



The Federal Council for the Advancement of  
Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

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## Reports and Proceedings

for the

14th ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

to be held at

**PIMLICO HALL  
JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY  
TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND**

**FRIDAY, 9th to SUNDAY, 11th APRIL**

**1971**



THE FEDERAL COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ABORIGINES & TORRES

STRAIT ISLANDERS

PRESIDENTIAL REPORT - 1971

In presenting my report to Conference I would at the outset like to say that the success of our coming together will be really gauged by our ability to get to grips with the issues that face our people and a frank exchange of views how best to overcome those things and actions that are holding us back.

Nationally the problems that face us are basically similar in their essence. That is they flow from the legislations that in varying degrees and language all relegate the Aboriginal and Islander to a second rate citizenship in life.

The Federal Government for the first time through its Prime Minister, Mr. Gorton has highlighted the truth of this statement when in Singapore at the Commonwealth Conference he obviously under pressure declared that the Queensland and West Australian State Governments had 2 years to remove their discriminatory legislation or the Federal Government would do so.

This stand will be welcomed by all concerned with the welfare of Aboriginal and Island People and can lead to an end to the situation where States hiding behind so called State rights place discriminatory acts on the Statute Books, and the Federal Government to take seriously the responsibility given to it in the Referendum on this matter. To date we should add there has been little done in this regard.

The Queensland act is described as the most discriminatory of all by both those directly affected by it and Students of all opinions who study these matters.

A brief appraisee of "THE ABORIGINAL AND ISLAND AFFAIRS ACT OF 1965" Queensland may be appropriate for Conference.

There are approximately 30,000 Aborigines and Islanders subject to this act.

The most general powers are contained in regulations 10 to 13 of the act and apply to every resident on or visitor to the Reserve.

Thus all must conform to a reasonable standard of good conduct (R.10), must obey all lawful instructions of the Director, District Officer, Manager, Councillors or other Officers of such Reserve (R.11) and must not do any act subversive of good order or discipline on a Reserve (R.12). Even when a non resident is authorised to be on the Reserve, he may not interfere with the normal duties or activities of any assisted person (R.16). Naturally the Manager as the senior would be the one to decide, at least in the first instance, on what is a reasonable standard of conduct and what acts subvert good order and what interferes with normal duties.

The Director can forcibly move an assisted person not on a reserve on to any reserve in Queensland.

The regulations are designed in typical prison terms and are not conducive to assisting our people but to ensure they do not live as do other citizens in the community.

Recently the State Premier, Bjelke Peterson and his Minister, Mr. Hewitt had a helter skelter visit through all settlements and Reserves in the North. Great play was made of the wet canteen provision, a decision we applaud, other than a show visit for the Government. This visit has not helped our people.

He ignores the fact that 2 of the 4 Councillors from each Reserve are appointed by his Government and only 2 are elected according to this act. What a contrast. The stage managed decision with the Minister and Director at the Yarrabah conference in support of the retention of the act is in contrast to a freer conference held at the Cook University in May last of representatives from cities, towns and Government communities when it was, after days of discussion decided that "The Conference Calls for the complete abolition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Acts 1965 and 1967. It is considered that the Act retards all the basic and elementary human freedoms in such fields as employment, housing, health, education, freedom of expression and the dignity of the Aboriginal and Island People".

We should re-endorse the resolution of the May, 1970 Cook University consultations convened by the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, and again tell the Queensland Government that this act must be scrapped. The same applies to the Western Australian Act, and with the change of Government in West Australia recently we expect that the new Government will do this.

The onus is now on the Federal Government to tackle this matter and helpful legislation promulgated to assist in our educational needs, trade training, setting up of genuine industries, adequate housing and land rights along with financial assistance to overcome the 200 years of degradation thrust upon so many of our People following the landing of Captain Cook on these shores and still continuing.

Unless the voice of our indigenes is raised we cannot be sure of such actions from any Government irrespective of its title.

