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Too white to be regarded as Aborigines: An historical analysis of policies for the protection of Aborigines and the assimilation of Aborigines of mixed descent, and the role of Chief Protectors of Aborigines in the formulation and implementation of those policies, in Western Australia from 1898 to 1940

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Questions about where the scheme for native cattle stations originated or who first suggested it are of no special significance, other than for reasons of fair dealing. Credit for successful public programs always is claimed separately and individually by the relevant minister and by the relevant head of department: failure devolves upon the opposition. That is an enduring political maxim. The more important question is what purpose was served. In this instance, since it was an initiative at least encouraged by the Chief Protector of Aborigines, the reason for establishing feeding stations in the East Kimberley is useful for understanding how policy for Aborigines evolved.

Two years after Moola Bulla was established, the Colonial Secretary, James Connolly, told the Legislative Council; ‘It occurred to me that if they [the natives] were given their own home, allowed plenty of meat, allowed to come and go as they pleased, they would not spear the cattle belonging to owners up there’, and thus minimise the probability of their being gaol for the offence. 1 To demonstrate the success of the scheme, Connolly claimed it had reduced the incidence of cattle spearing and saved the gaols vote about £4,000 a year.

Gale made a similar claim for the success of Moola Bulla in evidence before a parliamentary select committee on 24 August 1915. He asserted the scheme saved the state £10,000 annually, including the cost of apprehending Aboriginal offenders and maintaining them in gaol; ‘At the present time the native gaols are empty, and that has been brought about by the establishment of the native settlement’. 2 No evidence was cited of benefits to Aborigines, other than that they were fed and kept out of prison.

The treatment of Aborigines in the northern regions and the influence of the pastoral industry in the creation of Moola Bulla and Munja native cattle stations and feeding at Violet Valley, La Grange, Lombadina and at denominational missions will be examined in this chapter. It will be demonstrated that a primary motivation was to reduce the incidence of cattle killing by Aborigines. The stations also served to pacify the Indigenous population so that pastoralists might be attracted to relatively unsettled parts of the Kimberley. The belief was that such

1 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 10 July 1912, p.245.
2 Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Retirement of Mr. C.F. Gale from the Position of Chief Protector of Aborigines, 12 October 1915, p.4.
measures, though necessary, were temporary because it was still held by many in official quarters that the Aboriginal race was in terminal decline. It will be shown in this chapter, however, that native cattle stations contributed not only to the protection of the Indigenous peoples, but also to preserving their culture. Aborigines learned to move between their Indigenous traditions and the behaviours required of them in the pastoral economy.

The creation of lock hospitals, first at Bernier and Dorre islands and later at Finucane Island, and the issue of wages for Aborigines, particularly in the pastoral industry, will also be examined to show how policy was founded not on concern to protect the well being of the Indigenous people, but rather to remove an assumed threat to the white population and to advance the vested financial interests of pastoralists.

White and Black in the Kimberleys

The invasion of Western Australia’s North, and in particular the Kimberley Region, proceeded differently from the British colonisation in the South-West. The numbers of white settlers in the North always were fewer than the Aboriginal population. After 1862 intending pastoralist-settlers migrated northward from the southern colony and stocked the North-West and Pilbara with sheep. European incursion into the East Kimberley began after 1880 when Forrest’s reports of favourable grazing lands were published. By 1885 when the discovery of gold at Elvire Creek saw a rapid, but brief influx of diggers, white settlement was confined to four enclaves, the Durack, Kilfoyle, Emmanuel and Byrne holdings, whose herds of beef cattle numbered collectively about 12,000. At the end of 1886, when Western Australia’s non-Aboriginal population numbered 39,584, the number of diggers on the Kimberley goldfield had peaked at 2,000. It declined rapidly after the anticipated ‘extensive goldfield of rich promise’ was not realised and by the end of 1887 fewer than 600 diggers remained. 3 By 1889 the rush was over and goldseekers had moved on to the Yilgarn and, subsequently, Coolgardie. For the next generation population growth was gradual and slow. By 1913, the non-Aboriginal population of the whole of the East Kimberley was less than 200.4 The population of Aborigines was not known, but appears to have remained relatively stable. While the numbers of full bloods diminished, their decline was neither as rapid nor as radical as in the south. The numbers of Aboriginal half-castes was proportionately fewer.

White settlers in the Kimberleys also had different motivation from the southern colonists. The Swan River Colony was established as a speculative land venture. Europe was at

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3 J.S. Battye, *Western Australia, A History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth* (1924), Historical Reprint Series, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978, p.366. Battye stated that at the opening of the Legislative Council in June 1886, Governor Broome reported ‘the discovery of an extensive goldfield of rich promise’.

peace, the transportation of felons sat uncomfortably with initiatives for penal reform in England and, before 1826, the Imperial Government entertained little territorial interest in Australia’s western half. Few of the venture capitalists in London who invested in the Swan River Company were farmers. Those colonists who had genuine aspirations to farm their allotments were soon disillusioned by adverse conditions of soil and climate and their inability to adapt English farming practices to land which previous to their attempts never had been tilled. Pioneer pastoralists in the North West and Kimberleys, on the other hand, had previous experience elsewhere in the colony or in Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland and sought fresh pastures to expand their enterprises. They adopted free-range animal husbandry. Provided they could engage plentiful and cheap labour during peak seasons of mustering, shearing and marketing, their wool and beef production generally was profitable.

Under the terms of the Order in Council for the leasing of Crown lands gazetted on December 17 1850 and the Land Act 1898, as discussed above, Aborigines could not be expelled from any of their traditional lands leased for pastoral purposes. In the south, where the alienation of Crown land by fee simple effectively extinguished native title, Aborigines either retreated from or were hunted off their homelands to become fringe dwellers of the white community. In the north they had lawful rights to live upon pastoral lands and to seek subsistence ‘in their
accustomed manner.\textsuperscript{5} Pastoralists were not compelled to encourage Aborigines to stay. Commissioner Roth observed that, as the law stood, pastoralists could not rid themselves of Aborigines on their runs:

On the other hand, natives may be offered no encouragement to remain; by depasturing the stock on all watered portions of the run; by destroying kangaroos; by dropping baits for the aborigines’ hunting dogs; by limiting, in the way of fences, the areas throughout which the native game can be obtained; by taking proceedings against blacks for setting fire to grass, etc.\textsuperscript{6}

They were the source of cheap labour essential to the financial profitability of the pastoral industry, however, and it was in the interests of pastoralists to maintain amicable relationships with Aborigines who shared their land. They provided blankets and clothing and supplemented Aboriginal bush tucker with beef, flour, sugar, tea and tobacco. Beef and damper with sugared tea became staples of Aboriginal diet. Tobacco often was reserved as a reward for good work.

Consequently, and unlike the Indigenous experience in the south, northern Aborigines were not as severely disaffected by colonisation. White settlers reaffirmed the power relationship demonstrated by Alexander Forrest that authority belongs to the person with superior weaponry. Initial localised resistance by tribal groups to the pastoral invasion of their tribal lands was persistent and brutal, causing the abandonment of some attempts to establish pastoral runs, but hostile confrontation was not strategically organised and sporadic uprisings either by individuals and small groups, or prolonged reckoning by bands organised against white incursion, such as the Bunuba resistance, were put down rapidly and brutally.\textsuperscript{7}

Over time Aborigines came to accept the options of passive acceptance or avoidance. The latter was possible because pastoral interests sought out accessible, watered and well-grassed plains and avoided inhospitable uplands and deserts. Aborigines who lived in or moved to the less accessible locations endured little interference from Europeans. They remained ‘wild blacks’ or ‘myalls’. Those who lived closer to pastoral stations tended to drift towards them for food and, in the case of some, employment. They adapted, acquired remarkable proficiency as stockmen or skilled station hands and became the integral workforce of the pastoral economy. Their culture, although modified, survived.

The Kimberley region continues to be characterised by extensive, even if diminishing, multilingualism. Tindale identified about 40 language groups and Akerman five cultural blocs in

\textsuperscript{5} The Western Australian Government Gazette, No 263, Memorandum, Chapter V, Clause 7.


which the predominant languages were Wunambul, Gadjerong-Miriwong, Djaru and Walmadjeri. Following European occupation the *lingua franca* of these groups became Kimberley English or Kimberley Creole, frequently referred to as ‘Kriol’, a dialect of recently evolved Aboriginal language which is the most understood and the most spoken. It may have evolved in the East Kimberley through cross-cultural interaction, mainly at Moola Bulla, Violet Valley and the Forrest River Mission.

This blending of tongues to create a new language with a derivative but customised lexicon and distinctive grammatical structures in some respects characterised the metamorphosis of northern Aborigines through the merging of their traditional and the imposed cultures. The everyday lives and the cultural cycle of the Indigenous people were shaped by seasonal patterns in the growth of plants and animals they relied on for food. For those Aborigines who attached themselves to pastoral stations as employees or as members of the extended families of station hands, or as in the case of Moola Bulla for rations, their cultural cycle was adapted to the pastoral seasons. During the wet season Aborigines reverted to the ways of the old people. From December to March they travelled to traditional places where they attended to matters of Aboriginal law and custom. It became seasonal practice in the pastoral industry that this was ‘walkabout time’ or ‘pinkeye’. After the annual cattle muster before the summer rains ended the dry season, Aborigines took their mandated annual leave, divested themselves of their acquired cross-cultural accoutrements and reverted to tradition. ‘Pinkeye’ was their time for gathering the mobs, corroboree, initiation and law.

Charlie Yeeda, interviewed by Eileen Cox, related how at Moola Bulla, traditional ‘law time’ and ‘racing time’ on the pastoral stations came together. ‘Before any one come to this civilisation’ they used to take law time, he said, ‘about August month, they used to keep it till December months’. Rather than gathering for cultural ceremonies at about the middle of the dry season, station Aborigines delayed until the commencement of the racing season, an annual celebratory event in the pastoral calendar to mark the end of the muster and the commencement of the monsoonal ‘wet’. At ‘racing time’ Aborigines at Moola Bulla and surrounding stations were free to take young people ‘for the Law or something like that, you know’:

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10 *ibid*, p.18.
12 Under provisions of section 30 the *Aborigines Act 1905*, employers were required to grant to Aborigines, at their request, leave of not less than fourteen days after three to six months employment and not less than thirty days after six months. That holiday time conventionally taken during the wet season was referred to as ‘pinkeye’.
13 Charlie Yeeda (Kija), ‘Place was Free to Go’, interviewed by Eileen Cox (nee Walalgie), in Kimberley Language Resource Centre: *Moola Bulla*, pp.167-169.
Chapter Three: Native Cattle Stations

They don’t dress like people doing the Law this time, walking in shirt and tie, they used to have naga and really truly paint up, real tribal way, you know? They used to walk hundreds of mile, from Fossil Downs to here, from Billiluna to here, from Nicholson to here, from Melville Down to here, and that was good time, you know? And the people used to have big law place in Moola Bulla, that was the centre and the Law was running, Aboriginal Law was running real strict, you know, about six kilometres away from town, from the station. Law didn’t break.

