

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

1974—Parliamentary Paper No. 227

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on
Aboriginal Affairs

Report on the
**Present Conditions
of Yirrkala People**

1974

*Brought up and
ordered to be printed 25 November 1974*

THE GOVERNMENT PRINTER OF AUSTRALIA
CANBERRA 1975

MEMBERS OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

28TH PARLIAMENT

Mr M.D. Cross M.P. (Chairman)
The Hon. W.C. Wentworth M.P. (Deputy Chairman)
Mr A. Ashley-Brown M.P.
Mr F.W. Collard M.P.
Mr J. FitzPatrick M.P.
The Hon. R.J.D. Hunt M.P.
Mr A.W. Jarman M.P.
The Hon. A.S. Peacock M.P. (a) (b)
Mr R.W. Thorburn M.P.

- (a) Hon. A.S. Peacock M.P. resigned 21 August 1973 and was replaced by Mr R.N. Bonnett M.P.
- (b) The appointment of Mr R.N. Bonnett M.P. was terminated at the end of the First Session in February 1974. He was replaced by Mr P.M. Ruddock M.P.

Clerk to the Committee : Mr M. Adamson

29TH PARLIAMENT

Mr M.D. Cross M.P. (Chairman)
The Hon. W.C. Wentworth M.P. (Deputy Chairman)
Mr G. Clayton M.P.
Mr F.W. Collard M.P.
Mr J.S. Dawkins M.P.
The Hon. R.J.D. Hunt M.P.
Mr A.W. Jarman M.P.
Mr P.M. Ruddock M.P.
Mr R.W. Thorburn M.P.

Clerk to the Committee : Mr M. Adamson

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Principal Recommendations	v - ix
The Committee	1
The Present Reference	2
- 1963 Inquiry	2
- Subsequent Events	6
The Inquiry	8
The Committee's Report	9
The Yirrkala Community	11
Action on 1963's Committee's Recommendations	18
The Mining Lease	26
Consultation	34
Royalties	39
Economy/Employment	44
Access to Aboriginal Land	50
The Environment	57
Decentralisation	63
Alcohol	69
Health	76
Education	83
Water Supply	93
Communications	95
Conclusion	98
Appendix I	99
Appendix II	104

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee's more important recommendations are listed below. All conclusions and recommendations are underlined in the text as they occur.

1. The Government should take a positive role in working out with the Aboriginals and Nabalco Pty Ltd a satisfactory formula whereby the Aboriginal community can freely exercise its proprietary rights to the land and the mining operations can remain a viable proposition. (Page 10)
2. Negotiations should take place between the mining company, the Government and the people of Yirrkala aimed at relocating the boundary of the mining lease in a position which at least accords with the 1963 agreement. (Page 30)
3. Nabalco Pty Ltd should improve its communications with the Aboriginal community. (Page 36)
4. A scale relief model of the Gove Peninsula should be displayed at Yirrkala for demonstration purposes. (Page 36)

5. An essential part of company policy should be to raise effective communication with the Aboriginal people to a high level of commitment. (Page 37)
6. Should the mining agreement be re-negotiated the company should firmly commit itself to direct negotiation and consultation. (Page 37)
7. The Aboriginal people should organise themselves to secure and protect their interests. (Page 37)
8. Income from royalties and other services should be substantially increased. (Page 41)
9. Of the royalty money paid to the Yirrkala community the higher the percentage devoted to long term investments the better. (Page 42)
10. Measures should be taken immediately to actively police the possession of permits for those going beyond the mining lease boundary and to prosecute those who contravene the Ordinance. (Page 52)

11. The Aboriginal people should give favourable consideration to requests by Nhulunbuy residents to use recreation areas within the Aboriginal Reserve. (Page 53)
12. Final decisions on matters of access to Aboriginal land should be vested in the local landowners. (Page 55)
13. The present red mud disposal area should be regarded only as a pilot operation and the future means of disposal should only be determined after a thorough analysis of effects on the local environment. (Page 61)
14. The Liquor Ordinance should be amended to allow the prohibition of bottle sales after a certain hour in areas where this is deemed necessary. (Page 75)
15. The Yirrkala Council should have the authority and facilities to apprehend and detain intoxicated Aboriginals until they can be released with safety or otherwise dealt with. (Page 75)

