

IN NORTHERN Australia the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is progressively implementing a program which arises from the recommendations of the Gibb Committee (1971), and from the adoption of new measures designed to relieve the socially and economically depressed condition of many Aboriginal people in pastoral areas. This program has, as its base, the acquisition of suitable areas of land upon which Aboriginal communities may establish and develop themselves with secure tenure of the land they occupy. Acquisition is essentially taking two forms; the outright purchase of an entire pastoral property (as in the cases of Willowra and Kildurk), or the excision of lesser areas by agreement with pastoral lessees. This program is most active in the Northern Territory, but it is also being implemented in Western Australia.

COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT
ON PASTORAL
PROPERTIES

An important element in the program is the wide choice open to Aboriginal communities as to the form of development they want, and the extent and type of assistance they can seek from the Department. In the initial stages of the program, efforts are concentrated on explaining the options open to individual communities and assisting them to determine their needs and priorities for themselves. Some communities are able to respond more quickly than others; some indicate little interest in much (or any) change at the present time.

Improved housing, water supplies, communications, health services and employment and training opportunities are amongst the needs which are most commonly expressed by communities. These needs are often not always perceived in the same way by the Department but it is for the communities to set the priorities that form the basis for their own development programs.

There are inevitable financial limitations upon the Department in its field operations with these groups, but a far more important inhibiting factor has been the shortage of field advisers in some areas. The whole program rests upon the ability of the Department to respond at need to these groups, and all too often a lack of advisory staff (and/or transport) has prevented the regular visits which are an integral part of the community development program.

TWENTY-ONE communities with a total population in excess of 1300 persons were regularly visited by either Departmental officers or Finke River Mission personnel, who assisted them in their negotiations with pastoralists for the release of land for the purposes recommended by the Gibb Committee. Several communities have already obtained, or are in the process of obtaining, the excise of land to enable them to establish permanent community centres. At the end of the period under review negotiations were in progress between thirteen separate communities and individual pastoral property owners for the provision of community owned land. At Utopia Station, several square miles have already been excised. However, the whole property has been offered to the Government for purchase on behalf of the Aboriginal community and the offer is currently being considered. Negotiations for the purchase of Mt Ebenezer Station have been in progress for a considerable time.

SUMMARY OF
ACTIVITIES IN
THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY

Where management has objected to the provision of land for community centres for various reasons, sites in other areas which are significant and suitable for community groups are being considered.

COMMUNITY development work as a professional activity is quite new to Australia. However, the Department and its predecessor organisations have recognised for some years the desirability of professional training for field staff.

THE TRAINING OF
COMMUNITY
ADVISERS

In the Northern Territory, for example, patrol officers have since 1946 undergone a period of traineeship extending over two years. This has consisted of a period of field training and a period of academic training. The field training enabled the officers to gain an understanding of Aboriginal groups and people and to familiarise themselves with their customs and how they affect the implementation of the policies of the Government of the time.

In 1947 the first academic courses were introduced at the Sydney University with an emphasis on Anthropology, History, Geography and Law, with some training being given in tropical medicine and linguistics. The course at the Sydney University terminated in