ABORIGINAL LABOUR FORCE: SOME DOCUMENTS

Editorial Introduction: G.S. McIlroy, the Inspector General of Administration, the Defence Division of the Department of the Treasury, visited Darwin during July 1942. As a result, he initiated a series of letters to state Native Affairs authorities, concerning the optimal use of Aboriginal men as civilian labourers. He also sought the opinions of W.E.H. Stanner and Donald Thomson, anthropologists, but then serving officers.

Following this correspondence, he chaired a meeting in January 1943. What follows is an exact copy of:

1. His letter to Stanner and Thomson;
2. Their replies;
3. McIlroy's minutes of the January meeting. These minutes quote some of the responses of state authorities.

Other documents also are included in the file AA CRS A705 68/1/700, but not printed here.

D.J. Mulvaney

**Letter to [Squadron Leader] Donald Thomson and Major W.E.H. Stanner,
7 December 1942**

Dear Sir,

During an overland tour of inspection to Darwin in July and August last, having in mind the acute manpower shortage in Australia generally and NT in particular, whilst at Alice Springs I discussed with resident officials of the Commonwealth Natives Affairs Branch, the prospect of utilising aboriginal labour for certain types of manual work. Subsequently a recommendation was made that the question be fully investigated by higher Authority.

You are probably aware that the Army is now utilising several hundred natives in the NT with satisfactory results, and it is now proposed to hold a conference in Melbourne at an early date, to examine the possibilities of developing the scheme more generally in several States.

During a recent discussion with Mr Chinnery [Director of Native Affairs], he suggested that State Native Control Depts. be asked for their views and particularly stressed that your comments also be requested. I would regard it as a favour, therefore, if you would be good enough to let me have your comments at your early convenience.

Arrangements similar to those operating in the NT would also be made for control of natives by Native Affairs officials, or Missioners if available, in special camps where housing, clothing, feeding and medical attention would be provided. Particularly where women are present, these camps would be isolated at some distance from Military Camps, and the vicinity placed out of bounds to troops. Labourers would be transported daily to the work on hand and handed over to Army control until they are returned to their camps at night. A small weekly wage would also be paid.

As total application of the scheme would entail the removal of natives from Missions or Reserves, it is recognised that a long range view must be taken as to possible after effects, if natives are taken en masse and placed in labour camps for any considerable time. This may have an adverse effect later when a return to existing tribal conditions is desired. On the other hand, the present need is urgent that every available avenue should be exploited for man power.

It may be possible in cases where it is considered the break up of a tribe would be threatened, to withdraw a useful number of men only, who could be transferred without womenfolk, leaving sufficient nucleus for the continued maintenance of the tribe as at present. If practicable, this of course, would be the more desirable objective generally, providing reasonable numbers of able-bodied men could be procured. It is proposed that this angle should be first investigated before wholesale removals would be undertaken.

You will doubtless be conversant with the problem which has arisen in the Cape York Peninsula, following the high incidence of VD amongst both AMF and USAFIA troops operating in that area. The disease, it is alleged, has been contracted from gins in care of Mission Stations adjacent to Army personnel. It seems probable that this will result in the natives from those Missions concerned, being concentrated at a spot more remote from troops. A suggestion has been made that able-bodied men be transferred to NT to supplement the aboriginal labour now being used there by Army.

Yours faithfully,
(Sgnd) G.S. McIlroy
Inspector of Administration

W.E.H. Stanner's reply
42/1060R
UNOFFICIAL
URGENT

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
VX 89030
Major W.E.H. Stanner,
Comd 2/1 NAOU
AIF
22 December, 1942.

Inspector-General of Administration
Department of the Treasury (Defence Division),
Melbourne SC1.

REF 42/1060R EMPLOYMENT OF NATIVE LABOUR

Sir,

1. I am honoured by the request of the Inspector of Administration, Mr G.S. McIlroy, forwarded through you, for an expression of my personal views on the employment of aboriginal labour for Army purposes.

I should like to make brief comment upon three aspects of the proposal:

- (i) numbers available.
- (ii) methods of control.
- (iii) general policy.

