PART II

FRONTIER CONFLICT
CHAPTER 6

RESISTANCE FROM THE RAINFOREST

Government policy towards Aborigines in Queensland was shaped principally by experience from the pastoral frontier, and was not significantly changed to meet the different requirements of the mining frontier. In the rainforest of North Queensland still different problems arose, and these at length did compel the government to modify its policy considerably.

Before European colonization, rainforest covered most of eastern North Queensland from the headwaters of the Annum River to the lower Herbert River, its distribution depending on heavy rainfall, adequate drainage, and reasonably fertile soil. It presented a formidable barrier to the settlers as forests had to European expansion throughout the rest of the world. Of North America it was noted:

To the pioneer the forest was no friendly resource for posterity, no object of careful economy. He must wage a hand to hand war upon it, cutting and burning a little space to let in the light upon a dozen acres of hard-won soil, and year after year expanding the clearing into new woodlands against the stubborn resistance of primeval trunks and matted roots.

To travellers, the fringe of the rainforest imposed often an almost impenetrable barrier of ferns, young trees, vines, and herbaceous nettles while beyond this, the taller trees with their canopy of foliage produced a gloom which limited travelling to the midday hours when the sun was overhead.

FIGURE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF TROPICAL RAINFOREST IN NORTH EAST QUEENSLAND PRIOR TO EUROPEAN OCCUPATION

RAINFOREST
SWAMPLAND
RIVER

ATHERTON-EVELYN DISTRICT

Reproduced, by permission, from T.G. Birtle, Land Use, Settlement and Society in the Atherton-Evelyn District, North Queensland, 1880–1914.
Through the foliage canopies protruded giant red cedar, kauri pine, and others that caught the attention of the early timber getters, the tallest trees growing near to water courses on the most fertile alluvial soils. The soft soil surface, covered by humus, fallen leaves and rotting logs, made the early settlers' transportation very difficult in wet weather.  

Much of this chapter will be concerned with the relations of the settlers and Aborigines of what Birtles terms the Atherton and Evelyn Plateaus, commonly called the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands or the Atherton Tableland. The Atherton Plateau has an area of 275 square miles and the Evelyn Plateau, 168 square miles. Their situation is indicated on the map, p. 242. Most of this area was covered by rainforest characterized by a great variety of species but on the drier western side occurred open sclerophyll woodland dominated by eucalypts. Although the border between the two vegetation covers was very marked, the trees of the sclerophyllous woodland decreased in height and density westwards from the rainforest.

Within the rainforest occurred pockets of sclerophyll forest. Many of these were the result of poor environmental conditions such as exposure to the strong south east winds, poorer or shallower soils, or lower rainfall. Yet the majority of such pockets in the Atherton-Evelyn District were on fertile soils where one might expect rainforest. Birtles discussed four theories to explain the existence of these pockets, one being that they were made or perpetuated by the rainforest Aborigines. He concluded it was impossible to state positively that the Aborigines had created these

4. ibid., p. 1.
5. ibid., pp. 2, 14, 15.
6. ibid., pp. 19-22.
pockets but it was noted that once the Aborigines were
removed the rainforest tended to encroach on some.

Irrespective of the origin of such pockets, there is ample evidence from early observers that rainforest Aborigines made systematic and sustained use of them. One of the earliest European intruders into the heart of the forest was Christie Palmerston, an experienced explorer and prospector. He entered these clearings while they were still being used and was quite convinced the Aborigines were responsible for perpetuating and, by implication, creating them. He noted in a diary of his expedition from Herberton to the Barron Falls in December 1884 and January 1885:

We reached a pocket — that is a piece of open country about a quarter of an acre in size, circular-shaped, used by the Aborigines for war dances and fighting. They take particular care to keep the place free from jungle, which would creep over it in a few seasons if allowed. There were several gunyahs around its margin, one of which we took possession. 7

Palmerston was not dependent solely on his own observations. His Aboriginal guide, Willie, was 'a native of the jungles we were about to explore' 8 and he frequently used rainforest Aborigines as porters and could communicate with them. 9

Some of these pockets were certainly Aboriginal camp or ceremonial sites and, Birtles believed, all probably were.

The early settlers found well defined paths connecting the pockets and subsequently some of the settlers' roads followed the most useful of these, the pockets being readily

8. ibid., p. 231.
9. See f.n. 12 below.
utilized by the settlers. When the experienced explorer Mulligan approached the western fringe of the rainforest, he came upon a whole network of tracks linking Aboriginal camp sites where their huts were, of necessity, set out so compactly that he termed them 'townships'. He commented:

A splendid track, the best native track I ever saw anywhere. There are roads off the main track to each of their townships, which consist of well thatched gunyahs, big enough to hold five or six darkies. We counted eleven townships since we came to the edge of the scrub, and we have only travelled four miles along it ... Their paths are well trodden, and we follow them sometimes for miles.

In 1886, Palmerston pushed into the rainforest of the southern part of the Evelyn Plateau from the South Johnstone River prospecting for gold on the upper reaches of the North Johnstone, Russell, and Mulgrave Rivers to the west of Mt. Bartle Frere. In his diary, he also described the presence of Aboriginal paths connecting camp site and bora clearings situated in the densest jungles, in one of the wettest parts of Australia. He used local Aborigines to cut his way through the rainforest, followed Aboriginal paths, and camped in Aboriginal huts in such clearings as described. His experiences of the rainforest and its Aborigines make fascinating reading. Thus a rather

10. Birtles, op. cit., pp. 34, 36, 37, 106, 188. See Palmerston, 'Herberton to Barron Falls', p. 243. Aboriginal paths were taking him towards 'Peterson's pocket' on the Herberton to Cairns Road.


12. Queensland Figaro: 12 February, 19 February, 26 February, 5 March, 12 March, 19 March, 26 March, 2 April, 9 April, 16 April, 23 April 1887. During a series of prospecting expeditions from 12 July to 1 November 1886 he discovered payable gold in the Russell River and promises of gold elsewhere in this inhospitable region.
uneventful day is reported:

July 15th - Water was running both over and under us the whole of last night, and the rain seems of such sulky duration this morning it is impossible to break up camp. Two boys, Youganoo, Nurrinpe, and myself, explored a few miles towards the south-east, and found it terribly high, broken granite mountains, capped with basalt, jungle darkly dense. My hands are sorely torn with thorns, and blood from leech wounds is trickling down my legs in continuous streams. 13

It is not surprising that this difficult environment was to serve as a secure refuge to the Aborigines who had learned to live in it.

The earliest reliable account of the rainforest Aborigines is that of Lumholtz who, in 1882, lived for a period of fourteen months with Aborigines north and west of Ingham and encountered the rainforest Aborigines when he travelled into the ranges. He noted that there were marked differences between them and the Aborigines he was living with. 14 Walter E. Roth, as Protector of Aborigines in North Queensland, included valuable accounts of the rainforest people in his ethnographic studies of the Aborigines under his control. 15 Half a century then elapsed before the rainforest Aborigines were again the subject of

13. Queensland Figaro, 12 February 1887.
15. W.E. Roth, North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletins 1-8 (Brisbane, 1901-1905); 'Bulletins 9-18' in Records of the Australian Museum, VI-VIII (1907-1910). See especially 'Food, Its Search, Capture, and Preparation', North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin 3; 'Superstition, Magic and Medicine', North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin 5; and 'Miscellaneous Papers', North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin 11. Roth also submitted reports on three groups of Aborigines of the Atherton-Evelyn District and a report on the Aborigines of the Lower Tully River. These were not published in full although extracts were used in the North Queensland Ethnography Bulletins. The unpublished material is in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, uncatalogued manuscript 2167. Copies of these are now held at James Cook Library.
FIGURE 17 - BARRINEAN AND TRANSITIONAL TRIBES - 1940


Reproduced, by permission, from T.G. Birtle, Land Use, Settlement and Society in the Atherton-Evelyn District, North Queensland, 1880-1914.
scientific investigation

Tindale and Birdsell concluded from field work in the
Cairns region that the twelve small tribes of rainforest
Aborigines who occupied an area one hundred miles wide and
180 miles long from the Annan River in the north to near
Cardwell in the south were Tasmanoid — related to the
Aboriginal Tasmanians whom they had already described as
ethnically distant from 'the Australian Aboriginal type'. Support for the Tindale and Birdsell hypothesis of the
Tasmanoids has recently been eroded by linguistic and
biological studies of North Queensland Aborigines. Tindale
and Birdsell had claimed that the languages of the rain­
forest Aborigines were basically different from other
Australian languages. In his recent study of the Dyirbal
and neighbouring languages of the North Queensland rainforest,
Dixon concluded that Dyirbal was 'a typical Australian
language', possessing six dialects spoken by five
rainforest tribes and one that was partly rainforest. The Barbaram tribe which Tindale and Birdsell believed
linguistically to be 'one of the most characteristic of the
tribes' was claimed by Dixon to have fairly recently

16. N.B. Tindale and J.B. Birdsell, 'Tasmanoid Tribes in
North Queensland: Results of the Harvard-Adelaide
Universities Anthropological Expedition, 1938-39',
South Australian Museum Records, 7 (1941), pp. 1-3.
Unlike most earlier observers, who saw the Aborigines
as peculiarly homogeneous, Tindale and Birdsell argued
that the mainland Aborigines comprised two distinct
strains, each separate from the Tasmanians. This view
has not generally been accepted by more recent
of the First Australians, p. 16. Berndt refers to a
number of reputable critics of this theory: McCarthy,
Abbie, and Macintosh.

