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ADDRESS BY THE ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS MINISTER,
HON. L.J. KING. Q.C., M.P.

2/6/71.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

FIRST OF ALL I'D LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR SPARING THE TIME TODAY TO HEAR ABOUT A PROGRAMME WE BELIEVE TO BE THE MOST EXCITING AND FORWARD LOOKING FOR ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT OF ANY IN AUSTRALIA.

THE DIRECTOR, WHEN HE SPEAKS, WILL OUTLINE THE DETAILS OF THE REORGANISATION THAT FOLLOWS FROM THE AMALGAMATION OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE AND ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENTS AND CREATION OF THE NEW COMMUNITY WELFARE DEPARTMENT.

I WANT TO TALK FIRST OF ALL ABOUT SOME OF THE CONCEPTS THAT MOTIVATED THE REORGANISATION AND THE IDEAS WHICH GUIDED IT.

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THE HISTORY OF OUR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAS BEEN, IN MANY WAYS A TRAGIC ONE, AND TO PARAPHRASE BISHOP TREVOR HUDDLESTON, OFFERS NAUGHT FOR WHITE AUSTRALIA'S COMFORT. CONQUEST AND LOSS OF LAND AT THE TIME OF EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT WAS FOLLOWED BY CRUELTY AND VIRTUAL ENSLAVEMENT AND THEN BY A SYSTEM OF HANDOUT CHARITY WHICH DID ALMOST AS MUCH PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE TO THE ORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS AS DID THE INITIAL PHYSICAL ONSLAUGHT. HAPPILY, THINGS HAVE CHANGED SINCE THEN. BUT THE LEGACY OF POVERTY, DEPRIVATION AND NEGLECT IS STILL WITH US AND WE MUST RECOGNISE A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO A PEOPLE WHO LIVE, LITERALLY AND METAPHORICALLY, ON THE FRINGES OF OUR AFFLUENT SOCIETY IF THIS SORRY INHERITANCE IS TO BE OVERCOME AND OUR ABORIGINAL CITIZENS ARE TO TAKE THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN AUSTRALIA.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ACROSS AUSTRALIA ARE NOW, AND PROPERLY, ASSERTING THEIR PRIDE IN THEIR ORIGINS, A RIGHT TO THEIR OWN IDENTITY AND ARE DEMANDING RECOGNITION OF THEIR OWN CULTURAL VALUES. A GOVERNMENT IN FORMULATING A POLICY FOR ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT MUST TAKE ACCOUNT OF THIS IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING THE MATERIAL RESOURCES. THE LABOR GOVERNMENT RECOGNISED THIS IN 1965, AND IT IS ALSO CENTRAL TO THE PRESENT SCHEME. WE RECOGNISE THE RIGHT OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO LIVE IN OUR COMMUNITY ON EQUAL TERMS WITH OTHER AUSTRALIANS. BUT AT THE SAME TIME WE ACCEPT THAT THEY HAVE A RIGHT - IF THEY DESIRE - TO A SEPARATE AND IDENTIFIABLE CULTURE. THOSE WHO WISH TO REMAIN IN TRIBAL SITUATIONS MUST BE ENABLED TO DO SO. THOSE WHO WISH TO LIVE IN RESERVE TYPE SITUATIONS UNDER DETRIBALISED COMMUNAL CONDITIONS MUST BE PERMITTED TO DO SO, WITH PROPER PROVISION OF HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT.

AND, NATURALLY, ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS MUST HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN THE WHITE COMMUNITY AS AUSTRALIANS IF THAT IS THEIR DESIRE. IN OTHER WORDS IT IS THE JOB OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE THE OPTION AND IT IS FOR THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES - NOT TO HAVE THE CHOICES MADE FOR THEM. THERE IS A LIMIT TO WHAT CAN BE DONE AT GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL, BUT WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN UP TO THAT LIMIT.

