

Aboriginals a problem

This year will be vital to the rural industries. Last year's policies were a strange hybrid of props for some sectors of the industry and half-hearted efforts to get people out of others. If we are to go ahead as a major trading nation, it will not be this way. Even if it takes massive spending, 1972 must be the year for a proper rural rationalisation scheme.

The Aboriginals must rank as a major problem for the new year. Of all our social problems, it is the one that advertises itself most effectively abroad. For Aboriginals, 1971 was a year of setback, for the Commonwealth seemed to lose interest in them. It must be different this year: if we fail to tackle the Aboriginal problem, we will increase the Aboriginals' dissatisfaction at the limits to their rights and cause ourselves embarrassment abroad.

Finally, there are dangerous gaps and ossified patches in our foreign and defence policies. We have had to face some of the realities of Asia already, though we have not done much about it. Now we must face up to the changes as they affect us in the policies of the United States and the fact of a united Europe, in which Britain is but one of a number of equal members. In external matters we are rigid and parochial. Our foreign policy preoccupation is with trade; in defence, it is with yesterday's frameworks designed with yesterday's friends to deter yesterday's enemies. So Asia is little more to us than a system of markets and trade routes and the focus of our defence thinking lies somewhere in the Indian Ocean. In both areas, we need more realism, flexibility and — above all — vision.

Across the whole sweep of home and foreign policy, in other words, the time is well overdue for Australia to be brought into the Seventies. If we leave it much longer, we will leave it too late. With imagination and leadership, plus some of our well-tryed staying power, 1972 could be the year in which we made it.