Aboriginal custom and European pastoral practice adapted each to the other. The industrial schedule of the imported European culture was met and Aboriginal heritage was conserved. That might have been due more to fortuitous circumstance or seasonal imperative than to deliberate policy intention, but the freedom of movement available to Aborigines and the seasonal release from station activities at Moola Bulla helped protect the Indigenous culture.

That was not a primary consideration when Gale encouraged government to establish native cattle stations. However, while he was strongly supportive of the policy of rationing depots or feeding stations to deter Aborigines from killing cattle, Gale also was respectful of Indigenous protocols. He argued for the need to maintain the separation of language and cultural groups. Aboriginal custom demanded that tribes maintain territorial separation, other than at times when they gathered for law and ceremonial tradition. Each respected the other’s boundaries and uninvited intrusion by one into another’s lands incurred uncompromising reprisal. Gale understood, even if only for logistical reasons, that to maintain harmony among neighbouring Aboriginal communities several native reserves similar to Moola Bulla might be needed in the Kimberley. Because in each magisterial district there were several Indigenous groups who spoke different dialects and maintained rigorous territorial separation and cultural strictures, any attempt to gather them against their will ‘on to one reserve outside their own country must necessarily be unsuccessful’. Gale foresaw the need to establish self-supporting reserves in each tribal district. Furthermore, he argued, such reserves should be open; ‘The native race is of nomadic nature and they come and go of their own free will’.

The political motivation for native cattle stations was more financial than altruistic. A native station was less expensive than subsidising missions or paying contractors to provide relief. Scrutiny of Gale’s annual reports on Moola Bulla and other reserves reveals a public officer more interested in the management of the native cattle station and opening up the north to pastoral enterprise than in protecting Aborigines. Gale did not neglect Aboriginal culture, heritage and identity, but they were secondary considerations. As far as Gale was concerned they also were a

14 ‘naga’ – loincloth or pubic covering.
passing consideration since he believed the race was doomed to extinction. His stewardship of
the government’s relationships with Aborigines was distinguished by his commitment to
minimising expenditure for the welfare of Aborigines.

Two financial advantages from Moola Bulla directly benefited the Aborigines Department
and therefore the state. The first was the financial return generated by the station. Gale reported
that the settlement returned a profit of £3,489/8/10 for the financial year 1912-13.\(^{17}\) That was
additional to the savings claimed to attach to the annual cost of maintaining gaols by reducing the
number of Aborigines imprisoned for killing cattle.

The second benefit was that the native cattle station created a market for otherwise
unsaleable stock; ‘the balance sheet discloses that the settlement is credited with the sum of £2
for every beast killed to feed these unemployed natives’.\(^{18}\) However, the credit to Moola Bulla
was a debit against annual budget of the Aborigines Department. The financial saving for
government was more apparent than real. The notional savings in the Gaols portfolio of the cost
of maintaining Aborigines in prison was cancelled by payments from the Aborigines Department
to Moola Bulla for spayed cows slaughtered to feed Aborigines. Even then, in its first six years of
operations to 31 March 1916, Moola Bulla ran at an accumulated loss of £1,025/17/5.\(^{19}\) Actual
financial returns accrued only to the pastoralists in the East Kimberley who benefited from
reduced depredation of their stock.

When Neville was appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines in May 1915, Moola Bulla
and Violet Valley had been operating four full years and, as far as government was concerned,
their intended purpose of deterring Aborigines from killing cattle had been achieved. Much of
the cost of relief for indigent Aborigines also had been shifted to pastoralists. In October 1909
Gale had written to pastoralists pointing out the Aborigines Act gave him power to grant permits
to employ native labour under any terms he thought fit, and ‘unless I have very sufficient ground
for doing otherwise,’ the renewal of permits may be subject to conditions that the pastoralists
provide sustenance for all indigent natives on their stations.\(^{20}\) Previously, station owners could
claim reimbursement for the relief of Aborigines not employed by them, but living on their
leases as allowed by terms of the Lands Act. Some station owners absorbed the cost of
provisioning such natives as an operating cost, but others did not and ‘sent in a voucher to the
Government for the feeding of indigent natives’.\(^{21}\) Gale was able to report a very liberal response
to his implied threat to pastoralists to change the conditions of Aboriginal employment,

\(^{17}\) Aborigines Department, *Annual Report of the Aborigines Department for the Year Ending 30 June 1913*, p.5.
\(^{18}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{19}\) State Records Office, Colonial Secretary’s Department, Acc 993, Item 58/1920, folio 18.
‘resulting in a saving to the Government of £850 per annum in this direction alone’. In effect, responsibility for relief of indigent Aborigines was transferred from Government to private pastoral interests, causing Gale to claim; ‘I saved in that direction alone some £1,000’.

An Uneasy Transition

A.O. Neville inherited the native cattle stations program when he took over responsibility for the Aborigines Department. The department operated with financial stringency, but in the opinion of Rufus Underwood, the minister responsible for Neville’s appointment, it was characterised by administrative disorder and lacked leadership and managerial protocols. The first Chief Protector, Henry Prinsep, had demonstrated little respect for the Aborigines he was supposed to protect, and was unfamiliar with the country north of Geraldton where large numbers of them lived. The second, and Neville’s predecessor, Charles Gale, had practical experience and knowledge of Aborigines and was familiar with the northern pastoral industry. He spent six months of every year on tours of inspection of pastoral properties in the north and the management of his department and the affairs of Aborigines were left to his clerk. Gale maintained contact with his department and his minister by telegram.

Neville’s appointment as Chief Protector was controversial. He had not sought the position nor did he want it. His initial response was to decline. Had his refusal been final, some probably would have applauded. Neville was not their man. Critics would have preferred that Charles Gale remain in the position. He had been a pioneering pastoralist in the Gascoyne district and was acclaimed by his supporters as someone who knew and understood the North and the Aborigines who lived there. Gale’s minister, Rufus Underwood, on the other hand, did not share that confidence and wanted to be rid of him.

The office of Chief Protector was a statutory position under the Aborigines Act 1905, however, and could be abolished only by amending the Act. When in 1915 Underwood contrived to remove Gale, he suggested amalgamating Aborigines with Immigration. For two months from March to May 1915, Neville retained his position as Secretary of Immigration and assumed additional responsibility as Chief Protector of Aborigines. In May Gale was rendered redundant and compelled to retire. The Public Service Commissioner, Martin Jull, offered

\[\text{ibid. p.5.}\]

\[\text{Pat Jacobs, Mister Neville, p.54. See also, Moseley Royal Commission, Evidence of A.O. Neville, 13 March 1934, p.87.}\]

\[\text{At that time, the Aborigines Department functioned within the portfolio of the Colonial Secretary, Hon. John Michael Drew MLC. Underwood was an Honorary Minister or Minister without portfolio (now called a Parliamentary Secretary) who represented the Colonial Secretary in the Legislative Assembly. He signed for the Colonial Secretary in the Aborigines Department and the Charities Department and had direct oversight of the administration of those two Departments.}\]
economy as a justification for the administrative reorganisation. It was desirable, ‘owing to the need for economical working,’ to abolish the Immigration Department as a separate entity, and to add its restricted functions to another Department. Jull testified to the select committee inquiring into Gale’s retirement that when the Scaddan Government decided expertise in Aboriginal matters was not a requirement for the office of Chief Protector ‘it opened up the possibility of an amalgamation on the ground of economy, and on the ground of dispensing with Mr Gale’. Neville was appointed for his administrative expertise not for his knowledge of Aborigines.

Underwood had his way, but his stratagem produced political adversaries for Neville at the outset of his career as Chief Protector. A select committee of the Legislative Council was appointed ‘to inquire into the circumstances attending the retirement of Mr C. F. Gale from the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines’ on the motion of Gale’s long-time friend, Walter Kingsmill. The Committee reported adversely. It found that Gale’s involuntary redundancy was, ‘an ill-considered and injudicious step, illegally carried into effect’, was not justified by financial savings and was not to ‘the credit of the State nor to the efficient administration of the office in question’. While the Committee did not publicly find so, neither did the manner of Gale’s removal engender confidence in Neville. Some witnesses before the Select Committee presented guarded, but less than complimentary opinions about Neville’s suitability. In answer to questions from the Chairman, Hon. J.J. Holmes, about the need for specialised knowledge about Aborigines, Joseph Campbell of the Colonial Secretary’s Department, replied that if the man in charge lacked experience ‘naturally both the department and the aborigines must suffer’. The Under-Secretary of the department, Frederick Dudley North, offered a barbed response to a similar question from the Chairman about whether field experience was more important than office experience: ‘The man who has had 21 years experience in field and office work is a better trained man than one who has been trained only in office work’. Not only did Neville commence work with political adversaries, but also lacked credence amongst his colleagues.

The focus of the political challenge to Neville’s fitness for the office of Chief Protector was Gale’s practical experience in dealing with Aborigines and Neville’s lack thereof. Francis Connor asked in the Legislative Council,

28 ibid, evidence of Mr. Joseph Robert Campbell, Accountant, Colonial Secretary’s Department, p.14.
29 ibid, evidence of Mr. Frederick Dudley North, Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department and Comptroller General of Prisons, p.10.
How can Mr Neville know anything about the natives proper? How can he understand how to handle them and, above all, how to educate them? A more difficult proposition still is how will he handle the half-breed? I do not know, and I am sure he does not know.\textsuperscript{30}

Those rhetorical questions were intended to discredit Neville’s fitness for the role of Chief Protector. In response, the Colonial Secretary, John Drew, admitted that Neville had no first-hand knowledge of Aborigines, but defended his appointment on the grounds that he was an able administrator. Drew offered the extraordinary proposition that,

It was never expected that Mr Neville was appointed to do all this work or that he had the necessary qualifications. Mr Underwood has a very thorough knowledge of the requirements of Aborigines, gained after a long period of residence in the North-West, and he expects, by reason of the fact that he will have a fair amount of leisure time, to save thousands of pounds to the department.\textsuperscript{31}

It was the clear intention of the Minister who appointed him that Neville would not contribute to policy formulation. He was thought not to have the relevant experience to do so and was appointed to the position of Chief Protector solely to give administrative order to a previously ill-managed department. The Honorary Minister, Rufus Underwood was to be responsible for policy. As it turned out, within two years of his appointment as Chief Protector Neville became the principal source of policy for Aborigines. The very matters that were the focus of Connor’s rhetorical attack upon him above became focal matters for the full extent of Neville’s tenure in the role of Chief Protector of Aborigines. How well he handled them is a matter of historical judgement to be considered here. He made first significant foray into policy when he evaluated and reformed the policy of lock hospitals then situated on Bernier and Dorre Islands in Shark Bay.

Isolating Diseased Aborigines

Lock hospitals were mooted first at a conference presided over by the Principal Medical Officer convened on 11 June 1907 to consider how to treat large numbers of Aborigines said to be suffering from venereal disease. The then Chief Protector of Aborigines, Henry Prinsep, attended at the request of the Colonial Treasurer, Frank Wilson. The conference agreed that the most effectual strategy was to establish a hospital on an island or segregated compounds on the

\textsuperscript{30} Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 24 August, 1915, p.368.
\textsuperscript{31} ibid, p.373. Rufus Underwood MLA was a minister without portfolio in the Scaddan Ministry. He was given charge of the Aborigines portfolio, but was directly responsible to the Colonial Secretary, Hon. John Drew MLC.
mainland and to require police officers to send afflicted natives there for treatment. Barrow Island was nominated as a suitable location.

