first then secondary.

Women in South Australia agreed:

There should be tutoring done in the primary schools. They need more help with their schooling in the primary first then you start thinking about secondary. You must always start at the bottom and then work your way up.

In general, women believed tutoring would be of particular value in the early years of a child's schooling before difficulties are compounded.

Attempts to catch up in secondary school are too late.

For Aboriginal and Islander students group pressure can be a particular problem. Even a student who is capable of succeeding, feels confident enough to try and has managed to cope with all the other pressures, often finds peer group pressure an insurmountable obstacle. It means rejection of the group they identify with. To succeed where all others from the group are failing is perceived as accepting the school and staff and thus condoning the unfair treatment of other Aboriginal students.

The fact that so few Aboriginal and Islander students complete secondary schooling reflects in part this peer group pressure.





## Young people

The women voiced concern for their young people's unemployment, their lack of economic independence, and the social problems connected with it. Unable to get jobs, the young people have a lot of time to fill in. All too often they turn to alcohol, commit petty crimes and, perhaps the most destructive of all, in some areas, to petrol sniffing.

The extent of that concern is indicated in a report from Vicki Nangala-Tippett, our regional co-ordinator in Central Australia. In September 1984 a conference on 'Petrol Sniffing and Other Substance Abuse' was held at Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the Northern Territory. Approximately 200 people from the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland participated. According to conference participants, 'Petrol sniffing is not a physical health issue alone, and no medical treatment exists to combat the destruction'. They listed among the causes oppression, denial of rights, discrimination, stereotyping, inadequate housing and facilities, poor nutrition, unemployment, poverty and breakdown of the family.

The conference supported the establishment of youth facilities in all Aboriginal communities; the employment of counsellors and family support workers; information programs in Aboriginal languages; national annual meetings for Aboriginal children; education facilities for teaching trades on Aboriginal communities and the establishment of treatment centres.

The physical destruction caused by sniffing petrol with lead content is medically well documented. According to Maggie Brady's study there is a higher incidence of sniffing among young boys than young girls. Reasons for the sex differences are unclear but may stem from the fact that tighter control is kept over the girls. In early teenage years a boy begins to take responsibility for himself and is therefore under less control from older people. He may also in some places live in bachelor accommodation away from his family.

Certainly in the areas it visited the Task Force received no specific report of girls sniffing petrol.

But there is evidence from elsewhere:

One of the most interesting facts to emerge from our Yalata study, which included an analysis of juvenile court appearances, was that although girls appeared at court extremely rarely (for break and enter, illegal use of vehicles etc.), they did participate in petrol sniffing. Reports from elsewhere show that sniffing is not confined to boys (e.g. at Papunya, Maningrida, Elcho Island [Galiwinku], Oenpelli), although there are exceptions, where the boys consider sniffing to be 'boys' business'. Many of the recreational and initiation/punishment options suggested as solutions or alternatives to sniffing are decidedly male-oriented and it is clear that the participation of girls needs to be strongly borne in mind.<sup>6</sup>

Brady suggests that 'Teenage Aboriginal girls who are petrol sniffers and who give birth may expose their unborn children to organic lead'.<sup>7</sup>

According to data published in Brady's report the highest reported incidence of petrol sniffing in Australia is in South Australia. Eleven out of forty (27 per cent) Aboriginal communities (i.e. settlements, outstations or town camps) have experienced it. The Northern Territory

6. M. Brady, *Children with 'No Ears': Aborigines and Petrol Sniffing in Australia*, 1984, pp. 27-8. A discussion paper prepared for the Alcohol and Drug Addicts Board, South Australia.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

and Western Australia follow, each with 9 per cent. These figures are only a guide; much more research is still needed. There is also a need for the systematic collection of proper medical data on admissions to hospital due to petrol sniffing, and for a register of causes of death. This would provide valuable Australia-wide data indicating the degree to which governments should be concerned about petrol sniffing.

Task Force regional co-ordinators in the Northern Territory Louise Corpus and Vicki Nangala-Tippett reported that users exhibit physical changes after sniffing: they move about as though heavily drugged and their skins develop a pallor and texture that is different from non-users. Changes to behaviour patterns amongst users affects and worries the whole community. One member of the Task Force was advised not to walk around the community she was visiting alone—day or night—because she would be risking her life. Gangs of petrol sniffing teenage boys have been known to assault people in the community. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable. People were scared of the petrol sniffers because of their violence and unpredictable behaviour. Children as young as four have also been known to sniff petrol regularly, introduced to the habit, according to our information, by older users.

Because petrol sniffing is a recent introduction no traditional form of dealing with it is available to people on the communities. Publicly disgracing the users by flogging or caging would once have been successful and on some communities still is, but generally it does not halt these destructive habits.

It is vitally important that the causes of this habit be investigated immediately. Like similar habits, this one cannot be separated from its social setting.

Its causes include family drinking, peer group pressure, lack of role models, unhappiness at school, unemployment and lack of recreation facilities for young adults.

From major capital cities to remote communities and rural areas women despaired for the future of their children. The women considered that they were a forgotten group. They no longer feel they have any control over their children, who roam the streets, gathering outside cafes and hotels and getting into trouble with the police. One urban mother commented:

Children in Yass need some sort of recreation centre as there is nowhere for them to go during school holidays or after school. Some of the older children walk around the streets at night until the cafes close and this is worrying their parents. They also need funds for sporting equipment, and for camps during the school holidays. Maybe we will be able to hold combined camps for children from Queanbeyan, Canberra and Yass.

Generally the women felt that recreational, multi-purpose or community centres with paid full-time staff would go a long way in assisting with special education classes, counselling on drug and alcohol abuse, entertainment, sporting activities and advice on available services or just places for their children to socialise with others:

The mothers feel that the children are not being catered for and through this lack the children are being led into stealing, drug abuse, consumption of liquor etc. They feel very strongly that a community centre would solve most of the problems. (Eidsvold, Qld)

What the community needs is a recreational centre for the young people. They have nothing to do during the days when they are on holiday from school. They wander around getting in trouble or getting drunk, which is no



life for a child. We would like to see a hall built where they can go and have a game of pingpong, billiards and so on. (Aurukun, Qld)

Both in town and on communities there seems to be a lack of recreation for younger and older children. The women felt they would like to see more recreation facilities for older children aged from 12 to 17 years to be made available rather than them seeking entertainment around the hotels. (Broome, W.A.)

In Port Augusta the women have tried to establish their own community centre, but with little success:

There's been a lot of work done by the local organisations. Firstly in 1980 we went to DAA [Department of Aboriginal Affairs]. It took them 12 months to come back and say 'sorry you go to ADC [Aboriginal Development Commission]' and then we went to ADC and it took about another 2 years.

In South Australia Port Augusta has got the biggest Aboriginal population outside of Adelaide and yet since late 1980 we're still fighting for a community centre and that's just not good enough.

Many women considered there was not enough crisis and emergency care available. In Brisbane women thought the answer would be 'halfway houses for those children who are roaming the streets because of the problems at home'. They argued, further, that these houses should run both recreational and educational programs.

The following is how Darran Kennedy, a year 10 student in Townsville in 1981, viewed the situation around him in *Tulpi*, a book of Aboriginal children's writings and artwork published by the Catholic Education Office, Townsville.

*The Negative Side*

Two white people are walking through town.

First White: 'Look at that bludging no hoper over there.'

Second White: 'Who? That drunk Aborigine drinking?'

First White: 'Drinking? He is not drinking. He's surviving, drunk son of a ???! . . . .'

They keep walking. A bit further on a publican is throwing out a white bloke from the pub.

Publican: 'Get out and stay out!'

Drunk White: 'Sure, don't ask me to come back ya old???!'

First White: 'What a shame, poor kid—probably had no education and comes from a broken home, poor boy.'

Second White: 'Yeah! Poor kid. Not like that no good black.'

First White: 'Yeah!'

Aboriginal women everywhere are concerned that unless positive steps are taken at Commonwealth, State and local level the future of their children will be a very bleak one.

In the words of Lesley Grogan, a final year Diploma of Teaching Student at James Cook University in 1984, in *Black Voices*, (1, 1, April 1984):

A child is like a candle  
that stands in the dark;  
its burning ambition to learn  
awaits to be alight.

And the light of knowledge burns within  
the hands of the teacher,  
who touches the wick of each candle  
and nourishes the flame of knowledge.



The role of teacher must rest with the Australian community as a whole, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

As in other societies children are vitally important. For us they are our future and hope. We cannot afford to lose our most precious resource. It is necessary that we instill in them a sense of pride in their history and culture so that they too have the chance, like other Australians, of knowing who they are and why.





## Women and families

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Aboriginal values, beliefs, identity and language are developed and nurtured within the family. Keeping the family strong and healthy, both physically and spiritually, is vitally important to the continuance of Aboriginal society.

Children learn early that to refer to their 'family' is to refer to the extended family. A typical Aboriginal family might include mother, father, several children, numerous aunts, uncles and cousins, a number of grandparents and several grandchildren. These family members are both real and classificatory. Kinship ties dictate a person's behaviour, rights and obligations.

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### Living conditions

Large families are often part of the Aboriginal way of life. Difficulties arise for large families, though, when they must live together under the same inadequate roof. One woman reported living in a three-bedroom house with eighteen other people. Another lived in a two-bedroom house with eight other people.

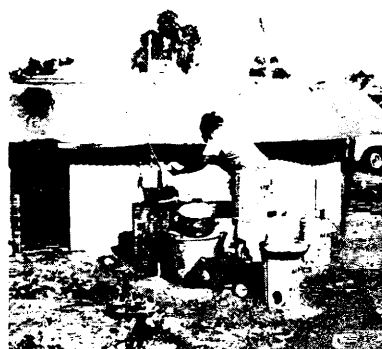
These numbers are not unusual. Most of the women who spoke to the Task Force about their houses commented that they were too small. Women in the east Kimberley area said they would like to have 'larger houses built to cater for extended families such as their mother, father, grandmothers, aunts and uncles'.

On Mornington Island we did see houses that were designed to meet the needs of extended families. These houses were built fairly recently to replace those destroyed by a cyclone in 1976. The high level of satisfaction with these houses demonstrates the benefits of designing houses to meet the needs of the users.

In Brisbane we visited a three-bedroom house that is home for sixteen family members. The house is rented by a woman and her husband. Their six surviving children (three are deceased), four grandchildren and daughter-in-law are also living with them along with the woman's youngest brother and her husband's parents. The children's ages range from 8 to 22. A daughter is pregnant with her second child.

Four generations live in the house. The 'lounge room' is used as a bedroom. A single bed is in one corner and two mattresses are stored underneath it during the day. On fine evenings members of the family sleep outside. Occasional visits from other extended family members, who may stay for a number of months, add to the congestion.

None of the family members was refused accommodation. The three eldest children have had their names on housing lists for up to four years. They and their families have nowhere else to go. The father is the only one who has been able to find a job.



Six children are attending school. Three of them are in high school. There is no room for a book shelf with books, little room for clothes, and no room for studying, so no homework is done.

The house is full to overflowing and essentials such as shower, toilet, refrigerator and stove are rarely working properly. Windows are broken and patched up with whatever is available. Doors do not close, much less lock. The occupants do not notify the State housing authorities of much needed maintenance because they fear eviction. There is nowhere else to go!

Despite these living conditions the atmosphere was warm and welcoming. When we visited, children were arriving home from school and were everywhere. There was bread and jam appearing and disappearing, laughter, tears, nappies and noise. Although companionship was evident, immense strain and tiredness were clear on the woman's face. She looked much older than her 41 years. Nevertheless she was strong and determined and full of hope that everything would work out and get better. Her angry demands were for a better understanding by governments and authorities of the needs of large Aboriginal families. She could only stand by and watch as her husband and three eldest children drank more alcohol than they should. She could only stand by and watch the violence that erupted on many occasions after heavy drinking bouts. Often she would be the victim of this violence. She had no idea what to do about the complaints that kept coming from the schools about the children. The idea of visiting the school was for her too traumatic—she did not have the confidence to talk to the teachers. She was not well but did not want to see a doctor for fear of what she would be told and because she did not feel comfortable with doctors.

This woman is not unique. She will struggle on from one day to the next. It is unlikely she or her husband will reach their sixtieth birthday.

In this and other households the mother has the major responsibility for the raising and care of children. These responsibilities are shared, though, amongst the extended family members inside and outside the home. They share in the discipline of the children and it is sometimes difficult to observe a family gathering and differentiate between the nuclear family groups.

Women have many roles to play in the Aboriginal family. They are mothers, grandmothers, wives, aunts, sisters, daughters, nieces and so on. The women will more than likely be expected to play most of these roles each day of their adult lives.

When families break down and members move away from the community the pattern of obligation which underpinned the family is fragmented and consequently obligations are not met. This causes particular problems for the care of aged people.

When people spoke of services for old people in their communities they were referring to more than health services. We met a number of elderly people who were not sick but who were not able to look after themselves. They were dependent upon people other than family members to care for them. This departure from the traditional practice of the extended family caring for and supporting its members arises from factors such as family breakdown, shortage of accommodation and low income.

Overcrowding was cited as one of the reasons for family breakdown by a woman in Charleville. Certainly several older women expressed concern about living with their children because it was 'too crowded and too noisy'. This woman expressed a desire for a small place of her own.



A woman in Western Australia explained that old people had to be sent to nursing homes to be cared for as there was no room in the small houses in which she and other members of her community lived.

The elderly people we spoke to also needed to have meals provided. Programs such as meals-on-foot helped those without families and eased the burden on families who could not afford to give the care they would like to.

A woman from Ngukurr suggested that hostel-type accommodation should be provided for the elderly, with a kitchen from which the Aboriginal community could prepare meals for a meals-on-foot program.

A woman from Numbulwar told us that she thought caring for the old people was a health problem and that there should be community health workers to go around daily to see if the old people needed medical attention. She thought there should be a village set up with a couple being paid to look after the old, co-ordinate medical attention, cook for them, clean their clothes and if possible take them out to the beach or the bush on excursions. 'Some of the old people are so old', she said, 'that they never get to see the sea which is a mere 50-75 yards away . . . the young ones don't respect the old and look after them so [we] want some real community effort to cope with the problem'.

One institution specifically designed to care for the elderly is the Hettie Perkins Home in Alice Springs. It was set up by Aboriginal Hostels in 1980 to provide sensitive and culturally appropriate care and accommodation. The home was planned to provide nursing beds and hostel-type accommodation but because of the demand it now provides only nursing care.

Women at Elliot spoke highly of the way in which the community health workers cared for the aged. They provided Milo and health biscuits every morning at the clinic and the homemakers cooked a hot nutritious meal for two old people who were not able to look after themselves. The experience of these elderly people and their daily visits to the clinic is in marked contrast to the situation in Ngukurr where the women said that 'the old people simply won't go to the clinic until they are on their death-bed'. These women were referring to a hospital in the community; in other places we visited concern was expressed about old people who were hospitalised away from their communities. Their removal from their own environment is traumatic: many of them have very limited knowledge or experience of the wider non-Aboriginal community nor, from reports from some others, would they expect to find sympathetic, sensitive treatment.

The differences in attitudes to and use of services between Elliott and Ngukurr may be explained, at least in part, by the origins of the communities. The cohesiveness of the community at Elliott reflects the fact that it was established by people bound together by kinship. The establishment of Ngukurr brought together disparate groups of people without interlocking kinship ties and those differences are still current in the community today. These two communities demonstrate the difficulties that can arise from the artificial creation of communities without due consideration of the traditional relationships among the people.

Housing is a major issue for women everywhere. We visited many homes in different places across Australia and were saddened by the extremely difficult conditions in which Aboriginal women almost everywhere strove to bring up their children.



A woman in North Queensland was extremely angry about the housing in her community which she described as:

not even fit for my dog or any dog. The houses would be roughly around five square metres in size which includes two bedrooms, some sort of a kitchen and lounge. They have no hot water in their homes except for two homes. They were promised hot water along with other things one and a half years ago and it's still coming. They have bare cement floors. In most of the homes they still have the old wooden stoves. The women said they would like to have electric stoves but keep the wooden stoves for the old people to sit around when it is cold. The gutterings are all in bad condition with big holes in and as you know it gets very wet up this way.

In this community there were ten houses for a population of just over one hundred people.

On the outskirts of a rural town in Queensland we saw a camp site which had been set up to provide temporary shelter but was being used as permanent shelter because there was nowhere else for the Aboriginal people to go.

We arrived at the camp site just as a woman and her family were setting up what would be their permanent shelter for an undetermined period of time. It consisted of six wooden logs sunk into the ground, the middle two joined by another log which acted as a crossbar. A plastic ground sheet arranged over the logs formed the roof. The family would live under this plastic roof with their bedding, clothes and food but they did not have even basic amenities. Light and power, running water, sink, bath, shower, fridge, stove, cupboards and so on were non-existent in the 'house'. Instead there was a bed or two, boxes to store food (no perishables) and clothing or to be used as a table and chairs (if space was available). A central ablution block would provide showers, toilets and a hand basin. The water would be cold unless there was money readily available to feed the slot machine for power.

The effect of bad weather on such living conditions can be disastrous. Bedding, food and people get wet. The shelter would be cold and uncomfortable. Cooking meals outside would be impossible. Muddy patches would develop around the camp, making use of the facilities difficult. Such conditions have serious implications for health.

There was also the risk of the shelter blowing away completely. Some of the other shelters we saw were held together with scraps of corrugated iron, logs or any other material that could be found.

In the Kimberley region of Western Australia the Task Force visited a 'house' that consisted of two rooms, which, together, would be no bigger than the lounge of a standard three-bedroom home. One of the Task Force members reported:

I walked into the small yard and passed a tap which had been set into a concrete slab. Pots and pans were drying upside down after being washed. A narrow verandah ran the length of the front of the house with a bed at one end. The only door into the house was hanging loosely on its hinges and could not be locked. There were two small windows (one in each room) and the house was extremely dark and hot inside. No cupboards, shelves, 'fridge, sink, table or chairs were evident at all.

After being shown around I spoke with the woman who lived there. (She was from another area and I had met her before.) She told me she was pleased that only two of her children were with her permanently. When her remaining children (I could not determine how many) and other relatives visited her there was no room for them to sleep in the house. Sometimes her relatives would visit her for over two months at a time and she could not under any

circumstances turn them away. She said there was a desperate need for larger and cooler houses because many families were bigger than hers.

At Bourke we spoke to a woman who had been living in a three-bedroom house in town but for several reasons had chosen to return to live on the reserve. There she was able to live in a house near other members of her family and at a short distance from the rest of the community.

The cost of living on the reserve was much lower than in the town. The woman explained that she had not been told about all the extra costs associated with living in a house in town and they had proved to be beyond her means. The house she was living in on the reserve was built of galvanised iron and timber with a dirt floor. It had two rooms, a bedroom and a living room. All the cooking was done outside; there was no water or power in the house. There was a tap outside and an electricity pole from which she could get power. The woman said she would like a better house but it had to be on the reserve and she wanted a say in the design and the positioning of the house.

In Kalgoorlie we saw temporary shelters which were being used as permanent shelters because there was nothing else. The temporary shelters were circular with concrete floors and walls which rolled up like garage doors. There were no partitions in these buildings. Cooking was done outside or else meals purchased from the canteen. There was a communal ablution block.

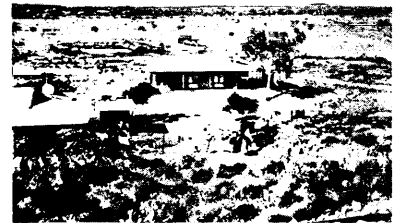
At Davenport Reserve in South Australia we saw four categories of 'housing'—makeshift shelters in the sand dunes, old tin shacks, transitional houses and standard three-bedroom houses with solid fuel stoves. The makeshift shelters and the transitional houses provide the opportunity for people to adjust to living in different circumstances. The makeshifts are mostly used by people moving in from more remote areas. They need time to adjust to living close to large numbers of other people.

The shortage of housing is universal. Women in every kind of community we visited told us housing was inadequate: insufficient in quantity and what there was was frequently poorly designed and maintained.

Despite the success of the re-building program on Mornington Island following the 1976 cyclone there were still not enough houses. The women we spoke to suggested that some smaller houses should be built for couples as it was wasteful to have two people living in a large house. The concept of special housing for pensioners and 'newly weds' was also raised elsewhere in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Victoria.

The Aboriginal Development Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs have estimated that there is a need for an additional 17 542 dwellings before the housing shortage can be overcome.<sup>1</sup> This figure is already out of date because it does not include the housing needs of newly established families. Housing for Aboriginal people is provided through several sources. The AIDC provides housing loans to individuals and grants to Aboriginal Housing Associations (AHA). State Housing Authorities provide low cost rental accommodation. Because of the housing shortage there is always a waiting period before a house is available or a loan granted.

Many women spoke to us about long waiting lists for houses. In the Kimberleys a woman said there was a three or four year wait for a 'State



1. Aboriginal Development Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Joint Housing Needs Survey, 1984.

house'. Women in Tasmania also spoke about a three-year waiting list for houses. A Queensland woman told us that people from 'down south were given preference over people who had been waiting all their lives'. Another Queensland woman told us that she had applied for a house eight years ago when she was expecting her first baby. She now has three children and is living in a caravan. This information is at variance with that provided by the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction. The department's figures show that the maximum waiting time in any State for State housing is three years and less for special housing for Aboriginals. It would appear that the women we spoke to were not able to obtain information about their access to housing. Waiting lists are also kept by the ADC and AHAs. The Black Community Housing Service (BCHS) of Queensland described some of the difficulties it had in providing houses and maintaining a waiting list.



There are approximately 600 people on the waiting list for Black Community Housing Service (Queensland) Ltd accommodation. It is difficult to keep accurate statistics in this regard as some people have not contacted us for some time and we do not know if they are still seeking a BCHS house. A great deal of frustration and dissatisfaction is experienced both by the applicants and the staff with regard to the lengthy waiting list. At present we have people constantly ringing us wanting a house—and knowing that we are purchasing two. It is a difficult situation knowing how desperate so many of these people are, but also knowing that only two families can be housed. A number of people are bitter and angry that they have been on the waiting list for a long time—sometimes years, and are still unable to get a house through BCHS. The situation leads to unfounded rumours about favouritism, etc., but is also taxing on the staff who have to constantly deal with people wanting help and continually telling those people there is little we can do to help them.

We hope to form a selection panel of people from various Black Organisations to help with selection of tenants for the new houses. We consider this to be the fairest way of handling the situation.'

Women also spoke of the difficulties they encountered in trying to find rental accommodation in urban areas. A single young woman in Canberra told us she was still living in a hostel eighteen months after she arrived because she had not been able to find accommodation.

Women with families from Queensland and southern New South Wales also spoke to us about their difficulties in this respect. All of these women felt that agents discriminated against them because they were black and not because of the lack of houses.

A woman in south-west Queensland told us of her experience and we were often told of similar examples.

I went into the estate agent and was told that the house I was asking about had just been rented. I didn't believe them and asked my friend who is white to go and say that she was interested in the same house. She was told that it was still available and would she like to look at the premises and then fill out an application form.

The Australia-wide shortage of housing is causing a massive problem of overcrowding of existing premises. The connection between overcrowding and maintenance was put forcefully by a woman in Cairns when she said:

They are still building three-bedroom houses which are too small for the average black family. Why don't they learn from their mistakes. If they built

2. Extract from an information paper on the Black Community Housing Service (Queensland) Limited.



bigger better houses for the average family, then they wouldn't be in the condition they are in today.

The poor condition of many houses is no doubt due in part to overcrowding, but lack of regular maintenance is also an important factor. Women were frustrated and angry about the poor maintenance service they received. There did not appear to be any difference in the standard of service between state housing and that owned by AHAs.

A woman living in Darwin told us that it took 'too long to fix the toilet, nearly two months'. Women in the Kimberleys spoke of the difficulties they encountered in having repairs done and fittings such as stoves and clothes lines provided. Many of the women who told us about their maintenance problems were not optimistic about their chances of having the necessary repairs done. A woman from Queensland told us the department would not do any repairs if the rent was in arrears. Another woman said that the same department would only do repairs if the house was vacant. This meant the family had to move out while the repairs were being done. We spoke to women who were coping with bathrooms flooding, showers leaking and houses that were not weatherproof in the wet. A woman from Hopevale told us that very cheap paint was used in her house and when she tried to remove marks from the walls the paint came off.

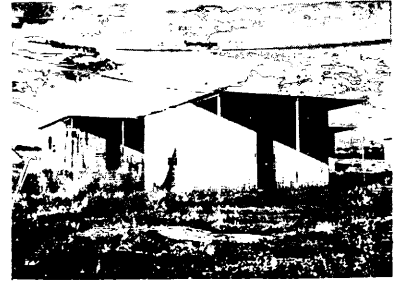
Some difficulties AHAs face in providing adequate maintenance are the lack of skilled tradespeople, proper tools and access to materials. Distances from centres which may provide all or some of these facilities further limit the Associations' ability to maintain their houses. AHAs operate within guidelines laid down by the ADC. These guidelines provide for rents to include a component to cover the cost of maintenance. They also suggest levels of rent. Each Association makes its own decisions about rent. Non-payment of rents is a problem for many Housing Associations and this in turn limits their ability to undertake maintenance. This in turn can create a situation where people are not prepared to pay rent for a house in disrepair.

In our discussions about maintenance and general repairs several women suggested that it would be useful if they or their children could learn how to do simple repairs around the house. To do this they, like the Housing Association, would need access to tools and materials and instruction on how to use them.

While the shortage of housing is Australia-wide, the lack of adequate services is confined largely to town camps and remote communities. The areas of greatest need are in central Australia and the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Where there is no reticulated water supply the women have to carry water in plastic bottles or buckets. While the provision of communal laundries and ablution blocks has reduced the task of carrying water for washing it still has to be carried for cooking and drinking. This means that people need light, sturdy, sealable and preferably insulated containers for water if it is to remain fresh, clean and potable.

Storage of food is even more difficult, particularly where there is no refrigeration. The women are forced either to purchase food in unperishable forms or to buy it just before it is to be consumed. They cannot therefore practise such economies as saving leftovers for another meal or buying in bulk. Food not eaten must be discarded and this can pose a health threat in communities where waste disposal services are inadequate.



For a woman living under these circumstances the preparation of meals is difficult, the cost of living is increased and her health and that of her family is at risk from environmental diseases such as gastro-enteritis, ear and chest infections, and parasites.

Among the communities we visited in the Northern Territory there were several where the sewerage system was totally inadequate for the size of the population. As it was not uncommon for the sewerage lines to leak or the system to break down, people did not always use the overtaxed facilities. Not surprisingly, then, there is a higher incidence of gastro-intestinal diseases among Aboriginal babies and children than among the non-Aboriginal population.

Distance from communal toilets creates particular difficulties for the old, the frail and the sick. In one community we were told the old people and children were afraid to walk in the dark.

A number of women told us of the difficulties they had in paying rent and power bills. Many of these women had had no previous experience of living in a house and so were unprepared for the costs involved in living in rented accommodation. For people accustomed to providing their own shelter the payment of rent is an entirely new concept.

The practice in some places of charging rent on the basis of the number of people living in the house was confusing for some of the women we spoke to. There may be sufficient income earners to affect the rent subsidy but they may not always contribute. One woman in particular said 'she would have to ask her older children to leave home as she couldn't afford the rent'.

