Excerpts of file about Torres Strait Islander cane cutters

Excerpt 1: page 2

NNW/BY  
Ref. No. B.176.A.

21 MAR 1949

My dear Prime Minister,

I desire to inform you that about 80 Torres Strait Islanders were employed recently under Award conditions in cane-cutting in the Gordonvale district near Cairns.

Taxation deductions, including Social Services deductions, were made from their wages.

When six of these men applied through the Queensland Director of Native Affairs to the Social Service Officer at Cairns for Unemployment Benefit, a decision was given that they were ineligible for such Benefit.

Apart from being taxpayers, these men, some of whom are married, are ex-servicemen and financial members of the Australian Workers’ Union.

I should be pleased if you would cause the case of these men to be investigated, with a view to their being accorded the same Social Service rights as are extended to whites.

Your advice in regard to this matter in due course would be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,  
(Sgd.) E.M. Hanlon  
PREMIER.

The Director-General of Social Services.

Referred, by direction, for favour of advice.

H.L. Lewley  
Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department.

The Right Honourable  
the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth,  
CANBERRA. A.C.T.

ACKNOWLEDGED

Mr. Gallagher, asked by telephone to provide details of all.

Excerpt 2: page 3

N.Q.344/1/8

26th April, 1949.

MEMORANDUM for:

The Director-General,  
Department of Social Services.

I desire to invite your attention to my minute of 28th March, 1949, covering copy of a letter from the Premier of Queensland, concerning the question of extending Social Services rights to certain Torres Strait Islanders recently employed in cane-cutting in Queensland.

I should be glad to be favoured with your advice in the matter.

F. Strahan  
Secretary

Excerpt 3: page 4

Q.344/1/18

19 MAY 1949

Dear Mr. Hanlon,

I desire to refer to your letter No. B.1764 of 21st March, 1949, in regard to six Torres Strait Islanders who had made application for unemployment benefit.

Some difficulty has been experienced in tracing the six claims for unemployment benefit received from Torres Strait Islanders referred to by you. It appears, however, that there may be the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| REDACTED | * Rejected |
| REDACTED | * Granted on appeal |
| REDACTED | * Rejected (failed to lodge income statements as required) |
| REDACTED | * Rejected |
| REDACTED | * Rejected (failed to lodge income statements as required) |
| REDACTED | * Rejected. |

Your letter, however, implies that you refer to six claims from cane cutters whereas the claim from REDACTED shows that up to 21st December, 1948, he was working for the Cairns Gas Supply Company and the claim of REDACTED shows that up to 4th November, 1948, he was working for J. Zapher, Trochus Shell Merchant of Innisfail. It is possible, therefore, that some claims have not yet been traced.

It appears that wrong principles were applied in rejecting the claims of REDACTED REDACTED and REDACTED, and the Director, Queensland, is reviewing these cases.

The claims of REDACTED and REDACTED were rejected because they failed to lodge income statements and the rejection had nothing to do with the fact that they were Torres Strait Islanders.

It would be appreciated if you would issue instructions to appropriate officers to bring under the notice of the Director, Queensland, any other cases where unemployment or sickness benefit claims of Torres Strait Islanders have been rejected.

Yours faithfully,

J.B. Chifley  
Prime Minister.

The Director-General of Social Services.

Referred, by direction, in connection with your memorandum No. C.S.41/G.592/DG. Of 18th May, 1949.

Secretary,  
Prime Minister’s Department.  
  
Hon. E.W. Hanlon, M.L.A.,  
Premier of Queensland,  
BRISBANE.