let's talk together

Jumbunna

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dss Social Security

In its 50th year, the Department of Social Security can proudly boast the special efforts undertaken to ensure that all qualified ATSI people have access to DSS advice, information and entitlements.

Currently, through a variety of programs and services, ATSI people, despite geographic remoteness or isolation and language or cultural barriers have non-restricted access to pensions, benefits and allowances.

Unfortunately, this was not always the case. Since the turn of the century, ATSI people were often excluded from pensions of a national nature. Prior to 1939 when social services payments were administered by the Department of Treasury, some of its national pensions were not available to all people in Australia. Under the Commonwealth Age and Invalid Pensions Act 1908 and 1910, "Aboriginal Natives" of Australia were disqualified from payment.

In 1941 when the newly established Department of Social Services began operations, not much had changed for "Aboriginal Natives". Among the first initiatives of the Department of Social Services was the introduction of a new payment called "child endowment".

Unbeknown to many Aboriginal people they were receiving their Social Security entitlements in the form of rations, cheap clothes, blankets, and housing.

This payment began in 1941 and was payable to Aboriginals if they were not nomadic or if the children, for whom they claimed the payment, were wholly dependent on State or Commonwealth Government support.

Although given restricted access to child endowment, Aboriginals were still disqualified from receiving other pensions such as Age and Invalid Pensions and Maternity Allowance until 1942. These relevant acts were amended and in 1942 when "Aboriginal Natives" of Australia theoretically became eligible to receive these payments.

by Lorraine Randall,
Director ATSIS.

The period from 1941-44 saw the introduction of two other new Social Services payments: - Widows Pension (1942), and Unemployment & Sickness Benefits (1944).

The introduction of these payments continued to disciminate against Aboriginal people. Although theoretically, under the Social Services Act Aboriginal poeple were eligible to receive these pensions, benefits or allowances, the Act still excluded Aboriginal people who were 'not exempt from the control of their state or territory, nomadic or primitive and not of good character, nor of an acceptable standard of intelligence and development.'

In 1959, the Social Services Act was further amended and most disqualifications relating to Aborigines were removed - except for those who were regarded as nomadic or primitive. These amendments came into operation in February 1960.

Many of those ATSI people who received payments and lived on church missions, government settlements or pastoral properties did not see their payments or only received a portion of it. This portion was often received "in kind" consisting of tea, flour, sugar, rice, meat and clothing.

Unbeknown to many Aboriginal people they were receiving their Social Security entitlements in the form of rations, cheap clothes, and blankets, housing etc.

In 1966, the Department of Social Services decided that all specific references to Aboriginal people were to be removed from the Social Services Act, including the provisions of disqualifying Aboriginal natives who were nomadic or primative from receiving benefits or pensions.

In the last year over $2.7 million was spent to specifically ensure full access to DSS advice, information and entitlements by the once excluded "Aboriginal Natives" of Australia.

It was only in the early 1970s that many Aboriginal people began to receive their full entitlements to Unemployment and Sickness Benefits, even though some were

DSS TIMELINE - ATSI ASPECTS

Year	Event	Year	Event
1901	Federation	1975	First ALO appointed (Alice Springs RO)
1909	Age Pension Payments - Dept of Treasury	1987	Community Agent Program established. 11 trial communities chosen
1910	Invalid Pension Payments - Dept of Treasury		
1939	Dept of Social Services established	1988	Remote Visiting Teams established 6 Teams began nationally in specific remote regions.
1941-44	Child Endowment Payments Widows Pension Unemployment Benefit Sickness Benefit Available to ATSI people if they were not nomadic or if children dependent on State/Commonwealth support.	1989	Support Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents launched 14 SNAP Officers started work in regions throughout Australia.
1942	Aboriginal Natives became eligible if exempt from Acts	1989	ATSI Interpreter Program First ATSI Interpreter commenced Broome RO
1959	Act amended - only primitive and nomadic exempted	1989	Community Development Employment Program
1966	All references to Aboriginal people withdrawn from Act	1989	ATSI Management Program
1970s	ATSI people began receiving payments as individuals	1989	ATSI Information Program

entitled to such payments in 1944.

Even after 1966, when all specific references to Aboriginals were removed from the Social Services Act, very few were eligible for Unemployment Benefit because of the "work test". Those who lived on missions or government settlements were excluded by policy and service delivery mechanisms until 1976.

During the last 18 years (1973-1990) the Department has introduced several initiatives to improve services offered by DSS to residents of communities and towns with predominately Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

In 1973 it was proposed by the then Minister for Social Security, Bill Hayden MP to establish specialised staff to liaise with Aboriginal organisations and communities.

This was given effect four years later when an Aboriginal Welfare Unit - the forerunner to the current

After almost 15 years since their commencement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers, are still servicing clients on a One on One basis

ATSIS - was formed at Central Office, Canberra. One of the main objectives of the Welfare Unit was to administer a scheme of Aboriginal Liaison and Welfare officers attached to state and selected regional

the Alice Springs Regional Office the Department employed its first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer.

During the last 5 years, because of the remoteness and isolation of many ATSI communities, some initiatives specifically targeted remote or isolated ATSI clients who experience significant difficulties in claiming or receiving their correct entitlement.

In 1987, the Department embarked on a pilot program where 11 ATSI community organisations were funded to employ a person to look after the Social Security interests in the local community.

In 1988, 6 remote visiting teams were established to spend specific periods in ATSI communities to handle all DSS matters of that community.

The establishment in 1989 of the first ATSI interpreter service in Broome WA, initiated a DSS commitment to provide services to ATSI clients who do not speak English or who have significant difficulty speaking English.

Presently, ATSI clients are experiencing unequalled levels of service delivery and policy development. In the last financial year over $2.7 million was spent to specifically ensure full access to DSS advice, information and entitlements by the once excluded "Aboriginal Natives" of Australia.

Events which influenced Income Maintenance Policy and Delivery to ATSI clients.

Over the last 50 years, there has been significant events which influenced the changes to the Department's legislation and the development of service delivery to Aboriginal and Islander people.

Segregation on Mission, Settlements & Pastoral Properties

In the late 1880s Aboriginal and Islander people were being forced to live on missions, government settlements and pastoral properties for their protection.

Because of this they had limited access to payments such as Unemployment Benefits. If they met the criteria their pension or allowance would be paid to an authority on their behalf.

Citizenship, Equal Rights, Records and Award Wages.

Records

When ATSI people were forced or encouraged to live on missions, pastoral properties and government settlements, dates of birth, parents' names, marriages etc were not always recorded, were changed, were guessed or misspelt.

Therefore, many ATSI people still have problems when applying for benefits and pensions from the Department of Social Security today such as lack of identification papers and birth certificates.

Delivery to ATSI clients—*continued from page 7*

Award wages

Another important catalyst for change was the decision by the Arbitration Commission in 1965 to grant equal pay to Aboriginal Pastoral workers in the Northern Territory.

This was seen not only as a step forward for award wages but also for equal rights, land rights, and access to the normal benefits and services accessible to all Australians - including Social Security Unemployment Benefits.

Citizenship and Equal Rights

Lobbying by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (FCAATSI) in 1964 drew attention on the Commonwealth Constitution which discriminated against Aboriginal people.

The FCAATSI lobbied to have these offensive clauses deleted from the Commonwealth Constitution. The Holt Government legislated to have these words deleted from the consitution.

As a part of the process a referendum was held on 17 May 1967. The positive outcome of this referendum made Aboriginal people Australian citizens, giving them the same rights as all other Australians.

Aboriginal Participation in World War II

One public event which acted as a pressure for amendments to the Social services Act was World War II.

During World War II Aboriginal Australian and black American soldiers shared a common experience of racial discrimination. However, Aboriginals learnt that despite the prejudice suffered by black people in America, the black Americans had greater access to Social Security. When this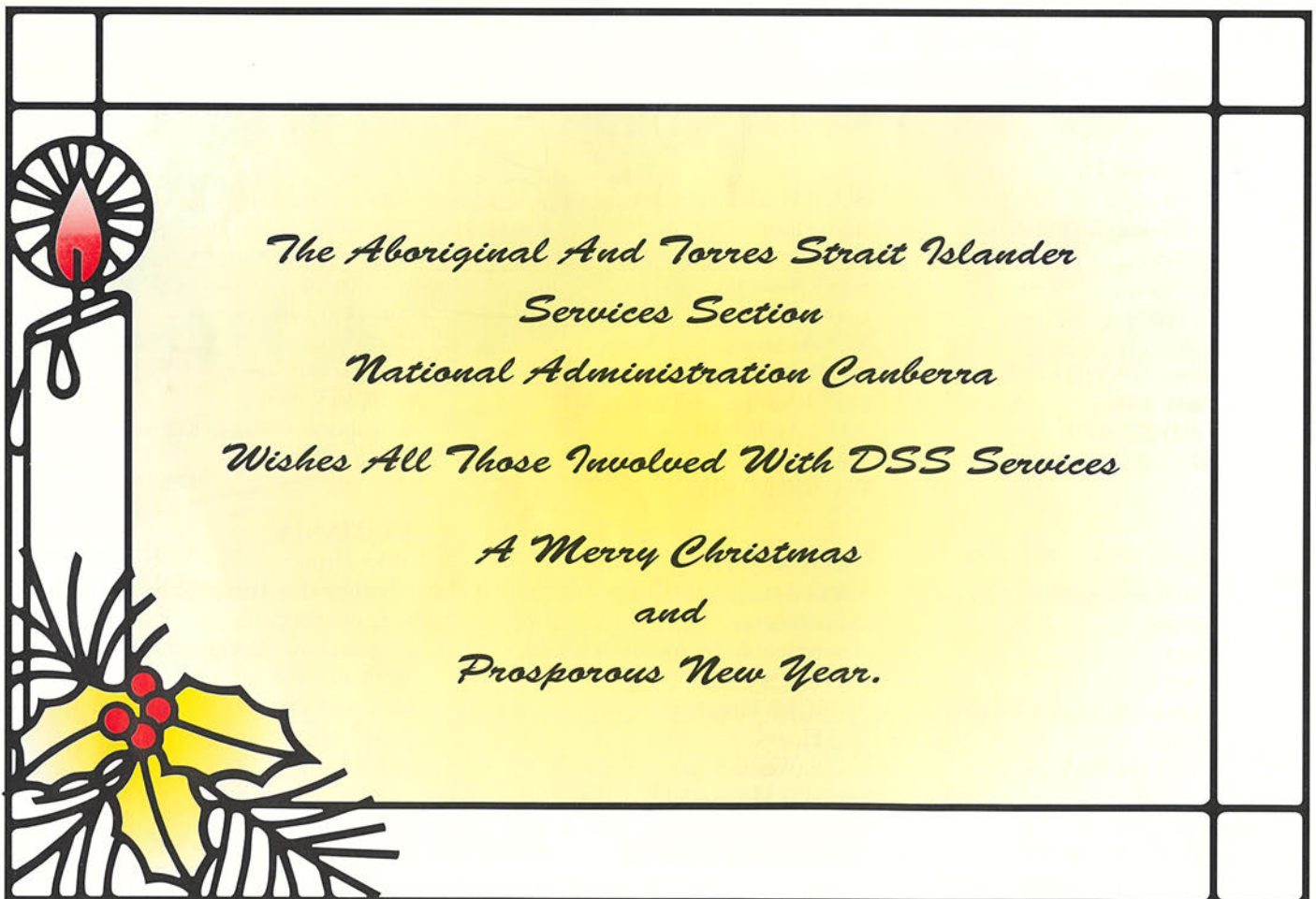 became known by the broader community there was mounting pressure to give Aboriginal people access to Social Security benefits.