The Curindjis at Wattie Creek are continuing their heroic struggle for land rights and despite all the manoeuvring and shilly shallying of the Federal Government and their friends the Vesteys, this struggle being waged by the Wattie Creek people has not diminished and has captured the imagination of large sectors of the people of the country, in particular the Trade Unions with the W.W.F. being well to the fore.

The Roper River struggle is also one that has broken the isolation barrier.

I would like to see greater liaison between the Gurindji Committee in Sydney and our Federal body and affiliates. The responsibility must be on us to take the initiative in this regard.

The continuing Lake Tyers and Franlingham actions as in the Moa Islanders struggle all show no matter whether it be in Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Victoria or South Australia our people want to live as human beings with land rights a sacred right and in practice a living reality. Today however, our National Government is more concerned with preserving estates like Vestey's rather than returning our land back to our people, even in small parcels.

Since our last conference I have had the opportunity to visit large areas of the Northern Territory. This trip was made possible through a grant from the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers Federation, to whom we extend our sincere gratitude.

The most disturbing feature in a number of areas is apathy flowing from misguided Government policy. This necessitates the introduction of a programme of re-thinking to change the present attitudes, particularly in Northern Australia.

The current training programmes are totally inadequate in the Darwin area and need to involve many more trainees and not just a scratching of the surface so to speak.

I stated on my return from Darwin and perhaps it could stand repetition that "a Pottery on Bagot Reserve, a co-project of the Welfare Department and the University of New South Wales, and a home management training scheme could be enlarged to take in more trainees. Komilda College, some 9 miles from Darwin, if run and supervised as an ordinary college as elsewhere, may be of benefit for all attending courses there in the hope of increasing their knowledge.

Employment opportunities over the past 10 years have increased in many fields in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, such as mining, agriculture and marine industries, and some Aborigines are being involved in these opportunities; however, what is required is a real training scheme to suit these particular industries so that many more Aborigines can be absorbed into the work force

The high cost of living in the Territory and outback Queensland, where a loaf of bread costs anything from 36 to 60 cents, motor fuel to as high as 66 cents a gallon along with high prices on other goods in areas where Aborigines are being used as cheap labour, make it impossible for them to enjoy the living standards of other workers.

Confusion exists in the Territory in relation to the leasing of land. It is necessary that explanation from Government level be undertaken to clarify the

intention and rights under such legislation that does exist.

The Cultured Pearl industry is one that this Conference could well call for a public investigation. A Journalist, who at one time was the Publicity Officer for the people, the North Committee based in Townsville, states that Japanese interests dominate this industry and it is not a joint venture and that Islanders who lived on their work in the Pearl Shell industry are being denied any real opportunity to develop their living standards as in the past.

The material produced by Mr. L. Foley is revealing indeed and it is not new.

There are many groups of people, organisations and individuals who have and are helping our attempts to achieve the aims of the Council, to all we express our satisfaction and probably with special mention of the Abschol movement, who through some of their members have done much to help as in the example of their going to Wattie Creek to help organise resources and people there, and to plan the area for the Gurindjis.

It was pleasing for me to see, on my visit to the Territory, the many movements to overcome injustices by Aborigines. Whilst the Gurindji struggle is well known, as also that of the Yirrkala people, there are also struggles for land at Roper by the Mara people, and five (5) other tribes have also claimed land in East Arnhem Land. West of Darwin area, the Brinken and Wagite tribes are anxious to claim their tribal lands and are anxious and worried at the intrusion of stock onto their reserve land occupied by them. The stock are from an adjoining grazing lease held by the Tipperary Land Corporation. It is not very hard for a non Aboriginal to obtain a prospecting right to hundreds of square miles of reserve land and then sub-let the authority to others, as was done recently in the case of the Adelaide Lady and the Uranium find which was found by the Queensland mining firm (proper name - Queensland Minerals?).

This is a case of where Aboriginal rights are not only neglected by the National Government but in reality are filched from their reserves with the approval of the Government.