These views are entirely personal, and do not of course necessarily represent any Army or official viewpoint.

2. (i) *Numbers Available:*

Probably far fewer natives are available than may be estimated by Department of the Army, if official figures are the basis of such estimates. Recent official estimates of the aboriginal population are not available to me in the field, but I understand that the totals published, eg, in the current Commonwealth Year Book, do not show substantial decreases from the figures published in 1935-36. These totals in 1935 were undoubtedly over-estimates by at least 30 per cent, possibly more, for remote areas of Queensland, NT, CA, and WA, personally known to me. Other professional anthropologists formed a similar conclusion in other areas. I am not in a position to say if these over-estimates are still true,

or not, or over what area of the Commonwealth, but the published figures should be treated with caution unless given with the authority of eg, Mr Chinnery.

My first recommendation would be, therefore, that Mr Chinnery, who commands the best personal and official information, and is in the best position to co-ordinate and assess conclusive figures, for all parts of Australia, should be asked to estimate the total aboriginal labour force available. To do so it will be necessary;

- (i) to correct existing figures for the probable errors of calculation already referred to.
- (ii) to exclude the native population in certain areas as being inaccessible, too scattered to concentrate, or too close to their nomadic mode of life to hold and work without ruining them.
- (iii) to exclude all natives essential to cattle stations working on Army meat contracts, police posts, etc.

A figure reached by this method should make it possible to estimate the native labour force available at:

- (iv) mission stations and non-essential cattle stations, mines, etc.
- (v) Government aboriginal settlements.
- (vi) town encampments and all other outback centres.

My belief is that it will be discovered that the *readily available and effective* aboriginal labour force will only be found at sources such as (iv), (v), and (vi). Whether the natives available at source (iii) are to be drawn upon is a matter for decision by the Government on grounds of general policy. My advice would be against taking aborigines from these sources.

I am quite certain that it would be uneconomic and unwise to try to take natives from the sources listed under (ii) above.

I am unable to offer any estimate of the numbers which could be obtained from sources (iv), (v), and (vi) except to say that it would obviously total some thousands for all Australia, and may be economically worthwhile.

2. (ii) *Methods of Control:*

The natives involved in sources (iv), (v), and (vi) can all be regarded as civilized or semi-civilized and, therefore, responsive to intelligent and fair control.

Without having made any close inspections, my belief is that the system now followed in the NT, in control of natives employed by the Army is along satisfactory lines.

The following principles should be observed:

- (i) Properly built camps should be established from which natives should be taken every morning to work and to which they should be returned at night.
- (ii) There should be close supervision of native health and diet. Striking results have been obtained in South and East Africa by scientific control of native workers' diet - food should be balanced in all elements, to eliminate deficiency diseases, and give adequate energy for sustained manual work.
- (iii) The camps should make family life possible for the working aborigines - men should not be in any circumstances segregated from their female relations for long periods.
- (iv) Ample leisure along lines understood by the aborigines should be provided for all inhabitants of the camps, and periodic rest-periods ('walkabouts') should be arranged, because fundamental native values are involved which cannot, without damage to the natives and the work they are required to do, be ignored or changed by force.
- (v) The camps should be arranged on a broad zoning basis so that as far as possible aborigines should be concentrated for work in areas and climates not too far removed from those to which they are accustomed.

- (vi) Minimum rates of payment should be established, but fixed rates applicable to all natives should be avoided. A fair wage should be paid to all natives capable of earning it (some aborigines have been paid £2 and £3 a week and have thoroughly earned it). Wherever possible, some part of every natives' wage should be paid in money, and special measures taken to make available to them useful articles which they can buy with their money. Payment entirely in kind leaves too many loopholes for fraud, short-weighting, etc., and is, I believe, bad in principle. Proper control at this stage will make it possible for many natives to learn something of the value of money. Suitably stocked Camp Canteens under good control will protect natives from unscrupulous trickery, and provide them with articles of value (hand tools, workable iron and wire, personal necessities, etc.).
- (vii) A trust fund, or system of deferred pay, for every native employed for a lengthy period should be established, and a worthwhile guarantee given that such trust funds will be available to them at the end of their labour period. The experience of many native employees in Queensland has been that money held in trust for them is *not* in practice available to them when asked for. This must not be allowed to recur under Army control. Many aborigines have had bitter experiences of worthless guarantee.