17. R.M.W. Dixon, The Dyirbal Language of North Queensland
(Cambridge, 1972), p. 2; Tindale, Aboriginal Tribes of
Australia: Djirabal.

18. ibid., p. 23.


undergone 'a series of rather drastic phonological changes', caused he suggested by the tribe's being displaced from its previous tribal area by population movements among the Dyirbal speaking people. Dixon commented on Tindale and Birdsell's hypothesis:

Tindale and Birdsell [1941] hypothesized that twelve 'rain forest' tribes were 'Tasmanoid' in physical type, and possibly in other respects. In support of this they maintained that the languages of these tribes were unAustralian. In fact eleven of the dialects cited (including the Dyirbal and Yidin languages) are typically Australian; the twelfth, Mbabaram (which is not in fact spoken in the rain forest region) appears aberrant on the surface, but can be shown to have developed out of a language of the regular Australian pattern. 22

Biological research has also undermined the Tindale and Birdsell hypothesis. After a cranial study of the Aborigines of Queensland, Macintosh and Larnach concluded:

the rainforest skulls ... fall unequivocally within the New South Wales coastal range. No trace can be detected of an alien component in the rainforest population and all the evidence shows that they are Australian Aborigines. 23

Similarly, after a study of blood groups and gene frequencies of the Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula, Simmons noted:

'Our findings do not suggest that the Aborigines of the Cape York area are basically different from those found in all other parts of Australia, but are more admixed'. 24

22. ibid., p. 348.
FIG. 16 - ABORIGINAL TRIBAL BOUNDARIES AND POPULATION ESTIMATE - 1896

Reproduced, by permission, from T.G. Birtle, Land Use, Settlement and Society in the Atherton-Evelyn District, North Queensland, 1880-1914.
The physical characteristics of the twelve tribes that had provoked the theory are, however, undeniable and can be observed among their descendants to this day at Yarrabah or Palm Island. They were

A people characterized by a high incidence of relatively and absolutely small stature, crisp curly hair, and a tendency towards a yellowish-brown skin colour. 25

There were other physical characteristics of hair texture, nasal structure, and lip shape which distinguished them from tribes on the more open surrounding country although Tindale and Birdsell admitted these tribes had mixed with and shared the culture of the Australian 'Aboriginal type'. 26

As would be expected, however, this area also contained distinctive cultural elements. 27 Tindale and Birdsell estimated that these twelve small tribes had a pre-contact population of about 1,500. 28 This seems to be an underestimate as a census undertaken in 1896 indicates a population of at least 2,634 for the area Tindale and Birdsell referred to. These figures were collected after much loss of life resulting from violence and disease. 29

They claimed that the area was enclosed in a half-circle by seven other tribes which included pygmoids but were more

25. Tindale and Birdsell, op. cit., pp. 1, 5. Some rainforest people were sent to Palm Island.
26. ibid., pp. 3, 6, 7.
27. ibid., pp. 6-8.
28. ibid., p. 3.
29. See map, p.250 reproduced from Birtles. Note there is a great deal of difference in the tribal boundaries and names indicated in the census map but not as much as first appears as parts of tribes are represented as tribes and names of tribes incorrectly recorded in 1896. Tindale, was unaware of this map when he made his estimate of the population. For a discussion of this see N.B. Tindale to T.G. Birtles, 15 February 1967, in T.G. Birtles, op. cit., 'File 1'. The numbers for the most northerly tribal group (209) have been omitted. Some of these were probably rainforest Aborigines.
mixed and these in turn were surrounded by a belt of tribes which did not noticeably include pyramids. 30

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In several parts of North Queensland, Aboriginal resistance was prolonged by the availability of refuge in nearby areas of rainforest or thick scrub. Between Bowen and Mackay, for example, Aborigines had continued to raid squatters' herds for 20 years. In the rainforest areas north of Townsville, especially on the Atherton and Evelyn Plateaus, resistance was so effective that it led to the evolution of a completely new government policy.

The first Europeans to encroach upon the rainforest north of Townsville were timber-getters who were attracted to the Tully, Johnstone, Daintree, and Bloomfield Rivers as early as 1874. When clearing some of the heaviest scrub revealed the land's fertility, there followed small selectors under the Land Act of 1876. 31 The 1884 Land Act and its amendments in 1885 and 1886 made it easier for hopeful men of limited capital to take up land and retain it and thus led to an increase in such small selectors. 32 In the 1880's much of the best cedar on the Johnstone and Daintree became exhausted and, by 1881, the timbermen turned to the tablelands behind Cairns when the farming potential of

30. ibid.
32. Cairns Post, 11 April 1888, editorial. Discusses the relative merits of the Acts in terms of financial considerations for the small man. Both Acts required five years' residence on the selection although the later Act allowed for an initial two years' period when the selector could allow a bailiff to reside on the new block to work it before commencing his stipulated five years' residential period. See Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 135 and Birtles, op. cit., pp. 122, 123.
this fertile area was soon revealed. 33

While timber getters and selectors were encroaching
upon the rainforest Aborigines from the east, denying them
the rivers and river flats of the Daintree, Barron, Mulgrave,
and the Johnstone, miners and newly-established small cattle
stations on the west were restricting their access to
hunting grounds and freshwater fishing. The thick uncleared
scrub and forest provided a refuge, but one which had in-
sufficient food. In 1878, the Police Commissioner reported
that, from the Mulgrave to the Mossman, 'the natives [were]
literally starving'. 34 After 1886, most of the available
agricultural land around Cairns and on the Barron River
had been taken up by selectors, 35 and the clearing of the
scrub country of the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands was
going on apace. More and more restricted, and more and
more hungry, the Aborigines of the rainforest found their
ancient homeland producing maize, potatoes and bananas in
abundance and untended settlers' huts and timber-getters'
camps full of good things.

Nor were they safe from intruders in the depths of
the scrub for even here prospectors were searching for and
occasionally finding gold and other metals. In 1879 the
Mulgrave Goldfield was discovered 38 miles from Cairns. 36
In the 1880's, patches of alluvial gold were found on
the Russell and Johnstone Rivers in the rainforest between

33. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 135; Birtles, op.
cit., pp. 122, 123, 159.
34. 'Police Commissioner's Report for 1878', 1879 V. & P.,
p. 752. This knowledge would have been derived from
Native Police reports. The officers were obviously
in the best position to judge.
35. J.W. Collinson, Early Days of Cairns (Brisbane, 1939),
p. 62; C.P., 11 April 1888, editorial.
36. P.D.T., 30 August 1879, extract from Cairns Advertiser.
See also Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 61.
the Atherton Tableland and the coast. In 1878, two discoveries of tin were made by the squatter John Atherton of Emerald End, on the Atherton Tableland. These discoveries resulted in rushes to Tinaroo Creek and the Wild River on whose banks grew up the town of Herberton.

The penetration of the rainforest soon caused a confrontation with its Aborigines. Relations with the timber-getters seem to have varied. On the Daintree an unusually peaceful situation existed until three cedar getters were killed in November 1874 which resulted in settler hostility and Native Police retaliation. A seaborne party of eight cedar getters were attacked by Aborigines at the Johnstone River in December 1877, their mast and sail stolen, their camp robbed, and finally their boat stolen. Eventually they made a 28 feet canoe out of a cedar log and reached Port Douglas after a five days' journey. They soon returned 'better equipped'. The wealth of the forests was enough to make most timbersmen take their chance with the Aborigines.

The miners were the first to encounter serious and sustained attack from the rainforest Aborigines. On the

37. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 110; P.D.T., 4 December 1886, 'Importance of Gold Discovery on Russell River'. The discoverer of the field, Christie Palmerston, at first had the Aborigines here working for him. See also C. Palmerston, 'The Diary of a Northern Pioneer', loc. cit.; C. Palmerston, 'From Herberton to the Barron Falls', loc. cit.; and C. Palmerston, 'The Explorer: From Murielyan Harbour to Herberton', Queenslander, 22 September, 29 September, and 6 October 1888. These articles describe this prospector's invasions into the rainforest and indicate that there were others. The slightest sign of gold brought a rush of European and Chinese prospectors which might quickly swell to three or four hundred: 'From Herberton to Barron Falls', p. 237.

