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PRIME MINISTER,  
CANBERRA.

12 JUN 1957

Dear Mr. Kibel,

I refer to your letter of 15th April, which was acknowledged previously by the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, relating to a recent television programme entitled "Manlaughter" featuring conditions of distress among Australian aborigines.

It should be pointed out that the State Governments are responsible for the aborigines within their borders, and the Commonwealth Government has no authority to concern itself with aboriginal affairs except in the case of the Northern Territory. You will, no doubt, be interested to read the enclosed copy of a statement made earlier this year by my colleague, the Minister for Territories, which indicates the considerable degree of effort being undertaken to advance the aboriginal population of the Northern Territory.

It may be stated quite definitely that the television film you saw is not designed to give a balanced picture of the circumstances of aborigines either in Australia in general or in the area to which the film is particularly related. Recently an investigation was made, under the leadership of Dr. W.B. Davidson, Commissioner of Public Health for Western Australia, of the nutritional state of, and the prevalence of disease among, the aborigines of the Warburton area, which have been the focus of recent public attention. This investigation covered a total of 483 aborigines and included 160 blood examinations and 300 clinical examinations of those aborigines seen who seemed most likely to be suffering from disease or malnutrition.

Dr. Davidson's interim report states:

"It is impossible that evidence of starvation could escape such rigorous investigation. It can be said here and now that no manifestation of starvation, or any condition remotely resembling starvation was elicited from the natives presented for our examination."

The report mentions that there were a few cases of mild vitamin and protein deficiency amongst aborigines in contact with civilisation, due to the replacement of some items of their natural diet by items available at centres of white settlement. The report also refers to