2. (iii) *General Policy:*

The after-effects of a rigorous policy on the above lines would be enormous. They could either ruin absolutely, or make a most valuable contribution, to native welfare. The most obvious dangers are that in a period of reaction after the war, official interest would collapse, controls be weakened or withdrawn, and the natives allowed to slip back into their pre-war state with the entire balance of their lives irrevocably and irretrievably altered. This is one reason why I have made the suggestion above, that the sources from which labour is drawn should be limited. The humanitarian reasons for doing so are reinforced by the fact that it would also be uneconomic to draw upon the sources I have excluded. There are indications already apparent in NT that where fairly liberal funds are available for native control, and some sense of urgency exists behind the organization of their labour services, the results may well be almost spectacular when compared with pre-war experience. These conditions have never existed before. Army's urgent needs are creating entirely new native conditions.

The present search for organised native labour is a radical outside intervention in NT native policy, and may well be all to the good. The pressure of Army needs also places a high premium on good organization. The factor of cost will probably not be allowed to exercise any limitation if large scale native labour is really required.

The general context is therefore very suitable for taking progressive steps in native control. These will provide the safeguards you mention in your letter, and, of course, the better the administration the more efficiently will Army's labour needs be met.

I take the liberty of further suggesting that certain constant factors should be kept in mind by those formulating the aboriginal labour scheme. They are:

- (i) White society, habits, material comforts, and settled ways of life, exercise a compulsive and very positive attraction for the aborigines.
- (ii) Once acquired, a taste for these things and these ways of living, never leaves the aborigines, and excludes any possibility of real return to the native state.
- (iii) The apparently degenerate native camps around all points of white settlement in the bush indicate *not degeneracy but the aborigines' desire to move upward to European levels* to whatever degree they can. Native poverty in many areas usually reflects the poverty of the white stratum to which they attach themselves. Most of the tribes have

ABORIGINAL LABOUR FORCE DOCUMENTS

died out because they left their old nomadic life, tried to live by an imitation of White life, lost their old skills and interests, and were wiped out by a combination of extreme poverty, new diseases, and under-nourishment, before they could work out a proper technique of adjustments.

- (iv) If Army makes widespread use of aborigines it will encourage and accelerate this process of native change, and therefore commits the Government to continuous responsibility for controlling the outcome.
- (v) Measures for proper control of the after-effects should therefore be integral with development of the employment scheme itself.

There are one or two special cautions I would like to express:

- (i) Withdrawal from tribes, living as tribes, of numbers of able-bodied men, on the lines of indentured labour in New Guinea and Africa, is unworkable in aboriginal Australia. The tribal situations are not comparable. In Australia very few men would be available from bush tribes, and nearly all who are are required for keeping the tribe fed and under control. Taking many men away would do irreparable damage, and not enough could be taken to make the step worthwhile. It is far better to organise controlled camps of semi-civilized and civilized natives and all their relations (those who have ceased to be nomadic) and send the men out to work in organised groups.
- (ii) Total application of the policy outlined in Mr. McIlroy's letter will inevitably involve the Government in some degree of conflict with Church authorities and pastoral interests.
- (iii) Transfer of natives to the NT, from other areas would be possible, but will need very intelligent and informed selection of sources, and skilled control.

3. *Other Comments:*

It seems to me eminently possible to make use of other than aboriginal native labour in NT, and northerly areas of the Commonwealth. Two possible sources for long-range labour planning are India and New Guinea. Both are comparable climatic zones, both have experience of large-scale indentured native labour under proper control, and the amount of labour available is immensely greater than that obtainable from aboriginal sources.

I shall be glad to offer any other information or advice which may be required.