Despite these problems, we can say that the Aboriginal People are not content to let things stay as they are, more and more groups and tribes are expressing their views firmly and whilst the process has been slow, I am confident that with co ordination of these activities a greater impression can be made on the establishment and a better deal can be won for our People both Aboriginal and Islander.

Mr. W. C. Wentworth, Minister in Charge of Aboriginal Affairs has stated "Our aim should not be to force the Aborigines into a way of life that to so many of them is still alien. We should aim rather at restoring that confidence and self respect which we took away".

"Aboriginals still living in a tribal situation on reserves and pastoral properties face some of the most difficult problems of all. These Aboriginals are the remaining heirs to traditional Aboriginal culture. If we do further destroy Aboriginal culture it will not only be Aboriginals but the whole National life of Australia that will be poorer".

(Quote from Abschol statement 16/9/70)

We heartily agree with this statement. however, what a gap between such fine statements and the actions of the Government of which the Minister is part. I feel that Mr. Wentworth's views of this question should be the property of the Nation and its Governments both State and Federal and legislation promulgated to guarantee this.

Some matters of internal interest in regards to the Federal Council.

Over the years this body has been the motivating body of many actions that has assisted the Advancement of Aboriginal and Island People in our 14 years of existance. Today there seems to be a need for a review of our organisation and its future.

Finance is always a problem and the Federal Council is not a beneficiary to the wealth of the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, mainly because we are actively engaged against the racist policies of all our Governments.

The Trade Unions have been our mainstay. Perhaps in this way National and State Union organisations could be requested to, in an organised way, be encouraged to play a bigger part in our life with joint activity on policy, basic movements and of course, finance. Trade Unions may be willing to come into some Bureau activity to ensure that our common struggle for human dignity is able to continue at a much higher rate.

In the meantime, down to earth priorities in what is essential to our future, should be worked out and adhered to, as a guide to the direction of activities between our conferences.

We need more and not less activists out among our People, working with our People.

This to me is the most important side, coupled with a regular flow of propaganda explaining our viewpoint in the many ways that are open to us. The Executive in my view has an impossible task in its present set-up.

The small involvement of forces at the top and the restrictions placed on collective leadership form the consequences of such organisation.

The year that lies ahead must be accompanied by a realisation of organisation changes necessary to improve and organise, and think in terms of today.

Therefore, it is my firm view that 1971 must see changes in our approach from the



Federal level down. The coming together of affiliates in Conference such as this one is very good and allows us to exchange views and arrive at mutually considered conclusions. Closer consultations with other bodies such as A. C. T. U. and State Labour Councils can no doubt be cemented for in reality ours is a common struggle with we Aboriginal and Islands People struggling to ensure that our People are treated as human beings.

1970's Easter Conference of this Council in Canberra went into session sharply divided on issues of the functions of Council, and after three days of fruitless discussion with confusion on all sides we finally disbanded in an atmosphere of uncertainty for the future.

Today we are all the wiser for over the past year we have had the opportunity to face up to the reality of the needs of our people.

For the Tribal Council it meant starting from scratch, where our Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders began 13 years before and had achieved national recognition of its organisation that has won numerous reforms in Aboriginal Advancement.

The Federal Council of the Advancement Organisation was also faced with many problems to re-organise its depleted forces and strive to attain the same effectiveness as in the period prior to 1970.

Many of the scars of last Easter still remain and will no doubt be with us for some time, but there is another side also.

There are many organisations concerning themselves with Aboriginal advancement in one form or another, some more to the fore than others, how best can the direction of all these activities be channelled so that our people will benefit and not be the victims of disunity. I stand on the basic view that there is room for all to unite, keep your own identity if you wish, but at all times identify yourself with the aim of advancement.

I have often said and I think it is worthwhile repeating, what is in a name, irrespective of what it is, it is policy and effectiveness that counts when the results of the activity are brought together, petty jealousies can only bring disaster.

In Conclusion -

We are faced with big responsibilities for the advancement of Aboriginal and Island People, our deliberations are chock full of controversial and provocative matters.