Access to Benefits and Service Delivery.

It has only been over the last 15 years (1975-90) that the Department of Social security, at Central, State and Regional Office levels, has endeavoured to address a whole range of issure relating to services and programs for ATSI residents in remote areas.

One of the initial strategies introduced to overcome these problems was the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander section in Canberra.

Additional initiatives included the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers (then called Aboriginal Welfare Officers and Aboriginal Counter Officers who were placed in selected Regional Offices.

The Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander
Services Section
National Administration Canberra

Wishes All Those Involved With DSS Services

A Merry Christmas
and
Prosporous New Year.

Department of
Social Security

Annual Report
1990–91

50 Years of
Service to
Australia
1941–1991

Social Security

PART THREE:
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A HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT

THE 1940s

The Department of Social Services 1941

Australia made an early entry into the area of pensions when, in September 1900, New South Wales became the first of the then Australian colonies to introduce legislation for a non-contributory age pension scheme. Denmark had introduced a form of non-contributory old-age pensions in 1891 and New Zealand in 1898.

Following Federation in 1901, other Australian States explored the possibility of introducing old-age pensions. However, when the Federal Government introduced an Australia-wide scheme for the old-age pension in July 1909, this new scheme superseded schemes the States had previously established. An Australia-wide invalid pension scheme came into operation in December 1910. Both old-age and invalid pensions were non-contributory and were funded from consolidated revenue. In 1912 maternity allowances were introduced. This was a lump sum cash grant payable to a mother on the birth of a child.

Proposals to place pensions on a social insurance basis were considered in 1928 and again in 1938 but were not implemented.

Before 1941, pensions and maternity allowances were paid by the Commissioner of Pensions in the Department of the Treasury, but in 1941 the new Department of Social Services began to operate as a separate entity and assumed responsibility for these and new Commonwealth payments and services.

A Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security was appointed in 1941

The staff of the Pensions Section of the Federal Treasury in Tasmania, circa 1914. Responsibility for pensions and maternity allowances was transferred to the newly created Department of Social Services in 1941.

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'to report on ways and means of improving social and living conditions in Australia and of rectifying any anomalies in existing legislation'[1].

This Committee made broad ranging recommendations including the introduction of widows' pensions and unemployment benefits.

The first of the new payments was child endowment introduced in 1941. This provided a regular flat-rate, non means-tested cash payment to parents (usually the mother) for children after the first. A New South Wales scheme, which had been introduced in 1927, was abolished at the same time.

Widows' pensions were introduced in 1942. As in the case of age and invalid pensions they were flat-rate means-tested payments financed from general revenue. Those eligible included deserted wives, divorced women and women whose husbands were in prison or a mental hospital. Applicants were required to have resided continuously in Australia for a period of five years immediately before applying for pension. The new scheme superseded the New South Wales Widow's Pension.

There were several developments in 1943. Funeral benefits were introduced; these were lump sum grants payable for the funeral costs of a pensioner. Wife's Allowance was introduced for a married male pensioner with a dependent spouse. A reciprocal agreement on social security was concluded with New Zealand. In addition, automatic cost-of-living adjustments to pension rates first

introduced in 1933 were repealed. Their application would have resulted in a rate reduction in that year.

There was a major extension of the social security system in 1945 with the introduction of Commonwealth unemployment and sickness benefits in the form of flat-rate payments financed from general revenue and subject to an income test. A Queensland scheme of unemployment insurance was superseded by the new benefits.

The introduction of these payments took place against a background of major changes in the revenue-raising functions of the Commonwealth and the States. The Commonwealth took sole responsibility for income tax in 1942, so expanding substantially its capacity to raise revenue. While the exigencies of the 1939–45 War had much to do with this change, its broader effect was to facilitate an expansion of the Commonwealth's role in social security, as in other areas.

There was a further development of specific relevance to social security in 1945. The Commonwealth split the personal income tax into two components. One, the social services contribution, was to be used exclusively to finance social security cash payments. Revenue from the new contribution was paid into the National Welfare Fund, from which all such cash payments were to be made, but there was no link between personal contributions and entitlements. The Fund was supplemented by subventions from general revenue. In the event, the social

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services contribution was again merged into a single personal income tax in 1950. Australia and New Zealand remained the two industrialised countries with non-contributory social security schemes.

Meanwhile, doubts had arisen about the constitutional validity of the Commonwealth legislation in respect of cash payments other than age and invalid pensions which were specifically within the powers of the Commonwealth. As a result, a referendum was held in 1946 under which the Commonwealth sought a constitutional amendment empowering the Commonwealth Parliament to make laws with respect to 'the provision of maternity allowances, widows' pensions, child endowment, unemployment, pharmaceutical, sickness and hospital benefits, medical and dental services (but not so as to authorise any form of civil conscription), and benefits to students and family allowances'. The referendum was carried. Before 1947 the various social security cash payments were made under separate Acts. In 1947 they were consolidated into a single Social Services Act.

The pursuit of social security as a major objective of governments both during the 1939–45 War and in the period of reconstruction following it resulted in a significant expansion of the social security system in the 1940s.

Income Support — Privilege or Right?

Under the *Invalid and Old-age Pensions Act 1908* an applicant for an old-age pension was required to be of 'good character and deserving of a pension'.

Aliens and overseas born Asiatics were ineligible for an old-age pension. An amendment to the Act in 1942 provided, for the first time, for the payment of an old-age pension to Aboriginal people having regard to 'character, standard of intelligence and development'.

Pension entitlements were examined by officers called 'special magistrates' commissioned by the Governor-General. Evidence from applicants was taken on oath. In country areas, clerks of petty sessions conducted the interviews with applicants in courthouses. In outer suburban areas the interviews were conducted by travelling magistrates. Avenues for appealing against pension decisions apart from complaining to local members of Parliament were limited.

The formal and, on occasions, severe face of the administration was reinforced by the community attitude of the day that pensions were a privilege rather than a right. That attitude was fostered by the stringent means test rules which prevented all but the poorest from receiving pensions.

The Consolidation Act of 1947 removed disqualifications directed against Aliens and Asiatics. Disqualifications in regard to Aboriginals were not removed until 1960.

In its 1948 Annual Report, the Department noted:

> ...the changed attitude towards social services. Today, the right of the individual to security against loss of income due to illness, old age or widowhood finds almost universal acceptance.[2]

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Nonetheless there remained a lot of ignorance of the rights of people to social security entitlements. There was little concern to ensure community awareness. The offices would encounter people who had reached age pension age several years previously, but had not known they qualified for a pension.

Administration in the 1940s

At the time of formation of the Department in 1941 there were fewer than 300 staff throughout Australia. The Secretariat, headed by a Director-General, was initially established in Canberra and dealt with matters of policy, legislation, finance, statistics, staff and general administration. The office of the Commissioner of Pensions was also established in Canberra to issue instructions for the assessment of claims and handle cases referred from State Offices. During the War period these offices were amalgamated in a Central Administration and moved to Melbourne. In each State capital there was an office headed by a Deputy Commissioner to deal with claims. There was only one Regional Office in Australia. This was in Newcastle in NSW which until 1945 had a staff of one.

During the early years of the new Commonwealth Department of Social Services administrative methods remained much the same as they had since the 1920s. All claims were assessed, paid and reviewed from the one office in each State capital city. All information was on files stored in vast registries and all

procedures were done manually. Almost all pensions were paid in cash through post offices on fortnightly presentation of pension cards, with the pensioner's name, number and rate of payment handwritten at the top. Receipts were forwarded from post offices via State GPOs to the State Pensions Branch where payment was duly recorded in the central pay register. Each register was completely revised once a year and pension cards regularly re-issued. When child endowment payments were introduced they were also paid by cash through post offices.

The rapid changes of the 1940s posed major administrative challenges. With the introduction of child endowment in 1941, staff pitched in spending long hours on week nights and weekends processing applications. Almost 500 000 child endowment claims, involving 900 000 children, were processed using manual methods in 1941 while office routines were frequently disrupted by wartime air raid drills and expertise was depleted as many experienced staff left to join the armed forces. In 1947, when the legislation was consolidated, rates of pension and wife's allowance were increased and numerous means test provisions were altered. The Department had less than a month to adjust 72 000 cases from the time the legislation was finally passed to the date of introduction of the changes.