Fear of the cost of rent stops some people from applying for a house. We met two women in Galiwinku, an island off the coast of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, who said they would not put their names down because they could not afford to live in a house. This fear of the cost of living in houses is reinforced by the people who leave them to return to the camps; even though there may also be other reasons for leaving, it is the cost which the women remembered.

Living in a house and managing a budget means not only the acquisition of new skills but also moving into a different economic structure. Whereas in a camp, people can make their own shelter and have greater control over their expenditure on water and power than do house dwellers, in houses some furnishings are necessary. But women in remote areas had limited access to second-hand furniture, and transport and costs mean that new furniture was frequently beyond their means. In Broome women told us that 'even second-hand 'fridges' and washing machines were too expensive'. One woman cited her experience when trying to buy a table and chairs. The cheapest setting she could find was \$250. This problem is common to all remote communities and affects the ability to buy household items and clothes.

Homemakers schemes have been operating in various forms since the late 1960s. Over time the term homemaker has described a variety of services. The scheme set up by the Department of Community Welfare (DCW) in Western Australia in the late 1960s was part of a housing program for Aboriginal families. It involved building conventional houses for people who had been living in town camps 'and homemakers were handed the task of turning them into conventional people'.<sup>3</sup> In other

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3. Extract from a paper presented by J. Hewett, DCW, WA at a specialist officers conference, *Homemakers Services—Scope and Future*, 1977.

words housing was being used as a means of changing ways of living. This is no longer the case.

The underlying philosophy of the homemakers service is that many of the problems the families and communities experience result from inability to cope with the stresses of society; that often the families and individuals do not need 'professional' or formal government help but rather the involvement of someone in the community who cares and who can help them find a way clear of their current life crisis.

Within this broad framework a wide variety of homemaker services have been and are provided. Some are set up by government departments and others by Aboriginal organisations. Services have been established which teach budgeting, purchasing, preparation and storage of food, general care and maintenance of the house and skills in dealing with government departments and agencies. Other schemes focus more on assisting people through the provision of meals and home care. Another variation is that currently operating in Darwin, which focuses on providing support and assistance to families or individuals with particular problems.

In our discussions it appeared that the women thought of homemakers as a service to help them acquire the skills to live in a cash economy and in a house.

Women at Mowanjumb talked about the success of a homemakers scheme in helping people learn how to keep their houses clean. The women said there was a continuing need for such a program but 'it should be run by Aboriginal people'—a point made by most of the women who spoke to us about homemaker programs or services.

Women in a town in Central Queensland objected strongly to the program in their area. It was run by non-Aboriginal people who held classes in a vacant house. The women felt that the teacher did not treat them with the respect due to them as adults.

A woman in South Australia summed up the attitudes expressed by so many non-Aboriginal people when she said:

I mean a lot of white races have got this little stereo thing about Aboriginal people you know, they say 'the Government supplied them with a house and look at it now it's a wreck'. But it's only because they don't know how to use it. The same thing is happening when we go to Maralinga. Black people come in from Yalata and Ceduna where they just don't know how to use electricity because they have never used it before. If they wanted a fire lit, you know, they won't use electricity to boil the kettle they just make a fire. So you have got a lovely house you know, you need homemakers, you need to learn right away, once you get into this house how you care for the furniture, etc.

Women everywhere stressed that they should be consulted about the size, style, location and configuration of their houses.

In Queensland women living in State government houses were angry about the design and size of their houses. Women in New South Wales who were moved from a town camp to houses in the township were angry because they had not been consulted about the location of their houses. They felt that by housing a number of Aboriginal families in one street the planners had created a ghetto. This view was confirmed by racist comments made to them by service providers and taxi drivers. Their children were also the butt of racist comments such as 'you live in vegemite village'.

In more remote communities women talked about the need for a wider range of housing options than those offered in more settled areas. In the Kimberleys women had left rented houses to return to the camps. They



had found that living in houses was costly and stressful largely because of overcrowding or demands placed upon them by family and friends.

The reaction of women to questions about their living conditions indicated a commonly held view that they should be more involved in making decisions on matters that affect them.

At Lake Tyers in Victoria we saw a positive example of the benefits of Aboriginal people making decisions about how to meet their housing needs. New houses are being built by Aboriginal residents, with the assistance of a non-Aboriginal carpenter and architect, from timber and bricks produced in the community. The future residents have direct control over decisions affecting location, design and size of the house. This is in marked contrast to the conditions that prevailed when the original houses were built at Lake Tyers. The fact that these houses were in straight lines, facing each other, implies that Aboriginal people were not consulted about this aspect of the housing. For many Aboriginal people the configuration of their houses is most important. They prefer to live in an area surrounded by other family members, the closeness or distance of the houses reflecting the closeness or otherwise of the relationships.

The small, dark, original houses and the new ones also contrasted sharply. The house we looked at was large, spacious and airy, with four bedrooms and an open fire in the lounge room. A verandah ran around all sides of the house and large windows opened onto excellent views.

People told the Task Force that they took great pride in their achievements. While the community still has its social problems they have been drastically reduced because of the better living conditions. People are less destructive and are happy with the new housing arrangements. Overcrowding has largely been eliminated and the self-esteem of the people is being restored.

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## Crime, punishment and Legal Aid

The impact of the law on the daily lives of Aboriginal people has been immense. Many women shared with us the anxiety they experienced when members of their families had been in trouble with the law. The following statistics show just how often Aboriginal women have to contend with the legal system.

The statistics on Aboriginal crime and imprisonment are appallingly high. An Aboriginal person is thirteen times more likely to be in prison than a non-Aboriginal. While Aboriginals represent less than two per cent of the Australian population they make up a much larger proportion of the prison population: in Queensland thirty-five per cent, in Western Australia forty-one per cent . . . An Aboriginal person is much more likely to be arrested, to be unable to afford bail and to receive a prison sentence rather than a fine when convicted.<sup>4</sup>

Petty offences almost always end in conviction and consequently many Aboriginals have long criminal records.

Often Aboriginal people are not aware that they are committing an offence. For example a number of actions chargeable under Australian law are 'accepted' behaviour on Aboriginal reserves and communities. The occurrence of a fight, often violent, to settle an insult or disagreement is

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4. ALP Aboriginal Affairs Policy 1983. (Some of these figures are updated in DAA, *Aboriginal social indicators 1984*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984.)

not unusual in Aboriginal society. The same insult in a club or hotel could still result in a fight but the participants are likely to be arrested by police. The common practice of stripping off clothing before fighting has even worse ramifications. Similarly, in Aboriginal society the practice of not using toilets is not, necessarily, seen as offensive. In a town, urinating in public could result in arrest for offensive behaviour or indecent exposure.

Many Aboriginals have found themselves charged with being an associate to a felony because they do not understand that in law the knowledge of a crime being committed is an offence. In their own communities the knowledge that someone is about to break into a store has no repercussions. In the wider community it is seen to be assisting the person committing the crime.

Another example of different attitudes is the position of a person under the influence of alcohol. In some Aboriginal communities drunk persons are seen to be not responsible for their actions, within the terms of Aboriginal culture. They are considered not to have their 'spirit' with them and therefore not to be responsible. It is regarded as improper to interfere with them and anyone doing so would risk community disfavour and even have retaliatory action taken against them. The same drunk persons outside the community would be arrested and charged if they were causing any disturbance. The above are just a few examples of actions acceptable and tolerated within Aboriginal society but viewed totally differently by Australian law.

Throughout our consultations women everywhere said that there just never seemed to be enough Aboriginal Legal Service solicitors and liaison officers to help them sort out their difficulties with the non-Aboriginal legal system. They said they needed someone to be available to explain how the law affects them. In some communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia women said that 'the Legal Aid mob come mostly for big problems and big trouble'. The women said they wanted Legal Aid to have more staff so officers could spend some time explaining things of a criminal nature. They want things explained in their own language and from their own cultural perspective.

The concern of most Aboriginal women about the effects the law has on them and their families was aptly summed up in the following statement by over 100 women attending the Aboriginal Women's Task Force's National Conference in Canberra in April 1984.

. . . On available evidence it seems that Aboriginal imprisonment and youth corrective institutionalisation rates are the highest recorded in the world.

Aboriginal women bear a great deal of the suffering caused by incarceration of Aboriginal men, and suffer incarceration themselves and become separated for long periods of time from their families and children.

That over thirty per cent of present prison population is Aboriginal is an urgent priority and must be dealt with effectively by the Government and Aboriginal organisations . . .

Women everywhere were concerned about the increasing number of young Aboriginal people with criminal records. They are particularly worried about the status that their peers gave to those who have criminal records. They felt that this was partly due to the high percentage of Aboriginals in the prison population and are concerned that a type of role model is developing. They felt that the main reason for these high numbers was not imitation but because the young people had nothing much to do, got bored and committed crimes for excitement. Women said that 'the young people have nothing to do but roam the streets, get drunk, hang around pool tables in hotels and then get into trouble with

the police'. In some communities young men, in particular, commit crimes so they can have a 'holiday' in prison. This is probably most evident in Groote Eylandt, where going to prison in Alice Springs or Darwin means 'having three meals a day, colour television, a good bed and company'. The stigma of having a criminal record is seen as a kind of 'bucking the system' rather than the way it is generally viewed in non-Aboriginal society. The women felt that because there was a lack of effective counselling these young people were on a sort of roundabout with longer jail terms each time.

The women felt that the education of non-Aboriginals responsible for dealing with Aboriginal offenders was also very important. They saw the training of parole officers in the different cultural perspectives of Aboriginals as a way to facilitate the rehabilitation of Aboriginal offenders and as a means to deter Aboriginals from committing further offences and returning to institutions.

Aboriginal and Islander people should also be trained as parole officers, they said. Aboriginals placed in the care of an understanding parole officer would be more inclined to accept advice rather than reject it.

Women in Queensland pointed out that many Aboriginals do not understand the big words used in parole applications.

Because a lot of our people are illiterate, administrative discussions regarding parole applications should be undertaken with Aboriginal and Islander people trained as parole officers to do parole reports from a different cultural stance.

The women argued that there should be education programs that catered specially for youth, showing the effects of alcohol, petrol sniffing and of having criminal records. Most frequently women saw this as a role for the Aboriginal Legal Services but knew that they did not have the staff to do it.

The Aboriginal Legal Service in Darwin has in recent years endeavoured to fulfil this educational role on those rare occasions when time and resources permitted. They give talks at Aboriginal Community Council meetings and schools and have in some places arranged 'Mock Courts'. They have also arranged for visiting magistrates to meet with Tribal Councils, without any other interested party being represented, to discuss certain aspects of the criminal proceedings. They liaise with the Police Training Academy in an effort to improve relations between the police and Aboriginal people. They have at times acted as a resource for such non-Aboriginals as teachers taking up positions in Aboriginal communities. These measures could become a regular part of the Legal Aid Service program if more funding were available.

Another major concern of women everywhere is the increase of alcohol-related crime.

Crimes of murder and rape by and against Aboriginal people have increased in the past ten years. In many instances these crimes are committed while under the influence of alcohol.

The Task Force regional co-ordinator in Darwin, Louise Corpus, reported:

In recent years an average of four Aboriginal women in Darwin have been murdered by European men whilst both have been under the influence of alcohol. In each instance it is thought that a relationship of a sort existed between the men and their victims. In September this year (1984) in the space of one week in the Katherine area, three Aboriginals were killed (two of them women) by other Aboriginals with whom they were familiar. Of significance to these Katherine deaths was the fact that both women were from interstate and in all deaths they shared the common problem of being transients.

All of the slayings were horrifying in their execution and carried out while the assailant was under the influence of alcohol. In the same week there was an attempted murder of a 17-year-old girl at Kormilda College (a school in Darwin for Aboriginal students from remote areas of the Northern Territory).

In Western Australia the Task Force regional co-ordinator Thomasisha Passmore-Skelly, recently appointed as the first Aboriginal woman to the Western Australian Parole Board, reported an increase in the number of Aboriginal men imprisoned for rape.

Our regional co-ordinator in the Kimberley area, Glynis Sibosado, reported that a number of young Aboriginal women from that area had died as a result of alcohol-related violence.

In Queensland recently a young Aboriginal woman was found dead after a violent quarrel in a public place.

At a meeting in Alice Springs in October 1984 Aboriginal women said that they must be able to do something about the high crime and imprisonment rates in the Northern Territory. (The 1983 National Prison Census shows that Aboriginals constitute 60.7 per cent of the prison population and are the majority of both male and female prisoners. According to the 1981 Census, however, Aboriginals are only 23.6 per cent of the total population of the Northern Territory.)

The women said that they did not want crime to go unpunished or ignored. They told us of a case recently where a man was sentenced to five months jail and two years good behaviour bond for rape. They said that this punishment was significantly milder than the punishment that would have been meted out to the offender under traditional Aboriginal law. Under the law of their group the offender would have been exiled or killed and would have expected such treatment.

The Australian Law Reform Commission has consulted with women and has looked at ways to protect their rights as part of an inquiry in to Customary Law. Their findings are not yet finalised.

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## **Women and their families' employment**

### **Labour force participation and unemployment**

The low educational achievement of the Aboriginal people generally has perhaps its most drastic effect when they seek employment. Though their expectations are not high, they are still disappointed. Their education is invariably inadequate for the few jobs that are available, particularly in rural areas. So their only source of income is some form of welfare benefit.

Not surprisingly, then, the Task Force's discussions about employment with Aboriginal women throughout Australia usually focused on unemployment. It is even less surprising when one realises that the unemployment rate among the Aboriginal population varies between 60 and 90 per cent.

In a speech in Federal Parliament on 8 December 1983, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Clyde Holding, M.P., said:

Aboriginal families on the breadline have felt for generations that their children would be just as easily unemployed without an education as they would be with one. It was, of course, only a generation ago that Aborigines were allowed into the schools of this country, being dismissed so often as 'backward' or 'slow learners'.



Many women told us that their own and their children's education did not prepare them for the type of jobs available in their community. They also said that in some communities there would never be enough jobs and so argued that education should be looking at different areas that would enable people to keep themselves occupied and if possible earn incomes. Others told us that they had long since given up expecting employment for themselves or their families.

Distrust of the education and employment offered by whites has come from experience—that of always being at the bottom of classes or having the lowest paid jobs. C.D. Rowley, in *A Matter of Justice* (1978), wrote:

Most [Aboriginal parents] probably do try to plan for the future of their children, but targets of uneducated people will be low; and the modest ambitions for the child are based on generations of experience which indicate that blacks should not be too ambitious.

<sup>1</sup> Many of the women we spoke to rarely are able to find gainful employment so they cannot provide for their dependants from their earnings. Pensions and allowances are often the only alternatives, providing a stable but permanently low income. Aboriginal women are more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be solely responsible for raising their children. Over 30 per cent of Aboriginal women with children are without partners. Moreover 15 per cent of Aboriginal women with children have never married (compared with 1.3 per cent of all Australian women).

Many women told us about their bitter experiences as they and their families tried to get jobs. Other women told us of the stress caused when members of their families have to leave home for employment.

They talked about men being away from home for months as they moved from place to place doing seasonal work—shearing, fruit picking, etc. Often all the family moved to where these jobs were available. The consequences for their children's education and their living conditions are obvious. As stated before, the women's overriding concern was for the future of their children.

At a meeting in Western Australia women told us:

Because there was no work available in both Broome and Derby the mothers felt the young people were losing the initiative to work. This was also placing a lot of pressure on Aboriginal families. The Aboriginal people would like to see more field officers with CES [Commonwealth Employment Service] working in the field explaining more about the role of CES and what is available.

Other women said that for those who do complete secondary school the only type of employment available is usually some form of training scheme in the public sector. Mostly these schemes last for six to twelve months and do not guarantee a permanent job at the end of the scheme. In many instances the trainees have to travel to major towns or cities. They are then faced with looking for accommodation, having no support from family and friends and working in a department where they are a minority group. For many the pressures become too much. They throw the job in and go home, saying 'the training schemes do not work so why bother trying'.

In New South Wales women were worried about their young people not being able to get jobs locally:

We want more employment for young people in Yass. We thought perhaps some CEP programs would help train some of the young people until something permanent came along. Most parents do not like their children going to other towns, where they do not know anyone, looking for work.



In South Australia the women were particularly concerned that training schemes did not result in permanent jobs. They said:

They train them and put them off to put someone else on. It could last for years.

Next scheme you get trained for six months or a year whatever it is but the employer then puts someone else on. Well as far as I know the scheme is being phased out altogether; it's not getting the results that had been expected. They want us to succeed but not to do it too well, you know, I mean they will give us an inch but they won't give us a yard. If it had been guaranteed that people would get permanent employment after their training people would have stuck to it a lot better.

In Queensland similar views were reported by Ada Branfield, the regional co-ordinator.

The women feel that the Community Employment Program scheme is not being utilised and the unemployed youth and others are turning to alcohol and drugs and the family structure is being broken down therefore creating not a one-fold problem but five-fold problems: the effects on family finances, and on children's education (they cannot study in this unhappy environment), uneasiness between the parents and the children and on the youths, who in turn begin to use drugs and alcohol, with consequent effects on health.

At another meeting in South Australia a woman said, 'I am thinking towards the girls. You never see a black person in a shop, a black shop assistant. That may be one area that something could be done to help with getting jobs'.

One woman from Queensland told us that she was responsible for organising positions for Aboriginal trainees in local shops, milk bars and business houses. She told us that it would always be the trainees with the lightest coloured skin who would get the positions. She said that the employer always stated other reasons but the situation occurred too frequently to be coincidental.

Another woman from Darwin told us about the time she applied for a position in Commonwealth Education. She said that she was told that she should go to the DAA because they had more jobs for Aboriginals and that she would be really happy there.

A woman who had been involved in counselling young Aboriginal trainees talked to us about some of the issues they raised with her. The most common were: the interviewers do not look you in the eye; the tone of voice of the interviewers is condescending; the interviewers often use big words or departmental jargon; the seating arrangements at most interviews have the panel on one side of the table and the interviewee on the other and this made the interviewees feel isolated and threatened; sometimes the panel had older people who the interviewees felt could not communicate with them—there is a generation gap; the question/answer technique used by some interview panels creates a lot of pressure. This happens particularly when the interviewee normally uses a form of Aboriginal English or an Aboriginal language. The interviewee consequentially must process the question into his/her own language which takes time. The panel often assumes that the time lapse is indicative of the slowness or lack of intelligence of the interviewee.

Older people experience similar difficulties but have the added dimension of not being treated with respect nor is any value placed on any experiences they have had outside the paid workforce. This was raised by a number of older trainees, particularly women.

Concern about employment for young people was often mentioned in conjunction with discussions on the need for more Aboriginal people to be employed in the delivery of services at the community level.





## Women themselves

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### Women's business—a return to tradition

In October 1983 over 300 women turned to their own cultural tradition in one of the biggest ceremonial meetings of Aboriginal women in recent times. The women came to Turkey Creek in Western Australia from the Northern Territory and the Kimberleys. They sang, danced, laughed and talked over three days in dry and hot conditions which they ignored as they each in their own way strengthened their cultural bonds under the large bough shelters.

The ceremonial songs, dances, rituals and body decorations had been handed down over many generations. Each group performed their own ceremonies for the benefit of all the women present, some for the first time in many years. Sharing, good will and support were major features of all the activities.

Many of the conversations centred around the importance of ceremonial life. Queenie McKenzie, law boss for the Turkey Creek women and consequently the meeting, said,

This is women's business. Men have their own business somewhere else. From now on no man can come here to Billigani. This is the site for us women. Men will get very sick or maybe even die if they come here.

Many sites belong to women. They are land custodians along with the men, a point that has been stressed many times to the Task Force. Indeed, the hundred Aboriginal and Islander women from all parts of Australia, who attended the Task Force's national conference in Canberra on 30 March to 1 April 1984 demanded that the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC; since disbanded) and the Commonwealth Government should 'recognise the status of women as land owners'.

A further meeting was held at Lake Gregory from 3 to 7 May 1985. Over 400 women and about 50 young children attended this meeting. Women came for a number of reasons including the need to find and express a sense of unity; to exchange knowledge about certain ceremonies or dreaming stories/law; to meet with relatives they had not seen for many years; to have a break from gadia (white/European) laws and structures; to work out ways of organising themselves so that their views and opinions are taken notice of; to assent the importance and power of women's law and their ties and rights to the land. Some came out of curiosity and just to have fun.

The women all agreed that the meeting gave them an even greater confidence in themselves as important elements in the identification of Aboriginality and that these meetings should be held regularly.

The Pitjantjatjara Women's Council intend to hold the next meeting.



## Land rights

Throughout our consultations we were conscious that the way in which Aboriginal women were involved in this issue varied. We were also aware that the term 'land rights' is usually seen by non-Aboriginals as simply the Aboriginal ownership or claim to ownership of a particular piece of real estate. The long established spiritual and social significance of their land to Aboriginals cannot be encapsulated in two non-Aboriginal words—land rights. Marcia Langton, an Aboriginal anthropologist, vividly explains the relationship:

The land for Aboriginal people is a vibrant spiritual landscape. It is peopled in spirit form by the ancestors who originated in the Dreaming, the creative period from time immemorial. The ancestors travelled the country, engaging in adventures which created the people, the natural features of the land and established the code of life, which we today call 'the Dreaming' or 'the Law'. The Law has been passed on through countless generations of people through the remembrance and celebration of the sites which were the scenes of the ancestral exploits. Song, dance, body, rock and sand painting, special languages and the oral explanations of the myths encoded in these essentially religious art forms have been the media of the Law to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

For many Aboriginal women their relationship with their 'country' is the foundation of their existence. The land binds them to their ancestors, each other and their children. To be dispossessed of their land would literally mean the loss of their life source. Aboriginal women's relationship with the 'country' of their ancestors may appear to non-Aboriginals to be tenuous but it is none the less a fundamental part of their lives.

To separate the issue of land rights from other issues such as education, employment, culture and housing was thus not easy. Few women spoke to us at any length specifically about land rights but we knew that the issue is an implicit part of their daily lives.

Two reasons were given to us that explain in part the relative silence on this issue. In Yirrkala (Northern Territory) the women felt 'that the question of land rights was too important to decide matters quickly' and in southern Victoria one woman said that while she supported land rights she spent most of her time just 'dealing with day-to-day matters of survival'.

Another reason was the lack of knowledge and information about existing land rights legislation. At a meeting convened by Margaret Packanen, the regional co-ordinator in Canberra, it was generally agreed that not very many people in the community understood either the New South Wales Land Rights Act or the proposed National Land Rights legislation. Many felt that the main reason for the lack of understanding was the language used by government agencies when disseminating information. One woman at a meeting in Canberra commented that 'even people who did understand the Acts found it was necessary to cross reference them with a number of other Acts'. In Elliott (Northern Territory) women 'complained about how little they know of land rights'. They, along with women from Ingham in Queensland, expressed the desire to know more.

Certainly most of the women we spoke with about this issue want to be consulted before any decisions are made.

Women from Ngukurr in the Northern Territory made this point quite

1. World Council of Churches. *Justice for Aboriginal Australians*, 1981, p.13.

clearly: 'This is our dreaming and our future. Why can't we have a say and know what's going on?'

Accordingly the women felt they should have representation on land councils. The Northern Land Council and the Kimberley Land Council were mentioned specifically. Women from Numbulwar in the Northern Territory declared their interest in being able to sit on a Woman's Council of the Northern Land Council on the basis that this right is not being automatically accorded them as traditional owners. They said that 'in the old way no man spoke for them about their land like the way it is being done now'.

These women felt that if they had representation they could express their views on local issues such as distribution of royalties and the proposed highway between Ngukurr and Nhulunbuy, which they felt was too close to many sacred sites and would 'bring in biggest mob of white men'.

In Queensland women in Bowen and Townsville did stress the importance of land rights. They felt that the 'strangle hold' of the then Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Affairs should end and that 'all reserves should be handed back to the people unconditionally'.

Most women we spoke with saw land rights as a form of compensation for all that has been taken away.<sup>2</sup> Through land rights will come dignity and self-esteem—both necessary elements in the struggle of Aboriginal people for recognition and self-determination.

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## Women as victims

Traditional Aboriginal culture was passed on in a unified way as part of daily life. The passing on of knowledge of any aspect of the culture—for example sex education, land responsibilities, nutrition and food preparation—is adversely affected when the cultural life practice and the relationship to land is disrupted.

For Aboriginal women, the forced breakdown of their culture has particularly affected their access to knowledge about sex. Traditionally sex matters were a closely monitored subject. They were not discussed at random between individuals but rather were conveyed indirectly through stories, ceremonies and songs. For many these have gone as a result of the deliberate dispersal of Aboriginal people into compounds and onto islands and the forced removal of their children. Thus traditional knowledge of sexual matters has been denied to future generations.

This has left many Aboriginal women ignorant of basic facts about sex matters and without control over this aspect of their lives. They are consequently particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and victimisation.

A report from one of the regional co-ordinators highlights this. We




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2. The aims of Aboriginal land rights are: the doing of simple justice to a people who have been deprived of their land without their consent and without compensation; the promotion of social harmony and stability within the wider Australian community by removing, so far as possible, the legitimate causes of complaint of an important minority group within that community; the provision of land holdings as a first essential for people who are economically depressed and who have at present no real opportunity of achieving a normal Australian standard of living; the preservation, where possible, of the spiritual link with their own land which gives each Aboriginal a sense of identity and which lies at the heart of their spiritual beliefs, and the maintenance and, perhaps, improvement of Australia's standing among the nations of the world by demonstrably fair treatment of an ethnic minority.

quote her report in full since the Task Force obtained very little information on this important subject elsewhere.

It became more and more apparent that the women themselves saw [sexual matters] as a health problem that was unique and entirely different for them and one that was spoken of with much hesitancy, embarrassment and secrecy that only involved the women. Very few Aboriginal women here have ever discussed sexual oriented health problems before. I hope a major breakthrough will be achieved.

A lot of women have become increasingly alarmed at the lack of sex information for themselves and for their children. A lot of mothers have asked that basic sex education be made available to themselves and they spoke of the lack of knowledge about orgasms and sexuality, the fear of venereal disease (V.D.) and effective family planning.

On orgasms and sexuality—these were merely words that white women used. Many Aboriginal women I spoke to said that they received little or no enjoyment from sex and viewed the act of sex with contempt: it left them either with (a) an unwanted pregnancy or (b) venereal disease or (c) with enough money for alcohol.

(a) They do not really understand contraception and are reluctant to seek information. Many had opted for Depo Provera<sup>3</sup> until this was removed due to the far reaching side effects. Many have become sick from using the loop and are frightened of having an alien body inserted into them. All know about the pill but many can't see the importance of spending money on a packet of pills that could buy meat or bread. A lot of women stated that after a while they forgot to take them and because of recurring pregnancy are of the opinion that the pill doesn't really work anyway. There is a strong fear among the women about an operation that could help as they don't want to be barren women.

The women who discussed all of these fears (with me) were between thirty and fifty-five and had children. They wanted information mainly for their daughters and sons.

(b) The ignorance on venereal disease is appalling. The women said they are terrified of contracting V.D. but once they are victims they are very reluctant to seek help and inevitably the disease spreads to others. A lot of the younger women say they would never go to the Aboriginal Medical Service because they felt everybody would know. They would never use the facilities of the V.D. clinics and they would never go to a white doctor because the shame and embarrassment would be too much. Most of the mothers say the same applies to their sons and their sisters and brothers and almost their entire families. It's frowned on to discuss this with any of their family and because of this the disease is spread in increasing proportions. All of the women stated that they want education on V.D. as a priority and are deeply concerned about the effects this has among their families and relatives. They say if there were more Aboriginal women health workers they would be able to alleviate this dreadful situation.

