

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Premier of New South Wales, Bertram Stevens, 31 March 1938, New South Wales Archives and Records, NRS 12060, Item No. [12/8749-8750]

I note that the Government Architect has approved of the new type of dwelling at Cumeroogunga. Actually it is the Departmental decisions in these matters that we protest about and seek that the Government should dictate a policy for aborigines. We are very disappointed at the Departmental attitude in every way. This is, usually, one of oppression and domination, or take it or leave it, and the last ones to be considered are the natives themselves and their feelings are not considered at all. We claim that the native is progressively becoming civilised but the attitude of the Department is static, on the standard that applied when people had not attained the present condition. In fact we claim that the Department should not merely keep in step with the native advancement but it should definitely lead in the uplift. We claim and ask for a definite policy by the Government which we may know and be able to check up on, being able to make our representations when the Department fails to keep up with its responsibilities. We submit that reasons of finance should not be always in the way of native advancement. May we expect some intervention by the Government.

In regard to the type of home as a standard throughout the State, may we ask if the Department intends to adopt this type at Le Perouse or is the practice to continue which has been explained thus:— “We keep La Perouse to show Mariposa passengers how Australian looks after her aborigines?? These homes are vastly inferior to the type built at Cumeroogunga when the station was first opened. These homes did have glass windows, the new type has merely wooden shutters, which, when closed to keep out the weather, keeps out light and air. You will be aware of the T.B. trouble the natives have so frequently. The new homes are conducive to that condition. We seek that the standard of 50 years ago at Cumeroogunga be the standard still. These places are humble little cottages and should be the irreducible minimum.

In regard to sanitary arrangements, I am thoroughly aware of the conditions and protested against them as they are. In a community living together as they do in Cumeroogunga, I feel there should be a sceptic tank but if not I claim, on behalf of my league that the present system be brought up to the standard applying in white communities using the pan system. We ask but two things in this respect:—

(1) That proper pans should be used, with the standard covers when being taken away for emptying.

(2) That the pans should be emptied more often. I am only telling you what I have seen when I say that the pans get over full and run over the sides. The condition of the W.C.'s is so bad that sheer necessity is the only reason that they are ever entered.

Now that the pressure associated with the elections is now over may I request that you and the Chief Secretary make an inspection of Cumeroogunga with a view to the adoption of a policy for aborigines. I would suggest that you interview the natives but for the fact that they generally are afraid to make representations fearing reaction to their disadvantage.

Cumeroogunga is a natural sanitarium, delightfully situated on the Murray River. That it is so different in fact calls for earnest thought. The policy of "the irreducible minimum" for aborigines is not in the best interests of the State and we request that it be replaced with a policy which regards us as fully human.

Hoping for your personal dealing.