Prinsep supported the island proposal, principally on economic grounds. He suggested in his annual report for 1907 that a hospital facility on the island might prove beneficial because ‘a considerable number of sheep might be grazed’ there, thus saving cost of food and providing financial returns from the sale of wool. Furthermore, should a contract be let for digging phosphates, probably guano, on the island, employment might be found for ‘any of the invalids who were able to do some work’. The contractor might also provide ‘easy and cheap’ communication with mainland. Prinsep seems to have overlooked the relative values of treating Aborigines in their homelands rather than on remote islands or the cultural consequences of removing and isolating diseased Aborigines from their communities.

The Colonial Treasurer received the report of the conference after Prinsep retired and Gale had been appointed to succeed him. In the interim, the lessee of Bernier Island, George Bastow, learned of the proposal and offered to sell his lease comprising 16,000 acres with improvements, including a house which he claimed ‘cost me £1,000’, to the government for the sum of £1,000. Government accepted. The Colonial Treasurer, Frank Wilson, requested that the Premier and Minister for Lands, Newton Moore, ‘secure Bernier Island, and to reserve Barrow Island’ so that they may be proclaimed Aboriginal reserves under the Aborigines Act.

A decision on Barrow Island was deferred, but Bernier Island was resumed and reserved as a lock hospital for diseased Aboriginal women. Police officers were instructed to report the names of women suffering from ‘syphilis or other bad form of venereal disease’ so that arrangements could be made to remove them to Bernier Island. Gale reported in 1908 that, ‘Already 58 native women suffering from venereal disease have been collected from Wyndham downwards, and have been sent across to the island’. Barrow Island was rejected in favour of Dorre Island as the site of a hospital for men, principally because the proximity of Dorre to Bernier Island meant transportation of afflicted Aborigines would be cheaper. Cabinet approved the Dorre Island site on 12 October and the island was proclaimed on 7 November

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32 Aborigines Department, Report for Year Ending 30 June 1907, p.3.
33 State Records Office, North-West, Acc 653, Item 119/1916, folio 1, George Bastow to F.D. North, 22 June 1907.
34 ibid, folio 6, Colonial Treasurer to the Minister for Lands, 4 July 1907.
35 ibid, folio 106, J. Connolly, Colonial Secretary. The Reserve on Bernier Island was proclaimed on 28 May 1908: ‘that portion of Bernier Island lying between a West line from Wedge Point to the North, and a West line from Cleft Rock on the south containing two thousand (2,000) acres’.
36 ibid, folio 101, CPA to Acting Commissioner of Police, 15 May 1908.
38 State Records Office, North-West, Acc 653, Item 119/1916, folio 180, CPA to the Under Secretary, 9 September 1908.
1908 as a Native Reserve, number 11603, for a hospital for male Aborigines.\textsuperscript{39}

Not everyone agreed that the numbers reported by Gale demonstrated success. Nor was the incidence of disease as severe as estimated. Gale himself was moved to observe on the basis of police returns: ‘I am inclined to think that there are not as many Natives suffering from disease as was anticipated’.\textsuperscript{40} In the Committee on Supply the following year, Underwood challenged the efficacy of the lock hospitals. He cited an article in the \textit{Hedland Advocate} which alleged that afflicted Aborigines were not being sent to the hospitals. It questioned whether a police constable should perform ‘a lock hospital examination on any sickly-looking gin he meets’.\textsuperscript{41} Underwood protested against the management of the scheme and suggested the appointment of a special medical officer. That was not done until some twenty-five years later, however.

Gale identified a different kind of problem. He suggested that under the existing law it was quite probable that the incidence of venereal disease amongst Aborigines would not be contained, ‘if some drastic measures are not taken to stamp out the same disease among the males of other nationalities’.\textsuperscript{42} Plain speaking from a courageous man, but Gale did not say which other nationalities. Prinsep had intimated the European population was at fault; ‘the seeds of the evil have been sewn by them in the first place’.\textsuperscript{43} Popular opinion preferred to blame ‘Asiatics’ or ‘Manilamen’ for introducing venereal disease to the pearl fisheries. In 1875, there were 989 Malays and 493 Aborigines on the fifty-seven vessels licensed out of Cossack; in 1913 there were 1166 Japanese, 634 Malays, 92 Koepangers, 7 Chinese, and one South Sea Islander, but no Europeans employed in the pearlimg fleet.\textsuperscript{44} If Gale reflected popular opinion, it was the ‘Manilamen’ who were the target of his proposition that it was ‘a hopeless task trying to cleanse the aborigines, if fresh legislation in the above direction is not introduced’\textsuperscript{45}.

Neville shared Gale’s opinion that venereal disease amongst Aborigines could not be managed unless it was ‘stamp ed out from amongst the white men’, but when in 1916 he reviewed the lock hospitals program, his approach was not so much concerned with blame as cost effectiveness.\textsuperscript{46} In July of that year there were only 50 patients under treatment, 39 women at Bernier Island and 11 men on Dorre Island. When they were established in 1908, two complete and separate lock hospitals were built, each to accommodate an estimated 200 patients. Since their inception until 1916, 601 patients, 395 females and 206 males, had been treated, never more

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{ibid}, folio 230, R. Cecil Clifton, Under Secretary for Lands.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{ibid}, folio 180, CPA to the Under Secretary, 9 September 1908.
\textsuperscript{41} Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 2 February 1909, p.1848.
\textsuperscript{42} Aborigines Department, \textit{Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Year Ending 30 June1908}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{43} Aborigines Department, \textit{Report for Financial Year Ending 30 June1908}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{44} Hugh Edwards, \textit{Port of Pearls}, Hugh Edwards, Swanbourne, 1984, pp.47 and 58.
\textsuperscript{45} Aborigines Department, \textit{Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Year Ending 30 June1908}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{46} State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 652, Item 44/1919, attachment to folio 36, A.O. Neville, Report to the Under Secretary, 25 October 1917.
than 100 on both islands, at an average cost £70 per head for treatment alone. Only 149 women and 237 men had been deemed cured and 165 patients, 119 women and 46 men, had died. Forty-five per cent died within a week of arrival. Those who stayed more than two years were chronically incurable and probably were doomed to quarantine on the islands until they died.

There was some doubt about which was the target disease when the lock hospitals were first proposed. There were no extant records of the original meeting in the Principal Medical Officer’s office in 1907 when Neville undertook his review. The Principal Medical Officer subsequently had referred only to venereal disease, but did not specify any particular diseases. After reviewing available information, Neville determined that the disease amongst Aborigines intended to be treated at the lock hospitals was granuloma. That was thought to be an affliction primarily of dark-skinned people. No infections among whites had been reported, although in 1917 the Principal Medical Officer, Dr Atkinson, offered the opinion that may be because ‘it was characterised by very repulsive and visible lesions, which are likely to act as a deterrent to the white man’.

Even though granuloma was the target disease, Aborigines afflicted with all forms of venereal disease, notably syphilis and gonorrhoea as well as granuloma, were gathered from all parts of the state and from across a wide range of cultural groups, notably from north of Broome and the northern goldfields, many from well inland and sometimes walked to the nearest port on a chain. They were despatched to Carnarvon and from thence by lugger to the islands. There they were compelled to live in close proximity with little opportunity to remove themselves, despite language differences and cultural proscriptions against contact between peoples of different moieties. Isolated from their lands and their people, they had little to do other than to submit to intrusive medical examination and treatment and, between times, wander aimlessly in, for them, the confined spaces of the islands. They were in sight of the mainland, but an impossible distance removed from it. Prinsep’s earlier hope that Angora goat farming might be established on the islands to defray costs and provide occupation for the patients was never realised. Neither was it practicable. Those Aborigines retained on the islands for extended periods were the hopeless cases, lethargic from disease and its treatment and from their dreadful alienation. Those discharged within a few months or even weeks, reported cured, probably should never have been

47 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 653, Item 58/1920, folio 1, Principal Medical Officer, Medical Department to Secretary, Aborigines Department, 31 July 1916.
48 Probably granuloma inguinale, also known as granuloma venereum or donovanosis: a chronic, mildly contagious STD caused by the bacterium *Calymmatobacterium granulomatis*, which contaminates food and water. It produces thick, puffy, red sores on and around the genitals and anus and, occasionally, in nongenital areas. Urology Channel, http://www.urologychannel.com/std/granuloma.html (15 July 2006).
sent there.

In his comprehensive report upon the program to the Under Secretary, Neville, in pointing out that the hospitals were established for the treatment of granuloma and not for other forms of venereal disease, demonstrated that the state had been put to unnecessary trouble and expense. The lock hospitals on the islands had been established, he said, ‘to ensure the complete isolation of persons suffering from a disease which might have been equally well treated on the mainland without danger to the community’. As for the need for separation of male and female patients on Bernier and Dorre Islands, Neville observed that, by tradition, Aborigines lived according to a rigid moral code. They had come to understand understand the nature of the malady from which they suffered, he said, ‘and of their own free will deprecate any intercourse while they know they are in a diseased condition’.

Neville showed considerably more cultural sensitivity than had his two predecessors, Prinsep and Gale. Furthermore, he displayed notable political acumen. He demonstrated that the cost of the existing lock hospitals was prohibitive. The average annual expenditure on their upkeep since their establishment in 1908/9 had been £5,165. In the same time, £10,000 had been expended on the collection and transportation of diseased Aborigines for admission to the hospitals. The total cost of the hospitals, therefore, had been £5,600 per annum. Neville proposed that the same service ‘can be rendered for approximately £2,000, in any case not more than £2,500’. He recommended the closure of the hospitals on Bernier and Dorre islands and their replacement with treatment facilities at Derby and Port Hedland, preferably on Finucane Island. Rather than separate medical establishments, treatment could be administered by district medical officers resident at these two localities in return for salary supplementation of £50 and £100, respectively, compared with the £400 supplementation paid to the Carnarvon district medical officer who visited Bernier and Dorre Islands thrice weekly.

The proposal had compelling appeal to government, especially after the Principal Medical Officer of the Health Department pointed out that Neville had over-estimated the cost. In fact, the cost to the State would be half his estimate. At that time district medical officers were remunerated for the treatment of all cases of venereal disease requiring free treatment and ‘so long as the total expenditure does not exceed £4,000 per annum’ the Commonwealth paid half.

The Lefroy Ministry agreed in Cabinet to Neville’s scheme. The sites selected, the old residency, Derby and Finucane Island opposite Port Hedland were to be declared reserves under

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51 ibid, A.O. Neville, Report to the Under Secretary, 25 October 1917.
52 ibid, folios 78-9, PMO to Under Secretary, 5 November 1917.
the *Aborigines Act*. The man appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines for his administrative skills and not for his knowledge of Aborigines, and who had been expected not to have a pivotal role in policy formulation appears to have made his mark.

