
State refused Aborigines basic wage

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THE State Government denied Aboriginal workers the basic wage in 1967 to ensure they remained attractive to employers.

Despite repeated representations from unions, the Government under then premier Frank Nicklin declared Aboriginal employment opportunities, particularly for stockmen, "had to be preserved".

"Were the rate to follow the basic wage, particularly where employees had 'keep' provided, work opportunities could possibly contract considerably to the detriment of the Aborigines themselves," Cabinet decided.

The information came to light yesterday with the release of state Cabinet papers under the 30-year rule.

When a new Aboriginal and Islanders Affairs Act was proclaimed in April 1966, a substantial wage increase for Aborigines was provided after an agreement with the United Graziers Association.

But representations were constantly made by the Trades and Labor Council in 1967 to include Aboriginal stockman in basic wage rises.

Aboriginal stockman received a wage of about \$25 a week, while their white colleagues received about \$33.

A basic wage increase of 50 was granted on April 10, 1967.

After consultation with the UGA, it was considered an "inopportune time" to also increase the Aboriginal rate of pay.

While Aborigines were fighting for a fair deal, white Australians were still enjoying post-war prosperity. Unemployment was 1 percent, a new Ford Falcon cost \$1500.

State Cabinet admitted that alcohol might contribute to the annual road toll of 475 and suggested that Queensland follow Victoria and introduce tough drink-driving fines.

Some youths were beginning to take substances with strange sounding names such as marijuana, but drug possession, even for heroin, carried a \$100 fine.

The crown of thorns star fish was causing concern as it threatened to wipe out the Great Barrier Reef within two years. Cabinet approved \$6400 in addition to an already approved \$20,000 for research into the problem.