

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS STRATEGY 1989

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Congress recognises that Australia was occupied by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for thousands of years prior to British occupation and subsequent settlement on the 26th of January, 1788.

1.2 Many of the original inhabitants were dispossessed and dispersed, their culture disrupted and threatened and, today their descendants are the most disadvantaged people in Australian society. Some indicators of this disadvantage are:

- (i) The average life expectancy at birth is 15-20 years less than that for other Australians;
- (ii) Aboriginal infant mortality, while improving, is still nearly three times that for non-Aboriginal Australians;
- (iii) Aboriginal people suffer from a higher incidence of both communicable diseases such as hepatitis B, and 'lifestyle' diseases such as diabetes and heart disease;
- (iv) Aboriginal unemployment is six times the national average;
- (v) On average, Aboriginals earn only half the income of other Australians;
- (vi) A large proportion of Aboriginal families live in sub-standard housing or temporary shelter;
- (vii) Aboriginal imprisonment rates are over 14 times higher than those for other Australians and death rates whilst in custody are alarmingly high;
- (viii) Aboriginals in remote communities are often without basic essential services; and
- (ix) Aboriginal culture has been threatened and in some cases destroyed.
- (x) Aboriginal people are the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia.

2. RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

2.1 Congress notes that the injustices of the past 200 years must be remedied if there is to truly be reconciliation and an agreement reached with the indigenous people of Australia.

2.2 Congress congratulates the Federal Government on its program thus far and in particular notes the following:

- (i) Funding channelled through the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio increased in real terms by 46.8% from 1983/84 to 1989/90.

- (ii) Expenditure from other portfolios directed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders increased in real terms by 81.6% from 1983/84 to 1989/90.

2.3 This increase in funding has been directed in the following way.

- (i) Hostels

Aboriginal Hostels Limited now provides accommodation for more than 3000 Aboriginal people in 156 hostels across the country.

- (ii) Health

- (a) Aboriginal Health Services has increased over seven years from 27 operating in 1982 to 66 today.
- (b) Aboriginal infant mortality rates have fallen from 75.5 per 1 000 live births two decades ago to 27.7 per 1000 today.
- (c) Hepatitis B among Aboriginal children is being eliminated through targeted health checks and the provisions of miniature receivers by the National Acoustics Laboratory.
- (d) The Department of Aboriginal Affairs supports 43 Aboriginalcontrolled substance-abuse programs.

- (iii) Education

- (a) Retention rates to the final year of secondary school had risen for Aboriginal children to 22.4 per cent by 1988 in comparison with only 6.4 per cent a decade ago.
- (b) In seven yearsthe numberof Aboriginesenrolled in courses leading to higher education awards had risen from 700 to 2604.
- (c) In just two years the number of Aborigines enrolled in certificate courses at TAFE colleges has risen from 1287 to 2746.
- (d) In the past year 52 new proposals have been added to the 60 language proposals funded for 39 schools and community organisations under the National Aboriginal Languages Program.
- (e) The Remote Area Program for Aborigines is now funding nine projects.

Despite these improvements Congress recognises that Aboriginal people remain the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia.

- (g) Congress recognises the introduction by the Federal Government of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education **Policy**.
- (h) In implementing this **Policy** the diverse educational needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people should be met and

Aboriginal people and their established networks should be involved in all education decision-making processes.

(iv) Institute of Aboriginal Studies

- (a) The Institute of Aboriginal Studies has six three-year major research projects in progress.
- (b) It runs three short-term community access courses at frequent intervals.
- (c) Six Aboriginal studies courses have been stimulated into existence at Australian tertiary institutions.
- (d) Since 1984, 132 grants have been made to Aboriginal people for studies into such things as plant medicines, oral history, traditional language dictionaries and recording of burial grounds.
- (e) The Institute has published more than 200 books and produced more than 100 films. It also releases records, cassettes, microfiches and journals.

(v) Infrastructure

- (a) The Accelerated Community Infrastructure Program provided adequate water supplies to 23 communities and sewage disposal to 17.
- (b) The Town Campers Assistance Program enabled 12 camps to gain tenure to their land; 20 camps had water supplies installed or upgraded.
- (c) Infrastructure is being provided to more than 40 Northern Territory town camps through a three-year joint program between the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments and Aboriginal Organisations.
- (d) The Accelerated Communities Development Program is upgrading essential services and assisting the purchase by Aboriginal communities of traditionally significant land in Western Australia.
- (e) The Priority Communities Development Strategy was introduced in 1988 to provide rapid and sustained improvement in the most impoverished Aboriginal communities. Twenty communities have so far been improved through this program.

