

William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Chairman, New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, 28 November 1938, New South Wales Archives and Records, NRS 12060, Item No. [12/8749-8750]

While conditions in some parts of Australia are improving, for a long time I have been receiving complaints about conditions at Cumeroogunga. What impressed me was that complaints were made by men of sterling character, people of fine type. Some of the complaints I was not able to verify, not being on the spot and in respect of others I told those concerned that the League would have to have something definite before we could take up the matter. I felt that there was a good backing for some of the statements made but our league is careful in what it says and does not want to lose its good name by irrational statements. I wanted to be able to prove the statements made.

Later I received a petition, which I forward herewith, and which you will see is very representative of the people living on the settlement. On receipt of this I made personal enquiries and herewith is set out the complaints of the people. They are prepared to substantiate them to you personally or to a board of enquiry you may appoint. They are not satisfied that the Inspector (Mr Smithers) or some other officer conduct an informal enquiry. This in the past has never been satisfactory and it is as much a protest against such officers as against the management. They and this league ask for an enquiry which will seek to know facts with a view to a remedy.

1. The manager and the matron call all the married women only by their christian names. The married men object to this and the women support their protest. The women say that they are required to always call Mrs MQuiggan Matron and they feel that she and the manager should call them Mrs Jones, or as the case may be.

2. Natives are not allowed under any circumstances to travel in the cab of the station truck. This rule is never varied, no matter what the weather, even with convalescents returning from the hospital. Native women, known to be tubercular, have been compelled to sit on the back of the truck, in the cold and wet, while there is room in the cab for these delicate people. The natives contend that the truck was supplied for the use of the station and that it is unreasonable to force delicate women out into the cold and wet while there is room in the cab for them.

3. The houses near the river do not get sanitary clearances though they are but a short distance from the centre of the township. The occupants bury the nightsoil. When the River rises over the land this nightsoil is disturbed and the water of the river is polluted.

4. The meat issued to the natives is from sheep so badly conditioned as to fit only for boiling down. The carcasses average only 20 to 25 lbs. in weight. The meat is secured from the Echuca Freezer and is starving stock. It is unfit for human consumption and much is thrown to the dogs.

5. Many of those to whom clothing was issued under previous administrations do not now receive it which is now only issued to old people. A wider issue was made prior to Mr M'Quiggan being appointed.

6. The manner of Mrs M'Quiggan to the women is most offensive. She goes to the homes when she likes and says what she likes. If things don't suit her she bounces the women. If they pick her up for the way she speaks the rations are stopped or, if they are old people, their curry and pepper are stopped.

7. The natives ask that the Health Inspector visit the place and report on its condition.

8. Open night pans are infested with flies, which also pollute the food. A more suitable type of W.C. is necessary or, preferably, a septic tank system should be installed.

9. The streets are in bad order. In heavy rain, people are up to their knees in mud and water.

10. The rooms of the houses are too small and the number of rooms too few for the size of the families. Overcrowding results and there is much dissatisfaction.

The complainants are ready to submit evidence to a Board of Enquiry or yourself. They are not prepared to do so to the Inspector or other Officer of the Board responsible for the conditions.

The League supports the claim for a full, free and impartial investigation.