16. The practice of training Aboriginal health workers to go among the people, educating them on such matters as personal hygiene, nutrition and child care should be expanded and that for this program, use be made of the facilities of the Nhulunbuy hospital. (Page 81)
17. If a survey of Yirrkala Creek shows that the water is contaminated and unfit for consumption, that the water be brought from bores near the Airport. (Page 81)
18. An adult education program, run by experienced and qualified social workers and teachers, assisted where possible by interested Aboriginals, should be instituted. (Page 88)
19. An immediate study should be made by relevant departments aimed at establishing a program of adult training courses, especially in the trades. (Page 89)
20. The upgrading of existing communications facilities is desirable and should be undertaken as soon as possible. (Page 96)

21. The extension of the Arnhem Highway should not proceed without the full and considered consent of all the Aboriginal clans whose land the road affects. (Page 97)

THE COMMITTEE

By resolution on 18 July 1974 the House of Representatives agreed that a Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs be appointed :

... to inquire into and report on matters referred to it by resolution of the House, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs or by motion of the Committee within the following terms :

- (a) to consult with Aboriginal and Island people on policies and programs for their advancement;
- (b) to examine the present situation of Aboriginal and Island people, recommend policies and improvements; and
- (c) evaluate the effect of policies and programs on Aboriginal and Island people.

The appointment of this Committee followed the appointment during the 28th Parliament of a similar Committee of the House of Representatives which had identical terms of reference.

The present Committee was empowered by the House to make use of evidence and records of the previous Committee.

THE PRESENT REFERENCE

At a meeting on 23 July 1974 the Committee resolved :

That having regard to the recommendations of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Grievances of Yirrkala Aborigines, Arnhem Land Reserve, made in the report of 29 October 1963, this Committee examine the present conditions of the Yirrkala people and the carrying out of those recommendations.

This resolution is identical to one carried by the previous Committee and on which that Committee had taken evidence in Darwin, Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy, and in Canberra in February, March and April 1974.

1963 Inquiry

The House of Representatives Select Committee on Grievances of Yirrkala Aborigines, Arnhem Land Reserve, was appointed by motion on 12 September 1963 :

... to enquire into the grievances of certain aboriginal people of Yirrkala relating to the excision of land from the Aboriginal Reserve in Arnhem Land, contained in their Petition presented and read to the House on the 28th August 1963.

The English translation of the Petition

read :

1. That nearly 500 people of the above tribes are residents of the land excised from the Aboriginal Reserve in Arnhem Land.
2. That the procedures of the excision of this land and the fate of the people on it were never explained to them beforehand, and were kept secret from them.
3. That when Welfare Officers and Government officials came to inform them of decisions taken without them and against them, they did not undertake to convey to the Government in Canberra the views and feelings of the Yirrkala aboriginal people.
4. That the land in question has been hunting and food gathering land for the Yirrkala tribes from time immemorial; we were all born here.
5. That places sacred to the Yirrkala people, as well as vital to their livelihood are in the excised land, especially Melville Bay.
6. That the people of this area fear that their needs and interests will be completely ignored as they have been ignored in the past, and they fear that the fate which has overtaken the Larrakeah tribe will overtake them.

7. And they humbly pray that the Honourable the House of Representatives will appoint a Committee, accompanied by competent interpreters, to hear the views of the Yirrkala people before permitting the excision of this land.

8. They humbly pray that no arrangements be entered into with any company which will destroy the livelihood and independence of the Yirrkala people.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray God to help you and us.

