VOICES FROM THE PAST:
Extracts from the Annual Reports of the
South Australian Chief Protectors of
Aborigines,
1837 onwards

A. Crooks
and
J. Lane

2014
For Maria
(1949 to 2008)
FORWARD

Crooks and Lane offer history in the raw

By Tony Thomas*

It takes real selflessness to re-key thousands of pages of historical documents, not for one’s own research but purely to help other researchers, now and in the future. This is the task that has preoccupied Adelaide’s, Joe Lane 71 and Alistair Crooks 62, for several years. It now results in their joint book of extracts from documents of the South Australian Protectors of Aborigines, from the mid 1800s to the early 1950s. The full collection of their re-typed documents is at http://firstsourcesguide.com or www.firstsources.info

Lane says he wants to get across to people that there is a whole lot of authentic documentation around, so we don't have to believe everything we hear. He also wants the documents to help students doing compulsory Aboriginal studies, so they can respectfully “wave them at their lecturer’s head for teaching things which are contrary to the primary records.”

Crooks says, “We don’t really have any overarching thesis, we just want the documents accessible to everyone and we’d like the documents to speak for themselves. But we’re also prepared to help readers a bit by sorting material into important themes.”

Who are Crooks and Lane? Both have long familiarity and empathy with Aborigines.

In one of his first jobs Alistair Crooks worked as a labourer with the Highways Department in Darwin. In his work-gang, he was the only white. In fact, he reported to three tiers of Aborigines – the leading hand, the foreman and the supervisor. He discovered that his co-workers had somewhat different thought-patterns to his own and he began a lifetime of study of Aboriginal lifestyles. He became a geologist’s field assistant, working in most mainland States, and regularly in touch with local Aborigines. Later he became a qualified geologist with the SA Mines Department, and later as a contract geologist in private industry, specializing in mapping. This involved him directly with Aboriginal groups, negotiating with them about exploration and mining impacts on traditional grounds and sacred sites. In these talks, the Aborigines generally held the best cards and good communications and empathy were essential. With the downturn in the mining industry, he now has an excuse to pursue his interest in Aboriginal policy, working (unpaid) in the archives two days weekly re-keying documents into his laptop.

Crooks began to feel a warm admiration for the Protectors who were shoulderling immense workloads while attending to crises (e.g. a white or black person killed) and fending off complaints from the ever-vigilant SA public about alleged governmental inhumanity and muddles. Their main day-to-day task was organizing the safe delivery of rations to 40-plus depots around the state – in the era of bullock drays, not trucks. At any given time, 100 tons of supplies could be on the tracks. Other than the Protector, the ration issuers were unpaid.

Joe Lane’s work dove-tails nicely as he is re-keying Protectors’ correspondence. This involves a staggering 13,000 letters in and 8,500 letters out, dating from 1840-1912. Lane did his schooling at Bankstown, Penrith, Wagga Wagga and Darwin, finishing at age 18. After Teachers’ College and a stint as a teacher, he became a laborer and factory hand for 15 years. In 1966 at Pt McLeay, he married Maria Rigney, a Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal and eldest of ten siblings. They jointly worked for 43 years for Aboriginal advancement, until her death in 2008.

For example, although Harold Thomas had designed the excellent black, red and yellow Aboriginal flag in 1971, most Aboriginal communities persisted with their own-design flags. These commonly featured kangaroos, spears and boomerangs and were not only parochial but hard to make. The Lanes would come home from factory work, finally get the kids to bed, and

* For more information on Tony Thomas, see the book's preface.
then set about making two or three tri-color flags with cloth, sewing machine and scissors. Eventually they made more than 100 and distributed them round the country, helping the flag’s virtues to become self-evident. Maria also got the flag international exposure by presenting it to visiting celebrities such as black American folk-singer Roberta Flack and native American singer Buffy Sainte-Marie.

Lane initially took a naïve Marxist approach to Aboriginal land rights and autonomy. He discovered the hard way at various communities that the communities had a conflict between economic success and success at attracting welfare. To his dismay, some once-thriving rural operations have been run down to nothing.

Maria was always an advocate and practitioner of play centres and early childhood education for Aborigines. Joe and Maria in the 1980s moved into roles involving academic support for Aboriginal tertiary students, with Maria winning a Master’s in Education and a senior lecturership in Indigenous student support. Their disagreements with administrator/politicians in the Aboriginal-studies university sector were bruising. These defeats were discouraging to the Lanes’ goal of lifting education success for disadvantaged students, counteracted only by the success of their students.

Joe and Maria, as land-rights activists, devoured history books on Aboriginal affairs. These accounts seemed invariably based on second and third-hand sources plus hearsay, but their message attuned with the Lanes’ then view of the world. The situation changed in the early 1980s, when Joe Lane got hold of the 600-pages of journals of missionary George Taplin, who ran the Pt. McLeay Mission on Lake Alexandrina from 1859-79. Soon after he was presented by a well-wisher with a big cache of Point McLeay Letter-books, rescued from a rubbish tip. The primary source-documents of Taplin and his successors to 1908 showed the disconnect between today’s negative ‘narrative’ about past policies, and the realities of 19th and early 20th century administrator’s beneficial roles.

“I wouldn’t have done anything different myself,” Lane says. “But they virtually worked themselves into early graves.”

Making primary documents available on the internet has become his life’s passion. The Pt McLeay material now also includes half a century of school records and births, deaths and marriages. His other re-typed material includes royal and select committees of 1860, 1899, and 1913-16, each about 300 pages.

Despite the hard slog, Crooks and Lane have re-keyed only 0.6% of the fifty metres of material in the South Australian Archives on Aboriginal affairs – and vastly more is scattered in other archives. But their small fraction alone tells remarkable truths of how SA Government representatives thought and acted about the Aborigines under their jurisdiction. The picture that emerges is of humane and conscientious administrators trying to do their best for their charges, despite limited funds and personnel. The term “personnel” is actually putting it too high, since for decades the staff of the SA Protector was not 100, not 10, but merely one – himself.

It was not all sweetness and light, but nothing like the black-armband view today of Aboriginal policy and implementation. This was supposed to involve dogmatic missionaries and callous bureaucrats implementing policies to eviscerate Aboriginal culture, herd Aborigines to missions, and take countless half-castes from their mothers for racial reasons. Crooks is disappointed that the national apology by then-Prime Minister Rudd to the “Stolen Generation” in 2008, the SA Government did not voice any defence of its maligned predecessor governments and their staff: “It is a denial of natural justice. Their voices deserve to be heard.” Crooks and Lane agree that there is in fact nothing in any of the thousands of now-accessible South Australian documents they have seen, to corroborate Rudd’s black-armband views.

A small example: the pre-war State, hard-pressed as it was for funds, gave out at least 100, 15-foot boats to Aboriginal communities on the riverways, to help people fish, travel and become self-sufficient. This worked out at about one boat per 25 people on waterways. Able-bodied men paid half-price, those without resources got free boats, and repairs. Joe Lane has in-laws whose
grandparents “owned a boat” – very likely from government-issue. Guns for hunting were also doled out. Clearly, both guns and boats were part of a strategy to keep people hunting and fishing “in their own districts”.

Aborigines in those days got better welfare than whites – including free rations, free medical services, subsidized or free housing, and even 160-acre rent-free allotments for farming.

Lane and Crooks say there was no devious plan to drive Aborigines off their land and missions and take children away. “Complete rubbish,” is Lane’s verdict. The practice in fact was as far as pragmatic to preserve authentic Aboriginal culture and lifestyle. The full-bloods themselves often excluded half-castes, and would not absorb them into their culture. The officials’ view was that half-castes risked exclusion on all sides and could become an alienated sub-group in a ghetto existence, as was the occurring in the US and South Africa. To not integrate them if they wished would have seemed a travesty. Meanwhile, many local whites looked down on half-castes, who therefore needed the education and skills to get jobs and show themselves as assimilated citizens.

In respect of ‘taking’ half-caste children, the neglected children sent to Pt McLeay mission dormitory in 1880-1900 were so few that Lane says he could virtually name them. At a time when thousands of half-caste children were allegedly being ‘taken’, the Pt McLeay school rolls of 200 students show in two decades a mere eight arrivals from elsewhere, of whom only two or three were orphans or foundlings who were not accompanied by a parent. In the next 50 years, he found fewer than a dozen brought-in children – and out of a total of eight hundred Aboriginal children enrolled over that time, fewer than fifty who were taken into any sort of care, usually for a year or less. Far from confining children to missions, the Protector helped one homesick boy from the north to get to Oodnadatta and then to his own lands. (A year or so later, the boy was back at the mission, working and asking for money to buy a harmonium).

Missions seldom had more than four staff, along with a crushing workload of issuing stores, building cottages, supervising farming, and doing schooling and medical work. They had little spare time for eugenics-based activities.

The authors do not know who will want to mine their exhaustive documentation, either now or in 50 years. But Lane imagines an opportunity, for example, for someone’s micro-history of Pt McLeay, similar to the ground-breaking 1979 study of Montaillou in southern France, “Cathars and Catholics” by Emmanuel Le Roy. That reconstruction of 14th-century village life and affairs was made possible because inquisitors had preserved scores of interviews with the arrested 250 inhabitants and churches had kept detailed family records going back nearly a thousand years.

Crooks’ new projects include typing up reports on Aborigines by Daisy Bates to the WA Government, and records of South Australia’s so-called massacres and outrages, which he says have taken on some lurid colorings in today’s accounts that have little support in contemporary documentary evidence. He also pursues written records of traditional culture and early contacts for his own website www.aboriginalculture.org #

* Journalist Tony Thomas is a frequent essayist on Aboriginal topics. He blogs at http://tthomas061.wordpress.com
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ABORIGINAL INSTITUTIONS NAMED IN THE TEXT
### Aboriginal Institutions Named in the Text

**AND YEARS OF OPERATION (to 1952)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Years of Operation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide School (also “The Location”)</td>
<td>1839 - 1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Lincoln School</td>
<td>1840 - 1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter Bay (Limbuana)</td>
<td>1840 - 1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivoli Bay (moved to Mount Gambier)</td>
<td>1845 - 1860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poonindie (also “The Training Institution”)</td>
<td>1850 - 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point MacLeay (also Point McLeay)</td>
<td>1858 - *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Gambier School</td>
<td>1860 – 1867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacepede Bay Native School</td>
<td>1863 - 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kopperamanna (also Killalpaninna or Lake Hope)</td>
<td>1866 - 1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Pierce (re-named Point Pearce, 1915)</td>
<td>1868 - *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermannsburg (Northern Territory)</td>
<td>1878 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koonibba</td>
<td>1901 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manunka</td>
<td>1901 - 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oodnadatta (moved to Colebrook Home, Quorn)</td>
<td>1924 - 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Reach (moved to Gerard)</td>
<td>1925 - 1947</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colebrook Home, Quorn (moved to Eden Hills)</td>
<td>1927 - 1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepabunna</td>
<td>1930 -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ooldea (moved to Yalata, 1954)</td>
<td>1933 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umeewarra (re-named Davenport, 1964)</td>
<td>1937 -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finniss Springs</td>
<td>1938 -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ernabella</td>
<td>1938 -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colebrook Home, Eden Hills</td>
<td>1943 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oodnadatta</td>
<td>1947 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerard</td>
<td>1947 -</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Government Station from 1915-16.
Map Displaying Principal S.A. Localities

Mentioned in the Text

Note, some variations in spelling are evident.
INTRODUCTION

The South Australian State Archives hold an almost complete set of Monthly, Quarterly, Half-Yearly or Annual Reports of the Protectors of Aborigines for South Australia, and with the later abolition of the position of Protector, of the Aborigines Protection Board. While the set is not complete, there is enough material to provide a useful synopsis of the attitudes, practices and policies from the earliest times. These reports, of course, relate specifically to conditions in South Australia, but it is difficult to believe that the general conditions in other States were too much different.

These reports are, of course, reflective of official government policy, and so these extracts can be regarded as official government policy statements. Certainly, one would expect a certain amount of government “spin” in a government document, but it is clear that the Protector was using these Annual Reports as much as a platform to both counter external criticisms of himself and the government, and as a platform to lobby for the advancement of his own policy agenda, as he was using the Reports to advance any policy of the government. By reading the explicit statements – with a bit of reading between the lines – it is possible to reconstruct the nature of the criticisms, and to extract both the government’s thinking, and the Protector’s thinking, of the time.

Of course, the reports contain much minutia of the daily workings of the Protector which are not directly relevant to study of the evolution of Aboriginal policy, and so this document has been prepared by extracting out key, or interesting, sections. Clearly, since the extracts from these reports have been selected, the accusation of a selection bias is inevitable. However, all of the reports referred to have been captured electronically and are available on the Joe Lane web site First Sources-annual reports, for easy cross checking, and of course the originals are stored in State Archives. Several other documents, and groups of documents, are also referred to in the text via these links:

- the Select Committee of 1899 on the Aborigines’ Bill,
- the Conference Papers for the first meeting of the State and Commonwealth Protectors of Aborigines held in Canberra, 1937,
- the SA Chief Protector’s letters – 1840 to 1912, (8,500 out and 13,500 in)

and are also available on the same site (http://firstsources.info/), along with much other relevant primary source material.

The underlying purpose of this document is really no more that to provide an interesting glimpse of the type and quantity of primary source material and a feel for what they contain. The basic structure of the document includes a short background of the situation at first settlement that the Protector of Aborigines was introduced into. This is followed by a longer description of the early years of settlement and the environment in which the Protector worked. This included the constraints of rule of law, and the oversight from both the public at large and the free press. From the criticisms the Protector has received, both now, and at the time, we have grouped the extracts from the reports to deal with certain contentious aspects of policy: the distribution of rations (see also Appendix A), an often presumed “rounding up” onto missions, the dealing with neglected children, the training institutions, policies relating to traditional culture, and the Aboriginal census.

The primary concern of this document is the role of the various Protectors of Aborigines over the first one hundred years of settlement, but the document also includes an overlap into the first ten years or so under the Aborigines Protection Board, since this was a period of major changes to the government policy. Also, from about this time, the nature of the annual
reports appears to change from being the personal and plain-speaking voices of the individual issuers of rations to being the reports of a more modern bureaucratic organ of government.

One should remember that these documents date from the century before last, and so contain terms like “full-blood”, “half-caste”, “quadroon” and “octoroon” which are now considered to be unacceptable, but at the time, the racial intermixing and integration were of primary interest to the Chief Protectors and such distinctions were considered necessary. In reading these extracts it is necessary to project oneself back into the circumstances of the times, before judging in retrospect. Terms like “savage” were in common use, and were perhaps more related to concepts of “uncivilised”, “not Christian” or “lacking technology”. They should not be taken as indicative of a complete lack of respect, interest or sympathy.

Also, some ordinary words have undergone slight changes in meaning:
- Inmate — someone who stays in an institution overnight, not necessarily locked in, as in “the inmate of the hospital”
- Remove — essentially synonymous with “move”.
- Late — not necessarily dead, often simply “recently retired”, as in “the late Protector”
- Station — usually a government station but can be a police station, mission station, sheep station, cattle station, telegraph station or railway station. Often used simply as an unspecified ration station.
- Native — usually synonymous with Aborigine, but can also be simply a person born somewhere in the Colony of Australia, viz., The Australian Natives Association.

The authors wish to pay tribute to the massive work of Keith Windshuttle and his book, “The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume 3, The Stolen Generations”, and to the précis of it by Tony Thomas under the title – “The Pocket Windshuttle”. Like Windshuttle and Thomas, we also believe there is much to be gained from examination of the primary source material.

The authors would like to to thank Margaret Crooks for many of the probing questions and astute comments during the editing process which have made a significant contribution to the final product. In particular, her work on researching the Appendix on the legislation was invaluable and much appreciated. Thanks also to Tony Thomas for contributing the Forward.

The authors are also very appreciative for comments, helpful advice and encouragement of Tony Thomas, Gary Johns, Stephanie Jarrett during the early stages of the project. We hope the end result is not too much of a disappointment for them.
THE POLICY SETTING AT THE TIME OF SETTLEMENT

The role of the Protector of Aborigines was mainly to act as an advocate on behalf of the Aborigines of South Australia with both government and settlers. The necessity for the appointment of a “Protector of Aborigines” had been recognised in London, even prior to the first colonists departing from England. Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for the Colonies, first offered the post of Protector of Aborigines, South Australia, to the well-known George Augustus Robinson of Van Diemen’s Land, but he apparently declined in favour of a similar position in Victoria. George Stevenson, the secretary to Governor Hindmarsh, was ultimately appointed as the first Protector because of prior experience with native American Indians whilst resident on his brother’s ranch in Canada.

The job description for Dr. Matthew Moorhouse, who was appointed to the post of Protector of Aborigines in 1839, was published in the Government Gazette, of July 11, 1839, and can be taken as the pro forma, general job description for all Protectors:

“Government House, Adelaide
July 8, 1839

His Excellency the GOVERNOR directs that the following general rules have been furnished to the Protector of Aborigines, for the guidance of that officer in the discharge of his duties, be published for general information.

GEORGE HALL, Private Secretary.

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General Duties of the Protector of the Aborigines.

1. He will devote himself wholly to the duties of his office, without following any other occupation.
2. A great part of his time must be spent among the natives, in such a manner that he may acquire their friendship and confidence.
3. He must make himself acquainted with their language and dialects, their customs, their habits, their prejudices, their tribes, numbers, and peculiar districts, and with all other particulars concerning them which may be of importance.
4. He must see that all persons who receive pay or emolument from the public funds for performing services of any kind to the natives do their duty actively and faithfully, and he must also take care that all agreements entered into between the natives and colonists are, if possible, strictly fulfilled.
5. He must use every exertion to promote and maintain good understanding between the settlers and natives, and must assist, as far as he can with propriety, in discovering and bringing to justice those of either party who may commit offences against the other.
6. He must most diligently endeavour to instruct the natives in reading, writing, building houses, making clothes, cultivating the ground, and all the ordinary arts of cultivation.
7. Above all things, he must most perseveringly endeavour to bring them to the knowledge of GOD, and of the fundamental truths of CHRISTIANITY.
8. He must carefully observe their means of subsistence, and while leaving them in this respect as much as possible to their own exertions, he must see that they do not, at any time, fall into destitution.
9. His intercourse with the natives must not be confined to those who are to be found in the neighbourhood of Adelaide, but he must visit frequently all the tribes in
the province to which Europeans have access.

10. He must keep notes of all the information that he may acquire concerning them, and a detailed journal of all his proceeding. Copies of these must be laid, quarterly, before the [Executive] Council.

11. He must report to the Government, without delay, any circumstances of a very extraordinary and pressing character that may occur among or in reference to the aborigines.

I hereby declare that I have examined attentively the above duties of the Protector of the Aborigines, and shall endeavour to perform them as effectually as I am able.

(Signed) MATTHEW MOORHOUSE

When the first Governor, Captain John Hindmarsh, arrived at Glenelg on the “Buffalo” more than half of his Proclamation of the Colony of South Australia, delivered on December 28, 1836 concerned the natives:

“It is also at this time especially my duty to apprize the Colonists of my Resolution to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the Native Population as to the rest of His Majesty’s subjects, and of my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity all acts of violence or injustice which may in any manner be practised or attempted against the natives, who are to be considered as much under the safeguard of the law as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British subjects. I trust therefore with confidence to the exercise of moderation and forbearance by all classes in their intercourse with the Native Inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting me to fulfil His Majesty’s most gracious and benevolent intentions towards them by promoting their advancement to civilization, and ultimately, under the blessing of Divine Providence, their conversion to the Christian Faith.”

Incidentally, it was George Stevenson, in his capacity as the Governor’s secretary, who actually read out the Proclamation of the Colony.

An open letter published in the Government Gazette in 1840 by the Colonial Secretary, Charles Sturt, outlined to colonists the government policy with respect to land purchases and grants, and outlined the role of the Protector of Aborigines in this:

“Land Office, July 11th, 1840.

To: the above.

Gentlemen,

Having laid your letter of the 9th inst. before the Governor and Resident Commissioner, I am desired by His Excellency to say, in reply, that it is to him a matter of deep surprize that persons of intelligence, like yourselves, who also, as preliminary purchasers, are well acquainted with the history of the establishment of the Colony, should consider any rights which any Europeans possess to the lands of the Province as preliminary to those of the aboriginal inhabitants.

Those natural indefeasible rights which, as His Excellency conceives, are vested in them as their birthright, have been confirmed to them by the Royal instructions to the Governor, and by the Commissioners’ instructions to the Resident Commissioner. Under these it is that His Excellency has acted in the case to which your letter refers.
The Royal Instructions command that they shall be protected in the free enjoyment of their possessions; that injustice and violence towards them shall be prevented; that all measures which may appear to be necessary shall be taken for their advancement in civilization; and the Commissioners’ instructions direct that they shall not be disturbed in the enjoyment of lands over which they may possess proprietary rights, and of which they are not disposed to make a voluntary transfer.

That this Colony was publicly known to have been founded on principles of the strictest regard to the original rights of the aboriginal inhabitants, His Excellency need only refer you to a document with which you must be well acquainted – the First Annual Report of the Colonization Commissioners.

It is scarcely necessary for the Governor to mention, that, prior to the landing of the first British settlers, the natives possessed well understood and distinctly defined proprietor rights over the whole of the available lands in the Province.

In the degree of knowledge which they have attained, it would, however, have been to their great disadvantage to have them enter into general treaties with them for the cession of lands, inasmuch as such lands would certainly have been obtained for the most insignificant, ill-defined, and unsubstantial returns.

The course which the Governor and Resident Commissioner has preferred to take, is that of directing the Protector of Aborigines to select such land for the natives, in moderation, as he may deem likely to be necessary for their future use, support, and advancement in civilization: such land being afterward secured in the Governor and Council, and Protector of Aborigines, as trustees.

This measure has been immediately brought about by the direct applications on the part of some of the natives belonging to the districts to which your letter refers for land for cultivation.

The selection has been made by the Protector with judgement and moderation, and the only modification that His Excellency can allow to be made with regard to it, is one which he authorised when objections were first raised, that of permitting exchanges to other unappropriated sections in the event of the persons who may desire the sections which are first selected for the natives being able to show, to the satisfaction of the Governor and the Protector of Aborigines, that the sections proposed in exchange are equally advantageous in all respects for the purposes of the original possessors.

This modification must have reference as much to money tenders and to the holders of eighty-acre sections as to those of preliminary land orders. His Excellency cannot perceive the justice of your proposition, that the natives should choose immediately after yourselves, and consequently previous to the two other classes of purchasers.

If the claims of the natives are not void before all, they are preliminary to all. They cannot occupy a middle ground.

Charles Sturt, Asst. Commissioner.”
Thus, in two these documents, the rights of the Aborigines as British subjects and their rights to the enjoyment of their land and the conditions placed on that were laid out. Although a right to use land for their own benefit was set out, Aborigines exclusive right to the land was removed and the Protector was to have a role in the holding of land in trust on their behalf for their future cultivation. Clearly, Sturt and other colonial authorities saw no inherent contradiction between settlement and Aboriginal property rights. They envisaged land as being either available for sharing, or as being only too easily bartered away or abandoned by the Aborigines for the claims of agriculture and animal husbandry. The framework for the interaction between settler and Aborigine, and the role of the Protector as intermediary, was established.

Some months after the proclamation, Stevenson resigned and Captain Walter Bromley was appointed as Protector. Bromley had also had prior experience in the North American colonies dealing with native American Indians. After discharge from the army, he had set up a school for poor children and Indians in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1813. As early as November 1836, on his first arrival in the South Australian colony and even before the proclamation of the colony, he had opened the first school on Kangaroo Island. This operated until May 1837, when as Protector he moved to Adelaide and established the “Native Location” on a site chosen by the Aborigines one mile from the centre of the new town. This site was next to the Torrens River, adjacent to the location of the Torrens Weir, the first construction of which dates from 1862. This also became the site of the first Adelaide Aboriginal children's school. The well-meaning but perhaps out of his depth Bromley, referred to as the “inefficient Protector ad interim”, was unfortunately accidentally drowned in the River Torrens.

The list of Protectors and their tenures include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protector</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Stevenson</td>
<td>1836-1837</td>
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<tr>
<td>Captain Walter Bromley</td>
<td>1837</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. William Wyatt</td>
<td>1837-1839</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Matthew Moorhouse</td>
<td>1839-1856</td>
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<td>Dr. John Walker</td>
<td>1863-1867</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.B. Scott (Acting)</td>
<td>1867</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. John Walker</td>
<td>1868-1869</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.L. Hamilton</td>
<td>1873-1908</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.G. South</td>
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<td>F. Garnett</td>
<td>1923-1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. T. McLean</td>
<td>1931-1936</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.R. Penhall</td>
<td>1936-1940</td>
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There was a period of some few years between the retirement of Matthew Moorhouse in 1856 and the appointment of John Walker in 1863, during which the position was administered by the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, with the Commissioner himself adopting the title of Protector. However, it will be noticed from the reports furnished by George Mason from Wellington on the River Murray that he, on occasions, used the title “Protector of Aborigines” himself in his reports. In other reports he is identified as a “Sub-Protector”. Hamilton was also designated Sub-Protector in some of his earlier reports before being confirmed in the position of Protector. From 1908 the position of Protector of Aborigines was re-designated as Chief Protector, with Sub-Protectors being elevated toProtectors. In 1940 the role of Chief Protector was subsumed into the Aborigines Protection Board with the Chief Protector now Secretary to the Board.
The Protector’s office, at least in the early years and perhaps as late as the turn of the century, had a staff of one, himself, with some regional oversight in the distant parts of the State delegated to a hand full of Sub-Protectors. These were generally some local identity, like a local Police Inspector, a local magistrate or local religious leader. The financial reports of 1900 list only two salaried persons in the Protector’s department, the Protector and a Sub-Protector for the Far North. Issuers of rations were usually the local police trooper, or a pastoral station manager in places where Aborigines were numerous and there was no police presence. All these positions, including the issuers of rations, were honorary positions:

“The dépôts for distribution of food, clothing, medicines, &c., are - 20 under police, 4 at mission stations, 2 at post and telegraph offices and 16 under station managers in the Far North. All furnish monthly reports enabling the condition and requirements of the natives to be investigated and dealt with, tending to promote friendly relations between them and the European settlers.” 1905-06.

The rations system and policy relating to it will be covered in a later chapter.

The Missions and Schooling

The proposal outlined in 1836 by Governor Hindmarsh in the founding Proclamation of the Colony indicated that the intention was to bring the aboriginal population progressively into the mainstream over an unspecified period of time and without undue coercion. This implied an intention to provide training and education as required.

Within a very short period of time The Lutheran Church had, with some government assistance, set up schools: in Adelaide (1839), at Encounter Bay (1840) and at Port Lincoln (1840). The Anglican Church set up The Aboriginal Training Institution at Pooindie in 1850 just outside Port Lincoln. Point McLeay, on Lake Alexandrina, was opened in 1858 by the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association. Kopperamanna Lutheran Mission opened in 1866 in the Far North-East of the State and Port Pierce, on Yorke Peninsula, was another Aborigines’ Friends’ Institution which followed soon afterwards in 1868. These missions with their attached schools had the triple objectives of being centres of religious instruction, schools for the children, and a source of employment and training for Aborigines. There was an expectation that these institutions would become financially independent via their attached agricultural holdings. Other small schools also sprang up, for various periods of time, at Lacepede Bay, Rivoli Bay, Goolwa and Mount Gambier.

Since conversion to Christianity was also seen as one aspect of this integration, a system of mission stations to provide for the protection, education and employment of Aborigines during this period seemed to the government an excellent way to provide services in parallel with the government ration depot system. The missions could provide employment to those not able to compete on the open employment market, and train the young for future off-mission employment. This, of course, only applied to the settled agricultural areas, and, as we will see, the missions were few and small and could in reality have only provided minimal impact over all:

“*The mission station system, efficiently carried out, will evidently be the most effective mode of dealing with the natives; and when every industry is introduced that affords a reasonable prospect of successful culture, providing suitable pastoral,*
agricultural, and other light occupations, a large number of natives may be usefully and profitably employed, and eventually become self-supporting communities.”

1878

However, in spite of the early promise, the mission system didn’t seem to be attaining the required results at a rate considered acceptable to the government. Literacy rates were advancing and the skilling of the Aborigines had proceeded well, but this was not turning into full-time, off-station work – and, ultimately, into assimilation into the mainstream. Aborigines, and increasingly part-Aborigines, were identified as living in more or less idleness on government rations on the missions. In time, the Protector proposed taking control of the mission stations and turning them into full-on, working farms where married, able-bodied Aborigines supporting a family were expected to work in return for wages. Young Aborigines, it was felt, should work off-station in the mainstream community in preparation for integration into that wider community, or, at the very least, work two days a week in return for maintenance rations, if no outside work was available. The children were to be schooled and skilled in preparation for their entry into the work force. It should be remembered that it was only in 1875 that attendance at school for non-Aboriginal children became compulsory.

Initial confrontations

As life in the new colony unfolded and as colonists expanded into each new territory, there was, in general, a short initial period involving some confrontation between Aborigines and remote shepherds and hut-keepers with their sheep - as well as an early mutual recognition of trading opportunities. In the City of Adelaide itself, there was no confrontation recorded at all. In the South-East, after the “Maria” incident in 1840 (described below, in the next chapter) there were no further major incidents. Only one seriously dangerous confrontation, involving the South Australian Police, occurred in the Murray Lands in 1841 just over the border in New South Wales, where parties over-landing stock from the eastern States were, for a time, in conflict with the local Aborigines as they passed through. As in most cases around the colony, most incidents could be related to stock losses; often not inconsiderable. In one incident in the Murray Lands alone, three Europeans were badly wounded and 7,000 sheep lost. Buoyed by their initial success, the local Murray tribes, became more self confident, emboldened and aggressive. Journalist, J.D. Woods described the period in his book “The Native Tribes of South Australia”. After a protracted campaign, here is Woods’ description of the final climax of the encounter:

“A few days afterwards the new expedition was attacked by the troublesome tribes. They had refused all overtures of friendship, and were determined, confident, no doubt, in their numbers, to possess themselves of all the white men’s effects. The engagement lasted about a quarter of an hour, and about thirty were killed, and some ten wounded.”

The government’s response was to appoint explorer Edward John Eyre to the position of Magistrate and as a local Sub-Protector of Aborigines to act as a go-between between Aborigines and settlers and attempt to resolve disputes peaceably. Just three years later he was able to write in his 1845 book, The Manners and Customs of the Aborigines:

“During the whole of the three years I was resident at Moorundie, not a single case of serious injury or aggression ever took place on the part of the natives against the
Europeans; and a district, once considered the wildest and most dangerous, was, when I left it in 1844, looked upon as one of the most peaceable and orderly in the province.”

And later in the book he states:

“As resident Magistrate of the Murray District, I may almost say, that for the last three years I have lived with the natives. .... I have gone almost alone among hordes of those fierce and blood-thirsty savages, as they are considered, and have stood singly amongst them in the remote and trackless wilds, when hundreds were congregated around, without ever receiving the least injury or insult.”

As will be seen in the next section, the government was open and subjected to public scrutiny so these incidents and the broader policy evolution with respect to Aborigines are all well-documented and published in timely government reports. It appears that little was hidden from the public eye. The next chapter describes this public environment in which the Protector of Aborigines worked, particularly in those earliest years, as outlined in contemporary government documents held in the South Australian State Archives.
THE PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE PROTECTOR WORKED

To us the most astonishing feature of the Protectors’ Monthly, Quarterly and Annual Reports is how “modern” they are regarding many aspects of government action and the public expectations they report. That is, apart from the complete lack of modern bureaucratic language in the reports themselves.

Reading in full the Protector’s reports, we can see that the substance and sub-text of the reports demonstrates the social, legal and political milieu in which they operated. They were subjected to the same sort of public oversight that one would expect today, incurring criticisms to which they were constantly forced to react and respond. The Annual Reports were one vehicle by which the Protectors could answer their critics, or deflect the criticism onto others. In addition, they were not averse to using these documents as an instrument to advance their own policy ideas, and apply pressure to their Ministers, and ultimately to Parliament. This makes them a very interesting source of information on the development of Aboriginal policy. They provide an interesting window through which to view the development of the colony and the development of Aboriginal relations.

South Australia was part of a constitutionally governed, generally enlightened and overwhelmingly Christian society, so one should not be surprised to see the active role played by the free press, Christian philanthropic societies and the justice system. The supervisory role played by these three institutions will next be looked at in turn.

The Free Press

The free press operated in South Australia from the very beginning. The South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register had printed its first edition in June 1836 in London before the colony had even been established. As with all newspapers the operations of the government and the happenings in the colony were under constant scrutiny.

Consider the response of the colonial press with respect to the “Maria” incident. In 1840, the barquentine “Maria” ran aground at Lacepede Bay on the South-East coast of the State on her way between Port Adelaide and Port Hobart. Twenty-eight survivors of the wreck were massacred by the local Aborigines. However, the colonists appear to be more incensed at the treatment of the Aboriginal perpetrators at the hands of a police party, where two Aborigines were apparently shot trying to escape, and two more were summarily executed after a brief “court martial” trial for their part in the massacre, than they were at the treatment of the victims of the actual massacre itself. The outcry in the colonial press was such that the Governor was recalled to England in disgrace:

“(Police Inspector) Tolmer wrote:
The results of these reprisals by the police, under the instructions of His Excellency Colonel Gawler, was severely commented upon by the home authorities, and doubtless the unjust treatment he received in England, after his recall, was attributed to the mistaken decision arrived at by some persons miscalled philanthropists. The colonial press also attacked the Governor furiously, and those who acted under his
orders. I remember especially Mr George Stevenson was most bitter and vindictive in some of his articles at the time, expressing an opinion that Major O’Halloran and myself ought to have been sent home and tried for murder.’” Edwin Schurmann.

As one might expect in a democratic, free settlement like South Australia, the free colonial press, was not inclined to hold back when breaches of legal convention were observed. Incidentally, the journalist, “George Stevenson”, mentioned here is the same George Stevenson who was South Australia's first Protector of Aborigines.

While the free press was open to scrutinise the Protector and Aboriginal policy, one should not forget to scrutinise the free press. While the press reported an attempted rape by an Aboriginal man, Sub-Protector Mason investigated and reported in the Government Gazette, July 15, 1852, on the newspaper report of the incident:

“WELLINGTON – Sub-Protector Mason states, on the 26th June, ‘A report appeared in the South Australian Register of the 3rd May, of an attempt made by the natives to ravish a German woman named Takemann, residing on the Bremer. I have since visited the Bremer, and made inquiry of several persons residing there, respecting the truth of the report, and they all agree in stating that they believe Mrs. Takemann’s story to be utterly false. In her statement made before you, she says, “my hut is six hours' walk from my other house, and I think Strathalbyn is the nearest place.” But I am informed that her hut is but a few hundred yards from three other houses, and a few miles from the township of Callington on the Bremer. The residents there did not hear of the report till it appeared in the South Australian Register. I was informed that Mrs. Takemann is again residing on the Bremer, and has lately been professing to tell fortunes. I believe there is no credit to be placed in the statement made by her’.”

1852.

And later we have in a police report from Inspector Giles:

“A lot of trouble is caused out here by the irresponsible statements printed in the newspapers about the conditions under which the blacks live, the picture being of shrieking aboriginal women being chased all over the country by lustful and brutal white men makes good journalistic matter, but is absolutely untrue to fact so far as my thirty years outback have shown me. I have never seen the blacks treated other than decently. Generally speaking the station owners and managers go without to help them, and no aboriginal woman is molested unless she wants to be. “The few white men who have sexual relations with the aboriginal women usually make up for it in their kind treatment of the older blacks.”

1931-32.

While no individual may have the whole picture, we should not be surprised by the idea that the media might sensationalise a story to get a circulation boost. This is hardly new. Here, the Protector and police rebut unsubstantiated rumours in the press by printing rebuttals of the “irresponsible statements printed by the newspapers” in their Annual Reports.

Incidentally, one should also consider that, just as today, criticism in the robust, free press can at times be ill-informed, self-serving, and sometimes, totally wrong. It is just as well to read the Protector’s side of the story before jumping to any conclusions. Journalist J.D. Woods, in the forward to his 1879 book, “The Native Tribes of South Australia”, made serious
criticisms of government policy with respect to Aborigines. At the first available opportunity Sub-Protector Hamilton published not only his refutation of the criticism, but the criticisms themselves. This was timely, open government. The Government Gazette of March 20th, 1879, reports:

“My attention has been drawn to a work on the "Native Tribes of South Australia," recently published by Messrs. Wigg and Son, containing an introductory chapter, written by Mr. J. D. Woods, in which the following remarks appear: —

‘No attempt was ever made by or at the instance of the colonial Government to investigate and record the manners and customs of the aborigines, nor to preserve their language, so that now only a comparatively imperfect idea can be formed of the South Australian natives as a whole. At one time, there were native schools in Adelaide and other places, and a training institution near Port Lincoln, for the blacks, which was subsidised by the Government. The native schools, like those who attended them, have passed away and are forgotten, except by some of the earlier colonists. The Poonindie Mission is now carried on without Government assistance. The mission at Point Macleay is also carried on without subsidy from the public purse. With the cessation of the aborigines' protectorate as the function of a separate staff, all official interest in the native seems to have expired, and nothing now is done for them except periodically to give to them through the mounted police, flour, tea, sugar, &c., and even this modicum of generosity is administered in a loose and perfunctory manner, owing to the pressure of more urgent duties of those in charge.’

In making the foregoing statements, Mr. Woods shows that he has evidently omitted to possess himself of accurate information, and hence he makes several mistakes, and his observations are calculated to convey a very erroneous impression as to the position occupied by the Government in relation to the aborigines. Whatever apathy may have been shown on the part of former Governments as to the desirability of attempts being made to collect and preserve, in a permanent form, some record of the habits, customs, languages, &c. of the natives of South Australia, it cannot be fairly said that this matter has been entirely lost sight of. In response to circulars issued from this office about three years ago, a variety of papers have been received from different sources containing a valuable and interesting collection, of aboriginal "folklore" and ethnological information. These have been placed in the hands of the Revd. George Taplin, who has undertaken to edit them, and already the greater portion of the MSS. has reached the printer’s hands. Prior to the Poonindie Mission Station becoming self-supporting, in 1860, it received grants-in-aid from Government amounting to £7,225. Point Macleay Mission was established in May, 1859, and received a grant-in-aid from Government of £300 per annum up to 1876, when this amount was increased to £1,000, which is still paid. In 1875, Parliament voted a special sum of £700 to relieve this institution from its then liabilities, chiefly arising from loss of crops through red rust. Point Macleay Mission has therefore received public grants amounting to £11,600. The aborigines’ protectorate still exists, fully organized for the performance of all its functions, and at no period during previous years have a greater number of agencies existed than are now in operation for the protection of the aborigines, and the amelioration of their condition. There are now fifty depots (in addition to the five mission stations) carefully distributed throughout the province, provided with rations, clothing, medical comforts, &c., to be issued in accordance with printed form of instructions.
(copy appended); and, unless the monthly returns furnished by the issuers are wilfully falsified, I am unwilling to believe that these officers neglect their duties to such an extent as has been suggested.

I have, &c,
E. L. HAMILTON, Sub-Protector.
The Hon. Commissioner of Crown Lands, &c.”

And much later, more unsubstantiated newspaper reports:

“No unusual occurrence against the natives came under notice. A newspaper report that an aboriginal man was killed during a fight at Cook was investigated but found to be without foundation.”

1936-37.

Nor should we be surprised when stories turn out to be totally fabricated. Mr. Driver, the Government Resident at Port Lincoln, reports:

“Another boy of the native school informed Mr. Schurmann and me (on the alleged authority of Mintalta, a native constable), that a native woman had died by poison administered to her by a sheepfarmer; that Mintalta had seen the poison mixed in flour, and given to the woman; that he had warned her against eating it, but she had done so nevertheless, and when taken ill that her eyes appeared to be bursting out of her head, and her body much swollen; that he witnessed her dying agonies; and finally, to close this sad story, that he, the said Mintalta, native constable, had helped to bury her. The parties were soon confronted at the school-house; the boy stood dumbfounded. Mintalta not only distinctly denied having ever said anything of the kind to him or to any one else, but further asserted that the woman was alive, and as well as usual when last seen by him, which was only a few days previous. I had the youngster whipped in the presence of the rest of the school children, as a caution.”

The Mr. Schurmann mentioned was the Rev. Clamor Schürmann, the principal of the Port Lincoln Native School, and an important local court interpreter. This reference to “whipping” perhaps requires further exploration at this point. The resort to corporal punishment was raised by Protector Walker in his 1863 General Report as an alternative means of dealing with widespread drunkenness:

“The abuse of intoxicating drink (which is another predisposing cause of disease [tuberculosis]) is unfortunately a very common vice amongst the Natives. Drunkenness prevails, especially in the South- Eastern district to a fearful extent, and all efforts hitherto made to prevent the sale of liquor to the Natives have been to a great extent fruitless. ..... Everything however will depend on the nature of his punishment, and I would suspect flogging as the only one likely to be efficient. A few weeks or even months imprisonment is not looked upon by the Natives generally as any punishment whatever, and certainly such a penalty would have no effect in checking the Evil in question.”

1863.

The government implemented many of the policy suggestions from Dr. Walker’s General Report, but this was not one of them. The reason was neatly summed up when the issue was raised much later at the first general conference of Chief Protectors of Aborigines in Canberra in 1937:
“Mr. BAILEY. – No white man is punished except by an order of the court, and we should require an order of the court before punishing a native. I see danger in allowing a Protector of Aborigines to inflict corporal punishment. If permitted, he will soon cease to be regarded as a protector.” 1937.

Naturally, in accordance with ancient British tradition, they saw no problem with the caning of minors by their parents or school masters, but the two incidents cited, of boys being “whipped”, are the only two I have seen in the Protectors reports:

“March 11th. – Three small pilferers were brought up charged with stealing onions from Mrs. Bishop’s garden, the award against two of them was, that they should be whipped by their parents, and sent back to Mr. Schurmann’s school.” 1851.

Rule of Law

The Protectors’ main problem was driving a reasonable course in what they believed was the best interests of their constituents, the Aborigines, but also what was within their legal mandate. They were public servants, bound by rule of law and by government policy and watched over by a robust, free press. The result was a situation where it is clear that they would not be able to get away with the unilateral, private, decision-making and policy setting that some try to ascribe to them. Nor would they seek to do that.

The outcry over the breach of process over the “Maria” incident only emphasises that, in the colony of South Australia, rule of law prevailed and was expected to prevail.

Consider how modern this example is:

On the 2nd November, 1850, Mr. Henry Baird of Eyre Peninsula, was speared to death by Aborigines, and more than 2,000 of his sheep stolen. A small police contingent sent to investigate the situation surprised a larger number of Aborigines with around 700 of the sheep, but were forced to shoot in self-defence, when the Aborigines resisted arrest and raised their spears against them. In the incident one Aborigine was captured and another killed. In what might be considered a very modern response in the case of an officer resorting to the use of his fire-arm, the Lieutenant Governor ordered an immediate inquiry to be conducted by no lesser functionaries than the Commissioner of Police and Protector of Aborigines themselves. The general Police Report, published in the Government Gazette, January 30, 1851, reports that the inquiry is to be held:

“The Lieutenant-Governor, having deemed it expedient that particular enquiries should be made into the circumstances, and especially into the necessity which existed for the resort to fire-arms, and the number of wounded, the Commissioner of Police, in company with Protector of Aborigines, by His Excellency’s directions, proceeded to Port Lincoln on the 6th December last.” 1851.

In the filing of their report, published in the same Government Gazette of January 30th, 1851, Police Commissioner Dashwood and Protector of Aborigines Moorhouse also express their concern over the correct police procedure with regards to the necessity of a legal warrant
before an arrest could be made, given that a prisoner was taken during this incident. The inquiry report records:

“To the second, it may be said, that under ordinary circumstances it is more safe and proper that a constable should be armed with a Magistrate’s warrant before apprehending a prisoner, whatever the offence with which he may be charged; but under a variety of circumstances the law will justify a constable in performing this part of his duty without a warrant, and it will also in some cases authorise him to call other persons to assist him in so doing.”

One should note also that the investigation into the death of the Aborigine was thorough, the body concerned being exhumed for forensic examination by the Protector of Aborigines, a certified medical practitioner, to confirm the exact circumstances of his death. This was not unusual. All suspicious deaths were investigated. In the Quarterly Report for period ending 30th September, 1851, the Protector of Aborigines instigated an investigation into another potentially suspicious death:

“During the floods in September, an adult named Jemmy Robinson, was drowned whilst crossing Gilbert River. From the manner in which the report reached me, I was led to infer that some mystery enveloped the case. Mr. Tolmer, the Inspector of Police, was passing the Gilbert, and made minute inquiry into the event, and ascertained that it was purely an accidental occurrence.”

In an earlier example from 1849, Dr. Moorhouse investigated a murder in the South-East of the State. We need to recognise the difficulty, rendered by the remote localities involved, in collecting sufficient evidence to secure a conviction. It should be remembered that at the time, the Protector of Aborigines had a staff of one, himself, and it took 16 days to reach the locus of the incident. The important thing is that the investigation was done diligently and by the book. Dr. Moorhouse reported to his superior, The Colonial Secretary, as recorded in his Letter Book:

373
?? March 1849
Colonial Secretary
Sir,
In reply to your letter of the 30th January requesting me to visit the South Eastern District and to enquire into a suspected murder of some natives, I have the honor to report that I left Adelaide on the 7th February and arrived at Guichen Bay on the 19th. On the 21st I left the bay accompanied by the interpreter of the district, and adult Native guide and Corporal Burgon (Burgoyne) of the Mounted Police. On the 22nd, 40 miles from Guichen Bay, we procured a native who had seen a settler named Brown some months before with a gun and on the same spot several Natives lying dead with wounds fresh and bleeding. This Native took us to the spot where we found five holes where had been deposited five human bodies. On searching the neighbourhood of the graves, we found fragments of human bones scattered in every direction, faint tracks of Natives, one European and one horse – we continued our examination of the ground for some time and discovered, about 80 paces from the graves, the remains of a fire amongst which were portions of calcined human bones, native bags and mats. It was evident that the bodies had been exhumed and burnt but there were remains sufficient to prove that they were natives. The burning of the bodies has rendered it
impossible to speak medically as to a cause of death, but on the other hand it strengthens the convictions that guilt prompted such a proceeding. The bones and other fragments were conveyed to Guichen Bay and left in charge of the police; they were produced at the first hearing of the case before Captain Butler on the 1st Current.

Mr. James Brown was charged with the offence on the 1st Current; he was remanded and is at present in custody. It will take about a month to bring all the witnesses in the case to Guichen Bay; I arrived in Adelaide on the ?? Current.

In this case there was apparently insufficient evidence collected to secure a conviction against the accused, a Mr. Brown. Explorer-Magistrate and Sub-Protector of Aborigines, Edward John Eyre, noted with dismay in his 1846 book the difficulty breaking down white prejudice amongst jury members to secure convictions against white perpetrators. He also notes the role that the media played in fomenting this prejudice (a different “Mr. Brown” one assumes):

“When Messers Biddle and Brown were murdered, the newspapers entertained their readers week after week with the details of the bloody massacre, heaping a profusion of vile epithets upon the perpetrators.”

How little things change! The media incites its readers against Aborigines before the trial and then, as in the “Maria” incident, against the government afterwards.

In cases where there was evidence of wrong-doing on the part of the colonists, the police and the Protector of Aborigines did everything they could to obtain justice for them. Policeman, Corporal Morton reports from Penola in the Half-yearly Report 30th September, 1865:

“A native, named Harry, otherwise Beedman, had been employed as a bullock driver by a carrier named Henry Roden, who resides in Penola. He was to receive wages at the rate of 10s. per week. Beedman had drawn some money from his employer, but he did not think he got all his wages. As his master would not pay him the balance, I summoned him for £16 4s. The case was heard at the Local Court, Penola, and the judgement given for the plaintiff for £10 1s. 6d., which his employer would never have paid unless compelled.”

But it was not always easy. The difficulty in obtaining sufficient evidence to mount a successful prosecution was, and still is, a considerable problem, but one should remember that this requirement for evidence is the very foundation of our justice system. A comparison with the “rules of evidence” applicable under Aboriginal customary law may go some way to explain Aborigines’ bewilderment at our judicial system. For example, under customary law, even a dream could be regarded as an eye-witness account, and if the perpetrator absconded, a punishment could be transferred to near relative. (An example of this is incidentally provided later, where Aborigines Pelican and Giles beat another Aboriginal named Kropinyeri, because of an offence committed by his son, William.) This contradiction was well understood by the Police. Police Commissioner Dashwood and Protector of
Aborigines Moorhouse, in the report into the death of an Aborigine whilst investigating the death of a settler William Baird (as mentioned above), notes:

“\textit{It is extremely doubtful whether the aborigines, and especially those who are but little acquainted with our customs and laws, can be made to comprehend the nature of those safeguards which have mercifully been placed by the wisdom of our legislature to prevent the innocent suffering, and that guilt must be made to appear as clear as daylight before the accused can be legally punished. Their surprise must, therefore, be great, when they find that those who they know to be guilty, should, for want of legal evidence to convict, return to them uninjured, and apparently rewarded; and points out the impolicy of resorting to arrest and the form of trial, unless such a measure of legal evidence can be produced as to render a conviction probable.}” \textit{1851.}

A 1930's example demonstrates the difficulties faced by the Chief Protector, that of distance and time, in acquiring sufficient evidence to mount cases:

\textit{“Two serious cases came under my notice during the year. The first concerned the spearing of the owner of the Welbourne Hill Station by one of the blacks employed on the station and the other the reported murder of a native at Tieyon Station. In the former case the station owner in capturing his assailant fired at him with a rifle and struck him with a piece of wood, thereby causing such injuries that the native has been an inmate of the Adelaide Hospital since 6\textsuperscript{th} July, 1934. The native was charged at Oodnadatta with maliciously wounding his employer and was committed for trial at Port Augusta, but the Crown Law authorities withdrew the charge before the case was heard. Although I felt that the native was treated more harshly than necessary I was unable to gain sufficient information to enable me to take any further action. The other case was that of a native who was reported to have died as the result of knife wounds inflicted by a white man at Tieyon Station. A considerable time elapsed between the alleged attack on the native and the date it was brought under the notice of the Oodnadatta police officer. The constable travelled long distances and exhumed the body of the native in an endeavour to secure evidence that would either prove or disprove the reported stabbing, but the Crown solicitor after consideration of the evidence obtained, decided that it would be useless to take proceedings. Both these cases were unsatisfactory but it is hoped that the inquiries made will show that ill-treatment of natives is viewed very seriously by the Department and that it will act as a warning to anyone who may tempted to deal harshly with them. \textit{1934-35.}”}

While the Protector lamented the difficulty of getting sufficient evidence to convict settlers, there were other problems for him to confront to obtain convictions too. Collecting evidence aside, the collecting of witnesses also proved a problem. In the Quarterly Report for period ending December, 1851, published in the Government Gazette, the case of an assault on an Aboriginal girl by a white shepherd was cited:

\textit{“Yorke’s Peninsua. - .... In my last report I referred to a charge of felonious assault upon a girl of this district, made against a shepherd who has since been captured. The case went before the Grand Jury of the Supreme Court, and a true bill was found,}
but on the morning the trial was to have taken place, the girl and her father abscended, and could not be found during the sittings of the Court. They have returned to the Peninsula, and the police are in search of them, and if not forwarded by the next vessel, I propose going over, so as to secure their attendance at the next sitting of the Court.”

And the Quarterly Report for period ending 31st March 1851:

“Port Lincoln. – Mr. Driver, the Government Resident, has forwarded the following remarks :-

‘February 17th, 1851.
Fined Henry Smith, bullock driver, ten shillings, for assaulting Wibultu, by taking hold of his beard and threatening to do further injury. Defence set up, ‘that he was skylarking; Warned not to play that game with any British subject who was disinclined.

‘Information laid by Yailgata Wipeepi, through the interpretation of C.W. Schurmann, that he had been assaulted by Robertson and others, at Kapuyu.

‘February 24th, 1851. Robertson and others appeared in Court to answer the charge of assault, but complainant and witnesses were wanting, though they had received flour at the Post Office to induce them to stay; the charge therefore, fell to the ground. The summoned parties appear greatly dissatisfied at being called away during the busy season of sheep dressing to answer NO charge. Some had been erroneously designated by the native complainant, and, consequently, a wrong party had been required to attend from a long distance; the serving of these summonses has rendered the police horses unserviceable, and to add to the unpleasantness, a charge of felony has been preferred (to justify the assault) against Yailgalta Wipeepi, for breaking open a hut and stealing provisions. The investigation of this matter is being proceeded upon.’

In the February Gazette in 1852:

“At the November Sittings of the Supreme Court, there were only two names on the calendar for trial – one, Walkoinni, for spearing a bullock, but the bill was ignored; the other, Marrissa, charged with the murder of William Bagnall, at Yorke’s Peninsula, was not tried, as the native witnesses abscended the evening of the trial was to have come on: the principal witness has been captured, and is now in the Adelaide School.”

And later:

“On the 4th April, Pandalteratoo, a native woman, informed me that Mr. Weaver had, just before sunrise that morning, while in a state of intoxication, entered her wurley, which was near the Police Station, and behaved in a very violent manner; after knocking several natives about with one of their waddies, he seized a spear and wounded Pandalteratoo with it in her foot. Three native men secured him from doing more harm. I advised Pandalteratoo to lay an information; I have made her and the witnesses understand the time they were to appear in Court, and requested the Police to see that they were in attendance. They did not appear, all having, except one witness, left the Township a day or two before the day of hearing, and the information accordingly fell to the ground.”

1855.
The settlers also showed a certain amount of pragmatism with respect to the breaches of the law by Aborigines. They appeared to be well aware of the limitations of the legal processes and refrained from getting involved in legal action where success was unlikely or the where the outcome was likely to be ineffective.