Donald Thomson's comment

42/1060R

8938

X201

CYPHER MESSAGE
FROM S/LDR. DONALD THOMSON
TO RAAF HEADQUARTERS
23rd DECEMBER, 1942.

FOR ATTENTION G.S. MCILROY INSPECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION THE TREASURY
MELBOURNE YOUR COMMUNICATION 42/1060R DECEMBER 7 ACKNOWLEDGED.
CONSIDER THAT ANY SCHEME TO EMPLOY ABORIGINES IN THE MANNER PROPOSED
CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED AND THAT THE REMOVAL OF MEN FROM RESERVES AS
SUGGESTED MUST INEVITABLY BREAK DOWN NATIVE ORGANIZATION AND AGGREGATE
CONDITIONS WHICH ARE NOW LEADING TO EXTINCTION OF ABORIGINAL RACE.
REGRET DELAY IN REPLY YOUR LETTER BUT HAVE BEEN IN HOSPITAL WITH MALARIA.

Director General of Administration: employment of aboriginal labour

G.S. McIlroy

Editor: *Notes on a meeting on 8 January 1943 with representatives of all services; E.W.P. Chinnery and V.J. White, Commonwealth Native Affairs Branch; A.D. Neville, ex-Commissioner for Native Affairs and T.J. Corteen, Inspector, Western Australia; G.S. McIlroy, chairman.*

The meeting agreed during preliminary discussion that it was desirable efforts should be continued to organise native labour throughout Australia.

GENERAL:

The meeting considered reports obtained earlier from competent authorities. The reports indicate that for the purposes of review as a possible source of labour, the native population of Australia may be graded into two classes:

1. Civilized, and semi-civilized natives who have been in contact with white people and employed either regularly or intermittently in some form of labour. Excluding the appreciable number already engaged in useful work, such as employees of Stations, Government contractors or Public Institutions, there would appear to be a useful surplus which can be recruited.
2. Outback nomads who (unless located within a convenient distance from Defence Establishments in the far North), it would be uneconomical and impracticable to transfer to far distant areas, while their degree of usefulness would at first be limited.

Although opinions differ on certain aspects there is reason to believe however, that in some areas in the North-West of Western Australia and certain parts of North Queensland, provided scope exists for employment in these localities, either on Defence work or making of roads, railways lines, telegraph lines or other tasks for which manual labour is required, that it would be possible to obtain a useful percentage of able bodied natives who, under the control of experienced Native Affairs officials, could be developed into useful labourers.

In addition to the respective Native Affairs Authorities in Queensland, NSW, South Australia, Western Australia and NT, an opinion was previously obtained from such well known Anthropologists as Sq/Ldr Donald Thomson and Major Stanner....

[one page summarising their views omitted]

... It seems evident from the following information that in the NT at least, appreciable numbers of civilized and semi-civilized natives can be marshalled without drawing on the nomadic population at present, although later the possibilities in this direction will no doubt be investigated if it is found that more labour can be utilised.

So far the States of Western Australia and Queensland are concerned, there appears reasonable ground for the assumption that a useful number of natives could be obtained, both from the semi-civilized population, and also outlying natives, provided work was available adjacent to their own areas on which the latter can be employed.

NORTHERN TERRITORY:

Attention was first given to this area where considerable progress has already been made in developing the scheme. Mr White, who is the NT Administration Officer in charge of Natives, was asked to outline the position to date, and reported:

Altogether about 700 native labourers are being employed on Army work at various points as follows:

Delissaville	-	100
Koolpinyah	-	40
Adelaide River	-	70

ABORIGINAL LABOUR FORCE DOCUMENTS

Katherine	-	100
Mataranka	-	200 (including Railway gangs)
Alice Springs	-	100 on general Army tasks 55 released by Army for work on essential services
Staging Camps	-	30

Control Camps, where natives and their families are quartered, have been established at the abovementioned places, except Staging Camps. The system which has been adopted appears to be working very satisfactorily. Camps are sited not less than 5 miles from the nearest Military establishment and are placed out of bounds to troops and civilians. Labourers are under the control of Native Affairs officials while off duty, but pass to the control of Army during working hours. Labour gangs are picked up at the Camps by Army trucks each morning and returned each evening.