Following inquiry the Committee reported to the House of Representatives on 29 October 1963. The Report contained the following recommendations :

- (a) That the excised portion of Gove Peninsula be declared a protected area in order that people other than Aborigines shall be prevented from hunting there.
- (b) That early action be taken to carry out a complete survey and early development of water resources.
- (c) That the Yirrkala people be consulted as early as possible on the location of their sacred places.
- (d) That the sacred places be set aside (perhaps under the Historical Objects Ordinance) for their exclusive use.

- (e) That the hill from which the artists obtain their pigments be set aside as an inalienable reserve for their use and benefit.
- (f) That a proclamation be made to prevent unauthorised persons entering the Mission area.
- (g) That some building lots within the town site be reserved for Aborigines.
- (h) That homes for European and Aboriginal Australians be developed simultaneously.
- (i) That compensation for loss of traditional occupancy be made by way of -
 - (i) land grant
 - (ii) capital grant
 - (iii) monetary compensation.
- (j) That the Yirrkala people be consulted on the location of the proposed town.
- (k) That, when the town develops, social service benefits be paid directly to the people of Yirrkala.

The Committee also recommended :

That for the next ten years there shall be a Standing Committee of the House of Representatives to examine from time to time, the conditions of the Yirrkala people and the carrying out of this Committee's recommendations.

Subsequent Events

Until 1973 no action had been taken by the House of Representatives to appoint a Standing Committee with the task suggested in the final recommendation. In the meantime many of the matters about which the Yirrkala people* had expressed their apprehension in 1963 became realities. The township of Nhulunbuy with a population of 4,000 people became established on the slopes of Mt Saunders, the construction of the large alumina plant was completed, and mining operations for bauxite commenced in earnest and a large scale export trade in bauxite and alumina began through a developed port - all upon the lands of some of the Yirrkala people.

The question of Aboriginal land rights has been uppermost in the minds of the Yirrkala people since the 1963 Committee's Inquiry, especially in connection with the case in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory of Milirrpum and others V Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of Australia and subsequently as a result of the judicial inquiry into Aboriginal land rights recently conducted by Mr Justice Woodward. The Yirrkala people are, of course, well known for their independence and forthrightness on questions of their interests and welfare. Their petition to the Parliament

* The Committee uses the phrase 'Yirrkala people' for reasons of convenience without implying that all the Aboriginals at Yirrkala, the site of the Mission, identify with that place.

in 1963, and their subsequent representations, including their opposition to the granting of the liquor licence at the hotel in Nhulunbuy, are illustrations of this.

In the absence of any action to implement the final recommendations of the 1963 Committee and as mining operations and processing are now well past the planning and establishment phase, the Committee appointed in the 28th Parliament believed that it would be timely and appropriate to examine the present position of the Aboriginal people at Yirrkala. It considered that the Inquiry should encompass the other recommendations of the 1963 Committee and that an attempt should be made to assess the impact of the development of the bauxite resource on the Yirrkala people. This approach was endorsed by the present Committee.

THE INQUIRY

The Committee appointed by the 28th Parliament, held a number of public hearings at Darwin, Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala over a period of 8 days early in February 1974. Oral evidence was given by 43 witnesses of whom 12 were Aborigines. Considerable interest was shown in these hearings, particularly by the Aboriginal people at Yirrkala. Evidence was also taken in Canberra on 19 March and 1 April 1974.

The present Committee concluded the public hearings by taking evidence in Sydney and Canberra in September and October 1974. A Sub-committee consisting of Members who had not previously been to Yirrkala, made a visit in October 1974.

A list of witnesses is attached as Appendix I.

THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

The Committee's report now follows. The more important recommendations have already been listed at pages v to ix. All conclusions and recommendations are underlined in the text as they occur.

At the outset it should be stressed that any comment or observation made at present on the conditions of the Yirrkala people must allow for the fact that although Mr Justice Woodward has presented a final report on land rights to the Government and the Government has indicated that, in general terms, it accepts his recommendations, no legislative action has yet been taken.