(c) A lot of the young women are using sex as a means to an end. Prostitution has become rife although they will deny emphatically that they are prostitutes. When the U.S. navy visits this area the younger women stream in from everywhere for the money that is so obligingly easy. They have said that the money supplements their income. Many are already supporting mothers or on some welfare payment and because they know that they will end up with V.D. or pregnant AND forgotten, their self-esteem has plunged to an all time low. The girls say there is an increasing frenzy among themselves to see who can acquire the most money from the most men in the shortest time regardless of the

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3. Depo Provera is an injectible hormone which is used for various clinical conditions. Although it has been used as a contraceptive, this is not an approved indication in Australia.

consequences. Because so many have been rejected they have become dejected and are turning to drugs for solace.

I spoke with one such girl. She once had a fantastic career, a wonderful personality and was very beautiful. When she spoke to me, she now has a child from a black U.S. sailor, contracted V.D. which she still has and she indicated that she thought the baby was born with V.D. symptoms. She is a chronic drug user. She now sells herself for drugs, beats and neglects the child and is totally disoriented. Her family has rejected her and she refuses help from any Aboriginal medical outlet. When I asked her if she knew any other girls in the same situation she said she knew dozens.

I spoke to many young girls with many sexually based problems. A lot spoke about abortion although this is another taboo subject. Some who had abortions had never spoken to anyone not even their families. There were many who had wanted an abortion at one time but did not know where to go for advice, and though there are family planning clinics available most of the women were totally unaware of them or refused them because of white administration. Word obviously got around about the Aboriginal Women's Task Force and I had many calls from women wanting advice regarding family planning, abortion, V.D. and information regarding rape.

I had strange calls asking me to meet women either at home, in a park or in a hotel. They refused to come into the office and I was eventually to become aware of and appalled by the enormous number of rapes committed against our women. The women were very sad and very bitter.

Less than a handful had ever gone to the police when raped and virtually none had ever used the rape crisis centre. They have suffered all of the traumas and more that rape victims face. More, because very few people have believed them and more, because no one has even spoken to them. These women could make you cry. Their self-esteem is non-existent and most have turned to prostitution. When I asked them why, they all gave virtually the same answer. When they were raped they became, so they felt, some sort of dirty sex machine and lost all hope of ever finding a regular boy friend or husband and the ones that had, had eventually been discarded by their men once the truth was out. Two women said they hated men and were glad to be able to transmit V.D. to them. The psychological problems are enormous (so is the V.D.) but they are still refusing to use the facilities that are available for their white counterparts.

Since working for the Aboriginal Women's Task Force I have become aware of a very fast growing proportion of Aboriginal men rapists. This is something that is very frightening and an area that should be looked at in the future.

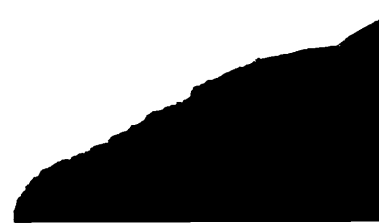
Yet another subject that came to light was one concerning incest. This is something that has always been there but for the first time ever the women have felt inclined to discuss it. In a way I think the Task Force proved to be a godsend to many of our women.

On incest I had one young girl inform me that her uncle had been having regular sex with her since she was thirteen. She was now twenty and the relationship had ceased once she turned seventeen. She was very much aware of the social complications this would cause if her mother knew so she ran away from home and refuses to see any of her family at all. She can't hold a job and is currently on valium.

Another young girl who has become very neurotic told me how her father insisted on showering with her and coercing her into committing lewd acts. Her stepmother, who was white, hated her and she had no one to confide in. When she started talking to me her speech and her behaviour were really weird and creepy. She has a little boy to whom she says she will teach the same things her father taught her. I felt totally hopeless in this situation. I could offer her nothing in the way of support.

The forced removal of children is still affecting people's lives today. A lot of older women told me that they were worried about the fact that so many of our people were dragged away to the settlements and given totally new

naals  
rapists  
incest



identities. When a lot of them eventually married they were worried that there may have been incest without them knowing. I met three women who had had retarded children and they were horrified to think this could have been because of interbreeding with their relatives. With the strict rules of Aboriginal culture in this regard they had a genuine fear that they may have committed a major sin against their families. I met one old woman who had been living with her own nephew for years and did not know until he died. She now has terrible mental problems and refuses contact with any of her children. She has a terrible opinion of herself and is almost always crying through an alcoholic mist. She would have to be the saddest woman I met in the time I worked with the Aboriginal Women's Task Force.

I thank those women who shared their very personal details with me and hope that others who read their stories may find the courage to seek assistance in coping with similar circumstances.

## **Rape**

Since colonisation many many Aboriginal women have suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of white men. They have used Aboriginal women and girls as slaves in their homes and camps. They have abused Aboriginal women verbally and physically. They have been responsible for 'gin sprees' or 'gin busting' excursions—the object being to rape, maim or kill as many black women as possible.

Nor has rape been just a part of the brawling, drunken and rough way of life of the colonisers. It was carried out in 'respectable' homes—behind closed curtains and doors. One woman from Brisbane remarked about her mother:

She was born as a result of rape against my Grandmother by a white man. Needless to say he was the pillar of society in the area in which he lived. He was well off and gave the appearance of a happily married man devoted to his wife and children. He used my Grandmother for his sexual gratification and never cared about her feelings or the consequences of his actions. He obviously thought this was his right. She was powerless. She was his employee. She was also black.

At the 1984 Women and Labour Conference in Brisbane, Mrs Edie Carter, an Aboriginal woman who works at the Adelaide Rape Crisis Centre, ran a workshop entitled 'Repowering Raped Aboriginal Women'. During this session there was a lot of discussion from the Aboriginal women present about rape and existing services for women. Mrs Carter explained that the 'topic of rape is taboo for Aboriginal women. They will not speak about their own rape'. In her opinion 'black women do not use services already in existence because they generally have no trust of white people'.

There were mixed reactions from the audience about the benefits of having Aboriginal women's rape crisis centres. Some of the women present considered that all women (whatever race, colour or creed) share the same experiences if they have been raped. Some felt that a separate centre for black women would not allow confidentiality because of the closeness of the black community. Generally, however, the meeting agreed that the ideal situation would be a centre run by and for black women. It considered that Aboriginal workers would be able to relate to the Aboriginal women's needs and would be trusted. Such a centre would also relieve the lack of awareness of where to go for help and advice. To go to the police is out of the question since 'black women will not go to police stations for fear of being assaulted by them'. According to the women at the conference 'it has happened many times in the past'.



It was generally felt that if Aboriginal women were to run their own centres they would be able to take into account the racist aspects of rape and with the problems of black men raping black women.

Since the conference Mrs Carter has had a number of Aboriginal women speak to her about rape and incest. She attributes this to the fact that she is another Aboriginal woman who comes from the area. She is also of mature age and considers that young women are more inclined to speak with someone who is older. Only five Aboriginal women have visited her at the centre. Others have requested meetings at home, in a hotel or whilst driving around in a car.

## **Incest**

Incest is another subject that was very seldom mentioned.

On one occasion a young Aboriginal woman spoke with a Task Force member about her experiences, something she had never done before. Her story would still be untold if she had not known and trusted the women on the Task Force.

It all started when I was six. My mother married a white man who raped me regularly for ten years—from the age of six to sixteen. I told my mother about it but she believed him not me. After the marriage broke up a few years later my mother blamed me. I was made to feel guilty. Because of this I haven't spoken to my mother about anything of importance since. People don't listen to their kids. The kids' instincts should be trusted.

I haven't cried since I was six years old when it started and I had a nervous breakdown at nine.

There was no way that I could escape it. To go to the police was out of the question. The uniform turns everyone off. The psychological effect of being raped over and over was bad enough without seeing a uniform.

I became cold, shy and introverted. I felt that everyone knew and that I was dirty. Now I hate to have people know too much about me or get too close to me. I'm frightened to have relationships with men. I often feel suicidal but the thought that I would one day get revenge keeps me going.

Rape crisis centres should be run by women who have had the same experience. They can really relate to what a rape victim is feeling. They should not be an official setup. They should be more like a house where women can relax and don't feel so exposed.

There is much that needs to be done for Aboriginal women in this area. Aboriginal women need to be involved in collecting information and formulating strategies to deal with the issue. We must stress that the information in this section would not be here if Aboriginal women (in this case Task Force members) had not been involved.

## **Alcohol abuse amongst Aboriginal women**

One of the most destructive forces, according to women everywhere, is alcohol; and women themselves are becoming its victims in ever-increasing numbers. Some look to alcohol to blot out their own burdens and others are victims because of the drinking habits of family members.

Because many Aboriginal people are now living in urban areas, the congenial atmosphere of hotel bars has made them accepted meeting places.

For many, the consumption of alcohol has become a way of life. It is seen as the way to relieve much of their suffering; to which, however, it adds just another dimension.

Violence is often the result when people drink alcohol because of stress, strain, hopelessness and frustration. It is not confined to the drinking place

but spills out into both the home and the wider community. (Alcohol-related crimes of murder of Aboriginal women have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3.)

### **Alcohol—implications for women's health**

Over the last twenty years a number of studies have been published suggesting that women develop alcoholic liver disease more readily than men do. This theory, together with the reported increase of alcohol consumption by women both in Australia and overseas, has given rise to concern about a possible increase in the numbers of women with alcohol-related liver damage.<sup>4</sup>

A number of women we spoke to were concerned about the excessive consumption of alcohol. As one woman in Alice Springs said, 'There is more and more dependence upon alcohol, not only young people but young women too'.

Several women in Alice Springs were interested to hear that there is some evidence that excessive consumption of alcohol and/or heavy cigarette smoking can have an adverse effect on unborn babies. They said that 'the young women should be told about this'.

### **Violence in the home**

The increase of alcohol abuse has very profound effects upon the home, whether in an urban or remote area.

Women commented that it was directly related to although not the only cause of the increase in domestic violence.

While women everywhere expressed their deep concern for the amount of alcohol consumed by their people, it was in the Northern Territory that the issue was discussed the most.

At meetings in Alice Springs the new '2km law' was discussed at length. This is Section 451D of the Northern Territory Summary Offences Act. It was introduced on 1 January 1983 and relates to the consumption of alcohol on unoccupied private or Crown land. Licences to sell alcohol are held by hotels, taverns, liquor shops, clubs, restaurants, supermarkets or shops. It is now illegal to consume liquor on unoccupied land within a 2km radius of these outlets.

For Aboriginal people the law means that those living in Northern Territory towns can no longer consume alcohol in the parks and other public areas that were formerly used for this purpose.

While women in Darwin had conflicting opinions about the law, they agreed that it did not seem to have reduced the number of alcohol-related offences. In Alice Springs, however, women told us that the law is having far-reaching effects on them and their families. The dry Todd River bed has for many years been the meeting and drinking place for Aboriginal people. Now, under the new law this location is proscribed, so alcohol is now being taken into the home or town camps. This disrupts family life, creates disturbance within the community and has been instrumental in increasing outbreaks of violence against the family. The new law disturbs many Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory who can see quite clearly the resultant changes in the drinking habits of their people. Women we spoke with believe the laws do not address the real issue of



4. R. Norton and R. Batey, 'Why Do Women Appear to Develop Alcoholic Liver Disease More Readily Than Men?', *Australian Alcohol/Drug Review*, 2, 2, July 1983, pp. 48–52.

alcohol consumption and dependence but rather hide them away where no one will be offended by them.

One woman expressed her concerns as follows:

I live in a fringe camp and there's a lot of problems there with that new law coming in. Everyone's got to drink at least 2km away from an alcohol outlet, so it's all going back to camps. People are not drinking in the creeks anymore or in an open space. They are going back to camps where they don't live because they might just be transients from the settlements. They move in with relations and the camps have been set up so that Aboriginal people have got their own home and the woman has actually got a roof over her head to look after her husband—to bring up her kids. Then all this hassle with the new law is really breaking that up and it's creating a lot of problems. You are getting women who are just becoming really distraught to deal with those sorts of problems because of that law. Now those arguments were put forward to the Northern Territory Government and pointed out to them that these are the problems that they should know about. Every time suggestions were made from the Aboriginal people to the Government they were just neglected . . . I just feel sometimes that women, particularly in Central Australia, are just beating their heads up against a brick wall.

Similar views were put by the women from Alice Springs:

They are always making laws about alcohol, related to alcohol, but they never put up any solutions of how people can combat their problem. It's always how they can eradicate people that drink alcohol more than anything else isn't it? It's always an Aboriginal problem and not a white problem—not a white-created problem. Women suffer the most.

Women repeatedly expressed their concerns and fears to the Task Force. Louise Corpus, the regional co-ordinator in Darwin, reported:

There seems to be a concern by the women about their protection from relatives who assault them while *muggari* [under the influence of alcohol]. For example in Numbulwar [where] a man severed a limb off his sister while he was drunk. He went at her with an axe as well as a spear.

Some women have been instrumental in making changes and finding solutions.

In Ramingining in the Northern Territory where they had only recently banned alcohol totally women were the ones who secured the ban . . . They did say that before the community was declared dry the women were the ones having to cope with violence and find tucker for themselves and the kids.<sup>5</sup>

Some women from Indulkana in South Australia told us that their Council, with the support of the community, had agreed that people should not be allowed to bring alcohol into the community. If this rule is broken a warning is issued, if it is broken a second time the car is destroyed. The women told us that seven cars had been burnt.

### Refuges for women

Feelings about existing women's refuges are mixed. Whether Aboriginal women use these services seems to depend largely upon the women who run them. If their approach is genuine and sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal women then Aboriginal women use the services in their areas. Port Augusta Women's and Children's Emergency Hostel, for example, has a majority of Aboriginal clients and Aboriginal women keep returning when in trouble. Most of the women consulted would, however, prefer to have refuges that are run by Aboriginal women or at least to be assured



5. A dry area is where alcohol is not permitted without a special licence to consume a set number of cans (not bottles) within a certain period of time and in the home of the person with the licence.

that Aboriginal women and their needs are represented on existing committees or on the refuge staff.

### Health

With one or two exceptions our discussions about health focused on services rather than particular illnesses. This is not to say that we met only healthy people—indeed we saw large numbers who were suffering from disorders such as ear, nose and throat infections, skin diseases, trachoma, diabetes and malnutrition. We visited communities where constantly dripping taps created a breeding ground for mosquitoes, where the dust from unsealed roads and ungrassed areas meant unrelenting irritation to those with chest and eye infections, and where the health of the whole community was put at risk by the lack of basic sanitation.

We met and talked to women worn out with bearing and rearing children on low incomes in difficult living conditions. We sat and talked with elderly women who were too frail to care for themselves.



### Attitudes to non-Aboriginal medical services

Women as the bearers and nurturers of children and carers for the aged are the main users of health services. For many of the women we spoke to 'going to the doctor' is a stressful experience, particularly in places where there is no Aboriginal staff. Seeking advice from strangers exposes them to the alien practices and values of non-Aboriginal society. As a woman from Western Australia said, 'In many cases because we are poor and sometimes dirty they don't explain things to us'.

Several pregnant women out-patients in Launceston also expressed this feeling of being looked down on. They were angry because they had not been asked if they minded if a medical student sat-in on their consultations. The women were not aware that it was normal practice for medical students to attend consultations for public patients; they assumed they had not been asked because they were Aboriginal.

Women in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and New South Wales told us that they were embarrassed when they had to get undressed in front of a male doctor or have internal examinations. A woman in the Northern Territory told us that she was 'frightened of the doctor and worried a lot about check ups'. She went on to say that she would not be so frightened if there was a health worker present who spoke her own language or a member of her family. Given her lack of confidence in her dealings with doctors it is unlikely that she would feel she had the right to ask that a member of her family be present during the examination.

Fear of the doctor may arise from bad experiences at the hands of an insensitive doctor or nurse, either personal or as reported by other members of the community. Another cause is fear of the unknown. This is particularly true for people who are being hospitalised for the first time.

While it is fairly acceptable practice in the white community for a white male doctor to carry out intimate examinations of white females on the first visit, such practice is to some sections of the Black community totally unacceptable. Even to Black women who might otherwise be amenable to the idea in different circumstances, in what may be regarded by her to be a hostile environment she is likely also to view the experience—or even the notion—as traumatic.

With very few exceptions, Black women avoid consulting a doctor on their own behalf especially in regard to abdominal or sexual complaints.<sup>6</sup>

6. Bobbi Sykes, 'White Doctors and Black Women', *New Doctor*, 8, 1978, pp. 33–5.

According to Bobbi Sykes, relationships between Aboriginal people and doctors were poor or non-existent even up to the 1970s.

White managers who controlled the reserves where Blacks lived summoned the doctor for the Blacks if and when they saw fit in emergencies. For various reasons, such as the geographic isolation of most reserves, and the power invested in the managers, and likely also for economic reasons, most managers provided the nearest thing to medical treatment that ever became available. Rural hospitals too, reflecting the status quo, often had separate facilities for Blacks, relegating sick inpatients to outhouses or verandahs which were unscreened.

Therefore there was little contact between the Black community and doctors, a situation which was beyond the control of the Black community.<sup>7</sup>

### Access to medical service

Women from Queensland and New South Wales described the various problems they encountered when they had to go to the city for medical treatment either for themselves or their children.

Women spoke about trying to find their way around when they did not know the city and could not read the signs or communicate easily in English. Other women spoke of their difficulty in finding low cost accommodation. As one woman said, 'You travel down there . . . you haven't any relatives to stay with . . . you've got to find your own accommodation. There are some places down there where they only take boys under five or six years of age'. Another woman told us that she did not know how long she would be in the city, 'You go down there to see a specialist, say today and he tells you to come back tomorrow, or next week or next month . . .'

These difficulties, together with anxiety about the health reasons for the trip, mean that a visit to the city is often a harrowing experience.

The women who raised these issues also put forward several solutions. They suggested that there should be signs on railway stations giving directions to hospitals and accommodation. They also suggested that Aboriginal Hostels should provide more accommodation for short-term visitors with children. Several of the women we spoke to had been unable to stay in a hostel in Brisbane because there were no vacancies.

There are approximately 163 beds in hostels for transients or mothers and children in Brisbane as well as 150 beds in multi-purpose hostels. The women we spoke to who had been turned away from hostels were apparently not aware that they could have booked prior to going to the city. This is in keeping with the generally expressed view that 'they should be able to find out about things before they go to the city and then it would not be so strange'.

### Services for pregnant women

In the more remote areas of Queensland, South Australia and Northern Territory women were extremely concerned about being sent away to hospital to have their babies. They were angry because they had no choice about being sent away for anything from four to six weeks before their confinement; angry because they were not forewarned of their departure. Several women in North Queensland said they were not told when they had to leave the community, 'all of a sudden we are put on a plane with no time to say goodbye or anything'. But the health workers on the



7. Ibid.

community explained to us that if they gave the women notice of their departure the women would go into the bush and hide.

In the Northern Territory the women were also worried about pregnant women being lonely and isolated when they go to hospital. Pregnant women said 'they felt a deep sense of discomfort about the intimate nature of giving birth with strangers, particularly men, around and no one from their own country nearby'.

Women in remote areas objected strongly to being sent away for the birth of their children unless there were complications. These women said it was not unusual to be sent to hospital in town six weeks before the baby was due. If there were no vacancies in the hostel the women had to 'scrounge around for somewhere to stay'.

There are important cultural practices to be taken into account in the birth of Aboriginal children. Women who are sent away from their community are deprived of the comfort of these practices. Women who have given birth to children in Alice Springs hospital complained of the loneliness and cultural alienation they experienced and the fact that no aspect of Aboriginal traditional law regarding childbirth was taken into account.

Despite the fact that more than 80 per cent of Central Australian Aboriginal babies are born in the Alice Springs hospital, the stillbirth and neonatal death rates remain shockingly high (300–400 per cent higher than in non-Aboriginal Australia.) A contributing factor is the lack of cultural supports in the present system and consequently the women do not always follow medical directions and only attend ante-natal classes sporadically.\*

In May 1984 the Commonwealth Government gave the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress \$13 300 for a twelve-month study of the obstetric problems and preferences of Central Australian Aboriginal communities. The findings of the survey were presented to a meeting of more than 250 Aboriginal women held in Alice Springs on 16 and 17 July 1985. The recommendations from the meeting form the basis of a submission to the Commonwealth Department of Health. The submission will seek funding and support to enable Congress to design an Aboriginal-controlled obstetric service suited to the complex social, cultural and medical needs of Aboriginal women.

### Family planning

Our discussions on family planning were confined to three or four communities. This limited number reflects the reticence and shyness most Aboriginal women experience in discussing such matters with non-Aboriginals or, in our case, strangers. We are particularly grateful to those women who felt they could share their feelings with us.

In a rural area of New South Wales women were concerned about 'kids having kids'. As one woman put it, 'You see a lot of young girls who just leave school and six to twelve months later you see them wandering around pregnant, and that's bad'. Women in Queensland and Western Australia expressed similar views. Their concern centred on the effect early pregnancy would have on the girls' lives by tying them down and limiting their opportunities for further education and training. In other words they saw early motherhood as a way in which girls become trapped into the poverty, low income cycle. The women did not appear to be



8. Central Australian Aboriginal Congress media release *The Fight for Aboriginal Birthrights*, March 1984.

aware of the health risks, for both the mother and the baby, of teenage pregnancies.

The woman who raised this issue considered that young women were frequently afraid to go to the doctor because they did not want to have an internal examination. Although many women have had lots of children they themselves do not understand the intricacies of the reproductive cycle and feel unable to speak authoritatively on the subject. There is also a general mistrust of the medical profession and acute embarrassment about seeking advice from doctors who are predominantly male, middle-class and young. That they are also not Aboriginal almost goes without saying.

Depo Provera the injectible contraceptive is still prescribed in Tasmania and our regional co-ordinator there, Beverley Muir, spoke to several women who had been given the drug, some by private doctors and others at the hospital. In the latter case the women did not know what it was for. One of the women was simply told to 'come back again for another one in three months'. The women who spoke to us about these matters were in the main in their late thirties and forties, and they were concerned about their daughters. Traditionally it is the responsibility of older women to introduce young women to 'women's business'. Once new ideas are accepted by the older women they may be incorporated into their life pattern.<sup>9</sup>

### **Sexually transmitted diseases (venereal disease)**

In Cairns women expressed concern at the high rate of such diseases among both women and men. Women in Western Australia voiced similar concerns and also discussed the difficulties of seeking treatment. They said that generally people were reluctant to seek medical treatment because they were embarrassed or ashamed. Their reluctance applied equally to using non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal medical services. In the latter case the women said that because people were 'shamed' they did not want to be seen consulting the doctor by any of their family or friends. The women said that because discussion of sexually transmitted disease within the family was frowned on, there should be education about it and the danger it posed for future generations.

### **Malnutrition**

The poor state of health of so many Aboriginal people can be attributed to factors such as poor living conditions, low incomes, inadequate or inappropriate services and poor nutrition. From our discussions we learnt of the different circumstances which leave so many women with insufficient money to feed and clothe their family, let alone pay the rent.

We spoke with women who were minding their grandchildren or other people's children full-time without any financial help from the children's parents. A woman told us that the traditional practice of sharing food placed a great strain on her limited resources. Others explained that by the time they had paid the power and rent bills there was not much money left for food. In other cases there was not enough money for food because of the amount spent on alcohol, cigarettes or gambling. In the more isolated areas the very high costs of foodstuff compounded the problem.

Women living on Cape Barren Island in Bass Strait told us when we

9. Aileen F. Connon, 'Family Planning Among Aborigines', *Med. J. Australia Special Suppl.*, 1, 1975, pp. 17-19.

were there in 1984 that there was only one shop there and that its range of foods was limited and expensive. For example 2 kilograms of self-raising flour was \$3.00, 250 grams of butter \$2.50, 250 grams of tea \$2.50, 2 kilograms of sugar \$3.00 and 1 kilogram of powdered milk \$6.78. Supplies including diesel for heating and lighting came from Tasmania every three months. Because of bad weather the boat was frequently late and then people were short of food and fuel. What irked the women most was that the supply boat to Flinders Island passed by the island weekly.

In northern Queensland, too, women spoke of high prices for basic food stuffs, for example 2 kilograms of sugar or flour were \$4.59 each.

Transport costs in the more remote areas explain in part the high costs of foodstuffs. They may also explain the limited variety and poor quality of the food we saw in some of the stores we visited.

Maintaining supplies in stores in remote communities is particularly difficult in Northern Australia during the wet. Women in the Kimberleys told us it was not uncommon for the store to run out of essential foods towards the end of the wet because supplies could not get through. So people went hungry. In pre-contact times it was not uncommon for people to go hungry towards the end of the wet; however, at that time there were no restrictions on their movements or competition for the resources of their country. Moreover, they had hunting and gathering skills; today that is not always so.

In a recent study on retail services in Northern Australian Aboriginal communities, Elspeth Young analysed ownership, management and employment and found that although most shops are now owned by Aboriginal bodies few are Aboriginal managed and the level of control exerted by Aboriginal owners over the activities of European managers is often extremely weak.

Dr Young considers that management and staff training to enable Aboriginals to run the stores is needed.

In South Australia the development of market gardens and city farms has proved to be beneficial not only in terms of providing fresh food but also in providing training in all aspects of market gardening. The gardens have also generated interest in home gardens. In Ceduna several workers from the garden at Poverty Flats have assisted interested home owners establish their own gardens.

### **Women and their own education**

Many of the Aboriginal and Islander women we spoke with had experienced only minimal, if any, secondary schooling. Invariably they had been taught by untrained people who were either ignorant of or insensitive to their culture. They told us of some of the reasons for their lack of formal education: they only attended the 'school' on the reserve or mission, usually not beyond primary level and then went out to work; the value of more education was not apparent to them; they simply could not cope with the lessons and dropped out of school; they were not allowed to go to the same classes as the white pupils. The quality of their education thus created and reflected the view that they were only suitable for employment as domestic or manual workers.

Now the disadvantage of their lack of educational qualifications is becoming increasingly apparent to a large number of mature-age Aboriginal and Islander women. Many are returning to educational institutions to gain the higher school certificate or its equivalent and some are progressing even further. For the first time, they are succeeding in formal education.





Perhaps the most significant factor in the women's success is their motivation. Some told us they were studying to increase their job opportunities; others were at last getting that 'piece of paper' which white people so emphasise; others were simply increasing their skills.

Women told us that, since completing courses, they had significantly gained in confidence when putting their ideas and problems to non-Aboriginal people. Talking to teachers, administrators, community advisers, health workers and even people like the Task Force team seemed easier. They were also happy, now, to be able to help their children and other family members with their studies.

On the other hand a number of women said that though they would like to do some type of further study, they were deterred by the problems involved: the need to travel to major centres to do a course; the cost of accommodation; having no family members close by to help with child care and general support; the difficulties Aboriginal and Islander people have in adjusting to an academic way of life.