Army provides rations for natives and selected dependants, and clothing, etc, for the labourers only who also receive payment of 5/- [shillings] per week. Medical attention is also provided and, where no private stores are operating north of Tennants Creek, mobile dry canteens visit the Camps.

The value of this native labour is recognised, and a request was recently made by Norforce for permission to establish additional Control Camps at Larrimah and Pine Creek.

Mr White reported that recent correspondence between the Dept of Interior and His Honour the Administrator indicates that the present system should be extended. He expressed the opinion that the present number in employment by Army could be doubled by collecting suitable natives who are still available in certain districts. Such a force of approximately 1500 organised labourers would provide a most useful contribution to the existing labour problem in the Territory.

Suggestion for Regularising Conditions of Employment:

The conditions of employment and control of Natives which have been developed by agreement between Norforce and the Administrator, appear to be generally operating satisfactorily, although there are said to be some minor variations in certain districts.

The meeting agreed that it was desirable that conditions be regularised, and requested Mr White to submit an outline of what he considered necessary to obtain the most efficient results. In consideration of Mr. White's proposals the meeting suggested that these be forwarded through the B of BA [Brigadier of Base Area] to LHQ [Land Headquarters] for consideration and submission to GOC [General Officer Commanding] Norforce for approval or amendment and to be later confirmed by LHQ.

The following proposals, submitted by Mr White, are said to be already operating, with the exception of the proposed increase in wages from 5/- to 10/-, and that at present dependents in the Alice Springs area are not maintained by Army as is the case in the Northern Area:

- (i) That labourers be engaged, and not recruited or enlisted - their mental outlook, dwarfed as it is by lack of education - would not be conducive to an appreciation of the serious import of what enlistment entails.
- (ii) That engagement of labour be the function of Officers of the NT Administration who are aware of natives' capabilities and tribal distribution.
- (iii) That engagement be confined or restricted (with some elasticity) to natives who have been employed previously in Darwin or other centres of settlement, Buffalo-shooting Camps, Missions (if reduced Mission activities have caused unemployment), defunct farming areas (Daly River), and Mining areas (Pine Creek), etc. The pastoral industry will absorb all competent stockmen; hence Stations can be eliminated.

- (iv) Areas to be explored: Bathurst and Melville Islands, Coburg [*sic*] Peninsula, Coastal and Island Missions, Roper River, Maranboy, Inland town centres, all areas adjoining North-South Road (for purposes of eliminating loafing element), Daly River, Alice Springs and districts, etc.
- (v) Road, Rail or Sea Transport to be provided by Army for staff when recruiting and for transporting engaged labourers to Control Camps. (Native Affairs Branch has no transport facilities).
- (vi) Uniform conditions of employment to be laid down in relation to rations, clothing and wages; the following to serve as a guide:

Rations - to be issued by Army to Labourers and selected dependents, scale as under:

<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Amount per man per week</i>	
Flour -	7 lbs	
Sugar -	14 ozs	} Governed by Rationing } legislation
Tea -	3 ozs	
Tobacco -	2 ozs	
Rice -	3 lbs	
Jam -	1 lb	
Beef -	10 lbs	
Soap -	3 ozs	
Baking Powder }		
Curry Powder }	as required	
Hops }		
Potatoes }	to be issued if Rice	
Onions }	is not available	

Clothing - Annual issue by Army to Labourers only.

Boots -	1 pair (Salvage), when required
Socks -	2 pairs
Trousers (Shorts)	3 pairs per year
Shirts -	2
Singlets -	2
Sweater -	1 (in colder climates)
Towel -	1
Blanket -	1
Plate, Knife }	
Fork, Spoon }	1 each
Pannikin }	

Note - 1 blanket extra, Alice Springs District.

Dependents' rations and clothing: The Army to ration dependants selected by the Native Affairs Branch. Clothing of dependants to be the responsibility of Native Affairs Branch.

