

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, 31 August 1940, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858**

In your letter of May 1939 and on other occasions you have expressed your "active interest in the welfare of the Australian Aborigines" and I am therefore again writing to bring the needs of my people to your notice before the Federal Elections.

I regret troubling you when the gravity of the International situation is needing your constant attention but I would point to the fact that the serious condition of my people does call for immediate consideration. Unless their position is speedily rectified their condition will inevitably deteriorate, therefore from the point of view of economy alone it is surely wise to increase financial assistance and so help them to become useful members of the community instead of the outcasts they must otherwise become.

Are you in favour of carrying out the Federal Governments policy as outlined by Mr McEwen when Minister for the Interior, or at least the main essentials of this policy as recommended by Mr Chinnery, Director of Native Affairs?

These are—

1. The provision of more reserves for the preservation of the natives still in their tribal state of culture.
2. The provision of Mission or Government Stations on the fringe of the reserves for the establishment of pastoral and other industries. This would prevent the drift to the towns which is bringing about the deterioration and inevitable extinction of my people. Land for their own use is the first essential for my people and any that is given now is small compensation for all they have lost.
3. We also desire the appointment of more District and Patrol Officers with Assistant Patrol officers of aboriginal blood instead of native police who will administer justice, render medical assistance and supply rations where necessary.

You will realise that for carrying out this policy an adequate financial grant is essential.

We congratulate the Federal Government on the appointment of Mr Chinnery as Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory but would point out the fallacy of expecting him to carry out his work effectively unless the Government places the means at his disposal. If the Government refuses to go forward because of the war it will find that after the war it will be too late for any real constructive work for my people.

We would point to the deplorable moral conditions which exist at present in Darwin owing to the large number of troops, and to the number of undesirable civilians who have flocked to the town and we request you to take immediate steps to remedy this state of affairs. We ask you to press for the provision of several trained Women Protectors, to be assisted by women protectors of aboriginal blood, for the proper

protection of aboriginal and halfcaste women. We commend the steps already taken by Mr Chinnery for improved educational and recreational facilities and urge that still greater steps be taken in this direction at a centre further removed from Darwin than the present compound.

My League is pressing for the federalisation of aboriginal affairs with a national policy of a constructive character, but until this can be brought about we would urge the Federal Government to provide a grant to Western Australia for the purpose of aboriginal education. W.A. has the largest aboriginal and smallest white population of all mainland states and therefore cannot, or will not, adequately tackle this problem. Half-castes in the S.W. of W.A. are growing up in deplorable squalor and are becoming a community of out-castes. Out of 1,600 children in the S.W. less than one quarter are receiving any education.

If Australia is sincere in her stand for democracy and her desire to free the peoples of other lands from the oppression of Hitlerism, her sincerity will be shown by the attitude she adopts towards her own exploited minority. Lip service to democracy and Christianity is not enough. "By their fruits ye shall know them".

I would point to the fact that no answer has been given to the petition of my League for an aboriginal representative in Parliament.

Trusting you will find time to deal with this important matter.

P.S. I hope to attend your meeting in the Camberwell Town Hall on Monday evening.