38. Birtles, op. cit., p. 89; Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, pp. 117, 118.

39. Queenslander, 8 December 1877, editorial. See also M.M., 24 November 1877, and P.M., Cairns, to Col. Sec., 19 November 1877, Telegram, Q.S.A. Col/A248, 5357 of 1877.

40. The Townsville Herald, 29 December 1877.
Mulgrave, the Aborigines were not at first regarded as
dangerous although they were daring and successful camp
robbers. Soon, however, the frontier miners of the
rainforest aroused their antagonism as they had elsewhere.
Within two months, the prospectors were reporting that
they had to battle Aborigines almost daily and some
missing miners were believed killed by the Aborigines.

Often surrounded by dense scrub, fossickers found it essential to work at least in pairs to protect lives and property.

In 1882, the normally restrained Mining Warden regretted 'the
spearing of cattle and horses ... have been of frequent occurrence' while, as late as 1888, the Cairns Post
was still urging the necessity of protection for the handful of scattered miners on the Mulgrave who were being constantly robbed of blankets, tools, and food. Even though their lives were not in danger, the Post deplored that 'a revolver and rifle are as necessary adjuncts to the miner as a pick and shovel'.

Herberton was only a year old when the citizens discovered their vulnerability to ambush and sudden attack. In January or February 1882, three miners were speared, one fatally, while in April a pony express contractor was surrounded and killed in broad daylight only one mile from the small mining town of Nigger Creek and three miles from Herberton. A petition signed by 265 people pointed out their inability to protect themselves from ambush and requested that the Aborigines be driven from the district by the Native Police. The Police Commissioner was

43. P.D.T., 30 August 1879, from the Cairns Advertiser. See also P.D.T., 25 October 1879, from Cairns Advertiser.
45. C.P., 11 April 1888.
instructed to respond accordingly. A detachment of Native Police was moved to Herberton and two other detachments were ordered to patrol the district. In his recent research, Dixon referred to 'the almost instant elimination' of the Barbaram tribe situated on the Herberton tin field just west of the rainforest on an arid area of the Dividing Range. He attributed this to the influx of miners. His evidence for this is not given but, considering the petition of 1882, it is not surprising. Later that year after two more speарings and a spate of camp robberies, the Herberton Advertiser remarked:

Verily we live in troublesome times and can hardly bring ourselves to consider the black police as the most effective instrument possible for the suppression of myalls. 48

The roads from Herberton across the forest-covered mountains to its ports, Cairns and Port Douglas, became yet another dangerous trade route whose importance was increased by further mineral discoveries in the vicinity of Herberton, especially those of Irvinebank and Mont Albion. 49

During 1884-85, Aboriginal resistance became more intense. The Aborigines may have been emboldened by their previous success and the realization of their relative

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49. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, pp. 118–120; C.P., 9 July 1885, 'Aborigines 200 strong near road'; C.P., 8 October 1887, 'Blacks on the Warpath'; C.P., 26 October 1887, 'Police Protection in the Herberton District'.

safety in the rainforest. Most probably, however, they were
driven to desperation as the settlers — miners, timber­
getters, farmers, and even pastoralists — increasingly
penetrated and cleared their refuge areas, encroaching
further upon their food supplies. In the heart of the
rainforest, the Aborigines had already proved themselves
difficult enemies. Nine Chinese miners had been killed
on the Russell River while travelling from Cairns to the
Johnstone River.50 The settlers on the Mulgrave River
petitioned successfully for Native Police protection51
after crops were robbed, animals speared, properties broken
into and robbed, and settlers occasionally killed.52

Further south on the Tully and Johnstone Rivers during
1884 and 1885 Aboriginal resistance brought the usual
frantic telegrams and petitions for assistance. Three
selectors had been driven from their homes which were looted,
at least one being burned. With the collapse of the
sugar market in 1885, cattle baron Tyson, and his nephew,
Isaac Henry, on the Tully River had turned from sugar to
cattle as they considered this the only economically viable
alternative for their rich agricultural lands because
of the contemporary state of the transport facilities on
the Tully. In ten months, however, Tyson had lost 69
cattle and Henry more than 200. Some 'half-tame Blacks'
had warned Henry the Aborigines intended to burn him out
and kill his family. Both men threatened to abandon
their selections. No doubt the prospect of Tyson diverting
capital and interest elsewhere influenced Griffith, then

50. P.D.T., 8 September 1883, 'Telegraphic News', Brisbane,
5 September 1883. See also N.M., 5 September 1883.
51. C.P.: 22 May 1884; 3 December 1885; 11 February 1886.
52. C.P.: 3 July 1884; 10 July 1884; 14 August 1885;
21 August 1885; 1 January 1885; 29 January 1885.
premier and colonial secretary, to request Native Police protection. A detachment was stationed at the Johnstone to patrol both rivers.

On the Johnstone the conflict was apparently more intense. As early as 1880 the Aborigines had earned official notice by attacking a government survey camp and killing a Pacific Islander. Four Chinamen were killed during 1885 and prospecting on the Johnstone River diggings, where there were 150 Chinese and a few whites, was paralysed. The Chinese worked in groups of twenty and the Queenslander correspondent agreed that there 'the scrub and the blacks are "terrors"'.

Further north around Port Douglas, especially along the Daintree and Mossman Rivers, Aboriginal raids were so frequent and successful that European exploitation of the district was hindered and at times stopped altogether, for a week in one district, to protect life and property from the Aborigines. The local government authority, the Port Douglas Divisional Board, took up the problem on behalf of the selectors after one man was surrounded and killed while clearing the scrub. More than twenty-five 'depredations' of the previous few months were listed precisely and objectively with the offer of detailed substantiation if required. Apart from the death of the

53. I. Henry, Cardwell, to Col. Sec., 9 September 1885, Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885. See minutes by Griffith and Police Commissioner Seymour. See Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, pp. 144-152 for the decline of the sugar industry from late 1883.
54. P.M., Cairns, to Col. Sec., 3 September 1880, Q.S.A. COL/A298, 4813 of 1880.
55. Queenslander, 13 March 1886, 'Johnstone River'.
56. J.W. Stewart, J.P., Daintree, to Col. Sec., 21 April 1885, Telegram, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885; 'no work done Upper Daintree for a week time taken up for protection from blacks'. 
selector, most would seem relatively unimportant compared with the conflict on the pastoral and mining frontiers, yet in their way they inhibited European progress just as effectively. A selector's working bullocks were killed, the camps of timber-getters and surveyors were 'cleaned out', one camp being robbed six times, selectors' huts and homes were robbed, and cattle were rounded up to be driven into the scrub. In some cases the Aborigines took away things that could have been of no use to them, presumably in an attempt to drive out the intruders. Another report from this district indicated that the Aborigines could speak English, had developed a taste for tobacco and were becoming more audacious because they were aware of the settlers' vulnerability. In a scathing comment on the effectiveness of the Native Police in the rainforests, the Divisional Board suggested that the existing strength be withdrawn from the district altogether as they deluded the selectors into a sense of false security. A whole detachment was needed constantly patrolling in the small area of Mossman, Daintree and Saltwater Districts alone. The harassed Police Commissioner acceded to their request though he was unable to respond at this time to a demand from the Tully because no more Native Police were available.

The Herberton Advertiser commented in sympathetic wonder that the settlers on the Daintree were suffering even more than those in the Herberton District.

In all the areas in the far north where selectors, miners, timber-getters and even the pastoralists encroached

57. H. Smith, Clerk, Port Douglas Divisional Board, to Col. Sec., 10 April 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885. See also C.P., 16 April 1885.
58. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 27 April 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885.
59. H.A., 15 June 1885, 'Blacks on Daintree'.
upon the extensive areas of thick tropical scrub and rainforest the resistance seems to have been similar. The Aborigines found refuge in the least accessible parts of their tribal lands but, being denied the river valleys, the sea coast, and the more open fringing areas, and with even their woodlands being progressively cleared, they were denied sufficient food to survive. Of necessity they had to harvest the European resources placed temptingly before them by the invaders. Starvation heightened their resentment of sacrilegious dispossession. In the areas examined, and even on the Lower Herbert further south, the tropical scrub and rainforest, provided a fortress from which the desperate Aborigines could sally out, even at great risk, upon the property of the scattered and vulnerable intruders. Even close to Cairns where conflict had begun with the first settlement in 1876 and was soon 'very bad', Aborigines were still occasionally spearing horses within four miles of the town as late as 1886 while in the same year at Cape Grafton a selector's bailiff was murdered. Nevertheless their power to resist was diminishing and they were about to admit defeat. Some had been 'let in' and, by June 1886, about one hundred male Aborigines came into Cairns seeking work with the settlers though they were too uncertain of their reception to bring women with them.