Sub-Protector Minchin of the Northern Districts reports in the Government Gazette of May, 1854:

“February 8th, four natives stole a bag of flour and three cheeses from Mr. James Paterson’s station. This was a most wanton robbery, and a case in which punishment should certainly follow. It is to be borne in mind, that the four said natives have always been always well fed and taken care of while on the station. Mr. Paterson will not prosecute in the matter, although a conviction might certainly be had from the evidence which could be produced against them. It is much to be regretted that such a case could be allowed to pass unnoticed, if it were only for the sake of example to others.”

Later, he explains in Government Gazette December 27th, 1855:

“On the other hand, it is to be regretted, that where natives have committed wanton robberies, and the parties clearly known, in no instance, yet, within this district, have I seen a guilty party punished according as the law would direct. The settler reasons thus: ‘Can I afford to go ninety miles (to the nearest Court) 100, or 250 miles, as the case may be, to prosecute, and am I then certain of obtaining a conviction?’ The natives, thus escaping the law, are encouraged to go on in the same manner. I cannot help thinking, but that it would be for the benefit, and kindness to the whole tribe, to punish those who are deserving of the same.”

The settlers themselves were not unaware of the need for reliable solid evidence to ensure a just outcome:

“January 2th, I as informed by Mr. Hayward, of Arroona, that he had lost some sheep by the natives, but he very properly states, and I use his own words, ‘It is not the blacks I blame for the loss of my sheep, but my shepherd, who, without any authority from me, entrusted my flock with a wild creature who happened to pass his hut.’ It is uncertain as to whether the sheep (I believe thirty) had been stolen, or lost by the inexperience of the native.”

We are also introduced to a Mr. Hack of the Coorong in the October, 1860 quarterly report of Sub-Protector Mason of the Wellington District – Government Gazette, November, 1860:

“The natives all speak in praise of Mr. Hack and his family for the kindness shown by them to the natives when in want.”

And a very reasonable man he appears to be. In the May 16th, 1861 edition of the Government Gazette we learn, again from Sub-Protector Mason:

“On the 17th of March, Mr. Barton Hack, of the Coorong, reported to me that the natives (numbering 300 men) had assembled near his station, from the Goolwa, Mundoo Island, the Peninsula, Salt Creek, and other parts of the Coorong, for the purpose of holding a grand Corrobberie; and while there some of them had taken
advantage of Mr. Hack’s store-room window being broken, and had entered by that means, and by cutting holes in the bottoms of bags of flour and wheat, had stolen a quantity of each, valued at £4. The robbery had been committed in such an artful manner, that Mr. Hack did not discover it till some time after it had taken place, when he found some of his bags being empty, the contents having been taken from the bottom of the bags. On receiving this report, I started, in company with Police Trooper Morgan, in the Government boat; but owing to the contrary winds, we did not reach Mr. Hack’s station till the fourth day, the distance being about seven miles. On arriving there we found nearly all the natives had decamped, leaving only a few aged people, natives of the place; from them we could gain no information, except that the robbery had been committed by Mundoo Island natives. We then started for Mundoo Island and the Goolwa to see the natives there. On arriving at the Goolwa, Mr. Jones pointed out several natives who had been at Mr. Hack’s, one of them, named “Jerry” promised to proceed with us and point out the natives who had committed the robbery, some of whom he said were on Mundoo Island, one at Mr. Davenport’s station, Lake Albert, and one was Mr. Hack’s stockkeeper; we then sailed for Wellington, taking with us four Goolwa natives, to whom we had promised canoes.

After three days’ stay at Wellington, I again started in company with Police Trooper Morgan, and the native “Jerry” on horseback, for Lake Albert, and McGrath’s Flat; but in consequence of ill health, I was obliged to stop on the way and Police Trooper Morgan, with the native, proceeded on to Mr. Hack’s. On arriving there, Mr. Hack declared he would not believe a word the native “Jerry” had to say on the subject of the robbery; and that he was quite satisfied with what the Police had done, and did not wish to take any further steps in the matter. Thus ended a search and inquiry, amongst the natives, which had occupied Police Trooper Morgan and myself nearly a month. I rewarded the native Jerry with a canoe and a blanket.” 1861.

Nor should one think that the courts were any less scrupulous in their operation than they would be today. The Protectors’ Letter Books, and financial statements in the Annual Reports of the Protector of Aborigines indicate that legal representation was routinely provided to Aborigines on trial for serious offences. The “Mr. Fisher” named below was Adelaide lawyer, James Hurtle Fisher (cf. Hurtle square in Adelaide), inaugural Mayor of Adelaide (1840), Leader of the Bar in South Australia, and later, Sir James Fisher M.P.:

“91
Feb. 17th 1843
J.H. Fisher Esqre
Stephens Place
Sir,
Here are five Natives for trial at the next sittings of the Supreme Court which you are requested by His Excellency the Governor to defend, namely,

King John, alias Merainmalla charged with stealing three sheep from Mr Lake? (Lade?)
Jimmy alias Yuki Warritya stealing sheep from C.H. Bagot Esqre
Tommy alias Kepuin stealing silver spoons from Captain Duff
Nuttia & Moullia, from Port Lincoln, for the murder of Rolls, Brook & others.

[Moorhouse]  "

The following extract from the Supreme Court records encapsulates the whole legal process - what an Aboriginal defendant accused of the murder of a white settler (by throwing a stone
at him) could expect in 1877: a defence lawyer (a QC in this case), an interpreter, the Judge
directing that multiple spouses (acceptable under Aboriginal customary law) cannot give
evidence that may prejudice their husband, the Judge directing on the verdict, and sentence
which seems quite light even by today’s standards:

“Supreme Court Records - Volume 7

Friday, November 16th 1877

28/ Winginia Ab. Native

Murder of William Knox
Interpreter sworn
Plea of Not Guilty entered

Jury
William Cox Edward Clarke
James Chadwood James Cobbledick
Henry Cole Charles Curnow
Edward Cullen Ebenezer Cooler
Thomas Candy James Chaplin
John George Cartwright Henry Coussens

Crown Solicitor for the prosecution
Mr. Impleby Q.C. for the prisoner

Crown Solicitor to the Jury

Calls James Robertson (sw) [sw = sworn]
XXed by Mr. Impleby [XX = cross examined]

Calls Samuel Mills? (PT) (sw) stone produced [PT = Police Trooper]
Thomas Clode (PT) (sw)
XXed by Mr. Impleby

Calls Gustavus McCord (PT) (sw)
order put in, read, and marked A
XXed by Mr. Impleby

Calls Henry Eustace Astler (sw)
XXed by Mr. Impleby

Calls Moumillia (sw)
His Honor refuses to take her evidence as she states she is a lubra of the prisoner
Mr Andrews (CS) [CS = Crown Solicitor]

Calls Nindillia but states that she is a lubra of the prisoner
His Honor directs that she can leave the box

His Honor directs that the Jury could not find a verdict of guilty of murder against the prisoner. Crown Solicitor withdraws from prosecution as to murder
Mr Ingleby to the Jury

His Honor sums up

Verdict    Guilty of manslaughter

Called on –

Sentence –
Imprisonment with hard labor for 1 year    20-11-1877  "

The court record notes that an interpreter was “sworn” (the interpreter’s name is not given, but Police Trooper Clode was often named as an interpreter in the courts). The lack of an interpreter was considered a serious matter by the courts. There was a principle – no translator – no trial, even in 1843, in this letter from the Protector of Aborigine’s (Dr. Moorhouse) Letter Book, 1840 to 1857 from The Protector to the Colonial Secretary in 1843:

“87
Jan 21st 1843
Hon Col Sec
Sir,
I beg to inform you that His Honour the Judge refused to have Natives put upon their trial unless an interpreter who will engage to translate the main facts of evidence to the accused, can be provided, & in the case of the two Port Lincoln natives, it may perhaps be necessary to request Mr Schürmann’s attendance. If His Excellency the Governor should think it desirable that Mr Schürmann should be sent for, there will be an opportunity of sending to Port Lincoln in a few days.  [Moorhouse]”

Edwin Schurmann, in his 1987 biography of his grandfather, “I’d Rather Dig Potatoes”, reports:

“During 1847, a native from the Gulf country was to be tried for larceny at an Adelaide court. Without first checking relevant facts, someone in authority subpoenaed (Clamor) Schürmann to act as interpreter at the trial. He duly attended, but quickly found the man charged was not from a tribe with whom he had associated, and his dialect was unintelligible to him. ... A letter from the Advocate General’s office to the Colonial Secretary noted ‘... it was impossible to put the prisoner on his trial, who was discharged.’”

The Quarterly report of the Protector of Aborigines of 30th June, 1851, as published in the Government Gazette of July 24th, 1851, notes:

“At the last sittings of the Supreme Court there were nine natives on the calendar for trial, one from Port Lincoln, charged with sheep stealing; he had been four months in custody, but could not be tried for want of an interpreter; he was discharged. Two from Yorke’s Peninsula, charged with sheep-stealing, but the bill against them was ignored by the Grand Jury. Three from the Peninsula, charged with the murder of a fellow-aborigine, who was travelling overland from Adelaide to Port Lincoln; they were tried, found guilty, and had a sentence of death passed upon them, but were subsequently pardoned by His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor. The other three were from Guichen Bay.”  1851.
The Government Gazette of Feb. 23, 1854, has an interesting case of the police providing an interpreter:

“On the 27th of October, a native (one of the Franklin Harbor tribe) of the name of Pingultie, laid an information against Adam Farch, for an assault committed on him at Lake Hamilton. The Court had great difficulty in understanding the prosecutor, although a native constable from Venus Bay police station attempted the interpretation. A part of the alleged assault was proved by the sworn evidence of a European, for which a penalty of one pound was inflicted.”

In the Government Gazette of January 30th, 1851:

“5. GUITCHEN BAY AND SOUTH-EASTERN DISTRICTS. – The Government Resident, Captain Brewer, reports ‘the murder of one of the natives, in the month of March last, by four other natives, near Mr. Gifford’s station. The four natives were apprehended and sent up, prisoners, to Adelaide. At the Criminal Sessions in May, they were tried for murder; but were acquitted, for want of evidence. Mr. Moorhouse has sent them back to Guichen Bay by sea, as they would have had to pass through the country of the tribe to which the deceased native belonged, if they had returned overland.

6. ‘I trust that although these men have been acquitted, their having been sent to Adelaide, and detained there some time in jail, together with Mr. Moorhouse’s admonitions, will have taught them that they must not murder one another any more than white people; they evidently did not understand this previous to their apprehension, as they spoke openly to the settlers of what they had done, and when told, the Police would certainly apprehend them, said, “why will the Police come and take us, we have not killed a white man.”’

Notwithstanding the number of cases “ignored” (not proceeded with) by the courts, it is evident that there was also oversight of the courts by the Protectors of Aborigines, (they generally attended all important court hearings to give advice to the presiding judge on matters of culture), and also by the Governor (who regularly commuted sentences or pardoned convicted Aborigines in cases where culture appears to have taken a significant role in the committing of the crime). All these measures acted to ensure that there was some mitigation of the law as it was applied to Aborigines.

“At the last Criminal Sittings of the Circuit Court at Robe, three natives of this district were charged with murder, convicted, and sentenced to death. The crime had been committed in carrying out a tribal custom among the natives, and the Court appeared impressed with a sense of difficulty in bringing a case of this nature under the operation of our Criminal Law, where the prisoners had doubtless acted under the belief that they were performing a sacred duty. The sentences were subsequently commuted to two years’ imprisonment with hard labor. The Minister of Justice (the Hon. W. H. Bundey) recently called the attention of Parliament to this subject, and announced his intention of introducing a Bill to amend the existing Criminal Law in respect to its application to offences committed by aborigines”.

Half year ended June, 1874.
But, at the end of the day, it is the lack of crime which dominates the Protectors’ reports. An example may be the report of Mr. Buttfield, Sub-Protector, Far North:

“There is one other point to which I would give prominence, and that is the utter absence of crime. The aborigines are well disposed, and peaceably inclined. For months past there has not been a single aboriginal offender brought before any of our local Justices.”  

1875.

In fact, the police reports in the Protectors’ Annual Reports are dominated at most by petty crime, generally associated with alcohol. For example, the Crime Report in the 1917 Annual Report is absolutely typical for the whole period 1900 to 1921 when the Crime Report was presented in the Annual Reports in this format:

“CRIME REPORT

The following shows the number of aboriginals convicted during the year :-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>Convictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assaults</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begging alms</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental defectives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach of the licensing Act (in possession of liquor)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful possession</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total convictions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight persons were convicted of supplying liquor to aboriginals.”

1916-17.

And perhaps there is a certain cynicism about the effectiveness of what they are actually achieving:

“Oh the far north-west of Oodnadatta sixteen natives were arrested during the year for killing sheep and cattle with intent to steal the carcasses. All were imprisoned for periods ranging from six to nine months. No doubt the offences were committed in times of stress and hunger, and one must sympathise with them, but it would be extremely unwise to overlook these offences. Leniency would be construed as indifference, and if continued the natives would kill stock without being in actual need. When in Port Augusta Gaol the aboriginal prisoners are provided with good food, clothing, and tobacco – three commodities that are almost unobtainable for them in the bush. There is little work for them in the gaol. They sit about all day and appear contented. I do not think imprisonment punishes them. Maybe it creates a measure of awe in their minds for the masterful white man.”

Police reports, 1928-29.

“Four natives were committed to Port Augusta Circuit Court for sentence for killing goats belonging to settlers in the Musgrave Ranges, and one for larceny of a suit case from a train at Edwards Creek. In regards to goat killing in the Musgrave Range country, I am pleased to say that several more recent cases have been dealt with summarily by the justices at Oodnadatta and sentences were taken out in the Oodnadatta Police Station. To my mind this is far preferable to taking these myall blacks to Port Augusta, as experience has shown that the trip to Port Augusta is regarded as an incentive rather than a deterrent to such crimes.”

1934-35.
To put the legal situation into its context, consider that during the first twenty-five years of settlement in South Australia, 1837 to 1862, the Register of Executions, Whippings and Commutations records that twenty Aborigines were listed as being hanged for capital offences against white settlers, while one non-Aborigine was executed for the murder of an Aborigine. In the following hundred years to 1970, while South Australia still had the death sentence, no Aborigines were executed, while thirty-five non-Aborigines were executed (for crimes unrelated to Aborigines). Also in that early, post-settlement period a further twenty-three Aborigines were sentenced to death, but had their sentences commuted or were pardoned by the Governor, and of those twenty-three, half were for the murder of other Aborigines. No whippings of Aborigines are recorded in the Register, which dates from 1900, but rare references to corporal punishment do exist prior to 1900 (3, I believe), all consistent with court imposed punishments of the day.

And, to put this into its broadest context, the last hanging of an Aborigine in South Australia happened almost to the day when John McDouall Stuart arrived in Port Darwin on the first overland trek of the continent. After twenty-five years of settlement while the colony was still discovering its boundaries, in South Australia the relationship between the settlers and the Aborigines had more or less apparently settled down.

Public Opinion

While rule of law prevailed in the courts, outside the courts it is also clear from the Annual Reports that there was considerable sympathy for the Aboriginal population, with significant numbers of “Friends of the Aborigines” and of church and charitable institutions constantly scrutinising the government and the Protector’s activities. The Protectors’ main problem was driving a reasonable course between what they considered to be over-zealous charity, and what was in the best interests of their constituents, the Aborigines. They were also dictated to by what was within their legal mandate. They were public servants bound by rule of law and by government policy, and watched over constantly. Below, three of the main contentious issues which concerned the public are covered: that of the provision of sufficient food and clothing for the Aboriginal people particularly the sick and elderly, the provision of protection for Aboriginal children, and dealing with displaced Aborigines. Each of these issues represent a continuing point of contention, and so are also dealt with in some more detail, in their own chapters, a little later.

Example 1 – Public Scrutiny and The Distribution of Rations:

The 1839 duty statement of the Protector of Aborigines, presented earlier, explicitly gave him responsibility for the care of sick, infirm and destitute Aborigines who were incapable of providing for themselves as one of his major duties.

“8. He must carefully observe their means of subsistence, and while leaving them in this respect as much as possible to their own exertions, he must see that they do not, at any time, fall into destitution.” 1839.
With that end in mind, a series of ration depots were set up across the Province. The government had a policy of restricting rations to only those who were in genuine need, a policy which brought it into conflict with various charitable institutions over a definition of what “genuine need” might be. Examples from the Protector’s Annual Reports indicate the sort of scrutiny he was under. The attitude of the government, and its Protector of Aborigines, placed great emphasis on the “while leaving them in this respect as much as possible to their own exertions” part of the duty statement. This is best displayed in an example from the Protector’s 1899-1900 Annual Report. Here, the Protector effectively challenged the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association by printing the presentation of a government representative’s answer to criticism of the government’s rations policy. It would appear that government critics would like to see Aborigines receive more rations, but the Minister gives an explanation of the rations’ system policy and effectively chastises the delegates, telling them to reconsider their policy of “indiscriminate charity”:

“APPENDIX
At the annual meeting of the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association, in the Town Hall, Adelaide, on the 8th of October instant, His Excellency Lord Tennyson, who presided, ....
The Minister of Agriculture and Education, (Hon. E.L. Batchelor) said: - ... ... In South Australia the public funds, so far as the natives were concerned, chiefly went in providing rations and clothing in depôts scattered about the colony, and also the assisting the missions like those under this association (the A.F.A.) He had heard criticisms – he was not referring to His Excellency’s that evening, that they did not do enough in the way of providing food and clothing for the natives. He was personally quite convinced that it was possible to do more harm than good by indiscriminately providing food and clothing all over the place, and so leading the natives to think there was no necessity for them to work. They might spend four or five times as much money as at present, and do a great deal less good than was being done. Idleness among whites or blacks bred all kinds of trouble, disease, and finally death, and if they took care that the assistance rendered by the public always went in the direction of helping those institutions which aided in providing work for the natives, they would do far more good than by public or private indiscriminate charity to the aborigines. He had seen natives in a good many places.” 1899 – 1900.

The Protectors published many oblique external criticisms of the rations policy, and continued to mount a defence of it. One example of this comes from the 1879 Annual Report. Clearly the extracts, below, were in response to some undocumented criticism of the Protector of Aborigine’s distribution of rations in the Far North-East of the State involving allegations that the Aborigines were in a “miserable condition”. Although the source of the initial criticism was not revealed, the three extracts presented from the Annual Report of that year were clearly responses from his rations distribution network in the region to the Protector’s inquiries about the real situation on the ground. There are references to suggestions that Aborigines were living in “a miserable condition”, in conditions of “starvation”, “severe privation”, and even “reduced to cannibalism”. The three replies he received were:
“Beyond the limits of my district the blacks were more favourably circumstanced. In the Far North and North-West, rainfall had been more abundant, consequently food was more plentiful. The numerous depôts established have averted suffering and privations which otherwise must have been entailed upon the recipients. As a rule, the depôts are under the supervision of gentlemen who dispense the provisions committed to their charge wisely and well. Very little sickness and but few deaths have occurred during the past year.

Reports have been circulated as the miserable condition of the natives in the Far North and North-West. I have very reliable authority for stating that such was not the case. To meet the requirements of the aged, sick, and infirm, depôts have been extended North and North-West.

Many have applied to me for rations for certain stations, which I have declined to recommend. I have also opposed, to the utmost of my ability, applications for the establishment of depôts in centres of population, as I consider such a course detrimental to the interests and well-being of the aborigines and others.”

Sub-Protector Buttfield, 1879.

In the second response it would appear that Rev. Meyer at Kopperamanna Mission was also referring to the same rumours of “starvation” and “privation” as Sub-Protector Buttfield:

“Last week fifty-eight men, in the prime of life, returned with red ochre from Parachilna, thirty miles south of Beltana, and a party of sixty from another tribe had previously, some three months ago, made their first expedition on the same errand. In times of “starvation” red ochre is a secondary matter.

I have said enough to show that in this district it is an exceptionally good season for the natives, and until the receipt of your letter I had not heard the “faintest whisper” of their being privation among the blacks anywhere in the north, and I was on the Cooper nine weeks ago.”

Kopperamanna Lutheran Mission Station, 1879.

And this – “reduced to cannibalism” by hunger?:

“LAKE COONGY, COOPER’S CREEK, FAR NORTH.

Mr. G.B. Armstrong, reports :-

In reply to your communication of the 9th October, 1879, I have to say that the blacks on this run are not reduced to cannibalism, and I do not think any in the district are. I have never known an instance of blacks eating human flesh for food. The black boys working for me inform me that when a chief dies some of the flesh is scraped off the cheeks with a shell and eaten as a mark of respect, and that near relatives of a dead person sometimes eat a part of the cheek as a mark of affection.”

1879.

It is clear from this example that reports of Aborigines living “miserable conditions” have in this instance been greatly exaggerated, and the Protector was using the Annual Report to rebut this criticism. As a general aside, one might note in passing that Mr. Armstrong’s suggestion that flesh is “eaten as a mark of respect” is described in some detail by Police Trooper Gason in Woods’ 1879 book, “The Native Tribes of South Australia” and should not be dismissed a flight of his fancy.

Police officers, who were also the main distributors of rations, were not above criticising the quantity being offered either:
“Wallaroo.- Sergeant Besley, the issuer, reports as follows: ‘I have lately visited the Peninsula as far south as Moorowie, and beg to state for your information that none of the natives below Point Pierce have been supplied with blankets this season, say about sixty adults and fifteen children. I beg further to state that the natives now more than ever require assistance from the hands of the Government, their old resources being now completely cut off. The country is nearly all fenced in, and their services no longer required as lamb minders, and the settlers do not like their hunting in the lambing paddocks which contain the best feed, consequently the best game. Clothing is less plentiful than it used to be, as the number of employees are greatly reduced, the country being fenced, and old cast off clothing is more difficult to obtain, so that the natives at present are not so well fed or clothed as they used to be.’

I visited the Peninsula as far south as Lake Sunday, but without obtaining any evidence of a want of either food or clothing among the natives there. Kangaroo and other wild animals were most abundant, at the encampment of a large number of blacks I saw a great quantity of dried skins, which they told me they intended to sell, or exchange for flour and other necessaries.” 1868.

The Protector investigated the claims himself. Again, he was happy to print the criticism – and then respond to his critics with his on-ground observations, in his next Annual Report.

And as we can see the distribution of rations was an on-going issue for the Protector:

“Complaints frequently reach this office that aborigines are not supplied with sufficient clothing. During the year there have been issued 2,019 blankets, 293 blue shirts, 949 yds. serge, &c., and a supply of discarded uniform shirts have been obtained from the railway Department and distributed.” 1902-03.

“The district under my supervision being very large and scattered I have not been able to visit many depôts, but, through inquiries and regular returns coming in, I have every reason to believe that the stores supplied by the Government have been properly distributed by the persons in charge of the depôts. A few complaints have been made, which were immediately investigated, and found in most cases there was not the slightest foundation, and if found to be any cause it was at once remedied.” Sub-protector’s Report. 1902-03.

The point we would like make here is that the people did care about Aboriginal issues, and were distressed by the obvious needs of the Aborigines, but the Protector followed a deliberate policy of not wanting them to become totally reliant on the government rations system, and tried to encourage Aborigines to either move into paid employment or return to their traditional practices. However, he felt himself to be continually undermined by the “well-meaning folk who claim to protect the rights and liberties of the natives.”

“Rations are issued to all natives camped near Port Augusta and because of this and the lure of the picture shows and betting shops, the native population of Port Augusta is steadily increasing. They require a lot of police supervision as sailors and others visit their camps with liquor and are suspected of going there for immoral purposes. The work of the police in trying to discourage natives from remaining at
Example 2 – Public Scrutiny and Neglected Children:

Another response to criticism - “Attention has been called …”, this time the thorny issue of neglected children is raised. Quite naturally, the various philanthropic associations concerned themselves with neglected and destitute Aboriginal children in and around the camps, and many constantly criticised the actions, or inactions, of government. In the extracts below, the Protector appears to be responding to some implied criticism of government inaction over the handling of neglected children. He deflects the criticism onto Parliament and the Courts and points out he could not act by law. In this series of extracts watch the years tick over as the criticism continues – but still, he could not act:

“Attention has been called to the number of half-castes about the Far North and West, and their condition, especially that of the girls, is not a satisfactory one. “Neglected” European children can be dealt with under the provisions of the State Childrens Act, but a recent legal decision was to the effect that this Act does not apply to aborigines. Some amendment of the law in this respect would seem desirable whereby destitute neglected aboriginal children could be committed to a mission station till they attain the age of 18 years, to apply to orphans and children whose parents are shown to be unable or unwilling to care properly for them.”  

1900-01.

“The moral relations of whites and blacks in the Far North and West cannot be regarded as satisfactory. The laxity of the law makes it difficult, if not impossible, to extend legal protection to native women and girls, unless actual cruelty and ill-treatment can be sufficiently proved.
An attempt was made about three years ago to deal with this question, and the Bill prepared by Mr. Justice Dashwood and laid before Parliament was referred to a Committee of the Legislative Council, and appears to have been dealt with exhaustively, as twenty-one witnesses were examined and 114 pages of evidence taken. The recommendations of the Committee have not so far led to any further action. The difficulty appears to be to succeed in enacting a measure which will afford sufficient protection to aborigines, and regulate their employment by Europeans, without imposing conditions and restrictions of an unnecessary harassing character.”  

1902-03.

“The neglected condition of half-caste children about the Far North deserves some attention. It is difficult to deal with them. Their fathers are mostly unknown, and in the absence of legal proof of paternity cannot be prosecuted. These children usually go about with their mothers, who are unwilling to send them to a mission, and the State Children Act has been held not applicable to aborigines.”  

1903-04.

“The necessity for some additional legislation on behalf of the aborigines was pointed out in the last year’s report of this department, and it was urged that provision should be made for the legal recognition of aboriginal mission stations as reformatory and industrial institutions, the better protection of native women and
children, some system of boarding-out half-caste and quadroon children and apprenticing them to some suitable employment.

It is hoped that some definite action will be taken to introduce a Bill for an Aborigines’ Protection Act during the present session of Parliament.”  

1905-06.

“I trust the Bill for an Act for the better protection and control of the aborigines, now ready, will meet with Parliamentary sanction, as it will be of great benefit and is much needed.”

1908-09.

It is, of course, interesting in retrospect, because here the Protector was subjected to criticism for failing to take the “neglected children” into State care. But note how, when he finally did get some legal authority to act, that also caused a flurry of critical letters to the papers. It is clear that there is constant scrutiny of all government actions:

“During the year several half-caste children have been removed from the black’s camp and placed under the care and control of the State Children’s Department with the most encouraging results; the children are thriving and happy and well, I feel confident, grow up self-supporting members of the community, as they will know nothing of the habits of the aborigines and will be given an occupation.

Several letters have appeared in the press in opposition to the removal of these children from their cruel surroundings, but I think the writers have failed to grasp the seriousness of the problem now facing South Australia and some of the other States.”  

(authors’ emphasis)  

1909-10.

In 1909, the Protector was still using his Annual Reports to apply pressure to his Minister and Parliament to pass legislation that would force the “country justices of the peace” to allow him to act on the children’s behalf:

“I trust the Bill for an Act for the better protection and control of the aborigines, now ready, will meet with Parliamentary sanction, as it will be of great benefit and is much needed.

The half-caste problem is still a difficult one, but as the State Children’s Department is now willing to take charge of the Children, I hope to be able to place under its control all those found wandering and camping with the aborigines. Unfortunately some country justices of the peace consider the State Children’s Act of 1895 does not apply to half-castes, but the Act does not discriminate. It applies to all children under the age of 18 years who are, in the opinion of the justices, “destitute or neglected”; the word “child” being defined as “Any boy or girl under the age or apparent age of 18 years.”

The Adelaide justices evidently recognise this, as two cases I have had placed before them have been dealt with. In the first case the children were remanded for a week to enable the mother to return with them to her husband, who owns a block of land, which she did.

In the other case the child (a girl) was committed to the care of the State Children’s Council. This will, I hope, convince justices that the Act does apply to half-castes and aborigines as well as other children irrespective of nationality.

This being the case, I purpose, subject to Ministerial approval, bringing all wandering half-caste children before the justices with a view to their committal to the care of the State Children’s Council, where they will be educated and trained to useful trades and occupations, and prevented from acquiring the habits and customs of the aborigines, and I feel sure they will, as a rule grow up useful, self-supporting
Incidentally, the policy of the removal of children was not done with any great enthusiasm, and there is no evidence of large scale removals. The Protector knew the policy was the subject of criticism and he used his Annual Report to give his reasoning for his actions. This in reference to removal of part-Aboriginal girls from the Northern Territory:

“With reference to the girls, the country is not yet sufficiently developed to absorb them in the Northern territory. Many of the men on the cattle stations are not married, and there are few white women in the country. Personally, I feel that, for the time being, it is best to continue the practice of sending them to situations in South Australia. This, however, should be considered a temporary expedient and stopped as soon as possible. ... From a humanitarian standpoint, the practice of taking these half-caste children from their aboriginal mothers is objectionable, but it seems fully justifiable for the following reasons:

1. The mothers are nomads, and this is the only way to secure for these half-caste children the advantages of education and training.
2. It is generally reported, and doubtless true, that aborigines in these parts of Australia often kill children not wanted, and especially half-castes.”

(authors' emphasis) 1924-25.

Example 3 – Public Scrutiny and “Rounding up” onto the Missions?

This following extract supplies an example of another contentious issue which the Protector, and indeed the police force, were subjected to popular complaints about: the claims of driving Aborigines out of their traditional land and them rounding up onto missions or reserves. Presumably in response to complaints about the behaviour of Aborigines camped around the city, the Protector was quite open and honest about what he would like to do and why, but is constrained to act within the law. The Protector advertised this to his political masters in his Annual Reports, effectively blame-shifting criticism of his handling of the difficulty of dealing with destitute Aborigines around the city onto the politicians, trying to embarrass them to take action to pass a proposed new law (“This is provided for in the new Act should it become law”):

“There are still a few of the old natives in and around the city and towns who are a source of trouble, being responsible for most of the offences shown in the appended list of convictions.
They are not fit to be sent to any of the missions to mix with the younger ones, whom they would naturally corrupt. They hang about the city begging, and spend the money thus obtained in drink, and even sell the blankets and clothing, &c., provided by the department. They should all be placed and kept on a reserve by themselves, separate from the well-behaved, but at present there is no power to deal with them. This is provided for in the new Act should it become law.”

(authors' emphasis) 1908-09.

It was not legal for Aborigines to be confined in missions or other reserves at the time. The proposed Act referred to above (and passed into law in 1911) did give the Protector the right
to confine Aborigines to reserves, but as we shall see in the later chapter on this issue, the evidence is that this power was used quite sparingly.

Again the Protector was under constant scrutiny and criticism for his handling of Aboriginal policy. In the following extract, we see “adverse comments published in the English newspapers” that the Protector needed to respond too. But those who complained at home and abroad were unaware of the underlying complexity of the problems and that it was they themselves who were exacerbating the problem. This (lengthy) extract is from the Conference papers of the first meeting of State and Commonwealth Protectors of Aborigines held in Canberra in 1937. Mr. Neville was the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, who travelled to Canberra by the train on the Trans-Australian line, and Mr. McLean was Chief Protector for South Australia:

“NATIVES ON THE TRANS-AUSTRALIAN LINE.

Mr. NEVILLE. – This subject concerns both South Australia and Western Australia. The presence of natives along the trans-Australian line has been a source of great trouble for many years to Western Australia, .... Continually, passengers write to the press on this subject, and adverse comments are published in the English newspapers about the miserable conditions of the natives. I absolutely deny that the natives along the Western Australian section of the line are living in miserable conditions. .... I do not want to criticize the South Australian control in any way, and in a sense, the natives cannot be blamed for coming to the train. I merely want to place the facts before the Conference. When these natives approach the train, they are received with extraordinary sympathy by the passengers, who give them money, fruit, cake and many other things, and in every way possible encourage them. At Immarna about 100 very dirty natives of all sorts and conditions, dressed in filthy rags, crowded to the train. I have never seen such a collection. I should have been ashamed to have had anything to do with them. The train stopped at that station for nearly twenty minutes and these natives swarmed round it like flies. One extraordinary feature of this business is that although, ten years ago, there was hardly a child to be seen among the natives along the line, there must have been from 30 to 40 children from ten years of age downwards in that company. Knowing the natives as I do, I am quite satisfied that those children were bred for the purpose of begging. The mothers carried them along the train on their backs, and the little children held out their hands to the passengers who gave them shillings and sixpences and other coins. Their pathetic appeal could not be resisted by the passengers. It seems to me that only two things can be done to remedy this state of affairs. They must be taken away from the line altogether, which would involve the expenditure of considerably more money than Western Australia or South Australia can spare for the purpose, or the passengers must, in some way, be prevented from making gifts to them. It is not charity to these people to give them money. It is actually pauperizing them. On our end of the line they are already properly fed and clothed, and they do not really want for anything. As things are, it is difficult to keep them from contact with the passengers. I understand that the natives are allowed to travel without charge on what is known as the “tea and sugar train”, which once a week carries rations between Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta. The natives get on this train and get off at some station a distance from their own locality and beg from the people on the passenger train when it arrives there. They really move from place to place, and it is very difficult to do anything with them. I suppose it would cost £3,000 or £4,000 in capital expenditure to provide adequate quarters for them away from
the line, and it would probably cost £1,000 a year to maintain them. This must be
done, or the Commonwealth Government must request passengers to cease making
gifts to them. Unfortunately, a feature of the advertising in connexion with the trans-
Australian trip is that aborigines may be seen along the route. These aborigines,
however, bring only discredit upon the Commonwealth. Another element that adds
to the difficulty of the situation should be mentioned. There is a native walk between
the south coast and the gold-fields which is used by 300 or 400 people, who, from
time to time, come down from the interior to enjoy the sympathy of the train
passengers. We have checked this to some extent, but we cannot altogether stop it.
Mr. McLean’s problem is very much the same as ours, but is probably accentuated by
certain missionaries who encourage the people to come to the railway line. Unless
we can get financial help to correct this state of affairs, it is likely to continue.

Mr. McLEAN– The facts are as Mr. Neville has stated. This has been a burning issue
between the Commonwealth railway authorities and our Government for some time.
We issue rations at only one point along the line, and that about four miles from the
railway, where there is water, our object being to keep the natives back from the
stations. We issue them with clothes so that they may appear more or less
respectable, but we find that they hang their clothes on a tree, and present
themselves in their rags before the passengers so as to excite sympathy. The only
solution I can see is to have permanent police officers on duty to turn the natives
back from the railway.”

First Conference of Chief Protectors, Canberra, 1937.

South Australian Chief Protector McLean was clearly stung by the criticism, but had no
illusions as to the usefulness of proclaiming an Aboriginal reserve and attempting the confine
the Aborigines concerned upon it:

“The congregation of aboriginals at places along the Transcontinental Railway
continues to create an unsatisfactory condition for both the aboriginal and the white
men employed along the railway line. This condition is responsible for much
unfavourable comment and criticism from travellers along the line but as yet no
satisfactory solution has been found. Even if a large reserve were proclaimed for
these natives they would in all probability leave the reserve and continue to visit the
line. The only method of punishing them if they did leave the reserve would be by
prosecution in a court of law and sending them to prison, which, with such people
would be quite ridiculous and unsatisfactory.” (authors’ emphasis) 1936-37.

However, in the interior the suggestion for a large new native reserve had been emerging for
some time, championed by some of the police workers in the Far North. This was the
antithesis of the de culturing paradigm; it suggested a complete segregation from the white
community should be attempted in order to maintain cultural and racial integrity. The Chief
Protector was not shy about printing these recommendations in the Annual Reports –
perhaps a signal to Parliament that a policy decision was expected:

“I firmly believe that the full-blooded natives, if allowed to live their primitive
manner of life, and protected from the vices of others, would be happy and
contented. The general condition of the full-blooded native is good. In most cases
they are healthy and apparently contented, and it is only where they are constantly
coming in contact with the whites that any diseases of a serious nature are
prevalent.” Police Report, Sub-Inspector McCarthy, 1920-21
“From the conditions at present prevailing at Mungeranie the constable at present stationed there is of the opinion that it would be advisable, in the interests of the natives generally, to have a reserve proclaimed for them somewhere in the vicinity of Kalamurrina or Poonaruna, on the Warburton River. This would afford them a good deal of security from the whites, besides they would be able to practically keep themselves on this country, where there is plenty of game and fish.”

1921-22.

“M.C. Aiston reiterates his statement contained in last year’s report, that some suitable portion of the back country should be set apart for the exclusive use of the natives, where they could be allowed to live their primitive manner of life, and pursue their tribal habits and customs, and be protected from the vices of others. The race is fast disappearing, and this appears the only practical way of preventing, to some extent, their complete and inevitable extinction.”

1922-23.

“The full-blooded natives, if allowed to live their primitive manner of life and protected from the vices of others, would be happy and contented, but the race is fast disappearing. With further development of the pastoral areas, accompanied by an increase of white population, will hasten their complete and inevitable extinction. In the place of the pure bred and inoffensive native we will have the half-caste and mixed bloods to deal with, whose standard of morality is considerably lower than the pure bred Australian aboriginal.”


“During the past few weeks the reports concerning the aboriginals near the border of Central Australia and in Central Australia have not been so satisfactory. This country produces little food for man or beast; its average carrying capacity being, say, two bullocks to the square mile. The advance of white settlement on these lands means the destruction of the aboriginals’ already scanty natural food supplies, and makes it urgently necessary that reserves should be proclaimed for them and that they should be gradually taught to make good use of same.”


And so?

And so we have seen in the various Protectors’ Reports that the Protectors of Aborigines have been restrained by rule of law, subjected to continuous scrutiny from an interested public and a robust free press, just as any public servant would be scrutinised today. The three examples presented above, the role of the rations system, the policy with respect to confining or not confining Aborigines on government stations and missions, and the dealing with neglected children, are three of the main points of contention in Aboriginal policy for which the Protectors are still receiving the most criticism today. These three points will now be dealt with separately in more detail, covering the period from 1837 onwards during which the “regime” of the Protectors held sway. Some brief mention of the period beyond 1940 will be made. Three other issues are also covered in some detail, since they are also points of modern contention; that is, the operation of the training institutions, the issue of protection of culture, and the census of the Aboriginal population.

Finally, there is an Appendix of maps (Appendix A) which outline the evolution of government ration stations up to 1906, extracted from the Volumes of Letter-Books of the
Protectors of Aborigines from 1837 and an Appendix in some relevant South Australian legislation (Appendix B).

Note, there is some duplication in the texts where extracts cover more than one topic.

When reading these more detailed extracts we hope that you recognise how incorrect the somewhat insulting picture is, that Aborigines were somehow passive victims of the government’s policy and were meekly subservient to the will of the Protectors of Aborigines. Aborigines continually exercised free agency in their decision-making, and were from time to time well capable of frustrating the policy ambitions of the Protectors when they saw fit.
The Protector's Role in Welfare Provision: Rations or Work?

The government policy on rations distribution has always been a subject of controversy, with some of the criticism discussed in the previous chapter. K. Hassell, in her 1921 University of Adelaide thesis, notes the handing out of rations caused problems from the start. This, from 1837, only months after settlement:

“The first official collision with the natives was farcical. It was not with bloodthirsty savages that the Protector had to deal, but with creatures like spoilt children. They would not eat their porridge. A system of rations had been introduced, by which the natives received from Captain Bromley biscuit, rice, or oatmeal, which they called “bappy”. Of these the last, probably cold and sodden, and certainly sugarless, was, of course, the least appetizing. It was when there was a shortage of biscuit and the diet of the natives was restricted to rice and then to the odious “bappy”, that the trouble began. About seven weeks after Captain Bromley’s appointment some of the natives had refused rice in place of their delectable biscuit, pretending that they would rather be hungry. They knew well that wheedling and intimidation would obtain more palatable food than rice from indulgent or timid settlers. A few weeks later they refused to eat the boiled oatmeal that was given them, although they seemed at times almost starving. They crowded into the Protector’s tent and reviled him. The older ones were especially importunate and abusive, telling him that there was plenty of the coveted biscuit at Glenelg. Arrogant at first, they quickly became insolent, and alarmed the Protector, who peppered the Colonial Secretary with complaints. So clamorous were they for “bicketty” that he considered his life in danger.”

The following extracts describe the situation across the State of South Australia: how many rations depots there were, and how much in the way of rations were distributed, why, and to what effect.

Rations were distributed from the very beginnings of settlement. Initially, settlement did not impact directly on the ability of Aborigines to hunt and gather, but the government was anxious that the sick, the young and the elderly should be basically maintained during the annual cycles of game availability and scarcity. Later, the ration system was extended in recognition that their lifestyles were being impacted by settlement. The provision of rations also extended to the supply of other basic necessities (clothes, cooking equipment, blankets), and the means to gain employment or a better food supply (nets, canoes and even guns and ammunition).

The 1839 job description of the Protector of Aborigines demonstrated that the government recognised an obligation to maintain the welfare of the Aborigines of the State and that the responsibility for the provision of welfare resided with the Protector:

“8. He must carefully observe their means of subsistence, and while leaving them in this respect as much as possible to their own exertions, he must see that they do not, at any time, fall into destitution.”

40
Here, the government’s policy on rations was quite explicit. The government expected Aborigines to be self-sufficient, either by traditional hunting and gathering, or by obtaining employment. However, the sick and aged could expect to get basic food supplies. Even the able-bodied, either when work was in short supply or in times of natural food shortage, could also expect to be maintained by the government:

“Wellington. - .... I gave several strong, able-bodied natives rations during the present quarter, as they could not obtain any work – this not being a season when the blacks are employed by the settlers.”  1864.

And the Half-yearly report 30th September, 1865:

Overland Corner, and Chowilla. – .... Corporal Bentley endeavours, as far as his power or influence extends, to get the natives to work for the settlers, and this many of them do at the lambing and shearing seasons. He was obliged, shortly before my visit, to issue rations for a short time “to a number of able-bodied men, as, in the consequence of the flooded state of the river, they were unable to obtain fish; but as a rule no food is given to the healthy and strong.”  1865.

The Protectors and their staff appeared to be attempting to ensure that rations did not replace traditional food sources, by trying to keep as many aborigines away from the towns and out on their traditional lands as possible via the judicious placement of ration depots. Sub-Protector Butterfield also saw the need to respond to criticism relating to reports of “privations” suffered in the Far North Region due to insufficient rations:

“Beyond the limits of my district the blacks were more favourably circumstanced. In the Far North and North-West, rainfall had been more abundant, consequently food was more plentiful. The numerous depôts established have averted suffering and privations which otherwise must have been entailed upon the recipients. As a rule, the depots are under the supervision of gentlemen who dispense the provisions committed to their charge wisely and well. Very little sickness and but few deaths have occurred during the past year.
Reports have been circulated as the miserable condition of the natives in the Far North and North-West. I have very reliable authority for stating that such was not the case. To meet the requirements of the aged, sick, and infirm, depôts have been extended North and North-West.
Many have applied to me for rations for certain stations, which I have declined to recommend. I have also opposed, to the utmost of my ability, applications for the establishment of depôts in centres of population, as I consider such a course detrimental to the interests and well-being of the aborigines and others.”

Sub-Protector Buttfield, 1879.

The government recognised the perils of welfare-ism and wanted to avoid it. It is perhaps for this reason that the amount and type of rations distributed was comparable with the quantities and type of food available at other government institutions, such as prisons and the destitute asylum. The following extract (also presented in the previous chapter) from the Appendix to the Report and Returns, 1899 to 1900, includes part of a speech by the Minister of Agriculture and Education where he essentially outlines the government policy on Aborigines – and the rationale behind the operation of the ration stations:
APPENDIX
At the annual meeting of the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association, in the Town Hall, Adelaide, on the 8th of October instant, His Excellency Lord Tennyson, who presided,.....

The Minister of Agriculture and Education, (Hon. E.L. Batchelor) said: - ...
... In South Australia the public funds, so far as the natives were concerned, chiefly went in providing rations and clothing in depôts scattered about the colony, and also the assisting the missions like those under this association (the A.F.A.). He had heard criticisms – he was not referring to His Excellency’s that evening, that they did not do enough in the way of providing food and clothing for the natives. He was personally quite convinced that it was possible to do more harm than good by indiscriminately providing food and clothing all over the place, and so leading the natives to think there was no necessity for them to work. They might spend four or five times as much money as at present, and do a great deal less good than was being done. Idleness among whites or blacks bred all kinds of trouble, disease, and finally death, and if they took care that the assistance rendered by the public always went in the direction of helping those institutions which aided in providing work for the natives, they would do far more good than by public or private indiscriminate charity to the aborigines. He had seen natives in a good many places.” 1899 – 1900.

The link between “idleness” and early mortality was widely identified as a cause of premature death in Aborigines at the time. In his 1863 General Report, the Protector of Aborigines John Walker, a medical doctor himself, also recognised a link between a lack of work and a predisposition to tuberculosis as a major cause of premature death:

“Extreme indolence also, such as is shewn by many who loiter about the towns and Stations begging their food, and the want of that muscular exertion and mental exhilaration which the chase afforded in their savage state, induce a predisposition [to tuberculosis].” 1863.

On the other hand, the government was well sensitive to criticism, the above speech being clearly in response to some genuine concern, and they recognised their responsibility to supply rations to those genuinely in need.

A second motive for the distribution of rations was its usefulness in gaining the confidence of the remote area tribesmen, and gaining useful intelligence on their movements, their habits, their language and the main personalities in the tribes. Police Commissioner Dashwood and Protector of Aborigines Moorhouse were invited to make suggestions on future policy options to deal with situations like the Baird incident discussed in the previous chapter, where a settler was speared and his stock stolen. Their report on the incident concluded, not with the recommendation for wholesale punishment for the murder and the theft of 2,000 sheep, but with this policy suggestion:

“On the whole, therefore, we do not find ourselves in a position to recommend any course likely to produce beneficial results; but the one which we have in some degree been instrumental in carrying out during our recent visit to Port Lincoln, that is to say, cultivating the acquaintance of the northern tribes by issuing them with flour and blankets at stated periods, and thus obtaining a knowledge of their persons generally, and through interpreters of their own tribes, becoming aware of their haunts, habits, and movements. We see no reason why these measures should not
result in taming the Port Lincoln natives as well as the natives of other districts of the Province, who, in the early history of the Colony were equally savage and ferocious; and we have, upon our own responsibility, in furtherance of these desirable ends, promised that an issue of flour and blankets shall take place at the Three Lakes Police Station, trusting that His Excellency will be pleased to sanction and approve of the same.” 1851.

In his General Report on Aborigines, dated 9th April 1863, Protector of Aborigines Walker wanted to formalise the arrangements and standardise issues, making the following suggestion:

“At present the issues are not made according to a fixed and uniform scale and at some of the depôts the allowance is insufficient whilst at others it is more than enough. I therefore recommend that the following scale be adopted and that all dispensers of stores be directed to make their issues accordingly.

**Ration to each Native per diem**

- **Flour** 1 lb.
- **Sugar** 2 oz.
- **Tea** ½ oz.

I do not think it advisable to issue Rice as an ordinary article of diet – but would use it rather as a Medical Comfort. When substituted for flour the allowance to be 1 lb with 4 oz. of sugar. Authority should be given to purchase Meat for the sick and infirm when required, and to provide in any serious case whatever is certified to be absolutely necessary by any qualified Medical practitioner.

The issues should be made daily wherever it is possible and an account thereof regularly kept – according to the appended “Form” already referred to. Returns of Receipts and issues to be made up and forwarded quarterly as before.” 1863.

Blankets were also more widely distributed from about this time at Walker’s suggestion.

The 1878 half-yearly report stated explicitly the guidelines set out by the Protector to be followed by the issuers rations:

“The following Instructions are furnished to Issuers of Stores at Aboriginal Depôts:

1. **Rations to be issued regularly** – only to the sick, the old and infirm, orphan children, and women with infants under twelve months. All healthy and able natives should be encouraged, as far as possible, to provide for their own and the wants of their families; but occasional supplies may be given able-bodied natives when there is reason to believe that they are in want, and unable to obtain employment or procure their natural food – in every case the reason to be entered in the column “Remarks”.

2. **The rations or daily allowance** to each person receiving relief not to exceed – Flour, 1lb; sugar, 2ozs; tea, 1/2oz; to be entered in monthly return. Rice or sago, as medical comforts, may be substituted for the flour. Tobacco is not to be considered a regular ration, to be issued at stated periods, but is to be given at the discretion of the issuer, as a reward for good conduct or good service in the case of able-bodied natives and a comfort for the aged and infirm.

3. **The usual medical comforts** may be issued when required, and also such other articles as may be issued when certified by a qualified medical practitioner, or...
justice of the peace to be absolutely necessary, the accounts for which are to be certified by the issuer and forwarded to this office with the monthly return.

4. The issuer, when distributing stores, should caution the natives against selling or bartering their clothes &c., for intoxicating liquors.

5. The monthly returns of “Receipts” and “Issues”, “Births and Deaths”, &c., to be regularly kept according to the forms transmitted, and forwarded direct to this office not later than the seventh of each month. Any circumstances that may be thought worthy of mention – such as, whether the natives are employed by settlers; to what extent and for what wages whether there have been any disturbances, &c., - should be entered in the column “Remarks.”

6. Receipts for stores to be forwarded direct to this office as soon as possible after the arrival and inspection of the goods.

7. All returns to be signed and dated.

8. Care should be taken to make requisitions for fresh supplies in sufficient time to secure their dispatch and arrival at a depot prior to the stock on hand being exhausted. ”

But, as an aside, it may be noted that these strict instructions were not necessarily followed at the stations:

“Sir – In submitting my annual report on the condition and general conduct of the aborigines in the Far North for the past year I have the honor to state that the general health and conduct of the aborigines have been good, especially in the interior, where the police report having visited their camps very frequently and found the natives law-abiding and contented. This may be attributed to the action of the police officers stationed in the interior, who now make it a practice when patrolling to carry a liberal supply of aborigines’ rations and issue a supply to all natives (old and young) met with on patrol. By this means it has been found that the natives are far more satisfied and their behaviour is better, as in most cases it is chiefly “hunger” that prompts them to evil practices, such as cattle-killing, &c. ” 1908-09.

The quantity of stores sent out for rations was not insignificant. This table, below, presents a list of the rations distributed from each of the widespread network of fifty-three depots during the year ended 31st December, 1874. Note also the “miscellaneous” column, indicating that it was not just food that was being issued:
Table from Half-Yearly Report, 1874.

Difficult to read, but the following list of a year’s “rations” distributed for year ending June 30th 1909 may assist. The stores issued from forty-four depots were detailed:

“The stores issued to depots during the year for supplying the aborigines are as follows:—Eighty-three tons of flour, 22,728lbs. sugar, 5,051lbs. tea, 3,046lbs. rice, 337lbs. tobacco, 2,140lbs. soap, 420lbs. sago, 1,627 blankets, 431 shirts, 1,199yds. serge, and galatea, 206 tomahawks, 18 American axes, 123lbs. netting twine, 1,150 fish hooks, 175 fishing lines, 1,150 needles, 10lbs. thread, 100 spoons, 145 quart pots, 90 billycans, and 170 pannicans, exclusive of the stores issued by the Northern Territory Department.”

1908-09.

Table from Half-Yearly Report, 1874.
Here is an example of rations issued at Point Pierce, later re-named Point Pearce Station, with a population of around one hundred and fifty-four in 1909. The ration quantities mentioned in the second paragraph represent one week’s rations per person:

“About 45 head of cattle are kept, including 15 dairy cows for supplying the natives with milk and butter. Pigs were sold during the year which realised about £88, in addition to those killed for use on the station. The natives are liberally supplied with mutton produced on the property. The number of sheep killed during the year amounted to 1,150.
The natives are all supplied with free rations, consisting of 7lbs. flour, 2lbs sugar, 10lbs. meat, tea, pepper, salt, and tobacco. In order to give the able-bodied natives an opportunity of purchasing further necessary goods, clothing, boots, &c., are stocked, and the store opened at stated times during the week and goods retailed, which they pay for out of their wages.”

Point Pierce, 1908-09.

The Sub-Protectors oversaw the distribution by the issuers. The issue of rations was carried out free of charge by the ration depots, the positions being honorary:

“During the year I have inspected several depots, and, being able to converse in the native tongue, have ascertained that they were well cared for, and the Government rations were fairly distributed amongst them, and the natives had no complaints to make.”

Sub-Protector Clode, 1907-08.

“The thanks of the department are due to the Adelaide and other hospital authorities for the many kindnesses shown to the sick aboriginals sent there for treatment; the Commissioner of Police and his officers for the ready assistance rendered in ways too numerous to mention; to the depot keepers all over the State for distributing the rations to the aboriginals, free of cost to the department; and the station owners and other settlers for their kindly treatment shown to the natives.”

1916-17.

“The health of the aborigines throughout the State during the year has been fairly good, and their requirements have been well attended to by the depot-keepers, who have cheerfully given their services free of charge.”

1920-21.

Depots were opened and closed depending on the number of Aborigines in the locality and their general need. Appendix A displays the evolving network of ration depots from 1840 to 1906. One should not overlook the logistical problems associated with supplying such a widely distributed network. The problem of finding bullock drays, the rough bush tracks, and the vagaries of the weather compounded the Protector’s problems. The 1879 Annual Report contains this note from the missionaries at Hermannsberg over the border in the Northern Territory:

“The rations forwarded in June by the Government for the support of the aborigines were received in November last.”

1879.

Nor should the costs of cartage be minimised either. A bullock dray, carrying from six to eight tons, cost £7 per ton from Port Augusta to Blinman in 1876 but this expanded to £60 per ton from Port Augusta to the Hermannsberg Mission:
“The increase of the sheep is used as rations for the station, and for the natives who come and go. Last year fully 800 sheep were thus used to save £60 a ton for the transport of rations from Port Augusta.” — Hermannsberg Mission, 1878.

To put this in context, a bullock driver’s annual salary could be as low as £25 per year plus food, and a labourer around £50 per annum. The combined annual salaries for the Protector of Aborigines and his Sub-Protector (Far North) in 1900 (two fairly senior government bureaucrats) is listed in a table below as £262, being £210 for the Protector and £52 for the Sub-Protector. Conversion of cartage rates into today’s dollars is rather shocking. An eight ton load going to the Northern Territory could cost nearly £500, equivalent to three to four years wages for a senior public servant, or ten years wages for an unskilled labourer.

