

Petition to the Chairman of the New South Wales Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, 16 February 1889, New South Wales Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings*, 1889, vol. 5, Medical Attendants to Aborigines at Cumeroogunga Mission Station (Further Correspondence Respecting), p. 5

We, the undersigned aboriginals, members of this Mission, do most respectfully beg to submit the following facts to your kind consideration, begging that you will, with the co-operation of the other members of the Boars, give our case your valuable attention, and that, by your influence and decision as representatives of the Government, you will at once, and for ever, remove the causes of dissatisfaction that have been so long robbing us of our peace and impeding our progress as a community.

First. — We are led to understand that according to the rules of the Aborigines Protectorate Association, no aboriginal is entitled to any rations unless he works six hours a day. If a man absent[s] himself from work through illness, or other circumstances over which he has no control, which must occasionally happen, the absentee and all his family are deprived of food, because the Superintendent considers the reason for absence unsatisfactory. We are sensible to admit that there are some on the Mission who cannot always give satisfactory reasons for absence; but even some of these are excusable when we remember the fact that nearly all the aboriginals are more or less affected with some insidious diseases, or the withering consumption which deprives of energy to do any kind of manual work. Further, if a man refused to perform work which he is unaccustomed to, he must suffer likewise — that is, to do without his food. In short, the Superintendent has all the rations in his own hands, and he can do just as he likes; and there is no one on the mission or in the district to question whether justice is done to the aboriginals, or whether they receive the rights conceded to them by the Government.

We humbly state that we consider it very unfair and unsatisfactory that the distribution of rations should be left to the discretion of the Superintendent alone. We have always understood that the Government, having dispossessed us of our land, hunting grounds, &c., gave us rations as compensation, without any condition that we should work a certain number of hours for it. We believe that rations are freely issued to the aboriginals, through the Police Magistrate, &c., in many parts of New South Wales,

We beg for similar concessions here through the Superintendent or some other responsible person. When we say rations, we mean the bare necessities of life, viz. flour, meat, tea, sugar, and salt. We do not wish to lead an indolent life, for there are other things that are absolutely necessary to render our homes comfortable, such as rice, sago, potatoes, oatmeal, also boots and clothing, the value of which we now realise, and for these we are heartily willing to work.

Secondly, we beg that Dr Eakins, who has for the last three years given us his services freely, without charge, and who has been recently appointed to attend to several cases of typhoid on the Mission, may now be permanently appointed to visit us regularly once a month, and also supervise the sanitary arrangements of the Mission. Moreover, that he who takes charge of the medicine should receive a systematic course of instruction as to dispensing medicine, either from the visiting doctor or from some

chemist in the nearest town; and we may mention that Mr James, the present school-teacher, is willing to undertake the work and undergo the necessary training, as he has kindly promised to do this for us.

We also regret to have to state that we will never be able to work in harmony with our present Superintendent, Mr Bellinger. We consider that he has treated us very badly during our present time of trouble. During the sickness we have received neither help nor sympathy from him. He may be able to manage the Mission efficiently in a pecuniary sense — that is, working the Mission at a small cost, by depriving us of our rations without any cause, thus destroying all our respect for him and our love for the Mission as our home. In fact, in our opinion, we have too many officers altogether.

Finally, we beg that a number of these well-known and respected gentlemen, whose names follow, be appointed to visit the Mission periodically, and give reports of their visit to the Board. This, we consider, will keep the officers from neglecting their duties, and us from abusing the rights conceded to us by the Government ...

Trusting you will accede to our urgent request herein ...

(Here follow the signatures of 19 Aborigines.)