The Committee's examination of the land rights question has therefore had to recognise that there will be a further lapse of time before Mr Justice Woodward's recommendations are fully considered and new Government policy formulated and implemented. It was considered whether it would be better to await the introduction of the measures suggested by Mr Justice Woodward before the Committee reported, but it seemed that it would be more beneficial to finalise this reference and present the report now than await that action.

The Committee in the report that follows recognises that Mr Justice Woodward's recommendations will bear on many of the things the Committee has to say. While the welfare of the Aboriginal people may not be immediately affected by the implementation of his recommendations, the future relationship between them and the mining company will certainly be different. The basis upon which the mining operation now stands could possibly be replaced by one in which the Aboriginal community has a stronger legal interest. While the Committee agrees that this may be the prerogative of the people if their newly acquired land rights are to have any meaning, it is also obvious that the original agreement, as embodied in the Mining (Gove Peninsula Nabalco Agreement) Ordinance 1968 of the Northern Territory, between Swiss Aluminium Australia Pty Ltd and the Government cannot be set aside. Because of this the Committee recommends that the Government take a positive role in working out with the Aboriginals and the company a satisfactory formula whereby the Aboriginal community can freely exercise its proprietary rights to the land and the mining operations can remain a viable proposition.

THE YIRRKALA COMMUNITY

Yirrkala is located on the Gove Peninsula on the north-eastern corner of Arnhem Land, 14 miles (23 km) south of the recently established township of Nhulunbuy. Because of the geographical position and the rich natural resources of the Gove area, the people who have inhabited it, for centuries have had contact with seafarers such as the Macassans who visited regularly to trade in items such as trepang. They also encountered Dutch and English mariners. The Macassan influence was strong and elements of Macassan culture found their way into that of the Aboriginal people.

Contact with these visitors continued until 1907 when for customs reasons the Australian Government prohibited further trading and from about that time the area increasingly became a focus of attention of the Australian people. The most important contact made after this early period came to an end was by the various churches which were soon to establish missions there. The Yirrkala Mission was one of these, it being founded in 1934 by the Reverend Wilbur Chaseling of the Methodist Overseas Mission. The Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve in which the Mission is located, was proclaimed in 1931 and the only major excision from

it has been the 140 sq. miles containing the bauxite leases at Gove.

With the establishment of the Mission the life of the Aboriginal people began to change. They developed a dependence on the Mission and the subsistence hunting activities and other elements of their traditional way of life became less significant. Yirrkala became a focal point and Aboriginal people from the region began to congregate there, even some whose traditional land was relatively remote. As a result, a firmly established settlement grew up with the Mission being active in constructing houses, in educating the people, and in establishing gardens and other enterprises associated with the new European influence.

World War II made its impact on Yirrkala through the building of an R.A.A.F. aerodrome at Gove from which flying operations were conducted. After the war bauxite was discovered and although many plans were prepared for the development of the resource, it was not until 1968 that a formal agreement was reached between the Australian Government and Nabalco Pty Ltd. The company was granted a lease over an area which at one point approaches to within half a mile of the Yirrkala township. In the meantime the Mission continued its work and as a result of the increasing contact with visitors such as those concerned with the European

Launcher Development Organisation tracking station at Gove, and Government welfare authorities, the Aboriginal people came under increasing pressure to adapt to a less traditional way of life. This contact was boosted by the improvement of communications, and whereas once the area was serviced by a small mission boat which ferried supplies from Darwin, it is now serviced daily by air and monthly by sea.

The people themselves have also become active travellers, making trips to Darwin and on some occasions to southern capitals. The reasons for this are varied but the people often travel for educational, sporting or health purposes, as delegates to church sponsored conventions, as members of dance groups, or as exhibiting artists.

The advent of mining activities and the township of Nhulunbuy have had a dramatic effect upon the people at Yirrkala. In this Report the Committee draws attention to some of the problems and attempts to suggest remedies or compromises. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to describe briefly some of the social background at Yirrkala so that a better understanding can be gained of the Committee's assessment.