By 30 June 1949, the Annual Report for the Department indicated that there were 321 000 age, 76 000 invalid and 43 000 widow pensioners, 621 000 endowed families, 1 200 unemployment,

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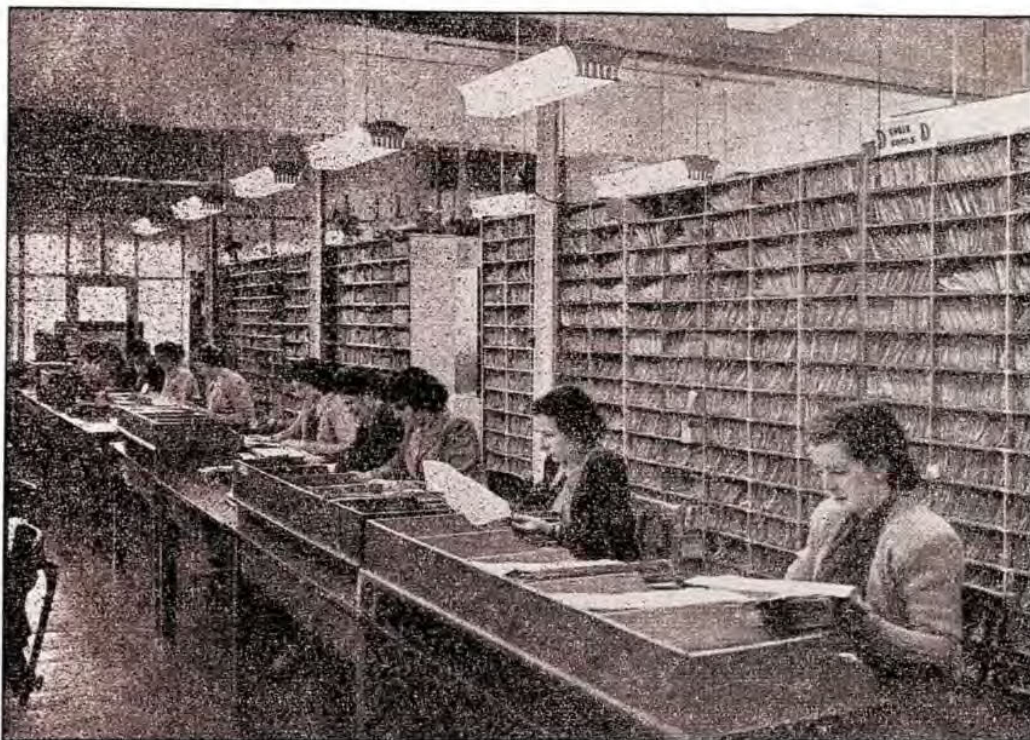
File room, Family Allowance Branch, Melbourne, 1951. At that time the Department of Social Services was making manual payments in respect of a total 2.4 million endowed children.

12 000 sickness and 5 000 special beneficiaries. During 1948–49, there were 178 000 maternity allowance claims paid, 19 000 allowances paid to wives of invalid pensioners and 26 000 funeral benefit claims granted.[3]

Initially there was only a small number of unemployment beneficiaries. It was said that when the first claim for unemployment benefit was received in Tasmania, the staff visited local employers until they found the applicant a job!

When in June 1949 the coal miners' strike resulted in the shut down of hundreds of factories, thousands of unemployment benefit claims flooded into the Sydney and Brisbane offices — 90 000 people went on benefit through the Sydney office in one week alone. Faced with the challenge of manually processing such large numbers of claims, permission had to be obtained from the energy authority during load shedding to turn on even one light in the Sydney office so that staff could work through the night.

In the early 1940s payment by cheque required the personal approval of the Deputy Commissioner. This system rapidly became overloaded so that cheques and direct payments to bank accounts began to be introduced. Former members of staff recall that, to

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encourage pensioners to transfer to cheque payments, they visited pensioners who were tardy and personally took them to local shopkeepers to organise for their cheques to be cashed.

The composite sources of information for staff on rules and conditions governing payments in these years were the Brown (pensions), Green (unemployment and sickness benefits) and Red (family payments) Books in which all instructions issued to date were codified. These were strictly confidential and for internal use only.

The first Regional Offices established in 1948, a total of 17 in all States except Western Australia, consisted of little more than a small counter area and two back offices. They were very small outposts of the State Headquarters, usually with five or six staff — a registrar/special magistrate, a grade two examiner, a field officer, a base grade clerk and a typist. Initially these offices had the power to determine and pay only unemployment and sickness benefits.
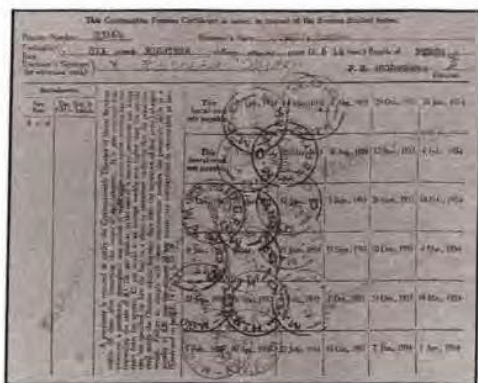
In the 1940s and 1950s pensions were paid on the presentation of pension certificates each fortnight at post offices. Payments by cheque and by direct deposit to bank accounts were gradually adopted. By 1969 payment through post offices ceased altogether.

Social Research Bureau

In November 1944 shortly after the formation of the Department, a Social Research Bureau was established . A research capacity within the Department of Social Services had in fact been suggested by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security of 1941.[4]

The Bureau had two functions, first, the introduction of modern social work methods and, second, the carrying out of a program of social research. One of the factors influencing the decision to establish the Bureau was the perceived value of social research undertaken in other countries.

The research program was ambitious. The Annual Report states:

> The Research Bureau is conducting a program of social research directed towards the evaluation of the actual human and/or social effects upon people of the Commonwealth's total

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social welfare program and of certain specific portions of the program. There is also being built up and maintained an up-to-date comprehensive listing of social services agencies and facilities throughout the Commonwealth, and valuable overseas contacts are kept with similar organisations so that the Department has reliable information of latest developments in the fields of social research and of social work generally.[5]

A 'Social Services Journal', chiefly for internal circulation, was published in 1948. Much of the information in the journal was about events within the Department. There were some, mainly anonymous, papers which discussed various aspects of the social security system, such as articles on maternity allowances and child endowment. It is likely that the staff of the Social Work and Social Research Section, as the Research Bureau had become, were responsible for these articles. The staff were also involved in commenting on social problems for senior departmental officers. However, the capacity for research was limited, since by 1949 the research staff consisted of only four people.

Departmental Ethos

The largest State Offices were about the size of today's medium-sized Regional Office. They were close-knit communities and said to operate like one big family. Particularly in the post-War years, there developed a remarkable 'esprit de corps'. Social clubs became active in all offices,

organising cabarets, picnics, dinner dances and Christmas parties for the children of all staff members.

Interstate sports carnivals began in the 1950s and in 1964 the first all-States sports carnival was held in Sydney. These carnivals involved a range of sports, including golf, tennis, bowls, snooker, squash and cricket.

A very strong sense of camaraderie was created by the sense, which has always existed in the Department, of having to work very hard together as a team in order to carry out essential work well and on time.

Working Conditions

Work arrangements for staff in the 1940s could be described as formal and disciplined. Male staff were required to wear suits, white shirts and ties and to keep hair cut neatly. The workplace was neatly ordered with desks set up in a grid as in a traditional class room under the watchful eye of supervisors. Fixed hours of attendance were strictly adhered to and it was said that lists were made of people returning late from lunch. Career prospects were limited and progression was slow. The relationship between staff and management was formal and the parliamentary process may have appeared remote from staff.

Office accommodation was woefully inadequate. Offices were lumped in together with privately-leased shops and offices and basements were also used.

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Waiting rooms and counter areas, Pensions Branch, Sydney, 1954. As the general standard of accommodation for the Department improved, better facilities were made available for the public.

There was no air-conditioning or central heating and in the budget constraints of war time, staff made do with packing cases for desks while brown paper was used to keep out draughts. Stores were in short supply and anecdotes indicate that officers even had to sign for a new pencil.

THE 1950s AND 1960s

Policy

After the passing of the *Social Services Consolidation Act 1947* there was a period of legislative inactivity in the social

security area that lasted until the early 1970s. Although there were some changes to rates and conditions, no new pensions and benefits were introduced into the Australian system in those years apart from sheltered employment allowance in 1967. Child endowment was extended to the first child in 1950. The pension means test was substantially eased and additional forms of assistance to pensioners were introduced. For example, supplementary (rent) assistance was introduced in 1958 and telephone rental concessions in 1964. The Pensioner Medical Service was established in 1951 providing free

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medical and hospital treatment to pensioners. A reciprocal agreement in social security was concluded with the United Kingdom in 1953. In 1954 the means test was removed for permanently blind people. In 1960 all Aboriginals were made eligible for pensions and benefits.

As well as having the function of making cash payments the Department was assisting people rejoin the workforce through the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service and the Training Scheme for Widow Pensioners (introduced in September 1968) and providing grants for accommodation for the aged and subsidies to meals-on-wheels and community aid services.

A demonstration of an IBM electric accounting machine in Sydney in 1952.

Research

The legislative inactivity appears to have been accompanied by a decline in the perceived importance of original research in the Department.
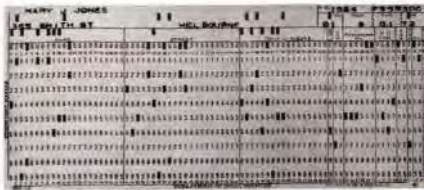
The first punched card machines were used by the Department in 1954 to produce 250 000 child endowment order books. Cash was payable on presentation of the orders at the post office. Payment was made by cheque where there were more than six children. Punched card machines were quickly extended to produce all pension cheques.

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During the 1950s, a large part of the Social Research Section's time was devoted to the collection of information on Australian and overseas social welfare systems. The Department became a member of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) in 1955 and this membership provided access to information on developments and trends in overseas countries.