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60. For the Lower Herbert, see Queenslander: 31 March 1877; 21 April 1877; 5 May 1877; 2 June 1877; 10 August 1878; 8 February 1879; 11 October 1879; 26 November 1887.
61. Queenslander, 23 December 1876, p. 12, 'Some Wrinkles About Trinity Bay and the Hodgkinson by Dry Fiddler'. 'The blacks were yesterday spearing horses four miles from here on the river; ... our best shots are after them, I am off too; there will be weeping and wailing somewhere shortly after I have started you bet.'
63. C.P., 11 February 1886.
64. Queenslander, 20 January 1886; C.P., 11 February 1886.
65. Queenslander, 26 June 1886.
### TABLE II

**ACREAGE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND CULTIVATED IN THE HERBERTON PETTY SESSIONS DISTRICT, 1885–1901**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area Under Cultivation</th>
<th>Area Under Permanent Pasture of Artificially Sown Grasses</th>
<th>Area of Land Under Crop</th>
<th>Area Planted with Important Crop</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maize</td>
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<td>English Potatoes</td>
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<td>Sweet Pot.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pumpkins</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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* Statistical data prior to 1885 has been incorporated in Cairns Police District returns.

**Source:** Government Statistician’s Office, Queensland – Statistics of the State (or Colony) of Queensland, Brisbane: Government Printer. All years from 1885 to 1901.

Cited T.G. Birtles, A Survey of Land Use, Settlement and Society in the Atherton-Evelyn District, North Queensland, Table IV.
There was a very different outcome in the Atherton and Evelyn Tableland and the Upper Barron River, where the rainforest and dense scrub was much more extensive. In this area, Aboriginal resistance highlighted the inadequacy of government policy and produced a creative initiative from the settlers that the government hesitantly adopted. Here agriculture had developed slowly. By 1885, only 911 acres was under crop in the Atherton-Evelyn District, the most important crops being maize, 512 acres, English potatoes, 76 acres, and sweet potatoes, 77 acres. This expanded to 942 acres in 1886, slumped to 749 acres in 1887, and rose again to 905 acres in 1888. The land was cleared, cultivated by hoe, and the crops sown among the stumps until these rotted when a plough could be used. Maize was the main crop grown primarily for fodder for the large number of horses used by the local timber-getters and packers, but it could also be consumed by the settlers in the event of a food shortage. For these reasons maize was the first staple grown in most agricultural districts in Queensland. Other crops were experimented with, including oats, other cereals, vegetables, and fruit trees. English and sweet potatoes proved the most successful of these. Once the land had been cleared much of it was let to Chinese tenant farmers who could pay the Europeans handsome rents and still earn satisfactory incomes for themselves while the Europeans continued to work as miners, packers, shopkeepers and publicans. As the Palmer and Hodgkinson mining fields became exhausted, such bailiff farming was practically the only way the displaced Chinese could support themselves.

Despite the limited nature of the agricultural develop-

66. Birtles, op. cit., pp. 153-155. See Table II.
67. ibid., pp. 151-153.
sent in this area, before the end of 1884 the Wild River Times was lamenting that Aboriginal raids had become so frequent in the neighbourhood of the scrub in the vicinity of Herberton (being indeed of almost daily occurrence) that their recital wearies us as well as our readers and it is only the more sensational cases that now find any interest outside of the victims of their thieving, destruction and bloodthirsty propensities. 68

At this time pioneer squatter of the Atherton Tableland, John Atherton, estimated that his losses to Aborigines for the past seven years was not less than £1 a day. 69 The evidence of such local journals as the Cairns Post and the Herberton Advertiser and of official government records indicate that as the scrub was cleared, the Aboriginal resistance became more determined.

In July 1885, the Cairns Post spoke of the 'growing boldness' of the Aborigines between Cairns and Herberton, of their danger to travellers on the main road, and of two attempts of twenty to thirty Aborigines to steal a crop of potatoes despite their being fired on both times. The Post remarked that such dangers did not encourage the expansion of agriculture yet had to admit cultivation was progressing favourably in the district, oaten hay was being extensively grown, the crops were 'looking grand', and there was great hope for the future development of an area claimed to be one of the most fertile in the colony. The concern and enthusiasm of Cairns for the hinterland that would guarantee its development was unmistakable. 70

An incident referred to as the Irvinebank Massacre focused attention on the role of the rainforest Aborigines

68. P.D.T., 1 January 1885, 'The Noble Savage', from the Wild River Times.
69. C.P., 7 August 1884, letter to editor from John Atherton, Emerald End.
70. C.P., 9 July 1885.
in inhibiting the development of the Atherton Tableland. The Nigger Creek Native Police detachment stationed about three miles from Herberton was removed after its involvement in the murder of a group of pacified Aborigines became publicly known. When the Police Commissioner decided not to replace the detachment, a protest meeting was called.

A numerously signed petition indicated that the earlier Aboriginal attacks on the mining field to the west of the rainforest had ceased following the placing of the detachment at Nigger Creek. It was feared these would be renewed as miners and settlers were scattered for forty miles around Herberton. As well the settlers believed the Native Police patrols from the Mulgrave and Johnstone Rivers and the new rush to the Johnstone would drive the Aborigines to the Herberton District where recent mineral discoveries had given a great impetus to prospecting and the extension of settlement. 71 Because of the close settlement of this area the Police Commissioner thought trackers stationed at the ordinary police stations at Herberton, Watsonville, and Irvinebank would suffice. 72 In April 1885, the Tinaroo Progress Association of Herberton informed the Colonial Secretary that depredations had increased alarmingly since the departure of the Native Police detachment; miners and settlers would be forced to leave the district and one settler already had. Travellers on the road to Cairns were occasionally molested and selectors' crops were being destroyed and their cattle speared, while huts were frequently robbed. At this stage the residents were still demanding more Native Police protection. 73 The police inspector at

71. Petition of Residents of Herberton District /215 signatures/ to Col. Sec., 6 March 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885.
72. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 19 March 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885. The Herberton District was at first called the Tinaroo District.
73. Tinaroo Progress Association, Herberton, to Col. Sec., 18 April 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885.
Port Douglas informed the Police Commissioner objectively:

It must be borne in mind that as the axe of the white man gradually but surely destroys the strongholds of the natives, so are outrages likely to increase as their scope gets narrower and narrower. 74

The pressure on the encircled rainforests was thus increasing.

From 1885 till early 1889, the pages of the Herberton Advertiser and the Cairns Post are studded with reports of horses and bullocks killed, sheds, huts, and houses broken into and robbed, camps robbed, and crops of corn and potatoes stolen. 75 Occasionally violent actions were taken against the intruders in this district but surprisingly no fatalities have been revealed in this investigation.

Occasionally settlers were 'stuck up' and robbed. 76 On one occasion, twelve Aborigines bailed up a selector in his own home with his own loaded revolver that had been snatched off his table and fired at him unsuccessfully when he made a run for it. This was one of the rare occasions when frontier Aborigines in North Queensland used firearms.

On another occasion, a miner's life was saved when he lifted his hand to button his shirt. A spear skewered the surprised miner's hand to his chest. 78 It was the constant fear of such unexpected attacks from the surrounding scrub that deterred many settlers. One selector described how he chanced

74. Insp. J.B. Isley, Port Douglas, to Pol. Com., 5 May 1885, encl. g.S.A. Col/428, 4592 of 1885.
75. See H.A., 7 August 1885, 'The Old Story'; 4 September 1885, letter from E.C. Putt; 6 November 1885; 20 November 1885; 18 December 1885; 19 February 1886; 26 November 1886; 11 February 1887; 29 April 1887; 17 June 1887; 8 July 1887; 9 September 1887; 30 September 1887; 21 October 1887; 28 October 1887; 20 January 1888; 4 January 1889; 11 January 1889. Compare C.P.: 26 October 1887; 1 February 1888; 1 August 1888; 4 August 1888.
76. C.P., 1 February 1888; H.A., 21 October 1887; H.A., 4 January 1889.
77. H.A., 4 January 1889.
upon a German settler with an old-fashioned holstered pistol at his waist clearing the forest. A shouted greeting saw the German spin round with gun drawn ready to shoot. He claimed he had come to clear his selection with three months' provisions, tools for farm work, and a dog for protection, all of which he lost the first day he went out to clear scrub. The correspondent claimed this man was almost driven mad knowing he was constantly watched by unseen Aborigines. 79

Another settler described the constant fear of the selector:

When we go to work, we have to go armed carrying our lives in our hands; and when engaged in falling scrub, or doing any other work are liable to be speared or tomahawked any moment. 80