We were able to tell these women about the various Aboriginal task forces and enclaves now established. Having Aboriginal people assisting with accommodation, student allowances, child care arrangements; counselling in financial, health, personal and family matters and providing a comfortable place to meet socially with other students has meant success rather than failure for many. Students enrolled in standard or bridging courses in educational institutions are given additional tutorial support. This makes entry into a complex institution less frightening, especially for students from remote areas. In 1983, 69 per cent of Aboriginal students enrolled in award courses attended institutions with support programs. The success of these programs, according to our respondents, stems largely from the fact that the majority of staff and all of the students are Aboriginal or Islander. The psychological advantage of studying with people who have had the same type of personal and racial history is immense. Support for each other, rather than competition, is one of the crucial elements in success.

### **Community-based courses**

Many women also told us they wanted courses that would enable them to operate more effectively in their own community. Courses such as bookkeeping and general office procedures, household budgeting, sewing, would help them to be less reliant on non-Aboriginal administrators. They suggested that such courses could be run in the community and that an Aboriginal educator, in liaison with colleges of technical and further education, could develop the courses according to the needs of the community. Some also suggested that mobile units could be set up to cater for outstation and homeland centres, along the lines of the mobile health units.

They saw many advantages in doing courses in their own community. These would eliminate both a lot of cost and personal disruption, and would encourage more people to try to do courses if they saw other family members succeeding, especially when their new skills were seen to benefit themselves and their own community.

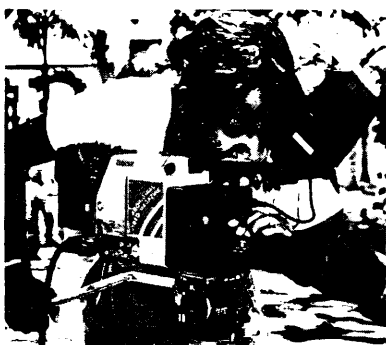
By far the greatest benefit of gaining further education for most of the women who spoke with us was to have more say in what happened in their lives.



### Complexity of educational institutions

The majority of women we spoke with said that they were confused and frustrated by the number of different education departments. Often they went to one place only to be told that they had to go elsewhere. As one woman said, 'One time you have to go to Commonwealth Education, next time it's State Education and then sometimes you have to go to TAFE. Why can't they all be in the same building'. The women felt that if all the departments were in the same area services would be better co-ordinated and they would be more aware of the types of services available for Aboriginals and Islanders.

A national guide to the range of services available to Aboriginal women is in the course of preparation by the Office of the Status of Women and should be available in 1986.



### Aboriginal women in the workforce

#### Employment and unemployment

Aboriginal women see employment as a means to improve their standard of living, reduce their dependence upon welfare assistance and gain control of their own affairs; yet for the majority of Aboriginal women unemployment is the reality. Their participation rate in the paid workforce is considerably less than that of non-Aboriginal women, 32 per cent compared with 46 per cent for all women over 15. In addition they are concentrated in poorly paid jobs in a limited range of occupations.

Aboriginal women also have a high level of hidden unemployment. Many are discouraged from seeking work because of limited job opportunities, lack of education, responsibility for children or past experience or expectation of discrimination. Many of these women will be in receipt of pensions and therefore are not counted in the official unemployment figures. According to a study by Gale and Wundersitz, 'they do not register for unemployment benefits if they cannot find work since most are eligible for a preferred more secure form of pension . . . many would work if they could find employment'.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the women we spoke to were either not familiar with the services offered by the CES or did not think they could register for employment if they were not eligible for unemployment benefits. Women in Broome suggested that the CES should employ more Aboriginal field officers so that they could regularly visit the communities to advise people about CES and how it could help them. They said there are not enough vocational officers to deal with the high number of unemployed. Several women in Queensland were critical of the CES because they considered it gave preferential treatment to non-Aboriginal people.

These views may help explain in part the low level of Aboriginal women registered for unemployment with the CES. Indeed there is a dearth of comprehensive accurate information from which to develop effective policies to increase employment opportunities. Such policies should be developed in consultation with Aboriginal women.

10. F. Gale and J. Wundersitz, 'Adelaide Aborigines: A Case Study of Urban Life 1966-1981', in *The Aboriginal Component in the Australian Economy*, Development Studies Centre, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1982.

## What the women say

They told us about discrimination when competing for jobs in both the private or public sector. Generally they said they felt uncomfortable in interviews. One woman from Sydney told us she was really not 'worried' about a recent interview but

There were five men on the interview panel and only one was Aboriginal. I felt not only uncomfortable but disadvantaged as well. I was determined not to let them see my nervousness. I got the job but I often wonder just how many Aboriginals have to go through this type of interview and not succeed.

A number of women told us that interviews were such a trauma they would not try again. Some women suggested that interviewing skills should be taught in schools.

On Thursday Island women talked about their need for training so they could compete for jobs. They told us that one of the major employers on Thursday Island, the hotels, were employing European women from the mainland. Consequently the local women were not being employed nor were there any programs to train local women to compete for the jobs. Similarly women on Mornington Island told us that Europeans were given jobs in preference to Aboriginals or Islanders.

Other women felt uneasy and uncomfortable when they worked in jobs where they were the only Aboriginal. They said they were lonely and unhappy because they had no support from their fellow workers.

Yet despite the insecurity evident in the above comments, Aboriginal women throughout Australia have many ideas about what needs to be done to ease unemployment in their own community.

Women in the Northern Territory said they wanted more jobs created in the community.

We want to learn sewing with a view to making clothes and school uniforms to sell and want help with learning how to set up an incorporated body where we have responsibilities of money and organisation in our control.

With such skills they believe they would be able to do the jobs currently done by non-Aboriginal people.

Women from one area in the Northern Territory want a boat so they can set up a fishing business and supply the community with fish. Women in several communities expressed interest in setting up their own art and craft business. They want to learn how to keep records and books and package goods for sale. They also said they needed a vehicle to collect raw material from the bush.

Women in south-west Western Australia had given a lot of consideration to the unemployment in their area. They were aware of the causes—basically, lack of education and qualifications—and had come up with solutions which they believed would work.

They want external courses in their areas where they can learn as a group and the opportunity to create employment by establishing their own enterprises (e.g. crafts or co-operatives) or having access to jobs in decentralised manufacturing firms (in, say, computer components). They argue that outlays on employment-creating ventures would prove less costly than paying social security benefits. These, they say, are inadequate for their needs.

## Women in successful employment ventures

Aboriginal communities have now established a number of projects which are self-sufficient or will be in the foreseeable future. Often these projects have been initiated as an alternative to welfare dependency and to



combat the view of non-Aboriginals that 'all Aboriginals want is sit-down money'.

At Utopia Station in a remote part of the Northern Territory the local Aboriginal women took the initiative in creating a batik industry. Before the Northern Territory Land Rights Act the women used to do menial work for the white pastoralists in return for meagre rations of food; now they have established this artistically and financially viable business on their own land, using designs for the cloth that come from their own experiences—flowers and lizards, etc. Their economic independence is obviously a source of pride and joy for these women.

Similarly Aboriginal women from Docker River have established their own batik industry. The local Aboriginal organisation assisted several women to go to the Philippines to study batik design.

Successful industries have also been established in Ernabella and Bathurst Island where Tiwi Arts and Craft does screen printing and pottery, and in Katherine where Mimi Arts makes batik. During our consultations many women wanted to know more about the process of setting-up such industries so they would have an alternative to the pension or the dole.

In South Australia a number of communities are establishing organic gardens. With the assistance of technical experts and minimal funding Aboriginals are establishing and maintaining very productive market gardens. Perhaps the most successful to date is Poverty Flats Garden, Ceduna. Here Peter Bennett, one of the foremost organic gardeners in Australia today, was contracted to teach the garden course.

Poverty Flat has received TV and newspaper coverage, and the successes there have attracted Aboriginal and white visitors from most States; Gary Foley has stated (after a visit) that the garden is the best preventive medical system that he has seen; and several others have made similar comments. Spinoffs are much improved relationships between white and Aboriginal communities at Ceduna (the Aboriginal people are now in the role of suppliers and teachers), greatly improved self-confidence and communication skills in Aboriginal students (17 in all at this garden); it has created an almost unbelievable improvement in the productive value of a hitherto neglected, littered, and hostile site belonging to an Aboriginal land trust.

We cannot praise too much the efforts of Peter Bennett as teacher, and his skills in soil science and organic growing have been imparted to his students, who (I believe) are Australia's best arid-land gardeners today.

The majority of these gardeners are women.

Another project was conducted at Nepabunna. Here, clean water had first priority, as salted bore water was causing renal failure and was unsuitable for gardening. Classes, convened by the School of Aboriginal Education (SAE), fabricated rolled steel tanks for home water supplies, and are now working to produce cement tanks at Ceduna to provide home drinking water, and potentially for wider sales to the public. Plans are also afoot to create storage systems (dams and swales) at Nepabunna and Oodnadatta.

Clearly TAFE and the SAE has shown that, by contracting excellent teachers and skilled tradespeople, the Aboriginal people quickly learn to identify and solve problems related to community health and the provision of basic life resources. Building and house retrofit and owner-builder classes are also under way at Yalata, Davenport and Oodnadatta and food preparation classes at Ceduna, where the food produced is also used to teach good nutrition. With the aid of modest resources and good teachers to identify the areas of community need, Aboriginal people have alleviated much misery and despair. Their students are strongly motivated when they see that their efforts directly help their community, and the praise that follows keeps their



involvement levels high. They are developing faith in their own ability to solve every problem once it is identified.<sup>11</sup>

In other areas, too, Aboriginals are demonstrating their capacity to learn and so achieve gainful employment.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL), which receives financial support from the Commonwealth, provides hostel accommodation for Aboriginals. AHL operates or funds hostels for students, trainees and young employees living away from home, aged persons, single parents, transients, homeless persons and persons undergoing alcohol dependency rehabilitation. AHL, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1983, has a well structured career development/training program, and has been able to achieve a 90 per cent Aboriginalisation of its employees, most of whom are women. In many instances they hold management positions.

The above examples clearly show the ability, initiative and creativity of Aboriginal women to develop employment for themselves. Their success depended on access to training, raw materials and financial support in the initial stages of the project. Many of the women we spoke with have not had the same opportunities.

### Occupational segregation

The occupations of Aboriginal women in the workforce are highly segregated. The majority work in three occupational categories: service, sport, recreation: 35 per cent; clerical workers: 23 per cent; professional, technicians, etc.: 17 per cent.

Moreover, even within this restricted range of occupations, Aboriginal women earn far less money than the majority of comparable workers. Only 4 per cent of Aboriginal women workers, irrespective of occupation, earn more than \$10 000 per annum.

Service, sport and recreation is the occupational group with the lowest wage structure; it is the largest employer of Aboriginal women workers.

The Professional, technicians, etc. group has the highest wage structure; Aboriginal women workers, however, are concentrated at its lower end.

A significant number of Aboriginal women are employed in health and education. Throughout Australia there are approximately 800 Aboriginal education workers (teachers aides), of whom 70 per cent are women. The numbers are similar in the field of health. These two groups, though not numerically large, play a particularly important role as the link between the government system and their Aboriginal clients.

In both the Commonwealth and State bureaucracies, too, Aboriginal women are making their way successfully. Their numbers are small as yet but their achievements are significant. These women (the list is not intended to be exhaustive) include: Eleanor Bourke, Director of the Aboriginal Services Section in the Department of Social Security; Janet Layton, first Aboriginal woman to be promoted to the Senior Executive Service, Department of Health; Pat O'Shane, the first woman to be appointed Secretary of a State government ministry; Pat Turner, the only Aboriginal woman to be appointed to the Senior Executive Service in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and currently the only one acting as a



11. Extract from report from Bill Mollison, Director, the Permaculture Consultancy Tasmania, to David Rathman, Head of School, School of Aboriginal Education, Adelaide College of Technical and Further Education, South Australia, 1984.

Regional Director. Lois O'Donoghue, the first Aboriginal woman to be appointed as a Regional Director of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Just as important, though in a different way, are all those Aboriginal women who work as clerks, clerical assistants, secretaries and keyboard staff. More numerous and therefore more visible they help to create a greater awareness of the Aboriginal community at all levels of the bureaucracy.

Throughout our consultations we spoke with hundreds of women who are active in many areas and in different ways. Some were being paid but the majority worked voluntarily. All are working towards improving conditions for their people both now and more particularly in the future.



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## Regional co-ordinators: Biographical notes

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### ADA BRANFIELD—Brisbane, Queensland

Ada Branfield was born in Goondiwindi, Queensland. When she was 4 years old her family moved to Cunnamulla. Ada was educated and obtained her first job, as a telephonist, in Cunnamulla. She spent three years in the Air Force stationed at Point Cook in Victoria. After leaving the Air Force she worked in Melbourne for four years before returning to Cunnamulla. Since then Ada has stayed in Queensland doing a variety of jobs including a twelve-month posting at Yarrabah.



### BEVERLEY MUIR—Hobart, Tasmania

Beverley Muir was born and educated in Brisbane. Before her marriage she was a trainee industrial chemist. Bev moved to Tasmania in 1970. In 1979 she joined the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as a trainee. She has also been involved with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre since 1977 as branch secretary, treasurer and state treasurer.

Bev is very interested in teaching schoolchildren about Aboriginal culture and has been asked to speak at schools on many occasions.

She has three children.





**JOCELYN MALLIE**—Cairns, Queensland

Jocelyn Mallie was born in Bowen, Queensland, and is of South Sea Islander descent. She is married to a Torres Strait Islander and has one child.

Jocelyn has worked as a shop assistant and as a tradesman's assistant for a sheetmetal worker. She has also done short courses in TAFE colleges on motor mechanics and woodwork.

Jocelyn has an out-going personality and enjoys vigoro and league football. Her main interests are social work, women's refuges and looking after her family. Jocelyn would like to see established a similar program of consultation for Torres Strait and South Sea Island women.



**MARGARET PACKANEN**—Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

Margaret Packanen was born in Moree in New South Wales. She commenced her primary school education at the Moree Mission School then moved on through the primary and high schools in Moree. Margaret commenced her training as a nurses' aide at the Moree District Hospital and has subsequently nursed in hospitals in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. She also worked with the Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney. In addition, Margaret has worked as a clerk, in a child care centre and a computer operator.

Margaret was on the committee of the Newcastle All Blacks Football team.

Married, with two children.



**KAREN BARRY**—Melbourne, Victoria

Karen Barry was born in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. She went to primary and high school in Shepparton. After her family moved to Melbourne in 1977 she continued her schooling at Brighton Technical School where she gained her leaving certificate (year 11). Karen had work experience placements in the then Victorian Premier's Department's Aboriginal Affairs Unit as a clerical assistant and with the Victorian Archaeological Survey as a laboratory assistant.

In 1983 Karen completed the Aboriginal Welfare Assistants Course, a one year full-time course covering sociology, business management, Aboriginal studies, communications, psychology, first aid, audio visual, community and its services.

The position with the Task Force was Karen's first full-time position and she hopes to be able to gain a permanent position soon. She feels she is well suited to do the work of an Aboriginal liaison officer's position.

Karen is an avid reader, likes music and most sports especially V.F.L. football because her brothers play and is very interested in fashion designing.



### LOUISE CORPUS—Darwin, Northern Territory

Louise Corpus was born in Darwin where she spent her childhood at the Reta Dixon Homes. Through her mother, Ngulmul, she has ties with the Nanganmerri people of the Fish River Region in the Northern Territory. Through her father, Alphonso, she has ties with the Yaro people on whose traditional land the town of Broome in Western Australia is built.

Louise also has ties with the Wagonman people of the Upper Daly/Douglas River region in the Territory.

Her Dreaming is the White Eagle and her favourite foods are flying fox, turtle, goanna, sea-snails, crocodile and dugong.

### PATRICIA WALKINGTON—Adelaide, South Australia

Pat was born in Port Augusta. She attended High School in Hay where she obtained her school certificate in 1979. She then did a secretarial studies course at the Griffith TAFE College and returned to Hay High School to complete her secondary schooling. Pat has worked as a clerk in Canberra, Sydney and Adelaide, in the last as a NESAs trainee at the Teachers College.

Pat resigned from the Task Force in September 1984 when she moved to Kingston, South Australia prior to her marriage.



### THOMASISHA PASSMORE-SKELLY—Perth, Western Australia

Thomasisha was born in Mt Magnet, Western Australia in 1940. She was educated at the East Perth Primary School and Kent Street High School where she obtained her junior certificate in 1955. On completion of her schooling 'Welfare' placed her in a hospital at Meridan where she worked as a nursing aide. Thomasisha married in 1957 and had five children by 1961—when the 'pill' came on the market. She had two more children in 1968 and 1970. After her divorce Thomasisha worked at a variety of jobs and on her education.

In 1982 she became a foster mother to two boys, a 15-year-old and a baby.

Thomasisha was instrumental in the establishment of the Black Australian Women's Movement in Western Australia. She is currently working towards the establishment of a Black Women's Resource and Information Centre.

In August 1984 Thomasisha was appointed by the Attorney-General to the Western Australian Parole Board. In this position she is involved in a project to examine the effect of the penal system on Aboriginal people in Western Australia. Thomasisha is also a member of the Western Australian Government's Task Force on Domestic Violence.

Thomasisha believes that this and every government should address as a 'duty of moral obligation the almost forgotten Aboriginal women of Australia'.



VICKI NANGALA-TIPPETT—Alice Springs, Northern Territory  
Walpiri Tribe

Born 1960 at Lajamanu on the edge of the Tanami Desert. Vicki attended primary school at Ali-Curang and Alice Springs then was sent to Adelaide for secondary school. After that she commenced a Social Work Diploma at SAIT with the Aboriginal Task Force, but left before it was completed.

Since her return to the 'Centre' four years ago she has undertaken various jobs: at the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, as a community development officer with the Tangentyere Council, and as a teacher's aide at a local primary school.

When the Pitjantjatjara Country Band went on tour throughout the Centre, Vicki accompanied them as cook, stage hand and driver.

Vicki's main interests are reading, playing the odd afternoon of tennis and driving around the country with friends and relatives.

She has this to say about her work with the Aboriginal Women's Task Force.

I undertook this job with the usual misgivings, that odd attitude about being a public servant smote me. But after speaking with seasoned Aboriginal women it altered my perceptions.

If more Aboriginal people worked within the system then it would be another step towards determining our future, gaining independence and most importantly having a voice.

Vicki was recently employed by the Pitjantjatjara Women's Council compiling a folio which the chairwoman took to the United Nations Decade for Women's Forum, Nairobi in July 1985.



GLYNIS SIBOSADO—Broome, Western Australia

Glynis was born in Broome and is married with six children. She has been actively involved in many Aboriginal organisations especially those concerning education, housing and welfare matters. Her involvement has made her well aware of the needs, hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara. In recent years she has worked as a liaison officer with the State Housing Commission for three years and was manager of the Aboriginal Progress Association in Port Hedland for twelve months. She has represented her community at meetings on a regional, State and national level. In November 1984 she participated in an Aboriginal Cultural Festival in Perth as a storyteller.

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# History of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force

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## Background

At a Teach-In on Aboriginal Land Rights, held in Sydney on 17–18 March 1979, the 300 people in attendance unanimously passed the following motion.

- That the Prime Minister establish immediately a Task Force on Aboriginal women with its main terms of reference—the role and status of Aboriginal women in the Aboriginal Land Rights stand. The Task Force to consist of representatives of Aboriginal women from the following non-governmental bodies
  - Aboriginal Lands Councils
  - Aboriginal Lands Trusts
  - National Aboriginal Conference, and any other Aboriginal organisations working towards the achievement of Aboriginal Land Rights.<sup>1</sup>

This recommendation was endorsed at a meeting of Aboriginal women from all States in Canberra on 2 April 1979. This meeting referred the recommendation to the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) which endorsed it unanimously in June 1979.

## Establishment of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force

The establishment of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force was the subject of lengthy negotiations between the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs and Home Affairs and their respective departments. These negotiations began in April 1979 when the proposal was discussed at a meeting of Aboriginal women and a representative of the then Office of Women's Affairs.<sup>2</sup> A significant step was the agreement 'in principle', in September 1979, by the then Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon. R.J. Ellicott, Q.C., M.P., and the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator the Hon. F.M. Chaney, that an Aboriginal Women's Task Force be established.

Following this decision there was an exchange of letters between the responsible ministers over the next fifteen months but no progress was made towards the establishment of the Task Force.

In February 1981 Mrs Nessie Skuta, a member of the NAC, convened a meeting of Aboriginal women in Canberra. That meeting drew up a proposal for a sub-committee on women's affairs in the NAC and an



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1. Land Trusts are simply title holding bodies. They are legal entities which may hold and dispose of property and sue and be sued. Members of a Land Trust must be Aboriginal owners and Aboriginals living in the area.

Land Councils are established to manage Aboriginal land. They are required to: ascertain and express the wishes and opinions of Aboriginals; protect the interests of the Aboriginal owners; negotiate, on behalf of Aboriginal owners and other Aboriginals, with people wishing to use Aboriginal land; help Aboriginals to pursue land claims.

2. The Office of Women's Affairs (OWA) in the Department of Home Affairs subsequently became the Office of the Status of Women in October 1982.



annual conference for Aboriginal women. The proposal was sent to the NAC and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The national executive of the NAC unanimously endorsed the proposal later in February.

Mrs Skuta's proposal was discussed at a meeting on 28 April between Ms Kathleen Taperell, the Director of the OWA, and Mr Tony Ayers, the then Secretary of the DAA. He expressed strong reservations about the practicality of the proposal, his major objection being that the NAC was an elected body and consequently there was no way of ensuring women would be elected. As an alternative he suggested that DAA regional planning meetings could be used to facilitate consultation with women.

A meeting of Aboriginal women and a representative from the OWA on 6 May 1981 discussed the points raised but was opposed to the alternative plan put forward by Mr Ayers. It was agreed, however, that no further action would be taken on Mrs Skuta's proposal until Aboriginal women in the community had had time to comment on it.

Following the appointment of Ms Pat O'Shane, a prominent Aboriginal woman, to the OWA in July 1981 there was a further round of discussions and correspondence on the establishment of an Aboriginal Women's Task Force. These culminated in the terms of reference for the Task Force in August 1981. It was to:

- inquire into the involvement of Aboriginal women in land rights, health, housing, education, employment, legal aid, culture and child care (with particular reference to adoption and fostering of Aboriginal children);
- seek to have Aboriginal women identify their critical needs in these areas; and
- make recommendations to the Commonwealth on what action may be taken to meet any identified needs.

In the same month arrangements were set in train to obtain the services of the Aboriginal Women's Adviser to the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. She and Ms O'Shane were to constitute the Task Force.

The establishment of the Task Force received major setbacks when Ms O'Shane resigned from OWA in November 1981 to take up an appointment as Secretary of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales and arrangements to obtain the services of the Aboriginal Women's Adviser in the Northern Territory failed in June 1982. The DAA was unable to provide any assistance with staff for the Task Force.

On 27 July 1982, at an informal meeting of Canberra-based Aboriginal women and a representative of the OWA, it was agreed to set up a small working party to revive the proposal for an Aboriginal Women's Task Force. The OWA representative, Mary Sexton, was the only non-Aboriginal member of the working party. The other members were: Eleanor Bourke, Director of the Aboriginal Services Section, Department of Social Security; Vera Budby, Clerk, DAA; Aileen Buckley, Research Officer, NAC; Pearl Duncan, Teacher; Flo Grant, Clerk, Information Section, Department of Social Security; Marcia Langton, Research Officer, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and Patricia Williamson, Research Officer, NAC.

The working party developed the following aims to assist the Task Force in its work and prepared detailed job specifications for the position of leader of the Task Force. The aims were to:

- undertake an extensive program of consultations with Aboriginal women throughout Australia;
- prepare a report to the Government, based on these consultations, which was to include action-oriented recommendations;

- develop a national network of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal organisations and in Commonwealth, State and territory government departments and agencies; and
- explore the value of permanent consultative arrangements between Aboriginal women and the Government.

Finding staff for the Task Force was hampered by the severe staffing levels operating in the Commonwealth Public Service at the time. The DAA was not able to provide any assistance and the then OWA had only one position available.

In November 1981 the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment the Hon. D.T. McVeigh agreed that the Office should make one of its policy positions available for a period of eighteen months.

Recruitment to the position of leader of the Task Force took several months due to other work pressures and the difficulty in finding an available person with suitable skills and background.

### Appointments to the Task Force

The position of leader of the Task Force was widely advertised in *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* on 6 January 1983 and in the *Australian* and *National Times* on 7–8 January 1983, and also in Aboriginal and relevant departmental newsletters and over Aboriginal radio stations. Interviews for the position were held in Canberra in March 1983 by officers of the Office of the Status of Women and a representative of the Public Service Board. Ms Phyllis Daylight was appointed in July 1983.

Ms Daylight was born in Roma, Queensland in 1945. Her family comes from Cherbourg but she was raised in Ipswich, near Brisbane. At the time of her appointment Ms Daylight was working as an Education Officer in the then Department of Education and Youth Affairs in Darwin where she had lived since 1976.

Ms Mary Johnstone, sponsored initially under the National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals (NESA), became the second member of the Task Force team. Ms Johnstone was born in Yass, New South Wales in 1949.

Her grandmother was born in Brungle, New South Wales, and moved to Yass in the early 1900s. After Mary completed her schooling at Mt Carmel College at Yass she moved to Canberra for work. After 1972 she worked in Sydney and Melbourne and returned to Canberra in January 1983. She had worked with Medibank Private for eight years prior to beginning preliminary work for the Task Force in April 1983.

In August 1983 the Aboriginal Women's Task Force was formally established in the Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.<sup>3</sup>

### Support group

A local support group of Aboriginal women was set up on 18 August 1983 to provide the Task Force with advice and support and as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The support group comprised those members of the working party who were still living in Canberra (Eleanor Bourke, Pearl Duncan, Flo



3. The Office was transferred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in March 1983. This move was part of the changes in administrative arrangements of the Hawke Government in March 1983. The Office is responsible for advising the Prime Minister on matters affecting women. It monitors and co-ordinates the development of policies to raise the status of women and monitors the impact of all government policies and programs on the status of women.

Grant, and Marcia Langton), a representative of the NAC (Merle Jackomos), a representative of the Federation of Aboriginal Women (Margaret Wirrpanda) and the following Canberra-based Aboriginal women Gloria Brennan (on leave from the Commonwealth Public Service, studying on an Aboriginal Overseas Study Award); Matilda House, DAA; Janet Layton, Equal Opportunity Bureau, Public Service Board; Alexis Omond, NAC Secretariat and Pat Turner, DAA. Following Ms Omond's resignation in February 1984 Jackie Huggins from the DAA agreed to take her place.

### Regional Co-ordinators

The breadth of the terms of reference and so the magnitude of the work the Task Force was to undertake made support staff essential. Accordingly, eleven women were engaged, under the CEP<sup>4</sup>, to work as regional co-ordinators for nine months. They were Vicki Nangala-Tippett (Alice Springs), Patricia Walkington (Adelaide), Ada Branfield (Brisbane), Glynis Sibosado (Broome), Jocelyn Mallie (Cairns), Margaret Packanen (Canberra), Louise Corpus (Darwin), Beverley Muir (Hobart), Karen Barry (Melbourne), Thomasisha Passmore-Skelly (Perth) and in Sydney Gwen Ridgeway and Ava Longbottom, who both resigned before the completion of the nine months because of family commitments.



4. The CEP was set up in August 1983 to assist the most disadvantaged groups of unemployed obtain permanent employment in the general labour market. It does this by providing work experience and where possible training in funded, labour-intensive projects of social and economic benefit to the community.

