



MINISTER FOR TERRITORIES.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.

3 1 MAY 1967

My dear Acting Prime Minister,

Cabinet Decision No. 79 on the constitutional amendment concerning Aborigines directed that if the referendum was successful the Commonwealth would hold discussions with the States to formulate a joint policy with respect to Aborigines whereby the States will be responsible for administration but the Commonwealth will have a role of policy participation.

In 1951 and again each two years from 1961 onwards Commonwealth and State Ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs have met to discuss matters of common interest in the field of Aboriginal advancement. The results of the conferences have on each occasion been reported to the Federal Parliament.

I attach a copy of the report of the 1965 conference held in Adelaide. On page 9 of the pamphlet is set out the statement of the policy of assimilation first agreed to by the Commonwealth and all States in 1961 and slightly varied at the Adelaide conference.

The revival of the Commonwealth and State conferences in 1961 was at the initiative of my predecessor who chaired the conference in Canberra in that year and in Darwin in 1963. The Minister for Social Services attended the 1961 and 1963 conferences. The Minister for Health attended the 1963 conference and was represented at the 1965 conference. Officers of those Departments and also of the Department of External Affairs have participated in the meetings of Commonwealth and State officials arranged in association with the Ministerial meetings. The Department of Territories has accepted some responsibility for national publicity on Aboriginal welfare and in co-operation with Australian overseas posts for the overseas distribution of the publicity material. The Department of Territories also acts as a central secretariat for the Commonwealth and State Ministers' and officers' meetings.

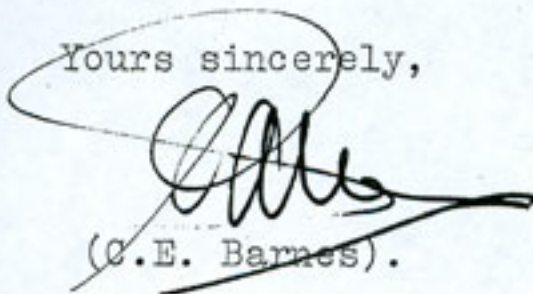
The next regular meeting of Commonwealth and State Ministers of Aboriginal Welfare is to be held in Perth on 21st July next.

*Miss G. Connor
forward this letter to me
she did not want to
retain a copy for
the history P.M.
M.J.H. 2/6.*

In my opinion this biennial meeting of State and Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs provides a convenient mechanism and one which is ready to hand for carrying out a Commonwealth policy role - but avoiding further Commonwealth involvement in administration - in Aboriginal matters. I am inclined to think that the initiative in State Aboriginal matters should come from the State Governments to such a meeting and the Commonwealth can as it has done in the past keep the States informed of what it is doing in its own Territories. Arrangements of this kind would recognise the great diversity of problems in this field - urban and remote area problems, differences in degree of sophistication, differences in traditions customs etc.

In any case the referendum result seems to require some definition by the Commonwealth of the part it considers it should play in the field of Aboriginal affairs and it would seem desirable that an early decision be made on where the responsibility for this should lie. As I see it, either a separate approach should have been made by the Commonwealth to the States before the ministerial meeting takes place in July or I should be briefed to put proposals or to state the Commonwealth's attitude to the State Ministers at that meeting.

Yours sincerely,



(C.E. Barnes).

The Rt. Hon. J. McEwen, M.P.,
Acting Prime Minister,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. A.C.T.