There were indications that the Aborigines of this district had become familiar with aspects of European life. This may have resulted from having their enemies under observation at such close quarters as well as from some miners and selectors' having made attempts to come to terms with them. 81 As on the pastoral frontier there are strong indications of a partial accommodation having been reached followed by an Aboriginal reversion to complete hostility as the Aborigines understood and rejected the nature of the accommodation. Thus Aborigines frequently took away arms and ammunition apparently to deprive the settlers of them since there are few instances of their being able to use them, despite settlers' fears. 82 A group appeared at an

79. C.P., 1 August 1888, 'Barron Valley Protection'.
80. H.A., 11 April 1890, a letter signed 'Selector'.
81. H.A., 11 February 1887: A resident of Atherton was attacked by a local Aboriginal he employed. See above, the three articles by Christie Palmerston which also indicate some contact with prospectors and miners.
82. H.A., 11 February 1887: a group possessed an abundance of arms and ammunition from recent robberies; H.A., 10 December 1886, (Telegraphic News, Geraldton, 6 December 1886): a large group of Aborigines armed with rifles attacked a camp of Chinese on the Johnstone River, killing one, wounding another, and carrying off a third. See also H.A., 26 August 1887: 2 rifles found in a camp; H.A., 21 October 1887, where a selector was bailed up and shot at by his own gun.
isolated shop demanding flour, billy cans etc. but were frightened off. A few months later at the same store, a group of Aborigines unsuccessfully sent a woman forward with stolen money to effect a trade. Such familiarity with the invaders' culture did not lead to a peaceful accommodation with the Aborigines of the Atherton and Evelyn scrubs.

In 1886, the Herberton Advertiser claimed that the theft of the selectors' crops had become 'monotonous'. A year later this paper remarked they were weekly becoming more numerous and in June 1887 declared that relations between the settlers and the Aborigines were 'daily becoming more critical'. It seems that Aborigines from more settled areas were seeking refuge in the rainforests of the Atherton and Evelyn District or had been driven there by the settlers. Thus sixteen Aborigines, 'powerful and well-conditioned people, beside whom the aboriginals of the scrub about Atherton look miserable beings' were raiding the settlers. They were later discovered to belong to 'the Karamia and Lower Johnstone River tribes'. If the seeking of refuge in the rainforest of the Atherton-Evelyn District by other tribes, was widespread - and it is logical to assume it was - there was the possibility of competition for the food resources and inter-tribal conflict. It is also possible that such dispossessed Aborigines were less able to get adequate sustenance and were forced to raid the settlers, more than the local tribes. The sixteen Aborigines were said to have been troublesome to the settlers for a long time. However, as this is the only account noticed of such displacement, no firm conclusion about its extent can be made.

83. H.A., 22 July 1887.
84. H.A., 30 September 1887.
85. H.A., 26 February 1886.
86. H.A., 11 February 1887.
88. C.P., 26 June 1889.
89. ibid.
The government was presented with the two familiar alternatives if better protection was not afforded: abandonment or a settler war of retaliation. A petition was presented and Sub Inspector Garroway arrived with his troopers with instructions to put down depredations with a firm hand. This brought no change for the better. In October 1887, the Aborigines were reported to be 'getting bolder' and their raids so unbearable that a petition was forwarded asking the Minister for Lands to exempt the settlers from their residence requirement for twelve months as occupation was impossible. Nor was this the only time that settlers complained of the difficulties the Aborigines posed to their fulfilling the residential requirements of the selection legislation. Thus one selector complained:

There are many of us that are compelled to live away somewhere in the immediate vicinity of our selections, not only for convenience and economy, but for safety's sake, on account of the well known danger we are in from marauding and murdering blacks.

The Tinaroo Progress Association had earlier informed the Colonial Secretary, Morehead, in more restrained language that such was the case.

In January 1888, the local member of parliament, Mr. Fred Wimble, and Mr. Louis Severin, representing the local authority, formally confronted Premier Griffith on the problem when he visited Cairns. He confessed that he had no idea the Aborigines were so troublesome to the Atherton settlers. Unfortunately there is no record of the settlers' reaction to this statement. However, Griffith

90. H.A., 17 June 1887.
91. H.A., 8 July 1887 and 15 July 1887.
92. H.A., 21 October 1887. See C.P., 26 October 1887.
93. H.A., 4 February 1888; H.A., 11 April 1890.
94. H.A., 11 April 1890, letter signed 'Selector'.
encouraged them to appoint a deputation to wait upon the
Minister for Mines, W.O. Hodgkinson, a few days later.  

This meeting was to have far reaching consequences for
the Herberton District and for many others in North Queensland.
Hodgkinson immediately promised a white trooper and a tracker
for Atherton. He pointed out the difficulty of dealing with
the Aboriginal problem and agreed to support gladly any
proposals the selectors might make. One member of the deputa-
tion then pointed out to the minister that at Thornborough
on the Hodgkinson goldfield the residents had raised money
which the Government supplemented to provide food for the
Aborigines. Hodgkinson thought this an excellent idea,
promising a pound for pound subsidy for money raised locally.
Two members of the deputation immediately donated £7
between them after which Hodgkinson delivered a homily on the
virtues of nineteenth century liberalism. He decried the
lack of Queensland private initiative and昆ealenders' dependence on the Government, using the problems of
utilizing artesian water and establishing a local school
of mines as examples. The Herberton Mining Warden, who was
also the Police Magistrate, was authorised to spend any reason-
able sum in providing food for Aborigines who might come in.

The Thornborough experiment was a good example of local
initiative successfully bringing Aborigines to a peaceful
accord. It had been supported by the government and reported
in the Warden's annual report to parliament. It was regarded
as unique and not as indicating a new initiative to be taken
with frontier Aborigines. The Cairns Post, by February 1888,
had twice suggested a scheme in which government financed

97. C.P., 1 February 1888. See also H.A., 3 February 1888.
98. H.A., 3 February 1888.
99. 'Report of the Hodgkinson and Mulgrave Gold Fields',
food would be distributed by volunteers, referring its readers to the practice in New South Wales which acted 'the part of a parental government'. 100 In August 1888 that paper repeated its suggestion adding as further inducement that the Aborigines could be utilized as a labour force thus benefitting them and soon relieving the government of the expense of the food. The article concluded: 'One thing is certain, the time for selectors to sow and blackfellows to reap has gone by'. 101

The new policy must be clearly distinguished from instances in which the Queensland Government had furnished rations, on local initiative, for already pacified, destitute Aborigines. 102 Two years earlier the government had rejected a similar proposal. A pastoralist on Kirrama Station, west of Cardwell, applied to the government for rations to pacify Aborigines troubling him who were able to find refuge in the dense scrubs of the Cardwell Ranges. He cited the successful use of such means at Thornborough. The request was refused on the advice of the Cardwell Police Magistrate who pointed out that the Scott Brothers, on the Valley of Lagoons, had not succeeded in preventing raids by giving food to offending Aborigines. 103

100. C.P., 1 February 1888.
101. C.P., 4 August 1888.
102. B. Sheridan, P.M., Maryborough, to Col. Sec., 12 August 1880, Q.S.A. COL/A298, 4590 of 1880; Sgt. Greene, Herberton, to Sub. Insp. Britton, Pt. Douglas, 22 October 1883, Q.S.A. COL/A372, 5714 of 1883; Sub. Insp. Carr, Barron River, to Under Col. Sec., 30 June 1884, Q.S.A. COL/A429, 4936 of 1885. Certain rations were given to Aborigines at Thornborough, Kingsborough, the Hodgkinson River, and the Barron River. These Aborigines had apparently previously been let in. Mention is made of feeding children. The examples noted above fitted into the framework of a nineteenth century government's responsibility for its citizens, limited though the concept was, especially in Queensland.
103. P.M., Cardwell, to Under Col. Sec., 16 September 1886, and Broad Brothers, Kirrama, Via Cashmere, Herberton, to Col. Sec., 10 July 1886, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A483, 7578 of 1886.
It was a year after the deputation met Hodgkinson before this plan was implemented, in which time there were more Aboriginal raids, more complaints, and more petitions. During this period, one settler listed his losses for the twelve months to August 1888 at £55/6/-, another at £20 while he was absent from his farm; others reported the almost total loss of crops, while some employed men to guard their crops or their houses. In October 1888, another deputation of northern members asked the Colonial Secretary to formulate a scheme for giving relief and protection to the Aborigines. Yet another petition called for the re-establishment of the Native Police detachment at Nigger Creek.

Queensland's frontier policy which had evolved as a result of the needs of the pastoral industry was once again being tested in North Queensland. The problems confronting the selectors were now well-known to the government officials, especially the Police Commissioner who in Queensland had been entrusted with the implementation of Queensland's

104. C.P., 4 August 1888: two petitions, one for Barron Valley and the second for the Evelyn Scrubs selectors were signed and sent to F. Wimble, M.L.A., for presentation to the legislature. See also R.C. Ringrose, Hon. Sec., Tinaroo Progress Association, Herberton, to B.D. Morehead, Col. Sec., 16 July 1888, and Mears, Clerk of Tinaroo Provisional Board, Herberton, to Col. Sec., 3 July 1888, and Mears, Clerk of Tinaroo Provisional Board, Herberton, to Col. Sec., 15 August 1888 encl. Q.S.A. Col/A558, 7966 of 1888; H.A., 18 January 1889: petition to have Native Police camp at Nigger Creek re-established.