Reports that were produced were mainly annotated administrative statistics rather than attempts at analysis or explanation. For example, reports on the characteristics of pensioners and terminations of invalid pensioners were probably made possible by the introduction of punch-card facilities from 1954 onwards. These reports were unsigned and were not intended for publication outside the Department. Indeed, problems were seen with the release of information because of its perceived sensitivity. When a Member of Parliament asked in 1965 whether certain details of the reports on social aspects that had been produced by officers of the Department of Social Services could be released, the Minister of Social Services replied that there could be difficulties.

Technology

The first moves towards speeding up the Department's operations through new technology included using stencil machines to print names on pension cheques and child endowment order books in the late 1940s. Pension cheque numbers still had to be handwritten into pay registers and, when the cheques came back, they had to be sorted and stamped. The first electric accounting machines for the hard-pressed accounts branches in the State Offices were bought in 1952.

In 1953 the Department took the major decision to introduce its first automated system – punched card machines. They were heralded in the Social Services Journal as 'the greatest step forward in efficiency in the Department's history'. Work began on 24 February 1954 in the Sydney office to produce 250 000 child endowment order books by punched card machine for introduction on 15 June. First introduced to produce child endowment order books, punched card machines were quickly extended to produce all pension cheques.

Cheques were still having to be enveloped by hand. The proficiency of some staff in this function was said to reach 2 000 cheques a day. Machines for folding, enveloping and sealing were introduced in the Victorian office in 1954, the first of their type in the Public Service. These machines were soon installed in all States, dealing with 6 000 cheques an hour.

In 1960 the Department established an ADP feasibility team in the Melbourne Central Office. By 1965 plans for conversion from punched card machine to computer were drawn up. The first computer produced cheque was made on a small computer in the Brisbane office on 3 March 1967. The NSW computer centre was opened in July 1967 with an IBM 360/40 and by the end of 1968

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A range of pensions, unemployment benefit and sickness benefit enquiries commenced to be handled by outposted Regional Offices in the late 1950s.

Regional Offices

The role of Regional Offices began to expand in 1957 when six of the larger offices took on local pensions administration. Decentralization of child endowment and maternity allowances began in 1962–63.

To cover the many areas where there were no offices, regional staff travelled extensively, usually conducting interviews in local court houses. In the more remote areas, council clerks and clerks of petty sessions still acted as agents for the Department, taking information on pensions and benefits claims. Pensioners and beneficiaries living

computers were operating in all States except Tasmania. By 1969 payment through post offices ceased altogether.

The commissariat store of 40 Macquarie Street, Hobart built seventeen years after the Tasmanian colony was established. This building was occupied by the Tasmanian State Headquarters of the Department of Social Services until 1970.

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in the capital cities had to travel to central city offices if they needed to visit a Departmental office.

For many years officers who visited clients in their homes travelled around on bicycles in country areas and by public transport in the city.

Accommodation

Decentralisation, though bringing the Department closer to people, did not automatically mean better conditions for either staff or clients. Owing to the difficulties encountered in finding suitable accommodation, the early Regional Offices often left much to be desired. The first Sydney metropolitan unemployment and sickness benefit office was set up in May 1950 in a section of a pavilion at the Sydney showground. There were no provisions in those days for elderly or invalid pensioners — no thought about factors such as people being in wheelchairs.

In some parts of Australia the Department occupied historic buildings. From 1955 the State Headquarters in Tasmania occupied a commissariat store built in 1820, seventeen years after the Tasmanian colony was established. The Department occupied this building in Macquarie Street, Hobart until 1970.

By the close of the 1960s the fiftieth office of the Department was opened and improved standards of accommodation were reported, providing 'convenience, comfort and privacy for the public and satisfactory working conditions for the staff.'[6] Airconditioning for many offices

was becoming a reality and a number of offices were operating from Commonwealth Centres. Nevertheless, the Annual Report for 1968–69 indicates there were still six Regional Offices without a ground floor inquiry area or a lift service.

Efficient Administration

During the 1950s and 1960s there was an increasing concern with efficient administration. Management statistics for establishment control were introduced. Staffing and establishment reviews, organisation and methods reviews and internal audits were active.

Training officers began to be appointed late in the 1940s. The first training film shown by the Department reflected the early emphasis on the community liaison aspect of staff training, rather than on the development of professional skills. The film was 'A Matter of Manners', obtained from the Public Service Board in 1952.

The first major staff training course, the Examiner-in-Training program was introduced in 1960. These courses, held in Sydney and Melbourne, ran for up to 38 weeks and trained selected staff from throughout Australia in all aspects of pensions and benefits work. The first departmental Programmer-in-Training courses were introduced in 1968–69. By 1969, a Staff Development Scheme had been introduced in all States.

Central Office was transferred from Melbourne to Canberra in December 1964. Annual Reports carried complaints about high staff turnover in the Central Office.

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During 1969 the Compensation Division was transferred to the Department of Social Services from Treasury and the Office of the Commissioner for Employees' Compensation was formed.

At the close of the decade there were three divisions in Central Office: Management, Social Security and Welfare Services. A three branch structure along the same lines operated in the States.

Information for the Public

In the early years, pamphlets, posters, advertising and media releases did not exist as such. A change of approach was heralded in the 1950s with the efforts made by the Department to help new arrivals during the massive immigration intakes. Departmental officers, with many other government and charitable bodies, staffed offices in the immigration camps, helping those who qualified to apply for benefits. In 1952, the Department also began to move to promote its activities in the rehabilitation field.

In the 1960s booklets on pension entitlements were produced for the public and in 1969 the first information leaflets, dealing with age and invalid pensions, were released, as well as the first ready reckoners, designed in the Adelaide office. These leaflets together with claim forms were available from post offices throughout Australia.

Welfare

Trained social workers were introduced in the Department in 1944, reflecting a view that cash payments alone, while alleviating financial distress, may leave untouched the underlying causes. The introduction of a social work cadetship scheme in 1961 did much to overcome the shortage of qualified staff and to allow the service to expand.

THE 1970s

The Department of Social Security 1972

The Department was renamed the Department of Social Security (DSS) in 1972 and associated with this was a rapid expansion of the Department's functions into many areas such as health insurance, child care and nursing homes. DSS took carriage of distributing subsidies to organisations providing services for the aged, the handicapped and the homeless, children and migrants. The responsibility for health insurance was returned to the Department of Health in December 1975.

Payment Policies

In regard to cash payments, the 1970s saw a period of rapid change in payment policy. Reciprocal portability agreements were concluded with a number of countries and in 1973, Australia introduced general portability of pensions. New cash payments, such as supporting mothers benefit (1973) and handicapped child's allowance (1975), were introduced. Automatic rate increases were provided for in pensions and benefits (1976). The means test – changed to an income test (that is, the

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Decentralisation brought the Department closer to the people and brought greater awareness of rights to social security entitlements and services. A fully decentralised office was opened at Darwin in 1966.

assets component was removed) – ceased to preclude persons aged 70 and over from eligibility for age pension. Child endowment was replaced by family allowance in 1976. Supporting mothers benefit was replaced by supporting parents benefit in 1977 thus extending the payment to cover male sole parents. The requirement for officers of the Department to make moral judgments regarding the good character of claimants had not been applied for many years and was removed from the legislation in 1974.

In the decade to 1980 departmental outlays increased from $972 million in 1970 to more than $7 000 million and the client population increased by 60 per cent. By the close of the 1970s, more than four million Australians were receiving payments from the Department of Social Security. For more than one

million people, these payments were their only source of income. The unprecedented increase in workload in the early 1970s due to the growth in client populations, particularly in unemployment benefit which grew 130 000 in the summer of 1974–75, presented enormous administrative challenges.

When the number of unemployment beneficiaries began to surge in the 1970s unemployment benefit was being paid weekly by manual cheque. The administration of unemployment benefit was still very largely centralised in State Headquarters. The dramatic rise in workload put pressure on all aspects of the administration – resources, organisation, systems, procedures, training and accommodation. In some places caravans in the street were used to provide emergency office accommodation. Long queues, demonstrations of angry clients outside the offices and sit-ins are vividly remembered by officers of those days.

Decentralisation and Consolidation

Efforts to decentralise were renewed and more offices were opened in 1973–74 than in any year from 1948–49. By the close of 1979 there were more than 140 Regional Offices operating across the country and decentralisation of processing functions from State Headquarters was almost complete. A joint Public Service Board /Department review established management levels and structures for Regional Offices with

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the delegation of more powers to regions and the decentralisation of all routine processing. Area management structures were being introduced.

The Department continued to move to new modern premises in the 1970s. Accommodation difficulties experienced in Central Office were eased in the short-term with the opening of Juliana House in Woden in 1971.

By the close of the decade the Central Office structure was being upgraded with two Deputy Director-General positions (level 5 second division officers). The Development Division, the Systems and Operations Division and the Legislation and Review Division were formed in the latter part of the decade and signified expansion in administration at that time to eight Divisions.

In 1977 the Director-General announced a full-scale training review and foreshadowed an expansion in executive training, staff development and job rotation programs. At that time more than half of the staff were under 26. In 1979 new training courses were introduced for field and counter officers as well as a variety of self-instruction packages. By 1979 there were 70 different training courses for staff in NSW alone.

Information Technology

By 1979 computer communication links were in place or being established for 95 per cent of the Department's offices. Four major programming systems were in place and were updated daily, maintaining a magnetic tape record of each client's circumstances. The systems were handling data entry of client details, issue of client advices and direct credit to financial institutions as well as cheque production. State-wide microfiche indexes were being produced to assist decentralised processing of benefits. A system for overpayments recording and recovery was in place. A new unemployment, sickness and special benefit system was being piloted to replace the interim system introduced to alleviate pressures on staff coping with the increasing numbers of unemployment beneficiaries. Word processing, introduced in 1979, was found to be particularly helpful in handling standard letters to clients.

Computerisation in the 1970s had significantly assisted the service provided to clients by reducing the time to make initial payments and handle client enquiries, particularly when clients moved to new locations. It changed the ability of the Department to implement complex changes to benefits legislation. In 1976 the Annual Report indicates that eight programmers working for three months implemented the increases in rate and new income test for 1.4 million pensioners. It was estimated that several hundred staff working for six months would have been required to do these tasks manually.