Neville had other reasons for locating the receiving depots closer to the homelands of the afflicted Aborigines. In one respect, those reasons were practical. The logistics of gathering and treating afflicted individuals were simpler and cheaper. In another, hospitals located closer to the homelands were more humane. Aborigines feared transportation to the islands; many who had been sent never returned. Neville observed they would sooner die than be sent there. People afflicted with granuloma hid their conditions as long as possible to avoid being sent away, ‘the result being in many cases certain death, where a cure might have been effected’. Neville found ‘the method which has had to be adopted of bringing in the unfortunate sufferers on the chain’ repugnant. An alternative, he argued, was local treatment that might instil confidence and encourage Aborigines to volunteer themselves for attention. Treating granuloma in the early stages was easy and rapid.

Neville also saw the establishment of facilities at Port Hedland and Derby as part of a larger plan which might help resolve an array of interrelated problems: pacifying Aborigines in yet unexploited districts of the West Kimberley, taking over from denominational missions the care and education of Aborigines in the North, and enabling more stringent discouragement of marriage between Asians and Aborigines. Gale had envisaged a chain of Native Cattle Stations across the East and West Kimberley. As a preliminary stage he had established rationing depots at Sunday Island and Lombadina Missions, and at La Grange in the West Kimberley. The objectives, as at Moola Bulla, were to reduce cattle killing in their vicinity and to reduce administrative costs of relief for indigent Aborigines by gathering them at the feeding stations.

Neville identified the opportunity to further Gale’s proposal on the Dampier Peninsular. He proposed that a reserve for Aborigines be established on 750,000 acres of land situated between Broome and Derby. It would involve taking over the Beagle Bay, Sunday Island and Lombadina Missions and relocating Aborigines from there and the La Grange rationing depot. The land, including the mission reserves, might then be re-developed as a self-supporting native cattle station with rationing depots on the model of Moola Bulla and Violet Valley. A lock hospital replacing those at Bernier and Dorre Islands would be worked in conjunction with the

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53 *ibid*, folio not numbered, Cabinet submission from H.P. Colebatch, Colonial Secretary, to the Premier, 6 November 1916.
54 *ibid*, attachment to folio 46, A.O. Neville, Report to the Under Secretary, 25 October 1917.
55 *ibid*, folio not numbered, District Medical Officer, Port Hedland to CPA, 13 December 1917. Dr Dodwell Browne, the District Medical Officer, Port Hedland, had advised Neville, ‘I am using a new antiseptic just obtained from home (at a fearful price) which goes by the name of FLAVINE which seems to hurry the healing process in the slowly granulating wounds’. (Flavine subsequently became a antiseptic solution kept in many household medicine chests for application on superficial skin wounds.)
station. The proposal won initial support, but brought Neville into direct conflict with the Roman Catholic Church.

Conflict with the Catholic Church

In a confidential submission dated 8 July 1916 to his minister, Rufus Underwood, Neville recommended that as a preliminary initiative government should discontinue all support for Sunday Island Mission and transfer the 21 indigent Aborigines and 59 children maintained there to a new settlement.  

The mission enjoyed an estimated annual return of £400 from harvesting trochus shell and Neville saw no reason why government should provide bulk supplies for the indigent Aborigines and children as well as pay an annual subsidy, which in the financial years 1914-15 and 1915-16 had amounted to £376 and £626 respectively. La Grange, he said, was inefficient. An insufficient number of indigent Aborigines lived there to warrant keeping it open. He recommended that depot be closed also and the services of the departmental officer in charge be dispensed with. Similarly, Lombadina Mission was not favourably situated and Neville suggested that Aborigines located there could be maintained more cheaply and effectively elsewhere.

Underwood approved of the proposals and noted that the subsidy to Sunday Island Mission ‘should be discontinued as soon as possible’. He called for a detailed recommendation, but deferred further action pending a possible change of government. In the event, the Scaddan Ministry was replaced by the Wilson Ministry on 27 July 1916 and on 7 August Neville’s proposal to discontinue the subsidy to the Sunday Island Mission was brought to the attention of Hal Colebatch, the new Colonial Secretary and Minister for Education. Colebatch called for further information about the financial returns of Moola Bulla and current admissions at Dorre and Bernier Islands, but no action was taken until Underwood returned to the Lefroy Ministry in November 1917.

Underwood took Neville’s submission forward in January 1918. The land he proposed to be taken over comprised a little over one million acres, being the whole of the northern portion of the Dampier Peninsula, including Sunday Island, Beagle Bay and Lombadina Missions and the La Grange Aboriginal rationing depot. Cabinet blinked, however. On June 11, 1918 it decided that the proposal should stand over for a year. There was dissension about the possible future of the Beagle Bay Mission, whether it should be taken over or closed. Until that issue was resolved,

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56 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 653, Item 58/1920, folios 5 and 6, CPA to Hon. Minister, 8 July 1916.
57 *ibid*, folios 4-10, CPA to Hon. Minister, 8 July 1916.
58 *ibid*, Item 58/1920, folio 10, footnote R.H.U. 10/7/16.
the recommendation for a native settlement on the Dampier Peninsula could not progress. Before further action could be taken, on 17 April 1919 Hal Colebatch became Premier for one month and Underwood was not returned to the ministry. Sir James Mitchell replaced Colebatch as Premier on 17 May 1919 and Colebatch was appointed Minister for Public Health, Education and the North-West. He called for the papers on the Dampier Peninsula again in November of that year.

The emphasis of Neville’s recommendations in December 1919 was, as before, the political economy of a native cattle station. Just as Gale had argued in support of establishing Moola Bulla, Neville emphasised the cost of bringing to justice and imprisoning Aborigines for cattle killing; ‘At present all the cattle killing takes place in West Kimberley, and if we are to prevent it the natives must be supplied with meat, as in the east Kimberley’. He also raised several new issues: the growing incidence of venereal disease; the increasing number of indigent Aborigines; the need for better care of young children; the opportunity of closer settlement of the Kimberley by returned soldiers; and the possibility of developing tropical agriculture. He favoured using the settlements already established on the Dampier Peninsula, but if that were unacceptable, he suggested as an alternative site for a native cattle station ‘the aborigines reserve of 414,000 acres lying between Collier Bay and King Sound’.

Neville had an enduring concern that missions generally were not performing the useful work that might be expected of them. In particular, they were not creating employment for young Aborigines who were attracted to the missions by the prospect of a relatively easy existence. Neville believed they were growing up in idleness instead of being employed on pastoral stations. He may have overestimated the amount of employment available since for much of the year most pastoralists employed only a small portion of Aborigines who lived on their runs and subsidised the rest. Neville persisted with his concern that because missions had not developed their own reserves as viable properties to create employment and because they were reluctant to release their converts to work at pastoral stations elsewhere, children were growing up without any prospect of a future, ‘being alienated from their old bush life, and rendered more or less useless for the condition of life being forced upon them’.

The submission Underwood presented to Cabinet in January 1918 paid particular attention to the failure of missions to teach young Aboriginal people the value of work, ‘attending almost solely to the religious side and neglecting the material’. Underwood was not even convinced that missions succeeded in their religious vocation; ‘they have had missions for over

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59 *ibid*, folio not numbered, memo, CPA to the Under Secretary, 3 December 1919.
60 *ibid*. That subsequently became part of Munja Native Cattle Station.
61 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 653, Item 58/1920, folio 6, CPA to Hon. Minister, 8 July 1916.
half a century, and personally I have not come into contact with one Christianised aboriginal’. He was particularly cautious about the role of ordained missionaries whom he saw as unsuited by their very nature, ‘even allowing for religious fervour’, to the role of pioneering the north of the state. In his opinion they were ‘fore-doomed to be impracticable in dealing with material questions’. 63

Beagle Bay Mission was especially problematic. It had been established in 1890 by Trappist monks, but was abandoned after a few years. The conflict between the contemplative vocation of the Trappists and the practical demands of establishing and maintaining a mission became insurmountable. 64 In 1903, Bishop Kelly of Geraldton negotiated an agreement with the Pallottine Pious Society of Missions for German Pallottines to take over the Mission. Funding was to be provided from Rome, the Pallottine Motherhouse at Limberg, and by Australian benefactors. The aim was that the mission eventually would be self-supporting. That expectation was never realised, local fundraising was difficult and Limberg was reluctant to provide continuing support.

In 1907 six sisters of the order of St John of God took charge of educating the children and training the girls. By 1910, the Mission ran 3,500 head of cattle on a pastoral lease of 80,000 acres and the adjoining Aboriginal Reserve of 750,000 acres, in total an area of approximately 830,000 acres. In addition, the Pallottine Fathers had a grant of 12,000 acres for Mission purposes. When Neville prepared his submission for the Minister, 831 Aborigines lived on the Mission.

Beagle Bay suffered particular privations during the Great War, 1914-18. Further financial support could not be received from Limberg and it was suggested that the Pallottine fathers should be interned along with other German aliens resident in Australia. The dissolution of the mission was considered, but averted by the intercession of Archbishop Clune and Bishop Gibney in Perth and Bishop Kelly in Geraldton. The mission was allowed to continue, restrictions were imposed upon the movements of the German missioners, and a police officer was stationed at the mission to guarantee security. 65 The work of the mission was severely curtailed.

Contrasting reports by Gale after he visited the mission in 1910 and by Neville after a detailed inspection in October 1917 illustrate the extent of deterioration at Beagle Bay. Gale described a reception by ‘the merriest and happiest looking native children from ten years of age that it has been my lot to see’. 66 There was a large area of ground under cultivation, with ‘a

63 ibid, folio 39.
plentiful supply of vegetables of all sorts being grown according to their season’. The cattle herd numbered only 3,500 and the annual financial yield from sales was small. Until a certain market for fat bullocks was obtained and the stock increased, ‘the financial position of the Mission must be a source of anxiety to those in charge’. Even with that qualification, Gale was impressed by the dedication of the missioners.

Neville was not complimentary; ‘It seems to me that things have been going back instead of forward’.

Some of the older buildings were dilapidated and the general appearance of the surroundings was extremely dirty. Livestock, supposed to number 3,500, were in poor condition and had not increased since 1911. New blood had not been introduced for a very long time. The Mission garden, ‘once the pride of the place’, grew only enough vegetables to feed the staff. Children did not get proper food, though probably they got sufficient. Neville acknowledged that the system of supplying rations in bulk had proved a mistake. They were intended for indigent Aborigines, but at Beagle Bay and Lombadina the rationing system led to the concentration of too many able-bodied people at the mission stations, ‘all being fed with food only intended for a limited number’.

Neville rated the teaching of the Sisters as excellent. Some of the boys were taught trades in the daily work of the institution, but any suggestion that they might leave the Mission to earn their living elsewhere was unacceptable to the management. Neville was critical; ‘what is the good of this training if after growing up these young people are merely kept for the purpose of reproducing their species’? He reaffirmed his recommendation that government take over the buildings and plant of the Beagle Bay Mission, subject to a sufficient sum being paid annually by the Aborigines Department by way of endowment for the establishment and upkeep of the school and the support of a missionary. Otherwise, he concluded, ‘I cannot help thinking that now is the time for Government to step in and take over the whole concern’. A native cattle station established on the reserve would supply all requirements; ‘there is nothing to prevent the station paying its way as at Moola Bulla’.

The subsidies of the other three missions (Beagle Bay, Lombadina and Sunday Island) would cease and indigents Aborigines could be gathered from as far as La Grange Bay and maintained near the homestead.