Gathered recently at Yirrkala which is located on the traditional land of the Rirratjingu clan, were

some 809 people from that and other clans whose land either adjoins that of the Rirratjingu or is in the general area. All belong to one or other of these patrilineal clans which as social formations provide links with the traditional life of the region and preserve very close associations with land, geographical areas, totemic arrangements, and a wealth of ritualised lore. The number of people in these clans at the time of the Committee's visit in February 1974, was :

Djapu	-	189
Dhalwangu	-	95
Gumaitj	-	196
Marrakulu	-	65
Galpu	-	51
Wangurri	-	33
Manggalili	-	32
Madarrpa	-	44
Munyuku	-	12
Warramirri	-	6
Rirratjingu	-	48
Ngaymil	-	13
Djambarrpunygu-		25
TOTAL :		<u>809</u>

Superimposed on the already complex Aboriginal social organisation there is now the social organisation introduced by Western society. Many of the principles

of the latter are, by their nature, alien to the Aboriginal people and conflict directly with principles of the traditional Aboriginal system. This clash of values has resulted in division, resentment and confusion in the minds of the people. The present conflict between the generations about the promise-system in marriage is an example.

As well as socially disruptive, there are also political forces, for no longer are the people divided into geographically separate and independent area-groups. By assembling at Yirrkala they sacrificed that independence, in part, and were forced by necessity to co-operate in ways unknown to them. It is to the credit of the people that such an exceptional adjustment has been made. The ability and motivation of the people to co-operate on important issues are apparent from their actions to gain land rights and to oppose the granting of a liquor licence to the hotel in Nhulunbuy. However, the strength of the clans still predominates and, now that a large measure of self-determination has been attained, some people have decided to demonstrate their independence by returning to live on their traditional land.

Political activity within the Yirrkala community is evidenced by the existence of formal bodies which have been organised for the self-administration of the township, for the management of traditional affairs and relations with outside interests such as Nabalco, and for the management of financial and economic matters.

The first of the formal bodies is the Town Council - which is a local government body elected to administer the municipal services of the township. While it has no legal status, it gains some authority from the Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services, which carry out the work of the United Church in North Australia. Until October 1973 the Council included European members of the community and the Superintendent of the United Church Mission, but since that date when a decision was made to grant self-determination to the people, it has operated independently, albeit with assistance from the Church when specifically requested.

The Village Council consists of tribal elders and leaders and considers traditional matters and the management of relations with the mining company and other outside interests wishing to deal with the Yirrkala people. This Council acts as a forum in which issues of contention between the clans can be discussed. By consultation with the Town Council, community involvement in the latter's decisions is more certain and its actions are therefore less likely to meet with disapproval.

The Dhanbul Community Association is an elected and incorporated body which manages income from royalties, compensation, and rent, allocates this income amongst the various clans and determines its use on projects of economic value.

However, participation of the Yirrkala people in the conduct of their own affairs has not been as effective or successful as it might have been. There are times when the people's enthusiasm can be marshalled quite effectively and with good results, but it was made quite clear to the Committee that as a result of the pressing social problems now facing them, there is apathy and a reluctance to participate. The decision to wholly conduct the administration of Yirrkala for example, was keenly taken at a public meeting held in October 1973. Operations were taken on energetically but since then enthusiasm has waned and gradually the standards of participation and results have run down. At the time of the Committee's visit this decline in activity was most apparent. Formerly flourishing enterprises such as the market garden were falling into dis-use and people were unwilling to seek employment.

Recommendation (i): That compensation for loss of traditional occupancy be made by way of -

- (i) land grant;
- (ii) capital grant;
- (iii) monetary compensation.

Legislation introduced in 1970 entitled Aboriginals to be granted General Purposes Leases over reserved lands. In 1972 an application was made on behalf of the Yirrkala community for such a lease over 5,000 square miles of north-east Arnhem Land. This was under consideration at December 1972, but with the change of policy on reserved lands at that time the matter lapsed. Since then the Government has agreed in principle to the nature and form of the land rights which will devolve on the Yirrkala community as a result of the Report of Mr Justice Woodward. The more important of these are :

- (1) Aboriginal reserve lands should be owned by Aboriginals in fee simple. The title in each case should be held by an Aboriginal corporation.
- (2) Land holding corporations should be called land trusts and they should hold land for the benefit of those having traditional interests in it or rights over it.

