

# A MUCH-NEEDED REFORM IN CARING FOR ABORIGINES

*Taken from an Editorial in "The Sydney Morning Herald"*

The news that the Federal Government intends to spend another £1 million on social services for aborigines will be widely welcomed. The extra money will be devoted to old-age, invalid and widows' pensions for aborigines living on supervised stations. The need for such expenditure has been evident for a number of years, and in New South Wales it has been urged in successive annual reports of the Aborigines' Welfare Board.

As things now stand, aborigines are entitled to certain Commonwealth social service benefits. This is the case no matter how much or little aboriginal blood they may have, and no matter where they live. But pensions are quite another matter. They are paid only to exempted aborigines living away from stations or reserves, or to those living on reserves which are not under the supervision of a manager.

In other words, aborigines who live on stations supervised by a manager are not entitled to age and invalid pensions, widows' pensions or maternity allowances. And yet they pay taxation, including social service contributions, in exactly the same way as whites! Here we have the situation which, after much delay and stubborn resistance, the Federal Government now proposes to remedy. In the past it has defended its refusal to act by saying that a person who is being cared for in one capacity should not also be cared for in another capacity.

As a statement of general principle this is reasonable enough. Thus, if aborigines are being assisted on supervised stations, why should they be eligible for pensions? There are several reasons. First, though it is true that, on N.S.W. stations, the Aborigines' Welfare Board issues rations to poor people, these rations are designed more for temporary use in times of stress than for the permanent maintenance of aged folk, many of whom are accustomed to a fairly high standard of living.



Secondly, the social effects of refusing pensions to such aborigines have often been deplorably bad. On a supervised station old people unable to work can only just exist. Their homes are rent-free, and they are given rations and a few clothes. But this does not bring them up to the level of old age pensioners. They never handle money unless helped by their relatives, and they find their position so humiliating that they feel impelled to leave the station.

Once away from it, they can draw their pensions and live more comfortably—except that they have no houses, and are reduced to living in old iron "humpies" on riverbanks or on the fringes of towns. Many of them feel it is better to do this than to stay on stations and inevitably become a financial burden on their relatives. Obviously, however, the choice is disagreeable. And why, in any case, should it be necessary?

The solution is clear enough. Allow them, if they are poor, not only to live on stations but to draw their pensions. In that case, they will not need to draw free rations; they can buy their own food. It is simply a rearrangement of State assistance. The cost will not be large; the aborigines affected need no longer feel that they are penniless "no-hopers", dependent on free hand-outs of food and clothing, and the victims of what the N.S.W. Aborigines' Welfare Board calls an "illogical and unjustified" distinction. It is most satisfactory that the Federal Government has decided to abolish that distinction.

---

## CROCODILE HUNTERS (continued from page 7)

The creed of these men is aptly summed up by their president, who says: "It is true that the croc' is a big target, taken overall. So is an Army tank, but a croc' like a tank, has a limited number of vulnerable points. The area in which you can shoot him with most deadly effect is equivalent, all told, to about half the size of a rabbit. That's one of the things that makes the game so fascinating".

When talking about his beloved adopted country, the North of Australia, this Frenchman always declares: "America's 'wild west' has nothing on it".

Men like Charlie Dargie, William Bullock, and, indeed, most of the professional crocodile hunters of Northern Australia, are by their shooting abilities and courage creating a legend for toughness which will endure like the great names of the "wild west" of America.



**This pretty lass is Colleen Moore of Wreck Bay Station.**