Mr. C. Perkins       First Assistant Secretary (Policy II)  
Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra  
Chairman.
Ms P. Turner       Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra
Mr. P. O'Neill       Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Northern  
Territory
Mr. R. Hempel       " "
Ms. S. Marriott       " "
Mr. B. Alcorn       Director, Community Welfare Division,  
Department of Community Development, Northern  
Territory
Mr. T. Simpson       Assistant Director, Community Welfare Division
Ms. R. Darmody       Office of Chief Carr, Canberra
Mr. G. Schlecht       " "
Mr. B. Valadian       Aboriginal Development Foundation
Mr. D. Scott       Aboriginal Hostels

2. Mr. Perkins opened the meeting, stating that its purpose was to  
establish working arrangements for the implementation of the policy  
guidelines on Aboriginal Adoption and Fostering, and the care and  
treatment of Aboriginal Juveniles in State Corrective Institutions.  
It was observed that the history of the development of the policy papers was  
familiar to all in attendance. Regional discussions are to take place in  
all States/Territories to seek agreement in principle on the guidelines,  
with a view to presenting definitive statements for adoption at the next  
Ministers Conference in 1980. It was recognised that the situation  
differed in the various regions, so it was also a purpose of the meeting  
to obtain a clearer idea of policies and practices being followed in the  
Northern Territory. The Community Welfare Division has functional  
responsibility in the fields of adoption and fostering and juvenile  
delinquency. It was suggested that a statement by Mr. Alcorn could  
cover all items of the agenda, as they related to the policy guidelines  
in these two areas.

3. Community Welfare  
Mr. Alcorn outlined the historical development of the delivery  
of welfare services to Aboriginals, pointing out that the Community  
Welfare Division had inherited a largely urban-based welfare structure  
which had responded minimally to Aboriginal needs. Since self-government  
a continuing review of all services has been undertaken, both internally,  
and externally through the Board of Inquiry into Welfare Services,
Programme reviews cover all areas of the Department of Community Development activities - income security, substitute care, youth work, community work, policy and planning, child care, family support, information, immigration and ethnic affairs.

A major task of the Board is to revise the antiquated legislative framework (primarily the Social and Child Welfare Ordnances) within which the Community Welfare Division operates. Its report would probably be issued next month.

4. With regard to Aboriginal children "in care", past policy has been facilitated by the provision of "soft" loans to mission societies for the establishment of family group homes. Current policy looked more towards the closing down of these homes throughout the Northern Territory - this is in accord with policy guidelines principles of retaining Aboriginal children within their own family/community environment. Mr. Alcorn provided the following indication of the status of Northern Territory family group homes:

- Sommerville (Darwin) - only 4 children currently in residence (1 out of 6 cottages in use)
- Wetca Dixon (Darwin) - likely to close at end of year
- St. Mary's (Alice Springs) - dwindling numbers
- Tennant Creek Home - closed.
- Katherine - 1 of the 2 homes closed.

5. Community Welfare has also inherited a difficult problem in relation to Aboriginal children committed into State care. There are approximately 35 children whose guardianship was transferred to the Director of Social Welfare on the basis of doubtful documentation with no legal status. The Department is currently attempting to locate the families of these children. Mr. Alcorn pointed out that, at present, there is no legislative provision for the transfer of guardianship and it was intended to write into the new legislation provisions allowing for temporary guardianship by the Director of Social Welfare with clearly identified review periods. Again, this pointed to obvious failings in the legislative structure as it relates to the provision of welfare services to Aboriginal people.

6. Attempts by Community Welfare to develop foster-care placements with Aboriginal families have encountered problems due to:
   (i) the historic fear of "welfare" amongst Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory
   (ii) the demographic structure of the Northern Territory with a large, young, single population.

It was anticipated that the proposed Darwin and Regional Aboriginal Child Care Agency (D.A.R.A.C.C.A.) would have more success in this area. Department of Community Development have indicated their support for the development of such an agency to work in co-operation with Community Welfare but as an autonomous body. Ms Marriott outlined the idea of the agency as it is perceived by the Aboriginal people involved.
7. Mr. Perkins queried whether this change in policy merely ignored the problem which existed and quoted examples of child and juvenile neglect in the Alice Springs area. Mr. Alcorn replied that his Department's policy emphasised positive alternatives to institutionalisation:

(i) placement with relatives
(ii) placement within the child's community on a short term foster care basis.
(iii) reconsideration of why a child may "need" to be in care.

With a multiplicity of family group homes, certain problems and abuses of the system were seen to exist - the quality of field staff, both within the homes and the referral system, could not always be assured. Some aspects of the system itself contributed to abuses. For instance, cottage parents used to be paid by means of a fixed allowance per child which encouraged staff to keep children longer in the homes and provide the cheapest possible care, in order to maximise their own income. Family group home "parents" are now paid a flat rate at a reasonably high level, with an additional allowance per child.