- (3) Legislation should provide for the preservation of traditional rights over the land concerned and for traditional landowners to be consulted before any leases, licences or permits concerning the land are granted.
- (4) The grant of title to Aboriginal land trusts must be subject to the preservation of existing rights in the land. So far as possible, those rights should be re-negotiated so that they are held direct from the Aboriginal landowners on terms acceptable to both parties.

The Government has given \$638,263 in capital assistance to the Mission for the development of Yirrkala since 1963. Other grants and loans made are as follows :

Aborigines Benefits Trust Fund

Assistance from the Aborigines Benefits Trust Funds amounted to -

Grants	\$59,370
Loans	9,400

Ten per cent of the royalties payable to the Aborigines Benefits Trust Fund as a result of the Nabalco mining from 1 January 1972 is paid to the Yirrkala community. To the end of October 1974 a total of \$132,882 has been paid comprising \$26,567 paid in 1972, \$64,615 in 1973 and \$41,699 in 1974 to date.

Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account:

Grants provided amount to \$87,295

Capital Fund:

Loans dispersed - \$136,000.

Recommendation (j): That the Yirrkala people be consulted on the location of the proposed town.

The Yirrkala community was consulted on the location of Nhulunbuy and on the boundaries of the Special Purposes Lease issued in respect of that town.

Recommendation (k): That, when the town develops, social service benefits be paid directly to the people of Yirrkala.

Social service benefit entitlements due to Aboriginals residing at Yirrkala are paid directly to them.

ECONOMY/EMPLOYMENT

Although the establishment of the mining operation and the town of Nhulunbuy has introduced the Western economic environment to the Gove area, it is a mistake to believe that the employment opportunities thereby created are necessarily of value and benefit to the Aboriginal people. Experience has shown that many people are disinterested in participating in any substantial way in the business ventures which have been established on their behalf, with the result that some ventures have either failed or are struggling. Engagement in these enterprises has proved to be unsatisfactory as some Aboriginal people have not been willing to provide the continuity of effort necessary for success.

On the other hand there are at Yirrkala probably more Aborigines more continuously and more successfully engaged in the production of artifacts and works of graphic and plastic art than anywhere else in Aboriginal Australia. This activity draws deeply on their traditional inspirations of mind, sentiment and artistic impulse. The fact that they are aware of and respond to the strong market for their work would seem to have at least two important implications. One is that their industriousness does not need a taskmaster when an opportunity they know how to take offers them a reward they want. The

other is that they are not averse from working for material gain. Evidently the non-traditional tasks on offer at Yirrkala and Nhulunbuy do not relate effort and reward in a congenial or convincing way.

For some Aboriginal people then, employment in a European sense is irrelevant to their lives and they have displayed a clear preference for occupations which are closer to their traditional life, such as artifact making and fishing. To coerce them to do otherwise is therefore quite unreasonable.

The problem at Yirrkala, as the Committee sees it, has been created by the sudden introduction of a sophisticated European social group with its attendant complex economy, its different social customs, and its industry, into an area where despite long contact with other races, the Aboriginal people are still trying to live a largely traditional way of life and obviously prefer to do so. It also seems possible that Aboriginal behaviour towards the situation may be deeply affected by preferences and antipathies which they do not, perhaps cannot, fully express and of which they may not even be conscious.

The problems facing the people are clearly those resulting from the cultural clash which manifests itself in many ways, including the reluctance of the people to quickly adapt to the

demands of the Western money economy into which they have been thrust. It has also produced other social complexities and problems characteristic of such cultural conflict.

At Yirrkala the Committee found that there are many more job vacancies than workers willing to fill them. The work available ranges in skill from labouring to truck driving and maintenance, and although some of the people have shown in the past that they have the ability to do this type of work, they lack the necessary motivation to offer, or if they do, to persist for long.