Wages: 10/- per week minimum, with margin for skill or special labouring tasks - such margin to be determined by Army and Native Affairs officials.

- (vii) Canteen: Army to make dry canteen service available to natives, as at present.
- (viii) Period of Engagement: After each twelve (12) months' term a 'walkabout' period be granted.
- (ix) Hours of Employment: 8 1/2 hours daily, including lunch hour, but not travelling time. Saturday afternoons and Sundays free - as is the present practice in Northern areas.

ABORIGINAL LABOUR FORCE DOCUMENTS

- (x) Control: All labourers to reside in Control Camps, the sites for which will be selected by the Administrator or his officers in collaboration with Army. The Army, as at present, to provide provost assistance in the matter of prevention of trespass in vicinity of Control Camps by civilians or soldiers.
- (xi) Housing: The Army to provide any material necessary for essential buildings. Hitherto those demands have been negligible and confined only to kitchens, stores etc., bush timber having been utilised wherever possible. It is unlikely that future demands would vary to any extent.
- (xii) Features of Control:
 - (a) The Administrator reserves the right to admit, discharge, or remove any native from Control Camps for reasons disciplinary or medical, or where change in environment is indicated.
 - (b) The Administrator reserves the right to employ certain natives in Control Camps on functions not directly concerned with Army, e.g. buildings, cooking, sanitation, gardening, etc.
 - (c) Medical: The Army, as at present, to provide adequate medical facilities, and to report any case of injury sustained by labourers during employment.
 - (d) Army to continue to transport labourers daily to and from employment; provide personnel at camps to check labourers before departing from the Control Camps in the morning; to keep normal rolls for pay purposes; to supervise transport and drivers when at Control Camps.
 - (e) Administration officers to assist in assembling labourers in the mornings, and to co-operate fully in the matter of organising and maintaining efficient labour units.
 - (f) Administration officers to furnish list of dependents to be maintained.
 - (g) Visitors to Control Camps must receive sanction of Area Commandant.
 - (h) The Administrator to be responsible for control of Native Camps, and of all natives therein between the hours of sunset and sunrise and during off-duty periods.
 - (i) Disposition of labour to be decided by Army.
- (xiii) Discipline: Breach of agreement to be met by loss of pay. Army to assist, where possible, in the repatriation of labourers on expiration of employment.
- (xiv) Channel of Communication:
 - 1 Policy: The Administrator and GOC Norforce.
 - 2 Routine: Area Commandant (Army); Civil Patrol Officer (NT Administration).

Increase in Native Affairs Branch Staff:

To effectively cope with the increasing organisation of Native labourers, Messrs Chinnery and White stressed the need for additional trained staff - at present Mr White with two assistants covers the whole of the Northern part of the Territory and it is not possible to give the close supervision necessary.

It was suggested that two members of the regular staff who have been called up by Army, should be transferred on loan to the Native Affairs Branch for special duty in connection with the recruiting and control of Native labour. Lieut F.R. Morris is said to be on duty in Sydney and Private F. Gubbins is a member of the Ordnance staff at Mataranka. It is understood that the Administrator is making representations that their services be made available.

QUEENSLAND:

The Director of Native Affairs stated in an interview with the Senior Inspector of Administration for Queensland, that the coloured population of that State consists of the

numbers under control of the Department; and nomadic natives who are not under control and are not employable in the ordinary sense for continued effort.

The natives under control number 2,500 mainland males and an unspecified number at Cape York and Torres Straits. (The latter, it is said, are wholly in the service of the Commonwealth in this area and under control of Service Officers). Of the mainland males, 2,000 are engaged in various employment - generally primary industry - under supervision of the Department. The balance of 500 are organised into 6 gangs or working parties under immediate control of trained departmental Supervisors. The gangs have, up to the present, been engaged in cane cutting, potato digging, maize pulling, cotton picking, etc, but the Director states there are breaks of time between jobs that need not be, if he could have assistance and support in forming a more continuous programme of work. At date (9/12/42) he had a gang on the South Coast digging arrowroot, and when that was finished no further work was in sight for them.