The Under Secretary endorsed Neville’s new submission in December 1919. Moola Bulla had justified itself, he said; ‘It is essentially a trading concern, but a philanthropic institution,
which, unlike most of them, more than pays its way. The Colonial Secretary, Charles Hudson, took the submission forward, but before Cabinet could consider it Archbishop Clune learned of it. He made strong representations to the Premier Colebatch. As a result of his protest, the scheme was left in abeyance. As before, no action on the Dampier Peninsula could be taken until the future of Beagle Bay mission was settled.

A separate issue of marriage between Aborigines and other races also had to be resolved. The provision of the Act of 1905 relating to the marriage of female Aborigines again brought Neville into conflict with the churches. Under the terms of section 42, no marriage of ‘a female aboriginal with any other person’ could be celebrated without the written permission of the Chief Protector. Some missions, while grudgingly observing it, opposed that constraint. They encouraged Christian marriage as a means of combating what they saw as the evils of traditional Aboriginal marriage practice. For example, some missionaries were offended by the custom of older men having several and younger wives. To young Aboriginal men and women brought up under strict tribal mores this meant promiscuity was not their custom. The moral dictum of the missionaries, on the other hand, was that polygamous marriage and promised wives, among other consequences, denied young men opportunities to marry and compelled them to enforced celibacy or resort to other means of procuring a consort or sexual gratification. For missionaries unsympathetic to traditional lore and custom, monogamous Christian marriage was an attractive instrument for detrivalising the Aborigines.

Neville, on the other hand, respected tribal custom. He was aware that Christian marriages frequently contravened traditional matrimonial lore that a man must not take as his wife any woman of his own totemic moiety or a woman of the opposite moiety who was a certain blood relation to him. In his consideration of applications for marriage, Neville took account of the tribal status of the intended bride. If she was married or even promised according to custom, he considered that Christian marriage to another man would be improper. The marriage of half-caste women was a matter of particular concern. Neville would not interfere where traditional matrimonial law applied, for example where a half-caste woman was the tribal wife of a full blood.

A case in point was presented for Neville’s decision while considerations about Beagle Bay were in progress. Permission was sought for the marriage of Antonio Peries, a Manilaman, and Mary Johanna, an Aboriginal. The prospective bride was known to the local protector as Jumballa, also known as Lucy, and believed to be the tribal wife of a man called Dingo, also

71 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 653, Item 58/1920, folio not numbered, Under Secretary to Colonial Secretary, 9 December 1919.
known as Turkey. Neville rejected the application on grounds that Mary Johanna was already married according to native custom. Because the policy of the department was not to separate ‘a native man and woman thus living together, I regret I cannot accede to the request that Antonio Peries should be allowed to marry the woman Lucy’.73

The matter was complicated by local opinion about marriage or cohabitation of Aborigines and Manilamen. Police and Aboriginal protectors opposed such marriages on two grounds. The first was that Asians employed on the Broome pearl fisheries enjoyed exempt status under the *Immigration Restriction Act*. Contrary to the general prohibition under the Act, Asians indentured to pearlers were allowed to remain in Australia, but upon expiration of engagement they were repatriated. It was generally believed, and supported by Neville, that wives and offspring left behind inevitably became a burden on the community.

The other objection was transparent racial intolerance. It was alleged that mixed marriages led to prostitution and breaches of alcohol laws. The common prejudice was illustrated in the objection recorded by Inspector Drewry, Police District Officer of Broome, against the marriage of Peries and Mary Johanna:

> The marriage of gins to Malays or Manilamen, or in fact any other coloured persons should be prohibited, it only means a useless half-caste population. Most of these men prostitute the gins amongst their own countrymen and it is a direct interference with the best interests of the aborigines. The marriage customs of the aborigines should not be interfered with, and the gins are required for the bucks.74

Neville was cautious about mixed marriages between Aborigines and Asians, but appears not to have had a closed mind on the matter. Where applicants demonstrated good character and marriage did not conflict with Aboriginal custom, he approved, but such marriages were few. In the six years to December 1917 there had been six.75 Neville’s disagreement with missions was over Christian marriage being given precedence over Aboriginal marriage. The Act gave the Chief Protector authority to decide each case, but his powers were limited and the missionaries persistent. Neville believed that the separation of secular and religious authority in the care of Aborigines might protect Aboriginal custom. This instance of Antonio Peries and Mary Johanna served only to support his recommendation for government taking over Beagle Bay. The

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74 *ibid,*
75 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 993, Item 58/1920, folios not numbered, Telegrams CPA to Inspector Drewry, Broome and reply, 28 and 29 December 1917. See also, State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 653, Item 18/1917, ‘Asking permission for Antonio Peres (Manilla Man) to marry Johanna, an Aborigine’. For an example of approved marriage application see State Records Office, Aborigines, Acc 653, Item 39/1925, ‘Marriage application by Apollonio Abayon (Manilaman) to Therese Santiago (father a Manilaman), Broome’.
recommendation failed, but for other reasons as discussed above, and the issue of marriage between Aborigines and Asians remained unresolved for the remainder of Neville’s tenure in office.

Munja Native Cattle Station

In November 1920, Neville was appointed Secretary of the Department of the North-West. He continued as Chief Protector, but had direct responsibility only for those Aborigines living north of 25°S latitude, that is in coastal towns and inland regions northwards of Carnarvon. On the instruction of his minister, Hal Colebatch, his major focus was to be development of the north. It is unsurprising, therefore, that when a native cattle station finally was established in the West Kimberley, Neville emphasised the capability for tropical agriculture demonstrated there. Not only might this create employment opportunities for Aborigines, but also might indicate a new direction for economic development in the region.

Neville acted promptly and government agreed with unaccustomed alacrity when the opportunity arose to purchase Avon Valley Station at Walcott Inlet 136 miles north-west of Derby and approximately the same distance south of Port George IV Mission near Camden Harbour.76 One of the owners of the station, Frederick Easton, died accidentally on December 21 1925. On January 8 1926 his brother and surviving partner in ownership of the station, William Robert Easton, offered to transfer the pastoral leases to the government.77 The transfer was executed on January 9 and three days later the Solicitor General completed the transfer and assignment with the payment of £500 to Easton.78

It would appear that the Under Secretary for Law, H.G. Hampton, had not been advised of the transfer and had misgivings about the manner of the transaction.79 Neville may have contravened Treasury instructions in executing a mortgage of £500 on behalf of the Aborigines Department through the Soldier’s Settlement Agricultural Bank. Neville dismissed the concern. He was interested only in acquiring the property without undue delay. The station was to be primarily for Aborigines, but he also anticipated, in his role of Secretary of the Department of the North-West, that ‘a good deal of cotton will be grown there’.80 Neville justified his actions in

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76 Port George IV Mission, subsequently renamed Kunmunya Mission, had been established in 1916.
77 William Robert Easton, articled surveyor, from 1919 a pastoral inspector with the Department of Lands and Surveyors; 1921 leader of expedition to explore country between Isdell River and Napier Broome Bay, North Kimberley, wrote Report on the North Kimberley Region of Western Australia; 1922 took up Avon Valley Station with his brother Frederick; 1927 appointed Surveyor General of the Northern Territory. Battye Library, MN 5408.
78 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 2/1926, folio 32, Solicitor General to the Under Treasurer, 12 January 1926.
79 ibid, Under Secretary for Law to the Under Treasurer, 13 January 1926.
80 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 2/1926, folio 37, A.O.N. to Actg. C. in C., 26 January 1926.
charging the cost of the purchase to a loan against his department, ‘as the purchase of this station will certainly be the means of encouraging tropical agriculture in this part of the country’. For the sum of £500, the Aborigines Department purchased 300,000 acres of pastoral lease, all the cattle, estimated to number 5,000, horses and other livestock and all other goods and chattels thereon. In effect, the department bought a fully functioning cattle station. The number of Aborigines in the locality was uncertain, but three tribes inhabited the general area: the Ung ñirivin, Worora and Wunambal. Neville was advised at the time of the takeover that ‘the natives are treacherous and indulge in cattle killing’. They were believed to have slain the previous owner, Easton, but evidence of the police investigation of the death indicated that Easton’s Aboriginal companions actually had risked their own lives attempting to save his.

The station was renamed ‘Munja’, the Aboriginal name for the nearby Harding Ranges and a permanent manager, Harold Reid, took up his position on April 2 1926. Neville’s instructions to Reid emphasised that the care of Aborigines was the primary object in establishing the station. He requested an early report on their condition and number in the vicinity of the station. Neville was particularly concerned about information he had received on several occasions about the incidence of disease, ‘particularly venereal disease, and possibly leprosy,’ and instructed that those Aborigines requiring treatment at the hands of the District Medical Officer be sent to Derby.

As at Moola Bulla, a feeding station was proposed to discourage cattle killing. In the West Kimberley the economic objective was not, as in the East Kimberley, to benefit existing pastoralists, but to encourage settlers to take up new country. Neville hoped that if the Aborigines could be pacified, it would ‘be possible for the surrounding country to be taken up by white settlers in the near future’. To that end, Neville instructed that, ‘the natives must be taught not to help themselves to cattle’, but, as at Moola Bulla and Violet Valley, to come to the station for meat.

Rumours about the prevalence of venereal disease appear to have been unfounded. Neville earlier had expressed some caution about the incidence, in particular the incidence of granuloma, among Aborigines. In his 1917 report on the lock hospitals, he expressed uncertainty about why so few patients had been treated there; ‘Whether the disease was not so extensive as expected, or the methods adopted for the collection of diseased natives were wrong, I do not

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81 ibid, folio 219, A.P. Elkin to Neville, 10 September 1926.
82 ibid, folio 22, Matthew Timothy Dept N-W, Broome to CPA, Perth, 9 January 1926.
83 ibid, Item 2/1926, folio 44, J.C. de Lancourt to Mr. W. Easton, 25 December 1926.
84 ibid, folio 63, CPA to Harold Reid, 4 March, 1926. Reid’s description of ‘venereal in mild form’ would suggest the affliction was an early stage of granuloma infection.
85 ibid.
know’. Two expeditions though the North-West had found fewer than anticipated infected Aborigines. The first found only 47 and the second, in which 513 Aborigines were examined, located only 32 cases needing hospitalisation. The experience at Munja tended to confirm that reports of disease among Aborigines were exaggerated. In the two years after the station was purchased only two cases of venereal disease were discovered, ‘and one of those cases was brought in from a great distance away’. The most common complaint among the Aborigines appeared to be ‘sore eyes’. They otherwise appeared to be ‘healthy and physically fit in every way’. The males were described as ‘tall and well set up’, but there were disproportionately fewer females ‘and a great scarcity of children’.

Contrary to their fearsome reputation, the Aborigines proved affable, but remained independent and far from subservient. Groups of varying sizes visited the homestead, initially perhaps out of curiosity, but increasingly for food and at times for medical attention. Reid estimated that more than six hundred had visited, but never more than half that number assembled at one time at the camp opposite the homestead. They were not obliged to remain and most came and went as they pleased. Rather than forceful subjugation of the colonised by the colonisers, the early Munja experience was harmonious co-existence of pastoralists and Aborigines, each benefiting from the other’s presence.