(vi) Land and Self Determination

- (a) Aboriginal people have title to approximately 12 percent of Australian land.
- (b) Aboriginal people have been granted 258,000 square kilometres of former reserves in the Northern Territory under the land claim process after hearing by Aboriginal Land Commissioners, amounting to about one third of the Northern Territory.
- (c) During the 1980's 141 properties have been purchased for Aboriginal communities.

- (d) Since the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments established the Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDC), which is a \$1 00 million agreement, 28 excisions have taken place in that State.
- (e) There are 29 Aboriginal pastoral stations now in Western Australia, and the Government has established a Pastoral Management Unit in the Central Kimberleys region.

The Government has granted title to 403 hectares of land in the Jervis Bay region to the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community.

- (g) Currently 73 Aboriginal and Islander community councils in the Northern Territory and Queensland are recognised as local governing bodies.
 - (h) There are 21 Aboriginal legal services with 65 branch offices employing more than 100 solicitors.
 - (i) Aboriginal legal services advice and represent about 50,000 Aboriginal clients annually.
- (vii) Jobs and Enterprise
- (a) In two years the number of participants in the Community Development Employment Project Scheme has risen from an initial 5000 to 20 000, with a comparative spread of benefits among dependents.
 - (b) The Community Development Employment Project Scheme is operating in 129 Aboriginal communities and is expected to be embraced by another 30 within 12 months.
 - (c) The Small Business Funding program has granted 78 loans and guarantees.
 - (d) The Enterprise Development Scheme has given assistance to 805 Aboriginal clients.
 - (e) The Aboriginal Organisation Training program has trained 2600 staff members of Aboriginal organisations.

(viii) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Legislation before Parliament to set up an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which will replace the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Development Commission, and establish 60 regions, each represented by a Regional Council which will set priorities for local program expenditure.

(ix) Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

The establishment of a Royal Commission and the Governments intention to implement its recommendations.

3. PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

3.1 Notwithstanding the Federal Governments recent achievements in the area of Aboriginal Affairs Congress believes that far more needs to be done to ensure that self

determination, self management, the preservation of culture and heritage for the indigenous people of Australia is realised before the end of the 1990's. This will require assistance to Aboriginal communities to develop their own substantial economic base, enabling ongoing commercial and social initiatives to be conducted on a self funded basis with a combination of traditional Aboriginal forms of democratic involvement and control and modern technology in management and accounting. Accordingly, Congress authorises the **ACTU** Executive to pursue the following.

3.2 Consultation

- (i) The **ACTU** holds regular meetings with the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations with the view to ensuring that there is greater understanding, communication and co-operation between both organisations.
- (ii) These regular meetings should focus on a range of issues including prioritising claims for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that could be pursued by the **ACTU** in "social wage" discussions with the Federal Government. The consultation should also lead to a revised **policy** document to be presented to the next **ACTU** Congress.
- (iii) To encourage **ACTU** Branches in each State and Territory to mirror these activities and discussions at a local level.

3.3 Education

(i) Education of the Trade Union Movement

To initiate in consultation with the National Coalition an education and awareness campaign amongst Trade Unionists concerning the rights and needs of the indigenous people of Australia. To request the **ACTU** Aboriginal **Policy** Committee to advise the Executive on implementation of the Education Campaign as well as to generally assist in the implementation of this strategy document.

(ii) Funding Aboriginal Education Institutions

To ensure that Aboriginal Education Institutions such as Tranby and Institute of Aboriginal Development are fully funded by the relevant Government bodies.

3.4 Aboriginal Controlled Water Supply Unit

- (i) To support as a major priority the funding and setting up of an Aboriginal Controlled Water Supply Unit.
- (ii) To ensure that prior to the end of the 1990's that water supply to all aboriginal communities is adequate to meet their needs well into the next century.

3.5 National Land Rights Legislation

- (i) To continue to lobby the Federal Government in consultation with the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisation for the introduction of National Land Rights Legislation. Such legislation to be introduced in terms

agreeable to the Aboriginal Community.

- (ii) In the interim State and Territory Branches of the **ACTU** should continue to support the introduction and improvement of existing Land Rights Legislation at a local level.

3.6 Infrastructure

- (i) The **ACTU** to encourage affiliates to continue to bring to the attention of Federal, State and Local Government authorities the infrastructure needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Further to continue to lobby government so that no person in Australia is denied access to water sewage, electricity, roads and decent housing.

3.7 Industrial

- (i) A priority over the next 12 months in conjunction with Award Restructuring is to ensure that no aboriginal worker enterprise or Organisation is Award free.
- (ii) Continued lobbying by the **ACTU** and its State and Territory Branches for increased funding to Aboriginal Organisations so that basic Award entitlements and claims under the National Wage Case Principles can be met.
- (iii) Continued employment by the Departments of Aboriginal Affairs, and

Employment and Industrial Relation of an Aboriginal Industrial Liaison Officer based in Alice Springs.