

Armidale Conference on Aborigines

To promote thought and discussion about pressing and difficult problems involved in implementing the policy of assimilation, a week-end conference was convened in Armidale by the Department of Adult Education, the University of New England and attended by persons interested and active in the welfare of Aborigines.

The conference was held from 22nd May to 24th May, 1959, under the Vice-Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board, Professor A. P. Elkin, M.A., Ph.D., who delivered an address on the history and treatment of Aborigines in New South Wales. Talks were also given by the Superintendent of Aborigines Welfare, an Aborigines Welfare Officer, a manager of an Aboriginal Station, the Director of Native Affairs, Queensland, and a school teacher, seconded by the Department of Education, to carry out research into the effects of education on Aborigines and their aptitude in learning. Four of the Board's Welfare Officers were present and took an active part. The conference was an outstanding success, most sessions being attended by approximately 100 persons.



Irene Ferguson,
Johnny Kapeer
and Norma Ray,
of Murwillumbah

Libraries on Aboriginal Stations

During the year, the Board directed that, in cases where there was sufficient interest shown by residents and a room available for use as a library, Managers of Aboriginal Stations were to obtain books through the services available from the Public Library and the Education Department. If, after a trial period, it was found to be warranted, a limited amount of funds would be made available this year to finance the purchase of books to inaugurate Station libraries.

At the conclusion of last year, the trial period mentioned was still in operation.

Commonwealth Social Services

For many years aborigines have been entitled to endowment, sickness and unemployment benefits, but old age, invalid, and widows pensions were only granted to exempted Aborigines living off Stations.

The Commonwealth Minister for Social Services has now advised the Premier that it has been decided to amend the Social Services Act to provide that Aboriginal natives, other than those who are nomadic or primitive, shall be eligible for pensions and maternity allowances on the same basis applying to other persons in the community, and irrespective of place of residence.

The Board has been pressing for payment of pensions to all Aborigines for many years and is gratified to learn that the matter has now been satisfactorily rectified.

It is a matter of regret that so many Aborigines, particularly those living outside Stations and Reserves, still reside in what can, at the best, be described as sub-standard dwellings.

The Board recognises that the erection of even modest dwellings of modern design, with bathing and laundry facilities, a proper sanitary service and some degree of comfort in furnishing, are essential with a view to assimilation.

The Board appreciates the growing interest throughout the State of private citizens and organisations in the welfare and progress of the Aborigines, and the practical work done by them in this regard. Also pleasing was the increased awareness, displayed by many Aborigines themselves, of the advantages to be derived from higher education, better housing, and their participation in employment of a permanent rather than casual nature.

On the other hand, the Board regrets that a few local authorities still display a reluctance to support the policy of assimilation, although such instances are in a small minority.

Their attitude is hindering the work of the Board and until such is modified, progress in achieving this desirable goal, which at the best can only be realised slowly and painstakingly, will continue to be impeded.

In conclusion, the Board records its appreciation of the help rendered by all who have assisted throughout the year and earnestly solicits their continued interest and practical aid towards promoting the well-being and progress of the Aboriginal population.



Alex Nean, of
Quirindi,
and
Colin Tighe, of
Carona