Munja was different from commercial pastoral stations in that it was public institution maintained for ostensibly beneficent purposes. It was intended to be self-supporting, but not a profitable trading enterprise. Without the good will and contributed labour of Aborigines Munja might not have been viable. The value of that labour was illustrated in Reid’s report of December 1926. He estimated that, at contracts rates, the improvements he had erected since his arrival would have cost about £150. Instead, Reid was able to report that ‘the expense has been very small, namely tools, food for the natives and my time’.

In financial terms, however, the benefits favoured the pastoral enterprise rather than the Aborigines. The relationship had overtones of ‘villeinage regardant’. The principal difference was

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87 ibid.
88 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993 Folio 2/1926, folio 215, memo CPA to the Under Secretary, 27 August 1928.
89 ibid, probably glaucoma which remains endemic among Aborigines in remote areas of Western Australia.
90 ibid, folio 179, H Reid, Avon Valley Station to CPA, Perth, 15 June 1927.
91 ibid, folio 151, CPA the Under Secretary, C.S.D. Excerpt of letter from H. Reid, 17 December 1926.
92 Steven M. Wise, Though Heavens May Fall, Pimlico, Random House, London, 2006, p.15: ‘There were two kinds, villeins regardant, who were attached to the land, and villeins in gross, who were joined to the persons of their lords…. Unlike a slave, whose hopes of freedom were limited either to voluntary manumission at the whim of his master or to escape, a villein might upgrade his legal status in numerous ways unavailable to black slaves, not just through manumission, but through his lord’s conduct, residence in certain cities or boroughs for a year and a day without the lord’s making claim, ordination, knighthood, marriage, and others’.

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that Aborigines were not bound to the station other than by cultural ties to their land. They had freedom of movement, but over time Aborigines bartered their independence for beef, flour, sugar, tea and tobacco. The station, in turn, bartered food, clothing and blankets for labour. There was neither obligation nor expectation of other payment for services, and the Aborigines did not succumb easily. They were aggressively independent. Reid counselled Neville against complacency; ‘as you know they are vain in their perceived prowess in defying authority & try to outdo one another’.93 Reid saw the need to teach Aborigines ‘to respect the white man’s law’.

The importance of Aboriginal labour for the economic development of the Kimberley came to focus on the potential for tropical agriculture and horticulture. An assessment of possible land use in the Kimberley prepared for the Department of the North-West by William Easton in 1921 observed that, though the region was pre-eminently pastoral country, certain areas were suitable for the cultivation of ‘many articles of commercial economic value’.94 Neville had identified the possibility of tropical agriculture at Munja. Reid confirmed Neville’s anticipation. He described the land in the river valley near the homestead as ‘hundreds of acres of beautifully rich loamy land, a shade darker than chocolate soil’.95 A variety of grains had been cultivated successfully at the Port George Mission which was self-sufficient in rice and cereals and Reid anticipated that ‘there is no reason why the property should not be self-supporting from Agricultural pursuits alone’.96

Neville saw an opportunity for regional development. In 1922, as Secretary for the North-West, he had compiled for his Department an information brochure that extolled the agricultural potential and claimed that, ‘with the advent of settlers’, the state would enjoy, ‘through its own growing, the many tropical commodities now imported’.97 Neville returned to that theme in a submission in which he argued that the success of crops at Munja warranted the appointment of an agriculturist to expand production: ‘There is unlimited labour’.98 The Director of Agriculture, George Sutton, was not so enthusiastic. Though it had been demonstrated that tropical crops grew luxuriantly, Sutton doubted whether ‘under existing conditions' they offered a sufficient financial return. The situation at Munja was different; ‘as I understand there is ample native

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94 William R. Easton, Report on the Kimberley District of Western Australia, Department of the North-West, Perth. Publication No 3, March 1922, p.7.
95 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 2/1926, folio 84, H. Reid, Avon Valley to CPA, Perth 4 May 1926.
96 ibid, folio 83.
97 Department of the North-West, The North and North-West of Western Australia Its Wealth and its Possibilities, Publication No. 2, March 1922, p.25.
98 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 2/1926, folio 214, CPA to the Under Secretary, 27 August 1928.
labour available’. That assumed Aboriginal labour would continue to be free. Agreements for employment of Aborigines under the 1905 Act stipulated that the employer must supply, ‘substantial, good and sufficient rations, clothing, and blankets, and also medicines and medical attendance when practicable and necessary’, but not wages. Section 60(h) enabled regulations for wages payable under agreements, but no such regulations were promulgated. The payment of wages, living conditions and terms of employment were entirely at the discretion of the employer.

Wages for Aborigines

In his report of August 1905, Commissioner Roth recommended a minimum wage for Aborigines ‘of five shillings per month on land and ten shillings per month on boats, exclusive of food, clothing and other necessities; the period of leave of absence to be also paid for’. That was not universally supported. The Resident Magistrate of Carnarvon, Charles Foss, suggested in his evidence to the Royal Commission that if wages were to be paid employers would ‘let their native servants go, and they would become a burden to the state in more ways than one’.

Surprisingly, the matter was referred to only in passing in parliamentary debate on the Bill for the Aborigines Act. In 1911, however, when the amending Bill was debated, wages for Aborigines was raised by the Labor Member for Guildford, William Johnson, who suggested that all agreements for employment should carry obligations of payment, not directly to the Aboriginal employee, but ‘to the Aborigines Department and used for the care of the indigent, the sick, and the children’. Arguments both for and against emphasised the ineptitude of Aborigines in financial matters or their intemperance; ‘if we provide them with money or with the means to earn money, most…will be spent on drink, I am afraid’.

Gale opposed Aborigines receiving wages. Neville supported it. The difference between them was about who should be responsible for the welfare of Aborigines, the state or the individual employer. Gale argued that the then-existing system was an incentive for employers to look after the extended group of relatives of their employees. He had arranged the transfer of responsibility for the care of infirm and indigent relatives of pastoral employees from government to pastoralists, and argued against the imposition of wages on grounds that ‘natives

99 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item, 2/1926, folio 220, Director of Agriculture to Minister for Agriculture, 18 October 1928.
100 Aborigines Act 1905, Section 22(1)(e).
101 Roth Royal Commission, p.10.
102 Roth Royal Commission, Evidence of Charles D.V. Foss, Resident Magistrate Carnarvon, 18 September 1904, p.47.
103 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 30 November 1905, p.139.
104 Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 24 January 1911, p.3244.
are continued in employment and their wives and children fed because they and their forefathers were born on the country where the employers’ stock are depasturing'. A requirement that pastoralists pay individual wages also would, Gale argued, compel employers to favour the most useful and return to government responsibility for the welfare of the rest.

Neville argued for individual responsibility, but for public guardianship as a safety net to ensure that a portion of wages was devoted to the support of dependants. By 1916, it had become the custom in the South-West and in some places in the north to pay a weekly wage to Aborigines, but the Department was frequently obliged to assist families who should have been able to support themselves, ‘by reason of the fact that the father is in constant, remunerative employment’. Neville argued for a system where wages, or a part of wages, should be paid to the Department in trust for the maintenance of the wage earner’s dependants.

The scheme Neville had in mind was the wages system implemented by Roth at the Cherbourg Settlement in Queensland. Twenty per cent of wages of Aboriginal workers recruited from Cherbourg was deducted as an offset against the keep of their families living on the settlement. The levy accounted for 30 per cent of expenditure. In effect, Aboriginal workers were taxed for the unwanted privilege of living at Cherbourg. Even those who did not live there, but who were recruited for employment through the settlement paid the levy. It was a convenient way of generating revenue, but a general policy of wages was resisted by Western Australian pastoralists.

When Neville first raised the issue he was sympathetic to the pastoralists’ position. It would be a mistake, he proposed, to compel the payment of wages to Aborigines employed in every district, but he suggested that his department should ‘exercise greater control over the money earned by natives in wages’. Few stations in the Kimberleys paid wages, but most supported the relatives of natives engaged on them: ‘as many as 80 natives are continually supported’. In the North-West and other parts of the state the tendency was to pay wages to Aboriginal employees. Neville saw the need for better regulation to protect the industrial and financial interests of Aborigines.

In the first quarter of 1923, Neville surveyed the remuneration of Aboriginal workers in the northern magisterial districts. Responses ranged from, ‘no payment is made to Aborigines in

107 Aborigines Department, Report for the Year Ending 30 June 1916, p.6.
108 For a critical account of that system see Thom Blake, A Dumping Ground. A History of the Cherbourg Settlement, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, 2001, pp.138-149.
109 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item, 451/1933 folio 11, CPA to Under Secretary, 22 February 1917.
110 ibid, folio 12.
Chapter Three: Native Cattle Stations

the West Kimberley, they receive food and clothing and in some cases not too much of either',\textsuperscript{111} to ‘payment in cash, at so much per month, according to the merits of the men. The highest wage paid here for an Aborigine is £8'.\textsuperscript{112} Whether wages were paid and the amount of wages paid varied not only amongst magisterial districts, but also amongst individual employers within districts. Neville observed that those who framed the Aborigines Act had overlooked the possibility that Aborigines might some day be paid wages and assumed ‘that they would work for their food, clothing, and medical attention only’.\textsuperscript{113} His 1923 survey demonstrated the facts of that assumption. Aborigines were sometimes paid wages, but in the majority of instances they received food and clothing only.

Neville recommended an inquiry into Western Australia adopting a version of the system then operating in Queensland. Local Protectors might approve wages and other benefits to be provided by individual employers as a condition of their permits to employ Aborigines. A system of safeguards to protect Aboriginal incomes would be necessary, but Neville was reluctant to offer suggestions until after thorough investigation. Such a system would have revolutionised Aboriginal employment. Neville anticipated considerable opposition. It is probable he anticipated the ministerial response, also. He was instructed to raise the matter again the following year, as indeed he did, but with similar success. Over his twenty-five years in office Neville made several submissions for legislative change to introduce wages for Aborigines, but never won Cabinet approval. His only successful implementation of a formal scheme of wages related to the employment of young men and women trained at the Moore River Native Settlement. In November 1941, Neville’s successor, Frank Bray, was able to advise the Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory:

Wages conditions vary in the length and breadth of this State, from food only to various rates of wages with all found, and to weekly rates of wages comparable to those paid to white employees doing the same class of work.\textsuperscript{114}

Discussion

Neville may have been appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines for his administrative skills rather than for his knowledge of Aborigines, but within a short time after his appointment not only had he identified shortcomings in the management of the department he inherited, but through systematic visits of inspection throughout the South-West, the Eastern and Northern

\textsuperscript{111} ibid, folio not numbered, Protector, Derby, to CPA, 7 April 1923.
\textsuperscript{112} ibid, folio 36, Protector, Shark Bay, to CPA, 17 April 1923.
\textsuperscript{113} ibid, folio 57, CPA to Minister for the North-West, 18 March 1926.
\textsuperscript{114} ibid, folio 88, CNA to Director of Native Affairs, Darwin, 11 November 1941.
Goldfields, the Murchison, the Gascoyne and the Kimberley districts, he also mastered a more than working knowledge of the Aboriginal people under his protection. His humane awareness is revealed in his early policy recommendations. Not all were implemented. Successive governments were reluctant to agree to other than administrative changes in the management of the department. Aborigines were not high in political priorities of any government for the first fifteen years of Neville’s term as Chief Protector. New initiatives or revision of existing programs were approved only if they were cost neutral or promised a financial advantaged to the public purse. Neville learned how to be politic in his submissions for reform.