8. Adoption and Fostering

There was some discussion on the policy guidelines sections dealing with the recognition of tribal marriages and socio/cultural structures as these related to the adoption and fostering of Aboriginal children. Legal interpretation of the Northern Territory Adoptions Ordinance may preclude the adoption of children by people not legally married. However, placements of Aboriginal children have been made in the past, with tribally married couples - officially these children could still be declared as being in "State care". There are presently 34 cases of unfinalised adoptions, according to Community Welfare statistics, of which approximately 22 are placements with unmarried parents. These people must seek legal advice to finalise the adoption of their children. Community Welfare is assisting in this regard, however, much depends on the launching of a test case by Aboriginal Legal Aid (re the Adoptions Ordinance and acceptance of tribal marriages) and the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission. Insofar as the recognition of tribal marriages in other fields goes, the Northern Territory Government has adopted a policy of piecemeal amendments to existing legislation, as it has no constitutional power to legislate exclusively on "marriage". A paper was circulated by Ms Marriott indicating changes which had already been made.

9. Some statistics were provided in response to a query from Ms Turner. The number of children available for adoption is insufficient to meet the demand of prospective adoptive families - only four children were placed last year.

Substitute Care (approximately 60% Aboriginal representation)
18 children referred (latest month statistics)
77 " in foster care (latest month total)
67 " in residential care ("")

Mr. Simpson pointed out the difficulty in obtaining statistics in all welfare related fields, as separate statistics for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals were not kept as a result of a National Aboriginal Consultative Committee recommendation.
5.

15. **Office of Child Care**

Ms Darmody described the role of the Office of Child Care in relation to Aboriginal children's services and the need for close liaison with State Welfare Departments, and Regional offices of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. She emphasized that in the Children's Services Programme, high priority was given to the needs of Aboriginals. At the Melbourne Child Care Conference (April) the Minister, Senator Margaret Guilfoyle, had pledged public support for the development of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies in all States/Territories. The Community Services Programme funded a variety of activities including family care, homemakers, emergency care, subsidy payments, etc. In the Northern Territory, mainly holiday/recreation activity programmes are funded. It is significant that the majority of applications from Aboriginal communities are from those where Y.M.C.A. type activities are already operating. The Office of Child Care was concerned that few proposals had come from Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and Ms Darmody commented that there seemed to be a lack of interest in children's services on the part of Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Mr. Perkins indicated that this would be rectified and assured full support of his Department. It was also pointed out that Community Welfare would be taking over the youth services and family support programmes, currently administered by Office of Child Care, in the near future.

16. **Department of Aboriginal Affairs**

Mr. Hempel and Ms Marriott commented on Department of Aboriginal Affairs residual welfare functions, which were a carry-over from the Welfare Branch days and the lack of services provided in remote areas by the Department of the Northern Territory. These types of activities are now gradually being taken over by Aboriginal organizations such as Kalano (Katherine) and the Aboriginal Development Foundation (A.D.F - Darwin). Ms. Turner stated that a heavy burden was often placed on Aboriginal organizations like these - State Welfare authorities have tended to abdicate their responsibility and pressure has been transferred to Aboriginal agencies to provide services. It was hoped this situation would not develop in the Northern Territory.

17. Mr. Simpson described an Aboriginal Development Foundation proposal to farm out juvenile delinquents to community service organizations, in order that they could perform some useful work and remain within the community, while in detention. This, in fact, was already happening in the Northern Territory - there are no barriers to community service orders under Northern Territory legislation, however, Community Welfare is concerned to develop a programme for juveniles which would not involve the coercive element of a breach of court orders.
10. **Juvenile Delinquency**

Again, due to the lack of separate statistics, only a rough estimate of 60% Aboriginal representation in juvenile statistics could be made - that is, of course, disproportionate to the percentage of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory population. It was pointed out that the policy guidelines, dealing mainly with the care of Aboriginal juveniles in State corrective institutions, were less relevant in the Northern Territory in view of the current move away from institutionalisation. There are no no security facilities for juveniles in the Top End and only Giles House in Alice Springs is operating in this capacity.

11. Messrs. Alcorn and Simpson outlined some of the changes occurring in this area. The Chappell Road boys' home is to be closed shortly, involving the abolition of twelve group worker positions, the occupants of which worked on a roster basis. This was felt to provide inadequate personal care and contact with the boys and consequently a new open facility at Malek has been operating from 16 August, with house parent managers. Dundas House is to function as a day attendance centre, staffed by youth workers (new positions) and providing an alternative education system and planned recreation programme.

12. The Aboriginal Community Development Worker training scheme would enable remote area teams (comprising an Aboriginal Community Worker and one other staff member) to work with Aboriginal communities in attempting to develop alternatives to institutional care for juvenile offenders. The remote area teams will work in consultation with local National Aboriginal Conference representatives and it is expected that this approach will allow flexibility in dealing with different community responses. The Department of Community Development provides funding resources for the development of community-based programmes for Aboriginal youth, through its Grant-in-Aid programme, however, communities have not yet identified specific projects in this regard. The Department also subsidises council-employed Aboriginal Welfare/Social Worker positions.

13. Mr. Perkins emphasised that there seemed to be a lack of research in the whole area of Aboriginal juvenile delinquency. Programmes could not be developed by or for Aboriginal communities if basic information was not available, or needs clearly identified. Obviously, some research work would be undertaken through Community Welfare's ongoing review of its own programmes but this was yet to be seen.

