

MINISTER'S TOUR OF N.S.W.

The Minister for Child Welfare and Social Welfare, Mr John Waddy, recently completed a series of long tours throughout N.S.W. Mr Waddy, who is also the State Government Minister in charge of Aboriginal Welfare, was appointed to his present position in March of this year.

Since then he has visited nearly every Aboriginal reserve in this state, inspected new houses which have been built for Aboriginal families in a number of country towns and spoken with many Aborigines and with Aboriginal leaders. In three of the four longest tours he made, Mr. Waddy flew himself in a light plane.

This enabled him to reach a number of the most distant places where Aboriginal families are settled and enabled him to do so in a few days what might have taken weeks by car.

On one tour of inspection in May, Mr Waddy flew to Tamworth, Goondiwindi in Queensland (and by car across the border to Boggabilla reserve), Moree, Mungindi, Collarenebri, Walgett, Goodooga, Weilmoringle, Brewarrina, Bourke, Engonnia and Wanaaring. On another tour he visited Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Wentworth and Dareton, Cummeragunga, Griffith, Leeton, Lake Cargelligo and Cowra.

Last month he did two country tours during which he met a number of Aboriginal groups. The first tour, by car, took him to Wollongong, Roseby Park, Wallage Lake, Bega and Kiah.

The second tour, by plane, took him to Taree, Lismore, Coraki, Cabbage Tree Island, Grafton, Baryulgil, Maclean, Yamba, Tingha, Tabulam, Woodenbong, Armidale, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Condobolin, and Coleambally in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. He has also visited Kempsey, Coffs Harbour and Brungle on other occasions.

Mr Waddy said that these tours were made to familiarize himself with Aboriginal affairs and to find out for himself the facts on housing, employment and the general living conditions of Aborigines.

The tours had given him the opportunity of having a close look at what had been done and those things which needed attention in the future. He said he had been very pleased at the way Aborigines both in Housing Commission homes and in other housing had settled into their new homes.

Various designs of houses for Aborigines were discussed by the Minister at a number of places

and with various Aboriginal groups. New designs would need to be acceptable to the various country councils which had authority over such matters. However, consideration would be given to designing houses for the particular needs of Aborigines in certain areas. The homes at Ergonnia had been a good example of this.

Mr Waddy said he had been most impressed at the way some Aboriginal groups were willing to help themselves to improve their housing. This was particularly evident at the Aboriginal reserve at Baryulgil. "The Aborigines, employed at a nearby asbestos mine, told me that they did not want Housing Commission homes. But they are most anxious to make improvements to their existing homes and we will be most pleased to help them. People who are prepared to help themselves like those at Baryulgil can count on my help wherever possible."

At some reserves there appeared to be definite opportunities for development of reserve lands for agricultural purposes. It was the Department's policy that his kind of development should be undertaken by Aborigines and that any money earned be theirs. However, the Minister was anxious that old people living on the reserves should also share the benefits of any developments, even though they could not themselves take part.

Mr Waddy said that he was looking closely at the employment situation in country areas. "I appreciate the fact that Aborigines must have employment like everyone else, in order to pay their bills. We will do what we can to ensure employment opportunities. I am interested in helping those who want to be financially independent like most other citizens. There are many Aborigines anxious to improve their standard of living. On my trips I met them and discussed their problems first hand. There are many I was unable to meet personally. My time simply ran out."

The Minister said that it was not the policy of the Department to move Aborigines from reserves. However it was the policy of the Department that no new homes would be built on reserves. Houses for Aborigines which were being constructed by the Housing Commission on behalf of the Department