OUR PRINCIPAL POLICY AIM, IF I WAS ASKED TO DEFINE IT IN A FEW WORDS, WOULD BE THE INTEGRATION OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE INTO THE COMMUNITY ON THE BASIS OF RESPECT FOR THEIR CULTURE AND TRADITIONS AND THEIR RIGHT TO LIVE IN THEIR OWN WAY - A WAY WHICH MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE WHITE MAN. THIS WILL OF COURSE INVOLVE THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTIFIABLY ABORIGINAL INSTITUTIONS - SUCH AS THE LAND TRUST AND THE RESERVE COUNCILS - AND GREATER INVOLVEMENT BY ABORIGINES

THEMSLEVES IN DECISION MAKING SO THAT THEIR SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS CAN BE UTILISED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THEIR PEOPLE. THE BASIS FOR ASSISTANCE MUST BE THAT OF NEED AND OF THE ABORIGINAL'S RIGHT TO IDENTITY.

WHAT WE ARE SEEKING TO DO, THEN, IN THE REORGANISED DEPARTMENT IS TO PROVIDE A FLEEXIBLE, EXPANDED STRUCTURE THAT SPECIFICALLY RELATES TO ABORIGINAL NEEDS AND CATERS FOR THEM ON A BASIS WHICH, BECAUSE OF LIMITED RESOURCES, HAS NOT PREVIOUSLY BEEN POSSIBLE. IT WILL BE A LARGER DEPARTMENT BUT - AND I EMPHASISE THIS - THERE WILL BE NO LOSS OF IDENTITY. WE PLAN TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE COVERAGE TO STUDY ABORIGINAL PROBLEMS AND TO APPLY GREATER RESOURCES TO THEIR SOLUTION. WE PLAN TO SUPPLY THEM FAR CLOSER TO PEOPLE'S HOME - AT COMMUNITY LEVEL.

TWO OF THE PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS IN THE REORGANISATION ARE THE CREATION OF AN ABORIGINAL RESOURCES BRANCH AND AN ABORIGINAL TASK FORCE.

THE ABORIGINAL RESOURCES BRANCH IS FORMED AND WILL HAVE A CONSULTANT ROLE FOR THE DEPARTMENT AND WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR COHERENT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF ABORIGINES. IT WILL COMPRISE EXPERIENCED SPECIALISTS IN VARIOUS ASPECTS OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND WILL MAINTAIN A CLOSE LIAISON WITH ABORIGINES TO IDENTIFY AREAS OF NEED AND CONDUCT FEASIBILITY STUDIES.

BASED ON SUCH STUDIES THE BRANCH WILL DEVELOP POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS - INCLUDING THOSE PARTICULARLY DESIGNED TO ATTRACT COMMONWEALTH FINANCE, IN CONSULTATION WITH DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS.

THE BRANCH WILL NOT ITSELF IMPLEMENT POLICIES, PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN DETERMINED, EXCEPT TO THE EXTENT NECESSARY TO EXERCISE A CO-ORDINATING AND SUPERVISORY ROLE.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES WILL BE WITH THE RESPECTIVE FUNCTIONAL DEPARTMENT, COMMUNITY OR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION, WITH WHOM A CLOSE LIAISON WILL BE MAINTAINED TO ENSURE THEIR RESOURCES AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO ABORIGINES.

TO EFFECTIVELY EXERCISE ITS ROLE THE BRANCH MUST, IN ITS ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE, BE ABLE TO BE A SUBSTANTIAL ADVOCATE FOR THE ABORIGINES IT SERVES.

IT WILL NEED TO BE A STIMULATING AND DEMANDING GROUP WHICH WILL GENERATE IDEAS AND ENTHUSIASM AND WILL COMMUNICATE THE URGENCY OF ABORIGINAL PROBLEMS. THERE WILL BE A NEED TO MAINTAIN CONTINUAL PRESSURE TO INCREASE SUPPORT IN A SYSTEMATIC AND EXPERT WAY DIRECTED TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT OF STANDARDS AND TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION INTO THE COMMUNITY.

THE ABORIGINAL TASK FORCE WILL HAVE FIVE PRINCIPAL AIMS:

IT WILL ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS, IT WILL ASSIST THEM AND WILL TALK ABOUT, IDENTIFY AND RECOGNISE THEIR PROBLEMS AND NEEDS.

IT WILL ACT AS A LINK WITH THOSE GOVERNMENT AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES WHICH CAN BEST MEET THEIR NEEDS.

IT WILL WORK WITH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS.

IT WILL ASSIST WITH THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF ANY CLUBS, GROUP ACTIVITIES, OR WELFARE FACILITIES WHICH WILL HELP THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THEIR MOVEMENT TOWARDS COMMUNITY ADJUSTMENT.