Controversial as to how best to tackle them, provocative in that we have had enough

of procrastinations by the authorities concerned with pinpricking officialdom at all levels.

Frankness in tackling these issues and aimed solely for the betterment of our people can only guarantee that when we conclude our 1971 Easter Conference we will be a much stronger movement, united in policy and organisational avenues on the programme we hammer out this weekend.



FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Pimlico Hall, James Cook University, Townsville Q'ld. 9th - 11th April, 1971.

AGENDA

Friday, 9th April, 1971.

1.30 pm. All Aboriginal and Islander Session.  
All other Delegates to assemble to discuss: "RACISM".  
CHAIRMAN: Mr. G. Bryant, M.P.  
TO LEAD DISCUSSION: Mr. J. Horner, Mr. J. Baker, Mr. A. Duncan.

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7.30 pm. Opening Session.  
CHAIRMAN: Mr. J. McGinness, President FCAATSI.  
Returning Officer from AGM to be elected.  
SPEAKER:

8.30 pm. Reports. "RACISM IN AUSTRALIA" ( State Secretaries)  
SPEAKERS: Mr. Jack Davis Western Australia.  
Mrs. Win Branson South Australia.  
Mr. Lester Bostock New South Wales.  
Mr. Jacob Abednego Torres Strait.  
Mrs. Geraldine Briggs Victoria.  
Mrs. Celia Smith Queensland.  
Mrs. Joyce Clague Northern Territory.

TO SUM UP: Mr. K. Brindle, N.S.W. Secretary FCAATSI.

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Saturday, 10th April, 1971.

9.30 am. CHAIRMAN: to be elected at All-Aboriginal Session.  
SPEAKER: Dr. B.E. Christophers. "The Queensland Trust Fund is Racist."  
10.00 am. SPEAKER: Mrs. Evelyn Scott. "Social Discrimination".  
10.30 am. MORNING TEA.  
10.45 am. Chairman to be elected at Aboriginal and Islander Session.  
Action Programme to eliminate racial discrimination.  
Mr. J. Staples, B.A. LL.B. Barrister (Law).  
Dr. N.T. Yeomans M.B. B.S. DPM. Manzcp. Dip.soc. (Health).  
1.00 pm. LUNCH.

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2.00 pm. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Dulcie Flower.  
SPEAKER: Father Tony Newman. "Land Rights and Autonomy".  
2.45 pm. Conference divides into three groups to discuss:  
1. Special problems relating to LAND RIGHTS.  
To lead discussion: Mr. Jack Davis.  
2. LEGAL DISCRIMINATION.  
To lead discussion: Mr. Ken Hampton.  
3. HEALTH  
To lead discussion: Mrs. D. Flower.

3.45 pm. AFTERNOON TEA.

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4.00 pm. Conference returns to a Plenary Session.  
CHAIRMAN: To be elected at All Aboriginal Session.  
5.00 pm. Close of Session.  
5.15 pm. BARBECUE MEAL.  
7.30 pm. Discussion will take place on the question of autonomy for Aborigines.  
Speakers: Jack Baker, Neville Perkins and Aboriginal speakers.  
CONCERT by local talent.

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Sunday, 11th April, 1971.

- 10.00 am. A combined Church Service is arranged.  
A Trade Union Meeting.  
A Women's Meeting.
11. am. MORNING TEA.
- 11.15 am. Final Session.  
SPEAKER: Mr. J. McGinness, President FCAATSI. "Discrimination in  
Employment".
- 11.45 am. Discussion.  
TO LEAD DISCUSSION: representatives of AWU.
- 12.30 pm. Close Conference.
1. 00 pm. LUNCH.
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- 2.00 pm. 1971 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF FCAATSI.  
CHAIRMAN:  
Chairman's Report.  
General Secretary's Report.  
Treasurer's Report.  
Correspondence.  
Election of Offices.  
General Business.  
Resolutions to change the Constitution.
- 4.30 pm. CLOSE MEETING.
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