

**William Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Minister for the Interior, Thomas Paterson, 25 June 1937, National Archives of Australia, A659, 1940/1/858**

I do thank you for your willingness to discuss the matter of the aborigines with me by letter. It is but another token of your genuine desire to do the right by my people. You say my previous letter was in a pessimistic strain. Mr Paterson, I am an old man and I did hope to live to see my people in a fair way to uplift. My hopes are not being realised, hence my despair. If my claims for my people are just, why should I not look for immediate relief. If they are unreasonable cannot I claim to be shown in what way they are. I am being assured all round that what we ask is only our right and therefore I feel that I am right when I persistently press for this right.

I am delighted at the assurance that your colleagues in the Federal Cabinet are likeminded with you and the Prime Minister in sincere desire to do the very best by our people.

I understand that the Federal Parliament has jurisdiction only over such aborigines as may live in the Territories. There are over 18,000 full bloods in these parts and I venture the opinion that if the Federal Government deals adequately with the problem as it affects the aborigines under its control a definite lead will be given to the State Governments and a favorable psychology will be developed in the general public.

Mr Paterson, your kindness is so genuine that I feel I can respectfully say to you, without impropriety, that you should, just for the moment, forget that you are a white man so that you may look at the matter as we do. To see things as we do, to feel as we do, is the best way to realise the extent of our disabilities. We do not want our people to remain primitive, uncultured and a prey to all comers. Why should we remain in the near Stone Age? The British were once where we are now. The conquering power of Rome, whatever else it did, lifted the British to culture and civilisation. We want that same uplift. Are we unreasonable?

We have proven our capacity, all over Australia, to become capable in every form of husbandry. In places we have made ourselves indispensable. We have acquired the faculty for the arts and crafts of civilisation, our men drive motor cars, are expert motor mechanics and engineers. We have orators, ordained clergymen, teachers and singers and I venture to say that our people, so capable of imitation, are to be found in every phase of modern culture. ALL WE HAVE ATTAINED TO HAS BEEN MERELY PICKED UP. WHAT WE WOULD HAVE BEEN WITH PLANNED UPLIFT MAY ONLY BE ASSUMED. We want our yet uncultured brothers to get the uplift we have received but we claim it should come by plan. Our uplift came throughout by a baptism of blood and only to a residue, the rest being destroyed by the contact. We are asking that, on their own reservations, according to the capacity of the soil, the dark people be trained in modern methods of agriculture. Progress will not be meteoric but we feel that it can be made practically self-liquidating. We urge that this should be the aim and the plan can be tried out experimentally first.

While not presuming more than to make a suggestion, we feel that planned uplift can be made through Christian missions more cheaply. We submit that the Commonwealth should supply the requisite machinery and expert supervision or

advice. Whether the work is carried out by the departmental officers or by missionaries, under Government supervision, the uplift should be associated with educational facilities for the children, which should be progressively raised in status until the aboriginal child has the same educational facilities as the white child.

Now, still looking at our problems from the point of view of the native, please forget the white man's discrimination between the half caste and the full blood. Except where the notion is put into the head of the half caste no one thinks of the white strain at all. All are aborigines and content to be so, proud to be so. The full blood is a full man and fully British and fully entitled to uplift. Our only thought in respect of preference to half-castes is pleasure that someone is getting something and the more the better.

There is nothing fantastic in our claim for full uplift for the aboriginal. To settle the matter as we suggest will confer a twofold benefit:— It will settle the problem of the aboriginal and settle it justly.

Now as to why we want a Parliamentary representative in the Federal House. Nearly 20,000 aborigines, including half castes, are surely not asking too much when they request what a handful of whites in the Territories have now got. We feel that a member representing our race can maintain contact with our people, study their needs and present their claims. He can watch legislation with a view to seeing that his constituency is not omitted or penalised. He can initiate legislation. Though he would have no voice in respect of other states, he would have members privileges when travelling and his opinion might be of value as an interpretation of aboriginal thought. AND, THE ABORIGINAL WOULD ONLY HAVE WHAT THE MAORI NOW HAS AND WHAT THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA IS PROPOSING FOR THE NATIVES THERE.

Mr Paterson, We claim that, given a trial, we will prove that we are capable of producing a yeomanry that can open up and develop the outback better than anyone else. We are acclimatised, and as our primitive people become civilized, they lose the aboriginal culture and outlook taking on the psychology of the white man. The aboriginal is loyal to the Throne and Person of this Majesty. The development of Australia by civilized aborigines is therefore sound in that it provides a bulwark for the defence of your land and ours.

I do hope that the administration of which you are so Honored a member will have the privilege of initiating the movement for emancipation of my people, in which you will have our full co-operation of my people, and that we will have an earnest of your good will by an early installment of reform is the earnest prayer of