In his first eighteen months as Chief Protector, Neville reorganised the management of the department and established methodical procedures for the collection and storage of information. A system of card records maintained at head office contained particulars of protectors appointed, relief at outstations, the issue of blankets and clothing, births, deaths and marriages, the issue of gun licenses, breaches of the Act, crimes committed by and against Aborigines, and agreements and recognisances entered into. Personal records were maintained for each Aboriginal person who came to his department’s attention.

Neville was instrumental in framing regulations regarding the employment of Aborigines, methods for issuing and renewing permits for employment, the control of reserves and stations, and the issue of gun licences. They were approved and gazetted in May 1916. The power for such regulations was granted by section 60 of the Act, but apart from incidental regulations disallowing the employment of Aborigines by Asians, authorising the pro-forma of official documents, enforcing the prohibition on the sale of alcohol to Aborigines and declaring prohibited areas, Neville’s predecessors, Prinsep and Gale, had disregarded the regulatory governance of Aboriginal affairs.

The system of permits for employing Aborigines mandated by the 1905 Act had fallen into disuse, with the result that records regarding employed Aborigines and their employers were incomplete and inadequate for purposes of administration and law enforcement. Neville revised and reinvigorated it. Under his new system permits expired and were renewed annually so that police, local protectors and head office had current information. Neville’s commitment was to the effective and efficient functioning of his department.

The Forrest government established the financial parameters of public policy for Aborigines. In 1884 Forrest, as a chairman of a select committee to inquire into the condition of Aborigines, had proposed that ‘a portion of revenue raised from the sale and lease of lands’ should be used to improve the condition of the natives.\textsuperscript{115} Twelve years later, as Premier, he

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Papers respecting the Treatment of Aboriginal natives in Western Australia,} ‘Report of the Select Committee to Inquire into the General Condition of the Aboriginal Race of the Colony’ (John Forrest, Chairman): ‘Large revenues, nearly £100,000 a year, are now raised from the sale and lease of lands which were originally possessed by its native
argued strongly against the proposition that £20,000, equivalent to one per cent of the current revenue of the Colony, rather than £5,000 should be granted to the Aborigines Protection Board for the welfare of Aborigines.\textsuperscript{116} Subsequent state governments adopted as a first principle of policy that the Aboriginal race was destined for inevitable extinction and government was obliged under the \textit{Aborigines Act 1905} to provide for their comfort; and second, that government must not be wasteful in that obligation.

Neville, as a public officer and head of the Aborigines Department, complied with the second principle, but not the entirety of the first. His policy recommendations were directed towards maintaining effective programs at minimal public cost and ensuring that essential programs such as the treatment of disease among Aborigines would return cost-effective social benefits, or that new initiatives such as the Munja Native Cattle station could be self-sustaining. However, he did not subscribe to the view that Aborigines were a dying race, the remnants of a race in terminal decline. He did not believe their Indigenous culture might survive in competition with the immigrant culture nor that in a few generations they might be raised up to the level of the Europeans, but neither did his policy initiatives indicate he believed they were necessarily beyond redemption as a distinctive race of peoples.

This was not contrariness on Neville’s part. Nor was it unusual for a public officer of his standing to commit to the efficient administration of government programs, but disagree with the values sustaining them. In such circumstances public officers may argue alternatives, but are obliged to implement whatever decisions their governments make. Neville, consistently with Westminster conventions of public administration, complied with ministerial or Cabinet decisions, but did not necessarily surrender his principles. He made submissions to the Wilson and Lefroy Ministries for alternatives in programs for treating diseased Aborigines and prevailed, not by the persuasiveness of his compassion for Aborigines, but for the cost savings demonstrated by him and reaffirmed by his colleague in the Department of Health. Conversely, he demonstrated to the Colebatch Ministry the cost benefits of a native reserve on the Dampier Peninsula, but was defeated by the countervailing sway of the Catholic Church. When the Collier Ministry agreed to the purchase of Avon Valley Station, Neville oversaw its development as Munja Native Cattle Station for the publicly approved purposes of pacifying Aborigines and encouraging pastoral enterprise to the North-West and the West Kimberley. He did not object to that purpose. It was consistent with the commitment to closer settlement he argued in his role as Secretary of the Department of the North-West. At the same time, however, he served his

\textsuperscript{116} Further Correspondence on the Subject of the Position of the Aborigines’ Protection Board, Government Printer, Perth, 1896, John Forrest, Premier to His Excellency the Governor, 13 April 1896, p.7.
statutory obligation to protect Aborigines. He sought balance between least intrusion into their racial integrity and merging them with the predominant European culture. Neville was neither subversive nor submissive to government policy in pursuing those separate and interrelated objectives.

On the occasions when governments supported initiatives proposed by Neville, frequently it was only because he demonstrated they could be done cheaply. When, for example, he proposed the closure of the Bernier and Dorre Islands Lock Hospitals he requested that the buildings be demolished and the materials be reserved for departmental uses elsewhere. The Colebatch Cabinet approved. The buildings from Dorre were removed to Finucane Island, and those from Bernier removed ‘for re-erection at native settlements where practicable and necessary’. By scrounging building materials in this way, Neville managed to provide facilities, however unsatisfactory, at Carrolup River and Moore River Native Settlements for minimum capital outlay.

When he tackled the problem of venereal disease among Aborigines, Neville confronted an impulse more powerful than government authority. He exposed the raw nerve of prejudice. Popular opinion regarded Aborigines as dissolute and disease ridden. Neville at first was not sure that perception was valid, but was cautious about disputing it publicly without irrefutable evidence. He found no extant documents to explain which disease or diseases were targeted when the lock hospitals were established, but patients were admitted there suffering from ‘venereal disease in various forms’. Two of the diseases, syphilis and gonorrhoea, were transmitted cyclically, principally between non-Indigenous men and Indigenous women, but the actual mischief for which the lock hospitals were established, granuloma, apparently was not transmitted to Europeans. The affliction also was easily and safely treated without need for quarantine. It was Aborigines, however, who were isolated in lock hospitals to protect the community from contagion. The experience at Munja convinced Neville that the incidence of the disease was smaller than popularly supposed. He proffered to his Under Secretary the judgement that ‘the imputation levelled by the residents of Broome and others that disease was rampant in this area has not been substantiated in fact’.

Prejudice against Aborigines, and the attendant belief that the proximity of diseased Aborigines threatened Europeans, impeded Neville’s plan for the relocation of the lock hospitals. The treatment depot for Aborigines at Derby was not resisted strongly because the old Residency

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117 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 652, Item 44/1919, folio not numbered, Cabinet Minute, 6 November 1917. The recommendation the Colonial Secretary, Hal Colebatch submitted to Cabinet included, ‘8. To remove the buildings from Bernier Island for re-erection at native settlements where practicable and necessary’.


119 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 2/1926, folio 215, CPA to Under Secretary, 27 August 1926.
was located three kilometres from the town on a declared Aboriginal reserve. Local objections were raised at Port Hedland, however. The Road Board proposed a site, Finlay’s Camp, on the coast some six kilometres from the town. Neville rejected it, but won Road Board approval for his preferred location, Finucane Island, separated from the town by a mangrove swamp more than a kilometre wide. Local authorities conceded both depots, at Derby and Port Hedland, only because they were relatively isolated. Residents of both towns objected to the presence of depots closer to town and insisted that they be protected from them. The role of the Chief Protector of Aborigines was recast as the Chief Protector against Aborigines.

Not only did Neville have to contend with public prejudice against Aborigines, but he also had to contend with the obdurancy of church and missionary authorities. Neville objected to the manner in which Aborigines were treated by the missioners at Beagle Bay, for example, noting that children are growing up without any prospect of a future. Neville attributed a malady of idleness to the missions: ‘They do not teach the natives to work, attending almost solely to the religious side and neglecting the material’. He did not acknowledge a similar problem existed at Moola Bulla and Munja native cattle stations or at Violet Valley or La Grange.

Station and domestic work was seasonal and even at peak seasons was available for only a relatively small number of capable men and women who visited the feeding depots or who camped near the homesteads. Most came increasingly reliant upon rations. They were fed beef to deter them from killing cattle, but where rations of beef, flour and tobacco were substituted for self-reliance through hunting and gathering, the ‘free and independent people’ whom Neville applauded gradually were reduced to a state akin to those ‘born in servitude’.

Rationing was a process described by Tim Rowse as ‘a social technology, or a technique of governance’ which resulted in ‘the unintended perpetuance of difference’. The intention of freely distributing beef to Aborigines at Moola Bulla and Munja and at the feeding depots was to assist the financial security of the pastoral industry by deterring Aboriginal depredation of pastoral stock. Pacifying Aborigines in this way also subordinated them to the will of the pastoral landowners. Aborigines learned their place in the power hierarchy and pastoralists, including the managers of Moola Bulla and Munja, by one means or another, ensured they stayed there. The method of doing so preferred by the manager of Munja, Harold Reid was by winning their confidence rather than by imposing his authority upon them.

The difference between the rationing policy as a ‘technique of governance’ and the

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120 State Records Office, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 653, Item 58/1920, folio 40, Underwood to Premier, 16 January 1918.
122 State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 2/1926, CPA to the Under Secretary C.S.D, 17 December 1926, extracts from letters by Mr. Reid.
rationing policy in the Kimberley is that at Violet Valley and La Grange, as at Moola Bulla and Munja, it was not intended that the Aborigines should be confined. They were free to come and go at will, and they did. They moved at their convenience between Indigenous tradition and the comfort of the white man’s beef, flour and blankets.
The tribal lands of the Ballardong, Wiilmen, Kaneang, Kooreng and Minang were invaded early in wadjella colonial history. John Septimus Roe and subsequently Alfred Hillman, while surveying prospective routes for a road to link Albany and Perth, and later a railway from Beverley to Albany, identified in the Plantagenet district lightly timbered country which held promise as grazing land or even for agriculture. Hospitable Kooreng, Kaneang and Wiilmen peoples, willing to share their traditional watering places with the visiting wadjella, guided them to water. Roe and Hillman, in turn, marked Narpun, Kojonup, Warkelup, Yowangup, Etucup, and Martinup on their survey maps. Police barracks were established at the most promising of those watering places and construction gangs located there from time to time as the road progressed from Albany to Williams and thence to Perth. The Kooreng, Kaneang and Wiilmen were dispossessed of their water; now it belonged to the wadjella.