The Director stated it is preferable that native labour should be employed within reasonable distance of their home location, but owing to lack of a suitable programme, the gangs have followed the work offering, which has taken them long distances from home.

Possible Use of Labour at Mt Isa:

It is understood that, for certain health reasons, in the Cape York Peninsula steps are being taken to remove natives from certain Mission Stations in the vicinity of which troops are stationed, to a more remote station where contact will not be easy. In a report from within Army to the CI [Chief Inspector] (Army) dealing with this subject, a suggestion was made that if the proposed concentration of natives was carried out, some of the able bodied men might be selected and sent to NT as labourers. In view of the shortage of Army labour which is said to exist at Mount Isa, and the fact that it seems likely NT requirements may be largely filled from local sources, the question might be examined whether native labour, if any, available from the re-adjustment in the Cape York district, could not better be utilised at Mt Isa.

NEW SOUTH WALES:

Information obtained from the Aborigines' Welfare Board states 'that aborigines in New South Wales are not collected together in tribes, the tribal instinct being practically unknown. Although tribal boundaries do not exist in New South Wales it would be preferable for groups of men to be employed in their own districts. It would certainly be inadvisable to employ aborigines outside the boundaries of the State.'

'The Aborigines' Welfare Board recently furnished the Director General of Manpower with particulars of youths and men living on aboriginal stations and reserves who could, if necessary, be compelled to work in pastoral or other industries. These lists included men who work in casual employment and others who were living in idleness with no attempt to seek employment in the war effort or otherwise.'

'It is quite a common practice at any time for the male aborigines to go to districts other than their own for employment, leaving their families behind.'

A subsequent memo, from the Chairman of the Board stated; 'When Mr Lipscomb, Superintendent of Aborigines' Welfare, recently visited Moree, it was reported to him that local aborigines were being refused employment in Allied Works camps and also by the pastoral community, with the result that many able bodied half-caste aborigines were now back at their camps and idle.'

The Director referred to lists of unemployed youths and young men which had been furnished to him by the Area National Service Officer of the Department of Labour and National Services, and attached a copy of this officer's report in which he states:

I feel sure that the only effective and satisfactory way that the services of these aborigines can be fully utilised is, firstly by recruiting fit men for work on Allied or Public work construction and segregating them in coloured gangs with their own quarters and with gangers or supervisors who have some understanding of the aborigine's character. From conversations with Police Officers in the districts where aboriginal stations are established, I have ascertained that the opinion of the Police is that the average aborigines are fair workers, in some instances very good under supervision, and would welcome some scheme such as the above, where they could be of some service to the country and would earn reasonable wages.

It is apparent from the above information that potential native labour in New South Wales is not being availed of at present, owing to lack of proper organisation and if the Services are in a position to absorb some or all, it would appear to be a simple matter to arrange to make use of this labour.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA:

There are said to be approximately 26,000 natives of both sexes in WA. Most of those in the Southern areas are stated to be in employment, but an objective review should be made to ascertain whether all are engaged on essential war work.

In more remote districts such as Wyndham and Broome, Mr Neville expressed the opinion that under proper control it should be possible to collect a limited number of suitable natives at centres within 200/300 miles of their usual habitation, if Defence or other work on which they can be employed is being carried out in such localities. It is understood that to some extent RAAF has already been utilising labour at aerodromes in the North-West of WA and elsewhere.

SUMMARY OF OPINION:

The meeting was of the opinion that generally reasonable prospects exist for organising useful numbers of natives, but that the first essential is to ascertain whether work exists in which they can be absorbed. ... If the Services are interested, a meeting could be arranged with representatives of the State Native Control Authority to discuss details and submit proposals to the IGA [Inspector General Administration].

The meeting considered that it being a matter of national importance that all available labour be used to advantage in some form of essential work, if the Services cannot use natives directly, steps should be taken to ensure that Manpower Authorities in each State are aware of the possibilities for organising native labour.