

Notes of Deputation representing Aborigines and various associations interested in Aboriginal welfare to the Minister for the Interior, Thomas Paterson, Melbourne, 23 January 1935, National Archives of Australia, A1, 1935/3951

... *Mr Cooper* presented the following statement which was read on his behalf by Mr James:

“This deputation has the Honor to represent the aboriginal population of Australia.

We, on behalf of the descendants of the aborigines naturally are greatly concerned in everything effecting our people. We consider that it is one of the most pressing problems of the day, yet it does not seem to seriously trouble the mind of the Government.

Therefore, on behalf of the aboriginal population of Australia we appeal for a constructive policy with better conditions than those existing and under which our people have to live. We respectively remind the Government that a strict injunction to the effect “that the aborigines and their descendants should be properly cared for” was included in the Commission issued to those who came overseas to Australia, and we trust the present Government will take every lawful means to extend the protection to the native population, who are His Majesty’s subjects, and the Government must punish, with exemplary severity all acts of violence and injustice which may in manner be attempted or practiced against the aborigines who are to be considered as much under safeguard of the laws as the white people under the British Flag.

Believing the British Empire to stand for justice, order, freedom and good Government we pledge ourselves as citizens of the British Commonwealth of Australia to maintain the heritage handed down to us by the Creator which we believe to be true, and we, therefore, with confidence, desire moderation and forbearance to be exercised by all classes in their intercourse with native inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting to fulfil His Majesty’s most gracious and benevolent intention to them by promoting advancement in civilization under the blessing of Divine Providence.

This injunction has not been carried into effect for our people have been driven further and further into the barren wastes on which it is impossible to live for much longer, consequently, the native people are faced with extinction.

Many of our civilised aborigines have not been given the status of citizens of the Commonwealth.

Many have no voice in its Government and no vote in the election of Parliament, and are apparently cut off from all opportunity of becoming good citizens and a valuable asset to the country.

I wish to point out having had 60 years’ experience of a fruitless task and waste of good energy on an Aboriginal Settlement on which no useful industries have been given to enable them to become useful and independent of the support of the Government.

The aborigines should not be blamed because it is not their fault, but the fault of the policy pursued by the various Governments in not adopting the suggestions mentioned before.

The Maoris of New Zealand have had Parliamentary representations since 1867, therefore, the Parliamentary representation of the Australian aborigine is long overdue.

In view of these facts, we, on behalf of the native races of Australia, respectfully submit the following requests:

- (1) That we be allowed aboriginal representatives to protect our interest in the State and Federal Parliaments;
- (2) That a Federal Department of Native Affairs be established to unify the aboriginal work of all States so that Australia may work out a national policy for her native race;
- (3) That a sympathetic officer be appointed for this Department to do for the aborigines what Sir Hubert Murray has done in New Guinea.

As, Sir, there are other speakers, I thank you for your patient hearing” ...

Mr Douglas Nichols: Sir, I endorse the statements which have been made. Much more could be done for our people. They should have representation in Parliament. We need not be a hindrance. We could work together with the white men and we look to you, Sir, to help us ...

Mrs A. Morgan: I speak on behalf of our native women. We need more education than we get with some of our Administrators. If we get the same education as the white girl we could stand alongside white people.

Mr James: The case of my people for more than 100 years has baffled all administrations. Protectors are appointed to dispense monies to the best advantage, and to feed, clothe and educate my people. Their work should be for our moral, social and intellectual advancement, but they have not lived up to their responsibilities. They have not done anything to raise the dignity of our people. We should have a say in the making of laws. Education is not systematically taught but a mutilated curriculum. Boys are drifting back. Teachers are unclassified and are not interested in the progress of our people.

There should be a suitable library to foster the love of reading. The system of today is pauperizing us and not helping us in any way. It should be altered to enable us to support ourselves and to have grants of land. There is plenty of land which can be split up and used. We should have a native representative in Parliament and a Protector in each State. We should be given opportunities such as are enjoyed by the aristocratic Brahman of India. We understand our people and strongly deprecate the policy of appointing policemen as administrators.

...