Systems Efficiency, Planning and Consultancy

By 1970 the traditional organisation and methods reviews were giving way to reviews of the efficiency of systems with a

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During the 1970s the Department commenced to pay particular attention to the specific needs of clients. Brian Wraith, senior officer with the Department, liaising with an Aboriginal community.

growing emphasis on planning and consultancy. A Special Projects Branch was also formed in Central Office to deal with operational processing problems. By the late 1970s the Department was restructuring the Regional Office environment for better service and efficiency. Improved flexibility in the deployment of Regional Office staff was being attempted through a productivity control system based on work measurement. Model designs for public contact areas in Regional Offices were being evaluated providing different degrees of attention and privacy depending on the reason for contact.

Direct keying from claim forms commenced to replace the use of coding sheets for feeding data into the computer network. The formation of an Internal Audit Branch in Central Office late in the 1970s signified the expanding role of systems-based auditing in the Department.

Specific Needs of Clients

Efforts were being made to provide a service to clients which was sensitive to specific needs. By 1979 the Department had a staff of more than 200 social workers and 50 welfare workers, based in

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State and Regional Offices, rehabilitation centres and migrant settlement services. Social workers were being integrated into operational areas of the Department, working as part of the management team assisting public contact areas as well as building links between DSS staff and the other welfare agencies and community groups operating in the area. An Aboriginal unit was established in 1976 in Central Office to examine the activities and responsibilities of the Department in relation to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal liaison officers and welfare officers began in the Department in 1978. The National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals was being implemented in the Department. The tuning of the Department's services to the specific needs of migrants and refugees was signified by the appointment of an Ethnic Liaison Officer and the formation of a Migrant Services Section in Central Office in 1978–79. Departmental officers who could provide interpretation were identified and the need for multilingual ethnic staff in public contact areas was being assessed.

Publications and Community Liaison

The Department was active in providing information to the public on its programs and services in the 1970s through the press, radio and television. Publications and public relations activities were better coordinated through the creation of a Publications Section in Central Office in 1970 and Community Liaison Sections in the States in 1971. In 1972 the first foreign language leaflets and claim forms

were produced. Later in the decade joint projects with State authorities and welfare organisations to distribute social security information through welfare agencies and community information centres were active. Information seminars for special needs groups, such as Aboriginals and migrants, were active. In the mid 1970s the Department also began providing grants to a number of voluntary welfare rights organisations, set up to give people better information on their social security rights and entitlements and to help improve access to welfare services.

Appeals Provisions

The lack of an appeal mechanism for members of the public dissatisfied with departmental decisions was remedied in 1975 when, in February of that year, the first Social Security Appeals Tribunals (SSATs) came into being. The legal authority for review by the Director-General was already available in provisions in the consolidated Act of 1947. During 1977–78 review officers were appointed in each processing office to provide a quick and independent examination of matters disputed by clients. In addition to those rights of appeal, clients could also take their cases to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. While the Ombudsman did not have decision-making powers, he reported his findings to the Department and to the Parliament. The level of unemployment benefit appeals in the 1970s pointed to the need for a more consistent approach by officers of the Commonwealth

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Employment Service (CES) and DSS. During 1977–78 an advisor/liaison officer from the CES was appointed in each State. This step was seen as ensuring that people were not wrongly refused payment of unemployment benefit.

Independent avenues of appeal and review were also available by the close of the decade in relation to administrative actions by complaint to the Ombudsman or through the Federal Court under the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977*.

Evaluation and Research

The period 1973 to 1977 was marked by several large-scale inquiries into particular aspects of income security and related policy including:

- the Henderson Poverty Inquiry;
- the Hancock National Superannuation Inquiry;
- the Woodhouse National Rehabilitation and Compensation Inquiry;
- the Myers Inquiry into Unemployment Benefit; and
- the Income Security Review.

The Social Welfare Commission contributed to policy analysis and the funding of research from 1973 to 1976.

The proposals asising from inquiries were examined during this period by an interdepartmental committee, the Income Security Review Group.

Toward the close of the 1970s the Department made submissions and gave evidence to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare which had references on evaluation of social security and health programs. The Department described a broad range of departmental monitoring, evaluation and statistical collection activities and a range of consultative mechanisms by which individuals in the welfare field as well as consumer groups, contributed to the evaluation and review of programs and policies.

In the 1970s, there was a renewed interest in the publication of departmental research. The *Social Security Quarterly* began publication in 1973 to be replaced in 1980 by the *Social Security Journal*. In contrast to the earlier 'Social Security Journal', these two

The male and female staff members of the Department of Social Services in Western Australia pictured on the roof of the GPO building in 1948. Jessie Howe, the first female clerk in the West Australian office is pictured fifth from the left in the front row.

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journals were designed for wider circulation including outside the Department. They contained mainly authored articles with contributions coming from a wide variety of government, academic and community areas. Both journals encouraged the publication of articles providing information and encouraging debate about issues in social welfare. The Development Division was established in Central Office in 1976. This enabled the concentration and development of expertise in income maintenance research and the collection of relevant statistics. In 1978 the Division began the production of a series of monographs. These, mainly signed, papers reported on findings from analyses of a variety of social welfare issues and were widely circulated and well received. A Social Welfare Policy Secretariat was set up during 1978 to examine major policy issues in the areas of social security and health. It was set up within the Department but reported to a committee of four departmental Secretaries.

Consultation

The Advisory Council on Social Security and Welfare operated from 1973 to 1974 and in 1976 the National Consultative Council on Social Welfare and a consultative committee on Women's Welfare issues were established by the Minister for Social Security providing a means for the Minister and the Department to receive the views of interested groups and experts on social welfare issues. By the close of the decade the Department was associated with consultative bodies ranging from ministerial level councils to committees comprised of representatives of a wide cross-section of welfare consumer groups.

National consultative processes had also been established by the close of the decade with the Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association which covered Third Division Officers and were in the process of being established with the Australian Public Service Association (Fourth Division Officers).

Entitlement Reviews

An interdepartmental Review Team was set up in 1978 to review systems and procedures of the Department. Resources were made available as a result of the review to tighten admission procedures and introduce new enforcement activities. Pre-grant interviews were introduced for unemployment and sickness beneficiaries. An annual review of pensions was reintroduced and a Benefits Control Branch was formed in Central Office to use innovative methods to tackle the identification of incorrect payments and fraud and coordinate the work of existing Benefits Control Sections in each State. At a time when expenditure was rapidly increasing, the number of fraudulent negotiations of cheques was increasing and there was concern about the increasing number of frauds being detected, the Department was coming to terms with the balance between the effective control of public outlays (consistent with cost effectiveness) and respect for the rights of

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the individual citizen. Studies were also initiated looking at improving the identification and recovery of overpayments.

Departmental Participation in United Nations Activities

In 1979 the Department of Social Security undertook principal responsibility for Australia's participation in the UN designated International Year of the Child (IYC). A national secretariat was set up in Canberra and the secretariat coordinated a number of projects and activities carried out by the Commonwealth and State Governments. A Commonwealth and State Ministers' Council, chaired by the Minister for Social Security oversaw the Government activities carried out during the year and also supported activities carried out by a National Committee comprising major non-government organisations. Other Commonwealth and State Government portfolios made important contributions to the national celebrations.

Two years later the Department was given responsibility for coordinating the Australian Government's involvement in the International Year of Disabled Persons. This International Year was managed on similar lines to those used during IYC. A national secretariat was again set up to coordinate Commonwealth and State projects recommended by councils of Commonwealth and State Ministers and peak organisations for disabled people.

1980 — 1991

Early in the 1980s the Department received new functions. As part of new Commonwealth health arrangements from September 1981 Health Care Cards were introduced. The Department was given responsibility for applying eligibility criteria and issuing the cards. Also in that year the Department assumed responsibility for the acceptance of unemployment benefit forms previously handled by the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES).

In December 1984 responsibility for welfare subsidies and rehabilitation was transferred from the Department of Social Security to the newly created Department of Community Services enabling the Department of Social Security to concentrate on income maintenance programs. Other changes of responsibility in the 1980s included: the transfer of the new Commission for the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation of Commonwealth Employees (COMCARE) to the Department of Industrial Relations in December 1988 and the transfer of the Australian Institute of Family Studies from the Attorney General's Department to the Social Security portfolio in July 1989.

Administrative change was a feature of the 1980s. Among the many initiatives to overhaul the administrative and policy environment were STRATPLAN, the pensions assets test, the Social Security Review, the Financial Management Improvement Program, the Government's social justice strategy and the Area Office review.

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STRATPLAN

In 1983, the Department adopted STRATPLAN – a comprehensive ADP strategic plan for the administration of all its programs. It embraced a total facilities re-equipment, the application of new technologies, the integration of word processing, electronic mail and office automation and networking of all departmental locations. It was the blueprint for one of the largest computer networks of its type in the world. Work on STRATPLAN commenced when there were 15 grants of pension or benefit being made every minute of the working day and there were 13 payments being made every second.

STRATPLAN involved the establishment of a National Computer System in Canberra bringing to an end the use of CSIRO facilities. New

The first computer centre was opened by the Department in 1967. Shown is the display panel and console typewriter of the IBM 360/40 in the New South Wales State Headquarters.

mainframes in all State capitals and minicomputers in all Department offices were established and these computers were linked into one network. The system initially provided four major facilities :

• On-line Enquiry, enabling staff to obtain accurate and up-to-date client and payment data;

• On-line Information, giving staff access to instructions, legislation and policy manuals;

• word processing; and

• On-Line Data Entry, used to enter client and assessment details into the ADP systems.

By 1989–90 all offices had been linked to the STRATPLAN network. On-line Benefits Processing (OBP) was implemented at the close of the decade and enabled the merging of records of all clients receiving more than one form of payment, for example, family allowance and family allowance supplement. The Person Data Update (PDU) facility allowed immediate change of a client's personal details. The On-line Data Entry (ODE) facility enabled the direct entry of all other client details. On-line Advices (OLA) replaced a standard letters system during 1990. All of the Department's offices were linked via electronic mail during 1989–90.