The Quarterly Report for the period ending 30th September, 1864, implies that it is the Protector who sees it as his responsibility to find where the Aborigines were living, and open up depots as necessary:

“It also visited Mount Gambier and Port MacDonnell. The camp at the former place was almost deserted, and at the latter there were about fourteen of all ages. The total number of the Bay tribe does not exceed twenty-five souls. Among them several children and some old and infirm persons who are wholly dependent on the inhabitants for support, and the whole occasionally suffer destitution. A supply of food and other necessities should, I think, be forwarded to Port MacDonnell, and I beg to suggest that the Police-trooper there be requested to undertake the duties of issuer.” — 1864.

Although not all potential depot locations were considered suitable:

“At Mount Burr (13th October) I saw twelve natives, old and young. They seemed well supplied with food and other necessities. Mr. Grist, innkeeper, says there are seven men, five women, and seven children belonging to the Mount, and that some of them suffered want last winter, having nothing to eat but the little he could afford to give them. He has asked to be supplied with stores for the relief of the necessitous, but I am opposed to the issue of rations at any house where intoxicating drink is sold, unless when absolutely necessary, which does not seem to be the case here.” — 1864.

Not Just Food and Clothes

The ration depots did not just distribute food and clothes. Aborigines were also provided with a means to supplement their food, as it was becoming more difficult to obtain by traditional means; Sub-Protector Mason of Wellington on the Murray made the following request for canoes in his Quarterly Report December 1859 (published in the Government Gazette February 1869). (Incidental note: the Lake Victoria mentioned here is the present day Lake Alexandrina; when Princess Alexandrina was crowned Queen Victoria 1837, it was proposed that the name be changed, but the new name didn’t catch on, perhaps because there was another Lake Victoria further upstream):

“I beg to observe that the greatest assistance the Government could render the natives of this district, would be to supply each tribe with two or three canoes, made of light deal planks, for fishing with hook and line, attending their fixed lines, and
getting crayfish and mussels. These articles of native food could not be obtained on the Murray, or the Lakes, without canoes; which the natives have been in the habit of procuring from the gum trees on the western side of Lake Victoria; but the land in that locality being all purchased, the purchasers complain very much at the natives intruding on their land, and destroying their finest trees by taking off the bark for their canoes. The canoes would be supplied at a very cheap rate by Mr. Potts, who is building a small vessel on the Murray near Wellington. Mr. Potts has built a model canoe for his own use; it is made of light deal planks, with a few gum timbers, the same shape as a native canoe, and it would last for years.”  **1860.**

The following year he reported:

“The model canoe lately purchased by the Government for the natives, has been in daily use in crossing the Murray, to and fro, in fishing, and procuring native food; and the natives are quite sensible how superior it is to their bark canoes. I lately saw nine men and women crossing the Murray in it at once. Many are the inquiries made to know when they are to get the canoes promised by the Government.”  **1860.**

And the story continues in the February Gazette of 1861:

“Nearly all the able-bodied natives have been employed at the harvest, and are only now returning to the Murray; most of them are well supplied with blankets and clothing, the produce of their labor, and several have brought canoes, which they cut near the ranges, and paid 10 shillings for each canoe to the settlers, who conveyed them to the Lake. This supply of canoes, and twelve which are building (sic) by the Government, will give them the means of procuring an abundant supply of native food, which they have been very short of for some time.”  **1861.**

Other canoes follow, and other gear was also supplied - fishing gear, axes, rabbit traps, fishing twine, even on occasion, guns and ammunition with the added aim of allowing Aborigines to earn a living and potentially become independent members of the money economy:

“Lower Finniss .... During the winter many suffered from cold, but no deaths occurred. The twine lately sent has been made into nets and lines; and, although until lately the state of the weather and of the river or lake were not favourable for catching fish, now they are taken plentifully.”  **Quarterly Report, Sept. 30th, 1864.**

“Murray Districts. – Corporal Bentley writes – ‘The healthy natives were employed at the sheep-stations during shearing. When this work was done, I issued twine to make nets for catching ducks, the water being too high for fishing. It takes three pounds of twine to make a net.”’ **1865.**

“I beg respectfully to suggest that a few axes be sent to this depot for distribution amongst some of them when out of employment; it would greatly facilitate their being constantly employed, either cutting firewood for the residents, or brush-fencing on some of the stations. It would further improve their condition if some blue shirts were sent up, to be given to the able-bodied men who receive no blankets.” **1865.**
“At present the natives support themselves chiefly by fishing and duck-shooting, and by washing, cleaning, chopping wood, &c., for the white people. In harvest time many of them are employed by the farmers, and are well remunerated for their labor.”

(authors’ emphasis) 1864.

“McGrath’s Flat. – Mr. McCallum, writing in June, reports the conduct and health of the natives satisfactory. A few were suffering from colds, prevalent at this time of the year. Fish and game are tolerably plentiful on the shores of the Coorong, and the natives in this locality are less dependent on supplies from the depot. Two additional canoes were supplied to this station in the early part of the year.” 1874.

“DEPOTS.
There are now fifty-three depôts in existence, at which blankets, various stores, and medicines are kept and distributed, as necessity requires it, among the aborigines. Nineteen canoes have been recently supplied to the depôts on the Murray and Lakes.”

1874.

“The able-bodied find no great difficulty in making a living by their own exertions, and the depôts, which are sufficiently numerous and judiciously distributed, afford the necessary relief to the old, sick, and infirm. I would recommend that a few more canoes be supplied to deserving natives who have families and other relatives depending on them for support; this will relieve the depôts, while it assists these people to lead a life of industry in a way that accords with their natural habits and instincts. A considerable sum of money is earned every year by the aborigines of the Lower Murray and Lakes, probably amounting to not less than £1,500. They do not, however, derive much real advantage from this – a few purchase useful articles, such as clothing, guns, and boats, but the majority squander the money, chiefly in exchange for intoxicating liquors.”

1879.

The police who issued the rations appeared to take their duties very seriously. Police Trooper Richards at Fowler’s Bay laments having insufficient time to make a net for the local Aborigines. It may be worth reminding the reader that being an open ocean port, it is unlikely the Aborigines would have traditionally used nets for obtaining fish:

“The quantity of rations supplied here is quite sufficient. I have a difficulty getting the women’s dresses made. The want of a net is much felt, the old one having been in use nearly five years, and I have not had time to make a new one.” 1874.

And from other reports, these for Rev. Taplin:

“Point MacLeay (sic)... In a subsequent report (October), Mr Taplin says- ‘The natives, during the quarter, have generally been healthy and peaceable. No quarrels or fights have occurred; and many of the men and women, by working for us and the neighboring settlers, earned good wages, which have been judiciously laid out in clothes, guns, powder and shot, &c. ... I think no grog has been purchased.’

MacGrath’s Flat  ... Now that the duck-shooting season is about to commence, a few boats would be of very great use up here for the natives to cross to the other side, where they obtain most of their game.” (authors’ emphasis) 1865.

“In April, I visited the Lake depots. A few days before my visit to Point MacLeay, a violent assault was committed on an old man, named Kropinyeri, by two blacks,
Pelican and Giles; who were afterwards convicted of the offence at Strathalbyn, and sentenced to three months’ imprisonment. In a letter, written the day after its occurrence, Mr. Tapley (sic) states – ‘The cause of the affair is as follows. Kropinyeri has a son, William, who, with his wife, Jean, has embraced Christianity and been baptized. William, before he was a Christian, had another wife, a girl of fourteen, named Tina. He felt it his duty when he became a Christian to put this, latter wife away. Tina is a near relation of Giles and Pelican, and they with her other relatives were much offended with William for putting her away. One Sunday night they waylaid him as he went from Service and he narrowly escaped their murderous hands. **For days he had, with his fellow-Christian Polteena, to carry a gun for protection when out of my sight.** After a bit, William’s enemies professed to be reconciled to him, and all seemed going on well till yesterday, when they committed the brutal assault; which I have described, on his father, and said, as they did so, that it was to revenge the old grudge.’

I examined the old man, but he was evidently more frightened than hurt. He had been struck with a “plongge”, and therefore, according to a prevalent superstition, believed that he was given over to the power of the Evil One, and would certainly die.”

Probably, Protector Walker has mistakenly confused Mr. Tapley (of Tapley’s Hill / Tapley’s Hill Road fame) who is also mentioned in the Protector’s Letter Book because of his other dealings Aborigines, with the mission superintendent, Rev. Taplin, who is more likely to have been the informant at Point McLeay since this incident is described in similar terms in his mission diaries.

Incidentally, Taplin tells us in his diaries (17th Dec, 1861) that a “plongge” is a type of sorcerer’s club:

> “I learn that all the plongges come from the myall country and are made of myall wood. They say that there was plenty of poison in that country and that the people there threw it (the poison) over towards this country but it pitched in the lake and so the poison of the plongge comes from the lake.”

But generally, Aborigines were being assisted into the money economy:

> “Wellington. – Corporal Rollison, after again referring to a great want of canoes, says:- ‘The neighbourhood of Wellington is very favourable for shooting in the swamps. * * * (sic) I think if there was a small quantity of powder to give to some of the blacks who have guns it would be a great blessing to them, as **a great number of the Murray tribes have guns**, and both the males and females shoot, and I have often seen them(able-bodied men) starving for want of powder and shot to shoot game. They most frequently borrow the money to buy ammunition, and pay for it in game, and often the storekeeper trusts them till they get the money to pay, which they do most punctually.’”

> “Employment – Very little offered by the farmers; the able-bodied natives catch fish and leeches for sale, and also shoot wild fowl (when they can buy powder and shot). Some cut fire wood for the inhabitants when required, but of late the farmers sell their wood by the cord, instead of long and large wood.”
“Tarpeena.  Mr. C.F. Sheppard reports :-  About the middle of June, a party of eight able-bodied men came to me, stating that they could not get any work, but having three guns of their own, if I would be answerable to the storekeepers for them to get some flour, powder, and shot, until the skins were sold, they thought they would be able to make a good living. They have been doing so until a short time before Christmas, when they separated for the purpose of harvesting.”

1875.

“The stores, blankets, &c., supplied by the department have been a great help and of good quality. The second-hand railway uniforms (which for the first time for many years you were unable to send this winter) have been much missed by the old men. Canoes are also badly needed to enable them to eke out a living by fishing, and also more netting twine.”

Point McLeay, 1903-04.

“On the Murray and lakes some new boats have been distributed, and canoes and guns are frequently repaired, the native owners being required to pay a portion of the cost, more or less, according to their ability, to encourage habits of industry and self-reliance.”

1905-06.

“Many of them have been assisted in the purchase of boats, guns, fishing nets, seed wheat, &c., with but little good resulting.”

1914-15.

“The usual routine work in supplying rations, blankets, clothing, and medical assistance to the aboriginals has been maintained throughout the year, and there has been no falling off in the demands made on the Department.

This year a large number of natives were supplied with rabbit traps. Skins and carcasses were bringing good prices and by this means many of the men were able to provide their families with clothing and the necessary additions to the department’s rations.

Eight hundred and seventy-seven blankets were issued. In spite of the fact that the blankets are of good heavy quality, the requirements are about the same each year as the rough treatment they receive at the hands of the aboriginals makes it necessary to renew them annually.”

1935-36.

“United Aborigines Mission, Nepabunna.- The superintendent of the Nepabunna Mission reports a successful year’s work with very little unemployment. The men not engaged in the surrounding stations were provided with rabbit traps, and were able to earn good wages. More than 22,000 rabbit skins were sold, and also a large number of fox skins. As the rabbits were trapped in the district, it will be seen that the aborigines are performing useful community service in addition to maintaining themselves and their families.”

1939-40.

“The large majority of the aborigines in this area earn their own living by hunting game and natural foods. In addition, the men who engage in “dogging” receive from the mission goods to the full value of the scalps, viz., 7s. 6d. less freight charges.”

Ernabella Mission, 1939-40.

“The young adult males organized hunting expeditions and destroyed a large number of wild dogs and foxes. Proceeds of sales of skins and dog scalps enable the hunters to maintain themselves in comparative comfort during the dry season.”

Koonibba Mission, 1943-44.
A lack of firewood became an issue on some stations and reserves, as shown in these extracts from Protector of Aborigines, John Walker in his Quarterly Report 30th September, 1864:

“Goolwa and Port Elliot .... One of the greatest wants is firewood, which is very scarce in the neighbourhood of their usual camping place. Mr. Jones kindly lends them, occasionally, a horse and cart, to bring in a load from the scrub, or unpurchased land at a distance from the township; and canoes (four in number) supplied by the Government some years ago, and lately put in thorough repair, are employed by the natives, not in fishing only, but also in carrying wood from Hindmarsh Island, where it is abundant. A few good axes should in future be substituted for the tomahawks now issued to them, which are comparatively little use. At Port Elliot also there is little firewood within reach of the natives; but, through the kindness and liberality of the white people, a supply sufficient for the whole winter was provided for them – one settler contributing as much as £5 for this truly benevolent purpose.”

“McGrath’s Flat. – The depot here has only been established about two months. During that time, forty-three have received rations, many of them being out of employment and destitute. Since the weather became warmer, they have gone off to their fishing grounds, and are getting abundance of their natural food. This has been a severe winter with the blacks on this station, in consequence of the very cold weather, and they, being unable to fish on account of the floods being so high and the current so strong in the river, several have lost their lives, and some of their new nets – being swept away by the current. They suffer very much from want of fire, as the wood is far from them, and they will not shift their wurleys nearer to it.”

The issuing of firewood was continued, particularly at Point McLeay, where the shortage seemed most acute:

“Rations are supplied to every native unable to obtain employment, and firewood is provided for every home and camp free of charge. Special rations are provided for the sick and infirm natives, and each family on the Station receives a daily allowance of milk. Single men work two days in return for rations.”

“Food and clothing have been provided by the Board for the old and infirm aborigines. Milk is distributed daily from the dairy free of cost to each family and in addition the school children have an issue of warm milk each school day. The Board provided 20 tons of firewood per week during the winter months and 10 tons per week during the rest of the year. Each householder receives an issue of firewood for which no charge is made.”

A few items from the Protector’s budget papers in 1900 show the more complete range of goods distributed. Most of these expenditures were repeated in each year’s financial records. One of the interesting things to note is that the budget for “Salaries”, just £262, indicates a staff of just two; himself and the Sub-Protector for the Far North District:
The following statement shows the expenditure of the “Aborigines Vote” for the year ending June 30th, 1900:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s.</th>
<th>d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rations issued at the various depôts</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing, blankets, &amp;c.</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoes, fishing tackle, &amp;c.</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical attendance and medicines</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport charges sundry depôt</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial charges, destitute aborigines</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firewood (old, infirm, and sick)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundry rations, prisoners, and travellers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual contribution, Adelaide Hospital</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potty, travelling, and sundry expenses</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services rendered by issuer of stores, Goolwa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical services in office of Sub-protector, Port Augusta</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving, issuing, and storing aborigines stores at G.P.O. stores</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone exchange</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and stationery</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.S. telegrams</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.S. postage stamps</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant-in-aid Aborigines Friends' Association</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries, Protector and Sub-protector, Far North</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£4,282</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E. L. HAMILTON, Protector of Aborigines.

As well as the rations expenses, in 1901 we have:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s.</th>
<th>d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canoes, boats</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical attendance and medicines</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial charges, destitute aborigines</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firewood (for old, infirm, and sick)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundry rations, prisoners and travellers</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing tackle, axes, tinware, &amp;c.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1900-01.

"Boats, guns, and repairs to same £ 10 0 0 "

1909-10.

Legal costs were also a recurring expenditure, e.g.:

"Defending prisoner (charged with murder) £ 5 5 0 "

1903-04.

**Medical Needs**

The medical needs of the aborigines, even from the earliest days, were met free of charge. This extract from a report for the months of February – March from the Sub-Protector of Aborigines at Wellington on the River Murray was published in the South Australia Government Gazette of April 14, 1859:
“I have visited the natives three times, at their principle camps on the Lakes, supplied the sick and aged natives with provisions and medicine. I found a great amount of sickness amongst the aged natives – and with them I left a liberal supply of flour, tea, sugar, and tobacco; and induced several, who required daily attendance, to settle near my residence, at Wellington, where I now have thirty aged, blind, and diseased natives who require a daily supply of food and other attendance.

An aged woman has been under my care for some time with diseased breast; she has suffered so severely from the disease, which is gradually eating away her breast, that I have been obliged to call for the advice of the medical gentleman residing here, who is now treating her for the disease. It is quite painful to witness the poor creature’s sufferings, and the smell of the breast has become so offensive that the other do not like her near them.”

The following subscript from the Secretary of the Commission of Crown Lands was appended to the report:

“They are instructed to obtain medical advice for the case mentioned in the above report, and also for all cases of sickness amongst the aborigines, when necessity for such advice appears. E.T.W., Sec. C.C. L.M. April 7th, 1859.”

Sub-Protector Mason maintained his care for the sick and aged as reported in his March Quarterly Report:

“Several of the healthy natives have been employed by me in procuring wood, reeds, &c., for building warm huts for the winter, for the accommodation of the sick and infirm, and a large number of their friends are preparing to pass the winter near the station.”

In his General Report on Aborigines, dated 9th April 1863 Protector of Aborigines Walker made the following suggestion:

“A proper supply of Medicines should be forwarded to each of the depôts not already provided therewith for many cases of disease would no doubt be cured and much suffering avoided in others, by the administration of such remedies as might safely be entrusted to non-professional hands. In populous districts such as Mount Gambier Goolwa and Wellington it is desirable I think if possible to engage the services of a Medical gentleman, at an annual salary to attend the Natives (within a certain radius) in cases of extremity and to give advice, Medicines, &c., to all the sick belonging to the district on supplication. Such an arrangement would be a great benefit to the poor Natives and almost if not quite as Economical as the present plan of paying the ordinary fee for any professional service rendered to them.”

In addition, in later years, each station, in general, had a medical centre / hospital. Serious cases were sent to Adelaide Hospital etc. Spectacles and dental work were also provided for:

Port Augusta. – .... I have visited the township in January and again in March, and all of the natives then seen were in good health, with the exception of two or three – one of whom was suffering from cancerous tumor. This poor fellow I persuaded to accompany me to Adelaide, per steamer, and obtained admission for him into the
Hospital; but unfortunately he left it the day after, and, as I have since learned, returned to Port Augusta. 1866.

“The natives west of Port Lincoln have suffered very much during the past six months from an attack of a disease said to be small pox. The late Dr. Lawson, of Port Lincoln, and Dr. Gething, of Port Adelaide, were sent, by the direction of the Government, to visit and prescribe for these people, and it is gratifying to state that their efforts and advice, in addition to the care and considerate attention the issuers of stores at various western depôts have been instrumental in stopping a disease that threatened the destruction to the native population of that portion of the province.” (authors' emphasis) 1867.

“NARACOORTE. Sergeant Besley reports: - .... “Frank Lawson” and “Robert” died, the former from inflammation of the lungs, and the latter pleurisy and congestion of the liver. Dr. Gunning attended them, and ordered wine, brandy, and butcher’s meat for the sick which was duly supplied. .... One “Jacky Jacky”, suffering from hyatids on the liver, was very successfully operated on by Dr. Gunning, who extracted two pints of fluid from the cyst. I am glad to state that he is now recovered. He received every care and attention from Dr. Gunning, and at the Doctor’s suggestion I engaged an old woman to attend to him as nurse.” 1879.

“So far as the means at the disposal of this department will permit, every provision is made for the care of the sick. In most country districts the medical officers who have charge of the “destitute poor”, are also appointed to look after those natives in need of their services; in other localities special arrangements are made for the same object. In a few places, where the aborigines locate in considerable numbers, sheds have been erected to shelter the old and infirm, and afford temporary hospital accommodation to the sick.” 1879.

“The medical needs of the natives have been attended to throughout the year; the medial officers and hospital officers and attendants have all given to native patients every attention. Owing to the outbreak of enteric fever at Point Pearce Station, three fully qualified nurses were sent there by this department. A temporary hospital was established there, and the natives segregated. The disease has been stamped out. Four aboriginals died of this disease. There would have doubtless been many more deaths if effective measures had not been taken for dealing with the epidemic.” (authors' emphasis) 1922-3.

“A suitable building has been set apart for a hospital, and the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association has kindly promised to supply a resident nurse, for which I thank them. This will be a great advantage to the institution.” Point Pearce, 1923-24.

“I recommend that a small hospital be built at this station. This would secure much better attention and care for the sick, and obviate the necessity in many cases of patients to be sent, as at present, to the Adelaide Hospital. The Aborigines’ Friends’ Association kindly promise to supply a nurse.” Point McLeay, 1923-24.

“Sister M.M. Lenton continues attend to the hospital and medical requirements of the natives, and has proved herself a very capable nurse. The Hospital has been utilised to a greater extent this year than in the past and nearly all maternity cases are now treated on the Station, when necessary the
mothers are taken into the Hospital. In addition to the hospital patients, the Sister attends to the dispensary, where all minor complaints are treated daily. She also visits patients in their homes and renders necessary assistance. Dr. J.R. Cornish, of Tailem Bend, is the Medical Officer for the Station and he is consulted in cases of serious illness. Any serious complaints which cannot be treated on the Station are removed to Murray Bridge or Adelaide Hospital. This service is all given to the natives without charge except in the case of confinements when mothers who receive the maternity allowance are charged thirty shillings for attention and accommodation at the hospital. Those who do not receive the Maternity Allowance are not charged.

Maternity Allowance is only paid to those mothers in whom white blood preponderates and this causes a certain amount of dissatisfaction amongst the people. It is for this reason that a hospital charge was decided on.”

Point McLeay, 1931-32.

“All cases of sickness reported to me have received proper care and attention, and serious cases which could not be treated in the localities in which they occurred were transferred to the Port Augusta and Adelaide Hospitals. The medical needs of the aborigines are met in some centres by medical officers appointed by the department, while all public and subsidised hospitals are available to them.”

(authors’ emphasis)

Point McLeay, 1932-33.

A complete health survey was initiated in 1942 to look for tuberculosis, and to vaccinate for polio etc.:

“Following the practice established in recent years a considerable number of aborigines were referred to the Chest Clinic of the Royal Adelaide Hospital for X-ray examination. Where the circumstances permitted, whole families were examined if one member of the family displayed signs of infection. Of the large number of persons examined at the clinic this year, only two young people were found to be suffering from tuberculosis, and they were immediately placed in hospital and are now well on their way to recovery.”

Point Pearce, 1943-44.

“Twelve aborigines were provided with spectacles, and eight others with artificial dentures.”

Finniss Springs, 1943-44.

In the absence of a doctor in a remote area, all manner of people endeavoured to fill in this void:

“Six male aborigines were found to be suffering from venereal disease. These have been treated by Constable Fox and have completely recovered from their trouble.”

1921-22.

“Western Division. - Inspector Millowick, of Whyalla, reports that Police Officers of the Western District have maintained a friendly supervision of the aborigines throughout the year. ... In a number of cases officers in this Division have travelled
Medical patrols were carried out into the reserves to treat those still living in a tribal circumstances:

“Dr. Trudinger also visited Ernabella during the year, and, in addition to attending to sick aborigines at the mission, carried out a medical patrol into the reserve for aborigines adjacent to the mission.” Ernabella, 1943-44.

Note also the arrival of technologies:

“We rejoice in the fact that Koonibba Hospital is now an accomplished fact .... Natives have been brought for treatment from as far as Ooldea. The Bush Church Aid Society has also transported natives to Koonibba in its medical plane which lands here if required when passing over.” 1937-38.

“A pedal wireless set installed by the mission is proving of great value in dealing with cases of serious illness.” Ernabella, 1939-40.

“The missioner has attended to the medical needs of the people under the direction of the flying doctor at Broken Hill, who has made two trips to the mission by aeroplane to remove patients to hospital.” Finiss Springs, 1943-44.

Shelter

Perhaps recognising that the difficulty of getting materials for traditional housing was becoming acute in some areas, the missions and government recognised a need to meet housing requirements. The improved health of those living in cottages was a further motive.

The provision of more permanent structures including conventional houses or “cottages” was probably encouraged by the systematic declaration of “reserves” for Aboriginal use across the State and the ability of the government to lease land to missions for use on behalf of Aborigines. Placement and size of reserves was largely coincident with ration depots or other emerging or traditional encampment sites.

The Crown Waste Lands Act of 1872 allowed the government to reserve portions of unalienated land for the use and benefit of Aborigines as declared “reserves”, although land was effectively being reserved prior to this. (This system of reserves should not be confused with the 160 acre grant system mentioned elsewhere, which was aimed at individual Aboriginal agricultural ventures.) The Aborigines Act of 1911 allowed for the long-term lease of Crown land to mission establishments which were also a form of reserve. The reserve network could include small encampment sites where water might, if necessary, be provided as well as some assistance with rudimentary shelter, to large stations of eventually substantial housing, schooling and attached farm lands. In the far North West and West of the State larger reserves for the continuing of traditional hunting practices were eventually declared, with neighbouring missions establishments as a point of contract and assistance as required.
The Rev. Taplin at Point McLeay Mission acknowledged the improved health outcome from proper housing:

“The improved health of the natives who live on this station is acknowledged by their countrymen. This improvement is seen in the increasing number of children; savage life is most destructive of infant life. Let there be a very hot day, or a very cold day, and immediately the infants in the wurleys begin to show symptoms of injured health – only the very strongest survive such circumstances, and they often with impaired constitutions. The superior health of the infants whose parents live in the cottages is manifest. If we could build more cottages there are at least a dozen families who would willingly reside in them.” 1874.

“Six three-roomed cottages for natives, a six-roomed house for the bookkeeper, and a hospital of eight rooms have been erected by contractors, Messrs. Tait & Voaden, from material obtained from cottages at Pompoota, and are very satisfactory. The work was done under the superintendence of Mr. G.T. Lane, Chief inspector of Soldier Settlements. This building has greatly relieved the housing problem, but more cottages are needed, and I hope to get two more erected from material still on hand.”

Point McLeay, 1926-27.

“Five new wood and iron cottages have been built, under the superintendence of Mr G. T. Lane, Chief Inspector of Soldier Settlements. Owing, however, to the steady increase in the population two or three more new cottages are needed.”

Point Pearce, 1927-28.

“In May, 1933, I visited Swan Reach where approximately eighty natives are camped on a small Government Reserve. The natives have occupied this site for many years, and have camped in bag wurleys which needed renewing every year to make them weather proof. It was decided that something more substantial would provide greater comfort for the natives and prove less costly to the department in the long run, so sufficient galvanized iron was provided to roof huts for these people. The erection of the huts was done by the natives under the supervision of the police officer. The framework was made from native pines and the sides covered with bags. The police officer has reported that the huts are now finished, and the camp presents a much better appearance, and in addition the natives have a more permanent shelter. I have recommended that the ground on which these huts are erected be proclaimed an aboriginal reserve.” 1932-33.

Cooperation over Fire Prevention

It appears that settlers knew how to issue their own supplies of desirable commodities to Aborigines, in order to secure their co-operation in important matters where habits and interests might differ. The Protector’s Quarterly Report for period ending 31st March 1850:

“In order to induce the natives to be careful not to burn the grass during the dry season, several gentlemen, stockholders owning runs around the Lakes, have offered rewards to them to extinguish all bush fires that may occur on their runs. E. Stirling, Esq., gave them three bags of flour, and I have just received from that gentleman 10 lbs of tobacco, to be distributed among the natives of the west side of Lake Victoria. D. McFarlane Esq. has promised the natives of the Peninsula (Lake Albert) several
blankets and two fat bullocks, as soon as the rainy season sets in when all danger of bush fires is past. The natives are now very careful in not allowing bush fires to spread, knowing, if they do, they will lose their reward.” 1850.

Sub-Protector Mason’s report in the Government Gazette of December, 1852 included:

“Mr. Edward Stirling has again distributed his annual present of tobacco to the Lake tribe, as a reward for their care in preventing the spreading of bush fires on his runs in the vicinity of Lake Victoria.” 1852.

And later in 1859:

“About forty young men are in constant employment with the settlers, as stock-keepers, shepherds, and general servants; they appear to give satisfaction to their employers and are satisfied with the wages they receive. Throughout the district the natives are treated kindly by the settlers. I have much pleasure in reporting the kindness of Mr. Gollan, of Lake Albert, who has kindly given, during the winter, upwards of one ton of flour, and killed six aged bullocks, to feed the natives of that lake and the Coorong; the only return requirement from them is, that they will be careful not to burn the run in summer.” 1859.

Soap, Piano Lessons and Christmas Cheer:

And some interesting extracts from various Protectors’ Reports:

“On the 25th instant, I visited Mrs. Smith at Mount Gambier ... Mrs. Smith told me she had invited all the blacks in the district to a tea party.” 1866.

“On Christmas Day last eighty aborigines sat down to dinner here, on roast mutton and plum pudding. I thought that the people of the Colony would like to know that these poor people, in some measure, shared the pleasures of this festive season, as so I made provision accordingly.” Point McLeay, 1866.

“The issuer at the Needles very kindly took the trouble to make fifty-nine of these natives a Christmas dinner. Sixty pounds of plum pudding and a whole sheep cut up and baked made their hearts rejoice with such a dinner as they never had before at this place. We supplied the fruit from the Point McLeay store. These simple-minded people highly appreciate and long remember such a treat as this.” Point McLeay, 1878.

“Venus Bay. – Police Trooper Provis writes – “Many of the natives frequently ask for soap, for washing purposes. If soap was supplied it would tend to promote the habits of cleanliness and industry.” 1865.

“Wellington.- Corporal Rollison reports:- ‘The blacks are in much want of soap; they throw away, very frequently, clothes that would be very useful to them if they were washed, particularly shirts and trousers. They often come and beg soap, from us, and soap is the principle thing they will steal when they come about the station.” 1865.
“The natives are very fond of games and sports of any kind; and besides cricket and bagatelle which they indulge in, one night a week is set apart for dancing in the schoolroom, and in which nearly all, old and young, take part, and were it not for the rather heavy boots and bare feet of some, their graceful manner and movements would surprise many of those of our own people who delight in the ‘light fantastic toe’.”

Poonindie, 1879.

“I wish to place on record my thanks to Mr W. Lambert of Blinman, who gave eight goats to some old natives camped at Parachilna, when game and other meat was scarce. Station owners generally provide quite a lot of meat for natives camped on their properties, and the department gratefully acknowledges these acts of kindness.”

1935-36.

“Being a musical enthusiast he (Rev. Turner) is teaching some of the young girls to play the piano and has a number of young boys learning to play stringed instruments.”

Point McLeay, 1936-37.

“Work was commenced on a children’s playground. A suitable area has been fenced, and four swings erected. Additional equipment will be added in the near future. …… Regular picture shows and other functions were arranged to provide entertainment for the local residents.”

Point Pearce 1943-44.

“A scheme for the beautification of the settlement has been inaugurated. At the Central Reserve lawns, flowering shrubs, and ornamental trees are being planted. In addition, 200 gum trees have been planted along various roadways in the village.”

Point McLeay, 1943-44.

“The Port Augusta branch of the Country Women’s Association, and also the Girl Guides, provided a party for the children during the Christmas season.”

Umeewarra, Port Augusta, 1943-44.

“Christmas cheer was provided for the old and infirm natives and children at Point McLeay, Point Pearce, and the United Aborigines’ Missions by donations from the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association, parcels collected by the United Aborigines’ Mission and gifts from the Father Adelaide Christmas fund.”

1935-6.

“The Boys’ Brigade is a popular organization, and caters for the needs of the young people.”

Ooldea Mission, 1943-44.

“The Red Cross Committee arranged several functions with satisfactory results”.

Point McLeay, 1943-44.

“Two sewing machines and a knitting machine will soon be installed to provide training in dressmaking, etc., for the girls in the upper grades of the school. All scholars are given hot cocoa to drink at recess time each day. The Mission Board is endeavouring also to procure playground equipment for use by the children during leisure hours.”

Koonibba Mission, 1948-49.

“One feature deserving special mention is that an effort made in response to the United Nations Appeal for starving children resulted in a sum of £45 being raised on the station for this worthy cause.”

Point McLeay, 1948-49.
Aborigines Could Apply for Small Holding Leases

Another method by which attempts were made to bring Aborigines into the money economy was by land lease grants. Guidelines for the granting of leases for farming purposes were set out in the letter published in 1840 by the Colonial Secretary, Charles Sturt, as quoted in the second chapter. By 1874 leases had clearly been granted, but there were apparently some legal problems that needed to be dealt with. One of the recommendations put forward by Rev. George Taplin, published in the Government Gazette in 1874 suggested:

“It will be remembered that some time ago the law officers of the Crown declared that the occupation licences under which some of the natives held certain sections of land were invalid, because illegal. Might not some measure be devised by which the Government could give legal tenure to aboriginal natives, so that they might occupy their land of right and not merely by sufferance.”

This had been dealt with by 1878:

“The power of the Crown Lands Act, 1877, to lease land (not exceeding 160 acres) to individual aborigines, has been exercised in a few cases. A half-caste native has obtained a fourteen lease of 160 acres. He is an industrious, intelligent man, has saved money, and now possesses stock and farm implements, and keeps a bank account, and has made several improvements to his farm. Similar leases are in course of issue to four other natives, one of whom recently married a European woman.”

“NARACOORTE.
Sergeant Besley reports: -
No complaints against the aborigines have been reached me during the past quarter.

... An aboriginal named “Charles Runga,” of the Chowilla tribe, River Murray, has resided for many years in this neighbourhood; on the 20th January, 1877, he married Mary Jenkins, a white woman, at Kingston, and has worked ever since on the railway line, and for two years previously. He is now anxious to obtain a grant of land (about 300 acres) on the south side of the railway line, about twenty miles from Kingston. I have known this aboriginal personally for about twenty-three years, and never a more deserving one; he is steady, hardworking, and trustworthy; I therefore trust that this application may meet with favourable consideration.”

“Eighteen aborigines have been settled on blocks of land containing from twelve to 160 acres each. With a little assistance in supplying them with some farming requisites, they will be encouraged in their efforts to earn a living independent of the mission stations.”

“There are about 10 males and 8 female aboriginals and half-castes in the Port Lincoln district; three of the males have acquired land in the Hundred of Louth, and are reported to be doing well.”

Police Report, 1878.

Police Reports, 1899 – 1900.

Police Reports, 1918-19.
“Assistance has been given to aboriginals occupying blocks on the Coorong where feed was destroyed by the disastrous fire which swept over the district during last December. We were able to help these unfortunate native settlers with supplies of hay and grazing for their cattle.”

1926-27.

“Aborigines occupying small reserves in various parts of the State have experienced great difficulty in providing feed for their sheep and cattle, and also in controlling sand drift, because of the serious drought conditions. All possible assistance has been rendered by the Board to persons concerned by providing hay, chaff, cereal rye, superphosphates, etc.”

1944-45.

“SMALL FARMS FOR SELECTED ABORIGINES.

While it is generally agreed that the aborigines of Australia are food gatherers rather than food producers, the Board has endeavoured to provide a sound training in primary production for a considerable number of young men living in the settled areas to enable them to become food producers. At Point McLeay and Point Pearce Stations and also some mission stations farming and dairying operations as well as wool growing are carried out on quite a large scale. Work on the farms on departmental stations is all done by native trainees under the supervision of competent officials with the use of modern power equipment. At Point Pearce large areas are cropped each year under a share farming system in which the land, farm machinery, seed, and superphosphate is supplied by the Board while the labour is provided by the four native share farmers. The farmers live in cottages on the property, rent free, and enjoy many other privileges. They are paid agreed rate of wages and when the harvest is completed are given in addition two bags of every 10 bags of grain reaped.

During the year under review the Board has extended the experimental scheme begun some years ago of establishing selected families on small farms with a frontage to the River Murray and on the Coorong. At Wellington there is a nice block of 132 acres of land suitable for dairying purposes. The “Love” family has been licensed by the Board to occupy and develop the land. A large windmill and tank has been provided by the Board together with seed and superphosphate for one section while the licensee has entered a share farming agreement with a neighbour for cropping the remaining land. He is milking several cows and supplements the income from the farm by engaging in shearing and other suitable work.
At Swan Reach a block of land comprising 155 acres about two miles north of the general camping reserve has been made available to the “Cook” family who have already erected two houses and moved into the new home. The family own a “fishing reach” along the frontage and engage in fishing on a commercial basis. The Board has assisted the family procure the necessary fishing equipment. In addition a new engine and pump with storage tank and piping is now being installed as the land fronting the river has a cliff face 100ft. high. The reserve is heavily timbered and no difficulty will thus be encountered in fencing the property. The family proposes to clear the land and to keep a few cows and some poultry. Income from the proceeds of fishing and other activities will render this family independent and useful citizens.”

1951-52.

But, as a brief aside, the barriers to success with a small holding were always very high. Rev. George Taplin of the Point McLeay Mission Station reported the sad tale of John Sumner in
his diary. Maybe Taplin was being a little harsh in ignoring the problem of a “demand-sharing” community:

“4 June, 1868. John Sumner has applied to the Government for a section of land near Teringi No. 24.”

“2 September, 1868 John Sumner returned from Adelaide where he had been to sign the deeds for a section of land given him by Government.... I went with J. Sumner for a walk round his Section. There is about 70 acres of good land on it. He is going to build a house.”

“24 November, 1869. ... Yesterday our shepherd Wullumme let the sheep get into Sumner's crop. He laid down and went to sleep and let the flock go where they liked. So this morning I sent him off. He is a most useless and worthless lazy fellow.  
25 November, 1869. ... It is almost ruin to poor Sumner. A large portion of his barley is totally ruined.”

“17 November, 1870. Very busy all day yesterday and today seeing after the beginning of barley harvest. I have to quite urge Sumner on, as he is so discouraged because they can't get the machine across the water to his crop.”

“2 December 1872.... Had a long conversation with Sumner. His crop has come to nothing. The poor fellow is much discouraged. This is the third crop of his which has not paid him. I think he will give up farming.”

“10 March, 1873. Afternoon went over to Mr. Moulden's and thoroughly sifted Sumner's affairs. It was very painful. Sumner is very much to blame indeed. He has got heavily into debt without prospect of paying. The system of giving natives Sections is a failure. They get eaten out of house and home by the other natives.  
11 March, 1873. ..... Then had a long talk to Sumner about his affairs. He wept bitterly..... I advised him to give up everything to his creditors and work out his debt.”

The Evolution of the Rations' Policy

As we have seen, all Aborigines in need could receive rations from the government distributed at various sites around the State. In the remote areas, rations were available if native foods are not available due to drought. Otherwise Aborigines were expected to hunt or collect dog scalps, etc., to maintain themselves. There were forty-eight depots in 1904. The number and location of depots changed with need. They were situated where they were required:

“The depôts (forty-eight in number), chiefly in charge of the police, are placed in the localities most frequented by the natives and afford them facilities for obtaining food, clothing, and other comforts. Medical attendance has also been provided in all necessary cases; 281 were treated at a cost of £ 157 14s. 11d.” 1903-04.

“The season has been a trying one in some parts of the north, owing to want of rain, which necessitated the sending of more rations than usual.” 1911-12.

The able-bodied men were well prepared for genuine work:
“During the year many of our natives have obtained employment shearing, wheat harvesting, and general farmwork with surrounding settlers. These men show in many instances that, should circumstances require it, they are quite capable of earning their living independent of the mission.”  

Point Pierce, 1903-04.

but, ... :

“At Point Pierce there are 20,000 acres, worth about £45,000, and the population consists of 136 half-casts and 20 blacks; and yet I regret to say these natives are not contented. Many of them are well able to earn sufficient to support themselves and their families, if they had only been taught self reliance and thrift.”  

Point Pierce, 1907-08.

By the 1911-12 Annual Report, it is clear that the Chief Protector of Aborigines believed that the ration system was not working as intended. The perception was that it encouraged idleness, particularly in the settled areas in the South administered by the mission stations. Too many rations were being handed out to able-bodied Aborigines, was the accusation. In that year's Annual Report the Protector proposed a new policy:


Sir – I have the honor to submit the following Report and suggestions for the future working of the Aboriginals Department :-

For some years I have been making a close study of the present system which has been in operation for a great number of years, and have come to the conclusion that the divided control of the aborigines, between the Department and the Mission, is most unsatisfactory, especially since the Aborigines Act has become law.

The natives on Point Pierce and Point McLeay, who are now chiefly half-castes, are very discontented, and are constantly asking me to do what I can to induce the Government to take control of these stations and work them as industrial institutions for the able-bodied and as homes for the old and infirm.

At Point Pierce there is 17,298 acres of Government land, which I value at over £60,000. The natives which frequent there number about 160, nearly all half-castes and quadroons.

At Point McLeay there are 5,513½ acres of land worth about £15,500, and the natives who frequent there number about 340, 75 per cent. of whom are half-castes and quadroons.

On these stations the natives have been maintained in partial idleness, especially on Point McLeay, which unfits them for any employment; and, as they know they can live at the stations without much exertion, the majority of them turn out idle useless people. The children, after passing through the schools, are allowed to grow up in comparative idleness, consequently they develop useless, lazy habits. Nothing else could be expected. White children brought up under similar conditions would turn out but little better.

If the stations were under Government control this could be altered, as the system of giving rations and clothing for nothing, as far as the able-bodied are concerned, would be discontinued and wages paid instead. The old and infirm should be better maintained than at present. The children could be apprenticed to useful trades, and, after serving their indentures, expected to maintain themselves off the stations.

I do not anticipate that the taking over of these stations would be more expensive than the present system, as Point Pierce I estimate to raise produce worth at least £9,000 per annum, and at Point McLeay a herd of 300 milking cows could be kept,
which should produce cream worth about £2,500 per annum. Pigs and poultry also could be kept in large numbers, and would pay well.

In advocating the taking over of these two stations I am not moved so much by the desire of saving taxpayers’ money as by a wish to raise the constantly increasing number of half-caste, quadroons, and octoroons from the idle, thriftless habits of the black to the level of the white race. This I regard as most important, as in the settled districts the blacks are rapidly dying out and being replaced by a race of half-castes, quadroons, and octoroons, who in turn must inevitably be merged into the general population. It is therefore desirable that nothing should be left undone that will help to convert these people into useful members of the community instead of allowing them to grow up dependents.

If the half-castes are given a fair chance I have great hopes of them; but as long as they are reared as hitherto there is no hope of their rising much above the level of the ordinary aboriginal.

The system of working which I propose for the future is as follows:

1. To resume the lands comprising Point Pierce and Point McLeay and to convert them into two aboriginal industrial institutions.
2. Provide shelter, food and clothing for the old and infirm on a reasonable scale, so that these old people shall be made comfortable and happy for the remainder of their days.
3. Abolish the charity system of rations, clothing &c., as far as the able-bodied natives are concerned.
4. Classify the able-bodied natives and half-castes and pay them wages in proportion to the number of their dependents, so that they can live decently on the stations if they elect to do so, giving them the right to seek outside employment.
5. Pay the young single men and women such wages as will simply keep them, but much less than they can earn elsewhere, which will encourage them to seek outside employment and thus become self-supporting. There is plenty of employment for them if they like to take it, but while they can live at ease on the Mission they will not do so.
6. As soon as the children leave school provide them with employment, either on the stations or apprentice them to suitable trades, so that they can support themselves when grown up, after which they should not be allowed the right of employment on the stations.

....

I have, &c.,

W.G.SOUTH, Chief Protector of Aborigines.” 1911-12.

(authors’ emphasis)

In 1915-16, Point Pearce and Point McLeay Missions were taken over by the government and the new policies introduced:

“The lands of these two missions were resumed by proclamation in February last, with the intention of converting them into Government industrial institutions for aborigines, but the late Government allowed the missions to be carried on temporarily as hitherto. I have long advocated bringing these stations under Government control, so that employment might be found for the ever-increasing number of half-castes and quadroons, who, under the present conditions, are growing up in partial idleness, and a burden on the State. Many of them have been
assisted in the purchase of boats, guns, fishing nets, seed wheat, &c., with but little
good resulting. Most of those helped still depend on the missions for rations, and are
likely to continue doing so until they are found employment and made to depend on
their earnings. This, of course, only applies to the able-bodied; the old and infirm
should be much better provided for than at present.” 1914-15.

“The natives are paid regular wages, out of which they are compelled to support
themselves and families; only those who are incapable of earning a living owing to
old age or infirmity are provided with food, clothing, and shelter. Medicines are given
free to all natives. A general store is kept on the station, where the natives can
purchase all their requirements, including meat and milk at cost prices. The natives
under this system are doing good work, and numbers of them seek outside
employment.” Point Pearce, 1915-16.

“The wages system has been initiated on this station as far as possible, but until the
dairying and piggery are developed more fully, we have insufficient employment for
the support of the 380 natives, consequently rations have to be supplied to many
who are capable of earning their own living. The sooner this can be abolished the
better, as the old and obsolete system of supplying rations encourages laziness and
thriftlessness, and I think it would pay the Government to completely abolish it and
pay wages to all able bodied married men and compel them to maintain themselves
and their families, single men being expected to find employment off the station.”
Point McLeay, 1915-16.

“We have been able to find work for all married men wanting employment. Several
of our men have been employed for some months at the flux quarries on Wardang
Island; others have earned a living for themselves and their families by fishing. All
the wheat-lumping at Balgowan jetty has been done by our men. A certain amount
of work has been found on the station for single men, but as far as possible they
have been encouraged to seek for work elsewhere. Farmers in the neighbourhood
have employed some, especially during harvest.” Point Pearce, 1915-16

“The system of paying wages to the able-bodied aborigines and half-castes, instead
of supplying them with rations and clothing, is proving most satisfactory, and
encourages many of them to seek outside employment, where they receive much
higher wages than those paid on the station.” Point Pearce, 1916-17.

“The sum of £ 2,712 10s. 9d. was paid in wages to the aborigines, and £ 427 worth
of rations was given to the old folk. Work is provided for as many as possible, and it
is considered preferable to issuing rations to idle people.” 1918-19.

The good wages talked about were apparently quite real. Note these extracts from the 1920s
and 30s:

“Another evidence of modern times is furnished by the number cars owned by the

“Other building improvements effected are:- Three stone tanks, walling to stop sand
drift at Gerguthy well, 4 sheds for natives’ vehicles, a bathroom and lavatory at the
farm overseer’s residence, a stall for the stallion, and a seed and super shed was
commenced in Jericho paddock some miles from the settlement.”
Meanwhile, in the Far North

But things continued as usual in the North, with policies largely unchanged:

“The constable stationed at Mungeranie reports that in consequence of the heavy rains experienced along the Diamantina River the natives are able to obtain an abundant supply of their native food, and with few exceptions, will not require any rations until next January.”

1915-16.

In 1917 there were fifty ration stations:

“There are about 50 natives at Innamincka Station, 30 of whom are receiving Government rations, and 20 younger boys and girls employed on the station. At Cordillo and Haddon Downs there are about 50, mostly employed at station work, &c. At Coongee Lakes there are eight old natives who get rations from the Innamincka depot. The natives on the Cooper during the last 12 months have been able to get plenty of fish and game, and with the good seasons have been able to obtain an abundance of their native food. The able-bodied natives can obtain (if they wish) abundance of employment at a good rate of wage, and the more energetic of them earn good money at times, particularly on the stations in the Far North. I would respectfully suggest that a supply of clothes be forwarded yearly to the police to Hergott Springs for use of the old and sick aboriginals in that district, as I understand the supply of blankets forwarded yearly are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the natives there.”


This first extended extract from 1918-19 Annual Report details the situation across much of the North. The ration stations provided a “pull factor” particularly in times of drought. (One begins to wonder how Aborigines coped during “droughty conditions” before ration stations.) The stations were open for aborigines to drift in and out as they require it. The needs of this drifting population were continually monitored and stations opened or closed where appropriate:

“There are about 50 natives in the Fowler’s Bay district, the majority of whom are able to obtain employment, while the old and infirm natives are supplied with rations, &c., regularly from the depot. There are about eight old adult aboriginals in the Streaky Bay district, and there are no special circumstances associated with them which requires special report or attention. There are about 10 males and 8 female aboriginals and half-castes in the Port Lincoln district; three of the males have acquired land in the Hundred of Louth, and are reported to be doing well. The wants of the natives in the Murat Bay district are being supplied from the depot which was recently established at that place, and from reports received it appears that they have everything they require.”
From reports received from the police at Indulkinna I find that the general health of the natives is good, and that very little trouble has been experienced among stockowners through the killing of stock by the natives. The supply of rations, &c., received from the Government has been sufficient to meet all demands, but a further supply will probably be necessary in the near future if the dry weather continues in the district.

At the Innamincka depot there is an average of 40 natives, comprising 16 old natives receiving Government rations, and 24 able-bodied natives, males and females, employed at station and general work. At Coongee Lakes there are 10 old aboriginals who receive rations from the Innamincka depot occasionally and live on game and fish, which are very plentiful.

At Cordillo and Haddon Downs there are about 36 natives receiving rations, and 20 young natives employed on stations.

There are about 150 aboriginals in the Mungeranie district (including 70 females) who are being supplied with government rations; some of these natives are suffering from severe colds, and I would respectfully suggest that a supply of eucalyptus be forwarded to the police at Mungeranie for the use of the natives.

The condition of the aboriginals in the Marree district is exceedingly good, there being plenty of employment for the able-bodied men who earn good wages at droving and camel driving, the wages being from four to seven pounds per month and keep. The old and infirm natives who are unable to work receive rations. At present there are very few aboriginals in the district, most of them having gone to Cooper’s Creek, where there is an abundance of fish and game owing to the recent floods in the river.

There are about 100 natives in the Tarcoola district, the majority of these natives pay periodical visits to the surrounding stations, and a number of them are at present engaged by the station owners trapping wild dogs. At present there are several old and infirm aboriginals at Tarcoola requiring assistance, and I would suggest that a supply of rations and blankets be forwarded to the police there for distribution among these natives.

From reports from the police stationed at Ooldea, on the East-West Railway, it appears that there are about 100 natives in the district, including 60 from Fowler’s Bay, and Western Australia, a number of them being uncivilized. In March last a last supply of rations and blankets was received from the Government and issued to the natives, and every endeavour is being made to induce them to return to their respective districts, and the police have been fairly successful in their efforts in that direction. ....

In conclusion, I am pleased to state that your department has always favourably considered applications for rations, etc., received from the police in this division.


“There are 200 natives in the Mungeranie district, and owing to the droughty conditions which prevailed in the district until recently, the blacks were unable to obtain even a limited supply of their native food. The closing of the mission station at Killalpaninna, and the drying up of the Cooper floodwaters has brought a number of the Cooper blacks to the Mungeranie depot for rations.” 1919-20.

“There are about 80 blacks of all castes in the Iron Knob district, inclusive of 12 half-bloods (six of these being of each sex), and inclusive in the 80 about 30 are children of both sexes and all ages. No rations whatever were issued last year, the natives in
this district have practically no requirements, as they are nearly all fit and earn their own living, and do so, upon the stations.” 1919-20.

“Blankets, clothing, and medical comforts have been liberally supplied to those entitled to same in all parts of the State, but care has been exercised to keep down expenditure as far as possible. The enormous increase in prices of all commodities has made it most difficult to make the departmental vote cover the necessary expenditure.”

1920-21.

“There are three old male and three female aboriginals at Cowarie who are feeble and blind with age; it is my intention, provided I can spare the rations, to send out a supply to these by the mailman.”


Rations were handed out, but the Chief Protector and his officers could see that there was a down side, in drawing desert- dwelling Aborigines in towards dependence:

“About nine months ago a large number of natives arrived at Ooldea from the Everard and MusgraveRanges and camped near the railway line, and by their persistent appeals for rations, &c., became a source of annoyance to the railway employees, and those who have once tasted the sweetness of idleness, and have been assisted by the white people, make no genuine effort to keep themselves, and eventually become a burden to the State.

About two years ago Mrs Daisy Bates established a camp at Ooldea and worked among the natives presumably with the object of raising them to a higher standard of living and to eventually bring about their complete civilization. After about 18 months’ stay amongst them she realised that all her efforts in that direction were in vain, and she returned to Western Australia, thoroughly convinced that any violation of their human instincts, and intrusion upon their native habits and customs, would be detrimental to them both from a moral and physical aspect.”


“Rations, clothing, blankets, and medical comforts have been supplied during the year to a number of depots throughout the State, and have been distributed by the issuers of rations to the old, sick, and infirm natives and to others found to be in poor circumstances. It is always a difficult matter to decide whether natives are in genuine need of assistance or whether they have been contributory through laziness or gambling to the state in which we often find them, without money or work, and having a wife and family to keep. The able-bodied natives, especially half-castes and quadroons, must be made to realise that they must maintain themselves and families without Government assistance. The practice of natives coming to Adelaide, spending all their money, and relying on the department to see them to their homes is far too common, and I intend taking a strong stand against this by considerably reducing the number of passes given from this office.”

1920-21.

“Most of the blacks are at present out on the floodwaters of the Diamentina, and should be well provided with their natural food for some months to come; but at every ration depot there are sure to be many that are too infirm to do any hunting or fishing.”


“Rations, clothing, and blankets have been supplied during the year to depots throughout the State, and have been distributed to the issuers of rations to the old,
sick, and infirm aboriginals, also to others found in poor circumstances. Their medical needs have been attended to. The medical officers and hospital officers and attendants have all given to aboriginal patients all necessary attention. Supplies of medicines for coughs, cold, and eye troubles have been sent to the depots, and given out by issuers of rations. There are fully equipped dispensaries at Point Pearce, Point McLeay, and Koonibba Aboriginal Stations.”

Drought remained a perennial problem:

“Mr G. Aiston, Protector of Aborigines for the Newcastle District, reports from Mulka Well (which is situated near the old Kopperamanna Mission Station) that drought still continues throughout the district. Apart from a limited supply of tree grubs (bards) all the aboriginals’ natural food have disappeared making them more than ever dependent on Government rations. Similar reports are being received from many ration depots in the interior, and, in consequence, many aboriginals who in normal times were self-supporting are now receiving rations.”

