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PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT.

CANBERRA,

23 SEP 1957

File No. 57/778

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Dear Mr. Pankhurst,

I am directed to refer to your recent letter expressing your Club's concern at the treatment of aborigines in the Warburton Range area in Western Australia, mentioning, in particular, a film recently shown to members of your Club which featured conditions of distress among the aborigines living there.

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 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 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.S. 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.

Mr. 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 the fact that enlarged abdomens were almost universal but points out that these were not, as has been claimed, due to dietary deficiencies, but were in fact due to posture and perhaps to the habit of taking large meals at infrequent intervals in contradistinction to the habit of civilised communities of having small and frequent meals.

The report provides clear evidence that claims of starvation among the aborigines of the area are exaggerated and