These major re-developments of the client payment systems involved major challenges for the Department in areas such as accommodation, staff training, recruitment and occupational health and safety. The new systems helped to

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Early confidential instruction manuals : "the brown book" — instructions for the examination, review and payment of pensions (top); "the red book" — instructions concerning maternity allowances and child endowment (centre); and "the green book" — instructions concerning unemployment, sickness and special benefits (bottom).

improve client service, ensure integrity and privacy of data and assisted staff in the accurate, efficient and timely processing of their work, resulting in a more satisfying and congenial work environment. They also very significantly assisted the Department's ability to accommodate rapid legislative and administrative change.

An increasing emphasis was being placed at the close of the 1980s on using computers in the area of decision support in view of the pace of administrative change. The Department was examining the potential of Expert Systems or intelligent job aids to assist Regional Office staff and management.

Management information systems were being enhanced to assist managers administer the Department's resources and functions with the devolution of decision making powers: ADMINS

(human resources management) and FINMIS (Financial Management and Information System). Personal computers connected to the network were being used to improve accessibility to management information.

Implementing Change

The number and complexity of changes in social security policy and procedures which flowed from the 1986–87 Budget and 1987 May Economic Statement were unprecedented. Extensive change was to be a feature of each year for the remainder of the decade and required the Department to adopt a project manager approach for the implementation of Budget initiatives. The concept had been used previously for the introduction of the pensions assets test in 1984–85 and the national overpayments action plan in

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1985–86. Project Managers were appointed from the States as well as Central Office to ease implementation.

To prepare for the budget process suggestions were called from the staff and policy options were developed by a Budget Policy Committee headed by the Minister and including the Secretary and senior executives of the Department. A Budget Coordination Section was established in Central Office to facilitate the process.

The implementation of budgetary changes meant changes to legislation, systems, data collection, staff training and procedures. Overall managerial direction for project managers was provided by a change management steering group. A Change Coordination Unit was established in Central Office in 1986. To look at how well the new measures were working, post-implementation reviews were integrated into the 1987–88 Budget changes.

The Social Security Review

In December 1985 the Minister for Social Security established a review of the Australian system of social security. Associate Professor Bettina Cass from Sydney University was appointed Consultant Director to the Review to work with researchers and policy analysts within the Department's Development Division (renamed the Social Policy Division in 1987). An advisory committee representing non-government welfare, union, business, church and ethnic organisations and government was

appointed to advise the Minister and the Consultant Director on the conduct of the Review. The Review focused on four major aspects:

- income support for families with children;
- income security programs for the labour force;
- income security for the aged; and
- income support for the disabled.

The Review examined issues of equity, adequacy, simplicity, access, redistribution and transition to work. Altogether 31 Research and Discussion Papers were prepared for wide distribution in the community and six Issues Papers put forward options for reform and formed the basis of community consultation.

The Review stimulated fundamental structural changes to the social security system, linking social policies more closely to economic, labour market and taxation policies. By the close of the 1980s significant policy changes had been introduced or were being planned through the budgetary process in respect of all major issues examined by the Review.

Policy

Major developments included:

- significant increases in real rates of pensions, benefits and allowances, including achievement of the Government's long-term commitment to lift the single rate of pension to 25 per cent of Average Weekly Earnings;

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- the extension of indexation provisions to almost all payments;

- better targeting to those most in need via assets tests and new income tests, while at the same time liberalising income tests for pensions and benefits;

- progress towards the complete removal of age pensioners from the income tax system;

- encouragement of greater self-provision, particularly among the aged including the promotion of superannuation;

- substantial increases in Rent Assistance, including additional assistance to families with children;

- the extension of Rent Assistance to unemployment beneficiaries and to low- income families not entitled to pensions or benefits;

- major improvements in assistance to families – in particular the introduction of Family Allowance Supplement and the achievement of benchmark levels for family payments;

- in line with the move to a more active approach to improving clients' access to employment, assistance to sole parents through JET, the long-term unemployed through NEWSTART and young job seekers through the Job Search Allowance arrangements;

- increased support for children of separated parents through the Child Support Scheme; and

- greater focus on cooperation with other agencies in the administration of programs.

Research

Research and analysis associated with the Social Security Review accounted for a large part of the Department's research program during the latter part of the 1980s. Continuous review of the social security system in the light of changing economic and social factors and evaluation of ongoing programs and initiatives were major priorities of the Department's Social Policy Division.

Critical to the Department's policy review process was the analysis of statistical data provided from internal research studies, as a by-product of its administrative operations and from other statistical collections, mainly those of the ABS. The range of departmental statistical publications grew and the Department made available unpublished material on request.

Departmental officers contributed to the wider academic and community debate on social issues by attending conferences and external seminars. The Department exchanged information with other organisations including other departments, welfare research organisations and overseas bodies. Close contact was maintained with the Social Welfare Research Centre (SWRC), established in 1980 under an agreement between the University of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government, and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), a statutory authority established in 1980 and transferred from the Attorney-General's portfolio to Social Security in July 1989. Liaison with overseas bodies

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included the International Social Security Association (ISSA), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In November 1989, the Five Nation Social Security Meeting with delegates from Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Canada met for the first time (in Australia) to discuss issues and challenges facing these countries as they entered the 1990s. It now meets annually.

Various consultative bodies provided advice to the Government on changing economic and social needs: the Social Security Advisory Council (SSAC), formed in December 1987 through the amalgamation of the National Advisory Council on Social Welfare and the Social Security Review Advisory Committee, the DSS Women's Consultative Committee (WCC) and the Child Support Consultative Group (CSCG), established in March 1987.

Social Justice

In November 1988 the Government introduced the requirement that the four elements of social justice (equity, equality, access and participation) should be explicitly taken into account when programs are implemented and evaluated. Developments in the latter part of the decade were focussing more on the Department's role in facilitating fair and equal access of its clients to services and the opportunity for their broader social and economic
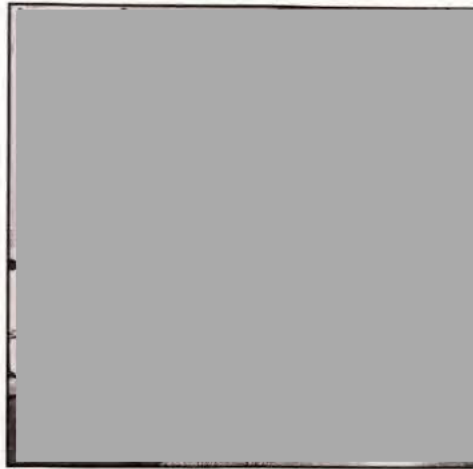
...... an Aboriginal welfare officer. Aboriginal liaison officers and welfare officers were appointed in the Department from 1978.

participation. This was particularly evident in the more active approach involving greater cooperation with other agencies in JET, NEWSTART and Job Search Allowance in assisting clients to find employment.

Strategies to improve access for Non-English-speaking Background (NESB) clients were introduced to ensure the provision of effectively targeted services.

A comprehensive strategy to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) clients was developed.

In 1988 the Department published a three year Access and Equity Plan seeking to increase staff awareness of multiculturalism. Adoption of the Plan led to major program developments.

Information Services

A National Information Program (NIP) was introduced in 1987–88 for the overall planning of the Department's

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information and public relations activities and the promotion of understanding of Social Security programs among clients, potential clients, employers, departmental staff and the general public. Priority was being given to promoting the major changes resulting from Budgets and the overall strategy of Social Justice.

On-line STRATPLAN facilities were used for the first time for disseminating information to staff throughout the network for the 1987 May Economic Statement. Once the Statement was released, publicity, information and staff briefings were timed for the next day. Toll-free hot-lines were used for public enquiries. This approach has continued.

A wide range of innovative options was utilised for getting the information about the major changes to people, for example:

- the newspaper *Age Pension News* for age pensioners, distributed to more than 1.3 million pensioner households; and

- television, local displays, seminars, mailouts, letterbox drops and approaches to employers — to promote family payments.

Market research was used to develop and evaluate information programs, one of the first being an information package to support new admission procedures introduced in the 1987 May Economic Statement.

A display of services provided by the Department in Perth circa 1951. In the 1950s the Department was active in promoting the aims of the rehabilitation program and ways in which employers could contribute towards its success.

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Departmental forms were monitored for compliance with the Department's plain English program. Departmental design standards were prepared and computer based design equipment implemented.

In 1989 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into the quality of service provided by the Department tabled its report entitled *Fairness, courtesy and efficiency?* A number of recommendations about information and public relations activities were adopted by the Department including:

- local outreach through the Area Outreach Officer network and increased involvement of regional officers in outreach activities;

- establishment of a permanent 008 telephone information line; and

- issue of toys for children in Regional Offices and video programming for waiting areas.

Tighter Administration

A Performance Monitoring Branch was formed in Central Office in February 1983 to focus, together with State counterparts, on problem identification and problem solving skills to service the Department nationally. Major investigations of problems identified through review and audit processes gave rise to a tighter administration.

Budget related and departmental initiatives, from 1986–87 in particular, focussed on tightened administration through upgraded efficiency and

reduction in the incidence of incorrect payment. In 1987 the Performance and Control Division was formed to coordinate work in this area. Unemployment beneficiaries were required to lodge personally their fortnightly income statements and a legal requirement for registration with the CES was introduced. Direct deposit was adopted for virtually all client payments. More stringent proof of identity procedures and new admission procedures allowing streaming of clients into different levels of interview were put into place.

PRISM (Performance Related Information System for Managers) was developed to assist management at all levels to assess the effectiveness of Regional Office operations. Regular reporting on the performance of Regional Offices was developed through the Quality Assurance (QA) package, introduced in 1987, for Regional Office managers to monitor the correctness of decisions being taken. The Performance and Accountability Improvement Report (PAIR), was implemented from 1990 to assist Area Offices to provide operational and managerial support to Regional Offices. National standards for processing new claims were implemented during 1990.

Following the establishment in 1986 of the Government's Efficiency Scrutiny Unit the Department completed a number of efficiency scrutinies and implemented a number of efficiency measures such as high-speed matching of departmental records and the devolution of certain national training functions.