14. The following statistical information (from the previous month) was provided by Mr. Alcorn - estimated representation of Aboriginals is 60%. These are children under 17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probation orders</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential admissions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In prison</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court assessments</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. Mr. Alcorn said that difficulties in developing Aboriginal community-based programmes were related to the problem of the changing functions of the Departments involved. He suggested that some consideration be given to the establishment of a separate funding resource, for Aboriginal children's programmes, within the Office of Child Care. This would allow the channelling of much-needed developmental funds into the process of consultation with remote communities, and would facilitate the research necessary for the identification of needs and appropriate responses. Mr. Schlecht indicated some agreement with this approach and pointed to the lack of resources in the Northern Territory Regional Office of the Office of Child Care, which made long-term developmental work with organisations and groups virtually impossible. It is obvious that this type of work must be done with Aboriginal communities, although the Office of Child Care is providing funds, the take-up will not be as rapid in the Northern Territory as in southern states.

19. **Summary of Discussion on Policy Guidelines**

It was established that most items of the suggested agenda had been covered by the statements of the various Departmental representatives and the subsequent discussions and that general agreement on the policy guidelines existed. Mr. Perkins noted that the Northern Territory was at an early stage of development of programmes for Aboriginal children's services and juvenile offenders and that future progress should be closely monitored. The meeting had provided a useful forum for exchange of views and information and for feedback on ratification and implementation of the policy guidelines. He suggested that Department of Aboriginal Affairs role in this area would be one of co-ordination of national policy and facilitation of consultation with Aboriginal communities in liaison with both Community Welfare and the Office of Child Care. Mr. Schlecht mentioned the Northern Territory Council of Social Service workshop (funded by Office of Child Care) to be held in the near future, as another medium of communication/liaison - this would be covering discussion of the whole range of welfare service provision and involves Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Community Welfare and Office of Child Care as well as voluntary service organisations.

20. **Annual Review**

A joint review on implementation of the policy guidelines (Department of Aboriginal Affairs/Community Welfare/Office of Child Care) co-ordinated by Community Welfare, should be completed before the next Ministers Conference in early February 1980. It was agreed that the terms of reference would be established at Central Office level and some suggestions were elicited on the types of information required. Mr. Alcorn advised that any evaluation criteria developed should take account of the three aspects of work in the adoption and fostering and juvenile delinquency programme areas - developmental, preventative, and remedial. Other information provided by the annual review should include:

(i) philosophy of the State Welfare department
(ii) delineation of the roles of Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Office of Child Care.
(iii) statistical information relevant to the policy areas.
There was some discussion about the process of consultation on the policy
guidelines to be followed with Aboriginal communities. It was pointed out
by both Community Welfare and Department of Aboriginal Affairs that
communities, at present, were suffering from a "consultation overkill" as
a result of self-government and the desire by Government authorities to
ratify their decisions and programme strategies with Aboriginal people.
The meeting expressed the view that it did not want to be part of this
"overkill" process and methods of consultation on the guidelines would
be given careful consideration.

21. Views of Representatives of Aboriginal Organisations
Representatives of the Aboriginal Development Foundation and
Aboriginal Hostels were invited into the meeting and were asked for
their comments on various areas of discussion. Mr. Valadian outlined his
ideas on the community service order scheme as it may relate to Aboriginal
juveniles. There was further comment from Mr. Simpson on the question of
whether the scheme would work more effectively without the coercive element
of court orders. Mr. Valadian expressed the opinion that there were certain
advantages in Essington House type programmes (as this involves a security/
coercive element in juvenile care programmes) He pointed out that informal
fostering arrangements worked well in tribal fringe-camp situations,
however, in urban areas, some problems had become evident. Tensions had
arisen in families fostering children of differing age groups and, in this
situation, it may be preferable to utilise a foster group home facility,
where the children in care are of similar ages. Mr. Scott suggested that
Aboriginal hostels could be used as alternative placements for these
children. In the past, there has been a lack of contact between Government
Departments and Aboriginal Hostels. Mr. Scott advised that there was a
need for more liaison in this area, and it may be that some suitable
arrangements could be made in terms of foster care or juvenile placements.

22. Ms Marriott questioned whether there was a need for financial
support for the informal fostering arrangements in fringe camps. Mr.
Valadian was of the opinion that, in many cases, this would create a
welfare dependency situation which conflicted with the policies pursued by
Aboriginal Development Foundation in their work with Aboriginal fringe-
dwellers. It was also felt that the allocation of a community development
worker to the fringe-camps, would not be of any great assistance at this
stage.

23. There was discussion on the consequences of declaration of restricted
areas at Aboriginal communities under the new Liquor Act. It was felt that
this would lead to an increase in the number of Aboriginals in towns, and,
consequently, an increase in juvenile delinquency and in the numbers of
children at risk. It was obvious that this situation will have to be
monitored very closely. Mr. Valadian suggested that there was an urgent need
for increased liaison with Aboriginal Legal Aid to establish what happened
to Aboriginal juveniles when they returned to their home communities.