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# The procedures of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force

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## Introduction

The first stage in planning the Task Force's program was to consult the members of the support group. Its collective expertise was invaluable in drawing up a program and in deciding which communities were to be visited.

The decisions about which communities to visit were made after exhaustive discussions on their types and sizes, their geographic location, special needs and the need to give proportional attention to all the States. It was also agreed that the Task Force should wherever possible hold meetings with Aboriginal organisations and government officials.

We knew that the need for our work arose from discussions about the way in which Aboriginal women had been largely overlooked in previous government inquiries and the fact that requests for consultations by Aboriginal women had been raised on many occasions since 1979. We therefore based our approach on the recommendation from the Aboriginal Women's workshop at the 1980 ANZAAS conference, 'The women would like the Government to listen to Aboriginal women first before the white people'.

As a first principle we went out to listen. The Terms of Reference provided a broad framework for discussions, but we believed that if we listened, rather than asked questions, the women would raise issues of concern to them.

## Methods of consultation

In drawing up our program of visits we were conscious of the need to talk to as many women as possible in different types of communities across Australia. At the same time we wanted to spend two or three days in each place we visited to allow time for broad discussions. Despite the constraints of distance and weather we visited over 200 communities in twelve months: 24 in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, 19 in Victoria, 18 in South Australia, 27 in Western Australia, 6 in Tasmania, 39 in the Northern Territory and 73 in Queensland. Sometimes (but rarely, because of the constraints imposed by time and geography) we were able to return to these centres.

Our program required a considerable amount of preliminary work: contacts in the communities to be established, meetings to be arranged, permission to visit sought from the Community Council, NAC members to be contacted, transport, accommodation and meeting places to be arranged. In some places we had to arrange to employ interpreters.

Because we knew we would need to allow time for women to put their views and ideas to us in different ways we developed a very flexible



approach to our consultations. We convened meetings but we also used every occasion we could to speak to women—at social functions and family gatherings, in airports, ‘planes and shops. Wherever the opportunity offered we talked to women and listened to their views.

In addition women, some of whom we had met but some we had not, have written or phoned us on a wide range of issues. Much of this material has been incorporated into the information on which this report is based.

Our consultations began in October 1983 with a three-week visit to communities in northern Queensland. Sometimes we worked individually, sometimes in tandem. Our program had us on the road for two to three weeks then back in the office in Canberra for a week or so to write our reports. This method of working and this schedule continued until February 1984 when the regional co-ordinators began working with the Task Force.



### The regional co-ordinators

The eleven regional co-ordinators (their names and areas are set out in Appendix 1) received a week's training in Canberra then returned home to begin working in their own communities. They provided enormous support for us when we visited their areas, particularly in introducing us to the women there and ensuring that they knew we were coming and why. They also arranged meetings, travel and accommodation and so saved us much valuable time. This is in marked contrast to the first six months of our work when we had to make *all* the arrangements from Canberra.

In addition the regional co-ordinators established support groups, attended meetings of Aboriginal organisations, acted as an informal information service within their region and reported regularly to us on their activities and the views of the women in their area.

The value to the whole consultation process of having women actually working in their own regions cannot be overemphasised. Without the regional co-ordinators' assistance we would not have been able to obtain anywhere near the depth of information we did. Throughout the time they worked with us they provided that vitally necessary link with women in the communities. Also, the bond that developed between us meant our task somehow seemed more achievable.

The benefits of having Aboriginal women consulting with their own people are best summed up in their words: 'You do realise that we would not be telling you these things if you were not Aboriginal women'.

### The national conference

At the first support group meeting held in Canberra in August 1983 we agreed to hold a conference, after we had been working for six months, to review the work done to date and obtain direction for the future. Accordingly, from 30 March to 1 April 1984 we held a national conference in Canberra attended by about 100 Aboriginal and Islander women. The participants came from all over Australia—women selected by their communities, our regional co-ordinators, members of the support group and the DAA Women's Information Officers.<sup>1</sup>

The conference provided the opportunity for women from many different communities to come together and share their ideas. For many it

1. The DAA Women's Information Officers were employed for one year under the CEP to consult with women. The project finished in February 1985.



was the first chance they had been given to look at Aboriginal women's issues from a national perspective. The record of discussions and recommendations from the conference have been used in preparation of this report.<sup>2</sup> In addition establishing new networks and reinforcing existing ones was a major achievement of the conference.

### The meetings

Details of our Australia wide discussions with women appear earlier in this report. Here it is worthy of comment that at each meeting we found out just how little most of the women in the communities knew about available government services. The Task Force team was often used as a resource to find out more about their entitlements to various services, for example CEP, Social Security benefits and welfare services generally, subjects that arose naturally as the women discussed their problems in these areas. Mostly we were able to refer them to a person within the relevant department or authority or undertook to follow up on their behalf.

We also encouraged women at the meetings to form their own Aboriginal Women's Group. We explained the many things they could achieve in their own communities by inviting officers from various departments to meet with them and exchange information or discuss any problems they were encountering. We explained that only they could decide what best suited them and that through lobbying and good liaison with the different departments they could effect many positive changes. Many communities now have strong women's groups.

These groups also served as a means of communication both among themselves and with the Task Force. Many women had complained that they were often questioned on many different matters, especially by academic researchers and government officials, but never received further feedback. In some cases we have been able to maintain on-going contact with the women we visited and so gained additional information. For those women we were not able to contact again we hope the report will be seen as our way of saying thank you for the time and information shared with us.



2. Taped recordings and photographs of the proceedings are held at the National Film and Sound Archives, Canberra.

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# History of administration of Aboriginal affairs 1788–1985

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## 1. Settlement in the east: the establishment of a 'prototype'

When Captain James Cook took possession of the east coast of Australia in 1770, the occupants of the land became, at least in British eyes, 'British subjects' entitled to the rights and protection of a British subject and heir to the demands of subjecthood. Certainly this view informed Governor Arthur Phillip's Instructions in 1787, to

endeavour by every possible means to open intercourse with the natives and . . . conciliate their affections enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.<sup>1</sup>

If any colonists 'wantonly' destroyed them or unnecessarily interrupted their occupations, Phillip was to punish the culprits. He ordered that the 'natives' should not be offended or molested in any way and were to be treated with every mark of friendship.

Despite some initial limited success, relations between the two peoples had been breached less than a month after landing. By the end of 1788, relations were marked by chronic violence. By 1790, three years after the foundation of settlement, the early policy of conciliation and friendship was completely bankrupt when Phillip officially authorised two 'punitive' parties to revenge the murder of a convict.<sup>2</sup>

Successive governors of the colony received similar instructions from the British Government. They were to regard and treat Aboriginals as British subjects, to practise peaceful co-existence and protect and 'civilise' the 'natives'. Governor Darling was directed to promote their 'religion and education . . . while protecting their persons in the free enjoyment of their possessions'. However, he was also instructed to 'oppose force by force' and to repel hostile incursions by Aboriginals 'as if they proceeded from the subjects of an accredited state'.<sup>3</sup>

These Instructions reveal the ambivalent legal status of Aboriginals (as both subjects and aliens) and the contradiction between 'conciliation' and 'dispossession'. Aboriginal subjects who resisted encroachment would be quelled by civil or military action.

The significance of land in Aboriginal culture inevitably meant Aboriginal resistance. But the Europeans had come as settlers, intent on

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1. 'Original Text of Instructions to Phillip', 25 April 1787 (C.201/1), *HRA* I, i, 13. See C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, MUP, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 79–80.

2. W. E. H. Stanner, 'After the Dreaming' (Boyer Lectures 1968) reprinted in *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938–1973*, ANU Press, Canberra 1979, pp. 198–201.

3. C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Vol. 1 of *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1970, pp. 19–20.

colonising a continent. Thus to offer protection and full rights to Aboriginals inexorably contradicted the objectives of settlement.

### **The development of a prototype: 'the hostile frontier' (1788–1838)**

During the first decade of settlement, along the Hawkesbury, the Hunter and the Shoalhaven, and later across the mountains in the Bathurst district, settlement almost always developed into an unacknowledged war of conquest of varying brutality.

As early as 1796, Governor Hunter had instructed settlers on the Hawkesbury to combine together for their own defence while stressing that wanton killing was murder. Two decades later, Governor Macquarie issued similar orders, and began to plan to station troops along the Hawkesbury, Nepean and Grose rivers.<sup>4</sup> Hence within the first three decades of settlement the 'hostile frontier' became established as the pattern of initial relations between Aboriginals and Europeans—a prototype which probably was completed by the declaration of martial law in the Bathurst region in 1824.

No agreement or treaty had ever been sought from the Aboriginals for the settlement of their land, even from those in the immediate vicinity of first settlement. Because the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia were nomadic and tended not to establish permanent camps or leave signs of permanent settlement, British officials regarded the land as vacant and felt free to authorise British settlement.<sup>5</sup>

Settlement meant dispossession for the Aboriginal people and led to attack and counter-attack, chronic hostility and fear between Europeans and Aboriginals on the eastern frontier. Worse still, the prevalence of convict labour meant that settlers were not even obliged to regard the Aboriginals as a valuable labour source and could, therefore, in their extraordinary arrogance, consider them entirely dispensable.

The good intentions of the British Government notwithstanding, colonial governors were as powerless to prevail against the hostility which governed the frontier as they were to prevent the spread of settlement, in the early days illegal beyond the Nineteen Counties. Their resources were totally inadequate to police the day-to-day relations of inhabitants of what was becoming a vast frontier.

The pattern of Aboriginal–European relations established in New South Wales was to be repeated in each of the other Australian colonies. Because they were established at different times and in different geographical situations, emphases differed but, not surprisingly, administrative policies reflected the general uniformity of their culture and society and that of the society on which they were progressively imposed.

Until self-government, each of the colonies remained under the authority of the Colonial Office, which was still influenced by the humanitarian principles that had prevailed, and foundered, at first settlement. These led to a House of Commons Select Committee, which in 1838 recommended:

missionaries for the natives, protectors for their defence, reservation of hunting lands, schooling for the young and special codes of law to protect Aboriginals until they learned to live within the framework of the British law.

But Governor Macquarie in 1814 had attempted to establish an educational 'Native Institution' at Parramatta, from which the Aborigin-

4. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

5. K. Maddock, *Your Land is Our Land: Aboriginal Land Rights*, Penguin Books, 1983, pp. 9–17.





als promptly withdrew their children, saying it was a means of alienating them from their traditional culture.

### **The Port Phillip Protectorate (1838–49)**

In 1838 Governor Gipps established the Port Phillip Protectorate, as recommended by the Committee. This was the first organised and full-scale attempt to offer the Aboriginals the protection due to them as British subjects.

(In Van Diemen's land there had been an earlier attempt at 'protection', organised by G.A. Robinson in an attempt to save those Aboriginals ordered out of the settled areas by Governor Arthur. They were placed on what were supposed to be 'controlled reserves', strictly reserved for them, and supplied with food and clothing. The attempt was a horrible failure; disastrous in its human consequences, it was important as the first attempt at protection—and segregation on controlled (i.e. the inhabitants could not leave) and 'inviolable' reserves—inviolable until settlers required them.)

Gipps appointed Robinson as Chief Protector and four Protectors, each of whom had a district for which he was responsible and in which he was to demarcate land for Aboriginal use, which was to have priority over pastoral use. Each Protector was to move with the Aboriginals, learn their languages, and persuade them to settle down to a farming life; to protect them from encroachment on their lands and from cruelty and injustice.

The Port Phillip Protectorate operated for little more than a decade with very little result. Local settlers vigorously resisted its operations; it failed to induce a disposition to settle amongst its Aboriginal charges; and it failed to arrest the alarming spread of disease and population decline. Financial stringencies and a high turnover of staff contributed to its shoddy public image, which the settler community, jealous of the prime land it controlled, made every effort to tarnish. The Protectorate was abolished at the end of 1849.

Gipps also attempted to provide greater legal protection for the Aboriginals in New South Wales by a more concerted attempt to enforce their legal rights and to punish severely offences against them. His intentions are starkly illustrated by his determined prosecution of the perpetrators of the Myall Creek Massacre of 1838—a determination which finally led to the execution of seven Europeans: station owners and their convict servants. Gipps followed this drastic action with the Border Police Act of 1839, which established a police force under the Commissioner of Lands to enforce the land legislation and to protect Aboriginals.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, Gipps's Border Police soon served to protect settlers from Aboriginals rather than the reverse. The 'imperatives' of the frontier reasserted themselves and the qualms of the thirties were readily forgotten.

With the demise of the Port Phillip Protectorate practically all concern for the Aboriginal British subject was lost, though the Colonial Secretary intervened to ensure that William Thomas was retained to act as Guardian of Aboriginals and that Commissioners of Crown Lands would be part-time protectors. Nonetheless, some institutional relief lingered in the Port Phillip area and beyond, almost as the ghost of a protectorate which refused to die. Governor LaTrobe provided new reserves in less settled areas in 1850 additional to those which continued to function from

6. M.D. Prentis, *A Study in Black and White: The Aboriginals in Australian History*, Hicks Smith, Sydney, 1975, pp. 61, 64. See also Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 38–9.

protectorate days, and the new Victorian Government, after 1851, voted funds for Aboriginal welfare each year. These enabled Guardian Thomas to make limited distributions of rations, medical services and clothing. In most settled areas of the east, however, Aboriginal policy and administration reverted to 'a blanket a year' and an almost total neglect.

### The bankruptcy of colonial policy

The policy with which administrators had first approached inhabitants of the Australian continent had been doomed from the start by its fundamental contradiction: to protect the Aboriginals and their freedoms and rights as British subjects while simultaneously depriving them of access to their land, and thus the basis of their economic and spiritual wellbeing.

Administrators had not understood why their policy had failed and thus sought to revive it and make it succeed. During the 1830s and 1840s they sought to right the wrongs of the initial settlement period through increased vigilance on the frontier, increased protection of Aboriginal rights and freedoms and, of course, a more energetic attempt to 'reclaim' Aboriginal subjects and train them to enjoy the benefits of Christian civilisation. By the end of the 1840s, their efforts had left them with three apparently intractable problems. The 'failure' of the Port Phillip Protectorate and of Christian missions to prevail against the Aboriginals' 'wandering habits' and 'heathen superstition' was the first. The constant disregard for law, justice and humanitarianism amongst European settlers in their dealings with Aboriginals was the second. The third was the continuing determination of Aboriginal people to resist by force, stealth or any other means at their disposal their enforced dispossession. All these problems converged by the end of the 1840s to render the efforts of administrators and other concerned parties futile, and to undermine both their basic beliefs in what was humanly possible and their will to achieve it.

These intractable problems had left administrators with a dilemma: their duty and responsibility for the Aboriginal people, on the one hand, and the primacy, in their colonial circumstances, of the 'dynamics of the frontier' on the other. This frontier moved ceaselessly outward and onward, reproducing again and again a set of violent and oppressive relationships, always evading the administrators' attempts to intervene or control its 'imperatives'.

### Elaboration of the prototype—settlement around the continent 1829–63

To the west of the continent two new settlements had been established, on the Swan River by Governor Stirling in 1829 and on the Torrens River by Governor Hindmarsh in 1836. Initially, each adopted the same approach to its Aboriginal inhabitants as that first employed in the east—protection, education, civilisation.<sup>7</sup>

On the Swan, however, there was an early concession that settlers were entitled to act in self-defence. One outcome was the 'Battle of the Pinjarra' in which twenty-five Aboriginals were killed in a military-style operation in 1834. So much for protection. By 1838 Stirling's 1834 settlement for vocational training had failed, and he appointed its supervisor as Superintendent of Natives for the Perth area, where his duties were, largely, to 'keep the peace' within the metropolitan area!



7. See N. Green, 'Aboriginals and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century' in C. T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, 1981, p. 89.

Stirling's successor, Governor Hutt, also attempted to incorporate Aboriginals into the life and work of the colony.<sup>8</sup> He too failed; hostility and fear marked relations between Aboriginals and Europeans, especially as settlement spread north and east. His 'Guardians of Aboriginals' (established in 1839) became also 'Protectors of Settlers' in 1849—roles that, as in the east, were inherently contradictory. The transition from an emphasis on protection and civilisation of Aboriginals to the policing of a problematic frontier, to the abandonment of anything but 'frontier justice', was completed more rapidly in the Swan River settlement than it had been in the east—within three decades rather than six.

The colony of South Australia also set out to bring the benefits of civilisation and Christianity to the Aboriginals.<sup>9</sup> Its expressed intentions on rights, protection, education and funding were more generous than elsewhere; but the promise of the land fund (one-fifth of the revenue from land sales) was not kept and the provision to safeguard land in Aboriginal use could not be policed and was unenforceable.

The outcome in South Australia was yet another repetition of the pattern elsewhere of hostility and fear. Aboriginal resistance was widespread and violent on the frontier, and settler reprisals were brutal and indiscriminate. Within four years from the foundation of the colony, the first authorised punitive expedition had taken place, the first of many as authorities strove in vain to impose law and order along the expanding frontier.

A dependent and listless town-dwelling Aboriginal population grew up at an extraordinarily rapid pace around Adelaide. By 1837 a significant and growing Aboriginal population was being supported on government rations.<sup>10</sup>

In 1856, the care of the Aboriginal population became the responsibility of the Commissioner of Crown Lands—a transfer of responsibility symbolising, in South Australia as elsewhere, the primacy of settlement. By the time the vast Northern Territory was placed under the control of the South Australian Government in 1863, that primacy was long established.

## 2. The abrogation of government responsibility: *laissez-faire* and the rule of the frontier

From the 1850s on attempts to protect and cultivate the Aboriginal population in each colony had broken down irreversibly. This period, often characterised as one of *laissez-faire*, is extraordinarily difficult to deal with in a history of Aboriginal policy, partly because, essentially, a policy of 'no policy' is an indistinct phenomenon and thus difficult to describe. Vague or even non-existent though the policy was, the administration of Aboriginal affairs continued in each colony, though with pronounced regional variations. In the absence of any fixed policy, the peculiar geographic, demographic and chronological characteristics of each colony were to be the factors which determined relations between Aboriginals and Europeans—factors which further complicate a history of the period.



8. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

9. South Australia, DAA, 'A Brief Outline of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia since Colonization', Adelaide, 1963, pp. 1–3. (Typescript 28 pp., AIAS Library, Canberra.)

10. Rowley, *Destruction*, p. 75.

### Victoria (1849–69)

If there was any exception to the rule of *laissez-faire*, Victoria was that exception. It had retained vestigial concern for Aboriginal welfare after the abandonment by the protectorate and, after only a decade of inactivity, appointed a Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines following continuing reports of Aboriginal depopulation. This board consisted of missionaries and members of parliament and was responsible for assisting Guardian Thomas in his efforts to reserve land and maintain supply depots in various parts of the colony. But it took another decade for this board to receive statutory authority for its efforts, in the *Aboriginals Protection Act, 1869*.<sup>11</sup>



In the meantime, the concerted resistance of settlers and the continuing despair of previously concerned parties frustrated the efforts of the board. The Act of 1869 did, however, mark the end of *laissez-faire* in Victoria. After its promulgation, the colony experienced a spurt of activity in the establishment of reserves and the expansion of mission activity. Even before 1869 Victoria had retained the most consistent commitment to the welfare of Aborigines of any Australian colony and had, by the end of its short-lived adherence to *laissez-faire*, developed a scheme which foreshadowed what was to become a sweeping national return to the policy of protection by the end of the century.

### New South Wales and Tasmania (1849–76)

In New South Wales during the same period Aboriginal policy receded from public discussion and disappeared from official agenda. The primacy of the frontier was acknowledged as a fact after 1850. In settled areas, Christian missions were severely discouraged and government activity was confined largely to the operations of Bourke's Land Commissioners who, like Gipps's Border Police, were primarily responsible for enforcing the land legislation and only secondarily responsible for Aboriginal welfare.

Existing reserves tended to be maintained only as the basis for a very limited relief operation towards aged and infirm Aborigines. The other main agent of government administration of Aborigines during this period was the Native Police—a mounted and armed Aboriginal police force, led by European officers. They had been deployed in the Port Phillip region but were withdrawn after 1850 to protect settlers and quell Aboriginal resistance north of the Clarence and Mackay rivers.

Just how dominant frontier attitudes had become by the 1850s and 1860s appears in the recommendations of the Select Committee of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly on the Native Police in 1856. Despite evidence of excessive brutality and of entirely extra-legal methods, the Select Committee recommended a more militarily efficient distribution of the force and the strengthening of units north from Moreton Bay. It found that the force had effected 'a great amount of good in checking the lawless state of outrage on the part of native blacks'.<sup>12</sup>

In Tasmania, the dismal failure of Robinson's attempt to preserve the Aboriginal community in his charge at Flinders Island led the government to assume their problem was over. After 1876, the government made no attempt to devise any Aboriginal policy.

11. Australia, DAA, *Aboriginals in Victoria*, pp. 5–6.

12. Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 39–43.



### Western and South Australia and the Northern Territory (1855–98)

In Western and South Australia, the offices of Protector and Guardian of Aboriginals were abolished—in 1855 and 1856 respectively. Aboriginal administration in each colony became the province of the coercive agents of the State—the scattered police force—a relegation of responsibility that typified *laissez-faire* in many Australian colonies. That the police were often the only representatives of the government in most frontier areas made them the obvious agents to administer Aboriginal welfare as a 'residual' responsibility. Nonetheless this primary task was essentially coercive and their cultural sympathies almost certainly lay with the settlers, so the prospects for Aboriginal protection on the frontier were further diminished during this period.

Western Australia continued under British control until 1898, but the influence of the Colonial Office was limited, its reminders sporadic. There may have been a cosmetic concern for 'legality' amongst Western Australian governors, but distance rendered that concern ineffective on what was now a massive frontier, especially in the violent north. The only other variation in the period of *laissez-faire* in Western Australia was the introduction of protective labour legislation in the 1870s and 1880s in which Aboriginals were included.<sup>13</sup>

In South Australia, the office of protector (abolished in 1856) was re-established in 1861. For the next three decades, however, Aboriginal administration was relegated to government representatives appointed as part-time sub-protectors, often policemen, who reported periodically to the Commissioner of Crown Lands on the Aboriginal population in their localities. The other major activity of the South Australian Government was to encourage the extension of mission activity. The missions at Point McLeay and Point Pearce, established during this period, provided the government with a timely answer to the problem of a growing fringe-dwelling population around Adelaide.<sup>14</sup>

The South Australian Government assumed control of the Northern Territory in 1863. Administrators in Adelaide appear to have regarded the Northern Territory simply as an extension of the South Australian frontier—and the 'non-interventionist' tendencies of the period were allowed to prevail. As a result, no concern for the protection and rights of the Aboriginal as a British subject ever influenced settlement in the Northern Territory. Instead, governed at a distance by a legislature which had abandoned any positive policy towards its Aboriginal inhabitants, the Northern Territory and its European masters were soon left to their own devices. The same system of protectors and sub-protectors then operating in the colony itself was established on the Northern Territory frontier. Its agents were either policemen or telegraph operators led by a part-time protector and a medical officer, stationed at Palmerston.<sup>15</sup>

Here, as in Western Australia and other remote parts of Australia, and unlike the other colonies, the value of the Aboriginal labourer worked to temper the worst excesses of the frontier. European pastoralists would often modify their excesses after initial hostilities ceased and seek some sort of adjustment with the local Aboriginal population to secure their co-operation as a labour force. In some areas, where Aboriginals were

13. Green, 'Aboriginals', pp. 107–10 and Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 189–91.

14. South Australia, DAA, 'A Brief Outline', pp. 4–5. See also Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 204–5.

15. Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 211–12.



amenable, such an arrangement often worked. Elsewhere, Aboriginal resentment and resistance rejected such an arrangement, and in these areas, hostility and brutality reproduced the frontier patterns that had prevailed in other areas. Because of the vastness of the Northern Territory frontier and the communication difficulties imposed by a sub-tropical climate, effective administration of frontier relations was virtually impossible.

### Queensland (1859–97)

The colony of Queensland was established during the period of *laissez-faire*: it was separated from New South Wales in 1859. Like the Northern Territory, Queensland was established with no professions of goodwill and protective intent. On the contrary: it had inherited over the two decades before it was separated from New South Wales a peculiarly brutal frontier tradition, one governed entirely by the free hand of the Native Police.

This extremely effective force, inherited from New South Wales but brutalised on the Queensland frontier, was allowed, indeed encouraged, to operate as the sole agency of 'native administration' until the 1890s. The inhabitants and administrators of the young colony made no positive attempts to discipline the force; rather they allowed it to elaborate and extend its activities further and further afield. Destruction and degradation of the Aboriginal people in Queensland were greater than in any other colony. By 1901 the Aboriginal population was estimated to be 26 670; in 1788 the estimate was 100 000.<sup>16</sup>

The 'imperatives of the frontier', that is revenge for resistance and dispersal of tribes, were, it seems, actually considered legitimate administrative strategy in Queensland. Thus the report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly appointed to review the operation of the Native Police in 1860 commended the 'valuable and zealous officer' in its service. In a few exceptional cases, the committee was forced to recommend a reprimand for an officer for occasional excesses. However, the committee was unanimous in its praise for the Force's achievements and recommended that it be strengthened and rendered more efficient in its operations.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, one Member of the Legislative Assembly argued against the passage of protective labour legislation in 1884 because, he said, Native Police were being used to destroy Aboriginals as a matter of policy and if this legislation were passed into law, they would be forced to perform contradictory duties under existing law.<sup>18</sup> One very important component in the development of this particularly brutal frontier was the nature of Aboriginal resistance in the area. Native Police were faced with the most concerted and effective resistance, often characterised as true guerrilla warfare, offered by Aboriginals anywhere in Australia.

Some limited and sporadic public criticism of the Native Police during the early years of the colony came from a handful of enlightened urban dwellers. It was confirmed during the 1870s by the missionaries who were by now expanding their activities in the colony.

In response to this criticism, reserves with ration depots were established at Bowen, Mackay and on Bribie Island in 1875. They were



16. Ibid, p. 384.

17. Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 159–61.

18. Queensland Legislative Council, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1884, Vol. XL11, 'Debate on the Native Labourers Protection Bill, 1884', quoted in Rowley, *Destruction*, p. 175.

used primarily to re-locate the fringe-dwelling population now growing up around Brisbane, but soon lapsed in the absence of effective government support. At about the same time the Government issued a renewed call to missions to extend their activity amongst Aboriginals—a call to which Lutheran and Moravian missionaries responded during the 1880s, though their attempts were hampered by the very poor land on which they were forced to settle.

The system of enforced dispersal and indiscriminate and brutal revenge with which the Native Police governed the Queensland frontier was not finally discredited until the 1890s. Their depredations in the Cape York area provoked a Moravian missionary, Archibald Meston, to strongly recommend the abolition of the Force in 1896. His recommendation was part of a substantial and very influential report submitted to the Home Secretary in 1896 on his residence and travels amongst Aboriginals in the Cape.

Meston's report prompted the Colonial Secretary to send the Commissioner of Police in Queensland, W.E. Parry-Okeden, to tour the Cape and recommend a better police system. The resulting report saw the Native Police 'damned by its own senior officer' and led the way to the operation of a more circumspect civil police force, after 1897.<sup>19</sup>

The tide was beginning to turn. The abolition of the Native Police, though extremely significant, was only the first step in a massive reorganisation of Aboriginal policy and administration in Queensland which was to have national implications. The strategies now adopted by the Government to deal with its Aboriginal population were to become a model for action, in virtually all other colonies, during the next decade and to shape Aboriginal policy for the next three decades at least.