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An ADP Audit Section was formed in the early 1980s to ensure adequate internal controls were developed and implemented in new systems. By the close of the decade all departmental programs were being regularly audited in a three-year rolling cycle. Follow up action to audits was overseen by the Departmental Audit Committee.

Fraud and Incorrect Payments

The Department was increasingly active during the 1980s in striving to limit misuse of the income security system. In recognition of the increasing prominence of incorrect payment and fraud control as a service-wide issue, the Department submitted a fraud control plan to the Government's Fraud Control Committee in 1988.

A comprehensive entitlement review strategy was developed. During 1990–91 more than 2 million reviews were undertaken by Regional Office staff, by mobile review teams or by Control, Review and Recovery Units in the Area Offices. The great majority were part of specific Government initiatives and were undertaken by mail, interview in a departmental office or by visit to the client's home. Statistical analysis and computer-based matching of data were increasingly used in the risk management approach taken to the review of client entitlement. Computer systems were developed to handle all aspects of internal checking of departmental data, computer matching, selection of risk

cases, recording and reporting of reviews, prosecutions and the recovery of overpayments.

The Department greatly improved its ability to establish and follow up debts quickly by personal contact with clients. In the latter part of the decade Area Offices became increasingly involved in debt recovery functions.

By the close of the decade measures were being taken to coordinate systems used by the Department and other agencies to reduce incorrect payment by data-matching in accordance with privacy requirements.

Freedom of Information

The *Freedom of Information (FOI) Act* came into operation in December 1982. An FOI Section was established in Central Office, an Action Officer in each Area Office and a Contact Officer in each Regional Office. In excess of 95 per cent of requests received by the Department have been from clients seeking access to personal documents. In addition, major manuals were published and made available for purchase. The availability of the documentation on decision-making expanded the avenues for review by the public.

Privacy and Security

The Department, by virtue of the Act, was always required to observe strict confidentiality in relation to the personal information which is collected from clients and others. The *Privacy Act*,

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which came into operation in January 1989, complemented the provisions in the *Social Security Act* but was concerned with a much broader range of matters. A Privacy Section was established in Central Office to ensure, among other things, that departmental practices conform to the privacy principles. Privacy Contact Officers were also available in Areas.

Appeals

The administration of the Social Security Act entered a new era in March 1980 when clients were given a further avenue of appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). The AAT had the power to substitute its decision for that of the Director-General. Questions of law could be further appealed to the Federal Court and the High Court. In September 1980, SSATs were given the jurisdiction to hear medical appeals. The added requirements for documentation and attendance at hearings increased the workload for the Department. As a result an External Appeals Branch was established in Central Office and an AAT unit in each State in the early 1980s. From November 1988 the SSAT was given powers to make determinations. Clients and the Department could appeal against the decision of the SSAT to the AAT. From 1988, Review Officers were based in Area Offices strengthening the internal review process.

International Agreements

In the early 1980s the Government announced its intention to set up a network of shared-responsibility agreements to secure and preserve entitlements for people who divide their working lives between countries. These agreements required detailed information exchanges, consultations with the relevant communities in Australia, Government-to-Government negotiations and arrangements for the legislation and administration to bring the agreements into force.

There are now agreements with Italy, Canada, Spain, Malta, Ireland, The Netherlands and Portugal. Information exchanges and community consultations were being held with a number of other countries. Agreements which had been earlier made with New Zealand (1943) and the United Kingdom (1953) were being renegotiated. The introduction of unilateral portability of pensions by Australia had eroded the form of agreement based on the principle that the country of residence assumed responsibility for providing social security coverage. From 1990 Australia was granted observer status on the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Social Security providing a valuable insight into developments in international social security coverage.

Review of the Act

The 1947 Act was rewritten in clear English, received Royal Assent on 23 April 1991 and came into effect on

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The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Sir Winston Churchill and the Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert Menzies, signing the Reciprocal Agreement of 1953.

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1 July 1991. The rewriting of the Act was welcomed by both staff and community workers.

Improving Management

The Department began implementing the Government's Financial Management Improvement Program (FMIP) in 1985–86. FMIP encouraged departments to 'manage for results' and included the introduction of corporate planning and program budgeting. The Department embarked in 1985–86 on the introduction of new corporate planning methodology to all levels of management. An interim charter and corporate goals were implemented.

In 1986–87 an interim program structure was developed and Portfolio Program Statements, including program objectives were drawn up. Program budgeting began in 1987–88. An Administrative Reform Seminar was held in the Department in November 1987 to set directions for the Department's organisation and administration to 1990.

Corporate direction documentation was completely revised during 1989 and a package entitled *Corporate Direction – Into the 90s* disseminated outlining the purpose, aims and priorities of the Department. The aims were developed with the help of staff at all levels and related to client service, staff support, quality, innovation and accountability. From July 1989 a new program structure was implemented indicating the broadening of the portfolio's responsibilities and the differing needs of specific client groups. Pensions, benefits and allowances were structured into five major programs. The new program structure reflected the growing focus on

Directors' conference circa 1970 (left to right): M. Wryell (Deputy Director-General), A. Cox (Director NSW), W. Smetherham (Director WA), D. Wearne (Director Tasmania), B. Hamilton (Director-General), A. Kopp (Director Victoria), C. Atkinson (Director Queensland), R. Dowell (Director SA) and R. Williams (Central Office).

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active and personal assistance to clients through, for example, NEWSTART, JET, FISP and the Child Support Scheme. Also from 1989–90 detailed material on the performance of programs was developed and incorporated into the Explanatory Notes (now Portfolio Program Statements) for scrutiny by the Senate Estimates Committee.

During 1990 work was undertaken to develop Program Plans setting out program issues and strategies being adopted to address those issues. A Strategic Plan enunciated a longer term vision for the Department to promote an awareness of how the Department will be operating as it approaches the year 2000.

Management committees were restructured in 1987. The Corporate Management Committee was formed to be responsible for high level strategic planning and decision making across the Department. Other management committees were introduced as the need arose. It was decided to establish Program Management Groups (PMGs) during 1989–90 with responsibility for management of individual programs.

The Government required all portfolios to prepare annual evaluation plans outlining major evaluations to be undertaken during the year and also internal plans covering a broader spectrum of evaluations. The first Portfolio Evaluation Plans developed from 1988 focussed on areas involving major changes in policy direction in response to the findings of the Social Security Review. The internal departmental plans covered evaluations

dealing with operational, administrative and organisational matters as well as policy initiatives. In the context of the increasing emphasis on evaluation and program management in November 1988 an Evaluation Branch was established in the Performance and Control Division and an Evaluation Planning Committee was introduced.

Area Office Review

The Area Office Review was established in April 1987 to re-think the organisational structure, roles, relationships and functions right across the Department. As a result the role of Area Offices was expanded so that they had full accountability and responsibility for services in the region they controlled. By 1991 the devolution of powers to Area Offices had progressed to the extent that State Office functions were completely integrated into the Area Office structure.

Devolution of powers to the Area Office ushered Social Security into a new era of regionalisation. It also brought to an end occupation by the Department of certain capital city buildings. One of these, Australia House in Carrington Street, Sydney, had been home to elements of the Department and its Treasury predecessor since 1935.

Regional Offices

Greater flexibility in responding to community demand for the Department's services was provided by the introduction of information offices and DSS Offices providing a reasonably full range of

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services as outposts of existing Regional Offices. The Department was seeking to collocate Regional Offices with the Commonwealth Employment Service wherever possible.

In 1985 as part of the settlement of an industrial dispute over staffing levels in the Department a Joint Staffing Review looked at the basis of staff allocations to the Department's Regional Offices. A new staffing model was subsequently developed in conjunction with the Department of Finance, an external consultant and the Public Service Union and implemented in 1987–88. The further development of the model was seen as enhancing the ability of the Department to manage staff resources across the regional network.

Also during 1985 alternative work organisation trials began in agreement with unions. The trials employed union and Department preferred models using multiskilling and rotation between 'front' (public contact areas) and 'back' offices to different degrees.

Central Office

With the creation of the Department of Community Services in 1984 about 1700 staff were transferred to the new Department. The title of the head officer for the Department of Social Security was changed from 'Director-General' to 'Secretary'. Structural and operational changes were implemented from March 1991. Central Office (now National Administration) consisted of the Executive, six Divisions, a Legal Group

and a Change Management Group. The six Divisions were Resource Management, Social Policy, Evaluation and Services, Program Delivery, Systems and Privacy, Fraud and Control.

Resources

In 1984–85, at the initiative of the Government, the system of staff ceilings was replaced by a system of human resource budgeting. Human resource budgeting was seen as providing greater integration of financial and staffing decisions. With the introduction of program budgeting in 1987–88 financial responsibility and decision making were progressively devolved to line managers. Greater flexibility for the Department resulted from the consolidation of running costs and the reforms to Commonwealth purchasing arrangements from 1989–90.

In the latter part of the 1980s the Department developed innovative packages for recruitment. Departmental representatives took part in career week activities in the Universities presenting information about opportunities in Social Security particularly computing careers.

Management Support

Various service-wide factors affected personnel administration and the development of the work environment. These included devolution of many responsibilities of the former Public Service Board to individual Departments in 1987–88, job redesign under the Second Tier Wage Agreement from

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The Department's first major staff training programs were introduced in the 1960s. Members of the first Pensions Examiner-In-Training course conducted in Victoria in 1960 (left to right): Rear — Bob Sloan (Vic), Bob Rowan (Vic), Barry Skewes (Vic), John O'Connell (W.A.), Bill Saunders (Vic). Centre — Joe Hansen (Vic — Training/Determining Officer), Ian Cameron (S.A.), Geoff Newbourne (Tas), Don East (S.A.), Bob Goodall (Vic), Harry Dobbie (Vic — Instructor), Ron Fisher-Brown (Vic), Laurie Rodriquez (Vic), Ian Pettit (Vic). Front — Bryan Lacey (Vic), Frank Ward (W.A.), Les Koochew (Vic).

1988–89, agency-specific proposals as a result of the Structural Efficiency Principle announced in November 1989, Equal Employment Opportunity and Occupational Health and Safety.