The Newcastle District mentioned was the State House of Assembly electoral district (1884 to 1902 then 1915 to 1956) covering the Northern parts of the State.

Notice that it is not just the Aborigines who were doing it tough:

“Labor. – On account of general unemployment we have more natives here than usual.”

“The continual drought and lack of work in consequence has thrown a number of able-bodied natives on to Government rations. The stations held throughout the district are so near bankruptcy that they are unable to even keep the old pensioners on the various places, and all the natural food seems to have disappeared.”

“Unemployment is very general, owing to the practical failure of crops on the greater part of the West Coast. Our natives cannot find employment among the farmers, hence they all come here; but we cannot employ so many profitably. Out loss on the Farm was over £ 2,000 last year. We now let the men work for a low wage, just enough to buy food for themselves. The women and children are obliged to obtain rations. Right here I would like to thank you, sir, for supplying us so promptly with rations. We would not know what to do without this help from your department.”

The drought broke:

“Mr George Aiston, Protector of Aboriginals, Newcastle District, reports that the condition of the aboriginals in his district is at present good, and that there is an abundance of food for those who are capable of looking after themselves. Unfortunately the long drought has made some of the aboriginals indifferent to their natural foods and they are still demanding rations.”

“From what I have seen of the aboriginals about Port Augusta I am convinced that working for wages is the best means for uplifting the aboriginal; it appears to instil in
them a self dependence we do not find in those who are in receipt of charity rations.”

Police Reports, 1929-30.

But then, droughts come and go:

“Mr. Geo. Aiston, Protector of Aboriginals for the district of Newcastle, has informed me that the natives of the north-east are now practically dependent on the Government rations. There is no work on stations and owners are hard put to get enough food for themselves.

He states that there has been very little sickness and that the numbers round his headquarters at Mulka remain approximately the same, although he has had visits from several parties from the Finniss and Oodnadatta who have now returned to their own country.” 1934-35.

“The inspector states that there is an abundance of game and natural food in the north-western portion of the State, but the conditions along the East-West Railway are less favourable. Rations are available at Ooldea for the natives who cannot secure sufficient game and natural foods to satisfy their needs.” 1938-39.

“Additional food supplies were provided for aborigines living in areas affected by the drought, particularly northern parts of the State where game and other native foods were practically unobtainable.

An additional ration depot was established at Everard Park to provide more effectively for the needs of the old and infirm aborigines living in the areas north and west of Oodnadatta.” 1944-45.

“During the period of severe drought when native foods are un procurable, the natives gathered at Ernabella, and food provided by the Aborigines’ Protection Board was distributed by officers of the Mission. When the rains came and game and other foods were again available, natives returned to their practice of hunting for a living, and this service was discontinued.” Ernabella, 1944-45.

There were still continuing concerns that the provision of rations encouraged dependency:

“In September last a large number of natives gathered at Ooldea for the performance of tribal rites and ceremonies.

On receipt of reports of this large gathering, Mr. W.R. Penhall, of my Department accompanied by the Rev. J.H. Sexton, Secretary of the Advisory Council of Aborigines, visited Ooldea and made satisfactory arrangements for their maintenance while in that district. I still have trouble with natives begging from travellers and fettlers along the East-West Railway line and it seems impossible to completely prevent this.

Rations are issued regularly at Ooldea by Miss Anna Lock, but it is not good policy to encourage these natives to sit about the ration depot in idleness and it is chiefly when they are sent off on hunting expeditions or when, to satisfy their nomadic instinct they wander about the country, that they become a nuisance to the railway authorities and their employees.” Ooldea Mission, 1933-34.

“The aboriginals on the Nullarbor Plain appear to be undernourished but although rations are issued at Ooldea, the Inspector says the natives will not stay there for any length of time but prefer to wander up and down the Transcontinental Railway line begging food from railway employees and selling souvenirs to the train passengers.
The natives are sometimes collected together and taken to Ooldea but they soon wander away again and how to keep them in one place is a most difficult problem. The line is a great attraction to them but the country along this track provides very little of their native food.” 1936-7.

“The Inspector says there is now a fair amount of work available for natives with previous experience in station work but some of them have refused to accept work so long as they can collect rations. He considers that aboriginals should not be permitted to camp near township unless they are self-supporting and the problem of making them self-supporting whilst they are near towns is very difficult. Rations are issued to all natives camped near Port Augusta and because of this and the lure of the picture shows and betting shops, the native population of Port Augusta is steadily increasing. They require a lot of police supervision as sailors and others visit their camps with liquor and are suspected of going there for immoral purposes. The work of the police in trying to discourage natives from remaining at this town is increased by the interference of well-meaning folk who claim to protect the rights and liberties of the natives.” 1936-37.

Thus, the on-going four-way arm-wrestle between the Protectors (or their later incarnations in government policy implementation), the “well-meaning folk”, the police and the Aborigines over their differing objectives continues into the present day.
Did the South Australian Government Have a Policy of Confining Aborigines to Missions or Government Stations?

Anecdotally, there appears to be a view that Aborigines generally were forced against their will into missions, reserves or government institutions. This chapter addresses that issue from the evidence presented in the Protectors’ Reports.

Since the Aborigines had been declared to be British subjects at the foundation of the colony there was no pre-existing legal provision removing their freedom of movement, other than on the general law and order grounds which applied to colonists as well. This mobility caused some headaches in the early colony where the delights of the city resulted in pull factors which escalated inter-tribal frictions. On isolated occasions, some restrictions on freedom of movement were imposed on law and order grounds. The letter book of the Protector of Aborigines, Dr. Moorhouse, records some of these concerns:

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6th April 1843
Hon Col Sec.
Sir,
I have the honor to state for the information of His Excellency the Governor, that the Encounter Bay Natives are now at Willunga or Onkaparinga on their route to Adelaide. They have been expressly invited by the Adelaide Natives to drive away the Murray people from Town, and as soon as they arrive there will be a severe contest. On the 23rd of December last the Encounter Bay Natives wounded seven and killed one of the Murray tribe and in the intended battle, there will probably be several lives lost unless the Police interfere. ....
[Moorhouse, Protector of Aborigines]

100
25th April 1843
[A.M. Mundy?] Private Secretary
Sir,
I have read the inclosed communication from Edward J. Eyre Esquire regarding the tribes of the Murray visiting Adelaide. I may add as an additional reason of them being kept from the Town, that if they are allowed to locate here, the real proprietors of the soil (the Adelaide tribes) will at once leave, & our attempts at education greatly retarded.
It would be desirable that Mr. Eyre should tell them that if they come to Adelaide, they would be driven back by the Police, and if they disregard the advice, I would recommend that an escort of Police take them back the days after their arrival in town. The Natives would then believe that the Government were resolved on keeping them in their own territory.
[Moorhouse, Protector of Aborigines]

In practice, from 1837 onwards there must have been increasing restrictions on the free use of and traversing of land by Aborigines imposed by settlement. The government attempted to ameliorate this circumstance with practical measures such as rations and equipment issue, training and employment options and land lease grants. In the pastoral districts they
explicitly retained access for traditional hunting and ceremonial pursuits and so free movement was little affected.

As we can see from the Government Gazettes of 1853 and 1854, the Aborigines were mobile for both work and pleasure in the early years:

The S. A. Government Gazette, June 2, 1853:

“There have been no natives residing in Adelaide during the quarter; ....
Schools. - ADELAIDE: There have been no children in town during the quarter; consequently the school could not be put into operation.” 1853.

The Government Gazette, July 28, 1853:

“The natives of the Murray have returned to town for the winter, and there are now located on the Park Lands 140. I have endeavoured to persuade them to remain in their own district, as their services are in great request by the settlers, but persuasion has hitherto failed; they cannot resist the pleasure of a visit during the winter months.” 1853.

Sub-protector Scott, of the middle Murray area, pleaded (unsuccessfully):

“I hope and trust that his Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor may be pleased to issue instructions for the purpose of putting a final stop to the wandering habits of the Murray natives, excepting in their own territories.” 1853.

S. A. Government Gazette, May 25th, 1854:

“There were no natives living in the neighbourhood of Adelaide for more than a few days; their services were in demand for country operations, and during the summer they like the country better than the town.” 1854.

It is apparent that there was no coercion on the part of the Protector in deciding where Aborigines might choose to live. In fact, the ration depots were explicitly spaced to enhance their mobility from one area to another:

“Naracoorte. – Corporal Field, writing in July states ’... All the healthy natives are employed on various stations ; some fencing, others shepherding, boundary riding, &c., for which they are paid money, food, and clothes. Occasionally they leave their employment for a short time to meet their friends and have a corroboree. I have supplied blankets and rations, if required, to these when travelling. The old and infirm natives at Padthaway receive every attention from Mr. and Mrs. Lawson, and are occasionally attended by Dr. Penny, of Tatiara. Those at Naracoorte, Binnum, and Morambo, are attended by Dr. Gunning, when necessary.’” 1874.

This was a continuation of earlier policies; the half-yearly reports for 1867 and 1868 record at Tarpeena in the South-East:

“Tarpeena. - Ranger Eagan reports, on the 13th May :- ‘all the aborigines located at the dépôt at Tarpeena left for MacDonnell Bay ; some of them had never seen the Bay and were very desirous to visit it. They subsequently returned to the Mount
when they met many of their friends, some from Glenelg, and they held a corroberie. The various depôts being at convenient distances from each other in this district they can indulge in their migratory habits, and there is no danger of their going short of food.’”  

“Glenelg” here perhaps refers to the Glenelg River. Tarpeena provides an interesting example as to the extent of what the Protector considered legitimate coercion. The Quarterly Report for the period ending 30th September, 1864, contains a report from the Tarpeena depot. One should note that the term “remove” was used at the time as a synonym of “move”:

“Ranger Eagan, issuer of stores states ‘.... A great deal of sickness prevailed in July, and they were so widely scattered, that it was difficult to attend to them. If forage was allowed for one horse, sick and destitute aborigines could be removed here when necessary. There is a cart and harness here, which could be lent for the purpose. And a black man could always be available. This I consider would be a great saving, and obviate the necessity of several depôts.’”

The Protector responded in the same report, but there is no suggestion of coercion:

“I would recommend the adoption of Mr. Eagan’s suggestion regarding the means of transport, in order that the sick and infirm may as occasion arises, be removed to Tarpeena, where they would not only have daily rations, and such comforts as they might require, but also regular medical attendance. As Mount Burr is ten miles beyond the limit of Dr. Clindering’s district, any visits there would cause much additional expense. So far as I could ascertain, the natives generally are neither afraid nor unwilling to go to Tarpeena; but, if any are adverse to removal, a temporary supply of rations should be furnished from the depot.”

The same Quarterly Report for the period ending 30th September, 1864, implies that it was the Protector who saw it as his responsibility to find the Aborigines, and open up depots where they were living as necessary:

“I also visited Mount Gambier and Port MacDonnell. The camp at the former place was almost deserted, and at the latter there were about fourteen of all ages. The total number of the Bay tribe does not exceed twenty-five souls. Among them several children and some old and infirm persons who are wholly dependent on the inhabitants for support, and the whole occasionally suffer destitution. A supply of food and other necessities should, I think, be forwarded to Port MacDonnell, and I beg to suggest that the Police-trooper there be requested to undertake the duties of issuer.”

Even the local publican seemed to believe he has responsibilities:

“At Mount Burr (13th October) I saw twelve natives, old and young. They seemed well supplied with food and other necessities. Mr. Grist, innkeeper, says there are seven men, five women, and seven children belonging to the Mount, and that some of them suffered want last winter, having nothing to eat but the little he could afford to give them. He has asked to be supplied with stores for the relief of the necessitous, but I am opposed to the issue of rations at any house where intoxicating drink is sold, unless when absolutely necessary, which does not seem to be the case here.”
Again, rather than coercing resettlement, the Protector provided rations where recipients were living:

“A temporary supply of rations was sent to Milang, for several sick and infirm natives reported to be destitute, and unable to travel so far as the depot.” 1866.

Freedom of movement also meant cross-border travel:

“Chowilla. – About thirty-five natives were on this station, but a large proportion of that number were from New South Wales side of the boundary.” 1868.

“Reports reached this office last year that many Queensland blacks came to South Australian depôts near the border for relief owing to insufficient provision being made for them in their own State. This matter was brought under the notice of the Hon. Chief Secretary, who made representations to the Queensland Government and subsequently Mr. Walker, J.P., of Innaminka, wrote saying: “I think we have done some good for the Queensland natives near our border, and no doubt for the future they will have more attention given to them in their own State. I must say South Australia tries to do its best for our aborigines, and about this quarter they have no cause to complain, as they have been well looked after.” 1902-03.

Aborigines were spread far and wide across the State and it was the Protectors and Sub-Protectors who went looking for them, and rather than rounding them up, they set up ration depôts where they gathered:

“The natives west of Port Lincoln have suffered very much during the past six months from an attack of a disease said to be small pox. The late Dr. Lawson, of Port Lincoln, and Dr. Gething, of Port Adelaide, were sent, by the direction of the Government, to visit and prescribe for these people, and it is gratifying to state that their efforts and advice, in addition to the care and considerate attention the issuers of stores at various western depôts have been instrumental in stopping a disease that threatened the destruction to the native population of that portion of the province. Since my term in office, extending to a period of six months, I have travelled a distance of 2,355 miles, in making official visits to the following places, viz: - Milang, Point McLeay, Waterside, Wellington, Goolwa, Port Elliot, Victor Harbor, Long Island, Meningie, McGrath’s Flat, Lacepede Bay, Narracoorte, Penola, Mount Gambier, Tarpeena, Mount Burr, Merne, Port Lincoln, Port Augusta, Beautiful Valley, Mount Remarkable, Stockport, Blanche Town, Overland Corner, Chowilla, Clarendon, and Rapid Bay, for the purpose of inspecting various depôts, and ascertaining the condition of, and rendering all the assistance I could to the aborigines who resort to those places of relief when occasion requires it. There are fifty-eight depôts in the Colony, at which stores and medicines of various kinds are kept for distribution among the aborigines, so that the wants of these people during times of scarcity of food and sickness are met, and whenever it is possible and necessary, medical practitioners are employed to attend upon the sick.”

EB Scott, Protector of Aborigines, 1867.

“NORTHERN DISTRICT.
Sub-Protector Buttfield reports, 13th May: – ‘Having travelled over a large portion of my district and mingled with the natives, I am enabled to speak from personal observation of their condition; and thus the subjects of my charge have come to
know me personally, and to understand the relation I sustain to them. The aborigines gratefully appreciate the efforts of the Government to minister to their necessities, protect them in their rights, and to enlighten them in their own duties and obligations towards the settlers, through the medium of ‘blackfellow master’ all about. During the last six months I have visited officially the following places, viz, :-

Ooriparinna, Appallina, Nuccaleena, Bobmooneywest, Windy Creek, Patsy’s Springs, Fink’s Creek, Mount Serle, Umberatana, Terelina, Mount Freeing, Blanchewater, Tooncattchen, Mannwalkanina Coldrinna, Lake Hope (Mount Serle and the five last-named places twice), Wilpena, Arkaba, Wanaka, Kanyaka, Stirling, Port Augusta, Beautiful Valley, Mount Remarkable, Willowie, Coonatto, Yanure, Mattawarangalla, Hollowilliena, Warcowie, Angorichina, Wirribinma, Wirrealpa, Arrowie, Warreata, Koppromaran, Killalpaninna, Lake Gregory, and many other adjacent or intermediate places.

I have thus gone over some 2,000 miles, seeking in every way in my power to discharge the duties of my office, so as to secure the best results. …

“I feel myself justified in stating the general health of the aborigines to be good. The timely arrival at the several depôts of blankets and other clothing, will no doubt contribute to the health and comfort of the aborigines. The provisions are, I believe, distributed with care and discrimination by the issuers. The almost total absence of native animals, and the failure of other resources, native and extraneous, have placed a very large number of aborigines in the most trying circumstances, and dependent upon the generosity of the Government. Notwithstanding the hard times the general conduct of the aborigines has been has been such as to excite sympathy, surprize, and gratification. They are for the most part, patient, peaceable, and well-disposed ; - occasionally an unprotected hut is robbed of stores ; and there have been one or two instances of crimes of a more aggravated nature. There are now 17 depôts judiciously distributed over my district as follows :-

East and North-East   - Melrose, Mattawarangalla, Arrowie, Booloomotta, and Bimbowie.

North – Port Augusta, Arkaba, Wilpena, Blinman, Umberatana, Yudnamuyana, and Freeing.

West and North-West – Franklin Harbor, Ogilvie’s, Mount Eyre, Wintalatingaro, and Mount Deception.

I think it will not be necessary to augment materially the number of regular depôts.’

Sub-Protector Buttfield, 1867.

“As I already stated, I have visited the South-Eastern, Murray, and Peninsular districts, besides various shorter journies (sic), during the past six months, and have travelled a distance of about 1,800 miles.”

1868.

In fact, the majority of the ration depots were never situated at either mission or government institutions:

“There are now 54 depôts in the Province for the distribution of blankets, rations, medicines, and medicinal comforts to the natives in need of such relief. 21 of these depôts are in charge of pastoral leases, 22 at police stations, 6 at mission stations, and 5 in private hands. Depôts were opened during the year at Moolooloo, Edithburg, Hiltrubey, and Finke River; and closed – at Nilpena, Tarpeena, and Waleberdina.”

1875.

If there was a drift to the missions, it was quite understandable:
“Point McLeay. – The following is extracted from Mr. Taplin’s report dated 2nd January:- ‘You will perceive that the number of aborigines who have received relief is large, but this is explained by the fact that during the past twelve months the old people of the Lake tribes have shown an increased disposition to draw round this station and make it their settled home. In many of them this is caused by the increase of age and infirmity; and I am sure that the Government and people of South Australia will be glad that the aged remnants of the aboriginal tribes are cared for in their declining years. The cost to the country is but trifling when compared with the satisfaction of reflecting that a duty has been performed, and hardship and suffering prevented from pressing upon those from whose original possessions we derive our wealth. It gives me much satisfaction to be the almoner of the Government to these people; but, while performing a duty of this kind, I am careful to avoid fostering a spirit of pauperism and indolence amongst the young and able-bodied. I always encourage and assist them in obtaining employment; and we have now made arrangements on this station which will secure a permanent supply of work to all who may need it’.” 1866.

One should also consider pull factors to various localities and, while the ration depots may have offered the prospect of food, there were other factors to be considered too. These could be unexpected – like a day at the races:

“Border Town. – In his return for May, Police-trooper O’Reilley remarks :- All the Tatiara blacks numbering 38, have been stopping in Border Town during the past month. They have been attracted here by the Border Town races. Their conduct has been good, and there are no complaints against any of them. As lambing season is approaching, they have gone to the circumjacent stations to seek employment. They will all return to the depot for blankets when lambing is over.” 1868.

Things were changing; some Aborigines were becoming more integrated into the settler economy, but others remained on the margins. For whatever reason, their movements were not restricted:

“Tatiara. R.B. Penny, Esq. M.R.C.S., L, &c., District Medical Officer for Aborigines, states – I have the honor to transmit, for your information, report in reference to the condition of the aborigines in my district. The camps at Wirrega, Nalang, and Cannawigra, were all deserted by the natives, they having gone to Border Town during the Christmas. … I would suggest that natives visiting from the Wimmera, Coorong, and Padthaway, have their war implements taken charge of by the police, and only given to them on their return home, as they quarrel and fight and become a great nuisance to the agricultural district and dangerous to the natives who are employed on the farms; as a general rule not one of the natives in my district carry any warlike implements.” 1875.

Chowilla. – Mr. McLeod reports – “Very few of the natives have been about this place for the last half year, and during the last two months there have been none at all. In February, March, and April, about forty came at different times, and I distributed the tomahawks, netting, twine, fish hooks, &c. and some rations among them. … The articles supplied to them have been of much use, enabling them to catch fish and wild fowl, so that they have plenty of food. They have all gone down the River to get
employment at the stations during shearing time, and will not return till it is over.”  

1874.

“Dr Englehart, of Kingston, where about forty aborigines are usually located, reports that their health and well-being have been satisfactory. They have found by experience that it is far better for their comfort to engage in work instead of idling away their time. In this direction the wattle-bark industry and rabbit-catching have offered ample opportunities to earn money, and with it to live more comfortably. Both men and women dress better and are cleaner than usual, and some of the half-caste girls have gone into service at Kingston and give satisfaction so far.”  

1900-01.

By around 1900, there were a number of Christian missions set up across the State - Poonindie (Port Lincoln, 1850), Point McLeay 1858 (also spelt MacLeay in the early years) at the Murray Mouth, Point Pierce (1868 - later re-named Point Pearce) on Yorke Peninsula, Kopperamanna Mission (1866) in the Far North-East, later re-named Killalpaninna Mission, and Koonibba Mission (1901) on the West Coast. Hermannsburg Mission was also set up west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory of South Australia, but was under a separate branch of government administration to the South Australian mission stations. These were all built to service the needs of the Aborigines but there was no forced movement onto those missions and a widespread system of ration stations issuing rations in a variety of locations was maintained. In 1906, for example, of the 42 ration depots where government rations were distributed, only 4 of the depots were at missions:

“The depôts for distribution of food, clothing, medicines, &c., are - 20 under police, 4 at mission stations, 2 at post and telegraph offices and 16 under station managers in the Far North. All furnish monthly reports enabling the condition and requirements of the natives to be investigated and dealt with, tending to promote friendly relations between them and the European settlers.”  

1905-06.

Even on the mission stations movement was not restricted. Consider the following missionaries’ reports from 1874-75. The Rev. R.W. Holden reported from the Poonindie Training Institution run by the Anglican Church:

“Poonindie. – The Rev. R.W. Holden reports in reference to the Wurley natives – ’I beg to say that from some unaccountable cause during the past half-year but few Wurley natives have visited us, and even those few made but flying visits, en route to the back country. ... In reference to employment very few of the Wurley natives are fit to work; but still we at all times hold out every inducement for them to remain with us, whether old or young. Last year the Wurley natives earned a good round sum by grubbing land for us, and we were in hopes they would have embraced the same opportunity during these winter months.’”  

1874.

In the next half-yearly report for period ending December 31st, 1874, he reported:

“During the last six months, ending the 31st December, 1874, we have not had many wurley natives remaining with us; they have been cared for and employed by the settlers in the district – visiting and receiving aid from us when they required a change.”  

1874.

In the 1875 Annual Report, Rev. Holden at Poonindie Aboriginal Institution still held out inducements to the “wurley natives”:  

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“The institution is a home open to all well conducted natives, wurley or otherwise, providing constant employment, with payment for work done, in cash. We are at all times most desirous the wurley natives of the district would avail themselves of the benefits of the institution, having plenty of employment on the station and farm for them. We had a number working for us during shearing, but generally the wurley natives prefer their nomad life.”

1875.

At Point Pierce Mission, Rev. W.Y. Kühn reported:

“I am sorry to say a prejudice still prevails against this station, owing to the death of many of the inmates in 1872, from inflammation of the lungs, consequently several children have been taken away by their parents into the bush. They come occasionally to the station, but only stay a few days at a time.”

1874.

In the above extract, “inmates” does not imply incarceration, merely that they are resident at the institution overnight. For example, the 1917 and 1924 Protector’s Annual Reports refer to “inmates” of the Port Augusta Hospital:

“During the year eight aboriginals have been treated at the Port Augusta Hospital, seven have been discharged as cured and one is still an inmate.”

1916-17.

“I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to bring under your notice the care and attention given the natives by Dr. Symons while inmates of the hospital.”


The following extracts do not imply anyone being confined to the mission (or government ration station) – they kept “going and coming”:

“KOPPERAMANNA LUTHERAN MISSION STATION.
Mr. C.A. Meyer, Superintendent, states :-
The number of aborigines who attended this station during the past year has been very variable, because they keep going and coming, and do not like to stay very long in one place; but, in spite of this, there has always been a fair number on the station; especially the young people, who seem to settle down more and more.”

Kopperamanna (later Killalpaninna) Lutheran Station, 1879.

“… although we did not this year get the usual summer rains, yet, ever since February there have been a succession of light showers that have kept the clay pans full, so that the natives have been able to roam all over the country, and obtain an abundant supply of food. In fact, we have especially notice during the last couple of months how very fat some of them are looking. … The Diamantina portion of the river having come down, and some of our black stockriders have deemed it a suitable time to have ‘a spell and walk about eat fish’.”

Kopperamanna (later Killalpaninna) Lutheran Station, 1879.

“HERMANNSBURG MISSION STATION, FINKE RIVER, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.
The Rev. G.A. Heidenreich, superintendent, reports as follows to 1st December, 1879 :-

1. Number of Aborigines on the Station. - It is difficult to name the exact number, as the aborigines will not remain located in one place. Last year there were, off and on, larger tribes present for some time; at times, however, only a few individuals. We observed that they stopped near the river and station if no rain had
fallen for a long time, but as soon as rain had fallen at some distance, and they were able to find food, they went to such places. We believe, however, that after the receipt of rations from the Government for distribution among those that need them, a larger number of aborigines will remain on the mission reserve.”

Hermannsburg Mission Station, 1879.

Fowler’s Bay was just a ration depot, not a mission station, but the same situation applied:

“At Fowler’s Bay M.C. Catchlove reports that about 250 aborigines arrived there from the back country – Wilgena and Gawler Ranges. They did not stay long and conducted themselves well. Very favourable reports have also come from the other districts on the West Coast.” 1899 – 1900.

Impact of closer settlement

In the southern areas, as settlement closed in, Aborigines were perhaps forced to hunt more widely in search of game, relying on ration stations more and more when the seasons made hunting difficult. In time, they undertook more full or part-time employment. This itself possibly provided a significant “push factor” for some towards reserves and ration stations. The young able-bodied Aborigines were eagerly sought out by the pastoral industry or on the farms, but these men were also the most effective hunters. Those left behind struggled more and more in diminishing hunting grounds, and moved more or less permanently to the ration stations which provided a more certain outcome than hunting. They more or less abandoned hunting as a primary source of food. This general trend was already apparent in the regular Monthly and Quarterly reports of Sub-Protector Mason of Wellington on the Murray during the 1850s and 60s:

“I have had a great number of sick and aged natives near the station, left for me to take care of while their friends were at the harvest fields, to those I have attended daily with supplies of flour, tea, rice, sugar, &c., and medicines when required.” 1861.

An extract published in the Government Gazette of May 1859, hints at the problems in the settled areas:

“During the past month there has been about 100 natives encamped within a few miles of Wellington; about forty of that number are aged, blind and sick; to those I have issued a daily allowance of flour, tea, sugar and tobacco, and simple medicine to those who require it. The friends of those natives who are unable to work, have erected for them good warm huts, built of pines, and covered with reeds, close to the station; where they intend to locate themselves during the winter, in hopes of receiving a daily allowance of flour, &c., which they feel the want of during the cold season, more than at any time, and which they are unable to procure for themselves. If it were not for the liberal supply of food issued by the Government, for the use of those natives, who from age, or infirmity, are unable to exert themselves to procure food, many of them would have suffered severely from hunger during the past two months, in the consequence of the scarcity of fish in this part of the Murray, and the game having been either destroyed or driven away. .... There are still about thirty young men and women in constant employment with the settlers, as shepherds,
stock-keepers, and general servants; and those who are employing them appear to set great value on their services. “

April, 1859.

“There are about forty young men in constant employment with the settlers, as stock-keepers, bullock-drivers and house-servants; and they appear to give great satisfaction to their employers. The young men who are not in employment are preparing for sheep-washing and shearing, at which numbers of them find employment yearly.”

August, 1859.

So a third of the local Aboriginal population at the Wellington ration station, the young able-bodied men and women, were away engaged in full-time work. These were the ones who might have been expected to supply the bulk of the food for the older, the infirm or less capable during the more difficult times of the year, when there was a seasonal short supply of food. Another third of the local population were sick, aged or infirm who were full-time supplied with rations. The other third were seasonally employed sheep washing, shearing etc., but this work was not available over winter when traditional foods like fish were also seasonally scarce, and other big game were too difficult for them to catch and not in sufficient numbers anyway. This third was also seasonally attracted to the ration stations, and supplied with food.

The following year, the story continued:

“Fish have been plentiful on the Murray, but the natives have become so accustomed to a change in food, that living on fish alone is disagreeable to them, exceedingly. Although flour is not regularly supplied to the able-bodied natives, they still share with the sick, lame and blind, who are fed daily.”

Dec, 1859.

“I have supplied all the sick, blind and aged natives, who have attended at the station, with daily rations, and medicines when required. I have also issued daily food to all the healthy natives who have applied for it, whenever I knew that their native food was scarce or difficult to be procured.”

March, 1860.

This situation at Wellington appears to be echoed across the State.

The supply of equipment and rations over the hard times was also drawing Aborigines into the mainstream economy in a self-employed capacity:

“The fish have been plentiful during a great part of the quarter, and the natives have either sold or bartered the principle part of them to parties passing overland.”

March, 1860.

“Blanchetown. – In his report, dated July, Police Trooper Ewens says – ‘The natives have been very quiet and orderly during the past three months. They have come down the river, a distance in some instances of 200 miles, for the purpose of friendly intercourse. They have been very industrious lately, fishing and shooting for dealers from Kapunda, Tununda and the Burra, for which they are well paid. The Burra dealer has given 10 shillings per cwt. for fresh fish. There is at present about twenty able natives employed in this trade. .... ’

In October he writes – ‘... The trade of catching fish to supply the fishmongers from the country townships appears much appreciated by them, and the able-bodied men
and their families appear to be making themselves comfortable with the proceeds. I have seen some camp-ovens and other useful domestic utensils in their mungoes (canoes). They receive for their fish 15 shillings per cwt., which they are very well pleased with, and I think it a fair price. The whole of the natives are bound to the river for their living, owing to the scarcity of game in the back country, caused by the dry seasons.

1865.

With the continued advance of settlement, the fencing in of properties, and the advancement of agricultural practices, there was a change in the nature of the available work. Aborigines either were absorbed into the mainstream community or moved closer and closer to the ration stations which were evolving into permanent refuges. Some were run by the government or missionaries and these started to provide a variety of other services such as employment or by acting as employment agencies, schooling, accommodation, medical care, rations, and security. This became the model. Note though that this was still largely confined to the more settled, agricultural areas:

“Their hunting grounds are now greatly diminished as agricultural settlement progresses, thus depriving them of their natural food. Another circumstance is referred to in some sub-reports appended, viz., that, except at certain seasons of the year, such as shearing time, the aborigines experience greater difficulty in finding employment. As runs become fenced their services appear to be less in demand, and their peculiar habits of life unfit them for a sudden change to the heavy and continuous work of ordinary laborers.

The system now in force for the protection and support of the natives has now been in operation about fifteen years; its merits and failings have therefore been tested by experience. In ministering to their physical necessities and alleviating the hardships of their position it has accomplished a good deal, but it seems to have failed in checking the high rate of mortality by arresting the causes that are operating in producing the premature decay of the race.

The absence of adequate provision for the education and training of the children, the regular employment of the adults in profitable industrial pursuits, is also in great want. The practice of supplying food and clothing, except in exchange for an equivalent in labor, is objectionable in its tendency to pauperize by leading to improvident habits and indolence.

A much better state of affairs exists at the mission stations at Poonindie, Point McLeay, and Point Pierce, where nearly 300 hundred natives, including children, are instructed and usefully employed. Their health is reported to be much improved, their death rate is lower, and births more numerous.”

Half-yearly Report, 1874.

“The native population is steadily increasing, not only because of the excess of births over deaths (see above), but the success of the mission attracts aborigines from all parts of the State. The totals given to you monthly of the number of natives on the mission on the last day of each month average about 235. I find about 340 natives have been receiving food and help from the mission during the past twelve months, and been partially or wholly supported here. Owing to the wandering character of some of our blacks the monthly total given you is misleading.”

Point McLeay Mission, 1902-03.

In the North though, conditions were largely unchanged
“At Anna Creek, Far North, where there are located from 100 to 150 aborigines, Mr Oastler, J.P., who has had charge of the depot for forty years, reports: “All the natives here are a quiet, well-behaved lot, and as they are well cared for and looked after by Messrs Hogarth & Warren, they are very contented, and would not be benefited by removal to a mission station or otherwise. They were pleased with the extra clothing supplied by the department.” (authors’ emphasis) 1905-06.

Again, Killalpaninna Mission, in the Far North-East of the State, is a good case study demonstrating how aborigines were free to come and go as they liked, and took full advantage of that freedom:

“Death took away five of them, while only four were born, and some five or seven left the station because of stricter rules having been enforced. A Commission went up in early 1909, and found that more stringent measures were necessary to make the work more successful. Mr. Riedel acquired the black’s language in nine months’ time so far that he could begin his spiritual work amongst the blacks, and he set to work with a hearty good will to recover ground that was lost while no missionary was at the station.” (authors’ emphasis) Killalpaninna Mission, 1908-09

“Sir – The natives this report is relating to live within two circles – one comprising those who dwell on the station itself and bind themselves to keep the rules of the station; the other are those who prefer to have liberty – and misery – without in the bush. The latter ones come to the station to get Government rations, and now and then to attend divine service. The school was attended by twelve black children. Two half-caste children were taken away by their parents, who left the station.”


“As we again got no flood in the Cooper the Killalpaninna Lake is getting dry; so the bush blacks cannot find fish at present, and many of them, caring for not much else than food and clothes, disappeared to “walk about” as they did from childhood.”

Killalpaninna Mission, 1910-11.

“In August last Mr. Fergusson, station manager of Togmorden, reported that a number of aborigines arrived at his station from Indukoona and the Gawler Ranges in a starving condition. A good supply of stores was sent to them from Oodnadatta, a distance of 70 miles, and was kindly distributed by Mr. Fergusson who was requested to give those who were strong enough to walk, sufficient rations to carry them to Oodnadatta by the camels that took the stores out, thus saving the expense of sending out more stores. Most of them returned to their own country when the first rains came.”

1902-03.

“The natives of this district roam about a good deal from one station to another and along the Cooper, where they are able to get plenty of fish and game.”

Police Reports, 1917-18.

“At present there are very few aboriginals in the district, most of them having gone to Cooper’s Creek, where there is an abundance of fish and game owing to the recent floods in the river.”

1918-19.

At Koonibba Mission, on the West coast, a similar story:
“About 100 aboriginal and half-castes live permanently on the station, while the average number of natives at the mission, including the floating population, was 145 for the year.”

Koonibba Mission, 1918-19.

Note too in this next extract, that, rather than confining Aborigines to the missions, the government sometimes set up ration stations quite close to the missions, in locations that were more convenient for the Aborigines:

“An increase can be recorded in the number of natives who have made Koonibba their permanent home, but there were not as many natives as usual paying the station casual visits. One reason for this is that quite a number of the old people died during the year, and another reason is that Government rations are now also being distributed at Murat Bay.”

Koonibba Mission, 1919-20.

Note a change of policy though with respect to Aborigines in the city of Adelaide, but this policy appears to be very restricted to the city. The issue had been building up for a considerable period of time. Rev. Taplin of Point McLeay raised the issue as early as 1874, but notice it is nearly forty years before the government actually acts:

“2. The health of the natives is better than it used to be. I attribute this to the more prompt medical assistance which they receive now. Those who suffer most are those who frequent the townships and public-houses. Those who hang out in Adelaide always return here in a low state of health. I have known of several deaths in the past years which have resulted from drunken exposure on the Adelaide Park Lands. It would be a mercy if the Government would direct the police to order the natives out of Adelaide. They have no right there; it is not their territory; and if the white man had not come here they would probably never have seen the ground on which the city stands.”

1874.

“The aborigines camping about the city and the beach have been a source of considerable annoyance to residents and police. At one time during the year I found 32 aboriginals camped near Glenelg, many of them able-bodied Point McLeay natives. It is most important that these camps be broken up, but at present there is no power to do so. This is provided for in the Bill now before Parliament.”

(authors' emphasis)

1909-10.

In 1911 the Aborigines Act was passed. The Act gave the Chief Protector the power to remove Aboriginal encampments to a desired distance from any town or municipal boundaries, the power to the Governor to ban Aborigines without employment there from being inside town or municipal boundaries as he saw fit “in the interests of aborigines” and it also gave the Chief Protector the power to remove and confine Aborigines on reserves or missions, albeit with certain exceptions. These powers stayed in place until 1962. These powers, however, appear to have been little used for the majority of the Aboriginal population. In the above case the Aborigines were moved from the city, but consider that these were identified as largely Point McLeay Aborigines and that they were being returned to their own tribal lands:

“The Aborigines Act, No. 1048, came into force in December last, and it is hoped that it will be of great benefit in protecting and controlling the aborigines. Under its provisions the camps which existed about the city have been broken up, and the old,
disreputable natives transferred to Point McLeay, where they are well provided for by the department, and are much better off and happier than begging and drinking about the city.”

1911-12.

There is only one other instance that we could find of compulsory relocation to a mission station:

“On January 15th, nine adult natives and two children were received as members into the church through the sacrament of holy baptism. One of them was a half-caste young woman, who had been sent to the station with her quarter-caste (quadroon) child by the police some years ago.”

Killalpaninna Mission, 1910-11.

This is the only evidence of any compulsion we have seen. Certainly, compulsion does not fit with the general picture. For example, consider that if Aborigines were being rounded up and held on the reserves or stations against their will – wouldn’t “expulsion” from the reserve be just what they were after? The examples given below show Aborigines being expelled from stations, and that, in fact, it was expulsion that they most feared:

There was this from the Government Gazette, May 25th, 1854; an expulsion from Poonindie, the Anglican Training Institution near Port Lincoln:

“I lament to say, however, that the dismissal of one man has been found necessary. He was quarrelsome and sullen, and there as a general wish amongst the other natives that the Society should be relieved of his presence. He was sent to Adelaide.”

1854.

It should be noted that since Poonindie training Institution recruited most of its trainees as graduates from the Adelaide Native School, so being “sent to Adelaide” was effectively being sent home. We also saw this earlier example from Taplin’s diary, where Wullumme was “sent off”:

“24 November, 1869. ...Yesterday our shepherd Wullumme let the sheep get into Sumner’s crop. He laid down and went to sleep and let the flock go where they liked. So this morning I sent him off. He is a most useless and worthless lazy fellow.”

And now, we hear of another expulsion:

“Crime has not been prevalent, most of the offences dealt with being on account of liquor. One man, after repeated warnings, was expelled from the station for misconduct, and this should have a restraining influence on the others, as of all punishment they dislike expulsion the most.”

(authors’ emphasis) Point Pearce, 1931-32.

Ooldea Soak and the Trans-Australian Railway.

The Protectors were well aware of the practical limitations of the powers that they wielded, and recognised that being heavy-handed would be completely counter-productive. Chief Protector McLean would sum this up in 1937:
“The congregation of aboriginals at places along the Transcontinental Railway continues to create an unsatisfactory condition for both the aboriginal and the white men employed along the railway line. This condition is responsible for much unfavourable comment and criticism from travellers along the line but as yet no satisfactory solution has been found. Even if a large reserve were proclaimed for these natives they would in all probability leave the reserve and continue to visit the line. The only method of punishing them if they did leave the reserve would be by prosecution in a court of law and sending them to prison, which, with such people would be quite ridiculous and unsatisfactory.”

1936-37.

This extract, above, dating from the 1936-7 Annual Report, detailed the problems the Chief Protector was having with Aborigines drawn to the railway line at Ooldea Siding. The following extracts, dating to the first opening of the line, give an unexpected window into both the mobility of the Aborigines and to unexpected pull factors. Note how far they have travelled and note also that, rather than rounding anyone up or driving them off their lands, the Chief Protector was trying to get them to go home to their own lands:

“During the year I visited the aborigines along the East-West Railway line between Port Augusta and the Western Australian Border, where I met about 200, most of these having come in from country near the borders of Western Australia and the Northern Territory to see the new railway line. They were not giving the white residents any trouble, and will no doubt return to their own country later on.”

1917-18.

“From reports received from the police stationed on the East-West Railway, it appears that as the line proceeded through the out-back country the natives flocked to the various camps along the line, and came into contact with a certain section of the workmen, who induced them to remain in the vicinity of the camps, with the result that their standard of living, both morally and otherwise, became lowered. The police, realizing the danger confronting the natives (particularly the females), persuaded them to return to their respective districts, and were successful in inducing the majority of them to return. These natives (about 200) consisted of tribes from Kalgoorlie, Penong, Fowler’s Bay, and Musgrave Ranges, and they all appeared to be in good health.”

1917-18.

“From reports received from the police stationed at Ooldea, on the East-West railway, it appears that there are about 100 natives in the district, including 60 from Fowler’s Bay and Western Australia, a number of them being uncivilized. In March a supply of rations and blankets was received from the Government and issued to the natives, and every endeavour is being made to induce them to return to their respective districts, and that police have been fairly successful in their efforts in that direction.”

1918-19.

“Since the East-West railway line was complete many aborigines have come in along the line from the out-lying country, and some steps will be necessary to prevent this, as they infest the sidings and beg from the train passengers and the railway employees. There is no necessity for them to do so, as their natural food is plentiful in their own country, and several ration depots exist in the district where the old and infirm may obtain supplies.
The able-bodied natives can find plenty of employment amongst the settlers, but as long as they are encouraged by sympathetic people to beg they will naturally refuse to work. In other parts of the north country, away from the railway line, all the aborigines find employment and earn good wages.”

Interestingly, a mission station was later set up at Ooldea railway siding (in the late 1920s) because of the large number of Aborigines gathering there. That is, the Aborigines apparently provided more of a pull factor for the missionaries than the other way around. Note here too that there was no European settlement in the Musgrave Ranges at this time, about 1,000km to the north, to provide a “push factor” for this resettlement. This was an entirely voluntary migration. Note too that the Chief Protector continued in his belief that welfare in the form of rations was not always a good idea:

“About nine months ago a large number of natives arrived at Ooldea from the Everard and Musgrave Ranges and camped near the railway line, and by their persistent appeals for rations, &c., became a source of annoyance to the railway employees, and those who have once tasted the sweetness of idleness, and have been assisted by the white people, make no genuine effort to keep themselves, and eventually become a burden to the State. About two years ago Mrs Daisy Bates established a camp at Ooldea and worked among the natives presumably with the object of raising them to a higher standard of living and to eventually bring about their complete civilization. After about 18 months’ stay amongst them she realised that all her efforts in that direction were in vain, and she returned to Western Australia, thoroughly convinced that any violation of their human instincts, and intrusion upon their native habits and customs, would be detrimental to them both from a moral and physical aspect.”

Ooldea provided a long-term headache for the Chief Protector as we will see later.

The situation in the North was still largely unchanged

In 1917, after the government had taken over the Point Pearce and Point McLeay Missions, of the estimated 4,772 Aborigines in the State, there were just 571 identified as living on departmental stations at that point in time and 158 on the only mission station. That’s only about 15% of the total State Aboriginal population:

“From this it appears there are now 3,852 full-bloods and 920 half-castes in the State – total 4,772. Of these 571 are on departmental stations and 158 are at the Koonibba Station.”

This next extract details the situation across much of the North. The ration stations provided a pull factor particularly in times of drought. The stations were open for Aborigines to drift in and out as they required it. The needs of this drifting population were continually monitored and stations opened or closed where appropriate. This extended abstract is included to give a broader perspective of the times:

“There are about 50 natives in the Fowler’s Bay district, the majority of whom are able to obtain employment, while the old and infirm natives are supplied with rations, &c., regularly from the depot. There are about eight old adult aboriginals in
the Streaky Bay district, and there are no special circumstances associated with them which requires special report or attention. There are about 10 males and 8 female aboriginals and half-castes in the Port Lincoln district; three of the males have acquired land in the Hundred of Louth, and are reported to be doing well. The wants of the natives in the Murat Bay district are being supplied from the depot which was recently established at that place, and from reports received it appears that they have everything they require. From reports received from the police at Indulkinna I find that the general health of the natives is good, and that very little trouble has been experienced among stock-owners through the killing of stock by the natives. The supply of rations, &c., received from the Government has been sufficient to meet all demands, but a further supply will probably be necessary in the near future if the dry weather continues in the district.

At the Innamincka depot there is an average of 40 natives, comprising 16 old natives receiving Government rations, and 24 able-bodied natives, males and females, employed at station and general work. At Coongee Lakes there are 10 old aboriginals who receive rations from the Innamincka depot occasionally and live on game and fish, which are very plentiful. At Cordillo and Haddon Downs there are about 36 natives receiving rations, and 20 young natives employed on stations. There are about 150 aboriginals in the Mungeranie district (including 70 females) who are being supplied with government rations; some of these natives are suffering from severe colds, and I would respectfully suggest that a supply of eucalyptus be forwarded to the police at Mungeranie for the use of the natives. The condition of the aboriginals in the Marree district is exceedingly good, there being plenty of employment for the able-bodied men who earn good wages at droving and camel driving, the wages being from four to seven pounds per month and keep. The old and infirm natives who are unable to work receive rations. At present there are very few aboriginals in the district, most of them having gone to Cooper’s Creek, where there is an abundance of fish and game owing to the recent floods in the river. There are about 100 natives in the Tarcoola district, the majority of these natives pay periodical visits to the surrounding stations, and a number of them are art present engaged by the station owners trapping wild dogs. At present there are several old and infirm aboriginals at Tarcoola requiring assistance, and I would suggest that a supply of rations and blankets be forwarded to the police there for distribution among these natives.

From reports received from the police stationed at Ooldea, on the East-West railway, ..... In conclusion, I am pleased to state that your department has always favourably considered applications for rations, etc., received from the police in this division."

(author's emphasis) Police Report, 1918-19.

New developments – in the settled areas

In the settled districts the Chief Protector, rather than trying to round Aborigines up onto the missions and government stations, he would dearly have loved to see Aborigines leave and integrate with the mainstream community, but they kept coming back. This was not rounding up onto stations, but quite the opposite:
“With reference to the young people, I recommend that some system be adopted dealing with them, on similar lines to the State Children’s Department. As they leave school, situations away from the station should be found for them, and they should be kept in constant employment until they are, say, 21 years of age. At present situations are continually being found for them, especially for the girls, on neighbouring farms, but authority is needed for keeping them in their places. The liberty to return to the station whenever they wish is harmful to their best interests. It is very necessary that this condition of things should be remedied.

(authors' emphasis) 1919-20.

“Employment of natives. – Employment on the station has been found for a large number of natives, who seem indisposed to leave the station to find work. Could this be overcome there would be little or no unemployment of natives, as the settlers are badly in need of labor.” (authors' emphasis) 1919-20.

“The settlers would employ more of our native youths and girls on the farms, but they find that when spoken to they want to go back again to the station to be kept in idleness by their fathers and mothers, and until we have some law compelling them to stay in their employment they will always be a source of trouble to the station and those who want to employ them.” (authors’ emphasis) Point McLeay, 1921-22.

“The boys and girls are still the same when working for the settlers, and that is, if spoken to make straight back to the station, where the fathers and mothers love to keep them in idleness, and this will continue until we have some law to compel them to stay.” (authors’ emphasis) Point McLeay, 1922-23.

The government would have liked to have seen Aborigines maintain themselves by either continuing their hunting and gathering lifestyle or by moving into the workforce. The Aborigines were not generally confined to the stations or missions. They were buying train tickets to Adelaide and then asking the Chief Protector to pay for their fare home:

“Rations, clothing, blankets, and medical comforts have been supplied during the year to a number of depots throughout the State, and have been distributed by the issuers of rations to the old, sick, and infirm natives and to others found to be in poor circumstances. It is always a difficult matter to decide whether natives are in genuine need of assistance or whether they have been contributory through laziness or gambling to the state in which we often find them, without money or work, and having a wife and family to keep. The able-bodied natives, especially half-castes and quadroons, must be made to realise that they must maintain themselves and families without Government assistance. The practice of natives coming to Adelaide, spending all their money, and relying on the department to see them to their homes is far too common, and I intend taking a strong stand against this by considerably reducing the number of passes given from this office.” 1921-22.

New developments - in the remoter areas

Meanwhile, the police in the Far Northern District were suggesting a quite different policy more in line with Daisy Bates’ comment, above. Again, rather than being “herded” onto
missions, the police wanted to see them completely segregated from the whites onto their own lands so that they could maintain their cultural integrity. The Chief Protector in airing these suggestions was perhaps softening up his political masters in preparation for the implementation of this policy:

“I firmly believe that the full-blooded natives, if allowed to live their primitive manner of life, and protected from the vices of others, would be happy and contented. The general condition of the full-blooded native is good. In most cases they are healthy and apparently contented, and it is only where they are constantly coming in contact with the whites that any diseases of a serious nature are prevalent.” Police Report, Sub-Inspector McCarthy, 1920-21.

“From the conditions at present prevailing at Mungeranie the constable at present stationed there is of the opinion that it would be advisable, in the interests of the natives generally, to have a reserve proclaimed for them somewhere in the vicinity of Kalamurrina or Poonaruna, on the Warburton River. This would afford them a good deal of security from the whites, besides they would be able to practically keep themselves on this country, where there is plenty of game and fish.” 1921-22.

“M.C. Aiston reiterates his statement contained in last year’s report, that some suitable portion of the back country should be set apart for the exclusive use of the natives, where they could be allowed to live their primitive manner of life, and pursue their tribal habits and customs, and be protected from the vices of others. The race is fast disappearing, and this appears the only practical way of preventing, to some extent, their complete and inevitable extinction.” 1922-23.

“During the past few weeks the reports concerning the aboriginals near the border of Central Australia and in Central Australia have not been so satisfactory. This country produces little food for man or beast; its average carrying capacity being, say, two bullocks to the square mile. The advance of white settlement on these lands means the destruction of the aboriginals’ already scanty natural food supplies, and makes it urgently necessary that reserves should be proclaimed for them and that they should be gradually taught to make good use of same.” Police Officers, 1927-28.

“This trip (to the Musgrave Ranges) gave me a unique opportunity of seeing the natives in their almost natural conditions. Although they had made some contact with white men, especially doggers, they could not speak English, and were almost entirely dependent upon the natural food supplies which the country provided. Rations have never been supplied by the department to the natives of this locality, and the longer they can be kept outside the influence of white civilization, the better for their moral and physical welfare.” (authors’ emphasis) 1932-33.

This new policy direction heralded a new interest in the Aborigines of the North-West, and a new recognition that they were coming under a threat from contact that would have to be “managed.”

A new Missionary era
In the mid twenties, the government seemed to have softened its position on the missions and a new round of missionary work started up, with new missions established at Swan Reach, Ooldea and Oodnadatta – and later at Nepabunna, Umeewarra and Finniss Springs:

“The Aborigines Inland Mission have two lady missionaries, Miss M. Brown and Miss R. Hellyer, at Tarcoola. These ladies visit the aborigines at Ooldea and other camps and conduct religious meetings. Miss Anna Lock, another lady missionary, is engaged in religious work amongst the aborigines in the Oodnadatta district. Medicines have been supplied to these missionaries for the sick by this department.”

1923-24.

Ooldea revisited

The Ooldea problem was again resurfacing - recognising that these were not necessarily Aborigines local to the area, but from many far distant tribes:

“OOLDEA.
“The East-West railway has created a problem here. In the month of November I visited this district and saw there about 80 aborigines. Altogether between Ooldea and Fowler’s Bay there are about 250 aborigines, and many of them make the natural soakage wells near Ooldea their centre. The country is more or less desert, and the natural food supplies for the aboriginal are scarce, consequently these poor aborigines are almost entirely dependent on the department for food. They are a low type. There is no work for their young men, except that they earn a little money obtaining scalps of wild dogs. They gather around the railway station looking for gifts of food from the passing trains. The water obtained from the wells at Ooldea is largely needed for the railway. Some provision should be made for these aborigines, and probably the best would be to grant them a reserve on the sea coast, where they could obtain fish. I hope shortly to be able to make a definite recommendation concerning the matter.”

1923-24.

“There are about 150 natives living at the various sidings along the East-West railway. The majority of these originally came from the Musgrave Ranges when the railway was in course of construction. The old and feeble ones are supplied with rations, &c., from the depot at Ooldea.”


“There are about 150 full-blooded aborigines in the district. Most of the older people have left the district, some to go up into Queensland, and a lot to cross over to the Finniss in the Arabunna district, and one fairly large party from here have sent me back word that they are in the Kingoonya district on the East-West line.”

Newcastle District (Far North), 1924-25.

“A very small percentage of the natives find regular employment on the surrounding stations, catching dingoes etc. The remainder wander about from place to place along the East-West railway, ranging from Ooldea on the west to Coondambo on the east.”

Sub-Protector, 1925-26.

In general conditions remain unchanged – Push factors and pull factors
They were not generally confined anywhere:

“The constable at Mungeranie reports that there are about 300 aboriginals living in the camps in the district away from the cattle stations, possibly another 200 are employed on the stations in various capacities”  


Even in what might be considered the settled areas:

“The number of full-blooded aborigines on this station is 38, half-castes 244. These figures include aborigines living in the immediate neighbourhood along the Coorong.”


Clearly, no one was confined at Koonibba Mission:

“The average native population was about 150; at times, however, there were considerably more. The older natives continue to lead a nomadic life, and they have a tendency to drift to the townships, where they are a nuisance.”

Koonibba Mission, 1922-23.

“During the year a new policy was introduced, but it is too early to make any comment. The new policy is to reduce the wheat-growing area and to extend wool growing. Several hundred sheep were purchased off shears, so that with natural increase we now have 1,500 sheep. They are doing remarkably well. We were forced to adopt this attitude on account of the fact that we cannot depend upon the natives. They would occasionally leave on their periodical wanderings just when they were needed most.”


“Our natives still have the wandering instinct strongly developed, and will, at times, leave just when they are mostly needed for farming operations. Especially does the deep sea port Thevenard attract them during the wheat season.”

Koonibba Mission, 1924-25.

“The religious training is leaving a mark upon them, although, for a season, some seem to forget that there is something nobler than the base, questionable pleasures of the morally depraved. There always are a few who get supplies of liquor and are inclined to loaf about the towns which are without police stations.”

Koonibba Mission, 1924-25.

“In the Farina police district the natives are a floating population to a great extent, and their number varies from six or seven of the regular ones to about 30 when there is any attraction in the town to bring them in.”