106. C.C., 30 October 1888. (Telegraphic News, Brisbane, 30 October). I have discovered no other reference to this interesting information.

frontier policy since 1864. In the overall expansion of the British Empire, the army and its local commanders had played a vital part. In Queensland, the Native Police force, its commander, the Police Commissioner, and the police officers attempting to control the Aborigines were similarly agents of imperialist expansion. It was their duty to meet local challenges when economic 'progress' and expansion of settlement was being inhibited. In the rainforest of North Queensland, the Police Commissioner was confronted with large-scale resistance which he had not been able to break by the customary use of the Native Police. The alternatives were to increase that force massively in the vicinity of the rainforests or to attempt to lure the troublesome Aborigines from their refuge to a peaceful accommodation as had been repeatedly urged by the northern residents.

The rainforest region posed many problems to the Native Police that most residents refused to consider. It was often impossible to move away from the beaten tracks on horseback. Patrolling through the thick scrub on foot became necessary but this was such unhealthy, energy sapping work that there were few officers who could do it satisfactorily. Inspector Isley, in charge of the Port Douglas police district, wrote:

The Mowbray Detachment has little mounted duty - the troopers being principally worked in the dense scrubs abounding in the patrol - to keep with the "boys"

108. A.H. Zillman, P.M., Herberton, to Col. Sec., 30 June 1892, Q.S.A. COL/A703, 8171 of 1892. The eventual solution to the Aboriginal resistance led to a dramatic expansion of agriculture which Zillman believed would be inhibited if the resistance was renewed. See also C.P., 26 October 1887; C.P., 1 February 1888; C.P., 1 August 1888; H.A., 4 January 1889.

109. C.P., 3 July 1884. See letter to editor, signed "Mulgrave Settler", complaining Sub. Insp. Carr seldom visited the Mulgrave and when he did, he used well-frequented tracks. He mentioned the need for foot patrols. See also C.P., 10 July 1884.
requires an officer of more than ordinary endurance and Mr. Nowlan ... is only fit for a mounted patrol ... The only men I know fit to perform the patrol duties are Insp. Lamond and Little. 110

This was a complete contrast with the methods of the force in the pastoral country. There a small body of mounted men armed with rifles had an enormous advantage over much greater numbers of Aborigines on foot and armed with only traditional weapons. In the rainforest, where horses could not be used and the advantage of rifles over spears was limited, the Native Police Force's effectiveness was greatly diminished. Aboriginal troopers were essential to counter Aboriginal raiders yet even they were often so exhausted after a patrol that they had to spell before undertaking another one. Thus a larger number of troopers were needed if patrols were to be always available. 112 Indeed, Griffith had given 'the Northern Jungles [where] it was absolutely impossible for a white man to get through' as one of his reasons for not abolishing the Native Police altogether. 113

Thus fundamental to the government's acceptance of the

110. Insp. Isley, Port Douglas, to Pol. Com., 26 February 1880, q.S.A. POL/12B/62, 19 of 1880. The Port Douglas-Cairns police records are the only ones discovered in this study to reveal Native Police action. His predecessor, Inspector Stuart had made a similar comment: 'The only officer that will be any use here is a good bushman - a man that can walk all day through the scrub and over the Ranges with his boys and if necessary camp out a week without his blankets'. See Insp. J. Stuart, Port Douglas, to Pol. Com., 2 January 1880, q.S.A. POL/12B/G2, 3 of 1880.


113. Q.P.D., XLVII, 1885, p. 825, Col. Sec., debate on Supply.
new policy was the realization that the Native Police, who had proved so effective on the pastoral frontier, were quite unable to deal with the problem of the rainforest Aborigines. Because of the difficulty of working in this densely timbered, mountainous region, patrol districts needed to be small with the detachment placed centrally close to telegraphic communications. Consequently, instead of the two detachments, one at the Barron River and the other at the Mowbray, Inspector Stuart recommended three detachments with four extra troopers for each detachment, pointing out that then the three detachments could work with one another. He added:

I regret to say that I find half measures of no use and that there is but one way of putting a stop to these outrages and the sooner and more effectively it is done the better.

When the heavy rains set in, movement in many directions became impossible because of flooded streams and boggy ground. The tracks of Aborigines would be often washed out and sudden floods could cut a detachment off from its supply of stores thus restricting its efficiency. Overriding all was the extensive area of dense scrub and rainforest which would have required an army of jungle fighters to subdue completely. Yet, the Police Commissioner realized that the Aborigines were compelled to raid the colonists on their tribal lands.

The Commissioner had informed the government of this truism publicly, in his annual reports, as early as 1879 and repeated it more emphatically in 1885 when he declared:

116. Douglas Divisional Board to Col. Sec., 10 April 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885.
117. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 27 April 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885.
It will be necessary to consider what means will have to be adopted to protect the aborigines from starvation, and so end what is now a source of constant trouble between blacks and whites. 118

He repeated this privately to the Colonial Secretary and Premier, S.W. Griffith, in April 1885 with regard to the conflict in the Port Douglas District, 119 and yet more emphatically in May 1885 concerning a Herberton petition and correspondence from the Tinaroo Progress Association. He reiterated that the Aborigines were starving and the settlers would be robbed 'no matter what strength of police may be in the district ... the difficulty will not be solved by increasing the police force in those districts, unless at the same time measures are adopted to provide for the legitimate wants of the aborigines'. 120 In June 1885, he repeated the burden of his argument, indicated how he would re-organize the Native Police force to staff the bush police stations, and admonished his minister:

The question of dealing with the Aborigines has now I beg to submit, assumed such an importance as to require very serious consideration and some legislative action. 121

As Griffith was Colonial Secretary in 1885, it is surprising to find him proclaiming in 1888 that he had no idea the Aborigines were so troublesome to the Atherton settlers. 122

The long-suffering Police Commissioner could hardly do more to effect a change in Queensland's frontier policy. The time must have seemed propitious. Griffith's liberal government had been antipathetic to the Pacific Islander labour

120. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 19 May 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885.
121. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 24 June 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885.
trade. It had instituted a Royal Commission to expose the abuses in the New Guinea area. 123

Griffith had made it clear that he wanted to disband the Native Police Force and replace it by white police with attached trackers. 124 There were also strong indications that this ministry wished to exert a restraining effect upon settlers and Native Police, possibly as much because of Griffith's respect for the law and his ministerial responsibilities as because of humanitarian concern. Thus Griffith told Parliament:

The practice of the black police making raids through the country as in times past would not be allowed any longer. ... It was intended to assimilate the system as nearly as possible to that of the white police. 125

Certainly the northern settlers believed that Griffith's liberal government intended that they and the Native Police could no longer shoot with impunity. 126


124. C.P., 30 July 1885. See the report of a meeting of the Cairns Progress Association. A Mr. Patience referred to an interview with Griffith in Brisbane when he found the Premier altogether adverse to the Native Police Force and anxious to abolish it'. See also Q.P.D., 1885, Vol. XLVII, p. 825. The Colonial Secretary and Premier, Griffith, had said: 'He should be very glad if the Government could see their way to abolish the native police altogether'.

125. Q.P.D., 1885, Vol. XLVII, p. 826, Col. Sec.

126. W.R.T., 30 December 1884: 'for it must be remembered that the old way of dispersing blacks is done away with and no harm will now be done to them'; C.P., 16 April 1885: 'We have been told pretty often of late that there is but one law for the white and the black, both having to undergo the same ordeal when indicted for crime or misdemeanour'; N.A., 14 January 1885, 'To Shoot or Not to Shoot'; C.P., 7 August 1884, letter from John Atherton, Emerald End: 'I applied to Sub Inspector Carry for protection but only received in reply an intimation that he and his troopers were stationed to protect the blacks, not to punish them. I am not aware if this is really the case, but if it is I fail to see what use he is to the white population'.
Inspector Nichols and his troopers for the massacre at Irvinebank was seen as implementing this new concern and the government's refusal to re-employ these men when they badly needed Native troopers supports this.

There were thus a number of different factors combining to bring about a change in policy regarding the distribution and usage of the Native Police which would allow the development of a new frontier policy to deal with the rainforest resistance. Firstly, the Native Police Force was manifestly unable to cope with it. Secondly, Griffith disliked the normal Native Police methods. Thirdly, the Police Commissioner realized that Aboriginal attacks resulted largely from encroachment upon traditional food resources. Fourthly, he realized that neither increasing the numbers of Native Police nor replacing them with white police and trackers would suffice. Finally, settlers on the Atherton Tableland advocated the policy of rationing which ran counter to Native Police policy and practice.