Until recently, some Aboriginal enterprises, such as the market garden, were prospering, but this prosperity was illusory for it was less the Aboriginal people who were responsible for the success than the United Church Mission. The Church supplied not only the advice and the professional assistance, but also much of the labour required to keep the enterprise functioning successfully. The withdrawal of this assistance and direction following the decision to encourage greater independence and self-determination in the Aboriginal community has directly resulted in a serious decline of the market gardens. The brickworks would seem to be an exception but here also the basic continuity is provided by the European manager.

The Committee considers it unreasonable to expect the Aboriginal people to conform closely or strictly to the standards by which other people live within Australian society. The Aboriginal people at Yirrkala live in a fertile environment and because of their traditional emphasis upon the skill of the hunter, fisher and collector, they have never had the need or desire to turn to a more agricultural subsistence or to one which involves business and production. To moralise upon their unwillingness to follow the pattern now visible to them at Nhulunbuy is therefore quite wrong and the Committee emphasises that a decision to adopt the Western work ethic is one which can only be made by the people themselves.

In the meantime the independence of the people should be safeguarded and they should be encouraged in the pursuits they choose to follow. These pursuits may be wide and varied and may not be related in any way to a modern mining and processing venture. The Aboriginal people in fact, did express to the Committee their dissatisfaction with working for the mining company and having visited the large and noisy alumina plant, the Committee can quite understand such an attitude. Any stipulation that the mining company employ Aboriginal people may therefore be quite inappropriate. The Committee would be satisfied to see them engaged on their own ventures which are more suitable to their temperament, interests and abilities.

Nabalco has a difficult task for while it may wish to employ Aboriginal people and to train them for skilled jobs, the people are reluctant and are needed in any case to work for the Aboriginal enterprises. The latter is obviously the more sensible and practical course to follow and the Committee is of the opinion that the most valuable contribution the company can make at this stage is to provide contracts on which the Aboriginal people can work on their own account. This has been the practice of the company for some time and the Committee feels that until such time as there are sufficient skilled people in Yirrkala to satisfy the demands of their own businesses, it should continue.

In the field of social welfare, the Committee sees great danger, in the application of measures used to meet difficulties in some other Aboriginal communities to problems at Yirrkala. The Committee notes, for example, the views of a number of witnesses, including Aboriginal leaders, that the liberal distribution of welfare funds only impeded the development and independence of the people. The Yirrkala community is a relatively prosperous one, it being the recipient of substantial royalties and other payments from the bauxite-alumina venture. The area has other natural resources and there is some unused scope for Aboriginal enterprise. Additional welfare funds, therefore are probably unnecessary and, in fact, could be counter productive.

With this in mind the Committee views very seriously the effect of the Government's decision early this year to replace 'training allowance' with award wages and unemployment benefits for those who cannot be placed in the workforce. At Yirrkala where labour is available but not forthcoming, unemployment benefits, in the Committee's opinion, should only be paid to people who meet the same criteria as apply to the rest of the Australian community. In other words, the sudden injection of funds into the community without taking account of the social consequences may have undesirable effects.

CONCLUSION

Over some 9 months the Committee has laboured in its study of the relationships between the Aboriginal people of Yirrkala and modern Australian society.

Members are grateful to all who gave us evidence or assisted in any way - notably the Aboriginal people themselves, representatives of the United Church Mission, Nabalco Pty Ltd and officers of the Australian Public Service. The Committee greatly appreciated the wise counsel and good fellowship of the Specialist Adviser, Emeritus Professor W.E.H. Stanner C.M.G., who helped all to a better understanding of the Aboriginal people.

The contribution made by all members of the Committee in the 28th Parliament is acknowledged. The Committee also places on record the enthusiasm and hard work of the Clerk to the Committee, Mr M. Adamson, and its Research Officer, Mr P. Reece.

November 1974

M.D. CROSS
Chairman