

Why Retain Lake Tyers?

SIR,—IN EXPRESSING our appreciation of Dr. Donald Thomson's public statement ("The Age," 23/5) of the position we have known he maintains, may I give some illustrations from my own experience.

Our birth place means much to our people.

Whenever possible I return to my home at Cumeroogunja, on the Murray. Like the people of Lake Tyers, we, too, wished to develop our land.

On each visit as I walk across the small part of the reserve still available to us, I see again the fine old people who were our parents, I remember the pride they had in their flourishing wheat fields, growing on land they had cleared.

Many families owned their own horse and jinker. We were proud of our homes, our church and our school.

Gradually the N.S.W. Government made it clear we had not titled right to the land. White neighbors were leased sections of the reserve.

We became dispirited and depressed. As the station commenced to break up the blame was put on to the people and it was said we were lazy and irresponsible.

Destroyed

It was the Government's policy and bad administration which destroyed us.

A self-respecting, independent people became dependent on charity and hand-outs.

Many families, refusing to live under the Government system, attempted to make their way in the white community. Descendants of these folk now walk the streets, live on the fringes of nearby towns and the banks of the Murray.

Other families who put up with conditions were ultimately offered homes in the nearest country centre, where, it was alleged, employment would be available and their children receive a better standard of education.

The three families who accepted the offer found how difficult life is for unskilled aboriginal laborers in white society, in spite of assistance from well-intentioned people.

They became demoralised and disintegrated. Their children finished up in Government institutions.

This is what I have seen and I will fight to the end to prevent it happening to the Lake Tyers families.

The retaining of Lake Tyers as a basis for creation of employment through community development must be seen as a practical humane plan which can offer security, shelter and stability to family life.

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