

THE PROGRESS OF THE ABORIGINAL LANDS TRUST

Previous editions of *New Dawn* have outlined details of the creation of an Aboriginal Lands Trust in New South Wales. Forty-two Aboriginal reserves are presently being transferred to the Lands Trust. It will receive the title deeds to the first four of these this month.

The present members of the Trust were elected in December, 1973, and are the same nine people who form the Advisory Council.

Meetings

Since its establishment the Trust has met on a monthly basis in conjunction with the Advisory Council. The Trust itself conducts a separate closed meeting.

The members of the Trust are all Aboriginal people who give up their time voluntarily to assist in their own way to help the people overcome the problems which face them.

Up to this time there have been six meetings held by the Trust, half of which were held in rural centres (including Lismore and Griffith) and the rest in Sydney. It is the intention of the Trust to hold as many meetings as possible outside Sydney so that members can, firstly, meet and discuss matters with the local people; and, secondly, examine the problems that will become the Trust's responsibilities when it accepts ownership of the reserves.

The members of the Trust, who are also members of the Advisory Council, are anxious to hold additional meetings in the rural areas. Subject to available finance, the ratio of meetings held in the rural areas will increase to the maximum possible. The Trust will notify people of the date and location of meetings through their local newspaper.

Aboriginal lands

As a statutory body created by an Act of Parliament the Trust is in the best possible position

to acquire and preserve Aboriginal lands, including burial grounds and other sacred sites, on behalf of the Aboriginal people. The Trust places particular value on information provided by local people concerning old reserve sites, burial sites and sacred sites of that nature.

Over the years the areas allocated for the use of Aboriginal people have been severely reduced. The Trust realizes that this reduction in the reserve areas has been caused by many factors, one of which is that many Aboriginal people have gone to live in the cities and no longer retain the old customs and ways of life. In some cases the old reserves in their present condition are no longer suitable to the new ways.

The Trust has taken note of the opinions of the people that they have met concerning the restoration of the reserves to their former size where possible, and for the attached buildings and cemeteries to be identified and preserved. The Trust is also looking at ways in which an effective programme can be initiated for the cleaning up and fencing off of burial sites.

Many of the old reserves hold special sentimental significance for the people because of the long period that their families and their ancestors lived on the reserves, and the Trust recognizes this.

Transfer of reserves to the Trust

The New South Wales Government has decided to transfer all reserves to the Trust. These are to be transferred according to their present condition. That is, the areas which are not presently being used and which are not subject to private leases will be transferred to the Trust immediately. Some delay will be caused before the actual deeds will be given to the Trust because of the large amount of paperwork involved in arranging the transfer of these scattered areas.

Most reserves with Government houses will be transferred to the Trust at a later date, subject to