Sub-Protector, 1925-26.

“Most of the blacks are at present out on the floodwaters of the Diamentina, and should be well provided with their natural food for some months to come; but at every ration depot there are sure to be many that are too infirm to do any hunting or fishing.”


As was indicated in the last chapter relating to issue of rations, the ration depots and missions were a constant pull factor every time there was a drought, sickness or levels of general unemployment in the surrounding district rose:
Labor. – On account of general unemployment we have more natives here than usual.”  


“The population of the Station has increased through natives from adjacent areas, who have hitherto more or less maintained themselves, being thrown on the department for support owing to the general shortage of employment.”  


“Unemployment has again this year adversely affected the aboriginals and has caused considerable numbers of them to remain on the Government Aboriginal Stations and around the ration depots. Not until most of the unemployed white population is absorbed in occupations will there be an opportunity of doing very much with the natives”.  

1931-32.

“The Superintendent, Mr. A.L. Payne, reports that the number of natives living on the Station has increased not only by an excess of births over deaths, but also an influx of natives from the surrounding country. These people being unable to find work are returning to the Station where better conditions are available to them.”  

Point McLeay, 1933-34.

“Natives from the Coorong and surrounding districts usually make for the Station in times of sickness.”  

Point McLeay, 1933-34.

These pull factors at times became more and more difficult to overcome when the seasons eased. The Aborigines themselves were at times disinclined to leave the ration depots and government stations:

“Mr George Aiston, Protector of Aboriginals, Newcastle District, reports that the condition of the aboriginals in his district is at present good, and that there is an abundance of food for those who are capable of looking after themselves. Unfortunately the long drought has made some of the aboriginals indifferent to their natural foods and they are still demanding rations.”  


“The inspector says that ‘There is little work available for aborigines, they are unfit for anything but station work, and many of them refuse employment on stations because they want award rates. There are many white men and boys working for less than award rates or making less on contract work, but few aboriginals will work for less.’” (This is during the depression)  


“The Inspector says there is now a fair amount of work available for natives with previous experience in station work but some of them have refused to accept work so long as they can collect rations.”  

1936-37.

There were still many Aborigines who were largely untouched by white settlement and maintained their nomadic existence:

“Outside of settlements and station properties there are many aboriginals about whom little information is obtainable and to whom this report does not apply.”  


And there were other Aborigines who continued to come and go as before:
“Mr. Geo. Aiston, Protector of Aboriginals for the district of Newcastle, has informed me that the natives of the north-east are now practically dependent on the Government rations. There is no work on stations and owners are hard put to get enough food for themselves. He states that there has been very little sickness and that the numbers round his headquarters at Mulka remain approximately the same, although he has had visits from several parties from the Finniss and Oodnadatta who have now returned to their own country.”

Apart from the major State censuses (see final chapter) there was an informal on-going census of the Aborigines conducted by the issuers of rations. The 1932 Annual Report provides an example which contains some useful information relating to the movement of Aborigines at this time. Firstly, the report noted the movement of Aborigines even from State to State. Clearly, there was little restriction on this movement. Secondly, in 1932, 51% (1732 of 3,407) of Aborigines were described as “nomadic” and therefore not resident on missions or similar. Of the rest, 30% (1009 out of the 3,407) were in regular work on (sheep or cattle) stations or farms, or were dependants of those in regular work. That means 81% were apparently not living in “supervised camps” and only 19% were on government or mission stations:

“The aboriginal population of South Australia at June 30th, 1932, was shown by the government statist to be 3,407, as against 3,349 on June 30th, 1931, and 3,995 on June 30th, 1930.

Population figures can only be taken as approximately correct, and variations from year to year are often caused by nomadic natives crossing from one State to another. The 3,407 recorded aboriginals are divided into two main classes – those living in the wild estate (nomadic), 1732 (51 per cent.); and those living in camps and on stations and farms, 1,675 (49 per cent.). Of the latter, 602 were in regular employment, and 666 were in supervised camps but not in regular employment, and 407 were described as dependants of those employed outside of supervised camps or not working.”

Swan Reach – A Case Study

In the 1930s Swan Reach appeared in the Annual Reports for the first time, and provides a good case study into how mission stations developed. The general scheme was that Aborigines collected into their own autonomous communities, living in a semi-traditional way and working when work was available, often close to a ration station. This was then considered unsatisfactory; there was a perceived need to “improve” their situation, probably in response to local complaints, and probably from local “philanthropists”. The Chief Protector would provide some building materials to improve the accommodation and the area would be proclaimed as an Aboriginal Reserve to give the Aborigines some form of secure tenure. Because there were a number of Aborigines in one spot, the missionaries would arrive to provide schooling for the children and to undertake spiritual work. Eventually permanent buildings, schools, cottages etc. would be built - and the “bag wurlie” settlement become a mission station. In the case of Swan Reach, the original site of the “bag wurlie” settlement was a bad one, too close to the Murray River and subject to flooding, so eventually the mission re-sited the whole community to a better spot out of the reach of
floods at Gerard, and where there was greater demand for unskilled worker, for example, in
the adjacent fruit-growing district

“In May, 1933, I visited Swan Reach where approximately eighty natives are camped
on a small Government Reserve. The natives have occupied this site for many years,
and have camped in bag wurlies which needed renewing every year to make them
weather proof. It was decided that something more substantial would provide
greater comfort for the natives and prove less costly to the department in the long
run, so sufficient galvanized iron was provided to roof huts for these people.
The erection of the huts was done by the natives under the supervision of the police
officer. The framework was made from native pines and the sides covered with bags.
The police officer has reported that the huts are now finished, and the camp presents
a much better appearance, and in addition the natives have a more permanent
shelter. I have recommended that the ground on which these huts are erected be
proclaimed an aboriginal reserve.
The United Aborigines’ Mission have two sisters stationed at Swan Reach who look
after the spiritual welfare of the natives and conduct a school for native children.”

1932-33.

“Swan Reach was also visited (by the Chief Protector) and the Missionary, Mr A.
Wyld, explained to us his idea of giving each native a small plot of ground
surrounding his hut and encouraging them to grow sufficient vegetables for their
own requirements. The question of providing a pumping plant so that water from the
river could be reticulated to each plot is under consideration.
At the time of our visit several new two-roomed huts had been erected by Mr. Wyld
with the help of the natives and material supplied by the Department and it is
intended to provide each family in this camp with a uniform type of hut. A new
school building has been provided for the children at the Swan Reach camp and Mrs.
Wyld has given daily instruction to all children of school going age.”

1936-37.

“Swan Reach.- The superintendent, Mr. H.E. Southwell, reports that a considerable
number of former residents of the Mission are now working and living in the upper
river districts. Those remaining at Swan Reach have been provided with rations,
medical attention, etc., as required. It is expected that the whole of the natives in this
district will eventually be transferred to the new Mission which the United
Aborigines’ Mission proposes to establish in the Cobdogla area, where suitable land
has been acquired for the purpose. The reserve for aborigines at Swan Reach is
subject to periodic flooding with dire results to the homes of the native residents.
There is no danger of flood damage on the land secured for the new Mission. It is
expected that there will be work available in this district for all persons able and
willing to work.”

1944-45.

Ooldea - again

Ooldea, as we have seen, followed a similar trajectory, starting out as a desert railway siding
and turning into a mission station. Note that it was not the mission, nor the rations that
provided a pull factor for the area. Nor did white settlement on their own lands provide a
push factor. As we have seen, Aborigines just turned up to look at the railway line, and didn’t
appear to want to go home. It wasn’t the missions or the government stopping them. There
was constant frustration, but very little progress:
“In September last a large number of natives gathered at Ooldea for the performance of tribal rites and ceremonies. On receipt of reports of this large gathering, Mr. W.R. Penhall, of my Department accompanied by the Rev. J.H. Sexton, Secretary of the Advisory Council of Aborigines, visited Ooldea and made satisfactory arrangements for their maintenance while in that district.

I still have trouble with natives begging from travellers and fettlers along the East-West Railway line and it seems impossible to completely prevent this.

Rations are issued regularly at Ooldea by Miss Anna Lock, but it is not good policy to encourage these natives to sit about the ration depot in idleness and it is chiefly when they are sent off on hunting expeditions or when, to satisfy their nomadic instinct they wander about the country, that they become a nuisance to the railway authorities and their employees.”

Ooldea Mission, 1934-35.

“The aboriginals on the Nullarbor Plain appear to be undernourished but although rations are issued at Ooldea, the Inspector says the natives will not stay there for any length of time but prefer to wander up and down the Transcontinental Railway line begging food from railway employees and selling souvenirs to the train passengers. The natives are sometimes collected together and taken to Ooldea but they soon wander away again and how to keep them in one place is a most difficult problem. The line is a great attraction to them but the country along this track provides very little of their native food.”

1936-37.

This following extract has been presented before, but temporally fits in here:

“The congregation of aboriginals at places along the Transcontinental Railway continues to create an unsatisfactory condition for both the aboriginal and the white men employed along the railway line. This condition is responsible for much unfavourable comment and criticism from travellers along the line but as yet no satisfactory solution has been found. Even if a large reserve were proclaimed for these natives they would in all probability leave the reserve and continue to visit the line. The only method of punishing them if they did leave the reserve would be by prosecution in a court of law and sending them to prison, which, with such people would be quite ridiculous and unsatisfactory.”

1936-37.

As indicated above, not only was the Chief Protector unconvinced by the idea of a reserve, but punishment by incarceration was also regarded as being of dubious worth:

“In regards to goat killing in the Musgrave Range country, I am pleased to say that several more recent cases have been dealt with summarily by the justices at Oodnadatta and sentences were taken out in the Oodnadatta Police Station. To my mind this is far preferable to taking these myall blacks to Port Augusta, as experience has shown that the trip to Port Augusta is regarded as an incentive rather than a deterrent to such crimes.”

1936-37.

To complete the picture, remembering that the South Australian Chief Protector, McLean, had been wanting the Aborigines of the North-West to return to their tribal lands and to their traditional hunting and gathering culture for years, we hear from the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for Western Australia, Mr. Neville, recently arrived in Canberra via the East-West railway line, for the first Conference of Chief Protectors in Canberra, 1937:
“NATIVES ON THE TRANS-AUSTRALIAN LINE.

Mr. NEVILLE. – This subject concerns both South Australia and Western Australia. The presence of natives along the trans-Australian line has been a source of great trouble for many years to Western Australia, ..... I do not want to criticize the South Australian control in any way, and in a sense, the natives cannot be blamed for coming to the train. I merely want to place the facts before the Conference. When these natives approach the train, they are received with extraordinary sympathy by the passengers, who give them money, fruit, cake and many other things, and in every way possible encourage them. At Immarna about 100 very dirty natives of all sorts and conditions, dressed in filthy rags, crowded to the train. I have never seen such a collection. I should have been ashamed to have had anything to do with them. The train stopped at that station for nearly twenty minutes and these natives swarmed round it like flies. One extraordinary feature of this business is that although, ten years ago, there was hardly a child to be seen among the natives along the line, there must have been from 30 to 40 children from ten years of age downwards in that company. Knowing the natives as I do, I am quite satisfied that those children were bred for the purpose of begging. The mothers carried them along the train on their backs, and the little children held out their hands to the passengers who gave them shillings and sixpences and other coins. Their pathetic appeal could not be resisted by the passengers. ... I understand that the natives are allowed to travel without charge on what is known as the “tea and sugar train”, which once a week carries rations between Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta. The natives get on this train and get off at some station a distance from their own locality and beg from the people on the passenger train when it arrives there. ....

Mr. McLEAN– The facts are as Mr. Neville has stated. ..... We issue rations at only one point along the line, and that about four miles from the railway, where there is water, our object being to keep the natives back from the stations. We issue them with clothes so that they may appear more or less respectable, but we find that they hang their clothes on a tree, and present themselves in their rags before the passengers so as to excite sympathy. The only solution I can see is to have permanent police officers on duty to turn the natives back from the railway.”

First Conference of Chief Protectors, Canberra, 1937.

As with Swan Reach, the situation was resolved by the moving (in 1952) of the entire community from the mission station at Ooldea to Yalata, nearer the coast, as a government-run station in sheep country, where more pastoral work was available and access to the railway more difficult. In a sense this was indeed “rounding up” onto a government station, but there was no compulsion for the Aborigines to go there, or compulsion to stay - there was no locked gate.

Oodnadatta followed a similar trajectory to Swan Reach and Ooldea, with the missionaries moving in on the Aboriginal camps:

“At Oodnadatta the United Aborigines’ mission have been erecting some huts for the old and infirm aborigines who have been in the habit of camping there. They should be much more comfortable in these huts than in the wurlies they had made for themselves from scraps picked off the rubbish tips. The labour for erecting these huts was given voluntarily by supporters of the mission and the material was partly supplied by the Mission and partly by the Department.” 1936-37.
“Oodnadatta Mission.- A home for orphans and neglected children was established at Oodnadatta during the year with Mr. N.B. Wiley in charge. Twelve children are now in residence, some of whom have never previously enjoyed the comfort of a good home with nourishing food and decent clothing. Three of the children attend the Oodnadatta public school; the remainder, whose knowledge of the English language is very limited, receive instruction at the mission school.”

Oodnadatta Mission, 1948-49.

A further example is presented at Wudinna on Eyre Peninsula, in the 1940s. Again, in this example, rather than attempting to confine Aborigines to a particular reserve, the reserves were proclaimed on sites required by the Aborigines. This particular site, at Wudinna, did not develop into a mission station:

“Western District … A considerable number of men are employed at the Port Lincoln branch of the Produce Department and in the Engineering and Water Supply Department at Wudinna.” 1945-46.

“Efforts are being made to establish new Reserves for Aborigines at Streaky Bay, Wudinna, where men temporarily employed or passing through the districts concerned, and their families may be able to camp.” 1945-46.

“WESTERN DIVISION …. An area of land comprising 6 acres near Wudinna, in the hundred of Pygery, was acquired from the district council of LeHunte for use as a camping place for aborigines. Camps have been established, and sanitation provided, with the assistance of the board, and several families are now in occupation. Water from the local supply scheme is laid on to the camp, and an abundance of firewood is available. The head of each family is employed on local road work or the water reticulation scheme.” 1946-47.

The policy still appeared to be one of trying to keep Aborigines on their own tribal land by opening more local ration depots, but with limited success in some cases:

“The Inspector says there is now a fair amount of work available for natives with previous experience in station work but some of them have refused to accept work so long as they can collect rations. He considers that aboriginals should not be permitted to camp near township unless they are self-supporting and the problem of making them self-supporting whilst they are near towns is very difficult. Rations are issued to all natives camped near Port Augusta and because of this and the lure of the picture shows and betting shops, the native population of Port Augusta is steadily increasing. They require a lot of police supervision as sailors and others visit their camps with liquor and are suspected of going there for immoral purposes. The work of the police in trying to discourage natives from remaining at this town is increased by the interference of well-meaning folk who claim to protect the rights and liberties of the natives. “ 1936-37.

“Efforts made during the year to induce aboriginals who had wandered into the camp at Port Augusta to return to their own localities have been successful and the number of adults in this camp has been reduced from 50 to 30.” 1937-38.

“Aboriginal ration depots were established at Granite Downs, Mabel Creek and Tieyon Stations to enable old and infirm aborigines who live in those districts to be
provided with food, without having to travel outside the boundaries of their tribal territory” 1943-44.

“Additional food supplies were provided for aborigines living in areas affected by the drought, particularly northern parts of the State where game and other native foods were practically unobtainable. An additional ration depot was established at Everard Park to provide more effectively for the needs of the old and infirm aborigines living in the areas north and west of Oodnadatta.” 1944-45.

Ernabella Mission

The missionaries had finally started moving in to set up a mission in the North-West of South Australia, This was mostly as a means for providing relief during droughts, but was also to counter the expansion of dubious European influences into the area:

“The proposal by the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church to open a Mission for the care and medical supervision of the aboriginals in the north-west of the State has proceeded and they have acquired a property of 500 square miles situated about 20 miles from the eastern boundary of the area reserved for aboriginals in that locality. The Rev. J. R. B. Love of Kunmunya Mission in Western Australia has been allotted the task of visiting the property, exploring the possibilities and advising the Board of Missions as to the best method of establishing and maintaining the Mission. An additional area of 4,235 square miles, between the eastern boundary of the original reserve of 21,900 square miles and the furthermost western fringe of settlement, has now been set aside for proclamation as an aboriginal reserve. This additional area contains several useful waters and ceremonial grounds used by natives and will add considerably to the value of the reserve as a sanctuary for them. This large reserve has in the past been subject to a lot of trespassing by men trading in wild dog scalps but with the establishment of the mission in close proximity to the reserve it is hoped that contact between the white doggers and the aboriginals will be considerably reduced and ultimately entirely prevented.” 1936-37.

“During the 1937 Session of Parliament the necessary resolution was passed to enable all lands previously reserved for the use and benefit of aboriginals under the Crown Lands Act to be definitely proclaimed as Aboriginal Reserves under the Aborigines Act. The proclamation was published in the Government Gazette of the 14th April 1938. Until this was done it was not possible to take action against persons trespassing on Aboriginal Reserves. The trespass upon the reserve in the north-west corner of the State by white men is reported to be common practice and the police officer at Oodnadatta has been asked to take action against the trespassers when ever evidence is procurable. .....” 1937-38.

“The mission Station at Ernabella is now definitely established with the Reverend Harry Taylor as Superintendent, and I think the influence of this mission and the interest of its superintendent and staff in the survival of the aboriginal as a pure race will go a long way towards arresting the drift which has set in through the immoral association of white men with the aboriginals.” (authors’ emphasis) 1937-38.
“The work of the Ernabella Mission is of great importance in that it is expected to retard the detribalization of the natives living on the adjacent reserve and ensure that the inevitable contact with civilization is made first of all with people whose moral character is above reproach.” (authors’ emphasis) 1938-39.

“The Ernabella Mission is performing great service to the aborigines of the northwestern parts of the State by delaying the inevitable process of de-tribalization, and preparing the children to take their place in the community of which they must eventually form a part.” (authors’ emphasis) 1939-40.

Restrictions of movement on and off this reserve (and other reserves) were only generally applicable to the non-Aboriginal population. There was also no across the board compulsion to live at the mission:

“During the period of severe drought when native foods are unprocurable, the natives gathered at Ernabella, and food provided by the Aborigines’ Protection Board was distributed by officers of the Mission. When the rains came and game and other foods were again available, natives returned to their practice of hunting for a living, and this service was discontinued.” Ernabella 1944-45

The next excerpts refer to missions where there were aborigines living in camps nearby who were not part of the mission, but were still cared for by the mission staff. These people were not coerced but could come and go as they wished:

“Oodnadatta Mission.—...... Services are conducted by Mr. Wiley, also at the camp occupied by aborigines.” (authors’ emphasis) Oodnadatta Mission, 1948-49.

“The old and infirm aborigines living on the reserve nearby are cared for by the mission staff, receiving medical attention and rations, including a hot meal each day. Visiting aborigines from far afield live on the reserve while receiving attention at the Port Augusta Hospital, and they are cared for also by members of the staff.” (authors’ emphasis) Umeewarra Mission, 1948-49.

Note also that in the late 1940’s there were still Aborigines who seem to have had little of no contact with the government system at all. (A description of the operation of the mission dormitories mentioned here will be dealt with in the next chapter):

“Matron K.M. Simmons and members of the staff are rendering outstanding service to the aborigines in that, when called upon, they take into the mission dormitory children who have spent their early years in aboriginal camps in the bush, and have not attended school, nor enjoyed any of the privileges well known to children who have always lived in the settled areas. There are about 35 children living in the mission home at present.” Umeewarra Mission, 1948-49.

“During the year 100 “new” natives came in from the Mann Ranges and even further afield. Some of these aborigines had not previously seen white people.” Ernabella Mission, 1951-52.

Here in this last extract are 250 aborigines who have freely left the Koonibba Mission:
“The Jubilee Celebrations which were most successful attracted a large number of visitors including 250 aborigines previously in contact with the Mission but now living elsewhere.”

Koonibba Mission 1951-52.

In conclusion, the analysis of census figures provided in Protectors' Reports and the regular descriptions of Aboriginal movements in those Reports, indicates that it was a minority of persons of Aboriginal descent who were ever at any one time residing on either mission or government stations, and most of these had freedom of movement to come and go as work or social needs required. This freedom of movement also applied to the still tribal Aborigines on the reserves in the remote areas of the State.
What Evidence is There for a Policy of Systematic Removal of Part-Aboriginal Children in South Australia?

At the proclamation of the colony Aborigines were granted the same status in law as all other British subjects. Hence at settlement the Protector had no more authority to remove the children of Aborigines from their families than the government had to remove the children of the settlers from theirs. In 1844, the Protector of Aborigines, Dr. Matthew Moorhouse, accompanying the Governor and his wife on an inspection of the Murray and Encounter regions south of Adelaide, recorded in his report:

“Amongst this tribe there are two aspects of peculiar interest – they have half-caste children – both girls – one appears to be about five years old, - the other not yet two, and in arms. The mother of the eldest died a short time since from the bite of a snake. They are very good looking children – of a copper color, with auburn hair, dark eyes and fine long eye lashes. It is distressing to see the oldest of these poor little creatures, who is deprived of her natural guardian, and dependant on savages, not connected with her blood, for scanty subsidence. It is hoped, that these interesting children will be taken from Savage Life which they are now leading that they may be snatched like brands from a fire – and be brought up in the way of truth. We cannot but wish that the whole Aboriginal race may be reclaimed – but the duty becomes, if possible, more imperative, in cases when the race is mixed with our own. – His Excellency endeavoured to persuade the natives to part with the Elder of these children (the other is too young to be taken from its mother) and allow him to take her to Adelaide, where she would be fed, educated and clothed - but the Natives would not part with the child.”

1844.

Clearly, the Governor of South Australia and the Protector of Aborigines did not consider themselves to have the powers to separate one motherless “half-caste” child from her tribal setting without the approval of the Aborigines themselves.

On the other hand, perhaps in response to this encounter with the orphaned child, the government introduced “Ordinance 12” in 1844, summarised (by McCorquodale, J.) as:

**Aboriginal Orphans (Ordinance 12 of 1844) (S.A.)**

*Assented and commenced: 28 August 1844*

*Repealed by The Aborigines Act 1911 (No 1048)*

Section 2 – s. 2 Provided for the protection, maintenance, and up-bringing of orphans and other destitute children of the Aborigines.

1. Protector of Aborigines or either parent may apply to two Justices to bind by indenture “any half-caste or other Aboriginal child”.
2. Punishment for misbehaviour by child: maximum of three months’ imprisonment; for ‘ill-usage’ by master: 10 pounds or three months.
3. Protector of Aborigines to be legal guardian ex officio of every half-caste and other unprotected Aboriginal child, whose parents are dead or unknown, or either of whose parents ‘may signify before a Magistrate his or her willingness in this behalf’.
The power to remove an orphaned and destitute child for care and educational purposes was not given to the Protector on his own – removal required the approval of two Justices or a Magistrate as applicable to the circumstance.

An interesting example of the process at work comes from an 1859 letter addressed to the Secretary of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, in the Commissioner’s capacity as Protector of Aborigines at the time, from the Bishop of Adelaide, on behalf of an Aboriginal woman living at the Poonindie Training Institution with her husband. It is an attempt by the Bishop to reunite the family in Port Lincoln under the supervision of the Superintendent at Poonindie, Mr. Hammond. The Bishop lobbies hard on her behalf, coming close to accusing the Commissioner of “Child Stealing”. The background to the application is presented and decision, agreeable to the child if not the mother, apparently arranged.

April 21 1859
From: Bishop of Adelaide
To: E. W. Wildman, Sec.: Comm., CL&I
Re: Daughter of Jane being looked after by Mr. Cox, Norwood.

Jane and husband at Poonindie, which was established especially for the benefit of Natives and such children.
I have the honor to state that Jane the mother is still most desirous of having her child restored to her; and that as a British subject, she has a full right to the guardianship of her child; that the detaining it from her against her repeated application is not only an utter disregard of natural feeling of a mother, but approaches to the crime of “child stealing”. As general Protector of the Aborigines, the Commissioner has been applied to on behalf of the Native mother, who appears quite unwilling to forego her rights. I would request again to take the subject into consideration, before any steps are, or may be, taken to assert the Mother’s Legal rights, which cannot be trampled upon by Mr. Cox, however with mistaken kindness may disregard the Mother’s natural affection.

[Note: 28th April, meeting with the Bishop, Mr. Cox, Jane and 10-yr-old child [Mary Jane]. (Protector of Aborigines) Moorhouse, 5 years ago, placed the child in his (Mr. Cox’s) care. Child very well taken care of, ‘shows the most unmistakeable repugnance to leave Cox and go with her black mother.’ Deemed it best to leave child where she is...... ‘This child being half-caste, it would be extremely undesirable to let her return to Port Lincoln with her mother, where she may be induced when she grows up to marry one of the aboriginal natives of Poonindie, which in my opinion would be decidedly retrograding in the way of civilizing them.’ ‘The mother is to have permission to visit Cox’s house as often as she pleases.’ ]

[Notes: (Commissioner Milne?) Child, born at Glen Osmond. Father” George, hut-keeper. ‘Mary Jane’. Mother left child with Natives. Had been in service with Mr. Cox 5 years, left child there. Now wants Mr. Hammond at Poonindie to have charge of Mary Jane.]
This incident is important in that it shows again that Aborigines were not necessarily helpless victims, but had important allies who could be called upon when required. The Protector was not able to act unilaterally, but had to follow process and at any time could be required to present sound arguments for his actions.

While the 1844 Ordinance was on the government’s books, it would appear that it was only rarely resorted to. We have come across only one mention of this Ordinance being used in any of the Protectors’ published reports, and in this reference, it was used to provide an apprenticeship to a destitute boy, John Wilkin. This one reference occurs in the quarterly report to 30th September, 1864, published in the Government Gazette Oct 20, 1864, Protector of Aborigines Walker:

“On the 21st, in conformity with Ordinance No. 12 of 1844, which provides for the protection, maintenance, and up-bringing of orphans and other destitute children of the Aborigines, a half-caste boy named John Wilkin, was bound by indenture, and put out as an apprentice to Mr. Samuel Chrystal, a saddler residing at Goolwa. The boy is one of a family of destitute children, supported for some years past at the Point McLeay Institution; he is active, intelligent, and can read and write as well as most white boys of his own age. He has been but a few weeks with Mr. Chrystal, and I already, I was informed, he gives promise of becoming in time a superior workman. He seems well pleased with his master, who bears a most excellent character, and will, I doubt not, treat the poor orphan with kindness, and endeavour to make him a good as well as useful member of society.”

1864.

Just as an incidental note, John Wilkin was the grandfather of one of the author’s (J. Lane’s) wife’s stepfather. It would appear that John Wilkin’s mother was granted a 160 acre land grant at Hog Bay, Kangaroo Island, but on the death of his father, William Wilkin, the family was destitute and split up. The two older children went into service in Adelaide, while his mother and six children went to Point McLeay. This would appear to be one of the 160 acre land grants to Aborigines referred to previously.

In another of the Rev. Taplin’s no-nonsense letters sent relating to the Wilkin family:

“1345/1861
1 July 1861
From: Geo. Taplin
Re: Mary Wilkin = particulars of leaving station.

In reply to yours of the 18th ult., I have the honor to state that Mary Wilkin left this place I believe about the 11th of March last – She only took with her the infant at the breast.
I am happy to state that I can refer with much pleasure to the general improvement which is taking place in the children which she has left here – They have derived advantage from the absence of their mother whose departure they have never expressed any regret at.”

Given the minutia of incidental personal anecdotes that were published in the Protectors’ reports, and given that the practice of child removal on the grounds of neglect was both morally and legally defensible at the time, one would not expect that the government would
seek to suppress information relating to the removal of orphans or destitute Aborigines from its reports. On these grounds, it would appear then that this Ordinance was very little used in the decades during which it applied. In general, it appears that keeping families together with the removal of the entire destitute family to mission stations where they could be properly monitored and supervised was the Protector’s preferred option.

Further evidence that Ordinance 12 of 1844 was rarely used is provided in the instructions to the issuers of rations from the government ration depots. The instructions published in 1878 (the full instruction document being reproduced in the chapter on rations, above) indicate that orphans were to be provided with rations at the ration depots, most of which were not situated at missions, with the clear implication that orphan children were expected to be present in the Aboriginal camps outside the mission system:

“The following Instructions are furnished to Issuers of Stores at Aboriginal Depôts :

1. Rations to be issued regularly – only to the sick, the old and infirm, orphan children, and women with infants under twelve months. ....” (authors’ emphasis)

1878.

Journalist and author, J.D. Woods, in his 1894 book, “The Province of South Australia” points out that, taken or not, even the schooling system was apparently never intended to be an effective means of segregation of the children from their parents:

“Native schools were founded in Adelaide in the very early days of the colony, but they were not attended with any degree of success. The adult males who hung about Adelaide often got the children away for days and even weeks together, and most of the good that was done to them was neutralised.”

page 413, 1894.

Compulsion does not appear to have been on the agenda:

“Moorundee – Mr. Scott writes, ‘That the aborigines have conducted themselves peaceably and properly towards the settlers during the quarter;’ and referring to the children, says, ‘I regret exceedingly that the Murray native children still continue to abscond from the school in Adelaide. I have remonstrated with the leading natives on the subject, in the strongest terms, but I find it impossible to subdue that superstitious feeling which induced them to induce their children away from the habitations of the Europeans; and unless it should please His Excellency to use some compulsory measures, I am afraid the attendance of native children at the school in Adelaide, will be both uncertain and irregular.’”

1850.

In an early reference to the placing of “half-caste” children in the Poonindie Training Institution at Port Lincoln, the placement was at parental request. The missioner in charge, Archdeacon Hale, reported:

“The occasion derived additional interest from the baptism of two half-caste children; these children having been a short time before deprived of their mother, a native woman, by death – their father [Thomas Adams?], had travelled upwards of 300 miles with his two little sons, for the purpose of placing them in the Institution.”

1855.
The first specific reference to any real proposal to remove half-caste Aboriginal children from their camps was this remark from Sub-Protector Buttfield, in the half-yearly report dated June, 1868.

“The there are in many parts of my district, several half-caste children whose fathers have abandoned to a wurley life, a certain degradation, and, in the case of females, infamy and prostitution. It is a pity something cannot be done to rescue such from their perilous position.” 1868

In the following remark, in the half-yearly report dated December, 1874, Mr. Thompson again outlined the problem:

“Wallianippie.
Mr. W.R. Thompson reports :- … I occasionally notice a good many half-caste children knocking about, not only in this, but also in the adjoining districts. Now, as these children rarely grow to man or womanhood when left with the tribes, it seems to me a pity that the police should not be instructed to have them removed to the Port Lincoln Institution at Poonindie, where they would be properly taken care of, and grow up, in many cases, to be useful members of society.” (authors’ emphasis) 1874.

A subsequent report does mention that orphans were now residing at the Poonindie Station, suggesting that some action may have been taken for these, at least:

“The natives resident on the station may be set down as follows : - Married couples, 15 ; married men, 15 ; widowers, 2 ; married woman, 1 ; single men, 5 ; orphaned boys, 6 ; orphaned girls, 12 ; children with parents, 25 ; total, 81.” 1878.

An inventory of buildings at Poonindie also includes:

“Dormitory for orphan girls ; stone and iron roof.” 1878.

In the same report, two specific requests were made for removals which were acted on by the Protector and a paper trail was recorded. The prima facie evidence is that if more requests came in, or other actions along a similar line were taken, they would have been recorded in the Annual Reports. This was not something that the Protector, or the government, was ashamed of and thought it should be hiding:

“BUNDALEER.
Mr. Marlin states :-
Necessity induces me to draw your urgent attention to the sad condition of a little half-caste girl named Joanna, aged ten years, who has neither father nor mother, and it is really painful to see this girl in her present position; she has no one to look after or care for her, and she gets her living as best she can by associating with the blacks, and has to content herself with any old rags she can find about the wurlies, and my object now is to appeal to you, and ask if some steps cannot be taken to send this child to school, where she will be properly cared for. She is an intelligent little girl, and if now taken in hand and properly cared for, will no doubt be able to go to service and earn her own living in a few years.

CLARE.
Inspector R. Saunders writes :-
I have the honor to report that a native lad here, aged nine years, is anxious to be sent to school; his mother, “Eliza McGragh,” is here knocking about from place to place her husband being dead; and she wishes to have the boy sent to school, and, should it meet with your approval, I will send him in, or attend to any instructions you may give.”  

1878.

The Protector added:

“(Both these children have been received into the native institution at Point McLeay.)”

In 1881 the Destitute Persons Act was passed. This Act allowed for the removal of any destitute or neglected child in the colony into foster care or into an industrial school, and hence applied to Aborigines potentially as well. Removal of an Aboriginal child, however, required not only the approval of the Destitute Board (later the State Children's Council) and a court, but also the approval of the Protector of Aborigines. This Act was repealed in 1895 with the passing of the State Children’s Act, under which the same approval process applied.

As we shall see, the Protectors often felt powerless to act for the welfare of half-caste children, due to the limitations placed upon them by the reluctance of the courts and the reluctance of the Children’s Council to apply this law to Aboriginal children. The problems were obvious, the solution elusive. Inspector Besley, Sub-Protector for the Far North explains the dilemma:

“The question is – What shall we do with the children of these unfortunate people? It is a difficult matter to decide for the best. There are not only black children of school-going age, but half-castes and quadroons that should be taken from the camps and taught to become useful members of society. If forcefully taken there would be a cry of cruelty, but it is cruelly unkind to leave them where they are. The girls become trained for a life of easy virtue, and the men drunken loafers. I have arranged with a Mr. and Mrs Schneider, at Port Augusta to take three of these children, with their parent’s consent. They are kind and good to them, though they both have to work hard for a living. These children appear to be fond of their adopted parents, and are kept clean and tidy, and attend school regularly. I am of the opinion that an apprenticing or boarding-out system would be the best for these children, who come in and hang about the townships; or they could be sent to Poonindie or Point McLeay mission stations, if there is room there and funds available. I am not so much in favour of the latter, as the dialects at both these institutions is entirely different to that spoken in the north. Before anything can be done Ministerial instructions should be given.” (Authors’ emphasis)  

1892.

The Protectors were also frustrated by the lack of power to see to the training and employment transition needed for adolescent Aboriginal and half-caste children who were residing with their parents on the missions.

**Settled areas verses Remote areas**

By the late nineteen century, two different sets of circumstances relating to Aboriginal children had become apparent; the children on the missions and the children in remote areas.
In 1900, the Protector of Aborigines first identified a problem of the young children on the mission stations who had had a good education at the mission schools, but then settled to a life of little work and low motivation due to the attitudes of their parents who were also living on the missions. He first raised the idea of removing children from living with their parents on the Mission stations using the State Children’s Act. Note though that it was just the floating of a policy proposal at that stage:

“What to do with the young people, half-castes and quadroons, who are increasing in number at Point McLeay Mission, is a question deserving consideration. Many of them show an intelligence that indicates a capacity for further improvement, and any scheme that promises a fair measure of success in dealing with them would be worthy of a trial. If some of them could be removed from the mission station and placed under the Children’s Department there would be some chance of them becoming more useful members of the community.”  

1899 – 1900.

Also in 1900, Protector of Aborigines Hamilton, raised the separate problem of young half-caste girls “at risk” in the remote communities. It was the girls that he specifically mentioned. A report from Oodnadatta indicates that the Protector, while wanting to act to remove these children from risk, could not, and would not, act without parental consent:

“I would suggest that some efforts be made to protect and provide for the large number of female half-castes who are found in the blacks’ camps both in this and surrounding districts; in some cases they object to leave their tribe, and in others the mothers of the girls will not consent to give them up.”  

Oodnadatta, 1900-01.

Note, though, that he made the clear distinction between “half-castes” of the settled and more remote areas. These were two separate issues:

“The number of half-castes at Point McLeay and Point Pierce cannot be taken as an indication of immorality among the natives, as during the past thirty to forty years both full-bloods and half-castes are regularly married.”  

1900-01.

With respect to these remote area children, mainly girls, Protector Hamilton followed up on this problem in the succeeding annual reports, but, much as he wanted to act on the perceived “risk” of exploitation of Aboriginal women and girls, his hands were tied by legal protocol. He was unable and unwilling to act, as to do so would be to act outside the law:

“Attention has been called to the number of half-castes about the Far North and West, and their condition, especially that of the girls, is not a satisfactory one. “Neglected” European children can be dealt with under the provisions of the State Children Act, but a recent legal decision was to the effect that this Act does not apply to aborigines. Some amendment of the law in this respect would seem desirable whereby destitute neglected aboriginal children could be committed to a mission station till they attain the age of 18 years, to apply to orphans and children whose parents are shown to be unable or unwilling to care properly for them.”  

(authors’ emphasis)  

1900-01.

“The moral relations of whites and blacks in the Far North and West cannot be regarded as satisfactory. The laxity of the law makes it difficult, if not impossible,
to extend legal protection to native women and girls, unless actual cruelty and ill-treatment can be sufficiently proved.

An attempt was made about three years ago to deal with this question, and the Bill prepared by Mr. Justice Dashwood and laid before Parliament was referred to a Committee of the Legislative Council, and appears to have been dealt with exhaustively, as twenty-one witnesses were examined and 114 pages of evidence taken. The recommendations of the Committee have not so far led to any further action. The difficulty appears to be to succeed in enacting a measure which will afford sufficient protection to aborigines, and regulate their employment by Europeans, without imposing conditions and restrictions of an unnecessary harassing character.”

The Select Committee Report referred to is the Select Committee of 1899 on the Aborigines’ Bill (available via link in Introduction)

Hamilton continued the following year. He still could not act to remove half-caste children with unknown fathers without maternal consent, which would be required in the absence of Children’s Board and court approval:

“"The neglected condition of half-caste children about the Far North deserves some attention. It is difficult to deal with them. Their fathers are mostly unknown, and in the absence of legal proof of paternity cannot be prosecuted. These children usually go about with their mothers, who are unwilling to send them to a mission, and the State Children Act has been held not applicable to aborigines.”

Another year later, Hamilton was still seeking the power to better protect Aboriginal women and girls, including the boarding out for work training of young “half-caste” girls who were regarded as being at particular risk:

“"The necessity for some additional legislation on behalf of the aborigines was pointed out in the last year’s report of this department, and it was urged that provision should be made for the legal recognition of aboriginal mission stations as reformatory and industrial institutions, the better protection of native women and children, some system of boarding-out half-caste and quadroon children and apprenticing them to some suitable employment.

It is hoped that some definite action will be taken to introduce a Bill for an Aborigines’ Protection Act during the present session of Parliament.”

In 1908, South replaced Hamilton as the Protector of Aborigines.

It is clear from the start that South wanted to follow an even harder line than Hamilton. He returned to the problem of the educated “half-caste” children in the southern mission stations and laid out his case:

“"In my opinion separate Acts are required for South Australia and the Northern Territory, as in South Australia the chief problem is the half-caste, who is yearly increasing. I will here treat all except pure-blooded natives as half-castes.

On the 30th June, 1908, there were at Point Pierce, Yorke’s Peninsula, 136 half-castes and 20 blacks; in the Point McLeay district there are about 320 natives, and fully 50
per cent. of them half-castes. From this it will be seen that the aboriginal problem is rapidly assuming a different aspect than it bore some years ago. In comparatively a few years the old type of native will probably have died out and be replaced by a race of educated half-castes, with a sprinkling of blacks. The State schools and those formerly conducted by the missions have worked wonders, and it is now seldom in the settled districts that one meets a native who cannot read and write. The only things they lack are thrift and enterprise. Unfortunately on the mission stations the children cannot be prevented from mixing with those natives who still retain some old habits and customs of the race, and whilst this is so there is not much hope of immediately converting them into self-reliant, self-supporting people, as the present system practically teaches them to look to the mission and Government for help.

I am of the opinion that the young children — especially the half-castes — should be placed in an industrial institution, educated up to a certain standard, and trained to useful trades and occupations, and then apprenticed until they attain the age of 18 to 20 years. During this period they should not be allowed to mix with the other aborigines. If something of this nature is not done, I fear we shall long be troubled with an aboriginal problem in the shape of a lot of half-caste nomadic mendicants.”

(authors’ emphasis) 1907-08.

It seems clear that South wanted to introduce a policy under which all “half-caste” aboriginal children would be removed from their parents on the missions, educated, given a trade, and assimilated into the community. However, he had no legal right to implement this policy and he knew it. Again, at this stage it was still only a proposal.

A new Bill for Aborigines which would give the Protector the powers to remove Aboriginal or half-castes onto reserves or into Aboriginal institutions was stalled in Parliament. This Bill, however, (which was eventually passed in 1911 as The Aborigines Act), would give the Protector the power to remove parent or parents and child together, but would not give him the power to separate children from parents, which is what he so desired to see happen on the mission stations and for half-castes in remote areas. We saw this example of a family being kept together in the previous chapter:

“On January 15th, nine adult natives and two children were received as members into the church through the sacrament of holy baptism. One of them was a half-caste young woman, who had been sent to the station with her quarter-caste (quadroon) child by the police some years ago.” Killalpaninna Mission, 1910-11.

South restated his case for State Children’s Council involvement more emphatically, encouraged by the Adelaide justices recognition that the Children’s Act did apply to Aborigines. He also criticised the mission system and did not see it as a long term solution. Note also that the proposal he was advancing for children was still to require the approval of Justices before committal:

“I trust the Bill for an Act for the better protection and control of the aborigines, now ready, will meet with Parliamentary sanction, as it will be of great benefit and is much needed.
The half-caste problem is still a difficult one, but as the State Children’s Department is now willing to take charge of the Children, I hope to be able to place under its control all those found wandering and camping with the aborigines. Unfortunately some country justices of the peace consider the State Children’s Act of 1895 does not apply to half-castes, but the Act does not discriminate. It applies to all children under the age of 18 years who are, in the opinion of the justices, “destitute or neglected”, the word “child” being defined as “Any boy or girl under the age or apparent age of 18 years.”

The Adelaide justices evidently recognise this, as two cases I have had placed before them have been dealt with. In the first case the children were remanded for a week to enable the mother to return with them to her husband, who owns a block of land, which she did.

In the other case the child (a girl) was committed to the care of the State Children’s Council. This will, I hope, convince justices that the Act does apply to half-castes and aborigines as well as other children irrespective of nationality.

This being the case, I purpose, subject to Ministerial approval, bringing all wandering half-caste children before the justices with a view to their committal to the care of the State Children’s Council, where they will be educated and trained to useful trades and occupations, and prevented from acquiring the habits and customs of the aborigines, and I feel sure they will, as a rule grow up useful, self-supporting members of the community, instead of (if left in the camps) developing into worse than useless dependants.

I recognise the good done in the past by the missions, which are still necessary as homes for grown-up aborigines and half-castes; but if anything good is to be made of the children something more is necessary, and in my opinion, they should be treated as State Children.

In dealing with these children it should not be forgotten that each succeeding generation will undoubtedly become whiter, as the children of half-castes are as a rule whiter than their parents, and no doubt the process will continue until the black will altogether disappear. There are but comparatively few full-blooded natives left in the settled districts, most of whom are old people; and in the Far North a similar state of affairs is increasingly evident. The white blood being the stronger must in the end prevail, especially as some of the women are legitimately and illegitimately mating with white men. From this it is evident that the ultimate end of the Australian aboriginal is to be merged with the general population, consequently the sooner they are physically and morally improved, the better for the white race. I think that all half-caste children at least should be gathered in, instead of being left in the camps where they are often subjected to the brutalising customs and ceremonial operations still prevalent in outlying districts.

There are still a few of the old natives in and around the city and towns who are a source of trouble, being responsible for most of the offences shown in the appended list of convictions.

They are not fit to be sent to any of the missions to mix with the younger ones, whom they would naturally corrupt. They hang about the city begging, and spend the money thus obtained in drink, and even sell the blankets and clothing, &c., provided by the department. They should all be placed and kept on a reserve by themselves, separate from the well-behaved, but at present there is no power to deal with them. This is provided for in the new Act should it become law.”

(authors' emphasis) 1908-09.
In 1910, the Aborigines’ Bill was still not passed. It would appear that some children were, at this stage, being taken by the State Children’s Department with the Protector’s approval. Both the State Children’s Act of 1895 and the The Children’s Protection Act of 1899 made it an offence to neglect to provide for the welfare of a child in a person’s care. Aborigines convicted under this law appeared in the “crime statistics” in the 1910 Annual Report:

“CRIME RECORD FOR THE STATE.
The number of convicted aborigines for the year was—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assaults, common</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorderly behaviour</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape legal custody</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecent language</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilful damage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstructing police</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach railway regulations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neglected children</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vagrancy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And the number of persons convicted of supplying liquor to aborigines was 26.”

(authors’ emphasis) 1909-10.

So it may be that a number of children involved with the above five convictions were taken into care by the State Children’s Department that year. These seem to have been taken from the remote area “camps.” Note, however, that even that was not without opposition (i.e. letters in the paper). The situation was being monitored and the government could not even act on behalf of neglected children without exciting comment:

“ The want of an Act for the protection and control of the aborigines and half-castes has been much felt, but it is hoped this will be met this session by the passing of the Bill now before Parliament.

During the year several half-caste children have been removed from the black’s camp and placed under the care and control of the State Children’s Department with the most encouraging results; the children are thriving and happy and will, I feel confident, grow up self-supporting members of the community, as they will know nothing of the habits of the aborigines and will be given an occupation.

Several letters have appeared in the press in opposition to the removal of these children from their cruel surroundings, but I think the writers have failed to grasp the seriousness of the problem now facing South Australia and some of the other States.

Take the case for New South Wales for example. There, according to the report of the “Board for the Protection of Aborigines,” dated May, 1910, the aboriginal population consisted of 2,123 full-bloods and 5,247 half-castes. Between the years 1882 and 1909 the full-bloods decreased from 6,540 to 2,123 and the half-castes increased from 2,379 to 5,247.

In this State a similar state of things is occurring, as in 1901 the census showed there were 502 half-castes, but in August, 1909, from information supplied by the police
officers, it was found there were at least 766, and later records have brought the total up to about 800.

At Point Pierce there were on June 30th, 1910, 145 half-castes and 17 full-bloods; at Point McLeay, River Murray, and the Lakes there are about 350 aborigines, 75 per cent. of whom are half-castes.

These figures, I think, prove the necessity of steps being taken to convert these people into useful members of the community, instead of allowing them to grow up in the camps, where they acquire the lazy habits of the aborigines which unfits them for any regular occupation; and I am still firmly of the opinion that the very best way is to treat them as neglected children, and have them placed under the care and control of the State Children’s Department until they reach the age of 18 years, by which time they should be able to earn their own living and should no longer be considered nor treated as aborigines.

The boys should be taught trades, and the girls trades or domestic duties. On the other hand, if left to wander and grow up with aborigines they and their offspring will become an ever-increasing burden.

At present, in many parts of the State may be seen practically white males and females squatting in blacks’ camps. On the mission stations the same sort of thing exists after the children have passed the school-going age. The very time when they should be taught to be self-supporting.

With the Aborigines Bill stalled South made his concerns explicit:

“The half-caste and quadroon children taken from the blacks’ camps in the interior and placed under the care of the State Children’s Department are doing well, and give promise of growing up useful members of the community. Recently a quadroon girl, about nine years of age, was taken from the vicinity of Stuart’s Creek. She is almost white, and has scarcely a trace of aboriginal features. To have left her to the inevitable fate of all half-caste girls brought up in the blacks’ camps in the interior would have been, to say the least of it, cruel. [See photograph attached in report]

The half-castes and quadroons are steadily replacing the blacks, who are slowly but surely dying out, and if they are left in the camps it will not be long before we shall have a race of nearly white people living like the aborigines. There are now over 800 of them in the State, a few of whom are girls between the ages of four and twelve years living with the blacks in the interior. These should be removed for various reasons.”

The Aborigines Act was finally passed in December, 1911. This Act repealed the 1844 Ordinance with respect to orphaned Aboriginal children and was the first specifically Aboriginal legislation since that year. This gave the (now) Chief Protector the right to confine troublesome Aborigines or whole families for welfare reasons on to reserves with superintendence, or into missions as “aboriginal institutions”. This did not give South the means to carry out his plans for the separation and education of children as he so desired. Only neglected children from the “camps” in the interior appeared to be involved in the immediately ensuing years. Included in the 1912 Annual Report was an extract from the State Children’s Council Report:

[Extract from the Report of the State Children’s Council.]

“Early in the year the question of dealing with the neglected half-caste aboriginal children in various parts of the State became pressing, and after some considerable
delay the Council succeeded in receiving one young girl from the usual degrading conditions of life in an aboriginal camp. She is now rapidly advancing in the usual public school curriculum. Her appearance has changed from the heavy, hopeless look with which she came to Adelaide to one of bright alertness, and promises to become a useful woman. The other children of this class previously cared for are also making good progress.

“It was with some degree of anxiety that the council undertook the work of training neglected half-castes aboriginals, but the result has so far justified the course adopted, and has made the council the more anxious to proceed. Those taken are all doing well. One little fellow is the pet and joy of the whole family and his school fellows. One girl who came to the department a rough, uncouth, heavy child, is now a bright, intelligent-looking girl, who is rapidly assimilating the rudiments of an education. If she goes on at present she will become a clever woman. Another child who, when first received, was painfully emaciated and shy, is now a happy little girl and a favourite with her playmates.

1911-12.

“The half-caste and quadroon children rescued from the aborigines’ camps and placed under the control of the State Children’s Department are doing well, and apparently forgotten their former wretched surroundings. They give promise of developing into useful members of the community instead of growing up vagrants, and are highly spoken of in the report of the State Children’s Department.”

1911-12.

The policy continued in 1913:

“During the year a few more neglected half-caste children have been removed from the blacks’ camps and placed under the care of the State Children’s Department. They, and those previously taken, are doing well and rapidly learning civilised habits and manners.

1912-13.

“During the year a few more half-caste and quadroon children have been removed from the camps in the interior and placed under the control of the State Children Department.”

1914-15.

The actual numbers taken and the reasons were not supplied, however, the numbers of Aboriginal adults appearing in court for breaches of the state’s welfare laws were not large.

“Neglected Children 5” 1909-10.


“Breaches of State Children’s Act 1” 1915-16.


It is likely that the conviction in 1919-20, was for the same child mentioned in the Far Northern police report that same year:

“Two natives were committed to the Mental Hospital at Parkside, and one child was put under the control of the State Children’s Department.” 1919-20.

No “Breaches of the State Children’s Act” were mentioned in the crime statistics in any of the intervening years (at least until 1930s, when figures in this format stopped) suggesting that
no neglected children were brought before the court in those years. Given that the Chief Protector had the power to legally remove children upon Children's Council and judicial approval, it seems difficult to believe that the absence of reports indicates hidden numbers. He evidently would have liked to take more. The above numbers taken under the State Children's Act seem to imply around 20 families appeared before the courts over a ten year period. That's about two a year.

Meanwhile in apparent complete contradiction to South's own policy, as Point McLeay and Point Pearce Missions came under government control in 1915, children were actually being placed under more direct parental control, not removed from their influence. The mission stations and government stations had had a voluntary dormitory system set up to take care of the children on the stations, essentially to ensure the children were well fed and clothed and available for school work. Under this scheme, there was no implication of child neglect involved, merely mutual convenience. Some details of the dormitory system will be outlined below supported by extracts from later Annual Reports. South's decision would suggest that he thought it important that parents took more responsibility for their children:

"Since coming under the Government the dormitory has been abolished, so that now the mothers of the children going to school have to wash and mend their children's clothes; this was formerly done under the direction of the matron."

Point McLeay, 1915-16.

At Point McLeay this policy with respect to the responsibilities of parents was cited again later, but there was apparently some pressure to re-instate the dormitory system, for a limited category of inmates. It was only the protection of girls and orphans that seemed to be the driving consideration with this policy:

"More cottage accommodation is much needed; also a dormitory for the girls and orphan boys. Boys who have parents should be under their parents' charge. If, by a dormitory system, the parents were relieved of all responsibility for their children, the greatest incentive to industry on the part of the parents would be removed. This would be an obvious mistake."


In the 1916-17 Annual Report, under the heading "A Difficult Problem", Chief Protector of Aborigines South again restated his old policy with respect to training. He still did not have the means to put into effect his plan for mass removal and industrial training for mission/station children and for the "wandering" half-castes of the North. He was frustrated by the difficulty getting young Aborigines into work. Again, there was a separate policy favoured for northern tribal Aborigines, where it was only neglected "half-caste" girls or orphans that were to be removed, from the policy that was favoured in the South. Things to note here: firstly that he was not concerned about the half-caste boys in the remote areas, which tends to suggest his concerns were more gender-based and secondly, the term "several" does not imply "many", and "chiefly at the request of their aboriginal and half-caste parents" implies that even of those "several", most were removed with the approval of parents:

"A DIFFICULT PROBLEM."
The most difficult problem in connection with the care and control of the aboriginals is the increasing number of half-castes, quadroons, and octoroons on the stations. For years the half-castes have been living and increasing on the Point Pearce and Point McLeay Stations, and year by year a whiter race is springing up. If these people are to be prevented from becoming dependents on the State, strong measures will need to be resorted to. Like the poor aboriginals they grow up expecting to be maintained by the Government. They will not obtain employment off the stations unless they are compelled to do so, and when they are found work by their parents or the department, they are never happy until they get back to their home stations. After leaving school they should be compelled to find employment away from the departmental stations, and in the event of their not doing so they should be placed under the care of the State Children’s Department until they reach the age of 21 years.

That department is equipped with the necessary machinery and powers to deal with children such as these. They could then be drafted out to reputable employers under proper supervision, part of their earnings placed in the Savings Bank, and on their attaining the age of 21 years they should have a good sum to start life with. Those half-castes and quadroons who have been taken over by the State Children’s Department are, in most cases, doing remarkably well, and promise to develop into good citizens as they do not come into contact with the aboriginals. Being nearly white they will have good chance in life.

