

Lake Tyers Aborigines

SIR—FOR ONE WHO purports to put forward a "rational assessment" of the issues involved in the Lake Tyers Aboriginal controversy, Stuart Sayers, "The Age" (11/5) shows a bias towards attitudes maintained by the management of the station and a lack of contact with, or knowledge of, the aboriginal point of view.

I offer comment on two of his statements: (1) He writes, "Of its kind the accommodation offered at Lake Tyers is good . . . life that is lived on this reserve is comfortable, enviably so . . ."

The three-roomed cottages lack floor coverings, bathroom, laundry and running water. Old-fashioned "colonial ovens" provide the only means of warmth and cooking for families with up to eight children.

In the past young couples have accepted offers from the Aborigines' Welfare Board to move into new homes in country centres away from the reserve, in some cases isolated from relatives, because they held no hope for the improvement of conditions.

Pastor Nicholls's action and leadership has given new life to residents, some of whom are now declining to accept homes in the outside community. They choose to put up with their "comfortable" life in anticipation of a stake in their birthplace.

Cost of Station

(2) Mr. Sayers states, "This station . . . cost the taxpayer . . . a net £27,774 to run . . . For something approaching £1500 a head a year, Victoria is maintaining in a state of almost complete idleness and uselessness 50 adults . . ."

Such huge expenditure for such little result reflects on the management, not the aboriginal people. The statement ignores the fact that many able-bodied men go out to seasonal employment, pea and bean picking, &c., when it is available.

If Mr. Sayers had spoken with any of the aboriginal residents he would have discovered their interest in some form of co-operative development of Lake Tyers. As vague as their concept of "co-operative" may be, their willingness to take responsible useful action was made clear by the sacrificial effort to build a fund to launch a united project.

In spite of the £2 a fortnight (plus keep) provided for work on the station, the men saved £40. Certain members of the Welfare Board, instead of finding ways to make use of this initiative, ordered the committee to refund the money to its members.

Mr. Sayers's article unfortunately bristles with such one-sided information. If the ills of "sentiment, muddled thinking, good intentions and sinister intentions" are to be avoided, more complete evidence should be obtained from all parties concerned.

STAN DAVEY (General Secretary, Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, Bayswater).

[Stuart Sayers comments: "Contrary to Mr. Davey's supposition, the article was based solidly on evidence drawn from conversation with a number of residents of the Lake Tyers station and as many aborigines in the surrounding district as could be met in two days.

"All who were willing to talk had opinions, which were carefully weighed with the opinions of white Gippsland residents of many occupations and varying degrees of experience in this question.

"To spare the aborigines who were prepared to talk all possible embarrassment, no one was directly quoted or identified in the article. From start to finish it was a report of things seen and heard and of certain conclusions reached from that evidence."

—Editor, "The Age."