In May 1885, Colonial Secretary Griffith had even requested Seymour to report on the best means of completely

127. H.A., 14 January 1885, 'To Shoot or Not to Shoot': 'What a fine frenzy of human feeling ran through the Colonial Secretary's speech when he declared that he would have justice avenged on the murderer of the poor niggers at Herberton'. See H.A., 24 January 1885, for trial of Sub Insp. Nichols and his troopers.

128. J.W. Stewart, J.P., Daintree, To Col. Sec., 21 April 1885 [telegram]. See Minute D.T. Seymour [Pol. Com.], 22 April 1885: 'There are two officers in this district but they are just now shorthanded. Insp. Isley has been instructed to recruit other troopers as those lately at Nigger Creek are not to be again employed'. In response to I. Henry's request for immediate assistance, I. Henry to Col. Sec., 18 April 1885 [telegram], the Police Commissioner wrote, Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 27 April 1885: 'I cannot accede to ... Mr. Isaac Henry's ... request for assistance ... as I have no native police available'. Above are enclosed Q.S.A. COL/A437, 6952 of 1885.
substituting white police with trackers for Native Police.

This seems to have been prompted by the request of Inspector Isley of Port Douglas for Native Police detachments on the Mulgrave River and at either the Barron River or Nigger Creek, additional to the one then being formed on the Mossman River. Both Isley and Seymour acknowledged the great expense of these proposals; Seymour, however, considered this expansion of Native Police strength would not stop the depredations in this area. His placing of two trackers at each of the outside stations of Irvinebank, Watsonville and Herberton apparently caused Griffith to think that a proliferation of ordinary police stations with trackers might solve the problem of frontier conflict while doing away with the Native Police force which he so much disliked.

Seymour considered such a change might work well on the coast and in the more settled districts, although it would be costly, if responsible constables could be found who were good bushmen and able to work with the trackers. He doubted whether such men were available in sufficient numbers. He did not believe the Native Police could be replaced in the sparsely populated far north and west where the areas to patrol were so great and the Aborigines too numerous for small detachments. The problem of supplying a larger number of remote stations was also a consideration. Such a change in the personnel confronting the Aborigines was far short of the 'very serious consideration and some legislative action' Seymour had requested. In the official correspondence of Seymour and some of his police officers

132. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 24 June 1885, loc. cit. See also C.P., 30 July 1885.
133. Ibid.
there was expressed dutiful concern for the need for restraint
by the Native Police and disapproval of the settlers' expecta-
tions that the Native Police would destroy Aborigines on
request. Yet this government did not accept the challenge
to rethink its frontier policy. Aborigines were to remain
British citizens to be shot by other British citizens who
had the legal right to the land.

From 1885 till 1889, Police Commissioner Seymour was
left with the Native Police and the ordinary police to pacify
the frontier. In 1885, with Griffith's instruction and no
alternative, he again had to rationalize his resources. He
was faced with two problems: firstly, getting suitable
constables to staff the bush police stations and secondly,
the fact that the Native Police were of little use suppress­
ing crime other than that attributed to the Aborigines.
Thus in settled districts he had to substitute the ordinary
police of the colony. The Native Police Force then consisted
of thirteen detachments of one Sub Inspector, one camp
keeper, and six to ten troopers. In 1885, the annual cost,
exclusive of horses, arms, and clothing, was £10,606.18.0.
He proposed to break up eight of the thirteen detachments
and had to substitute nineteen stations with one senior
constable, one constable and three Aboriginal trackers.
The new buildings, exclusive of paddocks and fencing, would
cost an estimated £10,000.135

With this large reorganization of his forces, Seymour
had closed the gap even further between a large number of
his police in bush stations and the much reduced Native
Police Force. Senior Constables and sergeants with three
trackers were now stationed at such places in Cape York
Peninsula as the Mulgrave, Laura, and Moresby Rivers.136

134. See Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 19 May 1885; Pol. Com. to
Col. Sec., 24 June 1885; Insp. Isley, Port Douglas, to
Pol. Com., 5 May 1885; all encl. Q.S.A. COL/428,
4592 of 1885.
136. 'Report of the Commissioner of Police for 1886',
1887 V. & P., p. 1082.
which were in comparatively closely settled areas where a
good deal of ordinary police work would be required, but
which were yet troubled by Aboriginal resistance. 137 This
major reorganization of the police force passed through
parliament uncriticised and virtually unchallenged, 138
presumably because no one doubted that settlers' rights
would be protected when necessary whether it be by Native
Police or ordinary police with trackers.

Thus, the Cairns Post welcomed Senior Constable Whelan
and his three troopers to the Mulgrave pointing out to its
readers that this was the first station established under
the new system by which the Premier, Griffith, intended to
supersede the present Native Police. The writer added:

he will be kept busily employed in protecting the
settlers and bringing the country districts into a
state of peaceful security. 139

The paper had clearly recognized Whelan's Native Police
responsibility. This was illustrated by one week's activities.
He patrolled in the neighbourhood of two sugar plantations
before arriving in town on the 3 February 1886. On 4 February,
he left for Barron River and Double Island where the Aborigines
had been very troublesome. He returned on the seventh.
On the eighth, he went by pilot cutter to Cape Grafton to
search for a missing man who had been killed by Aborigines.
On the tenth, he was back in Cairns where he remained in
charge while the commanding officer was absent. 140 This
member of the ordinary police force was now performing functions
of the Native Police. Perhaps the best, if extreme, example
of the dual functions of the frontier policemen involved

137. C.P., 3 December 1885, 'New Native Police Camp
Established at Mulgrave Reserve'.
138. Q.P.D., Vol. XLVII, 24 September 1885, pp. 825, 826,
Col. Sec.
139. C.P., 3 December 1885, 'New Native Police Camp
Established at Mulgrave Reserve'.
140. C.P., 11 February 1886. He was now Sergeant Whelan.
in this re-organization was provided by the two officers at Atherton who were actively engaged in reaching a peaceful accord with the rainforest Aborigines. Constables Hansen and Higgins both used violent retaliatory measures if they considered them necessary and even enlisted the support of Aborigines from the local camp against resisting Aborigines. Thus Higgins requested another two troopers 'as two (2) rifles would not teach a group of 200 Aborigines six miles from Atherton sufficient lesson for the depredations the [sic] have committed all over the district'.

Looking back over the first year's experiment Seymour wrote:

The arrangement which was proposed some time ago of substituting white police with native trackers in lieu of the native police has been tried during the


last year and stations of this description were formed on the Laura, Moresby, and Mulgrave Rivers, and so far the system has worked satisfactorily, and I am arranging other similar stations thus reducing the native police by degrees. 144

This rationalization was in accord with Seymour's frontier policy and his concept of the role of the Native Police. He believed:

Native Police were never intended for a settled district, but for the outside country where the distance between stations is so great as to prevent the residents from assisting each other. 145

Thus the criterion for having a Senior Constable and three troopers rather than a Native Police officer and six troopers was the ability of the settlers to combine against the Aborigines or to solve their frontier Aboriginal problem in any other way, not the pacified nature of the area. The closer settlement of the 1880's in such frontier areas as the north-east coast and the Cairns hinterland demanded more ordinary police work not necessarily less Native Police work.

However, closer settlement on the fringes of the rainforest and scrub didn't always intimidate the Aborigines. The presence of a large number of settlers and the realization of their firepower were not sufficient to offset their resentment, the advantage of their refuge, and the incentive of hunger. Their resistance, that is, their willingness to compensate aggressively for the loss of part of their land by utilizing the settlers' property, had not been broken, mainly because they still had part of their land for economic and, no doubt, spiritual, social, and politico-military support.