Within a single generation traditional hunting and foraging grounds adjoining the watering places were partitioned and allocated as sheep pasturage to people with Anglo-Saxon names like Norrish, Hassell, Quartermaine, Bayley and Monger. N-yonger competed with sheep which were husbanded and protected from dingo by wadjella shepherds. Some of those shepherds, as well as landholders, soldiers, merchants and carters sought Aboriginal yoker for comfort in their isolation; others used kymra simply for sexual gratification. To supplement their

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1 Leonard (Jack) Williams, a Nyungar from the Great Southern Region, ‘Now children,’ Dad used to say, ‘this is whitemen’s country now, it is no longer ours and you can’t go backwards, you have to go forward’. In Sally Morgan and Tjalaminu Mia (eds), Ngayay Ngarng Nidja Boodja Our mother, this land, Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 2000, p.24.
2 After Norman B. Tindale, Tribal Boundaries in Western Australia, Department of National Development, Canberra, 1947. Today the whole of the south-western corner of the State, west of the traditional circumcision-sub-incision boundary line, is referred to as Nyungar (or alternatively Noongar or Nyungah) territory, the name ‘Nyungar’ being a portmanteau term describing all people of Aboriginal descent belonging to the south-west of the State. See, Ronald M. Berndt, and Catherine H. Berndt, (eds), Aborigines of the West, p.7.
3 ‘wadjella’ – white men.
4 Originally covering the regions now called the Southern and Great Southern sub-divided into Local Government Areas which included Albany, Plantagenet, Kendenup, Kojonup, Katanning and Woodanilling.
5 Kangaroo – after J.E. Hammond, Winjan’s People (1933), Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1980, pp.82-3. George Fletcher Moore, Diary of Ten Years, offers the names ‘yangor’ for kangaroo and ‘kumal’, ‘ballagar’, ‘madun’ or ‘ngora’ for various species of opossum or possum.
6 wife, after Hammond.
7 woman, or sweetheart, after Hammond.
incomes, they hunted n-yonger and koomahl, but not for their meat, and not merely in sufficient number to feed themselves. Kangaroo and possum hides were harvested and sold to merchants in Albany for export and processing; carcasses were left to rot where animals were slaughtered.

Thus the Ko:reng, Kaneang and Wilmen, dispossessed not only of their water and their lands, but also of their women and their food, began ‘not so much to retire as to decay’. Malnourished, dispirited and alienated, many succumbed to, for them, exotic diseases like influenza and measles. Others died brutally. Some survived, adapted and made themselves useful as cheap farm labour, but they lived as exiles in makeshift humpies a respectable distance removed from wadjella homesteads.

Another generation later some wadjella tenant holders in turn were dispossessed when the Great Southern Railway Company was granted crown land, including favourable pastoral lease holdings, at the rate of twelve thousand acres for every mile of railway completed along the line from Beverley to Albany. New settlements were established at railway sidings named Wagin Lake, Lime Lake, Woodanilling, Katanning, Broomehill, Pootenup and Cranbrook. Pastoral leases were cancelled and converted to small farm holdings. Native title was extinguished and by the fourth generation, the traditional Ko:reng, Kaneang and Wilmen were all but gone.

Norman Tindale recorded the changing nature of the Nyungars in the Great Southern Region. An Indigenous informant ‘who escaped schooling & hence retains interest in his old language and traditions’, Harry Farmer, described the traditional social organisation and tribal boundaries. Tindale’s diary recorded:

By 1939 those clear lines of territorial and language demarcation and accompanying social organisation were lost to all but a few elderly Nyungars. Tindale noted some confusion about the

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8 opossum or possum, after Hammond.
9 Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), 1937, p.17.
10 ‘humpies’ – makeshift dwellings constructed of bush timber, branches and foliage from trees and discarded corrugated iron, flattened kerosene drums, hessian bags, or any other material which might offer shelter from sun and wind.
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way people viewed social organisation, ‘but it is because of half-knowledge & loss of the essentials; the old people who used it are gone’. The physiological outcomes of racial blending were apparent among the twenty-two children Tindale examined at the Gnowangerup Mission. Most were quarter-castes, ‘one of the whitest groups we have seen’. He identified a red-haired, second-generation half-caste family who sprang from an original Aboriginal-Scots crossing:

The red-haired F2 family is derived in both sides from red-haired Scotch white cousins and 5 of the 11 children have it, the other 6 being darker, but obviously of the same parentage. The F3 generation shows blonde hair & pale copper in the children & all with the most striking pink skin texture and appearance reminding one of the quarter-caste nomad type.

By contrast, community groups surveyed at Albany and Mount Barker showed evidence of westward incursion by tribal members from the Eucla region, a territorial assault which before British colonisation would have been resisted fiercely and the interlopers slain. Tindale found

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12 ibid, Wednesday 12 April 1939, p.883.
13 ibid, Friday 31 March 1939, p.859.
14 ibid, Saturday 1 April 1939, p.861. Tindale used the abbreviations ‘F1’ to refer to first cross of ‘first half-caste’ and ‘F2’ to identify the progeny of two F1 individuals, or second generation half-castes. He referred to third generation crossings, ‘F3’, as fractions of quarters and eighths according to the numbers of crossings between whites, other races and Aborigines in the progenitors. See Norman B. Tindale, *Survey of the Half-Caste Problem in South Australia*, pp.83-86.
strong evidence ‘of pygmyoid or Tasmanoid influences, short stature & yellowish tone of the skin & very curly hair; also pygmyoid nose’. These characteristics were pronounced in three full bloods in the Albany group who derived from the Esperance region some 500 kilometres east of Albany.

Aborigines of the full-blood may have disappeared from common view, but their race had not. The cultures which had identified and given order and coherence to the lives of the Indigenous peoples were dissipated. Only half-remembered fragments of the way of life of their Indigenous forebears survived the cauldron of social and cultural change. Those fragments melded over successive generations of blending with the imported culture into a Nyungar identity which gave coherence to what were, in fact, very diverse bands of people in the southern portion of the state. Custom adapted to changed circumstances and the Nyungar identity evolved and endured. Strong bonds of family and loyalties of kinship were maintained and new clans were formed.

Like their Indigenous forebears for whom ‘a month would be a long stay,’ the Nyungar seldom stayed long in one place. They moved according to season and the availability of employment. Initially, the pattern of their wandering followed routes familiar to those of their forebears, tracks linking places with the best water supplies, and seasonal supply of game and vegetable foods. Hammond described these tracks as ‘pads of natives, like cattle pads, and just as plain’ linking various parts of what is now the city of Perth to locations as far south as Nannup, Augusta, Denmark and Albany. One pad led south-eastwards from Perth to Pinjarra and ‘from Pinjarra to Marrinup, the Williams River, Kojonup, Kendenup, the Porongorups, and the end of the South-West territory’. Another led from Pinjarra to ‘Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River, Blackwood River, Nannup, Augusta, Norma lup, Denmark, Albany and Ongerup’.

Families and individuals identified with the places of their birth. It was the custom among members of the Indigenous tribes to visit places like Pinjarrup, Marrinup, Nannup, Kendenup, Kojonup, Tambellup and Ongerup, places of water, and stay ‘as long as food conditions would allow them to do so’. Those with reliable food and water supplies attracted the largest groups of people and were the birthplaces of many. They also were significant because they were on routes through which message sticks were carried.

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15 ibid, Thursday 30 March 1939, p.857. The reference to ‘pygmyoid’ or ‘Tasmanoid’ features is to a primitive racial group believed by Tindale to have entered the continent through Cape York and migrated south. They were pushed further southwards by a subsequent migratory group. Tindale proposed that remnants of the distinctive racial group, the Tasmanoids, survived on the Atherton Tableland, and in southern Victoria and Tasmania.
17 ibid, p.19.
18 ibid, p.17.
19 ibid, p.17.
Even after the traditional significance had faded from the consciousness of many Nyungars, the towns established at those sites continued to be seasonal gathering places. Nyungars camped on town reserves or congregated at convenient sources of water near gazetted town boundaries. The wadjella townsfolk, who resentfully tolerated them and wished that they would move on, feared their presence: Nyungars threatened their moral and physical comfort. Descendants of the Ballardong, Wilmen, Kaneang, Koreng and Minang who had hospitably shared their food and water with wadjellas were not welcome at the whitemen’s tables.

Some towns like Wagin (Wagunniup), Katanning (Ketannup), Kojonup, and Tambellup acquired a different significance for the Nyungars. They were open in daylight hours only to those who had legitimate business there and prohibited to all Nyungars after the evening curfew. The Nyungar thus lost their land, their language and their traditional social organisation. Unlike the Indigenous peoples in pastoral regions who maintained connection with tribal land and whose accustomed rights to the use of their land, to travel over it, to live on it and to hunt and forage on it, were preserved by statute, the Nyungar had no official recognition of traditional rights and little protection other than the strictures and obligations of the Aborigines Act. They were British subjects, but not citizens of Australia. They could not vote, and therefore were denied political power, nor could they own property and thereby acquire economic influence. Collectively, the Nyungar comprised a powerless, voiceless, impoverished Indigenous diaspora existing without purpose in gazetted enclaves estranged from the mainstream society. They belonged to the land they travelled and lived on, but the land no longer belonged to them, ‘a race of people without a country’.  

Few Nyungars enjoyed dwellings that met public health standards. Sometimes families camped in mia mias or wurlies on farms where they had occasional employment, but always that respectable distance removed from farm homesteads. At other times small groups camped where water was accessible. Between times they lived at designated Aboriginal reserves in humpies constructed of bush timber screened with hessian bags or wool bales, flattened kerosene drums or, occasionally, rusted or damaged and discarded corrugated iron. Paul Hasluck described such dwellings as, ‘habitations rather worse than the poorer class of suburban fowlhouse’ and the reserves on which they were situated as ‘so many rubbish tips for humanity’.  

Living conditions in the Perth metropolitan area were not different. Two camps at Swanbourne inspected in March 1937 at the request of the Deputy Commissioner for Native Affairs were characteristic of others inspected at Daglish, Tuart Hill, Guildford, Caversham, Rivervale, Bayswater, Belmont and Lockridge, all located within 10 kilometres of the central

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business district of the city. A half-caste couple and their six-month-old baby occupied the first camp:

The camp is comprised of old galvanised iron and bags. The surroundings are tidy and clean and there is a small vegetable garden set out. Sanitary arrangements are O.K. Health of all three apparently good. This young couple have lived here for some years, at least Mippy has and his wife since they were married last year. Mippy earns a few shillings collecting bottles etc. which I might suggest is a doubtful occupation for a native.

A half-caste man, his half-caste wife and five children aged from 11 years to 11 months occupied a second camp nearby. The three older children attended school:

This camp comprises old iron and bags, but with the surroundings, is tidy and clean. Tommy has lived on this site for about 5 years or more and earns a few shillings collecting bottles and doing casual work in the neighbourhood. The health of the natives at this camp is good and sanitary arrangements satisfactory.\(^{22}\)

The report was qualified:

It must be understood that when I say clean and tidy I am taking into consideration that these unfortunate people have little, if any material to keep a camp up to the standard of a white home, but under the circumstances they are doing their best. My comments on the conditions of such camps are based on native camps.

Those two families, like other Nyungar families camped in the vicinity, did not remain long in that location after the Inspector’s report was received. Wadjella authorities moved them on. Their humpies were demolished and burned. The families were shunted from one reserve to another, from one rubbish tip for humanity to another, part of an impoverished, dispirited Indigenous diaspora. Their Indigenous heritage was protected, but they, as Nyungars, suspended between their Indigenous and European roots, were disdained for their colour.

\(^{22}\) State Records Office, Native Affairs, Acc 993, Item 105/1937, folio 2, C.D. Taylor (Inspector) to DCNA, 8 April 1937.