### 3. Protection and segregation of Aboriginal life

#### The Queensland Model

Meston's seminal report was the immediate impetus for reorientation of government policy. In it he documented the extensive injustice, brutality and abuse of the Queensland frontier, in all its hideous detail. Meston's report laid decades of disgust and shame on the shoulders of Queensland's leaders. By doing so, it appears to have achieved more than its own recommendations could: the particularly brutal heritage of the frontier seems to have acted as its own final condemnation.

Meston's recommendations were adopted, in broad outline, by the Queensland Government. They were set out in an Act to make Provision for Better Protection and Care of the Aboriginal and Half-caste Inhabitants of the Colony, which received assent in December 1897.

The legislation was essentially restrictive: those Aboriginals who were not employed were to be removed from the towns and settlements and kept within the boundaries of reserves established for that purpose, under the charge of superintendents in each reserve. Those outside the reserves, in employment, were to be placed under the charge of a protector responsible for issuing the permits necessary for that employment and for supervising its conditions. The Act prescribed strict penalties for supplying alcohol or opium to Aboriginals. The regulations under the Act ensured that, within the reserves, movement, association, employment

19. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

and acquisition of property would be strictly supervised and breaches firmly punished.<sup>20</sup>

Queensland's legislation was more restrictive than earlier attempts in Victoria in 1869 and 1886 and New South Wales in the 1880s to protect Aboriginals. Moreover, the activity of the Queensland legislature appears to have sparked other colonies to adopt similar strategies or to invigorate and tighten their existing systems. The Queensland Act of 1897 heralded the final demise of *laissez-faire* in Australia and constructed a 'coherent' administrative strategy to replace it: protection and segregation.

Analogous legislation was enacted in the other Australian colonies over the next two decades. Western Australia legislated for the protection (and segregation) of Aboriginals in the *Aboriginals Act 1905*. New South Wales followed suit, reviving, empowering and tightening existing practice in the *Aboriginals Protection Act 1909*. The South Australian legislature passed the Northern Territory Aboriginals Act in 1910 and its own Aboriginals Act in 1912. When the Commonwealth assumed control of the Northern Territory it adopted South Australia's legislation of 1910 as the basis of its own policy, regulating in 1912 to render it more strict in application.

Hence, within a decade of Federation, protective legislation was in force throughout Australia. The sole exception was Tasmania, where policy makers even as late as the 1960s refused to acknowledge that they had any cause for concern with Aboriginal affairs.

### The impetus for protection

The action of governments throughout Australia in emulating Queensland's example so quickly was in response to the groundswell of public and 'specialist' opinion which had emerged by the turn of the century and which demanded government action to aid the Aboriginal people.

The legislation was designed to reverse the effects of over a hundred years of undeclared warfare, disease, depopulation and demoralisation amongst Aboriginal people and to appease the concern expressed by urban humanitarians and by the missionaries in the frontier areas, which coincided at the end of the nineteenth century with concern in the settled areas for the ailing fringe-dwelling population in their midst.

The provisions of this protective legislation were broadly similar throughout the continent. In each colony, the chief protector (or his equivalent) was empowered to remove Aboriginals from certain localities, particularly urban areas, to Aboriginal reserves, and to compel them to remain there. The association between Aboriginals and Europeans or Asians was controlled by provisions which forbade unauthorised persons entering reserves and made marriage of any Aboriginal subject to the agreement and strict supervision of the protector. There were some variations as between colonies. Some placed control of Aboriginal property in official hands, some controlled employment more strictly than others and some provided for children to be forcibly removed from their parents (for a variety of reasons).<sup>21</sup>

### The impact of protection

The protective measures adopted in each colony were strengthened progressively over the next two decades and reached their high water



20. Rowley (*Destruction*), as usual, has a good general description of these events and the legislation which resulted.

21. C.D. Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, vol. 2 of *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1971, p. 51.

mark during the depression of the 1930s. Their motivation may have been humanitarian; their strategy was, at best, paternalistic, at worst, restrictive and coercive. Protective measures may well have arrested the population decline amongst Australia's Aboriginal population, but the price was high; the denial to the Aboriginals so 'protected' of virtually all their basic human rights and their removal from the mainstream of Australian society. Protective legislation defined Aboriginals and rendered them a special and, in effect, subject class of Australians, without rights or entitlements under 'normal' Australian law. Under this legislation, most of Australia's Aboriginal population was firmly restricted in its rights of residence, mobility, association and ownership. In some States, Aboriginals were literally herded on to reserves in massive numbers and restrained there indefinitely.

This period of protection differs markedly from those of the earlier nineteenth century. They sought to protect the rights and entitlements of the Aboriginal people, to apply the law to them equally as British subjects, to train them for 'civilisation' and equip them to participate. It was almost 'assimilationist' in intent, but the twentieth century protection was distinctly segregationist, physically and legally: it controlled Aboriginal lives, work, education, and children, deprived them of their citizen status, and gave them minimal opportunity for equal participation.<sup>22</sup>



#### 4. Assimilation (1937–65)

##### The pressure for 'positive' policy

The disastrous effect of the protective system of reserves and special laws varied in its impact between States, some being more lenient (for example Victoria), others stringent (for example Queensland). But even in Victoria there was insistent discrimination between and separation of 'full-blood' and 'half-caste' Aboriginals with consequent disruption of and hardships to the Aboriginal community.

In those States where administration of the protective legislation was not stringent, many Aboriginal people were able to evade its reach. In 'frontier' States, particularly the Northern Territory and Western Australia, 'untouched' groups effectively remained beyond the reach of legislation. Many lived on the reserves gazetted as 'tribal' lands in the Northern Territory, and on the huge Central Australian Reserve established jointly by the governments of South Australia, Western Australia and the Commonwealth in 1920. Government policy towards Aboriginals in these remote areas was for limited relief and subsidisation of the missionary efforts, which were probably the most common source of 'contact' in remotest areas.<sup>23</sup>

While reserves dominated the lives of most Aboriginals in settled areas where there were limited opportunities for employment, large groups of Aboriginals remained outside these reserves in the frontier States, because their labour was vital to large-scale pastoral or mining enterprise. They provided an accessible and cheap labour force in remote areas in enterprises which would have faltered without them. Their conditions of employment were usually miserable. Payment, if any, was always 'in kind'—that is food or tobacco—and their relationship with employers

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.

23. Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 250–1.

resembled that of a serf. But the labour shortages experienced during World War I had emphasised their value as a labour force. As a result, after the war, pressure for their integration into the cash economy, though still not popular with employers, became harder to resist.

Spectacular injustices and brutal relationships continued to scar Australia's frontier regions—regions beyond the reach of protective legislation. Reports in the southern press of continuing outrages in the Northern Territory and in the Kimberleys of Western Australia provoked an upsurge of humanitarian concern amongst southern 'do-gooders'. These humanitarian groups, formed in the late nineteenth century, re-emerged during the twenties, spurred by the growing body of scientific/anthropological opinion which had always inspired their efforts.

The renewed outrage of groups like the Association for the Protection of Native Races was more keenly focused than earlier efforts had been, partly because the Commonwealth Government had entered the area of Aboriginal policy and administration in 1911 and especially as many outrages continued to occur in areas under Commonwealth jurisdiction. Many hailed the Commonwealth Government's entry into the field as the beginning of a 'new era' in Aboriginal policy. But the question of Commonwealth control was still unthinkable—or unthought. Nonetheless the Commonwealth was regarded as having a certain over-arching responsibility for the national 'tone' of Aboriginal policy. Lobbyists, therefore, focused their efforts on Melbourne (and later, Canberra).

The Commonwealth responded to this pressure and to unanswered questions about Aboriginal workers by appointing Queensland's Chief Protector, J.W. Bleakley, in 1928 to inquire into the Commonwealth's administration of Aboriginal affairs in north and central Australia. In 1929 he reported the continuation of horrendous conditions on the frontier, massive health problems amongst the Aboriginal population and exploitation of a large, indispensable and highly skilled Aboriginal labour force, most notably in the pastoral industry. Bleakley's recommendations were essentially for an upgraded system of protection for Aboriginal on reserves and in urban areas and for greater and more just recognition, perhaps even a basic wage, for Aboriginal workers.<sup>24</sup>

Although Bleakley's recommendations were not adopted in their entirety, his report became the subject of national discussion. The Hon. C.L.A. Abbott, then Minister for Home Affairs, convened a conference attended by representatives of Commonwealth and State governments and missions and by humanitarian groups and other interested parties in Melbourne to discuss Bleakley's findings and recommendations.

Although the immediate result of Bleakley's report was to tighten the Commonwealth's system of protection, the discussions at the conference foreshadowed changes to come. First, they heralded the beginning of a process of consultation between governments in Australia and with interested parties. Second, although the conference had accepted the principle that employed Aboriginals be paid, they considered that payment should be in kind, not in cash.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, Bleakley's suggestions for a minimum cash wage had again introduced the question of Aboriginal integration into the cash economy and the wider society from which their legal and physical segregation became increasingly



24. J.W. Bleakley, *The Aboriginals and Half-Castes of Central Australia and North Australia; Report to the Commonwealth of Australia*, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1928.

25. Rowley, *Destruction*, p. 275.

anachronistic as their numbers, particularly in the part-Aboriginal population, markedly increased.

Although the 1930s saw a climax in the volume and stringency of protective legislation, the impossibility of paternalistic control was becoming increasingly obvious. In addition the growing body of expert opinion—including such people as A.P. Elkin and W.E.H. Stanner—were exerting continuing pressure on governments for a more 'positive' policy towards Aboriginal Australians.



### **The adoption of the assimilation policy (1937–50)**

The first conference of Commonwealth and State ministers on Aboriginal affairs convened in Canberra in 1937 adopted a policy towards Aboriginals which foresaw their inclusion in the mainstream of Australian life. It agreed on a new statement of policy to which all efforts should be directed, namely that:

... the destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth.<sup>26</sup>

This statement, perhaps the first expression of a commitment to the assimilation policy, was expanded in 1939 by the Commonwealth Minister for the Interior, the Hon. J. McEwen, who explained that its aim would be to raise the status of Aboriginals so as to entitle them, by right and by qualification, to the ordinary rights of citizenship and to enable them to share with other Australians the opportunities available in their native land.<sup>27</sup>

Very little of the new policy was implemented before World War II. Protection Boards were renamed Welfare Boards, but there were no significant structural or legislative changes. The early expressions of the assimilationist policy included only persons of Aboriginal descent and not full-bloods. Words like 'absorption' were used to explain the intended aims of the policy; apparently many administrators foresaw a sort of 'breeding out' of Aboriginal 'traits' as the end result of this policy; hence full-bloods and tribal Aboriginals were to remain on inviolable reserves under constant supervision.<sup>28</sup>

World War II effectively dispersed any urgency from the issue of Aboriginal policy for most Australians. However, after the war, the pressure for a positive policy towards Aboriginal Australians was vigorously renewed, encouraged by the huge contribution Aboriginal people had made to the war effort and by the international climate of opinion which saw justice and human rights as urgent imperatives.

### **The elaboration of the assimilation policy (1951–65)**

In September 1951 the Native Welfare Council, comprising Federal and State ministers responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, met in Canberra. It issued the first official promulgation of the policy of assimilation, reaffirming its aims and devising strategies for its implementation. Its main recommendation was that full benefits under the Commonwealth's Social Services Consolidation Act be made available to all but nomadic Aboriginals. Although some benefits had been extended to Aboriginal people during the forties, this resolution led the Commonwealth to

26. 'Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities', Canberra, April 1937.

27. Rowley, *Destruction*, pp. 328–9.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

review its social welfare legislation thoroughly. In 1959, it approved the payment of benefits, pensions and maternity allowances to all save nomadic Aborigines.<sup>29</sup>

But there was still no effective attempt to dismantle the administrative arrangements established during the protection era and certainly no effective legislation in support of assimilation. Instead, governments appear to have simply endowed existing (protective) structures and services more richly—believing firmly, it seems, that Aborigines had to be ‘raised’ to their ‘destiny’ of assimilation and to undergo endless training *before* they ventured into the wider society. This tuition was best confined within Aborigines’ present circumstances, in order to facilitate their smooth transition into Australian society when they were ready—that is, when they would ‘fit in’.

The Native Welfare Council met again in 1961 and agreed upon a stronger statement of assimilationist intent:

... in the view of all Australian Governments ... all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians.<sup>30</sup>

The major significance of this statement was its indication that governments were now prepared to include all Aboriginal people within the scope of their assimilation policy. It and its accompanying eleven-point strategy also conveyed with remarkable clarity the ethnocentrism of the assimilation policy. When elaborated to eleven points, the strategy of assimilation was shown to be only marginally less oppressive than the policy of protection.

A careful reading of the conference’s assimilation policy showed that equality and inclusion in the mainstream of Australian society would be allowed only if the terms of that society were met: that Aborigines should be virtually indistinguishable from the other members of that society.

The cost of protection for Aborigines had been the loss of virtually all their basic human rights; the cost of assimilation was to be the loss of their Aboriginal identity: they were now to disappear culturally rather than literally.

This eleven-point strategy was additionally significant in that, at last, it formally set out what had been the effective strategy of assimilation since 1937 and so finally revealed the rationale of ‘tuition *before* equality’, which was essential to the Government’s plans for assimilation and had justified the continuation of the structures of the protection era. Under this strategy, reserves would continue to be maintained and government settlements would also be extended in some States to encourage nomadic and semi-nomadic ‘natives’ to adopt a more settled lifestyle. Welfare services were to be extended and housing and hygiene standards improved. Aboriginal children would attend ‘normal’ schools ‘to the extent possible’—otherwise segregated schools and vocational training and employment would be provided. A liberal approach was to be adopted to the removal of restrictive laws or protective legislation ‘as soon as the capacity and advancement of the individual made this possible’. A



29. South Australia, DAA, ‘A Brief Outline’, p. 216.

30. Native Welfare Conference, Commonwealth and State Authorities, *Proceedings and Decisions*, January 1961. See also Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 399.



public education program designed to eradicate prejudice and research into special problems was also foreshadowed.<sup>31</sup>

Governments thus continued to emphasise increased education and welfare as their means to an assimilationist end. However, in the years after the 1961 conference, governments did begin to dismantle the most restrictive aspects of the protection era.

The following year, 1962, Aboriginals not already entitled to do so were given the right to vote at Commonwealth and State elections. Legislation was passed in most States between 1958 and 1964 to repeal protective and restrictive laws over marriage, drinking and child welfare and to loosen the control of European managers on reserves. The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission approved the principle of equal pay for Aboriginals in 1965.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Aboriginal 'voice' and the impetus for change**

The swell of public opinion which continued to pressure governments to institute egalitarian measures for Aboriginals in the early sixties was led by the growing vanguard of Aboriginal people galvanised into powerful and articulate protest by anger at over a century of past injustices. What is often labelled as the 'Aboriginal Civil Rights Movement' of the sixties was, by now, in full swing. Groups like the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), supported by non-Aboriginal groups from political parties, churches and community organisations, began to recognise the cultural arrogance of the Government's assimilation policy and the impotence of its programs for Aboriginal advancement.

Over the decade of the sixties these groups developed a powerful critique of assimilation policy and devised effective Aboriginal alternatives for the administration of their lives. In the meantime, they exerted consistent pressure for increased recognition of Aboriginal people within Australian life—essentially for equality and civil rights, though the demand for land rights became increasingly prominent during the sixties.

In addition, they campaigned ceaselessly for Commonwealth control of Aboriginal affairs, because they regarded the Commonwealth as the appropriate administrative authority and believed that it would be more vulnerable to their demands for equality and even land rights than State governments, because of its constitutional responsibility to international bodies for national policies. As well, they believed that the substantial financial powers of the Commonwealth could be more generously allocated for Aboriginals' benefit if responsibility for national policy lay at the 'centre'. In fact, many Aboriginals and their supporters predicted that Commonwealth control would instigate a 'new deal' for Aboriginal people which, given the Commonwealth's powers to legislate, might even conceivably include the prospect of land rights.

### **The 1967 Referendum: Commonwealth control**

Although Commonwealth control of Aboriginal affairs had often been raised since Federation, it was this insistent campaign, led by FCAATSI and other Aboriginal organisations in the mid-sixties, which led to effective change. The Prime Minister, Harold Holt, early in 1967 called a referendum seeking amendment of the Constitution to give the

31. South Australia, DAA, 'A Brief Outline', pp. 26–7.

32. Prentis, *A Study in Black and White*, p. 88.



Commonwealth concurrent powers, with the States, to legislate in Aboriginal affairs.

The vote was a resounding 'yes', but hopes for a new deal were quickly quelled by a cautious Commonwealth debut at a conference with the States in July 1967. Nonetheless, the entry of the Commonwealth Government paved the way for a co-ordinated national approach to Aboriginal affairs and a concerted program for its achievement.

Prime Minister Holt appointed a three-member Council for Aboriginal Affairs and established an Office of Aboriginal Affairs in his own department to support the Council. Together they were to co-ordinate the Commonwealth's policy and to establish the necessary machinery for consultation between the States and the Commonwealth and with Aboriginal people.<sup>33</sup>

In March 1968 the new Prime Minister, John Gorton, announced the appointment of a Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs, W.C. Wentworth. Nonetheless, despite the Government's powers to legislate in many areas, including land rights, its policy continued to emphasise non-intervention in the States which Gorton, and later McMahon, sought to influence by its own example in administering Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory.

### **Integration: the right to 'choose' assimilation (1967–72)**

During the 1960s Aboriginal groups and their supporters had mounted a scathing critique of the policy of assimilation, with some limited success. After the 1961 meeting of the Native Welfare Council, they had publicly rejected the ethnocentrism and paternalism of the policy, criticising the assumption that Aboriginal people desired to attain the same manner of living as other Australians. They claimed that the assimilation policy failed to recognise the resilience and inherent worth of Aboriginal culture and society and went on to demand not only a recognition of their culture and identity but also of their capacity as Aboriginals to determine their own destiny, of which the paternalism of existing policy and administration was an implicit denial. And, towards the end of the sixties, they began to press for their inclusion in the policy-making process. For government policy to be effective and meet the needs of Aboriginal people, they claimed, local and national Aboriginal groups had to be consulted by governments, their advice had to be taken and it was imperative that Aboriginal people be given responsibility for the implementation of the resulting programs.

These demands, begun in the sixties, did not figure prominently until the early seventies. In the meantime, governments attempted to respond to criticism of ethnocentrism by modifying the terms of the assimilation policy and renaming it 'voluntary integration'.

In 1965, the conference of State and Commonwealth ministers agreed that Government would now seek that 'all persons of Aboriginal descent will *choose* to attain a *similar* manner and standard of living to that of other Australians . . .'<sup>34</sup>

This modified version of assimilation was labelled 'integration' by governments and it officially replaced 'assimilation' within administrative vocabulary. Many critics, however, saw this as mere semantic tinkering, especially when it was not accompanied by any measures designed to provide recognition or encourage the development of Aboriginal culture.



33. Australia. DAA, *Report of Activities for the period 19 December 1972–30 June 1974*, AGPS, Canberra, 1974.

In 1968 Prime Minister Gorton continued to define government policy as, ultimately, the assimilation of Aboriginal people—but he did allow that this should be accomplished without destroying Aboriginal culture and that Aboriginal people should have a voice in the pace of their assimilation into the wider Australian community.

As pressure from Aboriginal groups for choice, for recognition and self-determination mounted, the Commonwealth Government and the States were forced to concede more and more within their policy of 'integration'. Prime Minister McMahon stated in an announcement on Australia Day 1972 that 'the Government recognises the right of individual Aboriginals to effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which they come to identify themselves with [Australian] society'. He added, 'The role of Governments should increasingly be to enable [Aboriginals] . . . to achieve their goals by their own means'.<sup>35</sup>

This statement was probably the most radical definition of Aboriginal policy ever made under the general scope of 'integration'. McMahon went on to state that governments should also be seeking to encourage and strengthen the capacity of Aboriginals to manage their own affairs and to increase their economic independence. This promising tone notwithstanding, Commonwealth and State governments made very little effort to achieve these aims or to respond positively to Aboriginal demands.

The recognition of their rights to land was one of the most insistent Aboriginal demands during this period. Aboriginal groups believed that a secure base in land was not only theirs by right, by virtue of their prior occupation, but would offer Aboriginals a secure economic base from which to deal with white Australia and a spiritual and social base on which they could rejuvenate their communities.

The South Australian Government was as yet the only government which had responded to these demands. It legislated in 1966 to establish an Aboriginal Lands Trust, which would oversee the transfer of reserve lands to the Trust and then supervise and assist Aboriginal development of this land.<sup>36</sup> McMahon's Australia Day announcement included a very disappointing Commonwealth answer to the insistent claim for land rights. Land grants and short-term leases were the only concessions offered by a Federal Liberal government still essentially tied to a policy of 'integration' and opposed to the notion of 'special consideration'.

However, the *relative* radicalism of McMahon's Australia Day statement did foreshadow what was to follow. It contained the first formal recognition by government of the right of Aboriginals to effective choice about their destiny and of Aboriginal goals and Aboriginal means. The departure from former definitions of 'integration' also suggests quite clearly the real import of the 'integration' policy in a history of Aboriginal policy. The radicalism of McMahon's statement, in comparison with earlier policy, demonstrates its flexibility and suggests that the Commonwealth Government, in particular, was using it as a holding measure, or as a transitional definition of assimilation in an era when it was no longer acceptable for governments to seek control of Aboriginal 'destiny'. While the pressure for recognition of Aboriginal culture, identity and independence mounted towards the end of the sixties and

34. Rowley, *Outcasts*, pp. 402–3.

35. B.G. Dexter, 'The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs—its functions and underlying principles', 1973. Typescript, 12 pp., DAA Library, Canberra.

36. Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 410.

during the early seventies, governments (particularly the Commonwealth) were forced to a more and more radical modification of their understanding of assimilation as effective means were devised to empower Aboriginal to control their own lives and to break down resistance. This is really the best way to understand the policy of 'integration' as it was applied in the sixties.

## 5. Self-determination

### 1972 and after: hopes for a new day

The Labor Government elected in December 1972 officially took office in 1973. It was committed from the start to a policy of self-determination for Aboriginal Australians. In this sense, it promised the final answer to the Aboriginal civil rights movement of the sixties.

The Government came to office with a commitment to a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. In fact, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs had been transferred to the Department of the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts in 1971. On 19 December 1972 the new department was created. It was to have offices in each State as partial fulfilment of the Labor Government's election commitment to actively discharge the responsibility invested in the Commonwealth by the 1967 Referendum.<sup>37</sup>

The new Government perceived this responsibility largely in terms of co-ordination and regulation of policy throughout Australia.

Early in 1973 the Commonwealth Government suggested to State governments that they consider transferring their responsibility for policy formulation and co-ordination to the Commonwealth, together with those State administrators engaged in these activities. Detailed discussions with each State throughout 1973 resulted in the passage of the *Aboriginal Affairs (Arrangements with the States) Act 1973*. This legislation provided for the transfer to the Commonwealth of policy and co-ordination functions in Aboriginal affairs, as well as concurrent powers in areas specified in separate agreements with each State (except Queensland and Tasmania).<sup>38</sup>

Henceforth, all Australian governments would operate within the frame of Commonwealth policy on Aboriginal affairs. Administration of the policy would be supervised by the Commonwealth in its Department of Aboriginal Affairs, in association with other responsible Commonwealth departments, through a system of grants and grants-in-aid. State governments and Aboriginal groups and communities would retain most of the responsibility for the operation of government services and programs and would thus necessarily be involved in a continuous consultation with the Commonwealth in its formulation of policy.

Over the next few years, the Commonwealth Government, in co-operation with all but the Queensland Government, set about establishing the administrative and consultative machinery necessary to implement this new strategy. The activity of these years was incessant and demanding. It was a crucial period in the history of Aboriginal policy and administration.

Very few of the arrangements and structures of earlier years were still



37. Australia, DAA, *Report . . . December 1972 – 30 June 1974*, pp. 6–8.

38. Dexter, 'The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs', pp. 5–6. See also Australia, DAA, *Annual Report 1974–75*, AGPS, Canberra, 1976, pp. 1, 8–9.

relevant for the implementation of policy and programs designed to encourage self-determination amongst Aboriginal communities. Hence, whole new organisations and structures had to be developed and tested and judged for their effectiveness. Among the measures adopted by the Commonwealth were the establishment of an Aboriginal Land Fund, legislation which allowed for the incorporation of Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal land rights legislation. Many other measures accompanied these. Probably the most important was the establishment of a national network of organisations and a consultative machinery led by the NAC (formerly the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee)<sup>39</sup> and the Aboriginal Development Commission, designed to facilitate discussion and negotiation on policy matters between governments and Aboriginal people.

Australian governments (save Queensland) profess the policy of self-determination. To complete the transition from paternalistic and coercive administration to one which favours Aboriginal control will be a long and slow process. More than a decade after its establishment as official Commonwealth policy, the realisation of self-determination is not yet complete.

Nonetheless, the commitment of governments throughout Australia persists and certainly Aboriginal people have demonstrated their determination that it be realised. However, the co-operation of all parties must continue and indeed must be used to encourage all Australians to recognise the value of existing arrangements and to work to improve them.



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39. Abolished in June 1985. It is proposed to replace the NAC by the Aboriginal and Islander Congress in July 1986.

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# Guide to the Commonwealth Government's responsibilities in the administration of Aboriginal affairs

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## Historical introduction

In May 1967 the Australian electorate voted overwhelmingly by referendum to vest primary control of Aboriginal affairs with the Commonwealth.

The referendum campaign had been directed towards eliminating the annoying and destructive differences that existed in the basically similar State administrations, the international implications of Commonwealth control and the prospect of increased financial assistance from the Commonwealth to Aboriginals in all States.

It was not until 1972, however, when a Labor Government was elected to office with a commitment to assume the full responsibilities vested in the Commonwealth Government by the 1967 referendum that decisive action was taken, the previous governments having followed a policy of influencing the States by its example in administering the Northern Territory Aboriginal population. The measures taken by the Whitlam Government between 1973 and 1975 established the legal and administrative framework within which Aboriginal affairs are governed to the present day.

In an address to the Ministerial Aboriginal Affairs Council in Adelaide on 6 April 1973, the Prime Minister, the Hon. E.G. Whitlam stated, 'My Government intends . . . to assume full responsibility for policy in respect of Aboriginal Affairs and will take any necessary legislative action to this end'.

At the same conference, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Gordon Bryant elaborated:

The Government assumes full responsibility for policy and finance in respect of Aboriginal Affairs and will take any necessary legislative action towards this end. The Commonwealth's acceptance of this responsibility will be assisted by States transferring to the Commonwealth the responsibilities they presently administer including Aboriginal lands. This will make a national policy easier to develop and ensure the continuance of policies and personnel where practicable.

After several months of detailed and time-consuming discussions between senior members of the Government and of the newly created Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs with State governments and bureaucracies, a workable means of transfer was devised and in 1973 the Commonwealth Government legislated to provide for the transfer of responsibilities from the States through the *Aboriginal Affairs (Arrangements with the States) Act 1973*. The Preamble to this Act provided for the transfer of certain responsibilities to the Commonwealth Government including, 'responsibilities for the planning, co-ordination and financing of such activities as are designed to promote the economic,



social and cultural advancement of that people [Aboriginals] and are presently the responsibility of the States and their authorities'.