During the year several girls have been removed from the camps in the interior, chiefly at the request of their aboriginal and half-caste parents. I do not advocate taking boys from the interior, as they are always able to take care of themselves, but the girls should be removed for their own protection.”

(authors’ emphasis) 1916-17.

In 1917 a Regulation under the 1911 Aborigines Act made it an offence for an adolescent of 14 years of age or older who was able-bodied and single and who lived in an Aboriginal institution to fail to seek work outside the institution if required by the superintendent to do so. This Regulation can be seen clearly as a response to the Chief Protector’s continuing concerns. There was no power to require an apprenticeship or other post-school training be entered into, however, and continuing concerns regarding adolescents remaining on the stations without work or training seem to suggest that there was no wide scale use of the regulatory power by station superintendents.

Three years later South was still pushing his plan. The men did not want to leave the stations to obtain work. The young men/children, he thought, must be isolated from them before they learned this trait:

“I consider it necessary to call attention to the ever-increasing number of half-castes at these stations, which is becoming a serious problem; it will be seen that there at Point Pearce 232 and at Point McLeay 312, or a total of 544 half-castes; many of these, especially the younger ones, depend on the earnings of natives who are employed on the stations; they will not seek outside employment, and it is impossible to find work for all of them, and if it were found for them they would not take it. The only solution of this, I think, is to compel the children to enter into employment under indenture with reputable employers, and be kept so employed from the age of 14 to 21 years, and their earnings placed in a savings bank until they
reach that age, when they should be prevented from living on the stations, as most of them are nearly white; they should not be treated as aborigines after they are able to earn their living. After they have been educated and trained at the stations up to the age of 14 years I consider they should come under the control of the State Children’s Department, which is so well equipped for the work. This would be much more economical than to start another department.” (authors' emphasis)

1919-20.

“With reference to the young people, I recommend that some system be adopted dealing with them, on similar lines to the State Children’s Department. As they leave school situations away from the station should be found for them, and they should be kept in constant employment until they are, say, 21 years of age. At present situations are continually being found for them, especially for the girls, on neighbouring farms, but authority is needed for keeping them in their places. The liberty to return to the station whenever they wish is harmful to their best interests. It is very necessary that this condition of things should be remedied.” (authors' emphasis) 1919-20.

“Employment of natives. – Employment on the station has been found for a large number of natives, who seem indisposed to leave the station to find work. Could this be overcome there would be little or no unemployment of natives, as the settlers are badly in need of labor.” (authors' emphasis) 1919-20.

“The settlers would employ more of our native youths and girls on the farms, but they find that when spoken to they want to go back again to the station to be kept in idleness by their fathers and mothers, and until we have some law compelling them to stay in their employment they will always be a source of trouble to the station and those who want to employ them.” (authors’ emphasis)

Point McLeay, 1921-22.

“The boys and girls are still the same when working for the settlers, and that is, if spoken to make straight back to the station, where the fathers and mothers love to keep them in idleness, and this will continue until we have some law to compel them to stay.” (authors' emphasis)

Point McLeay, 1922-23.

Chief Protector South was not insensitive to the issues involved for adolescents leaving the security of their parents and life on the stations:

“The whole question of how to transform these people, who are gradually becoming whiter, into a useful race who will be able to maintain themselves, is a very difficult and serious problem. It appears to me that the only way will be to start with the young children, and after they have been given sufficient education, to place them out in employment and keep them under supervision and see that they are properly treated. For the purpose of providing these children with the means of a little relaxation and to prevent them from feeling too lonely I would suggest sending, say, three or four, to one centre so that they could come together for conversation and amusement. It would not do to isolate them in employment for they would always feel lonely and dissatisfied, and from a dissatisfied person, whether white or black, little success can be expected.” 1921-22.
In 1923, Chief Protector South died and Francis Garnett took over. Garnett demonstrated that he wanted to follow the same policy on education and training as before, including the transfer of adolescent children into supervised apprenticeships. To prepare children for this eventuality, which would include living away from their parents on the stations, he proposed a transitional arrangement for them where a dormitory for girls and a training school be established at Point McLeay. A new Bill for training puroposes was before Parliament:

“I consider the most urgent problem to be dealt with in our work for the aborigines is the better control and training of the rising generation, which consists principally of half-castes, quadroons and octoroons. A Bill dealing with this important matter, transferring aboriginal children at the age of fourteen years to the care of the State Children’s Department, will be dealt with by the present session of Parliament. This much-needed legislation, if passed, will mean a big advance in our methods of dealing with the aborigines, and should result in fitting the young to become self-supporting members of the community and an asset to the State. In order to better prepare the children for transition to the State Children’s Department, it has been suggested that a training school, with dormitory for the girls, be established at Point McLeay Station. These will be especially useful, as, in addition to proving a training home, it will provide sleeping accommodation and reduce the overcrowding in the cottages.”

1923-24.

Meanwhile, the Chief Protector appeared to be continuing with some level of success in removing neglected children from the interior:

“Another matter requiring prompt attention is the educating and welfare of half-caste and three-quarter-caste children. Whilst on patrol duty recently to Finniss Springs the constable noticed two children in a camp, both of whom were perfectly white, although undoubtedly three-quarter-caste. I would suggest that the constable be given permission to arrest these children, and bring them before the court with a view to having them placed under the control of the State Children’s Department.”


The situation in the adjacent areas of the Northern Territory is described in some detail below, although this was now a Commonwealth Government jurisdiction. A number of half-caste girls for whom it was difficult to find work in the Northern Territory had been brought south of the border for taking into work and apprenticeship situations. The Chief Protector did not like the removal of children but could see no alternative. He outlined his reasons for the separations and his desire to see the girls returned back to their country as soon as the situation allowed:

“NORTHERN TERRITORY.
About 20 young half-castes from the Bungalow at Alice Springs are in situation under agreement in various parts of this State, generally as domestics. I recently visited Alice Springs and the Hermannsburg Mission Station.
The “Bungalow” at Alice Springs, for half-caste children, is roughly built of wood and iron, no verandahs, and has rightly been condemned as “out-of-date”. It must, however, be remembered that many of the houses of white settlers in this district are just as primitive. Two aboriginal women have charge of the children living in the bungalow, and Mrs Stanley, the teacher, acts a matron. Mrs Stanley conducts morning school for the five white children attending, and afternoon school for the half-caste children. She is a very busy and capable person, and takes a real and
conscientious interest in her work. There are 55 children in the bungalow. The bungalow is situated in the immediate neighbourhood of the hotel. This is certainly very undesirable. It is, however, also in close proximity to the police station, and this is helpful.

I interviewed Sergeant Stott, the local Protector of Aborigines. He estimates that when the new bungalow is completed, the number of children will increase to 80. With reference to the boys as they leave the bungalow, there is no difficulty in obtaining work for them on stations at £1 per week and food. With reference to the girls, the country is not yet sufficiently developed to absorb them in the Northern territory. Many of the men on the cattle stations are not married, and there are few white women in the country. Personally, I feel that, for the time being, it is best to continue the practice of sending them to situations in South Australia. This, however, should be considered a temporary expedient and stopped as soon as possible. Presuming the railway is built to Alice Springs, I feel sure the Territory will be able to provide employment for these girls, and this certainly should be the ideal. When such a time comes, children who have been sent into South Australia should be given the opportunity of returning to their own country.

From a humanitarian standpoint, the practice of taking these half-caste children from their aboriginal mothers is objectionable, but it seems fully justifiable for the following reasons:

(1) The mothers are nomads, and this is the only way to secure for these half-caste children the advantages of education and training.

(2) It is generally reported, and doubtless true, that aborigines in these parts of Australia often kill children not wanted, and especially half-castes."

(authors' emphasis)

Firstly, when considering the situation in Alice Springs – and this also applies more broadly to northern SA as well – it is widely accepted that many traditional Aborigines of central Australia did not consider “half-castes” to be true aborigines, since they could not own land in the patrilineal land ownership system and therefore could not take part in ceremonial life. The removal of “half-castes” and an attempt at assimilation into the wider society was really the only solution for some of these children.

And, as indicated in point (2) above, one could also add that the prevalence of infanticide amongst traditional aborigines meant that “half-castes” were particularly vulnerable. This situation was alluded to in 1874, above:

“Wallianippie.
Mr. W.R. Thompson reports :- ... I occasionally notice a good many half-caste children knocking about, not only in this, but also in the adjoining districts. Now, as these children rarely grow to man or womanhood when left with the tribes, it seems to me a pity that the police should not be instructed to have them removed to the Port Lincoln Institution at Poonindie, where they would be properly taken care of, and grow up, in many cases, to be useful members of society.” 1874.

Professor Rubenstein of the University of Wales, writing about the area around Ernabella Mission, said:
“(t)he anthropologist Aram A. Yengolen, who carried out field work among the Pitjanjatjara people in 1966-67, found that infanticide there ‘may have varied from 18 per cent to 20 per of all births’ although ‘it would have been higher if infant mortality rates were not as high as they were both in the bush and contact populations’ … Yengolan states ‘ Presently infanticide is no longer openly practiced on missions and government stations’.” (see Jarrett, 2009, p26).

There are even fairly recent reports of missioners checking the Todd River for abandoned babies each morning. Infanticide was an on-going concern of the Protectors of Aborigines and was mentioned in the Protectors reports. Corporal Bentley, from the Murray District, and Dr. Hall, issuer of rations at Boolcoomata reported:

“The returns show three births, viz., two at Chowilla, and one at Overland Corner, the mothers remaining at the stations to receive rations during the period of nursing. This is a remarkable and gratifying fact, as in this district for years past, every living child appears to have been destroyed immediately after birth.” 1865.

“We have had several deaths lately in the neighbourhood of Boolcoomata, which I attribute to the difficulty of procuring nourishment. Several aged blacks have been left near the Springs by their tribes without any visible means of subsistence; and I regret to say that child murder has been very much more frequent since the prevalence of the dry weather and scarcity of game, than formerly.” 1865.

Sub-Protector Buttfield reported:

“The results of my inquiries will, I think, be gratifying to the Government. I am satisfied that the blacks are treated with kindness and generosity by the settlers generally. Their health is on the whole good. ... The country abounds with game and fish, yet the blacks are rapidly decreasing in number, owing chiefly to the common practice of infanticide.” 1866.

By 1925-26 a number of boys as well as girls had been sent south of the border from the Northern Territory for work and the Commonwealth Government had appointed someone to provide supervision:

“HALF-CASTE BOYS AND GIRLS FROM THE ALICE SPRINGS BUNGALOW. There are a number of these young people in situations in South Australia; the girls employed in domestic work, and some boys on sheep and cattle stations. There has been no proper supervision or local guardianship of these aborigines from the Northern Territory in the past, but negotiations have now been practically completed by this Department with the Commonwealth Government, arranging for the Department to undertake the work. An honorary lady inspector will shortly be appointed.” 1925-26.

“A BOARDING HOME. A BOARDING HOME IN Adelaide for aboriginal women and children has been established by the Adelaide City Mission, assisted financially by this department. The home was opened on the 29th June by the Hon. L. L. Hill, then Minister of this department. The need for such a place has been felt for years, as in the past it has been almost impossible to find suitable board for these women and children, when,
owing to sickness and other reasons, it has been necessary for them to come to Adelaide.”

“The boarding home in North Adelaide for aboriginal women and children conducted by the Adelaide City Mission is most useful. The matron of the home, Mrs. W. Owen, has been made a Protector of Aborigines, and acts in an honorary capacity as Visitor and Inspector of half-caste girls from Alice Springs in situations in Adelaide and suburbs.”

“Miss Elizabeth Hunter has continued the work of honorary inspector of half-caste girls from Alice Springs, who are in situations in Adelaide and suburbs.”

The Aborigines’ Children’s Training Act was finally enacted in 1923. The Act gave separate powers to the Chief Protector with regard to legitimate versus illegitimate children, which seems clearly aimed in part at the different circumstances prevailing on government or mission stations with resident families versus the (more likely to be) illegitimate half-castes among the nomad populations. It gave the power to commit Aboriginal children to an institution within the meaning of the 1895 Children’s Act, but for legitimate children it only applied to those at least fourteen years of age up to eighteen years (extendible to 21 years for girls) or with a school qualifying certificate, whereas for illegitimate children it applied to a child of any age who was in the opinion of the Chief Protector and the State Children’s Council was a neglected child or otherwise deemed suitable.

Importantly, removal of applicable children would no longer require a court order, only the completion of a Transfer of Control form (to the Children’s Council). The reluctance of courts to separate Aboriginal or half-caste children from their parents, even when in the opinion of the Protector it was in their interests, still must have seemed a potential stumbling block which had to be removed. However, the Act was suspended immediately because of Aboriginal objections!

“ABORIGINES’ CHILDREN’S TRAINING ACT, 1923.
The administration of this Act has been temporarily suspended owing to native sentiment being opposed to it. The Superintendent of the Koonibba Mission Station regrets this. There has been no objection made to the Act by the aborigines at Koonibba. I recommend that in cases where the parents are willing the children should be taken for training in accordance with the Act, also any orphan children.”

(authors’ emphasis)

“We had expected that the new Act of Parliament concerning native children would have been put into operation immediately. It is only too evident that something must be done for the benefit and welfare of these children. The principle underlying this Act is sound. We try to give the children a fair education, but when they leave school they are, by force of circumstances, allowed to drift. In our humble opinion the State should extend a helping hand to the rising generation and take them out of their environment into a different atmosphere. Only then will they to an appreciable extent embrace the ways of the white man.”


In 1924-25, the 1922-23 proposal for transitional training of children in vocational skills on the stations was still being advocated as a means of easing the youth into a future life of outside employment, at least for Point McLeay:
“Owing to the cost of this station to the Government, I am reluctant to recommend any steps which will increase the expenditure, but as this station has not the advantage of having a sufficiency of land to make it self-supporting and find reproductive employment for most of the aboriginals living there, it is more than ever advisable that the boys as they leave school should receive further training of a practical nature. For this purpose, I would recommend the appointment of an additional officer competent to train the boys in use of tools, carpentry, and general work. As the boys leave school, unless they are able to find work for themselves, it should be obligatory for them to work under such officer for at least two years, after which they should be expected to find outside employment, for which they would thus be much better fitted.”

Point McLeay, 1924-25.

Colebrook Home and Fullarton Home

In the 1926-7 financial year Colebrook Home for Aboriginal children, run by the United Aborigines Mission, was opened and first mentioned in the Annual Reports:

“A home for half-caste children has recently been opened near Quorn by the Australian Aborigines Mission. This home will give these children a good environment, and will doubtless show good results.” 1926-27.

In the 1952 Annual Report we get a potted history of Colebrook Home:

“Colebrook Home.- Matron Hyde and Miss Rutter who have been caring for the 40 boys and girls at the Home, recently retired. They commenced work amongst aboriginal people on the 1st January, 1926, at Oodnadatta where 12 neglected children were placed in their care and provide with a home. The Colebrook Home was established at Quorn and the children removed to that centre in 1927. During the following 16 years the number of children in the Home increased to 34. Owing to the shortage of water at the Quorn Home in 1943 the South Australian Government made available the building now in use at Eden Hills.

A number of young people who have passed through the Colebrook Home are engaged in responsible positions in the general community. Five of the girls are hospital nurses and Faith Coulthard is to begin training shortly as a nurse at the Murray Bridge Hospital.

The high standard of training at Colebrook is reflected in the success achieved by the young people who naturally regard it as their home.

The Board desires to express its appreciation of the great service rendered by Matron Hyde and Miss Rutter.” 1951-52.

The setting up of this Home helped fill the perceived need for removal of “at risk” half-caste children from the North and the provision of the training needed to integrate into wider society. Whether this was under the auspices of the State Children’s Act and the 1911 Aborigines Act regarding neglected or destitute children, or whether it was under the 1923 Aborigines (Training of Children) Act is unclear from the Reports:

“There are 31 children now at Colebrook Home, Quorn, where Miss R.M. Hyde, with the assistance of other ladies, is caring for them. These half-caste children have been gathered from the uncongenial surroundings of the aboriginal camps throughout the
far north and are receiving education and being given a chance which would otherwise not have been theirs.”

“The children were brought to Quorn from the northern parts of the State, in some cases from camp life of an unsatisfactory nature, and are now being trained to live and think after the manner of white children” Colebrook Home, 1938-39.

“The children from the home attend the primary and high schools at Quorn, and take the same curriculum as white children. They are readily absorbed in domestic, pastoral and industrial activities in various parts of the State, when their training is complete. During the year one girl was sent to a hospital as a nurse trainee, and one boy was apprenticed to an engineer.” Colebrook Home, 1941-42.

Certainly some children would have been gathered on social welfare grounds as “neglected children” under the Children’ Act. Some were orphans. And it is known that there were cases indicating some were there at the parents’ own request, rather than necessarily being “stolen” as per the “Stolen Generation” paradigm. Consider the case, for example, of Lowitja O’Donoghue, who at one time claimed to have been “removed” (by which she may have meant to imply “stolen” or simply the old meaning of the word, i.e. “moved”), with her three sisters and one brother, all residents at Colebrook at this very time. She was actually sent there by their white father (they were admitted in 1934) because of drought on his property in the North-West. This one admission accounted for five of the thirty-odd children resident. Lowitja O’Donoghue is quoted as saying, “Stop saying Stolen and start saying removal, and say there were degrees of people being removed (from their parents).”

There were others at Colebrook Home with parental approval:

“At the request of the parents, several children were placed under the care of the United Aborigines Mission at Colebrook Home, Eden Hills, and the Umeewarra Mission Home at Port Augusta.” (authors’ emphasis) 1943-44.

“A number of children were placed in the Colebrook Home at Eden Hills and Umeewarra Mission Home by their parents with the consent of the Board.” (authors’ emphasis) 1944-45.

Note: “…placed by their parents with the consent of the Board.” This isn’t even - placed by the Board with the consent of the parents! It is the Board here that must be convinced that the removal of the children is in the best interests of the children.

The 1936 Annual Report records:

“The United Aborigines’ Mission is continuing its useful work at Ooldea, Oodnadatta, Nepabunna, and Swan Reach, and their home for half-caste children at Quorn is also maintaining its healthy influence on the half-white children gathered from the blacks’ camps. During the Christmas season the children from this home and some from Oodnadatta were brought to Adelaide for a holiday. They were housed at Doctor Duguid’s property at Maylands, and were taken for outings and entertained by various religious bodies in the city and suburbs. The return fares of this party were provided by the department.” 1935-36.
Dr. Duguid was an important figure in Aboriginal welfare in South Australia. He undertook medical survey trips on camel into the North-Western region. He later became a member of the Aborigines Protection Board when it was set up in 1940, and was also instrumental in the setting up of the Ernabella Mission.

Also, we know a little more about this Christmas excursion to Adelaide from “The History of the United Aborigines Mission”, written by A. E. Gerard (1944?), which provides another example of parental consent for admittance of three more of the children at Colebrook House:

“Mr. George Hayes, of Barrow Creek, Northern Territory, not only sent his three children there (to Colebrook House) ‘to give them a better chance of life than he was given,’ but sent a cheque for 50 pounds, so that all the children could go to Adelaide for a holiday – ‘an educational trip.’ The following Christmas, 1935, they spent a great time at Dr. Duguid’s property at Magill. Dr. and Mrs. Duguid were away for the four weeks; they asked the children – thirty of them – not to spoil his garden and fruit trees. When the children had returned to Quorn, and the doctor to his home, he said he was agreeably surprised; there was no sign of damage to either the fruit trees or the garden, and he publicly asked his Presbyterian friends in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney if they could ever pick thirty children under fifteen years of age from any institution who would act as thoughtfully as these half-caste children.”

Incidentally, the children returned the following Christmas too:

“The children from their (The United Aborigines’ Mission) home at Quorn again visited the city during the Christmas vacation and this year they occupied premises kindly lent by the Rev. D. D. Munro, M.A., at the Semaphore. These children spent a happy holiday and were well catered for during their stay by religious and philanthropic bodies in the city and suburbs.” 1936-37.

Importantly, while noting that many of the children were at the Colebrook Home at their parent’s request, consider also that the numbers involved at the Home were not large. Assuming children were moved out from Colebrook Home when they turned 18 and assuming an even spread from say from one year old to 18 years old, 30-40 children implies that there were still really less than 2 children admitted, for whatever reason, per year. The annual reports over the years show only a gradual increase in numbers:

“The United Aborigines’ Mission has Missionaries at Swan Reach and Oodnadatta, and have recently begun work amongst the aboriginals at Mount Serle. Their home for half-caste children at Quorn has been enlarged and now accommodates 25 children.” 1929-30.

“There are 37 inmates at present, some of whom attend school, while others are working in the city. Three children attend suburban junior technical schools, and two older girls receive instruction in dressmaking at the School of Mines. Six young men from the home are on active service, four in the R.A.A.F., and two in the A.I.F. A fully qualified teacher, Mrs. Friebe, is in charge of the special school for aborigines connected with the home.” Colebrook Home, 1944-45.
In 1943, Colebrook Home at Quorn was relocated to Eden Hills Adelaide due to a deteriorating water supply at Quorn. The children appeared to be doing well:

“The school work has proceeded satisfactorily, with an average attendance of 40 children. Miss Nellie Lester, a native girl, has been appointed assistant teacher at Ooldea.”

Ooldea Mission, 1940-41.

“A pleasing feature of this year was the return of Miss Emilie Lester, who had trained in the Home to a position on the staff.”


“Miss Nellie Lester is the matron of the Gumeracha Hospital, and Miss Muriel Brumbie a member of the nursing staff. Nancy Brumbie and Amy O’Donoghue are teaching in kindergarten schools in the metropolitan area. Two young girls attend the Unley Technical School, while education of the younger children is provided for at the school associated with the home.”

Colebrook Home, 1948-49.

When considering the recruitment policies of Colebrook Home, the whole dormitory system of housing Aboriginal children should also be taken into account. Aboriginal children were often housed in dormitories and school homes on the mission stations in the pastoral and settled districts. This would appear to be invariably with parental consent, and did not mean the parents lost access to their children. There is not necessarily any suggestion of parental neglect, the decision to place children in there was often quite pragmatic:

“An increase can be recorded in the number of natives who have made Koonibba their permanent home, but there were not as many natives as usual paying the station casual visits. One reason for this is that quite a number of the old people died during the year, and another reason is that Government rations are now also being distributed at Murat Bay. The influenza epidemic was responsible for about 24 deaths among the aboriginals of the district, nine of these occurred on the station. It is noteworthy that though some of the half-castes were for a time in a critical condition none of them succumbed, all the deaths occurring among the full blacks. There were no losses in the Children’s Home, though all of the 67 children living there at the time, as well as the head matron, were laid up with the disease at one and the same time. The number of native children in the home is now 72, 15 having entered during the past nine months. That so many of the parents voluntarily give up their children, in whom they are sincerely attached, speaks volumes for the tact and efficiency of the matron and her assistants. The natives seem to have confidence in them, and the children are obedient and respectful, and seem well satisfied to remain under her care.”

Koonibba Mission, 1919-20.

The practice of leaving children in the dormitories was not uncommon (no doubt encouraged by the missioners), and was specifically to allow Aborigines to stay within their own tribal areas while also allowing movement for hunting and gathering, ceremonies, or to take up seasonal work when available, while allowing the children so remain at school:

“There are 16 inmates of the Children’s Home under the personal supervision of the missionaries. Parents of these children are nomadic in their habits, and leave the children at the home when going on walkabout.”

Ooldea, 1938-39.
“The mission has established a dormitory with several children in residence. The homelike atmosphere of the institution which is supervised by the missioner and his wife, is exercising a beneficent influence on the young people of the mission. Parents may now leave their children in the home while they are engaged on pastoral work on surrounding stations.” 

Umeewarra Mission, Port Augusta, 1940-41.

“A dormitory building is urgently required for the school children during the absence of parents who are working some distance from the mission.” 

Nepabunna Mission, 1941-42.

“Accommodation at the Children’s Home is utterly inadequate to meet the increasing demand by native parents for admission of their children.” 

Umeewarra Mission, Port Augusta 1944-45.

“Ooldea.- The Superintendent, Mr. H.E. Green, reports that there are now fifty children in the Mission Dormitory, and it is expected that this number will be considerably increased in the near future, as the parents now seem to realize the advantages, enjoyed by the children living in the dormitory.” 

Ooldea Mission, 1944-45.

“All able-bodied men are employed on adjacent pastoral stations, their families remaining at Finniss Springs and enjoying the protection of the Mission.” 

Finniss Springs, 1944-45.

Orphans were commonly looked after in the dormitories, keeping them within their communities, and avoiding the necessity for removal to other institutions:

“Since last March the staff at the Children’s Home consists of a married couple and their daughter, instead of three ladies as heretofore. The husband also does general work about the Station. The inmates of the Home now number 51, being chiefly orphans.” 

Koonibba Mission, 1933-34.

The dormitories were not unlike boarding schools:

“Nepabunna Mission, Copley.- There has been a drift of population from this Mission due to a number of men being employed at the Leigh Creek coalmine and others on the pastoral stations in the district. The children usually remain at the Mission to attend the special school under the care of Mr. Footner.” 

1951-52.

From school records it is possible to estimate that about a third of the children attending school were not staying in the dormitory at Koonibba:

“There are 47 children in the Children’s Home, and 74 children are enrolled at the local school.” 

Koonibba Mission, 1946-47.

Perhaps a half at Gerard:

“Gerard Mission, Berri.- Mr. Southwell reports that there are 11 children in the dormitory, one boy having left during the year to go to a position in which he is doing well. Twenty children receive instruction in the special school for aborigines.” 

1948-49.
Fullarton Home, a Salvation Army institution in Adelaide, was another home with an intake of “half-caste” girls which is mentioned in the Annual Reports. This intake seems to be another initiative for the training of adolescent girls, at least, from those otherwise resident at the two government stations which had so long exercised the minds of the Chief Protectors:

“How to find avenues for employment of the increasing number of half-castes on the Point Pearce and Point McLeay Stations has been exercising my mind for many years, and, unfortunately, there does not appear to be form of industry, which carried out manually, can compete with machine-made goods. It is quite apparent that the agricultural and pastoral work on these stations cannot profitably absorb the increasing population, and as there is no demand for workmen in any avenue of labour I am forced to do what I can to give some form of employment to all residing on these stations.

If money is made available this year, I intend to embark upon a scheme for training girls for service as domestics. It is intended that girls 12 years of age be placed under the care of the Salvation Army to be educated and trained in domestic subjects for 3 years. At the completion of this period efforts will be made to secure suitable situations for these girls and the Salvation Army will continue to take an interest in their welfare.

It is also thought that some form of wage subsidy scheme to get youths out to employment with farmers.”  1934-35.

Although the school was described as “large”, the numbers of Aboriginal children sent there were minuscule compared with the numbers of white children there, also receiving domestic training:

“The training scheme under which a number of girls are continuously in residence in the Salvation Army Girls’ Home at Fullarton for the purpose of receiving instruction in the domestic arts was in operation throughout the year. Two girls, whose training was completed on the 31st December, 1944, were placed in suitable homes and are rendering good service. It is pleasing to record that the dux of this large school is a native girl named Patricia Rigney, formerly of Point McLeay. All the trainees obtained good results in the annual examinations.”  1944-45.

It certainly numbers never reached the scale envisaged in earlier Protectors' reports:

“The training scheme for girls was commenced during this year, and three girls were sent to the Salvation Army Home at Fullarton in February, 1936. So far they have done very well and given no trouble. Three more girls will be selected for training this year. They are expected to remain at the Home for three years, and by that time they should be efficient in all classes of domestic work.”  1935-36.

The first girls were sent in 1936. Twelve years later:

“At present there are eight girls at Fullarton.”  1948-49.

Nor were these girls alienated from their community. And almost certainly, the girls went with parental consent:
The training scheme for girls from Point Pearce Station has so far proceeded very satisfactorily. There are now six girls under the care of the Salvation Army at Fullarton and all are behaving well and making good progress. The first three girls who commenced in February, 1936, were allowed to return to their parents at Point Pearce for the Christmas school vacation. They created quite a good impression on the native residents of the station and parents generally are anxious that their children will be selected to partake in this scheme.”

But, of course, the training schemes were not always successful:

“The Salvation Army continued the work of training half-caste girls in domestic arts at the Fullarton and Gilbert Street Homes. The matron and staff of the homes have displayed great patience in this work. Some of the native girls in training do not appear to realize the value of the training afforded and show little appreciation of the opportunity thus provided for them to become useful and worthy members of the community; other girls are working hard and give great promise of becoming very proficient in the domestic sphere. This scheme should at least ensure a higher standard of housekeeping in the homes of the natives.”

It is difficult to demonstrate a systematic policy of “half-caste” child removal given the number of part-Aboriginal children in the settled districts still residing with their parents on government or mission stations compared with the small number of children removed to outside training. In 1949 there were three hundred and eighty-one Aborigines at Point Pearce and three hundred and twenty-five at Point McLeay, mostly all mixed blood – and eight girls at Fullarton.

There was a new development in 1947. Remember this from 1917:

“I do not advocate taking boys from the interior, as they are always able to take care of themselves, but the girls should be removed for their own protection.”

This next extract, from 1947, suggests that the title “Protector of Aborigines” was at the time perhaps more about protection of women and girls than about the protection of Aborigines in general. It took years to think of establishing a boys’ programme equivalent to the program for girls at Fullarton Home. Again, there is a suggestion that the Fullarton Home was essentially voluntary, with competition for places; apparently the boys’ equivalent is to be established as voluntary.

“A suggestion has been made that native boys who desire to enjoy the benefits of a secondary education, and who appear to be qualified to undertake vocational training, should be provided with accommodation in the Anglican Hostel for boys at Glanville. Inquiries are being made with a view to adopting the suggestion, and thus commencing a system of vocational training for boys on the same basis as that provided for the girls at Fullarton.”

In the end after so many years, the industrial schools idea seemed to have turned into woodwork and sewing lessons for those primary school children at Point Pearce, Point
McLeay and Koonibba Mission, where the children were still largely residing with their parents:

“Mr. Lawrie is still in charge of the special primary school and continues to render good service, his long association with the Station has given him a special aptitude for work amongst children and the school work and discipline are a credit to him. In addition to the general education the boys are given a course in woodwork, and the girls sewing and domestic economy.” Point McLeay, 1931-32.

“The special primary school is still under the efficient supervision of Mr. W.T. Lawrie. He has the assistance of one female assistant teacher and Mrs. Lawrie, who takes the girls for domestic economy classes.” Point McLeay, 1934-35.

“The special Primary School under Mr. B.J. Gewar and his daughter is in capable hands, and as at Point McLeay, woodwork and domestic economy are taught in addition to the ordinary subjects.” Point Pearce, 1931-32.

“The present school teacher at Koonibba is a qualified woodwork instructor and to enable the boys at this Mission to be instructed in woodwork, my department will supply the Mission with the necessary equipment.” Koonibba Mission, 1935-36.

As indicated above, only a few boys and girls were being sent off for vocational training in Adelaide.

The Aborigines Act 1934 & The Amendment Act of 1939.

In 1934, a new Aborigines Act was passed. It was not proclaimed, however, until 1937. The Act was essentially an amalgam of the 1911 Aborigines Act and the 1923 Aborigines (Training of Children) Act, now incorporating references to the Maintenance Act of 1926.

This 1926 Act was another piece of welfare legislation covering the whole population of the State. It replaced the Children’s Council, with whom the Chief Protector must deal, with the Children’s Welfare and Public Relief Board. It made being “uncontrollable” an additional ground for child removal while removing being destitute as grounds. This was because the Act offered monetary relief for destitute persons on application to the Board. It also offered, upon application, the payment of a regular weekly allowance to mothers of children who had no means of supporting them.

There is some evidence that this provision for welfare payments to keep mother and child together was paid in some cases to Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal mothers for this purpose. Of necessity, this could only apply to those mothers who lived within the money economy. The authors are aware of Aboriginal families who received such payments with at least thirty Aboriginal children listed in State Records as having benefited from the scheme.

“I remember the department bloke coming down every month or two to Yankalilla, we used to sool our dog onto him, poor fella.” (Aboriginal informant.)
The Annual Reports from 1939 onwards are those of the Aboriginal Protection Board, and not the Chief Protector of Aborigines. This Board was a new body to “share the burden” of decision-making with respect to control of Aboriginal affairs. The Board was a creation of the Aboriginal Act Amendment Act of 1939, and it consisted of the Minister, the Chief Protector as Secretary and four other members, two of whom had to be women.

**Children of the remote communities**

Meanwhile, the work of the department continued without significant change of policy. In the North, where the number of “full-blood” Aborigines was high, the government’s policy was explicitly attempting to keep whites away from blacks to preserve the Aboriginal “race” as was seen in their best interest and to preserve traditional culture. The idea of separating “full-blood” children indiscriminately from their parents was always unthinkable, as will discussed in the next chapter on traditional culture. Here is a policy statement regarding the remote Aborigines still living in tribal conditions:

“(b) As far as possible, all tribal aborigines living under natural conditions should be protected from being de-tribalized inasmuch as experience shows that such de-tribalization, in spite of all efforts, leads inevitably towards extinction of the race through lack of interest in life, miscegenation, the introduction of European diseases, and under nourishment.

(c) To enable the tribal natives of the Musgrave Ranges to remain self- supporting, the land between the Reserve for Aborigines in the north-western corner of the State and the buffer Mission Station at Ernabella should continue to be attached to Ernabella as at present, or be added to the Reserve for Aborigines.”  

**1940-41.**

**Children of the settled areas**

The early Board Annual Reports stated its policy with respect to children of concern in the settled districts and on mission or government stations, that is “as far as possible, to preserve family life intact” and named a new appointee to to implement it. A new welfare officer was employed to travel around the communities giving assistance to the mothers ensuring that the children were properly cared for within a family environment, thus avoiding the need for removal:

“It has been apparent for a considerable time that the services of a suitable woman to engage in welfare work amongst the women and girls were urgently needed. Dr. E.J. Davies, a fully qualified medical practitioner, who has had considerable experience amongst native people, as a medical missionary, was appointed welfare officer in the Aborigines Department, and is now engaged in visiting the various mission stations and native camping places. It is hoped that, as a result of this appointment, there will be a great improvement in the standard of home life amongst the aborigines, thus providing the children with an environment conducive health of body and mind.”  

**1942-43.**

“Welfare Department.- The Welfare Officer, Sister McKenzie, reports that, during the year, employment was secured for 30 girls in institutions and private homes. Some of the girls and rendering good service, but others proved less satisfactory and require
constant supervision. Thirty-four visits were paid to aboriginal institutions and camping places, in addition to the calls at hospitals, schools, private homes and other places of employment. The lack of co-operation of some of the women and girls makes welfare work exceedingly difficult, and greatly impedes the development of a satisfactory home life and the profitable use of leisure hours.” 1944-45.

“One of the principle causes of ill-health, particularly amongst children, is the irregular and inadequate meals provided by some mothers, who are incompetent and neglectful. No doubt such children would enjoy better health, and be much happier if placed in institutions provided by missionary organizations, and in some cases, action along these lines has been taken. The board desires, however, as far as possible, to preserve family life intact, and with this object in view, the welfare officer, Sister McKenzie, and the nurses and helpers on aboriginal stations and missions are busily engaged advising and encouraging the parents to raise the standard of living in their homes. While in some homes reasonably good use is made of family income, it is obvious that in many cases there is an appalling incompetence in the management of money. The endowment income in such cases is brought under control of the department with a view to ensuring that the children are properly fed and clothed.” 1948-49.

In the settled areas, the Department’s policy towards children was now clearly to maintain them in their own homes wherever possible and, if necessary, quarantine the child endowment cheques to ensure this was best used in the interests of the children. This appeared to be the pay-off for the mothers in doubtful cases – keep the children, but hand over the control of endowment monies for the Board to ensure use on the child’s behalf. The similarity with the current “Commonwealth Intervention” is notable.

Concern had not abated, however, as to the future employment trajectory of those Aboriginal adolescents living at Aboriginal institutions. The 1939 Amendment Act now made it an offence for an Aboriginal child’s parents to fail to send the child to school if they were living at an Aboriginal institution and the child was 14 to under 16 years old and was not otherwise employed, ill or authorised to be absent from school. Clearly, longer years of schooling which might include vocational training, was seen as a softer option to the attempts to procure off-station apprenticeships and training for this age group.

In the northern areas, the situation remained unchanged, but with a gradual drift of children into the station dormitories and school system:

“Matron K.M. Simmons and members of the staff are rendering outstanding service to the aborigines in that, when called upon, they take into the mission dormitory children who have spent their early years in aboriginal camps in the bush, and have not attended school, nor enjoyed any of the privileges well known to children who have always lived in the settled areas. There are about 35 children living in the mission home at present.” Umeewarra Mission, 1948-49.

“Nepabunna Mission.- Mr. F. Eaton reports an increasing demand for native labour in the district. In some cases families accompany the men employed on surrounding pastoral stations, but the general practice is for the women and children to remain at the mission to enable the children to attend the local school for aborigines conducted by members of staff.” Nepabunna Mission, 1948-49.
As the title suggests, the scope of this document restricts itself to the years from first settlement until the position of Protector was replaced by the Aboriginal Protection Board in 1940, with a little cribbing into the beginning of the 1950s. The information revealed in the documents suggest that perhaps an average figure of two or three children per year removed into care by the Aborigines Department could possibly be supported, and perhaps provides a working, order of magnitude, figure. However, deciding how many of these were orphans, genuinely neglected, or children surrendered voluntarily by one or both parents, in order to isolate how many, if any, were surrendered unnecessarily and under duress is impossible to say. This is essentially the same conclusion that Keith Windshuttle came to, in the South Australian section of his book “The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume Three, The Stolen Generation, 1881-2008.” It is also apparently the conclusion reached by Justice Gray in the Trevorrow vs South Australia court case. Justice Gray did find in favour of Trevorrow in this case precisely because he was removed by a social worker in contravention to the government policy guidelines.

Windshuttle identified a potential for as many as 300 Aboriginal children in care in 1958, but this is outside the period covered by this document. More relevant, Windshuttle also presents a figure of 54 “half-caste” Aboriginal children being committed to State care during the period 1895 to 1914, roughly three per year in this more limited period, but again this covers all possible circumstances as to the reasons for removal.
What Policies Did the South Australian Government Have Towards Traditional Culture, Language and Customary Law?

Anthropological Studies

As the colony was established many people showed deep interest in the languages and culture of the Aborigines, recognising that Aborigines had international anthropological significance. The following exchange, published in the South Australian Government Gazette, in 1875, provides some flavour of the situation in the Colony of South Australia, placing the colonists within the broader context of the intellectual life of the Empire. In this series of Gazette articles, first the Annual Report of the Protector of Aborigines explains that the government had received a request though the State Governor from ethnologist Dr. Bleek of Cape Town for information regarding the Aborigines of the colony:

"Dr. Bleek, of Cape Town, who has, under the auspices of the Government of that Colony, been pursuing ethnological researches with respect to the South African tribes, has recently directed his attention towards the aborigines of Australia for a similar purpose, and through the Secretary of State for Colonies, has communicated with His Excellency the Governor of South Australia on this subject. In acknowledging the receipt of His Excellency Mr. Musgrave’s reply, Dr. Bleek has forwarded an interesting paper on “Inquiries into Australian Aboriginal Folklore”, a copy of which I have appended to this report.”

The Gazette reproduces Dr. Bleek's paper which includes part of Governor Musgrave's letter of response to on the subject. Clearly, as the report shows, Governor Musgrave was not only reading Dr. Bleek's comparative ethnograhic studies, but he was also able to contribute to the discussion, correcting an overly the simplistic understanding by Dr Bleek of Aboriginal numerical systems. He was able to refer him to South Australian Police-trooper Gason's account (Gason, himself, a fluent Dieyerie language speaker) of that particular tribe's method of counting: Dr. Bleek of “paper”, published in the Gazette, includes these extracts:

“The natives of Australia, the Bushmen of South Africa, and some of the Indian nations living West of the Rocky Mountains of North America, are probably the lowest types of humanity, as regards civilization and deficiency of political organization. The Australians and Bushmen especially are distinguished by the fewness of numerals contained in their languages; the Bushmen having no more than three (and perhaps originally only two, the third being possibly borrowed from the Hottentot. Yet, with all these deficiencies, it is probable that Bushmen and Australians, at all events, are nearer akin to ourselves in their language and intellectual life than other races who far exceed them in point of civilization, e.g., the Negroes of Africa. …

Mr. Musgrave (His Excellency A. Musgrave, Esq., C.M.G., Governor of South Australia) also kindly sent with his letter several books and pamphlets already published in South Australia, which have reference to this subject. …. The personal interest of His Excellency Governor Musgrave in this matter is also shown in his remarks on the intellectual state and physical development of the natives, to which his experience in different Colonies (British Columbia, Natal, the West Indies, &c.)
give an especial value. Thus he says – ‘For my own part I am disposed to think, from my own knowledge of some of them, that the common estimate of the relative grade of savage tribes, in mental development of any kind, is very assuredly erroneous. You speak for instance, of the Australians and Bushmen being distinguished by the few numerals which they possess, and point to this as indicating a low type of humanity as regards civilization. But in the system of the Dieyerie tribe, as given by Mr. Gason (South Australian Police-trooper Samuel Gason) in his account which I send (page 39), you will observe that this alleged deficiency of numerals by no means indicates an inability to compute and express greater numbers than the number of numerals they possess, any more than the French expression dix-sept or quatre-vingt denotes inability to compute beyond the numbers ten and seven, and four-and-twenty respectively.’”

Some comments by the Rev. Taplin of the Point McLeay Mission in response to Dr. Bleek’s request are also included in Dr. Bleek’s “paper”, a section of which includes:

“… In order to obtain the information which is desired by Dr. Bleek, it would be necessary that researches should be carried out under the authority and direction of the Government of this Colony. I should propose that the following objects should be sought for: …
2. A comparative table of the languages of the Aborigines, to correspond with the comparative table of Polynesian and Melanesian languages of Dr. Geo. Turner, of Samoa; but it would be desirable to form such a table on a different plan from Dr. Turner’s. … I made an attempt towards such an one, and His Excellency Sir James Fergusson sent the manuscript to the Secretary for the Colonies, by whom it was sent to Professor Max Müller. He laid it before the Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and they published it. … There exists a great necessity for trustworthy information about the Australian Aborigines. The very first sentence in Dr. Bleek’s paper, ‘On the position of the Australian Languages,’ contain a most questionable assertion, viz., ‘that the languages spoken throughout are derived from one common stock.’ 8 I have often seen similar doubtful statements made. …”

Dr. Bleek countered the Rev. Taplin with:

“8 Among the results of the researches made by Sir George Grey, (a former Governor of South Australia) and published in his ‘Journal of two Expeditions’ thirty-three years ago, the discovery that the languages spoken throughout the southern portion of the Continent are akin to each other, was confirmed to me by the study of the different grammars collected by Sir George, and described in ‘The Library of His Excellency Sir G. Grey, Philology, Vol. II. Part I. Australia.’ This view is mainly based upon a comparison of their grammatical structure, …."

Dr. Bleek also informs us:

“‘that the Ethnological Society of London have recently published, as part of their proceedings, a paper of his (Mr. Taplin’s) on the Native Languages and other matters and that Mr. Darwin, in his latest work, “Expressions of Man and Animals,” has repeatedly quoted Mr. Taplin’s observation.’”
(As a small aside, we might also add that Fredrick Engels also quotes Taplin in his 1884 book, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.”)

Here we see the enlightenment in action, albeit one very sure of its own “civilizational advantages”. State Governors were not just simple bureaucratic functionaries, but men with a broad range of experience gleaned from a number of colonies, who were engaged in the intellectual life around them and who were able to converse with anthropologists on the latest scientific developments. We see the Protectors, their agents and the missionaries were also engaged, making new observations and publishing and distributing them to interested parties across the globe. New ideas and debate – new hypotheses and counter hypotheses. The world in which the Protectors operated was in many ways the modern world, and the Protectors were well aware of global trends in thought.

The colonial elites realised the global significance of Aboriginal culture and tried hard to record as much as possible, even as it disappeared in front of their eyes. In those early years prior to 1900, much anthropological and ethnographic work was achieved, not all directly under the auspices of the Protector, but commonly funded or sponsored by the colonial government:

- Clamor Schürmann and a colleague, Rev. Tiechelman, produced, in 1840, a vocabulary and grammar entitled “Outlines of a Grammar, Vocabulary and Phraseology of the Aboriginal Language of South Australia Spoken by the Natives in and for Some Distance around Adelaide.”
- Protector of Aborigines Dr. Matthew Moorhouse wrote, in 1846, “A Vocabulary and Outlines of the Grammatical Structure of the River Murray Language.”

Several anthropological studies were written, many including vocabularies for different dialects:

- Governor George Grey wrote a collection of notes in 1842.
- Moorhouse published extensive cultural notes in the Protector’s Annual Report of September 30th, 1842.
- The missionary, the Rev. Meyer, based at Encounter Bay, forwarded to the Protector his notes on the Aborigines of South Australia, dated 1844.
- Explorer, Magistrate and Sub-Protector of Aborigines on the River Murray, Edward John Eyre, published an excellent book in 1845 entitled “The Manners and Customs of the Aborigines and the State of their Relations with Europeans” (which is still available as a facsimile reprint).
- Missionary, Rev. George Taplin published a scholarly study of the customs and beliefs of the Narrinyeri tribe of the Murray mouth district, in 1873.

Journalist James Dominic Woods published his “The Natives Tribes of South Australia” in 1879 (still available as a facsimile reprint) which included chapters by:

- Taplin – essentially a re-work of his 1873 paper.
- Retired Protector of Aborigines, William Wyatt, “The Adelaide and Encounter Bay Tribes”.
- The Rev. H. A. Meyer contributed his earlier notes on “The Encounter Bay Tribe”
- The Rev. Clamor Schürmann contributed a chapter - “The Port Lincoln Tribe”
Police Trooper, Samuel Gason contributed “The Dieyerie Tribe”, first published in 1874, which included extensive notes on the Dieyerie language.

The final chapter in Woods’ book was “A Vocabulary of the Woolmer District Dialect, Adelaide River, (Northern Territory)”, written by overland telegraph linesman, John Bennett.

Dr. Phillip Jones of the S.A. Museum in the introduction to the 2009 facsimile reprint of Woods’ book gives us more information about John Bennett:

“Bennett had been a linesman with South Australia’s Northern Territory Survey Expedition and his ambiguous fraternisation with the Woolna people apparently resulted in his death from spear wounds during May, 1870. News of Bennett’s death underpinned the Government’s orders for the Overland Telegraph party to adopt a strict policy of non-fraternisation with Aborigines and probably contributed directly to the neglect of official ethnographic investigations which Woods targets in his introductory chapter.”

The risk of “going native”, that the Europeans, like hut-keepers and shepherds in particular took in the remoter areas, often resulted in disputes, with violence to one side or the other. The act of getting close to Aborigines to make ethnographic observations made a person especially vulnerable; Gason, for example, had been the survivor of an earlier attack by Aborigines on the Barrow Creek Telegraph Station in 1873.

The wife of missionary James Smith, after thirty-five years of missionary and teaching work in the South-East of the State at Grey Town, Rivoli Bay beginning in 1845, and later at Mount Gambier from 1860, wrote a book on the Manners, Habits, Customs and Language of the Booandik Tribe of that area which was published by the South Australian Government Printer in 1880. She is the same Mrs. Smith who was referred in 1866 “Mrs. Smith told me she had invited all the blacks in the district to a tea party.” Her son, Duncan Smith, was an interpreter on the government payroll.


Not part of South Australia today but, in 1891, Northern Territory Police Mounted Trooper, William Willshire, wrote a detailed paper (published by the South Australian Government Printer) on the Culture and Language of the Aborigines of Central Australia. Willshire, like Bennett, probably also became “ambiguously nativised” and got into deep trouble, being tried, and acquitted, for the murder of two Aborigines also in 1891.

Interestingly, the man who collected the evidence to prosecute William Willshire, Alice Springs’ Postmaster General and Stipendiary Magistrate Francis Gillen, in collaboration with University Professor Baldwin Spencer, published in 1899 their own landmark anthropological study, “The Native Tribes of Central Australia.”

While the Rev. Meyer worked at Encounter Bay, his son became missionary in charge at Killalpaninna Mission in South Australia’s far North-East and also wrote a treatise on the Dieyerie language of the area.
It is important to note here that it is not only that there were numerous researchers publishing books on Aboriginal ethnography, anthropology and language, but there must have been a sufficiently broad readership to whom these books were being sold. In the 1879 annual report, in a brief obituary to the Rev. George Taplin, we are told:

“The last work of the kind that engaged his attention, and which he brought to a successful termination a few days before his death, was editing for the Government a series of papers on the folklore, manners, customs, languages, &c. of the South Australian aborigines. Of the first edition of this work, published in August last, a few copies only remain on hand.” 1879.

There were police troopers other than Gason who were sufficiently fluent in native languages. On the 10th of October, 1882, Police Trooper Thomas Clode, a witness in the case against Winginia cited previously, is named as being sworn in as an interpreter in the case of the murder of (Mary) Coonah, an aboriginal woman. Inspector Besley was also fluent in Aboriginal languages and became a Sub-Protector. The court records to 1885 name ten different men with European names sworn in as interpreters, Rev. Heinrich Meyer, Rev. Clamour Schürmann, Duncan Smith, Sub-Protector George Mason, Protector Dr. Matthew Moorhouse, Christopher Provis (another police trooper), John Freeman, James McKechnie, James Lock Higgins and Thomas Clode. The records show many Aboriginal interpreters sworn in, in that same period.

Native Languages Were Not Discouraged

The interest in native languages extended to attempts at their preservation. The earliest Annual Report that we have been able to find is one written by the Protector of Aborigines, Dr. Moorhouse, dated the 30th September 1842, which includes:

“Attempts at Improving their Condition. Christianization and Civilization are now in course of trial. The means used to effect the former, are preaching the gospel to them in their own tongue on the Sabbath, & when suitable opportunity presents, speaking familiarly to them on Religious & moral subjects. The children have now for nearly three years been assembled in school & taught Scripture history, the commandments, and doctrines of the New Testament in their own tongue. They have also been taught to read, write and understand common arithmetic. (authors’ emphasis) 1842.

The next year he reported in the Government Gazette, Thursday, March 23, 1843, that at the government funded Adelaide school:

“The system of education that has hitherto been adopted, has been almost entirely carried on in the native language. The advantage of this plan over the English, is, that the characters used for spelling native words have a fixed and invariable sound, and the child can, according to an undeviating rule, in a short time spell and pronounce the word. As soon as the word is pronounced, it is recognised by the child, pleasure is produced in the mind, and a taste for further attempts encouraged.” (authors’ emphasis) 1843.
We have seen above how many of the first dictionaries and grammars were compiled by the missionaries i.e. Tiechelmann, Schürmann, Taplin, Meyer the elder, Meyer the younger, so it will be of no surprise to learn that on the mission stations the missionaries taught and preached in native languages. Taplin’s Mission diaries of October 1863, reveal that he was engaged in translating the Bible into the native vernacular:

“1st October,[1863] Engaged all this week at translating Exodus XIX & XX chapters as far as they contain and relate to the Mosaic account of the giving of the Decalogue, also in revising for the press the translation of the Sermon on the Mount."

Point McLeay, 1863.

“2. Work of the Missionaries.- They have taken great pains to learn the language of this tribe, and have collected a pretty large vocabulary, and written outlines of grammar. This difficult preparatory work now enables the missionaries to work with greater success, and they endeavour to lead the aborigines to useful employment of their time.”

Hermannsburg Mission, 1879.

“The average attendance of children at school during the past year has been 25. They are making fair progress; but as they do not understand much English we now teach them in their own language, not forgetting to teach them in English also as well as we can. There is a fair number of them able to read and write in their own language as well as in English.”

Kopperamanna (later Killalpaninna) Lutheran Station, 1879.

“. . . Nevertheless, we are thankful to have been the means of conveying some light and love into the miserable life of an Australian black, and do not repent of our anxieties and untold worries this work has sometimes laid in our hearts; and this fact alone, that the New Testament was translated by our missionaries into an Australian native tongue, the only Australian language so honoured, proves that we have gone into our task in a very sympathetic manner. If any should feel interested to possess this book I will gladly forward it to any address.”

Kopperamanna, 1904.

“The Rev. F. Bognor, who has had the out-door management of the station, is working himself into the language of the blacks, so as to be able to teach and preach in “Dieri”, and thus we hope to be able to keep on the good work of educating the blacks to a useful Christian life.”

Killalpaninna Mission, 1905-06.

“Services were held in the Dieri Language every Sunday, and well attended by the congregation members and others.”

Killalpaninna Mission, 1910.

It should be remembered that these mission schools were government subsidised and so the policy of teaching in Aboriginal languages was government endorsed.

As well as learning Aboriginal languages, some of the missionaries even had to learn English. Alice Springs’ telegraph officer Flint reports on the Hermannsburg Mission:

“Amongst other disadvantages the residents of the mission station have laboured under is their difficulty mastering the English language, but this they are rapidly overcoming; in fact, now being able to speak English with a certain degree of fluency. There can be no question that natives understand communications made in
‘pigeon English’ better than the more guttural German tongue.”

Hermannsburg, 1879.

Mr. Flint, incidentally, was the same Mr. Flint who was the telegraph operator at Barrow Creek when, in February 1873, it was attacked and besieged by local Aborigines. Describing the incident in his 1891 paper, “The Aborigines of Central Australia”, Mounted Police Constable Willshire, records:

“Mr. Flint had a terrible spear wound in the thigh, but while lying on the sofa in the operating room “spoke” with Alice Springs and Tennant’s Creek stations with a pocket instrument which Mounted Constable Gason connected for him at the open window where the station instrument stood. .... Still the natives did not cut the wires, which was what the party most feared, nor did they spear any of the horses belonging to the station. Constant watch was kept day and night against surprise, as well as to catch the first signal of coming help. Plenty of water and provisions were in the station, and an abundant supply of medicine. The late Dr. Charles Gosse was hourly consulted in Adelaide by wire as to the treatment of Mr. Flint’s wound. His thigh had swollen up to an enormous size, the natives having poisoned their spears by steeping the barbs in the decomposing entrails of kangaroo. On the third day the symptoms were so bad that Mr. Flint was not expected to live, and it was feared that mortification was about to set in, but he lay resolutely in his blankets opposite the doorway, revolver in hand, to lend his aid if necessary to repel the hourly expected rush of the natives. However, he pulled through ultimately, and for fourteen years subsequently remained on the line, and was at the time of his widely regretted death from typhoid fever, in 1887, stationmaster at Strangways Springs.

