

THE BOARD AND THE ABORIGINE

A Special Feature by Mr. A. G. Kingsmill,
Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board

I have been asked to outline the role of the Aborigines Welfare Board in relation to the care of aborigines in this State.

First I might explain that the Board is a corporate body set up by State Parliament to promote the interests and welfare of aborigines and shelter them from exploitation and injustice.

The Board's charter is the Aborigines' Protection Act—first passed in 1909 and amended several times since.



Mr. Kingsmill meets Freddie Bugg, a shy visitor from Coff's Harbour, who joined the La Perouse school children on their day at Qantas House recently. Freddie was brought to Sydney by the Aborigines Welfare Board for specialist medical attention

For its work the Board is dependent on funds provided by Parliament.

Its eleven members are paid no fees. Aboriginal members, however, receive out-of-pocket expenses for attending Board meetings. They are also paid the same travelling expenses as other members when the Board makes inspection tours.

The Board, as constituted, brings to its counsels recognised experts in various fields of human relations.

Its members include Professor A. P. Elkin, the eminent Australian anthropologist who was recently honoured by the Pacific Science Congress at Honolulu.

This 1961 gathering of world scientists in Hawaii awarded the Herbert E. Gregory medal to Professor Elkin for outstanding contributions to Pacific science.

A lifelong champion of the rights of the aborigine, Professor Elkin has been a Board member since 1940 and is Vice Chairman.

Other Board members include a leading educationist and health specialists.

Following the report of a Parliamentary select committee in 1937 the Aborigines' Protection Act was overhauled in 1940 and again in 1943 when it was substantially modernised.

The Act now specifically charges the Board to assist aborigines to become assimilated into the general community.

The 1943 amendment provided for the addition to the Board of the aborigines—one full-blood and a second full-blood or a part aborigine. They are nominated and elected by the aboriginal population.

The question is frequently asked, "How many aborigines are there in N.S.W.?"

A recent Board survey shows there are only 235 full aborigines in the State. The rest of the native population is made up of 6,600 half-caste and 6,763 of lighter caste.

Out of this total of 13,598 some 5,442 are housed on stations and reserves.

About half of the remaining 8,156 live independently of the Board in a more or less assimilated state. The balance are scattered through the State, many living in groups on the fringe of settlements.