The Act allowed for (and thus foreshadowed) an agreement between the Governor-General and the Governor of each State in respect of the administration of Aboriginal affairs in that State. These separate agreements would arrange for the assumption of certain responsibilities by the Commonwealth from each State government and were also to provide for the accompanying exchange of personnel between State and Commonwealth governments.

Most State governments readily co-operated in finalising these arrangements, and, with the exception of Queensland, the agreements were concluded over the next eighteen months. South Australia settled its transfer as early as 1 December 1973, followed by Western Australia in June 1974, Victoria in January 1975 and New South Wales in July 1975. No such agreement was necessary with Tasmania because it did not have its own Aboriginal affairs agency and, of course, the Northern Territory was already under Commonwealth control.<sup>1</sup>

Queensland alone remained intransigent. It preferred to continue with existing arrangements until convinced that the proposed transfer was the desire of its Aboriginal citizens and would work for their 'betterment'. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth proceeded unilaterally to expand its operations in Queensland and to establish a full Regional Branch of the Commonwealth DAA. By the middle of 1975, the Commonwealth, through its DAA, had assumed control of the relevant existing State ministries and had augmented the staff of these offices.

The agreements reached with the States were broadly similar: they provided for transfer of offices and personnel; each specified that the Commonwealth was to assume responsibility for policy formulation and co-ordination in each State and across the country; some specified an additional publicity function for the Commonwealth while others excluded specific programs or agencies from the general provisions of the agreement.

Taken together, these agreements provided for the Commonwealth's assumption of the responsibility for policy in Aboriginal affairs and for the accompanying responsibility to provide financial assistance to the States.

These agreements still form the basis of operations and relationships of Commonwealth and State governments in their administration of Aboriginal affairs. They are, therefore, vital documents. They are also extremely difficult to understand and provide only the skeleton upon which governments build in their day-to-day administration of Aboriginal affairs.




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## Commonwealth–State relations

The ways in which Commonwealth–State relations work in the funding and administration of the policies directed towards Aboriginal affairs are outlined in this section. It outlines the different methods of funding and the various programs administered by Commonwealth departments. (Because functions sometimes overlap or because some instrumentalities are within a minister's portfolio but independent of the relevant department, they will be discussed only briefly at first mention and

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1. Australia, DAA, *Annual Report, 1974–75*. AGPS, Canberra, 1976, pp. 8–9.

treated in more detail in subsequent sections, to which they are cross-referred.)

The programs discussed here are sketched in broad outline; they do not represent a department's total activity on behalf of Aboriginal people. Many other forms of assistance—for example legal assistance, Aboriginal art and culture, community services—are also available. Information about specific programs and broader activities is available from the various Commonwealth departments, the addresses of which follow the discussion of each department's activities.

The DAA is the Commonwealth Government's main 'agent' in the realm of Aboriginal affairs. Its primary role is to formulate and co-ordinate national Aboriginal policy. In its own words:

The Department is responsible, in consultation with Aboriginal people, for the development of national policies directed to the advancement of Aboriginal people, the administration of these policies, and the co-ordination of programs.<sup>2</sup>

However, during the early to mid-seventies, when the department was established and as it began to expand its operations, it relied upon the advice and support of other Commonwealth Government departments.

The DAA is not an 'omnibus' department and does not seek to provide all services to Aboriginals. Instead, its role is as an overseer which passes the responsibility for the policies and programs it devises to other relevant Commonwealth departments, to State departments and agencies and to Aboriginal organisations.

The administrative changes made in 1973 and still in force today were not designed as a Commonwealth 'take-over'; rather, they were designed to facilitate better co-ordination of Aboriginal programs and to allow the opinions of Aboriginal people to be consolidated in a single place.

As a result, other Commonwealth departments, such as Education, Health and Housing, were included in the Commonwealth's policy-making process in Aboriginal affairs from the start, though the DAA always remains the focus of all relevant Commonwealth activity. Other Commonwealth departments continue to provide advice and funding and to administer the Commonwealth's Aboriginal programs relevant to their own functions. For example, the Commonwealth Department of Education administers the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Study Award Schemes which assist Aboriginal students pursuing various courses. (This process and the different responsibilities of each Commonwealth department are outlined below.)

The DAA also relies on the State governments and their agencies for advice in Aboriginal matters. More importantly, the Commonwealth relies on State governments and agencies for the administration of government policy and programs. Under the agreements mentioned above, State governments retained important responsibilities in program administration. Today, State governments retain a *primary* responsibility for the delivery of general health, education and welfare services for the entire community. State governments are responsible for ensuring that Aboriginal people have access to these services in a manner appropriate to their needs and lifestyle choices.

In summary, then, the DAA is primarily responsible for formulating national policy and 'supervising' the activities of other Commonwealth



2. These comments and the information contained in the rest of this chapter are based on press releases, information leaflets and advice from Commonwealth officers and on the annual reports and other official documentation. They are listed at the end of this appendix.

departments and State governments in relation to Aboriginal affairs; the State governments are primarily responsible for delivering basic services and operating government programs.

Accordingly, the Commonwealth and the State governments must engage in a continuous process of negotiation and consultation among themselves and with Aboriginal people. Despite the complexity of this arrangement, it is designed to provide the most effective and responsive administration of Aboriginal affairs possible: central oversight and co-ordination of policy with devolvement of responsibility for its implementation to regions and, where possible, to Aboriginal people is a model of government which promises the most effective achievement of the existing aims of governments.

The relationship between the Commonwealth and State governments in the administration of Aboriginal 'policy' is complex and not simple to explain. Thus within the general rules whereby 'policy' rests with the Commonwealth Government and 'operation of general programs' with the State governments there are occasions when the Commonwealth administers State programs, directly or indirectly, or the State alone provides services to Aboriginals, or occasions when both administer specific programs and still others when they administer some programs independently and others jointly. Aboriginal needs, government priorities and availability of funding determine which arrangement prevails.

The Commonwealth, through its DAA and other relevant departments, maintains a high level of financial assistance to State governments and Aboriginal organisations.

Through this financial assistance the Commonwealth Government participates in both the formulation and implementation of government policy. But a very fine line divides the two and it is virtually impossible for concern to be exclusively directed to either 'policy' or 'operations'. Both are part of a single process of government.

The Commonwealth Government is committed to supplementing the activity of the State governments by providing funds for both ongoing services and for programs of high priority which cannot be funded in any other way. It thus offers tangible support for the policies it devises, as, for example, by funding a community housing program which could not be funded in any other way. This sort of 'co-operation' may, however, present problems. Through it, the DAA may become involved in the administration of State housing policy. Such 'overlap' is unavoidable but is not always an effective or efficient means of government.

To avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and confusion the Commonwealth often prefers to provide financial assistance to State governments and Aboriginals through 'one-off' grants, the administration of which is rightly a State government concern.

The funding of programs for Aboriginal people with urgent and unanswered needs is an intricate process for which rigid rules are inappropriate. As a result, the Commonwealth is committed to a process of negotiation and consultation with all concerned parties and must take into account the needs and priorities of Aboriginal people and State governments when contemplating adjustments or changes in its policy. There are, however, some general rules and patterns governing the allocation of Commonwealth funds. They are outlined below.





## Commonwealth funding arrangements

The Commonwealth Government is empowered under the general provisions of Section 96 of the Constitution to make grants to the States for the implementation of Government policies and programs. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is empowered under the *Aboriginal Affairs (States Grants) Act 1976* to make grants to the States 'for the purposes of expenditure for the benefit of Aboriginals living in that State'. In addition, the Acts which comprise the general body of Commonwealth legislation designed for the advancement of Aboriginal Australians usually include clauses which provide for the Commonwealth to offer financial assistance to the States in the implementation of various government policies. Together, this legislation enables the Commonwealth to provide wide-ranging funding to the States for their administration of Aboriginal affairs.

### States grants

Each year the Commonwealth DAA and other responsible Commonwealth departments make a series of grants to State governments referred to as 'States Grants'. The DAA provides the bulk of Commonwealth financial assistance to the States over a wide range of policy areas (see Table 1). The assistance provided by other Commonwealth departments is usually only for their specific policy areas and is, as a result, much less extensive (see Table 2).

Financial assistance is provided to the States by means of 'general purpose' and 'specific purpose' grants. The general purpose grants are made to State governments every year for the continuing administration of programs in education, health, community welfare and housing, which are available to Aboriginal people equally with other Australians. A budget and set of conditions, prescribing in general terms how the funds are to be administered, accompanies each of these general purpose grants.

By means of the specific purpose grants, the Commonwealth, through one of its departments, provides financial assistance for specific purposes—often for particular Aboriginal programs or projects designed for the advancement of Aboriginals in that State. Each State government assumes the responsibility for the administration of these funds and the operation of the programs established as a result.

The Commonwealth funds provided to State governments, through either general or specific purpose grants, thus contribute to the administration of general services provided to Aboriginal people in each State and to the operation of Aboriginal programs.

State governments also have their own sources of income which they use to provide some of these services and programs. They supplement their own funds with Commonwealth grants. Thus State and Commonwealth funds may often be used for the same purpose or to fund jointly a particular program or project. It is, therefore, often impossible to determine accurately whether the Commonwealth or the State government is the main benefactor of the resulting programs or services. Some services or programs for Aboriginal people are, however, established and run separately by State and, less often, Commonwealth governments.

Because of the complexity of the funding responsibilities of each government, it is useful to remember one general rule: unless a program or service is provided specifically under a Commonwealth program or direct grant (see below), it will usually be the administrative responsibility



of the appropriate State government, regardless of where its funds originated.

The Commonwealth's provision of financial assistance to State governments by means of State grants is therefore regarded as a form of 'indirect funding' because it is provided only indirectly to the Aboriginal people. Moreover, because these funds become the direct administrative responsibility of State governments, Aboriginal people must therefore consult with and petition those governments for assistance.

### **Direct grants**

The Commonwealth also funds the administration of Aboriginal affairs throughout Australia by means of a series of grants known as 'Grants-in-Aid' or 'Grants for Aboriginal Advancement'. They are made directly to Aboriginal organisations or groups for their own specific purposes.

All manner of groups are eligible for this form of Commonwealth Government assistance. The only general conditions governing the allocation of these grants are that the Aboriginal organisations are 'incorporated' and that the grant be 'one-off'. The second condition is not always applied, however. The Commonwealth prefers to offer assistance for non-recurrent purposes, that is for the initial establishment costs of a program or for a specific need which would be fulfilled through the provision of a single grant.

These, then, are the main channels through which the Commonwealth offers financial assistance to those Aboriginal organisations and State governments responsible for implementing Commonwealth policy aims and objectives. The precise amount of Commonwealth funding provided to the States varies each year, according to changing priorities and available resources.

Direct grants to Aboriginal organisations or groups are another matter. Although they are very simple in principle, these direct grants take many different forms. They are made available for quite different purposes, to quite different groups, in quite different amounts and with quite different conditions and criteria attached. Exactly how direct grants are made and for what purpose is judged according to the merits and circumstances of each separate application.

In order to minimise the confusion that could arise from the plethora of grants and different circumstances, the Commonwealth has organised its most common form of direct grants into a number of programs, most of which are administered by the DAA (see Table 1); the remainder are administered by other Commonwealth departments (see Table 2). A brief discussion follows of the responsibilities and activities of each of these Commonwealth departments.



## **I. Department of Aboriginal Affairs**

The DAA monitors the impact of government activity in areas of health, education, employment and training, land matters, housing, legal services, community development, welfare and many other fields which affect Aboriginal people's lives. The department responds to the information it and other government agencies gather by devising methods of improving government programs and services, by seeking to supplement areas of need and eliminate inefficient or unsatisfactory programs. In all this, the department, along with its many advisers, is continually seeking the broad directions and shaping the outlines of future

policy and programs in Aboriginal affairs which will further advance Aboriginal interests. The main policies and programs currently administered by the department are summarised under policy headings below.

### **(a) Employment and training**

The DAA exercises its responsibility for Aboriginal employment and training in consultation with the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. Together, these departments have devised and administer a broad Aboriginal employment and training program known as NESAs.

NESA was introduced in 1977 as a result of the obvious need for a large-scale attempt to address the problem of Aboriginal unemployment. It was designed and still operates to improve the access of Aboriginal people to training and employment opportunities in the public and private sectors while taking account of their varied lifestyles.

Four main programs operate under NESAs. Two of these the Training for Aboriginals Program and the National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee, are administered by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations; the third (Employment in the Australian Public Service) is administered by the Australian Public Service Board. They are described in detail later (see II (a), (b), (c) below).

The fourth program is administered solely by DAA. It is referred to as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme and it aims to provide jobs for Aboriginals living in remote Aboriginal communities. The communities participating in this scheme are funded by the department with an amount equal to the total value of the unemployment benefits which community members would otherwise receive. Participating communities use this money to engage in building and improvement projects needed within the community. In addition, the community receives a loading of up to 20 per cent of the value of the wage funding already provided, for the purchase of necessary materials and the administration costs connected with the projects.

It is important to remember that the four programs which operate as part of NESAs are part of a single broad strategy designed by the Commonwealth, through two of its departments, to address the problem of Aboriginal unemployment, to ensure better access for Aboriginal people to employment and training and, by doing so, to increase the level of self-management and self-sufficiency of Aboriginal communities within Australian society.

### **(b) Education**

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs does not directly provide facilities or services on education, but in consultation with Aboriginal people develops policy and co-ordinates programs initiated by Aboriginal communities. Its primary role is to assist the establishment of innovative schemes which may improve educational outcomes.

In the planning and administration of this policy the Department works closely with the Commonwealth Department of Education. Both departments seek policy advice from the National Aboriginal Education Committee, which is the Government's principle adviser on Aboriginal education.



Another important aspect of Commonwealth policy on Aboriginal education is a commitment to high levels of Aboriginal participation in the planning, management and delivery of educational services to their own people. Towards this end, the DAA provides financial assistance, additional to that provided to the States, for the training and employment of Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants, parent management committees and Aboriginal language programs.

In addition, the department offers financial support to Aboriginal community schools, especially those in remote areas, and maintains high levels of funding assistance to public and community pre-schools attended by Aboriginal children.

### (c) Health

Until 1985, the DAA collaborated closely with the Department of Health in the formulation of policy and administration of Aboriginal health programs. The Commonwealth Government policy is for Aboriginal health standards to match those of the wider Australian community. Within this broad policy, the emphasis is on the need to improve environmental conditions and to increase Aboriginal involvement in the design, management and delivery of health programs affecting Aboriginal people.

The DAA relies closely on the advice of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (NAIHO) in its formulation of policy and programs. NAIHO is an umbrella organisation of Aboriginal health and medical services, which represents the opinions and experience of Aboriginal health workers across the country.

As with Aboriginal education, a great deal of Commonwealth assistance is provided through grants to the States for the delivery of public health services for Aboriginal people. In addition, the department provides funding for many of the independent Aboriginal medical services operating throughout the country. In the past, the DAA funded these services jointly with the Department of Health. However, from the beginning of 1985, the DAA became responsible for virtually all Aboriginal health matters at a Commonwealth level. These include funding those services previously assisted by the Department of Health, as well as responsibility for the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program.

In addition to these responsibilities for Aboriginal health policy and funding, there are two specific health programs through which the DAA provides direct grants to Aboriginal people: the Aboriginal Public Health Improvement Program (APHIP) and the Isolated Patients Travel and Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS).

Through APHIP the Commonwealth provides grants to Aboriginal communities for capital works needed in communities whose health problems are due to substandard living conditions. Grants made under this program are usually for such projects as the provision of adequate water supplies and waste disposal facilities. These are usually one-off grants. Aboriginal communities or State governments are usually expected to maintain the capital works once they are in place.

The other program offering direct assistance to Aboriginals, IPTAAS, was previously administered by the Department of Health. Its function is to provide financial and/or transport assistance to Aboriginal people in remote areas who require access to medical services located long distances from their homes or communities.



#### **(d) Housing and accommodation**

The DAA is committed to provide accommodation for Aboriginal people which will enable them to enjoy accepted standards of health and social well-being, while allowing them to pursue a lifestyle of their own choice.

The Commonwealth provides for the housing and accommodation needs of Aboriginal people in three main ways. The first is through the Aboriginal Development Commission, the Commonwealth's main agent in providing direct assistance in this area. (On its activities see (c) (2), below.) The second is administered by Aboriginal Hostels Limited. This company provides hostel-type accommodation for Aboriginal people throughout Australia. (On its activities see (c) (3) below.)

The third way through which the Commonwealth Government seeks to provide acceptable housing and accommodation for Aboriginal people is as part of the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreements. These agreements, are administered by the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction—see VII, below.

The DAA administers one additional area of the Commonwealth's provision for Aboriginal housing and environment. This is a form of direct assistance to Aboriginals, established as recently as 1983–84. It is referred to as the Aboriginal Town Campers Assistance Program (TCAP). Funds for this program are allocated by the department to assist in the establishment of improved living conditions, including the provision of essential services, secure land tenure and adequate shelter, in Aboriginal Town Camps across Australia. These funds are administered by the department, in conjunction with the ADC and AHL, and are allocated to each Town Camp to provide such services as water, sewerage and shelter.

In addition to these programs, and consistent with the Commonwealth's commitment to allow Aboriginals to pursue their chosen lifestyles, the DAA provides some significant support to the 'outstation' or 'homeland' movement. Through its support of the resource organisations which co-ordinate service delivery to outstations, and its provision of basic services, water, shelter, transport and communication, the department seeks to offer what assistance it can, within the broad rubric of independent and self-sufficient action by Aboriginal communities which the move back out to homeland centres actually represents.

#### **(e) Other portfolio agencies**

In addition to the DAA, a number of important Commonwealth Government agencies are also the responsibility of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. These agencies may be quite independent of the operations of the department or participate in programs designed and administered by it; each of these 'portfolio agencies', however, has its own administrative structure. Some were established by and operate on the basis of their own separate Acts; all have a separate budget, allocated by the Minister from within the total portfolio allocation.

The four major agencies within this category are:

##### *(1) The National Aboriginal Conference*

The NAC was established on 30 May 1977 and incorporated on 20 October 1978 under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1978*.

It was an elected, national Aboriginal body, with thirty-six members and had a 'tiered' structure.

To give effect to ALP Policy in respect of the NAC<sup>3</sup> the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Clyde Holding, MP, commissioned Dr



H.C. Coombs to review the role of the NAC and report on its future structure, functions and methods of operation. Dr Coombs's report was tabled in Parliament in February 1985.

Following consideration of the Coombs report the Minister announced in April 1985 that he did not intend to extend the term of office of the then present members beyond 30 June 1985.

It is the Government's aim to establish a body to succeed the NAC<sup>3</sup> by 1 July 1986. Miss Lois O'Donoghue has been appointed to advise the Minister on a replacement organisation following a six month program of consultation with Aboriginal and Islander communities.

The Minister has made interim consultative arrangements with portfolio and national Aboriginal organisations.

### (2) *The Aboriginal Development Commission*

The ADC was established on 1 July 1980 under the *Aboriginal Development Commission Act 1980*. It consists of ten Aboriginal Commissioners or Board members who are assisted and supported in their efforts by a large administrative network of central and regional offices. These offices actually organise and administer the Commission's programs.

The ADC was established in order to further the economic and social development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to assist them towards self-management through land acquisition, business enterprises and housing.

The Commission is now the main Commonwealth agency concerned with the provision of housing and accommodation for Aboriginal people. This activity is, however, only one of its concerns. The ADC is a major adviser to the Commonwealth and in particular to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on all matters concerning the economic and social development of Aboriginal people. The variety of its programs are evidence of the wide-ranging nature of its responsibilities.

In order to fulfil the responsibilities assigned to it under the Act, the ADC was given control of a body of funds referred to as the Aboriginal Entitlement Capital Account. This account is made up of two separate funds—a general fund, for general programs and administration, and a capital fund, for self-generating projects aimed to promote Aboriginal financial independence. The programs, which are administered by the ADC for the economic and social advancement of Aboriginal people, are all funded from this body of funds and are arranged in the following way:

- Land acquisition: The ADC makes grants to Aboriginal Land Trusts and corporations to enable them to acquire land and to build on and improve it. In this way, Aboriginal communities are provided with a secure basis on which to organise their communities' lives and interests.
- Housing loans: The ADC provides housing loans to Aboriginal people unable to secure any alternative assistance. These loans are made for the construction or purchase of dwellings, for the purchase of land for dwellings, for the extension or renovation of dwellings,

3. Develop and make effective the NAC as advising body to the Government and extend its powers as a policy making and organising authority amongst Aboriginal and Islander communities.

Ensure that the NAC has a structure and procedures acceptable to Aboriginal and Islander communities.

Support the policy of self-determination and make an annual allowance to the NAC to enable it to operate its own activities.

Australian Labor Party Platform, Constitution and Rules as approved by the 36th National Conference. Canberra, 1984.

for furniture and for refinancing housing loans from elsewhere when this is necessary.

- **Housing grants:** The ADC provides grants to incorporated Aboriginal organisations to enable them to plan and build or buy and administer housing for Aboriginal people. An additional aspect of these grants is that, by supporting Aboriginal corporations, they also usually create employment opportunities for the Aboriginals in these corporations and in the local area.
- **Enterprise loans:** The ADC provides *loans* to Aboriginal individuals or organisations to enable them to engage in business enterprises or social development projects which will contribute to the advancement of Aboriginal people and their communities. Preference is always given to Aboriginal-controlled projects which make good use of local natural and human resources and which will offer the greatest benefit to Aboriginal people.
- **Enterprise grants:** The ADC provides *grants* to Aboriginal communities or organisations to enable them to engage in business enterprise social development projects similar to those outlined below. These are usually one-off grants made to cover the establishment and initial running costs of a particular enterprise or for projects requiring only an initial investment. Preference is given to the same sort of projects as those described above.



Enterprise grants are available to Aboriginal *organisations* only. They are often combined with enterprise loans for ongoing costs or supplementary programs. However, grants are not available to individuals or couples, who must instead rely on loan assistance if they wish to engage in economic or social enterprises.

The programs administered by the ADC are available to all Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. However, because the ADC has only a limited amount of money at its disposal, it cannot provide assistance to all who seek it. In order to ensure that the process of decision making and granting of applications is equitable and consistent with its general responsibilities under the Act, the ADC employs a set of 'eligibility criteria' for each of its programs to assist it to judge those applications most in need of ADC support.

The criteria for each program may vary; however, some of the broad principles include:

- proven Aboriginality of applicants;
- availability of funds from alternative sources;
- viability of proposed enterprises;
- ability of applicants to repay loans;
- long-term benefit of project to local Aboriginal community.

A set of conditions is usually attached to each loan or grant specifying how the money is to be used and (if it is a loan) how it is to be repaid. These conditions, designed by the ADC in consultation with successful applicants, are always generous and are subject to negotiation if the needs or circumstances of applicants change.

Inquiries should be directed to the following address:

Chairman  
Aboriginal Development Commission  
PO Box 1200  
Woden ACT 2606  
Phone: (062) 891666

*(3) Aboriginal Hostels Limited*

AHL was incorporated as a limited company in the Australian Capital Territory in 1973. It is administered by a board of nine people, eight of whom are Aboriginal. This board, through an extensive network of offices and hostels, provides hostel accommodation for Aboriginal people throughout Australia.

AHL administers two main types of hostel. The first are hostels owned and run by the company itself. The second are often referred to as third-party hostels. These are funded by the company but managed and operated by community groups or organisations.

Hostel accommodation of either type is available in every Australian State, in city and country areas. Hostels are designed not only to provide shelter for Aboriginal people who have no other accommodation alternatives, although this is an important aspect of their operations. They are also designed to supplement other government programs by providing accommodation for Aboriginals involved in education, training, employment, medical or rehabilitation programs. AHL also provides hostel accommodation and sometimes even nursing care for aged people, medical and rehabilitation patients and supporting mothers.

For information about AHL's operations and the addresses of the hostels functioning across Australia, write to:

Chairman  
Aboriginal Hostels Ltd  
PO Box 30  
Woden ACT 2606  
Phone: (062) 896314

*(4) The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies*

The AIAS was constituted under the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Act 1964*. It was established to promote research into and collection of information about Aboriginal studies in Australia.

In fulfilment of this responsibility, the Institute administers an extensive publication program and offers financial support and other assistance to research workers and projects in fields relevant to Aboriginal studies. The Institute collects and maintains a comprehensive library of information, which it makes available to the general public (with appropriate restrictions).

In addition, the Institute is responsible for encouraging co-operation between those institutions and organisations engaged in the promotion of Aboriginal studies. It offers assistance to these institutions in the training of research workers in fields associated with Aboriginal studies.

The Institute offers specialist advice to the Commonwealth Government, undertakes research projects on behalf of the Government and participates with other academic institutions and Aboriginal organisations in national and international conferences designed to consolidate existing achievements in the field of Aboriginal studies and to promote further developments.

Further information about the Institute's activities and programs is available from:

Chairman  
Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies  
PO Box 553  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Phone: (062) 891222



These are the main areas in which the DAA and its portfolio agencies operate to formulate and implement policy and programs, including those which offer 'direct assistance' to Aboriginal organisations and communities. The department has a vast number of policy concerns—and indeed it continues to seek additional ways and means of advancing Aboriginal interests within Australian society.

In addition to those activities already described, the department is engaged in other policy and program areas. For example, it provides financial support to the independent Aboriginal Legal Services operating across the country, and to State governments, Aboriginal organisations and other community groups involved in the delivery of support services to Aboriginal people, including child welfare, family support and homemaker services, hostels, homes, relocation assistance and prisoner assistance services.

As well, the department, in consultation with the Aboriginal Arts Board within the Australia Council, offers wide-ranging support for the promotion of Aboriginal culture and achievements in art, literature and theatre. It offers assistance directly and also through the National Aboriginal Sports Foundation to Aboriginal communities and organisations for the establishment of sporting and recreational facilities and for the promotion of Aboriginal sporting achievements.

The variety of the programs devised and administered by the DAA in collaboration with other Commonwealth departments is enormous. However, government programs are always subject to change in accordance with the changing needs and priorities of those for whom these programs are designed. Further information about the programs described in this section and any changes which may have occurred, as well as information not covered here, is obtainable from the department.

Other Commonwealth Government departments, described below, are also active in the field of Aboriginal affairs. Most of them have an advisory role in formulating Commonwealth Aboriginal policy and programs. In addition, many of them administer Aboriginal programs or direct assistance schemes which coincide with their particular areas of expertise.



## II. Department of Employment and Industrial Relations

This department is responsible for administering the NESAs (mentioned also in I (a), above). It works in close collaboration with the DAA to secure better employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people, in which it plays a particularly significant part.

The department administers two of the four main programs which operate under NESAs. They are the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP) and the NAEDC. The third, Employment in the Australian Public Service, is administered by the Public Service Board, though the Department has a certain limited role in its development and administration. The fourth program, CDEP, is described above—see I (a).



### (a) Training for Aboriginals Program

Under TAP, the Commonwealth provides funds to assist Aboriginals to participate in career training. It usually consists of on-the-job training in both public and private sectors and participation in formal courses. The Commonwealth either subsidises employers for the salary costs of their

Aboriginal employees or provides a training allowance to Aboriginals engaged in formal courses.