As required by the *Public Service Act* an Industrial Democracy Plan was developed through a joint management/union sub-committee in October 1985. Consultation and discussion on matters of concern with unions were undertaken through forums at each level in the organisation. Four sub-committees were established to report to the National Consultative Council on:

- Equal Employment Opportunity;
- Occupational Health and Safety;
- Regional Staffing Model; and
- Technological Change.

In 1983, a separate Training and Staff Development Branch was established in Central Office to facilitate coordination and control of training programs throughout Australia and to make training more proactive in response to developing needs. By the close of the decade training and development activities embraced a broad range of areas: manager, client contact, client awareness, computer based, systems,

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technical/benefits processing, general administrative and induction training.

In August 1988 expressions of interest were called for the development of a 30 000 sq m office park for the National Administration. This move was to overcome problems being experienced because of substandard accommodation at 14 separate locations. By the close of 1990-91 the move to the Tuggeranong Office Park was near to becoming a reality.

Women and Equal Employment Opportunity

Of all the changes and improvements in working conditions over the years, nothing has changed more radically than the position of women. For decades, administrative practices throughout the Public Service reflected the view expressed by the first Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner, D C McLachlan, who stated in 1920 that 'Women are physiologically unfitted to carry responsibility at an age when men are improving and developing their capacity in this respect...'

Until the Second World War there were no female clerks in the Pensions and Maternity Allowances Branch of the Treasury, apart from Miss Annie Dougherty, who was with the State Public Service when the Commonwealth took over the administration of the NSW Pension Scheme in 1909. During the War the restriction on women entering the Third Division was overlooked and women were temporarily promoted to

Third Division jobs and carried a significant load of the burden of administration. As men started to return to the Public Service at war's end, women returned to their former jobs as clerical assistants and typists.

The bar on women entering the Third Division was lifted in 1947 and women began filtering into clerical positions, but it was some time before women entered management areas.

A notable exception to this was in the area of social work, research and the library. Miss Lyra Taylor was appointed the Administrative Officer in Charge of the Social Welfare and Research Section

The commission appointing Mavis Anderson a special magistrate for the NSW office, August 1962. Mavis Anderson was the first female special magistrate to be appointed by the Department of Social Services.

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established in 1945. Women were instrumental in the development of the social work service in the formative years.

Further advances came with the removal of the marriage bar in 1966 and the provision of equal pay from 1972.

Alison Page was the first woman to be appointed a regional registrar in the Department. She was appointed in charge of Burnie Regional Office in northern Tasmania in 1969. Due to the unequal pay scales in effect until 1972 — women were paid at 75 per cent of the male rate — Miss Page was third on the list of take home pay in Burnie (with a staff of three) when she first began working there, despite being in charge!

In the 1980s the Department took steps to improve the status of women in the Department. In 1983–84 a consultative committee of women from various levels in the Department was established to review and provide advice on departmental policies and procedures as they affect women. Provisions for equal employment opportunity (EEO) were made in amendments to the *Public Service Act* and in June 1984 an Equal Opportunity Section was established in Central Office to develop an EEO program for the Department. EEO Coordinator positions were created in all States. The promotion of EEO was integrated into the Department's corporate goal of guaranteeing an equitable, safe and satisfying working environment.

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Response to Natural Disasters

One aspect of the Department's history stands out as worthy of special mention. That is the extraordinary efforts that staff of the Department have made to help their fellow Australians in times of natural disaster. Over and above the payment of emergency relief funds and unemployment and special benefit payments, staff have provided service to disaster victims as part of a combined relief effort with State emergency agencies.

Within hours of Cyclone Tracy's devastation of Darwin on Christmas Day 1974, DSS staff throughout Australia were at work, locating cash and establishing emergency centres. The DSS office in Darwin itself suffered only minor

damage but most of the staff had been evacuated since their homes were destroyed. A contingent of departmental staff from other States went to Darwin to re-establish operations two days after the cyclone. With minimal resources the team worked 18 to 20 hours a day for six months coordinating welfare programs — overseeing evacuations, providing emergency assistance once people began returning and distributing cash, blankets and clothing.

When Melbourne's Westgate Bridge collapsed in 1973, killing 34 workers, field officers and social workers went to the victims' homes to arrange immediate financial aid for their families. Again, when Hobart's Tasman Bridge collapsed the following year, effectively cutting

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Hobart in two, DSS established a special mobile office to provide help to people cut off from their families and places of work. Departmental staff were on the scene to help people hit by the devastating Tasmanian bushfires of 1967, the great Brisbane flood of 1973, Victoria's terrible Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1982, the floods which in 1986 ravaged northern Queensland coastal areas, the Newcastle earthquake of December 1989 and the Nyngan and Charleville floods of 1990 to mention but a few.

The response of the Department in times of natural disaster has revealed much of the spirit of dedication of its staff and the fundamental purpose of the Department to put people first.

In 1990 a Disaster Response and Recovery Plan was drawn up by the Department. Disaster management and awareness training for staff was instituted in 1989–90. A less-complicated Disaster Relief Payment to replace special benefit was introduced in 1990–91.

CONCLUSION

Today the Department of Social Security is responsible for the social security entitlements of almost five million people. It plays a vital role in protecting those in need and provides income security for people who are disadvantaged because of age, invalidity, unemployment, sole parenthood, or who have low income and a need to care for children. It provides encouragement and assistance to people to gain and maintain a place in the workforce. It caters for people from diverse cultures and languages and people who are disadvantaged through distance or disability.

It is responsible for a major component of the Commonwealth Budget and during 1990–91 it distributed more than $24 billion (about 25% of Commonwealth outlays). Much of the story of Social Security has been about maintaining the integrity of the system and developing a balance between care for the Department's clients and accountability for its expenditure.

The Department employs more than 19 000 staff at more than 300 locations across Australia and is one of Australia's largest Government departments. Today the Department's staff include social workers, computer programmers and technical experts, accountants, lawyers, librarians, field officers, economists, statisticians, training and management experts, translators and journalists. The enormous developments in Social Security over fifty years and the higher profile of the Department in the general community have been achieved only through the sustained high level of commitment of the officers of the Department.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Department of Social Services. *Second Report of the Director-General of Social Services. Year Ended 30th June 1943.*
2. Department of Social Services. *Seventh Report of the Director-General of Social Services. Year Ended 30th June 1948.*
3. Department of Social Services. *Eighth Report of the Director-General of Social Services. Year ended 30th June 1949.*
4. *(First) Interim Report from the Joint Committee on Social Security,* 24 September 1941.
5. Department of Social Services. *Fourth Report of the Director-General for Social Services. Year Ended 30th June 1945.*
6. Department of Social Services. *Report of the Director-General for Social Services. Year Ended 30th June 1969.*

REFERENCES

Department of Social Security. *One Big Family — A Short History of the Department of Social Security.* June 1987.

T H Kewley, *Australian Social Security Today — Major Developments from 1900 to 1978,* Sydney University Press 1980.

Pamela Roberts and Andrew Herscovitch, *History of Australian Social Security, in Social Security, December 1980,* Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1981.

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ATTACHMENT

Ministers for Social Services

The Hon Sir Frederick Harold Stewart (UAP)	* 9 Apr 41 – 7 Oct 41
The Hon Edward James Holloway (ALP)	7 Oct 41 – 21 Sep 43
Senator the Hon James Mackintosh Fraser (ALP)	21 Sep 43 – 18 Jun 46
Senator the Hon Nicholas Edward McKenna (ALP)	18 Jun 46 – 19 Dec 49
Senator the Hon William Henry Spooner (LP)	19 Dec 49 – 11 May 51
The Hon Athol Gordon Townley (LP)	11 May 51 – 9 Jul 54
The Hon William McMahon (LP)	9 Jul 54 – 28 Feb 56
The Hon Hugh S Roberton (CP)	28 Feb 56 – 21 Jan 65
The Hon R W C Swartz, MBE, ED (LP)	21 Jan 65 – 22 Feb 65
The Hon Ian Sinclair (CP)	22 Feb 65 – 27 Feb 68
The Hon W C Wentworth (LP)	27 Feb 68 – 5 Dec 72
The Hon L M Barnard (ALP)	5 Dec 72 – 19 Dec 72

Ministers for Social Security

The Hon Bill Hayden (ALP) (later AC)	19 Dec 72 – 6 Jun 75
Senator the Hon John Wheeldon (ALP)	6 Jun 75 – 11 Nov 75
The Hon Don Chipp (LP Caretaker)	11 Nov 75 – 22 Dec 75
Senator the Hon Margaret G C Guilfoyle (LP)	22 Dec 75 – 3 Nov 80
(later Dame Margaret, DBE)	
Senator the Hon Fred Chaney (LP)	3 Nov 80 – 11 Mar 83
Senator the Hon Don Grimes (ALP)	11 Mar 83 – 13 Dec 84
The Hon Brian Howe (ALP)	13 Dec 84 – 8 May 90
Senator the Hon Graham Richardson (ALP)	8 May 90 –

Minister Assisting The Minister for Social Security

The Hon F E Stewart (ALP)	6 Jun 75 – 11 Nov 75
The Hon I B C Wilson (LP)	7 Dec 82 – 11 Mar 83

Parliamentary Secretary to The Minister for Social Security

The Hon Con Sciacca (A.L.P.)	8 May 90 –

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Directors-General Department of Social Services

F H Rowe	April 41 – May 58
H J Goodes	May 58 – Dec 65
L B Hamilton (later CBE)	Jan 66 – Dec 72

Directors-General, Department of Social Security

L B Hamilton	Dec 72 – Jan 73
Dr L J Weinholt	Jan 73 – Apr 73
L J Daniels (later CB,OBE)	Apr 73 – Aug 77
P J Lanigan (later OBE)	Aug 77 – Apr 81
A J Ayers AO	May 81 – Dec 84

Secretaries, Department of Social Security

A J Ayers AO	Dec 84 – Oct 86
D Volker AO	Nov 86 –

NB *The Department was established on 26 April 1939 but it was not until 9 April 1941 when Mr F H Rowe took up duty as Director-General that the Department commenced to function as a separate organisation.

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