For the record, it appears that although two Europeans died during the attack and several others were wounded, no Aborigines were ever charged over the offence.

The Chief Protector was actually worried that not enough English was being taught at the Hermannsburg Mission, but it wasn’t German that was being taught:

“The teaching of the English language should be emphasised on this station, as the lack of the knowledge of English must be a handicap to these aboriginals when they leave the mission to earn a living elsewhere. The native language (Arunta) is used almost exclusively on this station.”

Hermannsburg Mission, 1925.

And this policy continued: still teaching in native languages:

“The school teacher, having made a rapid conquest of the language problem, is rendering good service at Ernabella, all instruction being given in Pitjindjara, which is the language of the people. School books and materials are provided by the Aboriginal Protection Board.”

1939-40.

And later:

“The wisdom of teaching in the native language and in English will now become apparent as these bi-lingual children grow to maturity, understanding and appreciating the best of their own culture and in the elements of civilization derived from their contact with teachers whose sole aim is the welfare of their scholars.”

Ernabella Mission, 1948-49.
“Miss MacDonald continues in charge of the primary school. An additional native teacher is now being trained, four native girls being full-time teachers.”

Ernabella Mission, 1951-52.

“The school work has proceeded satisfactorily, with an average attendance of 40 children. Miss Nellie Lester, a native girl, has been appointed assistant teacher at Ooldea.”

Ooldea Mission, 1940-41.

As indicated earlier, a number of the police, such as Police Trooper Gason and Police Trooper Provis, were court interpreters. Sub-Protector Clode, formerly a Police Trooper, also was fluent and an interpreter:

“During the year I have inspected several depots, and, being able to converse in the native tongue, have ascertained that they were well cared for, and the Government rations were fairly distributed amongst them, and the natives had no complaints to make.”

Sub-Protector Clode, 1907-08.

Land Access and the Law

In Chapter Two, a section of the Proclamation of South Australia was quoted which laid out the position of the government as to the expected treatment of the Aborigines and also making clear the expectation that they would, in time become part of the mainstream community:

“It is also at this time especially my duty to apprise the Colonists of my Resolution to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the Native Population as to the rest of His Majesty's subjects, and of my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity all acts of violence or injustice which may in any manner be practised or attempted against the natives, who are to be considered as much under the safeguard of the law as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British subjects. I trust therefore with confidence to the exercise of moderation and forbearance by all classes in their intercourse with the Native Inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting me to fulfil His Majesty's most gracious and benevolent intentions towards them by promoting their advancement to civilization, and ultimately, under the blessing of Divine Providence, their conversion to the Christian Faith.”

1836.

Clearly, the government saw Aborigines as having all the status of British subjects while commanding a special status during an undefined transitional period of “their advancement to civilisation”.

In the early days of settlement the government adopted a rather *laissez-faire* attitude to this expected transition, allowing Aborigines to essentially find their own way of adapting to the evolving situation, while providing some amelioration. The main role of the Protector of Aborigines was to provide for the needs of the needy during this transition or as the need arose amongst the still fully tribalized, and also to mediate in disputes and to set aside some land for their use in cultivation at some future time.
Some assistance was given to Aborigines to be able to maintain their traditional lifestyles and where problems arose alternatives were offered. The provision of canoes, fishing tackle, and to some extent guns and ammunition are some examples described in earlier chapters. These were also seen to some extent as a means to facilitate entry into the money economy.

Efforts were made to maintain Aborigines on their own tribal lands and there were even some active measures taken to return them at times to their traditional land, and to keep them off the traditional lands of other tribes. Importantly, for the fully tribalised Aborigines, there was very little coercion exerted to to hasten this transition to “civilization” or, for that matter, for “their conversion to the Christian faith”.

As also quoted in Chapter Two, in a lengthy letter published in 1839 by Deputy Commissioner of Lands, Charles Sturt, it was emphasised that colonial settlers and Aborigines would both share the land, within the context of a broad assumption that eventually Aborigines would become agriculturalists as well. The Aboriginal population densities encountered during the first phase of settlement in and around Adelaide meant that dual land use was not an obvious problem and the local Aborigines were even drawn to the temptations of the new city life.

As colonial expansion progressed, it was the “pioneers”, the remote hut keepers and shepherds, who were at the forefront of any frontier friction with the Aborigines and this was mainly over the problems of isolated and unguarded property and stock losses. However, the attitude of the Protectors was made perfectly plain. The attitude of the Commissioners of Police was equally consistent. The Police Force, overstretched by the rapid expansion of the colony, was not overly sympathetic to settlers who seemingly invited trouble by taking huge risks moving into outlying unsettled districts. Police Commissioner Dashwood, in a joint report with the Protector of Aborigines into the death of an Aborigine during a police investigation into the death of the settler William Baird, published in the Government Gazette of January, 1851, responds to the Governor’s request on what legislative changes might be made to ease the situation in the outlying districts. The suppression of the Aborigines was not under consideration, but rather the setting up of a ration depot so that a dialogue could be opened:

“To suggest any measures which would be likely to prevent a recurrence of these disastrous events, we find a matter of considerable difficulty. In Mr. Baird’s unfortunate case we feel bound to say, that in settling himself down nearly forty miles from the nearest station, in the very centre of a tribe of natives known to be hostile to Europeans; with 2,600 sheep, himself and one shepherd constituting his whole establishment both of whom being obliged to tend the sheep during the day necessarily left their insecure tenement and the provisions it contained to the mercy of the winds, he acted most imprudently. But, on the other hand, to endeavour to prevent persons running risks of a similar kind by legislative enactment or otherwise, would, in our opinion, tend to cramp the energies of the colonists, by whom almost all the available country has as yet been discovered, as well as retard the advancement of the colony; and, on the other hand, to assist with the especial assistance and protection of the police every adventurous individual who, either influenced by avaricious motives or bent upon some wild speculation might take up an insulated position beyond the occupied districts, would be inexpedient, expensive,
and inconvenient. ... On the whole, therefore, we do not find ourselves in a position to recommend any course likely to produce beneficial results; but the one which we have in some degree been instrumental in carrying out during our recent visit to Port Lincoln, that is to say, cultivating the acquaintance of the northern tribes by issuing them with flour and blankets at stated periods, and thus obtaining a knowledge of their persons generally, and through interpreters of their own tribes, becoming aware of their haunts, habits, and movements. We see no reason why these measures should not result in taming the Port Lincoln natives as well as the natives of other districts of the Province, who, in the early history of the Colony were equally savage and ferocious; and we have, upon our own responsibility, in furtherance of these desirable ends, promised that an issue of flour and blankets shall take place at the Three Lakes Police Station, trusting that His Excellency will be pleased to sanction and approve of the same. 

Police Commissioner Dashwood, 1851.

Another memorandum taken from the Correspondence of the Police Commissioner’s Office, May/June 1866, from Egerton Warburton, Commissioner of Police in 1866, in a rather testy reply to letter from Sub-Protector Buttfield, (who I believe was also a deputised Minister of Religion as referred to in the text) is quite explicit:

"3
11/4/66
Memo
From: Egerton Warburton
? Commissioner of Police
Copy to Inspector Leary?
With reference to Mr Buttfield’s letter of March 30th 1866 to Inspector ?Leary – I can only say –
That no doubt the Blacks in the Gawler Ranges do from time to time commit depredations upon the property of the settlers – and so would the Whites in Adelaide if the citizens left their property equally exposed –
Mr Buttfield says the Shepherds and Hut-Keepers are unprotected – but to the best of my belief 19 out of 20 Huts are left during the day (sometimes for weeks) without any hutkeeper, and it is not the hutkeepers, but the property which is left by its owners wholly unprotected. If a man leaves his property in the Bush without any one to take care of it – no wonder he is robbed.
As to the Shepherds being unprotected, I do not know what they are to be protected from – have they been overpowered, assaulted & injured of their sheep forcibly taken from them whilst out tending their flocks in the Scrub ? I know of no case – I do not see that it is needful the shepherds &c should be restrained as to their modes of "self-defence" – if a man be assaulted, he is quite justified in adapting his mode of self-defence to the character of the assault – but when Mr Buttfield says they are unrestrained as to the amount and kind of “retribution” certain emergencies may seem to them to demand, I think he is altogether mistaken – Retribution is not entrusted to private hands and any shepherd or other person who may assume to himself the right of dealing it out will find the Police (as in duty bound) quick enough to restrain him. Mr Buttfield has I think feelingly & faithfully pictured the real position of the Blacks. They are represented as smarting under a sense of injustice inflicted upon them by the occupation of their country – that the many & nameless hardships arising from the presence of the White man are sufficient to engender feelings of resentment in natives even less savage – I believe this to be true – but I cannot follow Mr Buttfield in his remedy for such evils – viz., that a Police Station
should be established at Paney – or as I view the proposal – that we should employ
the best means we know of to frighten and drive the poor creatures clear out of their
country and away from their known waters! To me it seems that, if our exclusive
occupancy of every bit of water & country be admitted as an injustice towards the
Blacks the implicit remedy would be to release our grasp and allow them a fair share,
for their own exclusive use, of such country as was wanted to their sustenance.
I can not advocate a Pol. Station at Paney – the settlers want it, they can themselves
the expense of taking proper care of their own property. The Sub Protector wants it –
and so far as I can understand – for the purpose of over-awing the Blacks and by driving
them out of their country, & spare the whites the temptation of shooting them.
The Police are the only really executive native protectors, and I think that Inspector
Leary, in dealing with the Blacks, will consult his own views of justice between man &
man, rather than the pecuniary interests or the personal feelings of the settlers.

There can be no objection to sending Natives by ship when it can be done – but this is
not always the case. I need not here specify all the difficulties – they will readily recur
to the Minister. I merely wish to show that the Police do not escort Native
prisoners & witnesses over long land journeys for their personal pleasure or for the
infliction of wanton unnecessary hardship upon the natives; whenever circumstances
admit of their being sent by ship that course should be adopted.

E. Warburton.”

It is clear that the government was rather concerned by the rapid advance of settlement and
was somewhat embarrassed at its inability to keep up with the pace. In any case the police
clearly did not see themselves as an agent of the settlers with a responsibility to clear the
way for their advance. Quite the contrary, as a direct result of the incident of 1851 involving
the deaths of Mr. Baird, a settler on Eyre Peninsula and an Aborigine, it was resolved that the
right of access of Aborigines to at least pastoral lands for the purposes of traditional
ceremonies and hunting and gathering should be made explicit in pastoral lease documents.
A single paragraph in the 1851 report cited above on the incident, …:

“we … reached Anxious Bay on the afternoon of the 4th January, where we found the
[ship] Yalata and fourteen of the natives who had promised to follow us to Mr Baird’s
station, the women and children and some men having been deterred from coming
the whole distance partly by fatigue and partly by the fear of passing through the
runs of the settlers, which we regret to find can seldom be done by natives with
impunity.”

1851.

… prompted an immediate response published in the Government Gazette of 30th January, 1851:

Sir – I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 22nd instant, calling
my attention to a report of the Commissioner of Police, in which an officer states that
the natives of Port Lincoln have well-grounded fears in passing through the runs of
the settlers, and directing me not to issue any further leases of land without inserting
therein clauses recognizing the undoubted right of the natives to traverse the runs,
so long as they do not violate the rights of property; and also providing for their
protection.
In a letter which I had the honor to address to you on the 16th instant, relative to the reservations to be inserted in leases, I suggested the adoption of some clauses reserving the right of the natives to dwell upon land, and to follow their usual customs in searching for food; but I am not able to suggest any other protective clauses which would be likely to operate usefully.

The regulations respecting the forfeiture of leases might be put into operation in the event of a settler being convicted of any crime against the natives, but this I apprehend would not apply to offences committed by the servant of the lessee.

I am of the opinion, however, that if it should be found at any time that the natives suffer oppression in consequence of the land being held under lease, the evil may easily be remedied by setting apart certain tracts of country as native reserves.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
CHAS. BONNEY.
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

The Hon., the Colonial Secretary.”

The Pastoral Act was passed in 1851, and gave Aborigines nearly unlimited access to leasehold land for hunting and ceremonial purposes. All the South Australian pastoral leases had the following clause inserted:

“And reserving to aboriginal inhabitants of the said State and their descendants during the continuance of this lease full and free right of egress and regress upon and over the said lands and every part thereof and in and to the springs and surface waters therein and to make and erect and to take and use for food, birds and animals ferae naturae in such manner as they would have been entitled to if this lease had not been made.”

The 1989 Pastoral Act maintains these rights to the present day:

PASTORAL LAND MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION ACT, 1989

DIVISION 111-PUBLIC ACCESS

Rights of Aborigines

47. (1) Notwithstanding this Act or any pastoral lease granted under this Act or the repealed Act, but subject to subsection (2), an Aborigine may enter, travel across or stay on pastoral land for the purpose of following the traditional pursuits of the Aboriginal people.

(2) Subsection (1) does not give an Aborigine a right to camp-

(a) within a radius of one kilometre of any house, shed or other outbuilding on pastoral land;

or

(b) within a radius of 500 metres of a dam or any other constructed stock watering point.”
Aborigines were allowed to hunt and fish in game reserves, even during the closed season and this right was defended – here by the Rev. Taplin in his Point McLeay report:

“During the close season these natives only shoot such game as may be necessary for their sustenance: they sell none, and I know that they waste but little. I have been surprised to hear of unpleasant remarks being made by some persons because the natives sell feathers. It is very evident that if the natives eat feathered game they may just as well preserve and sell them as destroy them. When the natives – out of close season – shoot game and sell them to the dealers, of course they sell the feathers with it. But I cannot imagine what objection there can be to selling the feathers of the game which they eat, or of birds which are not eatable (very few). Any restriction put upon the natives in getting game would be a great hardship and injustice, and would compel the Government to provide means for the subsistence of all of them. The white man may kill the kangaroo by the hundreds and destroy their flesh which would have fed hundreds of natives, but no sooner do the natives sell some feathers than certain parties raise a cry that the feathered game is being extirpated by them. I consider that such persons are being unjust to the aborigines. The game is not being extirpated by the natives.” 1879.

Breaches to these laws were acted upon. A letter from the South Australian Protector of Aborigines, Letter Books dated 1876 (authors’ emphasis):

“# 604

28th June 1876
Mr C.A. Meyer
Kopperamanna
Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 12th inst., respecting the natives at Kopperamanna and Cooper’s Creek, I have the honor to inform you that, your letter has been forwarded to Mr Buttfield, Sub-Protector of Aborigines, Blinman, and when his report thereon has been received, I will communicate with you again upon the questions referred to in your letter.

With regard to your statement ‘that a settler at Cooper’s Creek had ordered the natives to leave his run, as he had taken a lease of the land, and would not allow them to remain thereon any longer” – I have to state that, a pastoral lessee is not justified in interfering with the Aborigines on his run in the manner complained of, as his lease contains a clause specially reserving to the Aborigines their full and free right to live upon such land, to erect wurleys &c, to use springs and surface water thereon and to take and use for food all such native wild birds and animals as they are accustomed to.
I have also to request that you will be good enough to report the circumstances under which the settler in question objected to the natives remaining on his run, and forward a statement to this office giving full particulars as to name and dates &c. – to enable the necessary action to be taken to protect the interests of these Natives.”

[Protector Hamilton, 1876]
(authors’ emphasis)
Interestingly, apparently, the “settler of Cooper’s Creek” in question, at Cowarie Station, subsequently applied to the Protector, and obtained approval, to become a distributor of government rations.

Traditional Customs and Customary Law Were Largely Unchallenged

There is no evidence of a systematic attempt to suppress tribal law or social structures by the South Australian Government, often even when matters were in conflict with European law. As we saw in an earlier chapter, polygamy was accommodated in court matters dealing with tribal Aborigines, as was under-age marriage, however tribal paybacks and tribal fighting were more actively discouraged in the settled areas where Aborigines were much more at risk from other Aborigines than from settlers.

In the remote areas, there was no systematic policy of imposing Australian law over tribal disputes:

“A tribal fight among the natives hostile to one another in the Arltunga district, Northern Territory, took place, in which one of the combatants was killed. It was considered, however, unwise for the authorities to take any action in the matter, it being a purely tribal dispute.” 1909-10.

“The general conduct of the aborigines has been good. No serious offences have been committed, and very few otherwise convicted for lesser offences. Two natives (male and female) suffered death (one near Oodnadatta and the other at Blood’s Creek [nr NT border]) at the hands of their countrymen, owing to disputes, it is supposed, between different tribes, according to their tribal laws. One member of the attacking tribe was killed in revenge for the death of the lubra. It was deemed unwise to take any action to punish the ringleaders, as the deaths were considered a tribal affair. Last May an old lubra was supposed to have died from injuries received at the hands of a native boy at Mount Gason. The police at Mungeranie made every inquiry, but could not obtain sufficient evidence to sustain a charge against the suspected offender.” 1910-11.

“The police officers receive frequent rumours of tribal killings amongst the natives west of Oodnadatta. A native shepherd employed on Lambinna Station was recently fatally speared.” 1937-38.

“Mr. Taylor reports yaws, sore eyes, burns, spear wounds, etc., are treated at the dispensary.” Ernabella Mission, 1938-39.

In general, the police only got involved when a crime affected a non-Aborigine or a partially assimilated Aborigine working for a settler, and in any case, the courts generally acted sympathetically:

“At the last Criminal Sittings of the Circuit Court at Robe, three natives of this district were charged with murder, convicted, and sentenced to death. The crime had been committed in carrying out a tribal custom among the natives, and the Court appeared impressed with a sense of difficulty in bringing a case of this nature under the operation of our Criminal Law, where the prisoners had doubtless acted under
the belief that they were performing a sacred duty. The sentences were subsequently commuted to two years’ imprisonment with hard labor. The Minister of Justice (the Hon. W. H. Bundey) recently called the attention of Parliament to this subject, and announced his intention of introducing a Bill to amend the existing Criminal Law in respect to its application to offences committed by aborigines”.

Half year ended June, 1874.

“Four aboriginals were convicted for the murder of an aboriginal shepherd at Granite Downs, and sentenced to comparatively short terms of imprisonment as the crime was regarded as an act of tribal revenge.”

However, since Aborigines were declared to be British subjects in 1836, they were entitled to the protection of British (and then Australian) law should they wish to opt out of tribal customs and law. Magistrate and Sub-Protector Edward John Eyre, describing the cicatrisation ceremonies affecting young girls, notes in his 1845 book:

“Among the females the only ceremony of importance that I am aware of is that of tattooing the back, a long and painful operation. ... The girls, however, are always anxious to have this ceremony performed, as a well tattooed back is considered a great addition to their other charms, and whenever I have offered to protect them from the cruelty of their tribe for refusing to submit to it, they have invariably preferred to submit to it.”

The 1912 Annual Report records:

“The brutal operation of subincision is still performed in the outlying districts, but the police have been instructed to take immediate action where any native is subjected to this operation against his will and desires the protection of the law.”

Police report for Far Northern Division, 1911-12.

Corroborees and other ceremonies continued, even with some facilitation by the government where thought necessary:

“On the 17th of March, Mr. Barton Hack, of the Coorong, reported to me that the natives (numbering 300 men) had assembled near his station, from the Goolwa, Mundoo Island, the Peninsula, Salt Creek, and other parts of the Coorong, for the purpose of holding a grand Corroboree; ...”

Sub-Protector Mason, 1861.

“Tarpeena. - Ranger Eagan reports, on the 13th May :- ‘all the aborigines located at the dépôt at Tarpeena left for MacDonnell Bay ; some of them had never seen the Bay and were very desirous to visit it. They subsequently returned to the Mount when they met many of their friends, some from Glenelg, and they held a corroberie. The various dépôts being at convenient distances from each other in this district they can indulge in their migratory habits, and there is no danger of their going short of food.’”

1867.

“Glenelg” here probably refers to the Glenelg River, not Glenelg in Adelaide.

“Naracoorte. – Corporal Field, writing in July states ‘... All the healthy natives are employed on various stations ; some fencing, others shepherding, boundary riding, &c., for which they are paid money, food, and clothes. Occasionally they leave their
employment for a short time to meet their friends and have a corroboree. I have supplied blankets and rations, if required, to these when travelling.” 1868.

“In September last a large number of natives gathered at Ooldea for the performance of tribal rites and ceremonies. On receipt of reports of this large gathering, Mr. W.R. Penhall, of my Department accompanied by the Rev. J.H. Sexton, Secretary of the Advisory Council of Aborigines, visited Ooldea and made satisfactory arrangements for their maintenance while in that district.”

Ooldea Mission, 19343-5.

Rather than suppress ceremony, there was a desire to work with Aborigines, for example to work hygiene into them. This example from the Newcastle District in the Far North of the State:

“I am endeavouring to get the aborigines to repose sufficient faith in me to allow them to doctor their ills instead of their own medicine men, and with one of the latter, a rather intelligent half-caste, I have taught a lot of simple rules of cleanliness, and have persuaded him to work them into his ceremonies. This man is rather a queer throwback. He is fairly well educated, but went through the initiation ceremony last year. He knew the folly of the medicine men’s methods, but through force of circumstances he took a bone out of a gin’s leg when she was suffering. She stated that the pain had gone, so he had to practice on others; finally he got such a reputation that he believes that he is really able to suck the pain out of a sick person. He told me the other day that one could not get near his camp for the bones he had extracted out of the sufferers.” (authors’ emphasis)

Newcastle District, 1924-25.

Even a type of cannibalism, as employed in traditional funerary rituals in the Far North, continued without interference:

“LAKE COONGY, COOPER’S CREEK, FAR NORTH.

Mr. G.B. Armstrong, reports :-

In reply to your communication of the 9th October, 1879, I have to say that the blacks on this run are not reduced to cannibalism, and I do not think any in the district are. I have never known an instance of blacks eating human flesh for food. The black boys working for me inform me that when a chief dies some of the flesh is scraped off the cheeks with a shell and eaten as a mark of respect, and that near relatives of a dead person sometimes eat a part of the cheek as a mark of affection.” 1879.

(This is exactly the same ritual described in detail by Police Trooper Gason in the 1879 book “The Native Tribes of South Australia” by J.D. Woods.)

While ochre-gathering expeditions in the North were discouraged due to clashes with both settlers and local Aborigines while transiting, the supply of ochre was facilitated by other means:

“Mr. Buttfield, S.M., Sub-Protector in the Far North, reports as follows for the six months ended June 30th: -

Serious depredations have been committed by aboriginals known as the Salt Water blacks. These men come down every year from Cooper’s Creek and elsewhere to obtain supplies of ochre from Aroona Cave. On returning to
their own country they not infrequently rob the huts of shepherds, and in one or two cases took away all the food and clothing. They did so at Myrtle Springs Run and also St. a’Beckett’s. The police have no power to deal with cases of this kind, as it is impossible to track and identify the offenders. I have had the honor to suggest for your consideration the desirability of a supply of ochre being sent to the Lutheran missionaries at Lake Hope as the only means whereby a repetition of the crime averted to may be obviated. If ochre from Aroona were obtainable outside the settled districts the Salt Water blacks would remain in their own localities and thus not only would the property of the shepherds be secured, but the several tribes of natives in the settled districts would be relieved of anxiety about the movements of their hostile neighbours, the Salt Water blacks.

Mr. Buttfield has been instructed to procure and forward a supply of ochre to the Lutheran Mission depot at Kopperamana, Lake Hope. If the action taken in this matter succeeds an important result will be obtained, inasmuch as the annual migrations of the Lake Hope blacks will be stopped and collisions with the shepherds – possibly leading to loss of life – prevented.” 1874.

However, five years later, the expeditions were still happening anyway, without police intervention:

“Last week fifty-eight men, in the prime of life, returned with red ochre from Parachilna, thirty miles south of Beltana, and a party of sixty from another tribe had previously, some three months ago, made their first expedition on the same errand. In times of “starvation” red ochre is a secondary matter.”

Kopperamanna Lutheran Mission Station, 1879.

Nor should one ignore the fact that some changes were quite popular with some of the Aborigines themselves. Loss of culture was also an active decision made by Aborigines. The Government Gazette, published Thursday, July 24, 1851, reproduces a report by Archdeacon Hale of the Training Institution, Poonindie, Port Lincoln:

“On the part of the young people themselves, there is the greatest readiness to emigrate to our little colony, but we have some difficulty in getting them away on account of the determined opposition of the older men. These well-whiskered, long-beared personages, see with alarm that the old established custom, which assigns to men of their age and standing a retinue of young wives, is in danger of being broken down, and their efforts to avert so great a calamity are of the most energetic character.” 1851.

However, over time, there was a general winding down of traditional practices – particularly in the southern settled areas:

“ In his report Dr. Clindening states – ‘... They had a corroboree on the 4th March, but in point of numbers, grotesqueness of gesture, vocalization, and time-beating, nothing in comparison to the grand affairs of the South in years gone by’. 1865.

At Tarpeena, in the South-East, the old ways persisted but perhaps with less enthusiasm:
“Tarpeena. – Mr. Eagan writes – ‘The Aborigines have been employed during the month (October) by the squatters washing sheep, at which work they are very useful. A great mob of them went away to the Mallee Scrub for spears and waddies. The scrub is more than 100 miles distant from this. I met them in the Province of Victoria returning with large quantities of those warlike instruments.’” 1865.

“Tarpeena.. Mr. Eagan remarks “... They had one ‘growl’ during the month about a lubra, and were going to fight. Some painted their faces white, and thirty men and one woman arranged themselves in battle array in the paddock opposite my house, with their spears, waddies, &c. Fortunately I happened to be at home and so prevented the fight, and they soon became very good friends.” 1866.

“Tatiara.
R.B. Penny, Esq. M.R.C.S., L, &c., District Medical Officer for Aborigines, states – .... I would suggest that natives visiting from the Wimmera, Coorong, and Padthaway, have their war implements taken charge of by the police, and only given to them on their return home, as they quarrel and fight and become a great nuisance to the agricultural district and dangerous to the natives who are employed on the farms; as a general rule not one of the natives in my district carry any warlike implements.” 1875.

At Point McLea Mission, near the Murray mouth:

“While I do not deny that there are incorrigible natives, who continue obstinately bad, yet I am sure there is much moral improvement as a result of our work here. In one particular there is a marked difference from times. We have not had any fighting for eighteen months. Formerly fights were monthly occurrences, Gambling too has very much decreased.” Point McLeay, 1866.

“POINT MACLEAY (sic) NATIVE INSTITUTION.
Mr. F.W. Taplin, superintendent, states :-
The general conduct and behaviour of the natives during the year has been good. Many of the old tribal feuds are gradually dying out, the intermingling of the different clans at the mission station doing much towards establishing friendship and unity between tribes that in years past only met with hostile intentions.” 1879.

But even in the strongly tribal regions, the ration system, which was introduced to assist Aborigines during hard times, could act as a disincentive to return to hunting and gathering, ultimately undermined traditional practices as the Protectors had always feared:

“Mr George Aiston, Protector of Aboriginals, Newcastle District [Far North of SA], reports that the condition of the aboriginals in his district is at present good, and that there is an abundance of food for those who are capable of looking after themselves. Unfortunately the long drought has made some of the aboriginals indifferent to their natural foods and they are still demanding rations.” Police report, 1930-31.

New Policy of Segregation in Order to Preserve Race and Culture

In the interior, by the 1920s, a new policy suggestion was emerging from some of the police workers in the Far North: that is, a complete segregation should be attempted in order to
maintain cultural and racial integrity. As the pressures of settlement continued, there was a gradual recognition that the laissez-faire policy was no longer working. The government would have to intervene in order to protect Aborigines from outside pressures:

“\textit{I firmly believe that the full-blooded natives, if allowed to live their primitive manner of life, and protected from the vices of others, would be happy and contented. The general condition of the full-blooded native is good. In most cases they are healthy and apparently contented, and it is only where they are constantly coming in contact with the whites that any diseases of a serious nature are prevalent.}” \textbf{Police Report, Sub-Inspector McCarthy, 1920-21.}

“From the conditions at present prevailing at Mungeranie the constable at present stationed there is of the opinion that it would be advisable, in the interests of the natives generally, to have a reserve proclaimed for them somewhere in the vicinity of Kalamurrina or Poonaruna, on the Warburton River. This would afford them a good deal of security from the whites, besides they would be able to practically keep themselves on this country, where there is plenty of game and fish.” \textbf{1921-22.}

“M.C. Aiston reiterates his statement contained in last year’s report, that some suitable portion of the back country should be set apart for the exclusive use of the natives, where they could be allowed to live their primitive manner of life, and pursue their tribal habits and customs, and be protected from the vices of others. The race is fast disappearing, and this appears the only practical way of preventing, to some extent, their complete and inevitable extinction.” \textbf{1922-23.}

“This trip (to the Musgrave Ranges) gave me a unique opportunity of seeing the natives in their almost natural conditions. Although they had made some contact with white men, especially doggers, they could not speak English, and were almost entirely dependent upon the natural food supplies which the country provided. Rations have never been supplied by the department to the natives of this locality, and the longer they can be kept outside the influence of white civilization, the better for their moral and physical welfare.” \textbf{1932-33.}

The following extract from the final report of the first Conference of Chief Protectors from the States and the Commonwealth, held in Canberra in 1937, (full document available via the Firstsources web site, see Introduction), while quoting Mr. Bleakley, the Chief Protector from Queensland, the extract neatly sums up the early South Australian attitude to Aborigines, and flagged the new direction it would take. There was a recognition that the government had “no right” to interfere with aborigines still tribalised, but, the laissez-faire attitude that the government had been following had been comprehensively under-mined by the back-door influence of a “low type of white people”, and that government had to re-take the initiative and provide “benevolent supervision” to protect them from those outside influences - all while recognising that this was ultimately a lost cause:

“\textit{Mr. BLEAKLEY. - ... We (in Queensland) have a full-blooded aboriginal population of about 10,000, of which, say, one-third, or at most, 4,000 are living a nomadic life. Very few of them have not come into contact with white people, the result being that, although they are living a nomadic life, and are maintaining tribal practices, many of which are harmful, they need supervision. It is essential, first of all, to realize that we have no right to attempt to destroy their national life. Like ourselves, they are entitled to retain their racial identity and racial pride. But it is evident that they}
cannot be left to work out their salvation without some benevolent supervision. It is also evident that the encroachment of white settlement is destroying the natives’ natural means of subsistence. While their native life should not be interfered with more than necessary, it seems that they should be encouraged to gradually change from a nomadic life, particularly now that their means of subsistence is becoming precarious. They should learn to raise from the soil something of the means of subsistence, of which they are now being deprived. It is essential that they should be saved from being destroyed by contaminating influences, because, after all, dare I say, even in the wildest parts of the northwest, the primitive native is suffering from contact with the lower type of white people – miners, stockmen and others, who invade his territory. It seems essential that there should be men there exercising supervision, upon whom we can depend to see that the natives are protected, and who will so educate them that they gradually abandon their destructive practices, which are responsible, it is claimed, for a great deal of sterility of the race. It seems to me to be a case of either helping these people under protection and supervision gradually to change their lives, so they can maintain themselves in happier circumstances, or allowing them to take their chance against the invading race.”

The First Conference of State and Commonwealth Chief Protectors of Aborigines, Canberra, 1937.

South Australian government policy was quite explicit. Professor Cleland, speaking as the Chairman of the Advisory Council of Aborigines of South Australia at the same 1937 Chief Protectors of Aborigines Conference in Canberra, made it quite explicit that the State Government recognised the need to preserve a “full-blooded” population as a social obligation, indeed, as an international obligation:

“Professor CLELAND. – In the interests of uniformity, I should be glad if we could reach some decision which would not leave any suggestion that we are careless about the ultimate fate of the full bloods. I would not like an idea to get abroad that there is any suggestion of a deliberate attempt on the part of the Conference to hurry up the detribalization of the full bloods. ... I am sure that very vigorous objections would be taken by scientists to any attempt to hasten the detribalization of the full-blooded aborigines, for they are unique, and one of the wonders of the world. Very general and strong opposition would be raised to any deliberate attempt to detribalize the full bloods.”

Large reserves were proclaimed, in an effort to segregate tribal Aborigines from white settlers:

“In the north-west, that is in the large aboriginal reserve and the country contiguous to it, the aboriginals in South Australia are making their last stand as a body of pure-blooded individuals not yet degraded by contact with a civilization they cannot assimilate and understand, and it will be to the advantage of the aboriginals and the State to keep them as such for as long as possible. It appears to be impossible to stop the progress of the white race, even if it does upset the life and habits of the indigenous people. It therefore becomes our duty to buffer the contact in some way so that the clash will not only be gradual, but will in the first instance be with persons who have the welfare and love of the aboriginal at heart, and not with those who wish to use him for their own personal gain, discarding him once he has served their purpose.
Doctor Charles Duguid has been urging this duty upon the people of South Australia and is endeavouring to get support for a scheme, which, gaining by the errors of missionary enterprises in the past, will serve to assist the aboriginal to retain his virility and self respect, and save him from the general degradation which usually follows his association with white settlement.

During the past year there appears to have been a wider and more sympathetic interest taken by the general public in the aboriginal and his problems, although most people are at a loss to know just what they can do to help.

“The Inspector states that it seems impossible to raise the aboriginals’ mode of living except under the most rigid control, and that unfortunately the white people who come in contact with aboriginals have not a very high standard of morality themselves and the native suffers from the white man’s sin.”

“The proposal by the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church to open a Mission for the care and medical supervision of the aboriginals in the north-west of the State has proceeded and they have acquired a property of 500 square miles situated about 20 miles from the eastern boundary of the area reserved for aboriginals in that locality.

The Rev. J. R. B. Love of Kunmunya Mission in Western Australia has been allotted the task of visiting the property, exploring the possibilities and advising the Board of Missions as to the best method of establishing and maintaining the Mission.

An additional area of 4,235 square miles, between the eastern boundary of the original reserve of 21,900 square miles and the furthermost western fringe of settlement, has now been set aside for proclamation as an aboriginal reserve. This additional area contains several useful waters and ceremonial grounds used by natives and will add considerably to the value of the reserve as a sanctuary for them.

This large reserve has in the past been subject to a lot of trespassing by men trading in wild dog scalps but with the establishment of the mission in close proximity to the reserve it is hoped that contact between the white doggers and the aboriginals will be considerably reduced and ultimately entirely prevented.”

“In recent years settlers have taken up country in the north-west, adjacent to the aboriginal reserve. These settlers as well as others who visit that area are engaged very largely in the collection of wild dog scalps and the chief method by which these scalps are collected is to trade flour, tea, and sugar to the blacks for the scalps of the dogs they kill.

This brings the natives into touch with the white man and his holdings, encourages him in the use of the white man’s food and discourages him from pursuing his normal routine hunting.

The result is that occasionally he kills the settlers stock and has to be brought to justice and punished in a manner entirely foreign to his understanding.

This problem is receiving serious consideration and it appears that some suitable way of policing this north-western reserve will have to be employed to keep white trespassers off the reserve and to endeavour to keep the natives as much as possible from making contact with the settlers.

I feel that the degeneration of the tribes inhabiting this area would be very rapid once they gave up their nomadic, tribal, social customs and manner of living.”
Significantly, efforts had long been made to keep unauthorised whites out of the Aboriginal reserves. The Aborigines Act of 1911 made it an offence for anyone to be on a reserve unless they were Aboriginal or otherwise had government authority to be there. This was essentially the beginning of the “gated” communities. However, it must be remembered that the emphasis was always to keep unauthorised whites out and not as a matter of general practice of keeping Aborigines in:

“During the 1937 Session of Parliament the necessary resolution was passed to enable all lands previously reserved for the use and benefit of aboriginals under the Crown Lands Act to be definitely proclaimed as Aboriginal Reserves under the Aborigines Act. The proclamation was published in the Government Gazette of the 14th April 1938. Until this was done it was not possible to take action against persons trespassing on Aboriginal Reserves. The trespass upon the reserve in the north-west corner of the State by white men is reported to be common practice and the police officer at Oodnadatta has been asked to take action against the trespassers whenever evidence is procurable. ….” 1937-38.

But the Chief Protector was under no illusions as to how effective reserves would be at protecting those Aborigines most at risk. There was no practicable means to prevent the Aborigines leaving the reserves in remote areas to associate with the whites, despite the powers to do so in theory granted under the 1911 Act:

“The congregation of aboriginals at places along the Transcontinental Railway continues to create an unsatisfactory condition for both the aboriginal and the white men employed along the railway line. This condition is responsible for much unfavourable comment and criticism from travellers along the line but as yet no satisfactory solution has been found. Even if a large reserve were proclaimed for these natives they would in all probability leave the reserve and continue to visit the line. The only method of punishing them if they did leave the reserve would be by prosecution in a court of law and sending them to prison, which, with such people would be quite ridiculous and unsatisfactory.” 1936-37.

Unable to effectively keep the two communities apart, the role of the mission on the reserve then was to attempt to delay the inevitable process of detrabalisation:

“The mission Station at Ernabella is now definitely established with the Reverend Harry Taylor as Superintendent, and I think the influence of this mission and the interest of its superintendent and staff in the survival of the aboriginal as a pure race will go a long way towards arresting the drift which has set in through the immoral association of white men with the aboriginals.” (authors’ emphasis) 1937-38.

“The work of the Ernabella Mission is of great importance in that it is expected to retard the detribalization of the natives living on the adjacent reserve and ensure that the inevitable contact with civilization is made first of all with people whose moral character is above reproach.” (authors’ emphasis) 1938-39.

“The Ernabella Mission is performing great service to the aborigines of the north-western parts of the State by delaying the inevitable process of de-tribalization, and preparing the children to take their place in the community of which they must eventually form a part.” (authors’ emphasis) 1939-40.
1940 – The Aborigines Protection Board

A new Aborigines Protection Board was introduced in 1940, set up under The Aborigines Act Amendment Act of 1939 which continued in force until the passage of The Aborigines Affairs Act of 1962. The policies under the Board did not materially alter the government’s position on culture, language or land access, although it did continue the push towards the education and training for work of remote half-caste girls in particular and the push for the work-readiness of adolescents and young adults living in Aboriginal institutions in the settled districts.

It is interesting that in 1944-5-6 the Secretary to the Board (the Chief Protector Penhall) was putting forward an idea first suggested in 1874, advocating separate court proceedings for dealing with tribal Aborigines:

“At the last Criminal Sittings of the Circuit Court at Robe, three natives of this district were charged with murder, convicted, and sentenced to death. The crime had been committed in carrying out a tribal custom among the natives, and the Court appeared impressed with a sense of difficulty in bringing a case of this nature under the operation of our Criminal Law, where the prisoners had doubtless acted under the belief that they were performing a sacred duty. The sentences were subsequently commuted to two years’ imprisonment with hard labor. The Minister of Justice (the Hon. W. H. Bundey) recently called the attention of Parliament to this subject, and announced his intention of introducing a Bill to amend the existing Criminal Law in respect to its application to offences committed by aborigines”.

Half year ended June, 1874.

“Legal assistance for 12 aborigines charged with serious offences was provided by the Board. The secretary of the Board also attended the court proceedings, and in cases where the offenders had been living under tribal conditions, suggested that, in determining the degree of responsibility and the penalties to be imposed, consideration be given to the influence of tribal laws and practices on the mind and conduct of the persons brought to trial...

“It is considered most desirable that a specially constituted court should hear all charges against tribal or semi-tribal aborigines who live in the remote areas of the State, and have little or no understanding of any law save that of the tribe to which they belong.”

1943-44.

“The secretary of the Board attended the Court proceedings when aborigines charged with serious offences were brought to trial, and in several cases the Board provided legal assistance. An amendment to the Aborigines Act has been recommended to provide for the establishment of a Special Court presided over by a Magistrate with a knowledge of tribal law to hear charges that may be made against aborigines living in tribal conditions.”

1944-45.

“Another feature of the welfare work of the department is the arrangement under which the secretary appears in court to assist the judge when aborigines are brought to trial. During the year considerable service has been rendered, particularly in relation to the trial of tribalized natives. Such cases present great difficulties in that a knowledge of tribal organization is needed to ensure that no injustice is suffered by
the person on trial. It is hoped that proposed amendments to the Aborigines Act will provide for a special court to deal with such cases. Two examples of the work performed during the year may be cited:-

1/ Several natives of the full blood were living and working on a station in the far-north of the State.
For some unknown reason, but probably with the idea of paying off an old account, a quarrelsome and belligerent type of native started a fight, with the result that another native was killed. In obedience to tribal requirements, two near relatives were detailed to deal with the person responsible. Unfortunately in the process of spearing the wrongdoer, the spear penetrated the abdomen instead of the thigh, as intended, with the result that the man in question died from the injuries received. The two men responsible for the spearing reported the case to the police and were apprehended and charged with unlawful wounding the deceased. The secretary attended the hearing, and informed the judge that the charge arose because in carrying out the requirements of tribal law, the men charged came into conflict with the laws of the State. He also stated that, if the defendants had failed to meet their tribal obligations, they would themselves have been the subject of tribal discipline. It did not appear to be a case of wanton killing, and when asked by the judge to suggest an appropriate term of imprisonment, the secretary stated that as the men had been in custody already for a period of six weeks, a sentence of six months, imprisonment from the time of arrest should be inflicted. This course appeared to be necessary, as the men charged were aware that they had come into conflict with the laws of the State, although they were still responsible to tribal authority. A short sentence was suggested, also, so as to prevent a lengthy absence from tribal life. A very difficult aspect of such cases is that there is a point at which tribal natives living on the fringe of civilization pass from tribal to civil responsibility, and they must be dealt with according to the degree of civilization.

2/ In the second case two half-cast aborigines were charged with serious offences arising from a drunken orgy. In this case the secretary stated that the white men who provided the aborigines with liquor should be charged with the defendants. It is estimated that in cases where natives are involved in wrongdoing, 75 per cent are directly traceable to the sale of bottled liquor of inferior quality provided for the natives for ulterior purposes by poor types of white men. The facts were taken into account by the judge in fixing a penalty inflicted on these misguided and unfortunate people. Judges and other officials of the courts are mostly sympathetic and helpful in dealing aborigines on trial.

During the year arrangements were also made for the release of two native prisoners from the north-western districts who had been sentenced to long periods of imprisonment, and who were suffering physically and mentally as a result of their confinement in gaol.
Another full-blooded aborigine who escaped from custody was granted a pardon at the request of the Aborigines Protection Board.”
The 1937 Chief Protectors' Conference and the New Aborigines Protection Board

The 1937 Chief Protectors' Conference

In 1937, the first Conference of State Chief Protectors of Aborigines was held in Canberra. This following extract from the Conference papers of 1937, a presentation by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for South Australia McLean, gives an idea into the concerns in South Australia at the time:

“CONDITIONS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Mr. McLEAN. – I find the problems outlined by the previous speakers are very similar to those which face South Australia. The differences is chiefly in degree. What Dr. Cook (Northern Territory) had to say is to a large extent true in our experience. People who are protected, especially those less than full-blooded aborigines, multiply quickly. Until twenty years ago the two settlements in South Australia, at Point McLeay and Point Pearce, were under the control of missionary agencies, but they came under the control of Government. At that time the population was largely full-blooded aborigines. To-day the population is practically all half-caste. On one station there we have only six full-bloods and on the other only 26. It appears essential to merge these people into the white race, and a start should be made without any great delay. Most people, I think, are of the opinion that the half-castes and those of lesser degree of aboriginal blood should ultimately be absorbed. People of other races are being absorbed in Australia, to-day and are becoming part and parcel of our general community. We have Greeks, Maltese, and Italians, in particular, entering into the communal life of our cities of country towns. Colour is lost fairly rapidly when there is a mixture of white blood with the aboriginal, but unfortunately racial characteristics and habits are not so easily laid aside. This is particularly true of half-castes herded together in institutions. Children, two or three removes from the full-blood, have blue eyes, fair hair and other features which, if they were mixing with white people, would make it difficult to distinguish them from people of full white blood. The difference in reliability, independence, and ability to maintain themselves is very marked in half-castes from institutions and those who have grown up in the outback and have had to fend for themselves, more or less. The half caste who has grown up in the bush is able to take his place as a workman and is considered by his employers to be fairly competent. That is not true of half-castes who have grown up in institutions. This leads to the conclusion that half-castes should be encouraged to leave the institutions and mingle more freely with the general public. There are, however, many practical difficulties connected with this progressive step. When I say that the half-castes in institutions have inherited their lack of ambition from the full-bloods, I do not speak depreciatingly of the full-bloods who, under their natural conditions, use the means of livelihood at their disposal to the fullest extent. Under sheltered conditions of the institution, the half-castes increase quite quickly. The population at Point Pearce, for example, has doubled itself in seventeen years. The people who grow up in institutions seem to have deeply embedded in their minds the old story that as the Government took their land from them it is responsible for their future existence. They resent interference with any unhygienic mode of living, are not willing to adopt proper conditions of sanitation and will not take steps to prevent themselves or their families from infectious diseases. They seem to be incapable of sustained effort and...
have many other peculiarities. Whether these unfavourable tendencies are accentuated because they are herded together has not been definitely proved, but I am of the opinion that this herding is one of the chief obstacles to progress. Families and individuals who have left the institutions and settled amongst the white communities have been nearly always the cause of trouble, involving white residents, local government bodies and the department responsible for the care of aborigines. The usual request is that they be removed from townships and sent back to reserves and institutions. It is only among the lower order of whites on the outskirts of country towns that they can mingle. It is generally said that the locality into which they settle becomes a hotbed of immorality, and the low-class whites take drink to them and encourage them to lend their women to the white hoboes of the town. Lack of employment has been one of the main stumbling blocks. We have not been able, in recent years, to find employment for our white population, and this makes it very difficult to find work for aborigines. Moreover, when work is found for them it is difficult to keep them at it constantly. The men are very ready to leave one job for another, or for no job at all. I am not altogether in favour of controlling the children in institutions. Parental control, even though it may be doubtful, is better, in the end, for a child than an institutional control. I have given very careful consideration to this subject and am of the opinion that the best time to take half-castes and quadroons away from the mission stations and aboriginal reserves is when they marry. If you take away a couple just married and find employment for the man in a country town and also provide him with a home, he will be able, in some fashion to at least, control his children. They will be able to attend school with white children, and will have a much better opportunity to live a successful life than children who are kept together in an institution. I do not say that very much progress is likely to be made by the father and mother. They will always be a difficulty, but their children will have a better opportunity than if kept on an institution. The ultimate result will be that the children will attain a degree of self-reliance and self-respect that will give them a definitely improved status. In regard to what Mr. Bleakley (Queensland) said about half-caste communities our experience is that these people are quite unwilling to do any service in return for what is done for them unless they receive payment. That is a stumbling block. We also have difficulty in dealing with these people when they commit breaches of the regulations. The only method available to us is the law, and if a prosecution is instigated the penalty can only be a imprisonment or a fine. Mostly, people concerned go to gaol because prison life is not altogether disagreeable to them.” (authors' emphasis)

First Conference of Chief Protectors, Canberra, 1937.

The Chief Protector's concerns regarding the dependence of Aboriginal institutional inhabitants and the difficulties in integrating those families and individuals who did move into the general community (with perceived issues regarding the abuse of alcohol and "lending" out of women to "white hoboes") are concerns which result in provisions in the subsequent Aborigines Act Amendment Act of 1939 and in new policy directives created by the Board which it established.

The Aborigines Protection Board

In 1939, the Aborigines Act Amendment Act was passed and the Chief Protector of Aborigines became a member of and secretary to an Aborigines Protection Board created in 1940. Chief Protector Penhall became the first Secretary:
“For some years there had been a growing conviction that the responsibility associated with the control of the aborigines was a burden much too great for a single individual. In consequence, provision was made for the appointment of the Aborigines Protection Board, and the abolition of the office of “Chief Protector of Aboriginals.”

The Aboriginal Protection Board was created as a corporate body consisting of the Minister and six other appointed members, two of whom were to be women. Every Board member was a legal guardian of every Aboriginal child under 21 years of age, except where they were declared to be a “state child” under social welfare legislation. In effect though, the change was the elevation into prominence of the pre-existing Aborigines Advisory Council, established by a regulation of the 1911 Aborigines Act in 1918. This Advisory Council had been composed of lay citizenry who had oversight of the Protector’s activities. In essence, the promotion of the Aborigines Advisory Council represented the elevation of the lay “philanthropic” sector into a more prominent role in the deliberations on Aboriginal welfare policy. A summary of the minutes of the Council meetings from inception in 1918 to 1939 are available on the Firstsources web site:


The 1939 Act largely contained the same provisions as the Aborigines Act of 1934, but with a few important changes and additions, apart the creation of the new Board.

The Act provided a wider definition as to who was an Aborigine and therefore who could be subject to its provisions. An Aborigine was now any person descended from an “original inhabitant of Australia”. This cast a wider net than the previous definition under the 1911 Act which did not necessarily cover all persons of part Aboriginal descent.

One important driver for the widening of the definition of Aboriginality was the perceived need to increase control over who had access to reserves and who could be sent to reserves, where prohibitions on alcohol were in place, as well as who could be sold alcohol. It had been an offence to bring alcohol onto a reserve since a 1917 Regulation under the Aborigines Act of 1911. There was also a long-standing prohibition on the sale of alcohol to Aborigines, at least from The Licensing Act of 1863, which was broadened to include “half-castes” in the Licensing Act of 1872. This prohibition stayed in place until the 1962 Aborigines Act.

The 1939-40 Annual Report of the Board explains the perceived need for the change of definition:

“The change was found to be necessary, as some quadroon, and nearly white aborigines, appear to need a greater measure of supervision than those of fullblood. The definition provided in earlier legislation enabled many of these people, when charged with offences against the Act, to prove that they were not aborigines within the meaning of the Act.”

Because of this change of definition, there now needed to be some formal process of exemption so that those Aborigines (whatever their proportion of racial inter-mixture), who
were regarded as able to fully participate in wider society without special protection, could be exempted from the Act. Unconditional or provisional exemption could be granted, but provisional was time-limited. The children of those granted exemption were themselves automatically exempt from the provisions of the Act.

Things didn’t necessarily work out as well as might have been hoped as the changes had unforeseen implications. Far from encouraging assimilation, the opposite was just as likely:

“Eight applications for exemption (from the Aborigines Act) were not entertained, and the declarations of exemption previously made in respect of ten aborigines were revoked, nine at the request of the persons concerned, and one for misconduct.” (authors’ emphasis)

1944-45.

Under the new Act, it was also now an offence for any non-aboriginal male to “consort with”, “keep as a mistress” or “have carnal knowledge of” an aboriginal female to whom he was not lawfully married. This clause was an attempt to increase the protection of Aboriginal women and girls, at least from those non-Aboriginal men who might not have been prepared to take responsibility for their offspring:

“This section of the Act will, doubtless, exercise a restraining influence on, and facilitate action against, any unscrupulous white man who, regardless of the serious consequences of his action, associates with aboriginal women.”

1939-40.

It was also now an offence for an Aboriginal child’s parents to fail to send the child to school if they were living at an Aboriginal institution and the child was 14 to under 16 years old and was not otherwise employed, ill or authorised to be absent. As we can see below, vocational training on the reserves in preparation for work was to receive renewed emphasis.

The Board’s new policy directives were set out in its 1940-41 Report, which included the significant concession that exclusive government control of institutions was not always preferable:

“During the year the Board gave special consideration to matters of policy, and, with a view to helping the aborigines to become independent and useful members of the community, the following programme was adopted:-

1. The provision of vocational training at the end of school years to fit young persons to obtain their livelihood in the community along the lines of station and farm work, and in handicrafts, such as plumbing, sheetmetal work, carpentry and joinery, blacksmithing, bootmaking and repairs, etc.

2. The provision of suitable employment for able-bodied persons, including those living on Point Pearce and Point McLeay Stations, who are considered capable of earning their living in appropriate Government Departments or in the general community

3. Measures to be taken to refit, when possible, houses now in occupation, and to provide the most suitable home-like, and at the same time least expensive dwellings that will meet the requirements of the inmates of Point Pearce and Point McLeay Stations.

4. Advice to be obtained as to the best use that can be made of the water in Lake Alexandrina to make Point McLeay Station more self-supporting.
5. Development of areas reserved for aborigines so as to produce on each reserve as much as possible of the requirements of the inmates. The activities suggested are:- Farming, dairying, gardening, poultry raising, fishing, and also spinning and weaving, mat and rug making, basketware, clothing for home use, etc.

6. The acquisition of suitable blocks of land on the river or in coastal districts for homesteads and community establishments

7. Medical survey of the health of the aborigines in South Australia.

8. Provision of a ration scale consistent with local needs of each group of aborigines.

In addition to the foregoing the Board also agreed that:-

(a) Operations of stations by religious organizations is preferable to control exercised exclusively by the Government.

(b) As far as possible, all tribal aborigines living under natural conditions should be protected from being de-tribalized inasmuch as experience shows that such de-tribalization, in spite of all efforts, leads inevitably towards extinction of the race through lack of interest in life, miscegenation, the introduction of European diseases, and under nourishment.

(c) To enable the tribal natives of the Musgrave Ranges to remain self-supporting, the land between the Reserve for Aborigines in the north-western corner of the State and the buffer Mission Station at Ernabella should continue to be attached to Ernabella as at present, or be added to the Reserve for Aborigines.”

The Board was starting to see the problems were not so easily solved, however. By their model, Aborigines of the settled areas were supposed to develop into model citizens, get their exemptions from the Act, and move seamlessly into the general community. The Board did not appear to understand the issues of identity involved and was confronted with the fact that some of these new citizens were not fitting neatly into the general communities, and in all probability, had no great desire to be separated from their broader extended family networks in the Aboriginal communities anyway. The double problem is outlined explicitly:

“The two principal problems confronting the board in relation to the exemption of aborigines are:-

1. Continued association of exempted persons with aborigines.
2. Excessive indulgence in alcoholic liquor.

In view of the general tendency to regard aborigines as a separate race of people, and also the reluctance displayed by members of the general community to receive exempted persons on a basis of social equality, the continued association of exempted persons with aborigines is not surprising, indeed, the gregarious instinct renders such a condition of affairs inevitable. The result is that the development and progress of the exemptee towards citizenship is definitely hindered, if not entirely precluded.