### **(b) The National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee**

NAEDC comprises representatives of the Aboriginal community, unions, the private sector and Government. More than half its members are Aboriginal. Its objective is to promote Aboriginal employment in the public and private sectors. In the past, NAEDC has concentrated its efforts on media promotion of the Aboriginal unemployment crisis. As part of its efforts it has established contact with decision makers in key areas of the public and private sectors. As a result of its wide-ranging membership and its developing experience, NAEDC has become an important source of policy advice for the Commonwealth Government on Aboriginal employment and training.

### **(c) Employment in the Australian Public Service**

Under this program, the Australian Public Service has adopted a number of measures to promote the employment of Aboriginal people within the Australian Public Service. The Board has secured the co-operation of many Commonwealth departments in identifying a broad range of positions for which a knowledge of Aboriginal culture or an ability to communicate with Aboriginal people is desirable. Under the Clerk (Aboriginal Services) Program and the Clerical Assistant (Aboriginal Services) Program, Aboriginal people have been encouraged to join the Public Service to work in these and other positions. In addition, recruitment and training programs have also been devised to improve Aboriginal access to government positions and to facilitate successful careers within the Australian Public Service.

These three programs, together with the CDEP, make up the Commonwealth's National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals. In order to facilitate Aboriginal access to these programs, NESAs are subsumed within the department under the operations of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). The administration of the TAP and information about all other NESAs programs is the responsibility of CES personnel located in CES Offices around the country.

The department also endeavours to include Aboriginal people in the operation of the Community Employment Program (CEP), which it administers, by setting a certain amount of funding aside for jobs for Aboriginal people.

In more general terms, the department continues to monitor Aboriginal unemployment and seek ways and means of ensuring that training and employment opportunities for Aboriginals are continually increased.

Information about TAP or Public Service employment, and details of how applications can be made, is available at all CES offices around the country or from:

National Director—CES  
 Department of Employment and Industrial Relations  
 PO Box 9880  
 Canberra ACT 2601

Information about the Clerk and Clerical Assistant (Aboriginal Services) Program is also available from the Australian Public Service Board, at any of its Regional Offices, or at the following address:



Regional Director  
Public Service Board  
McLachlan Offices  
National Circuit  
Barton ACT 2600

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### III. Department of Education

This Commonwealth department, in collaboration with the DAA, is responsible for providing program and policy advice to Commonwealth, State and local government authorities on Aboriginal education. Through its various agencies it provides a proportion of funding each year to State governments and Aboriginal education authorities for the development of Aboriginal education.

In addition to its general policy and financial responsibilities, the department administers a number of specific programs for Aboriginal people. It provides executive support for the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC).

The NAEC is the Commonwealth Government's principle adviser on Aboriginal education. It is a twenty-one member committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It draws on the advice of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) network. The Committee brings general and specialised education advice to the Minister for Education.

The department also administers a number of programs or award schemes which provide direct educational assistance to Aboriginal people. These programs are referred to collectively as Aboriginal Grants Schemes and are arranged in the following way:

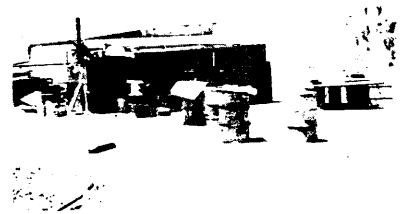
#### (a) Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme

Under this scheme, the department provides financial and vocational support to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students attending secondary schools throughout Australia. It provides an allowance to the parents of these students for living, travel and educational costs. Students receive a small allowance and access to an array of counselling and support services.

#### (b) Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme

Under this scheme, the department provides financial and vocational assistance to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students undertaking courses of study after they complete their formal secondary schooling. This scheme is open to students attending universities, colleges of advanced education, technical and further education colleges and business institutes. The assistance provided is very similar to that provided under the ABSEC except that all the assistance is provided to the students, rather than to their parents.

ABSTUDY has two additional features. If a particular course is not available, it can offer a financial contribution for the establishment of a course desired by Aboriginal students in a particular area. In addition, there is a special category of 100 awards set aside for mature-age students who wish to pursue studies in teacher education.



### **(c) Aboriginal Overseas Study Awards**

Under this scheme, the department offers financial and vocational assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who wish to study overseas. The support offered to these students is similar to that provided under other study award schemes, although the extent of travel assistance may vary and additional advisory services are often provided to fulfil the particular needs of students travelling overseas.

Inquiries about these awards and the method of application should be directed to the Commonwealth Department of Education Offices in each State or to:

Secretary  
Department of Education  
PO Box 826  
Woden ACT 2606  
Phone: (062) 837777

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## **IV. Department of Health**

From the beginning of 1985, the Department of Health ceased to be responsible for a substantial body of specific programs and responsibilities relating to Aboriginal health. It will, however, continue to have an impact on the lives of Aboriginal people, because it remains responsible for the policy which governs the provision of general health services to the Australian community as a whole.

In addition to the responsibility for national health policy, including the operation of the national health insurance scheme, Medicare, the department retains a small section which will provide policy advice on Aboriginal health matters to the Commonwealth Government, but it is no longer involved in providing indirect or direct assistance to Aboriginal people in health matters. The DAA has assumed full responsibility for Aboriginal health policy and programs and will, therefore, be the appropriate Commonwealth authority for Aboriginal people to approach for assistance or advice in the future.

Inquiries about Medicare, in particular, should be directed to the Commonwealth Department of Health, either in each State or at the following address:

Secretary  
Department of Health  
Furzer Street  
Phillip ACT 2606  
Phone: (062) 891555

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## **V. Department of Community Services**

The Department of Community Services is a 'new' Commonwealth department, established late in 1984. Most of its functions and responsibilities were transferred from the Department of Social Security. It is now the Commonwealth department responsible for the formulation of policies and programs relating to the provision of welfare services throughout Australia.

The two major programs which this department inherited from the Department of Social Security and now administers on behalf of Aboriginal people are emergency accommodation and child care



assistance. It provides financial assistance for emergency or relief accommodation to Aboriginal communities or organisations with large proportions of homeless Aboriginal people, through direct grants made under its emergency accommodation subsidy scheme.

In addition, the department provides financial support to Aboriginal communities or organisations for the establishment and operation of child care services.

These two forms of assistance to Aboriginals, unlike most of the others highlighted in this chapter, are not provided under programs specifically designed for Aboriginal people. They are part of broader programs designed for the Australian population as a whole. Both of them, however, are different from most general programs (to which, of course, Aboriginal people are also entitled) because, within their general provisions, it has become customary for a certain allocation of funding or some other quota of resources to be set aside specifically for assistance to Aboriginal people or communities.

Information about services to Aboriginal people from the Department of Community Services is available from:

Secretary  
 Department of Community Services  
 PO Box 646  
 Woden ACT 2606  
 Phone: (062) 891222 or (062) 836111

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## VI. Department of Social Security

This Commonwealth department has primary responsibility for the administration of the Commonwealth's income maintenance and support services—that is the payment of Commonwealth benefits, pensions and allowances. Although it does not administer any services specifically designed for Aboriginal people, its activities have an important impact on their lives, since they are, of course, equally entitled, along with all other Australians, to receive and benefit from its programs.

The benefits and programs provided by the department are many and varied. Indeed, the many different schemes and the detail involved in their administration often make the operations of the department seem confusing. What is important, however, is that Aboriginals, along with all other Australians, understand and utilise the services offered by the department.

The main forms of income maintenance or support provided are:

- Unemployment benefit: allowance paid to unemployed people between the ages of 16 and 60 (65 for men) who are capable of working and are attempting to find work.
- Sickness benefit: allowance paid to people who are temporarily incapacitated for work by sickness or injury and who have suffered loss of income as a result of their incapacity.
- Special benefit: allowance paid to people who are not eligible for unemployment or sickness benefit or a pension, but who are unable to earn sufficient livelihood for themselves or their dependants.
- Supporting parents benefit: allowance paid to sole parents with the custody, care and control of a child or children under 16 or a dependent full-time student(s) aged 16–24, if they do not receive any other pension or benefit.



- Age pension: paid to women over 60 or men over 65 subject to certain residence and income requirements.
- Widow's pension: paid to deserted wives, divorcees, widows, de facto widows, or prisoners' wives.
- Invalid pension: paid to people over 16 if they are permanently blind or incapacitated for work to the extent of 85 per cent or more of their former capacity.
- Spouse carer's pension: paid to male or female spouse with responsibility for the care of an incapacitated or aged partner.
- Orphan's pension: paid to guardian or institution for the care of an orphan under 16 or a full-time student aged 16–24.
- Family allowance: paid to parents or guardians with custody, care and control of children under 16 or full-time students aged 16–18 who are wholly or substantially dependent on them.
- Handicapped child's allowance: paid to a parent or guardian of a mentally or physically handicapped child under 16 or a full-time student aged 16–24 not receiving any other benefit.
- Family income supplement: an income-tested, non-taxable allowance paid to assist low-income families provide for their children.

In order to assist Aboriginal people to learn more of the benefits and services offered, and how to use them, the department has established a unit, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Section, for this purpose. It and an Aboriginal Liaison Scheme, operates from within the Department to provide a direct link between Aboriginal people and the department itself. Thirty Aboriginal liaison officers operate from Regional Offices of the department, to provide information to local Aboriginal communities about the services of the department and to assist them to take advantage of the benefits which are rightly theirs as Australian citizens.

Information about services to Aboriginal people from the Department of Social Security is available from:

Secretary  
 Department of Social Security  
 Juliana House  
 Bowes Street  
 Woden ACT 2606  
 Phone: (062) 844844



## VII. Department of Housing and Construction

Because this is the Commonwealth department with technical and administrative expertise in its area, the DAA and the ADC often have cause to rely upon its advice in fulfilling their own responsibilities relating to Aboriginal housing and accommodation.

In addition to its general advisory role, this department is responsible for the administration of the third component of the Commonwealth Housing program for Aboriginal people—see I (d) above.

The department administers those Commonwealth funds set aside each year within the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreements. These are made available to State governments in a series of tied and untied grants. Tied grants are those grants made for specific purposes which have conditions attached to ensure that they are used for that purpose. They are sometimes also referred to as earmarked grants. Untied grants are made

for the general purposes of State governments, and do not usually have specific conditions attached.

Within the tied grants made each year to the States under the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreements, a certain amount is earmarked or tied for the provision of rental housing or accommodation for Aboriginal people. The circumstances and conditions under which funds are provided to States for these purposes each year may vary slightly over time or between States. Ordinarily, however, they are allocated by the Department of Housing and Construction to the public housing authorities in each State for these specific purposes.

Aboriginal people may also benefit from the untied grants made under the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement to provide general public housing facilities in each State. The earmarked grants are, however, the most important strategy administered by the department for Aboriginal people.

Information about services for Aboriginal people from the Department of Housing and Construction is available from:

Secretary  
Department of Housing and Construction  
DHC House  
Northbourne Avenue  
Dickson ACT 2602  
Phone: (062) 436111

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## Conclusion

This chapter provides only a general summary of the Aboriginal programs administered by the Commonwealth Government and some information about some of the general services and benefits to which Aboriginal Australians are entitled. Space, unfortunately, prevents full details of every scheme or program being provided here. To pursue these programs, more information will be needed from the Commonwealth departments which administer them at the addresses provided above, or from Regional Offices.

Furthermore, the description of Government programs in this chapter provides information only about *Commonwealth* Government programs. A number of important Aboriginal programs are administered by each *State* Government in addition to their delivery of general community services to Aboriginals. These programs vary from State to State, according to local needs, priorities and the availability of funds. Information about them is available from State Aboriginal ministries (if they exist) or from State Departments of Education, Health or Community Welfare.

It is important for Aboriginal people to become familiar with the responsibilities and programs of all government agencies at State and Commonwealth level. Such knowledge will assist them to identify which agency to approach for particular needs. Also a familiarity with the range of Commonwealth and State government services and programs will assist Aboriginal people to 'co-ordinate' their dealings with governments and utilise the various opportunities offered by governments.

Joint funding can be arranged between different Commonwealth agencies, between State and Commonwealth agencies and between government and private organisations—see 'Commonwealth Funding Arrangements: States Grants; Direct Grants', above. Co-ordination of government and Aboriginal effort is not only possible and desirable, it



may often be the only means by which certain needs can be fulfilled. If Aboriginal people or communities have difficulty obtaining assistance from one particular source, there will usually be another agency or organisation able and willing to assist with *partial* funding.

In all things, it is vital to remember that the process of government and the administration of Aboriginal affairs is a flexible process. Good government is based on a process of negotiation and consultation between all those affected by its operations. In Aboriginal affairs, all government agencies rely on the participation of Aboriginal people, in particular, in expressing their needs and aspirations and insisting upon their right to be involved.

**Table 1**  
**DAA Allocations for Aboriginal Advancement Programs, 1985/86**

<i>Function</i>	<i>Appropriation 1985/86 (\$)</i>
<b>Health</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	22 417 800
State grants	15 488 600
<b>Education</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	6 085 170
State grants	9 540 300
Payments to the Northern Territory	138 000
<b>Employment (SWP)</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement (SWP)	3 200 000
State grants	46 200
CIDEP	25 656 000
<b>Social Support</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	6 315 450
State grants	1 794 000
<b>Community management and services</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	27 324 780
State grants	6 564 300
Payments to the Northern Territory	1 087 700
<b>Culture and recreation</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	4 008 700
State grants	37 900
<b>Legal aid</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	12 315 000
<b>Training</b>	
Grants for Aboriginal advancement	2 238 200
State grants	3 472 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>147 730 100</b>

Source: Department of Aboriginal Affairs *Government expenditure on Aboriginal programs 1985/86*, AGPS 1985.



**Table 2**  
**Commonwealth Allocations to other departments**

In addition to amounts appropriated to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio, the following Commonwealth departments and statutory authorities also provide special programs of assistance to Aboriginals.

<i>Department/Statutory Authority</i>	<i>Appropriation 1985/86 (\$m)</i>
<b>Department of Education</b>	
Aboriginal secondary assistance	34.211
Aboriginal study grants	30.470
Overseas study grants for Aboriginals	0.241
Remote Area Pilot Program	1.000
National Aboriginal Education Committee	0.449
Remuneration Tribunals Act—NAEC	0.121
Commonwealth tertiary education	1.488
Commonwealth Schools Commission	8.895
<b>Department of Community Services</b>	
Office of Child Care	4.928
Supported accommodation and homeless persons assistance	0.334
Emergency relief	0.180
Aged or disabled persons assistance	0.548
Home and Community Care program	0.033
Rehabilitation	0.077
<b>Department of Housing and Construction</b>	
Earmarked welfare housing for Aboriginals	54.300
Crisis accommodation of families in distress payments to Aboriginal Hostels Ltd.	0.200
<b>Department of Employment and Industrial Relations</b>	
Formal training in institutions, on the job training and special courses	58.500
Community Employment Program	9.100
Research, investigation and promotion of Aboriginal employment and training needs and opportunities	0.840
National Aboriginal Employment Development Committee	0.160
<b>Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment</b>	
Australia Council—Aboriginal Arts Board	2.551
Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service—Capital expenditure on community development	0.293
<b>Department of Communications</b>	
Australian Broadcasting Corporation—Aboriginal radio programs	0.095
<b>Department of Local Government and Administrative Services</b>	
Acquisition of sites and buildings	0.417
<b>Department of the Special Minister of State</b>	
Aboriginal electoral education program	0.978
<b>Total</b>	<b>210.409</b>

Source: DAA, *Government expenditure on Aboriginal programs 1985/86*, AGPS, Canberra, 1985.

**Official Sources for Appendix 5**

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Australia. Department of Education and Youth Affairs.

*Report for 1983*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984.

Australia. Department of Employment and Industrial Relations.

*Annual Report 1983–84*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984.

Australia. Commonwealth Department of Health.

*Annual Report of the Director-General of Health 1983–84*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984.

Australia. Department of Housing and Construction.

*Annual Report 1983–84*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984.

Australia. Department of Social Security.

*Annual Report 1982–83*, AGPS, Canberra, 1983.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

*Annual Report 1982–83*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1984.

## Selected statistics relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

- A. Selected Demographic Characteristics of the Population
- B. The Geographic Dispersion of the Population
- C. The Occupational Distribution of the Employed Labour Force
- D. Unemployment Rates by Age and Sex
- E. Non-participation in the Labour Force
- F. The Level of Education Qualifications of People Aged 15 Years or More by Sex
- G. The Distribution of Income
- H. The Distribution of Income of Employed People
- I. Dependency on Social Security Benefits and Pensions
- J. A Note on Aboriginal Mortality

### A. Selected demographic characteristics of the population, 1981

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders</i>			<i>Population distribution</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population</i>	<i>Non- Aboriginal population</i>
<i>(years)</i>	<i>('000)</i>	<i>('000)</i>	<i>('000)</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>(%)</i>
0-14	34.8	33.3	68.1	42.6	25.1
15-19	9.8	9.7	19.6	12.2	8.7
20-24	7.7	8.0	15.7	9.8	8.6
25-44	17.5	18.9	36.4	22.8	28.8
45-54	4.8	5.1	9.9	6.2	10.2
55-64	2.8	2.9	5.7	3.6	9.1
65 and over	2.2	2.3	4.5	2.8	9.5
Total	79.7	80.2	159.9	100.0	100.0

*Note:* Any discrepancies between totals and the sums of components are due to rounding.

*Source:* Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**B. The geographic dispersion of the population (a), 1981**

State/Territory	Number of people	Proportion living in			Total
		Major urban areas (b)	Other urban areas (c)	Rural areas (d)	
	('000)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<b>Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders</b>					
New South Wales	35.4	31.7	45.6	22.7	100.0
Victoria	6.1	47.0	39.8	13.2	100.0
Queensland	44.7	14.6	41.0	44.4	100.0
Western Australia	31.4	20.7	35.9	43.4	100.0
South Australia	9.8	32.7	31.2	36.1	100.0
Tasmania	2.7	22.7	48.3	29.0	100.0
Northern Territory	29.1	n.a.	32.0	68.0	100.0
Australian Capital Territory	0.8	78.7	n.a.	21.3	100.0
Australia	159.9	19.7	38.6	41.6	100.0
<b>All Australians</b>					
Australia	14 576.3	63.1	22.6	14.3	100.0

n.a. Not applicable

(a) Any discrepancies between totals and the sums of components are due to rounding errors.

(b) Major urban areas with a population of 100 000 or more.

(c) Other urban areas with a population of 1000 to 99 999.

(d) Rural areas with a population of less than 1000.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**C. The occupational distribution of the employed labour force, 1971 and 1981**

Occupation	<i>Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders</i>		<i>All Australians</i>		<i>Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders</i>		<i>All Australians</i>	
	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1981</i>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Professional, technical and related workers	2.4	7.0	10.2	13.6	4.0	12.6	11.7	17.0
Administrative, executive and managerial	0.6	0.9	6.7	5.3	1.0	0.7	7.4	1.9
Clerical workers	3.1	8.2	15.9	17.1	3.6	16.4	8.3	31.9
Sales workers	2.1	2.9	8.0	8.5	1.6	5.1	6.8	11.5
Farmers, fishing, forestry and related workers	25.8	11.4	7.7	6.4	16.7	1.8	7.6	4.4
Miners and related workers	2.0	1.1	0.6	0.6	1.6	0.1	0.9	0
Transport and communication	4.5	4.8	5.6	4.8	6.6	1.4	6.6	1.7
Trades, process workers and labourers n.e.i.	35.2	31.6	32.1	28.1	44.5	8.3	39.5	9.0
Service, sport and recreation workers	15.7	12.5	7.4	8.4	5.3	25.7	5.2	13.7
Armed services	0.7	0.6	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.1	1.5	0.2
Other inadequately described or not stated	7.9	19.1	4.6	6.2	14.2	27.8	4.5	8.7
Total employment	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

n.e.i. Not elsewhere included

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1971 and 1981 Censuses of Population and Housing.

**D. Unemployment rates by age and sex, 1981**

Age	<i>Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders</i>			<i>All Australians</i>		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
15-19	37.1	37.6	37.3	13.1	16.9	14.9
20-24	29.7	24.7	28.0	8.6	9.0	8.8
25-34	24.5	14.6	21.4	4.7	5.1	4.9
35-44	19.6	13.0	17.5	3.3	5.1	3.4
45-54	18.0	12.3	16.2	3.4	3.0	3.2
55-64	14.9	16.6	15.3	3.9	3.1	3.7
65 and over	25.5	35.0	28.8	5.3	13.1	8.1
Total	25.9	22.1	24.6	5.5	6.8	5.9

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**E. Non-participation in the labour force, 1981**

Age	Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders			All Australians		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
15-19	47.7	61.6	54.5	39.0	44.5	41.7
20-24	25.7	61.2	43.7	9.9	29.3	19.5
25-34	23.5	67.2	46.3	5.1	46.0	25.5
35-44	27.2	67.3	47.8	5.4	40.8	22.7
45-54	37.1	72.3	55.2	12.1	48.7	28.4
55-64	57.9	85.5	71.8	33.8	50.2	53.6
65 and over	91.1	95.6	93.4	87.7	95.1	92.0
Total	36.6	68.1	52.7	22.7	54.4	38.7

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**F. The level of education qualifications of people aged 15 years and over, by sex, 1981**

Qualification Level	Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders			All Australians		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<b>With post-school qualifications</b>						
Higher degree or graduate diploma	(a)	(a)	(a)	1.5	0.9	1.2
Bachelor degree	0.1	0.1	0.1	3.9	1.9	2.9
Diploma	0.4	0.5	0.4	3.2	4.0	3.7
Trade certificate	3.7	0.3	1.9	17.3	1.8	9.4
Other certificate	0.6	2.4	1.5	5.3	8.1	6.7
Other(b)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3
Sub-total	4.9	3.4	4.1	31.4	17.1	24.2
<b>Without post-school qualifications</b>						
No qualifications	77.9	78.5	78.2	57.3	70.7	64.1
Still at school	4.3	4.5	4.4	3.6	3.5	3.5
Not stated	12.9	13.6	13.3	7.7	8.7	8.2
Sub-total	95.1	96.6	95.9	68.6	82.9	75.8
Total age 15 years and over	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Less than 0.05 per cent.

(b) Not classifiable or inadequately described.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**G. The distribution of income, 1981**

Individual annual income	Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders			All Australians		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
(\$)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
0- 2 000	17.1	31.7	24.5	7.9	29.7	18.8
2 001- 4 000	23.7	22.7	23.2	13.0	21.9	17.8
4 001- 6 000	10.9	15.3	13.1	6.9	10.7	8.8
6 001- 8 000	14.0	8.4	11.1	7.1	8.1	7.6
8 001-10 000	9.0	4.3	6.6	9.5	6.9	8.2
10 001-12 000	7.2	2.4	4.8	13.7	6.8	10.2
12 001-15 000	4.6	1.2	2.9	14.5	4.9	9.6
15 001-18 000	1.8	0.3	1.1	9.4	2.3	5.8
18 001-22 000	0.8	0.1	0.5	6.4	1.1	3.7
22 001 or more	0.6	0.1	0.3	7.2	0.8	3.9
Not stated	10.3	13.5	11.9	4.4	6.8	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**H. The distribution of the income of employed people, 1981**

Individual annual income	Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders			All Australians		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
(\$)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
0- 4 000	11.9	23.3	15.9	4.4	17.3	9.2
4 001-10 000	48.7	49.6	49.0	24.7	45.3	31.7
10 001-15 000	24.0	12.1	19.7	36.8	25.8	32.7
15 001-22 000	5.2	1.8	4.2	21.0	7.5	16.0
22 001 or more	1.2	0.3	0.9	9.6	1.6	6.6
Not stated	9.0	12.9	10.3	3.5	4.3	3.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981 Census of Population and Housing.

**I. Dependency on social security benefits and pensions, 1976**

	Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders				All Australians			
	Males	Females	Persons		Males	Females	Persons	
	('000)	('000)	('000)	(%)	('000)	('000)	('000)	(%)
<b>Dependent on Social Security Benefits or Pensions(a)</b>								
Unemployment benefits	5.7	2.6	8.3	9.1	103.4	59.4	162.8	1.7
Other social security benefits or pensions	6.5	12.5	19.0	20.8	787.3	1 198.3	1 185.6	20.1
Sub-total	12.2	15.1	27.3	29.9	890.7	1 257.7	2 148.4	21.8

**Not Dependent on Social Security Benefits or Pensions**

Not receiving benefits or pensions	30.5	27.5	58.0	63.5	3 788.5	3 530.2	7 318.7	74.2
Not stated	2.9	3.1	6.0	6.6	205.3	185.7	391.0	4.0
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>33.4</b>	<b>30.6</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>70.1</b>	<b>3 993.8</b>	<b>3 715.9</b>	<b>7 709.7</b>	<b>78.2</b>
<b>Total population aged 15 years or more</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>91.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4 884.5</b>	<b>4 973.6</b>	<b>9 858.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Includes persons receiving more than one type of social security pension or benefit.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976 Census of Population and Housing.

**J. A Note on Aboriginal Mortality**

Since there is no nationwide system for the separate identification of Aboriginal deaths in death registration statistics, information on Aboriginal mortality remains extremely fragmented.

The Queensland Department of Health and Medical Services has collected data relating to deaths of Aboriginals in reserve communities only, which suggest that in these communities life expectancy at birth is about 54 years.

A study prepared for the New South Wales Department of Health suggests that Aboriginal mortality in New South Wales country regions in 1980–81 was consistent with a life expectancy at birth of 48–9 years for males and 55–7 years for females.

Information on infant mortality is available for a limited range of areas.

**Selected Infant Mortality Rates**

*Number of deaths per 1 000 births*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Qld(a)</i>	<i>WA(b)</i>	<i>NT(c)</i>
1976	65.9	45.6	52.8
1978	48.6	27.5	48.1
1980	26.5	31.3	36.3
1981	32.8	19.2	30.3
1982	23.6	25.2	38.3

Sources:

(a) Annual Reports of the Queensland Director-General of Health: Rates are for 14 communities only

(b) Annual Reports of the Western Australian Director-General of Health

(c) Northern Territory Department of Health bulletins

Although the Aboriginal infant mortality rate has decreased markedly in the three areas for which data are available it is still strikingly higher than that for non-Aboriginal Australians. In 1982 the total rate (which is inflated by the inclusion of deaths among Aboriginal infants) was 10.3 per 1 000 live births as compared with 38.3 for Northern Territory Aboriginal infants. Thus an Aboriginal baby in the Territory is four times as likely to die before its first birthday as a non-Aboriginal.

Data on adult mortality are even more limited but the overall picture is also very sombre. The New South Wales country data suggest that the



standardised mortality ratio for Aboriginals compared to the total New South Wales population is estimated to be 450 for males and 420 for females. That is, the overall Aboriginal mortality is estimated to be over four times higher than for the State as a whole. Aboriginals experience an especially high risk of mortality in the age group 35–39. The principal causes of the excess Aboriginal mortality would appear to be diseases of the circulatory system (mainly heart disease), diseases of the respiratory system, and injuries (especially motor vehicle accidents). (*Aboriginal Mortality in New South Wales Country Regions, 1980–1981*, NSW Department of Health, 1983.)

Overall, Aboriginal women not only are two to three times as likely to experience the trauma of an infant death, they can also expect to have a life span which is some twenty years shorter than that for non-Aboriginal women.