Unfortunately a number of persons, who at the time of exemption were regarded as being of exemplary character and conduct, have deteriorated seriously when granted complete freedom from control and supervision chiefly because of excessive drinking. As has been indicated in previous reports, the policy of the board is to help aborigines, particularly those of mixed blood, prepare themselves for assimilation into the life of the general community.

Contacts made in industry, and particularly in sport, at which they excel, and, to a lesser degree, in the social life of the community, indicate that persons of mixed
blood now under the control of the board must eventually be absorbed. It will undoubtedly be a long drawn out process, requiring sympathetic and patient administration by departmental officials, and courage and perseverance on the part of aborigines.”

The propensity described for some Aborigines to “deteriorate seriously” when allowed access to alcohol would not have made their acceptance into the mainstream communities any easier. However, there was still some optimism of improved integration through sport:

“Police reports indicate that, during the year, there has been an abundance of native game and other foods for the tribal natives. Jobs have been available also for all other aborigines able and willing to work. In some districts it is feared that aborigines are not receiving the rate of wages to which the quality of their work justly entitles them.

Rations are issued in all parts of the State by police officers to all old, infirm and genuinely unemployed aborigines. It is also stated that many young aborigines are developing satisfactorily. They appear to display a growing sense of equality with members of the general community, and are accepting work involving more responsibility in the remote parts of the State, and are consequently better treated. Because of their outstanding ability in games and sports of various kinds, particularly football and cricket, they are usually accorded a warm welcome to membership of appropriate organizations in many country towns.”

and through a suitable housing plan:

“There are a number of families living on aboriginal stations, particularly young married people, who are quite capable of living in the general community. There is little doubt that, if they were provided with cottages in or near suitable country towns, they would be successfully absorbed, and become an asset to the State. The Board is of the opinion that provision should be made for such families in the general housing plan.”

The policy in the settled areas of the State was still for integration, but still it appeared that Aborigines were disinclined to leave the stations, and that it was all going to be much harder and take much longer than they had thought.

The objectives of the Board, still largely composed of its original members, were also explicitly outlined in the 1951-2 Annual Report. War service and employment in the general community, doubtless encouraged by the shortage of war-time labour, seemed to have made a decided difference to those families involved, in the opinion of the Board:

“In view of the increasing public interest in the welfare of the aborigines and the steady, if slow, progress being made by many of the people under the care of the Board towards the ultimate goal of citizenship, it is a matter of considerable importance that the duties and responsibilities of the Board should be clearly understood.

The Aborigines Act, 1934-1939, was proclaimed on the 1st February, 1940. In accordance with the provisions of the Act the Board consisting of seven members was constituted with the Honourable M. McIntosh, Minister of Works, as chairman. On that day the Board assumed responsibility for the welfare of all aborigines in South Australia. The members of the Board serve in an honorary capacity and it is
interesting to note that of the seven members appointed when the Act was proclaimed, five are still on the Board. The Board has endeavoured to discharge faithfully its principle duties which are clearly defined in section 7 of the Act as set out hereunder :-

It shall be the duty of the Board :-
1. To apportion, distribute, and apply as seems most fit, the moneys at the disposal of the Board.
2. In its discretion to apply part of the moneys at its disposal in the purchase of stock and implements to be loaned to the aborigines to whom land has been allotted under section 18 and may supply the same accordingly either without payment or on such terms as are approved by the Board, and no person shall, except with the approval of the Board, acquire title to any goods or chattels so loaned as aforesaid.
3. To distribute clothing, provisions, and other relief or assistance to the aborigines.
4. To provide as far as possible for the supply of food, medical attendance, medicines, and shelter for the sick, aged, and infirm aborigines.
5. To provide when possible for the custody, maintenance, and education of the children of aborigines.
6. To manage and regulate the use of all reserves for aborigines.
7. To exercise a general supervision and care over all matters affecting the welfare of the aborigines and to protect them against injustice, imposition, and fraud.

As a result of contacts made during recent years on account of war service or employment in the general community, a large number of people under the control of the Board have made considerable progress toward citizenship and in consequence, the provisions of the Aborigines Act set out in the foregoing statement are being interpreted according to the varying needs of individuals, families, and groups of aborigines. Although still legally under the control of the Board the people concerned are given a large measure of freedom while living as ordinary citizens and maintaining themselves and their dependants. They come into contact with the Board only when sickness or some other form of adversity compels them to appeal for assistance. The methods adopted by the Board in this connection are designed to encourage a greater measure of independence in the persons concerned.” (authors' emphasis) 1951-52.

A new development – Commonwealth social welfare benefits

The arrival of social welfare moved the emphasis of the stations:

"A matter of great importance to aborigines was the decision of the Commonwealth Government to allow them to participate in the benefits of the Child Endowment Scheme. Except in the case of nomadic natives, the aborigines will participate to the same extent as white people. Efforts have been made to secure a wider application to aborigines of old age and invalid pensions and the maternity allowance. It is hoped that all aborigines living under European conditions will eventually participate in these benefits.” 1940-41.

The access to child endowment was granted as well as pensions for “exempted” persons, and is reported in the annual report in 1942:
“The additional family income derived from child endowment is reflected in many homes in the improved standard of food and clothing provided for the children. At the request of the Commonwealth Government the Board is administering the endowment funds in cases where the endowee is considered incapable of spending the money in the best interest of her children.”

Aborigines were now better educated, had been working longer, and were getting older – and they were beginning to speak out. They wanted equal pay; they paid tax, and so wanted the same access to services and pensions. The Board recognised the validity of their claims and attempted to act on their behalf:

“It is also intended to seek the powers necessary to enable the Board to control the working conditions, wages, etc., of the aborigines employed on farms and stations in various parts of the State. Considerable dissatisfaction prevails amongst aborigines because many of them are not eligible to participate in the benefits available to members of the general community under Commonwealth social legislation. Although required to pay income tax, the following persons are not eligible for pension benefits.
1. Natives not exempted from the provisions of the State Aborigines Act in whom aboriginal blood predominates in the slightest degree.
2. Natives who, irrespective of the degree of aboriginal blood, reside on aboriginal reserves, settlements or institution.

It is evident, therefore, that aborigines who have lived and worked on an aboriginal reserve or station all their lives are unable to obtain a pension unless exempted from the State Aborigines’ Act and removed from the place where their interests lie. With regard to maternity allowances, mothers in whom aboriginal blood predominates, unless exempted, are not eligible to receive benefits, regardless of the conditions under which they live.

During the year under review the Board forwarded a communication to the Commonwealth Government through the Honourable the Premier of South Australia requesting that social benefits be made available to all aborigines certified by the Aborigines Protection Board to be living under conditions comparable to the European way of life.”

Battles raged on between Commonwealth and State:

“CONTROL OF ABORIGINES

During recent years the Board has been unable to implement fully the policy formulated in 1940 because of the suggestion that the Commonwealth Government would probably assume control of all aborigines. At a conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers held at Canberra in January, 1946, it was agreed that a committee of Representatives of the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, Department of the Interior, and appropriate State Officers should meet to consider the question of control. Information was received recently indicating that the conference would not be held, and that the Commonwealth Government does not propose to make any legislation relating to aborigines under the provision of the Commonwealth Powers Act, 1943, of the State of South Australia. In view of this provision the Board is of the opinion that the Aborigines Act of South Australia should be amended, so that effect may be given to its policy, particularly in relation to the control of wages and working conditions of aborigines of the pastoral areas.
This is an urgent matter, as, during the period under review, a serious case of ill-treatment of aboriginal employees came to the notice of the Board. It is essential that the Board be empowered to control the employment of aborigines in remote areas by restricting the issue of licenses to persons willing to pay their workmen the prescribed rate of wages and observe such other conditions as may be required by the Board.”  

1945-46.

The Board was trying to get control of wages paid, because of some abuses by employers. There is an indication that the Board was following its own policy on improving wages on its own stations and paying appropriate wages:

“Another important factor is the higher rate of wages now paid to station workers enabling them to maintain a higher standard of living”  

1946-47.

The Board continued to lobby the Commonwealth for pensions:

“PENSION BENEFITS FOR ABORIGINES

The board has made repeated requests to the Commonwealth Government to provide pensions and other social benefits for all aborigines living under conditions comparable with the European way of life, particularly as such persons are liable to pay income tax.

During the year under review the Pensions Act was amended, but unfortunately no provision was made to amend correct this obvious anomaly. “  

1946-47.

And continued:

“SOCIAL SERVICES BENEFITS

At the conference of aboriginal authorities held at Canberra on the 4th February, 1948, the following resolution was adopted:-

‘This conference is of the opinion that full benefits under the Social Services Consolidation Act of the Commonwealth should be available to all aboriginals except full-blood aboriginals living under primate or nomadic conditions, and that Commonwealth legislation should be amended accordingly.’

Unfortunately, no action has, as yet, been taken to amend the Act to enable aborigines living after the manner of Europeans to participate in social service benefits. This is manifestly unjust, as all aborigines, irrespective of the degree of aboriginal blood, are required to pay income tax, and a considerable number of aborigines do in fact pay income tax, including the social services tax.

The particular section of the Act which adversely affects aborigines, and causes much discontent, is that which precludes a mother in whom there is the slightest preponderance of aboriginal blood receiving the maternity allowance. All aboriginal mothers, whose standard of living is equivalent to the average in the district, and who accepts the same obligations and responsibilities as other women in that district, should have access to the maternity allowance. The test of eligibility should not be the degree of aboriginal blood, but the standard maintained by the mother concerned.
Aborigines applying for invalid, age and widows’ pensions are required to leave their homes on aboriginal stations or missions, where they have lived and worked all their lives, and where all their interests lie, and, if aboriginal blood preponderates, they must be exempted from the provisions of the Aborigines Act in order to qualify for benefits. The board urges that this anomalous condition be remedied as soon as possible."

1948-49.

And continued arguing with the Commonwealth:

“SOCIAL SERVICE BENEFITS.
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1951-52.

Eventually, a 1959 amendment of the Social Services Act removed Aboriginal disqualification from social services payments, except for those considered nomadic and outside the money economy, where a small part of the payment was made to the individual and the balance paid to authorities in charge of Aboriginal affairs as a cost offset.

We can conclude this section on Aboriginal policy with respect to missions and government institutions with a related quote from South Australian anthropologist, Professor Peter Sutton, from his 2009 book, “The Politics of Suffering”. Of the mission era, covering the time when the Protectors of Aborigines had responsibility for the direction and implementation of policy with relation to Aborigines, he stated:

“It wasn’t heaven but it certainly wasn’t hell. That came later.”
Perhaps as an indication of that, in all the reports covering the period from 1837 to 1950 under review, under causes of death, we have seen no references to any incidence of suicide. It would appear that this was not a common phenomenon of this era.
Is it True that Australian Aborigines were not included in any Census?

In his 1879 book “The Native Tribes of South Australia”, journalist J.D. Woods provided an estimate of the total population of South Australia at the time of settlement as around 12,000. This estimate was based on the population studies in the 1840s for the settled areas, done by Protector of Aborigines, Matthew Moorhouse and Sub-Protector, Edward John Eyre. The implied population densities were then extrapolated over the entire Province. Given the number of tribes now identified across the State and the average population of a tribe, this number does not seem like an unreasonable estimate.

In 1841, the South Australian Government held the first general census of the total settler population of the new colony. Aborigines were not included in that general census. However, it is clear that the Protector of Aborigines, Matthew Moorhouse, had been making a continual routine assessment of the Aboriginal population of the settled areas as they came under central government control and that he had also attempted to assess the factors that had controlled the population in the past, as well as those factors which were influencing the population post-settlement. In his very comprehensive 1842 Annual Report he asserted:

“Numbers.
People living in detached groups, subsisting chiefly by the chase, having no mode of cultivating the ground, herding, or domesticating animals, or any systematic manner of producing food, must of necessity be thinly scattered over the country. This singularly happened among the natives of New Holland. In my report bearing date Feb. 20th, 1841, I then stated that in an area of 2,000 square miles we had 650 six hundred and fifty averaging one on every 4 ½ [sic] square miles. Since that time I have visited the Coorong in the South, 120 miles from Adelaide, the river Murray & Rufus to the east, a distance of 200 miles, and Crystal Stream to the north, a distance of 160 & should not think that more than 3,000 Natives are contained in this space. The Rev. Mr Schurmann calculates the number in the Port Lincoln district, to be from three to four hundred.

Causes of so limited a Population.
The scarcity of population is maintained first by the incessant wars, tumults and differences, which occur from the most trivial circumstances; secondly, from polygamy, and illicit intercourse, habits well known to check the progress of population; thirdly, infanticide; fourthly diseases as dysentery & venereal, the latter of which is particularly fatal to children.”

The setting up of widespread ration distribution points gave the Protector a means of maintaining an on-going assessment of the population in the areas coming under contact:

“One Her Majesty’s Birthday, the 24th May, the usual distribution of food took place in Adelaide. There were present – Males, 106; Females, 76; Infants, 10; a total of 192, unto whom were given two pounds of bread, and two pounds of roast beef. There were, also, 56 children who were supplied, ad libitum, with roast beef and plum-pudding, 51 of whom were rewarded with a blanket to give to their parents for allowing them to remain in school. At Port Lincoln, Wellington, and Moorunde, flour and blankets were distributed on the above occasion; the returns would have been given but sufficient time has not elapsed for them to reach me, since the termination of the quarter.”
This situation continued in a rather *ad hoc* manner, in part due to the failure of the government to fill the Protector's position after the resignation of Matthew Moorhouse in 1856. The position was not filled until the 1863, although rations continued to be provided based on need by the various rations issuers, usually police officers, under the direction of the Commissioner of Crown Lands.

A general census of the settler population was held every ten years and for the census of 1861 it was decided that Aborigines would be included for the first time. The following letter in the Commissioner of Crown Lands letter book records that decision:

471/61
March 6th 1861
From: J. Boothby, Supt. of Census
To: Hon. Commr C. L. & I.
Re: Census to be taken of Aborigines.

**Census 1861**

It being the intention of the Govt to take a Census of the Aborigines in connection with the General one, in April next, I have the honor by the Chief Secretary's direction to enclose copy of form of return which is to be filled up by each Collector. In the out Districts and where there are Aborigines' Depots, I am instructed to suggest whether it would not be practicable to cause a general distribution of the usual rations on or about the 7th April, so as to collect together as many individuals as possible, and thus lighten the labors of the Collectors.

**Form Letter:**

28th February 1861

I am desired by the Commissioner to request that you will furnish him with an estimate of the number of the Aborigines – men, women, and children – in your District; and, at the same time, report what you consider the boundaries of your District.

This information is required without delay, and with a view to affording the Government some reliable information as the numbers of the Natives in the settled portions of the Province.

**Form:**

**Census 1861**

District No. __________

RETURN OF ABORIGINES WITHIN THE CENSUS DISTRICT OF __________

ON APRIL 8th, 1861.

NB. This Return is to be filled up by the Collector from the information he has obtained whilst distributing and collecting the Census Schedules. Any aboriginal, who may be in the regular employ of a settler, if already returned in his Schedule, must not be entered.
The newly appointed Protector of Aborigines, Dr. John Walker, reported on these census findings in his 1863 General Report:

“According to the Census of 1861, the total number of Aborigines within the limits of the occupied country was 5,046, and from the great care then taken to ensure correct returns from the various districts, there can be little doubt of the accuracy of the enumeration.”

This General Report had been commissioned by the government on Dr. Walker’s appointment. He was required to report on the general situation of the Aborigines across the State, and make recommendations on how to improve their basic living conditions. Some of his recommendations, for example those relating to regularising the distribution of rations and blankets, have been dealt with in earlier chapters.

In this same report, Walker proposed that closer monitoring be done on Aboriginal population numbers, as numbers appeared to be in decline:

“It is the melancholy and all but unanimous testimony of the Issuers of Stores in their respective district the Aboriginal population is gradually diminishing but there is no data on which to found even a conjecture as to the rate of decrease for any given period. With the view of obtaining in future some information on this interesting subject as well as for other important purposes I have proposed a form of Return (Appendix A) to be filled up, instead of that now used, by all distributors of public stores, and which I trust will meet your approval.”

Approval was given and a standardised form sent out to the issuers of rations. The 1878 Annual Report included a copy of the instructions sent to the issuers of rations at government supplied ration depots of which at times there were up to fifty around the State. The full list of instructions are reproduced in an earlier chapter, but they included bullet point five, which outlined the detailed accounts of population data to be submitted to the Protector:

“5. The monthly returns of “Receipts” and “Issues”, “Births and Deaths”, &c., to be regularly kept according to the forms transmitted, and forwarded direct to this office not later than the seventh of each month. Any circumstances that may be thought worthy of mention – such as, whether the natives are employed by settlers; to what extent and for what wages; whether there have been any disturbances, &c., - should be entered in the column “Remarks.”
From this time an attempt was made to maintain a more systematic, detailed, on-going census, as monthly returns information was collated and compiled by the Protector. However, counting the nomadic, tribal Aborigines who only occasionally sought assistance at the ration depots, and those who were not yet in touch with the ration stations at all, was difficult to impossible. Even as late as 1952 there were still tribal Aborigines living out of touch with white settlement:

"During the year 100 “new” natives came in from the Mann Ranges and even further afield. Some of these aborigines had not previously seen white people.”

Ernabella Mission, 1951-52.

Another complexity for the census-keepers, commonly alluded to by the issuers of rations, was expressed by Inspector Besley, Sub-Protector for the Far North in a 1892 report to the Protector.

"Many deaths were not reported, as natives will not speak of their dead.”  1892.

Therefore, from 1861, the State government collected population figures via the standard State-wide decadal census, as in the table of the 1876 data printed in the 1879 Annual Report.
In 1901 the census figures were published along with a comparison with the results of the 1891 census results:

"Number of aborigines in the settled districts of South Australia, as per census returns of 1901, exclusive of the Northern Territory –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total blacks</td>
<td>3,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total half-castes</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total aboriginal population</td>
<td>3,888</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the census of 1891 the total number of natives in the State was 3,134, and this was reduced during the ten years to 2,824, as the births (369) and deaths (679) recorded during this period give an excess of 310 deaths. The census of 1901 therefore shows an increase of 1,064 aborigines, which cannot be regarded as a natural one, being probably caused by the influx of natives from the interior of the continent, owing doubtless to the severity of the droughts experienced during the past few years."

1900-01.

In addition, every few years a comparison would be made with the situation in other States. Clearly, they were counting their Aboriginal populations too. For example 1900-1901:

"The following comparative statement shows the number of aborigines and the cost of the departments in the States named:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>South Australia</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>New South Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of aborigines</td>
<td>3,888</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>6,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual vote</td>
<td>£ 4,412</td>
<td>£ 4,846</td>
<td>£ 16,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per head</td>
<td>£ 1. 2s. 8d.</td>
<td>£ 11. 3s. 10d.</td>
<td>£ 2. 8s. 1d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1900-01.

(The “Annual Vote” refers to the annual budget allocation to the Department, as voted by Parliament.)

In the interim years, between the major State-wide censuses, the data submitted by the issuers of rations was collected, collated and published to provide up-to-date information:

"The aboriginal population of South Australia, exclusive of the Northern Territory, was, as per the census of 1901 –

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>3,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-castes</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the three years 1901 – 4 there have been recorded:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Half-castes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Births</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excess of deaths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The returns to hand for the past year show that births (51) and deaths (65) have been more equal than usual, probably due to the good season causing healthier conditions of life among the natives than existed two years ago, when an epidemic of measles and influenza proved fatal to numbers. It may be noted here that the rate of decrease has been more rapid among the Victorian aborigines than in this State.

Estimated number in 1836 in 1903

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimated number in 1836</th>
<th>in 1903</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>3,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>382 ”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```
1903-04.
```

"According to the census of 1901 the aboriginal population of South Australia, exclusive of the Northern Territory, was :-

- Blacks 3,386
- Half-castes 502

During the year there has been reported from the 44 depots:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Half-castes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Births</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The seven years, 1901 to 1908 show a decrease record of 316 blacks and an increase of 125 half-castes; but doubtless many deaths and some births which occur in the bush are not recorded."

```
1907-08.
```

"According to the census of 1901 the aboriginal population of the State was shown as :-

- Blacks 3,386
- Half-castes 502

During the year there have been reported –

- Births – Blacks, 16; half-castes, 30; total, 46
- Deaths – ” 60 ” 11 ” 71

The 11 years, 1901 to 1912, show a decrease of 666 blacks and an increase of 207 half-castes, but my records show there are now 836 half-castes and quadroons, and I estimate that there are still about 4,000 full blacks in the State. It is impossible to obtain a reliable census of them, especially in the interior."
"ABORIGINAL POPULATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN STATES AND EXPENDITURE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of State</th>
<th>Full-blooded Aborigines</th>
<th>Half-Caste Aborigines</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Expenditure per head, in 1912</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>1,917</td>
<td>5,117</td>
<td>7,034</td>
<td>£ 3 7 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>£ 1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>4,820</td>
<td>£ 1 3 10½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>£ 14 18 10½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>33,475</td>
<td>£ 1 1 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67598

**POPULATION.**

On June 30th, 1917, the estimated population of the State was –

Full-bloods 3,852  half-castes, 920; total, 4,772
Births for 1918 – Full-bloods 43  half-castes 40; total, 83

Deaths for 1918 – Full-bloods 59  half-castes 18; total, 77
Estimated population, 30/6/1918: 3,836 942 4,778

1916-17.

Detailed statistical data was also kept for the demographic changes occurring on each of the mission or government stations:

"VITAL STATISTICS.

Point Pearce.
Births, 16 half-castes; Deaths, 3 half-castes.
Number on station - 11 full bloods, 239 half-castes; total, 250.

Point McLeay.
Births, 14 half-castes; deaths, 3 full-bloods, 6 half-castes.
Number on station - 13 full bloods, 236 half-castes; total, 249.

Koonibba.
Births, 2 full-bloods, 7 half-castes; deaths, 5 full-bloods.
Number on station - 110 full bloods, 87 half-castes; total, 197.
A census has just been completed of the aborigines in the State by the Statistical Office, results as follows: - Full bloods, 2,531; half-castes, 1,452; 3,983.

The Commonwealth Statistician gives the aboriginal census for Australia, June 30th, 1925, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Bloods</th>
<th>Half-Castes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>5,985</td>
<td>7,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>15,075</td>
<td>2,839</td>
<td>17,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>3,941</td>
<td>1,166</td>
<td>5,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>22,471</td>
<td>2,323</td>
<td>24,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>19,760</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>20,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62,394</td>
<td>13,393</td>
<td>75,787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference in the figures given above by the State and Commonwealth Statistics for South Australia shows a decrease of 1,124 in 1926. This is owing to differing estimates supplied concerning the number of aborigines untouched by civilisation in the extreme north-west portion of this State believe the later figures are the more correct.” 1924-25.

“ABORIGINAL POPULATION.
The estimated total for Australia is about 75,000. The figures for South Australia are 4,180, and the Government Statist supplies the following particulars: - About June, 1928, there were 4,180 aboriginals recorded, classified as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Blood</th>
<th>Half-Castes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>F.</td>
<td>M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomadic</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In regular employment</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In supervised camps</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1,417</td>
<td>1,198</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,417</td>
<td>1,198</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POINT McLEAY STATION.
Births – 12 half-castes. Deaths – 1 full blood, 6 half-castes.
Number of station - 25 full bloods; 279 half-castes; total, 304.

POINT PEARCE STATION.
Births - 1 full blood; 10 half-castes. Deaths - 9 half-castes.
Number on station - 5 full-bloods, 281 half-castes. Total, 286.

KOONIBBA MISSION.
Births - 6 half-castes. Deaths - 3 full-bloods.
Number on station - 93 full bloods; 102 half-castes. Total, 195.

1928-29.

"ABORIGINAL POPULATION.
The estimated total for Australia is 78,430, including 16,629 half-castes. The figures for South Australia are 4,086, and the Statistical Department supply the following particulars :-

About June 1929, there were 4,086 aboriginals recorded, classified as follows :-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Blood</th>
<th>Half-Castes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M. F.</td>
<td>M. F.</td>
<td>M. F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomadic</td>
<td>889 770</td>
<td>103 108</td>
<td>992 878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In regular employment</td>
<td>409 234</td>
<td>306 119</td>
<td>715 353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In supervised camps</td>
<td>37 50</td>
<td>261 287</td>
<td>298 337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>116 125</td>
<td>128 144</td>
<td>244 269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1,451 1,179</td>
<td>798 658</td>
<td>2,249 1,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>1,102 850</td>
<td>480 369</td>
<td>1,582 1,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>349 329</td>
<td>318 289</td>
<td>667 618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,451 1,179</td>
<td>798 658</td>
<td>2,249 1,837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POINT McLEAY STATION.
Births – 1 full-blood ; 18 half-castes. Deaths – 5 half-castes.
Number of station - 27 full bloods; 291 half-castes; total, 318.

POINT PEARCE STATION.
Births - 17 half-castes. Deaths - 2 full-bloods; 11 half-castes.
Number on station - 4 full-bloods, 294 half-castes. Total, 298.

KOONIBBA MISSION.
Births - 1 full-blood ; 12 half-castes. Deaths - Nil.
Number on station - 86 full bloods; 124 half-castes. Total, 210.

1929-30.

But demographic trends were now becoming more than apparent. They were becoming a major concern. The part-Aborigine population was beginning to rise while job prospects remained as elusive as ever.

"Point Pearce and Point McLeay are practically half-caste communities. At Point Pearce there are only five full-blooded natives in a population of 343 and at Point McLeay the numbers are 25 full-bloods to 328 half-castes. Both communities are increasing annually."
The population at Point Pearce, when taken over by the Government in 1916 was stated to be 27 full-bloods and 162 half-castes, and on June 30th, 1934, five full-bloods and 338 half-castes, so that in 18 years the half-caste population of this station has more than doubled itself while full-bloods have steadily decreased. A similar comparison cannot be made regarding Point McLeay because the population figures recorded in earlier years included all natives between Wellington and Meningie who were to some extent dependent on the Station, but reported births and deaths of half-castes at the station during the last 10 years show that there has been an excess of 70 birth over deaths for that period. Here also the full-bloods are gradually disappearing. As this increase is cumulative it will be readily seen what the problem will develop into within the next 10 or 15 years unless some means are devised to make these people self supporting.

“...There are far too many people living in a relatively small area and the resultant overcrowding in the cottages tends to lower the standard of living; moreover employment cannot be provided on the Station for all the able-bodied men seeking work.”

Point McLeay, 1951-52.

Koonibba Mission saw the trend too; increasing population, too few job prospects:

“The half-caste problem is one of great interest to me, as the birth rate of legitimate half-castes is in a very healthy condition at Koonibba at present. Making a comparison with the congregations of our church the percentage of births is better here than among Europeans. Half-castes will continue to increase. What is to become of this additional population in these sparsely settled areas? At present they are absorbed by farmers and others, but the labour market is already full. In a few years we will be faced with an awkward unemployment problem.”

Koonibba Mission, 1936-37.

Population Demographics

The early population decline, as noted by Protector Walker in his 1863 report, was of considerable, on-going concern to all the Protectors. The reason for the deaths was elusive, everyone having their own explanation for this decline.

Infanticide, as indicated in an earlier chapter, was occasionally blamed. The issuer of rations at Overland Corner reported:

“The returns show three births, viz., two at Chowilla, and one at Overland Corner, the mothers remaining at the stations to receive rations during the period of nursing. This is a remarkable and gratifying fact, as in this district for years past, every living child appears to have been destroyed immediately after birth.”

1865.

Sub-Protector Buttfield reports for Yorke Peninsula:

“The results of my inquiries will, I think, be gratifying to the Government. I am satisfied that the blacks are treated with kindness and generosity by the settlers generally. Their health is on the whole good. ... The country abounds with game and..."
During the droughts, other traditional population solutions apparently resurfaced, even when ration depots were nearby:

“We have had several deaths lately in the neighbourhood of Booloomata, which I attribute to the difficulty of procuring nourishment. Several aged blacks have been left near the Springs by their tribes without any visible means of subsistence; and I regret to say that child murder has been very much more frequent since the prevalence of the dry weather and scarcity of game, than formerly.” 1865.

Tribal warfare was also mooted, but like infanticide, these could hardly be considered to be a significant factor in the increased death rate, since these were long-time traditional practices which were actually being actively discouraged by the activities of the missionaries and the police.

The Western Australian Chief Protector of Aborigines, in the Conference papers from the 1937 Meeting of State Chief Protectors, in Canberra, has a different take on it. One suggestion as to why the “full-blooded” Aborigines may not be doing well was offered:

“Mr. NEVILLE. – .... However, so many women have become sterile through the practice of abortion that the percentage who can bear children is now small.”

First Conference of Chief Protectors, Canberra, 1937.

While we have never seen it recorded elsewhere that abortion was ever a traditional practice among the Aborigines, general “infecundity” was often mentioned in the reports:

“There have been a few marriages; but I am sorry to say the fecundity of the black women seems a thing of the past; this may be caused partly by the tendency of the women to grow unnaturally fat and partly from their past lives.”

Kopperamanna Mission, 1905-06.

Poor resistance to introduced disease appears to be the most credible explanation. The Protectors and issuers noted that apparently otherwise healthy Aborigines died from diseases which responded well to treatment in the settlers population but failed to respond to the same treatment in the Aborigines. For example, a predisposition to tubercular consumption and measles was widely blamed:

“Lacepede Bay. – Corporal Morris, the issuer, says – “The health of the natives in the vicinity of this station is good at present (June), with the exception of two suffering from pulmonary complaints. The natives of this district have a predisposition to consumption, which takes them of rapidly, particularly at this season of the year, when they do not take sufficient care of themselves.” 1874.

“Wallianippie. – Mr. W.R. Thompson, the issuer, reports – ... I regret that I cannot give a very favourable report as to their health, as there has been, and still is, much sickness among them – chronic consumption principally. Fully 80 per cent. of the deaths that occur are from chest complaints. I can, however, confidently state that it is not from want of sufficient clothing, the Government supply and what they get
from the settlers being ample. They are strangely predisposed to consumption. 1874.

“Bimbowie. Mr. C. Melvin states : - A good many deaths have occurred lately; some from measles, which were very bad here, both with whites and blacks. All are in good health now.” 1874.

“Port Augusta. Sergeant O’Shanahan reports: - During the last six months the natives have behaved exceedingly well, but their health has been bad, especially during the last few months. The prevailing sickness among them is severe colds, eventually ending in death. Venereal disease exists among them, but they will not seek medical aid for it, but rather die. They have not suffered in any way from measles.” 1874.

Corporal Rollison at Wellington offers, in the Government Gazette of October 20th, 1864:

“I imagine that the native population is much on the decrease in this district, and I attribute it to the way they live, as they are to be seen one day with a great deal of clothing on them, and the next they will be almost naked, and they generally complain of colds, and of spitting blood, and pains in the side.” 1864.

The Rev. George Taplin, in an attachment to the 1875 Annual report appeared to come close to linking two factors which others (for example the anthropologist Professor Elkin) later thought significant; the predisposition to newly introduced diseases and the fatalism brought on by the belief that disease was caused by sorcery. The medical solution provided to them for easily treated diseases was not always enough:

“... they (The Aborigines) easily give way to diseases, and hopelessly yield themselves up to a fatal result. ... The aborigines have no medicines peculiar to themselves, they regard all disease and most injuries to the person as the result of sorcery.” Point McLeay, 1875.

“Wallianippie. Mr. W.R. Thomson states :- ... The measles first appeared on this station among the whites. The aborigines eagerly submitted themselves to European treatment, but as far as I could notice, without any good result, as they recklessly exposed themselves to cold; I do not think they had any previous knowledge of measles, and resorted to few or no native remedies. The idea entertained by the natives themselves is that all illness is caused by the “Marrillia”, or native doctors, of the more northern tribes; they believe that the “Marrillia” comes during the night, always from the north, curses the tribe with some sickness, and returns to his own country before morning. The “Marrillia” generally takes the form of an eagle when travelling, and comes from a great distance in a very short time.” 1875.

And even when treatment was available, it was not always easy administer:

“The tendency of the aborigines to succumb to disease when exposed to the influences of the unfavourable side of civilization, has been examined to a very marked extent during the year by the exceptionally high rate of mortality; 52 births and 140 deaths have been recorded, being an excess of 88 death over births. The causes of death include 38 from consumption, and 55 from measles. ... The epidemic of measles is stated to have first attacked the whites, and afterwards spread among the blacks, who appear to have suffered most severely in the northern and western
districts. The dépôts in the infected localities were supplied with medicines specially prepared, and medical comforts for the relief of the sufferers; but there is much reason to believe that considerable difficulty is experienced in attempting to apply European medical treatment successfully to the aborigines generally. It appears that the administration of drugs is not attended with very beneficial result, except where the patients can be kept under control. The blacks seem to be liable now to many diseases which had no existence among them prior to the advent of the Europeans.”

1875.

It is interesting to note just how little the “control” that the Protectors were able to bring to bear on even desperately sick Aborigines. Protector Walker notes:

“I have visited the township (Port Augusta) in January and again in March, and all of the natives then seen were in good health, with the exception of two or three – one of whom was suffering from cancerous tumor. This poor fellow I persuaded to accompany me to Adelaide, per steamer, and obtained admission for him into the Hospital; but unfortunately he left it the day after, and, as I have since learned, returned to Port Augusta.”

1866.

“KADINA. P.C. Murray writes : - .... There have been some cases of sickness, which have been attended to by Dr. Robinson; one native woman was sent to hospital, but would not remain there.”

1879.

Sub-Protector Buttfield in the North-East District complained:

“Considerable difficulty is felt in treating sick blacks arising from their faith in their own nostrums – their fear of infection, which induces them to move from place to place – but more especially from risk of administering suitable medicines to patients so exposed to atmospheric and other changes. A short time ago I deemed it necessary to administer a powerful drug to a man suffering from congestion of the lungs; on the following day I repeated my visit and found my patient had burrowed a hole in the dampest place he could find in a creek, and there he lay in a state of perfect nudity – this man died. I am more than half convinced that the aborigines, in disorders of the kind named, are better left to their own devices. It is impossible to induce them to make use of the hospital I caused erected for them. I am not aware if a single native has spent a night in it since its erection.”

1874.

“NARACOORTE. Sergeant Besley reports : - .... Emma Lawson” was sent to Mount Gambier Hospital, but soon returned, as she could not endure the restraint and confinement there.”

1879.

Besley again, now a Police Inspector and Sub-Protector for the Far North:

“I have seen on my travels many whom I should liked to take to the hospital, but they would sooner die a lingering death from disease and starvation than go to hospital. They cannot endure the confinement and restraint placed upon them there.”

1892.

Many measures, including the detailed census collection, were designed and implemented specifically to verify or address factors that were considered important in this decline. The standard issue of blankets, which on the face of it would appear unnecessary to a population long used to exposure to the elements, was one such measure. Protector Walker, himself a
doctor of medicine, in his General Report of 1863 provided the following insight into the chief theories of the time, which, given his temporal and spacial proximity to the problem, should not be dismissed too lightly despite the obvious limitations of medical knowledge at the time:

“The chief causes of this decrease are presumably, and no doubt truly, believed to be Disease, Infecundity of the female and Infanticide. The diseases to which the Natives seem most liable are Pulmonary Consumption, Inflammation of the Lungs, Afflictions of the Liver, Rheumatism and diseases of the Skin. Syphilis does not prevail to any great extent but Gonorrhoea is common in some districts. Tubercular Consumption is by far the most fatal malady to which the Aborigines in all parts of this Colony are subject. A predisposition to this disease arises no doubt very often through insufficient and unsuitable food, the abuse of intoxicating drinks, immoderate smoking and other excesses, for whatever tends directly or indirectly to debilitate the system tends to the production of Tuberculosis. Extreme indolence also, such as is shewn by many who loiter about the towns and Stations begging their food, and the want of that muscular exertion and mental exhilaration which the chase afforded in their savage state, induce a predisposition. The more immediate cause is in most instances to be ascribed to a diminution or suppression of the insensible perspiration, from exposure to cold and damp and to this cause very many are subject during the winter in consequence of insufficient clothing and shelter. To the same causes may be attributed most of the other diseases to which they are liable. Many of the black women are quite sterile, and the total number of births must be small in proportion to the Adult population. This sterility and infecundity probably arises from debility or exhaustion of the female organs owing to premature and too frequent excitement. Sexual intercourse is often if not generally begun while the girls are yet mere children and afterwards they lead the lives of common prostitutes. There is good reason to believe not only that Infanticide occurs in all parts of the Province but that it prevails to greater extent than is generally supposed. I am unable to assign any more probable motive for the commission of this crime than the common belief that the lubras do so to save themselves the trouble of nursing their children and the burden of carrying them about as the tribe wanders from place to place. It does not appear to have its origin in Superstition, nor does it arise from scarcity of food or apprehension of want for on the River Murray above Overland Corner where supplies of flour, rice, sugar &c. have long been issued to them most liberally, where their natural food also is most abundant and easily obtained, and where the facilities for moving about are greater than in most other districts the crime of infanticide is I believe more frequent than in any other part of the Colony. It cannot be a matter of surprise if under such circumstances the Native population is rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth.” 1863.

One of the interesting demographic changes to note is that over time the ratio of “full-blood” to “half-caste” Aborigines was slowly decreasing. By 1937, this was reflected in the number of children being born. Although the “full-blood” to “half-caste” population was 45% to 55% respectively, the number of “half-caste” children was nearly three times the number of “full-blooded” children. The ratio of children to adults in the two groups was markedly
different – children making up over 40% of the “half-caste” population, while children make up only 20% of the “full-blood” population:

“Full-bloods numbered 1,734 or 45 per cent. of the total – divided thus –
Adults, 1,395; Children 339.
Half-castes (and lesser castes) numbered 2,103 (55 per cent. of total) –
Adults, 1,205; Children 898.”

The Protector had earlier made this comment:

“The number of half-castes at Point McLeay and Point Pierce cannot be taken as an indication of immorality among the natives, as during the past thirty to forty years both full-bloods and half-castes are regularly married.”

One suggestion at least as to the source of the differential between the birth rates in the two sub-groups is interesting – the introduction of a maternity allowance paid to the general population in the early 1930s and also to “half-caste” Aborigines. Tribal, “full-blooded” Aborigines, who were considered to be not part of the money economy and therefore self-sufficient were not paid the allowance. Western Australian Chief Protector of Aborigines Neville thoughts on the maternity allowance:

“Mr. Neville. – In many cases the money is squandered, and in others the existence of an allowance places a premium on the procreation of children.”

First Conference of Chief Protectors, Canberra, 1937.

However, some signs of a turn around in births, particularly in the part-Aboriginal communities, had already been appearing before the introduction of the maternity allowance. The Rev. Taplin at Point McLeay reported:

“The improved health of the natives who live on this station is acknowledged by their countrymen. This improvement is seen in the increasing number of children; savage life is most destructive of infant life. Let there be a very hot day, or a very cold day, and immediately the infants in the wurleys begin to show symptoms of injured health – only the very strongest survive such circumstances, and they often with impaired constitutions. The superior health of the infants whose parents live in the cottages is manifest. If we could build more cottages there are at least a dozen families who would willingly reside in them.”

One might speculate on the demographic storm which swept through the Aboriginal communities. We know that the pre-settlement Aboriginal population on the continent was probably at a steady state with respect to births and deaths. Populations fluctuated in tune with the seasons and the climatic conditions, increasing in good years and decreasing during droughts. However, there is little doubt that a major smallpox epidemic ravaged the South Australian Aboriginal communities immediately prior to white settlement; the disease apparently arriving from the Eastern States down the Murray River in about 1830. This was well known at the time; consider Rev. George Taplin’s report attached to the 1875 annual Report:

“Before the advent of the whites a strange disease came down the Murray and carried off many natives – it was doubtless small pox for some of the old men are
There are suggestions that the State population may have been as much as halved, as was the situation with small pox epidemics recorded in other communities around the world, in which case, the arrival of the settlers could have exacerbated an already gravely disrupted demographic situation.

The first settlers made interesting observations which may also bear on this subject.

Protector of Aborigines Moorhouse recorded in his 1842 Annual Report that the vocabulary of the (probably) Adelaide tribe had nine separate names for the first nine children born to a mother:

“Nomenclature.

Names are given to the children, in numerical order in which they are born. Thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Kertamera</td>
<td>Kertanya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Warritya</td>
<td>Warriarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Kudnutyia</td>
<td>Kudnarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Monaitya</td>
<td>Monarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Milaitya</td>
<td>Milarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Marrutya</td>
<td>Marruarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Wongutya</td>
<td>Wongwarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>Ngarlaitya</td>
<td>Ngarlarto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Pauarna</td>
<td>(wanting)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These names are given at birth, but in a short time after, another name is added, which is derived from some object in nature, as a plant or animal.” 1842.

This would tend to suggest that nine children were considered a likely enough event that nine separate names were required, but that ten was sufficiently unusual that a tenth name was not. We also know from other contemporary records that it was usual for a mother to have five children, but only raise two. How much of this was infanticide and how much due to high infant mortality rates we will never know, but clearly the early observers thought that
both were significant. During initial settlement with the impact of new diseases on children, death rates put further pressure on the population. Over time it would appear that Aboriginal population numbers, particularly for part-Aborigines, began to stabilise. The example of the Wilkin family, presented earlier, where he is described as one of eight children, suggests that by the 1870s the practice of having large numbers of babies had continued but now there was a better chance that a greater number would survive infancy. At this point the population decline began to reverse.

Clearly though the data shows that by 1940, two diverging populations were evolving, as the “full-blood” Aborigines in the remote areas continued to decline, but the number of part Aborigines, generally of the settled areas, had begun to increase. This situation had been foreseen and had been a source of concern for the Protectors for some time. The failure of their integration policies left them struggling for ideas:

“The half-castes and quadroons are steadily replacing the blacks, who are slowly but surely dying out, and if they are left in the camps it will not be long before we shall have a race of nearly white people living like the aborigines.” 1910-11.

Today, we can see that even the full-blood population is not “slowly but surely” dying out, hence a reversal or stabilisation of their numbers began to occur at some stage in the post-war era. Mixed race identity issues and degrees of integration, however, remain a public policy issue.

The definition of an Aborigine during the nineteenth century had relied almost as much on their adherence to traditional cultural practices as it did to racial characteristics. In the eyes of the Protectors, a “half-caste”, or perhaps even a de-tribalised “full-blood” Aborigine, did not fit their general definition of an “Aborigine” and should have been both willing and able to be integrated into the mainstream society. When many rejected integration, the Protectors were at a loss as to what the future would be for them. They were concerned that Aborigines should find a place in society in one category, the tribal Aborigines or the other, the mainstream community. If they were not to be culturally fully traditional Aborigines or not to become integrated into the mainstream, what was to become of them?
APPENDIX A.

Location of Ration Depots – 1840 to 1906
The following maps show the location of active ration stations as derived from the Letter Books, Volumes One to Seven, of the Protectors of Aborigines as contained in the State Archives. (but see also First Sources – Ration Depots)
MAP OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Volume 4.
Ration Depots and Issuing Points
1871 to 1877

Reference:

Also:
Owiendina
Penton Vale (YP)
Port Elliot

Goolwa
Point McLeay
Policeman's Point
Kingston SE
Robe
Naracoorte
Millicent
Mount Gambier
MacDonnell Bay

190
Map of South Australia

Volume 5.
Ration Depots and Issuing Points
1880 to 1884

Also: Milang (firewood and boats)
Owiendra

Reference:
Survey Lineshown by dots.
South Australian Legislation Regarding Aborigines
South Australian Legislation Regarding Aborigines

Below is a list and accompanying description of important legislation for Aboriginal policy in S.A. up until and including the creation of the Aborigines Protection Board in 1940.

Acts and their descriptions which are non-specific to Aborigines but also relevant to them appear in italics.

### Ordinance No. 12 1844: An Ordinance to Provide for the Protection, Maintenance and Up-bringing of Orphans and other Destitute Children of the Aborigines

- Made the Protector of Aborigines the legal guardian of every 'half-caste and other unprotected Aboriginal child' under 21 years of age, whose parents were either dead or unknown or whose parents agreed to this before a Magistrate
- Allowed the indenture as an apprentice of any half-caste or Aboriginal child under 21 years, with the consent of the Governor after coming before two Justices and upon application by the Protector of Aborigines as their guardian or upon application by either of their parents
- Justices to have the right to inspect premises where above apprentices live or work and must report to the Colonial Secretary as needed or as required by the Governor

### The Pastoral Act 1851

- Contained a clause requiring that aborigines have access for their hunting and gathering, for accessing watering holes, building wurlies and for ceremonial purposes
- Allowed, in Regulations, that any lease or part of a lease could be resumed for declaring an aboriginal reserve

### An Act to Regulate the Alienation and Sale of the Waste Lands of the Crown 1872

- Allowed the Governor to reserve portions of 'waste land' for the use or benefit of the aboriginal inhabitants (note that land was being reserved prior to this, but that this appears to be the earliest reference in legislation to the power to do so)

### Licensing Act 1863 /Licensing Act 1872

- Forbad the sale or supply of alcohol to aborigines, except where supplied for medical reasons
- 1872 Act forbad supply to half-castes as well as aborigines

### The Crown Lands Consolidation Act 1877

- Allowed the Governor to grant any aboriginal native up to 160 acres of Crown Land on any terms or for any years that the Governor thinks fit. (160 acre lots were being granted prior to this, but a legal difficulty to doing so had been previously raised)

### Destitute Persons Act 1881

- Repealed 'The Destitute Persons Relief and Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act, 1872'
- Two Justices may commit a destitute or neglected child to an industrial school to be detained until the age of 16 years (boys) or 18 years (girls). Destitute Board may apprentice children, manage their wages and property, licence foster mothers and supervise education, work and discipline.
- Children convicted of crimes could be committed to a reformatory for a period of time
• Amended by Destitute Persons Act Amendment Act 1886 - introduced term 'state child' for destitute and neglected children.

• Established the State Children’s Council to replace the Destitute Persons’ Board. Ages for detention of boys and girls made uniform (under 18 years). Repealed by State Children's Act 1895.

**State Children’s Act 1895**

• State Children’s Council established with responsibility for the care of state children, so declared after being found by a court to be a destitute or neglected child

• State Children’s Council responsible for the care, management and control of state children and their property, including their apprenticeship, placement and attendance at school until 13 years.

• Makes it an offence to fail to provide for or desert a child if liable

**The Children's Protection Act 1899**

• Specified grounds for the offence of neglect of a child

• Made it possible for a Magistrate to order the removal of a suspected neglected child until the matter could be fully heard in court

**The Aborigines Act, 1911**

• Repealed the 1844 Ordinance

• Created the Aborigines Department and the position of Chief Protector as head of that department under the Minister, with provision for district Protectors as required

• Made the Chief Protector the legal guardian (and district Protectors the local guardian) of every aboriginal and half-caste child under 21 years, except where they were a 'state child' under The State Children's Act, 1895 (which Act applied to all children of the State). This power meant it was their responsibility to protect aboriginal children from harm

• Defined an aborigine as an aboriginal native of Australia and a half-caste as the off-spring of an aboriginal mother and other than an aboriginal father; a half-caste could also be classed as an aborigine if married to and living with, habitually living with or associating with an aborigine, or a half-caste child 16 years or under

• Allowed for the provision of rations, blankets, clothing, medicines and medical care as required, and shelter for the sick, aged and infirm; for the custody, maintenance and education of children where possible and for loan of stock and implements to those aborigines allotted land. Made it an offence to sell goods provided for use by aborigines

• Allowed for the allotment of up to 160 acres from Crown Lands or the purchase of land for aboriginal occupants

• Allowed for establishment of hospitals or appropriation of parts of hospitals for care of aborigines, including 'lock-hospitals' for care of those with contagious diseases (venereal) and gave the Chief Protector the power to authorise medical examinations

• Gave the Protectors or police the power to inspect any place of employment of aborigines or half-castes

• With the approval of Parliament, allowed any Crown Land to be declared a reserve for aborigines, with appointment of Superintendents to manage the reserve as required
With the approval of Parliament, allowed for the lease of any Crown Land of up to 1,000 square miles to any mission or other aboriginal institution for up to 21 years with a right of application for lease renewal.

Gave the Chief Protector the power to remove to or keep any aborigine or half-caste within a reserve or aboriginal institution with the consent of the relevant governing body. Exemptions applied to any aborigine who was lawfully employed, was a female married to and living with a non-aboriginal person, had a permit to be absent or for whom the Chief Protector was satisfied that they were adequately provided for.

Made it an offence to be on a reserve unless the person(s) were aboriginal or were otherwise authorized.

Gave Protectors the power to order any aboriginal camp to be moved to a certain distance from inside any town or municipal boundary, to remove from the town any aboriginal or half-caste 'not decently clothed' and gave the Governor the power to declare, in the interests of aborigines, any town to be out of bounds unless in employment there.

Obliged the father of a half-caste child under 18 years to contribute to their support if living in an aboriginal institution or otherwise at State expense.

Allowed for Regulations on matters such as care and education of children, sending children to aboriginal institutions or industrial schools, keeping good order on reserves or in institutions, providing for apprenticeships, and payment of wages to aborigines for work on reserves. Regulations could be disallowed by Parliament.

Regulations

1917

Specified circumstance allowing for the expulsion of aborigines from aboriginal institutions.

Allowed Superintendents to employ aborigines for wages with preference to married half-castes whose spouses were resident and defined the working day for such employment.

Prohibited bringing in firearms or alcohol onto reserves without permission.

Made it an offence to fail to seek work outside the institution when required by the Superintendent if over 14 years, single and able-bodied.

1918:

Created an Aboriginal Advisory Committee of seven members to make recommendations to the Minister.

1919:

Defined an aboriginal institution to include any reserve.

Dealt with matters concerning control over reserves, including forbidding the playing of cards for money.

1925:

The Chief Protector was made a member of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

1926:
• Obliged an aboriginal or half-caste resident of an aboriginal institution to seek work if over the age of 14 and if after a week had failed to find work, required them to attend school for training

1933:
• Revoked the Chief Protector’s membership of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee

Aborigines (Training of Children) Act 1923
• Applied to illegitimate aboriginal/ half-caste children of any age who were neglected, or who the Chief Protector and the State Children’s Council deemed suitable; also to legitimate children who were 14 years old or had a qualifying certificate under the Education Act 1915.
• Allowed the Chief Protector, with the approval of the State Children’s Council under the State Children’s Act 1895, to complete a 'Transfer of Control' form and thereby commit any applicable aboriginal or half-caste child under 18 years (or females extendible up to 21 years old) to an institution under the 1895 Children’s Act as a 'State child' as if they were a neglected child. No court order was required.
• Act suspended immediately via Chief Protector not enforcing it after protests from parents, mainly from Point McLeay and Point Pearce

Maintenance Act 1926 [also known as the Social Welfare Act 1926]
• Consolidated Destitute Persons Act 1881-1886 and State Children Act 1895-1918.
• State Children Council replaced by Children’s Welfare and Public Relief Board.
• Upon application to a court, destitute or neglected children could be sent to an institution until 18 years with convicted children able to be sent to a reformatory
• Made provision for granting assistance to mothers for the maintenance of their children until from 14 to up to 16 years old and required fathers and immediate family to contribute or maintain depending on circumstances
• Made provision for payment of relief in money or goods to needy persons, with future repayment a possible requirement
• Gave the Board the power to supervise all illegitimate children under 7 and their homes
• Repealed by The Community Welfare Act 1972

Aborigines Act 1934
• Combined the 1911 Act and the 1923 Training Act and repealed these previous Acts
• Proclaimed in Feb. 1937

Aborigines Act Amendment Act, 1934-39
• Defined an aborigine for the purposes of the Act as being anyone descended from an 'original inhabitant of Australia' unless otherwise declared exempt from the Act under sec 11a.
• Created the Aboriginal Protection Board as a body corporate, consisting of the Minister and six other members appointed by the Governor, of which two were to be women. Members served for four year terms, with the first three serving only two years to stagger new appointments (or reappointments) on a half committee basis
• The Protector was the secretary to the Board and permanent head of the department; district Protectors could be created
• Every Board member was a legal guardian of every aboriginal child until 21 years of age, except where they were declared to be a 'state child'; district Protectors were local guardians

• An aboriginal person could be exempt from the Act if, in writing, the person was declared to be exempt 'by reason of his character and standard of intelligence and development'; an exemption could be unconditional and therefore irrevocable (and automatically transferred to offspring), or it could be a limited exemption which must become unconditional if not revoked after three years; appeals were to a special Magistrate

• It was now an offence for any non-aboriginal male to habitually consort with, keep as a mistress or have carnal knowledge of an aboriginal female to whom he was not lawfully married

• Made it an offence for an aboriginal child's parents to fail to send their child to school if the child was over 14 and under 16 years old and they were living at an aboriginal institution, except where the child was employed, was sick or infirm or it was otherwise authorised or justified

• Repeated all other (non-conflicting with above) provisions of the 1911 and 1923 Acts, with respect to creating and controlling reserves and entry to them by non-aborigines, granting leases to missions or other aboriginal institutions, controlling aboriginal encampments, power to control aboriginal movements to or between reserves or with respect to townships, the allotment of land to aborigines with the lease or grant of stock and implements, the provision of rations, clothing, blankets and other relief, making it an offence to sell issued or loaned goods, medical examinations and transfer to lock-hospitals for venereal diseases, maintenance from non-aboriginal fathers, the right to inspect places of employment and the transfer of children to training institutions (as per 1923 Act)

• Regulations could cover (consistent with the Act) the duties of Protectors and Superintendents, the care, custody and education of children, apprenticeships, controlling aborigines on reserves, payment of wages to aborigines on reserves and entry to reserves.

• Repealed by The Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962, which was in turn repealed by The Community Welfare Act 1972

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