Thus once again the government's expectations as espoused by the Police Commissioner conflicted with both the situation in this area of North Queensland and the settlers' expectation. There is ample evidence that the settlers thought it was the government's responsibility to pacify the Aborigines even though they sometimes assumed that role themselves. 146 It is also apparent that Seymour did not believe that the Queensland Government could, or should, offer the same protection to the small selectors and miners as it did to the pastoralists. Thus he informed the Colonial Secretary in typical vein:

Miners that are scattered through the district cannot have their several tents watched for them while they are away prospecting; and selectors in or close to scrub who leave their crops or cattle unprotected will suffer from the depredations of the blacks — who are always on the watch — no matter what strength of police may be in the district. 147 It was as impossible for the selector to prevent Aboriginal raids on crops, cattle, houses, and sheds as it was for the frontier mining population to protect themselves adequately. Furthermore, Seymour considered most of their crimes 'petty' yet, to the small selector struggling to clear his land and get established, robbery of crops, tools, provisions, the contents of his home, and the spearing of his few cattle were anything but petty. Seymour confronted Griffith with the unpalatable truth. More intense police protection against starving Aborigines would lead to more Aborigines' resisting arrest for petty 'crimes' whereupon they would have to be shot down or allowed to escape. Police Commissioner

146. W. Bonan, Chairman, Tinaroo Progress Association, Herberton, to Col. Sec. enclosed Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885; H.A., 21 August 1885; H.A., 20 May 1887; H.A., 17 June 1887; C.P., 26 October 1887; C.P., 1 August 1888, letter from 'Selector'.
147. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 19 May 1885, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A428, 4592 of 1885.
Seymour, who had commanded the Native Police since 1864 and never tried to restrain the settlers on the frontier, then added, apparently with affected horror: 'and even the most deeply injured settler would hardly demand that the blacks should be shot down for resisting capture for any charge short of a capital offence'. It is difficult not to conclude that the experienced commander-in-chief was gently deriding his minister, the well-intentioned, city lawyer, Griffith, and confronting him with the necessity of doing something more than uphold the sanctity of British law on the Queensland frontier.

The resistance of the Aborigines of the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands would no doubt have worn down in time but at a cost and delay in economic exploitation that the settlers would find unacceptable. The initiative to find a quicker, amicable accord with the Aborigines had not evaporated. In July 1888, when the Tinaroo Progress Association requested that the government end the continued depredations of the Aborigines on the Barron River, it referred B.D. Morehead, Colonial Secretary in the government that had followed Griffiths', to the previous correspondence. The Association reminded Morehead that the previous Minister

148. Pol. Com. to Col. Sec., 19 May 1885, loc. cit. Alexander Macdonald, a pioneer settler of the Cloncurry District, told with approval how he had interviewed Seymour and other officials about the Aboriginal resistance he was experiencing. He had pointed out that he would have to resort to violence whereupon Seymour warned him severely that he would be liable to prosecution etc. Macdonald left whereupon Seymour hurried after him and told him in private to take whatever measures he felt necessary. His official comment had been his public pose. See Fysh, Taming the North, p. 125. This accords with my interpretation of the conflict between frontier theory and practice.
for Mines, Hodgkinson, had promised its deputation that a
constable and a tracker would be stationed for this purpose
and added:

there are means of dealing with the Black question
without using severe repressive measures. 149

On 28 August 1888, the government decided to accept the
offer by pioneer Atherton settler, W.B. Kelly, of very
cheap accommodation for two police constables whose prime
task was to end the racial conflict in the Atherton-Evelyn
District. 150 There is strong evidence to suggest that a
carefully chosen police officer, Constable Hansen, was sent
to Atherton especially to establish a peaceful understanding
with the Aborigines. 151 There are other indications that
the initiative evidenced in the initial deputation to
Hodgkinson in 1888 was still active. W.B. Kelly, who had
offered the accommodation, had been one of the original
delegation to Hodgkinson, and was vitally interested in the
police constable's activities with the Aborigines of the

149. R.C. Ringrose, Hon. Sec., Tinaroo Progress Association,
Herberton, to B.D. Morehead, Col. Sec., 16 July 1888,
encl. Q.S.A. COL/A558, 7966 of 1888. See Birtles,
op. cit., p. 204 for reference to W.B. Kelly, as the
first selector to settle near Atherton. He later
became as well a storekeeper.

150. C. Mears, Clerk of Tinaroo Provisional Board, Herberton,
to Col. Sec., 3 July 1888, Q.S.A. COL/A558, 7966 of
1888; Mears, Tinaroo Divisional Board, to Under Col.
Sec., 15 August 1888, and Minute J. Fimcane, pro
Pol. Com., 28 August 1888, enclosed Q.S.A. COL/A558,
7966 of 1888.

151. W. Craig, Niagara Vale, Cardwell, to Col. Sec.,
4 April 1896, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 13634 of 1896.
See Minute by Pol. Com., W.E. Parry-Okeden, 25 April
1896: 'Cons. Hansen was selected specially because
of his known humanity and special fitness for the
work'. It is not clear whether this refers to his
first appointment or to his transfer to the Cardwell
District after he had established his reputation at
Atherton. His actions at Atherton, especially his
use of local Aborigines, suggest that he went there
with special instructions.
rainforest. He was the first local to request officially that the government supply food to the first group of Aborigines induced out of the rainforest. In addition, A.H. Zillman was appointed to the post of Police Magistrate and Mining Warden at Herberton at the same time as the deputation was meeting Hodgkinson and took up duty soon after. Zillman received many complaints about the Aboriginal raids and placed maximum importance on the solution of this frontier problem, giving the greatest possible support to Constable Hansen's initiative. Thus there were a number of influences combining to bring about a change in policy. However, the renewed efforts of the Tinaroo Progress Association and W.B. Kelly were probably most decisive.


153. H.A., 3 February 1888. This issue contains articles on the deputation and Zillman's appointment. It was stated he was to fill the post temporarily but he remained until 1 September 1893. See A. Zillman, P.M., Herberton, to Col. Sec., 27 February 1888, Q.S.A. COL/AS35, 2063 of 1888. Zillman took up duty on 27 February 1888. A.H. Zillman: his first appointment was on 29 November 1877. He was appointed Police Magistrate at Herberton on 2 February 1888, and held this position continuously until his transfer to Normanton on 1 September 1893. While in Herberton Zillman also held positions of Visiting Justice, Gaol, Acting Land Commissioner, Gold Warden, Mineral Land Commissioner, and Captain of Queensland Defence Force, D Company, Herberton. Source: Mr. P.D. Wilson, Archivist, Queensland State Archives, correspondence to writer, 27 July 1973.

154. Zillman, P.M., Herberton, to Under Col. Sec., 18 June 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890. See also Zillman, P.M., Herberton, to Under Col. Sec., 28 June 1889, enclosed Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890: 'I fear I am troubling you overmuch on this subject but must plead the very deep interest I take in it'.

See also Zillman, P.M., Herberton, to Under Col. Sec., 28 June 1889, enclosed Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890: 'I fear I am troubling you overmuch on this subject but must plead the very deep interest I take in it'.
Towards the end of February 1889, W.B. Kelly of Atherton, the Chairman of the Tinaroo Divisional Board, informed Zillman at Herberton that Constable Hansen had gathered a large group of Aborigines from the scrub in a starving condition and requested the government to supply them with food. The Premier and Colonial Secretary, B.D. Morehead, agreed if Zillman was satisfied they were in that condition. 155

Some idea of how Hansen established contact can be deduced from the few reports of his which have survived. In fact his first report from Atherton Police Station, dated 25 November 1888, of a patrol to the selections near Zeigenbein's Pocket describes a nineteen day search through the rainforest for Aboriginal camps. He came across two occupied camps containing about thirty bushels of corn plus a variety of other stolen property, including 14 steel axes and three tomahawks, and a number of old camps all of which indicated that corn had become an important part of the diet of the rainforest Aborigines. Hansen was accompanied by a tracker called 'Kerami' on this and at least two other patrols. As Kerami was one of the rainforest tribes to the south, it seems likely that Hansen was trying to establish communications using an Aboriginal with some understanding of the local language. Kerami [Dixon Giramaayan] is a dialect of the languages of the Atherton-Evelyn District. 156


156. Const. C. Hansen, Atherton, to Insp. Stuart, Port Douglas, 25 November 1888, Q.S.A. POL/12B/N1, 1 of 1888. See also Hansen to Stuart, 2 January 1889, and Hansen to Stuart, 3 February 1889, Q.S.A. POL/12B/N1. (These letters are not numbered). See also Dixon, op. cit., pp. 23, 24, for the degree of communication possible between the various languages in this area.
The local press noted favourably his energetic efforts. He was reported to have broken up several camps, possibly because the Aborigines fled when he approached them; but before the end of December it was reported that he had brought several Aborigines in. Within two months, Hansen had contacted a group of over forty Aborigines. Through an interpreter they were able to inform him of their hunger and he told them they could obtain food at Kelly's store at Atherton.

Kelly and the other settlers 'subscribed liberally' to provide the Aborigines with flour, sugar, tea, beef, tobacco and a couple of acres of sweet potatoes. Constable Hansen estimated there were two hundred more Aborigines ready to come in during the next week and believed he could bring all in if he could provide them with rations. Even this first request for government assistance contained the inducement that the settlers would soon employ the Aborigines, thus relieving the government of the expense of their rations. Neither the settlers nor the government clearly

157. C.P., 29 December 1888.
158. W.B. Kelly, on behalf of the settlers of the Upper Barron Valley, to Insp. Stewart [sic], Port Douglas, 23 February 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890. In November 1889, Hansen was reported to be using trackers recruited from the district in which they were working. See G.P.M. Murray, Relieving P.M., Brisbane, to Under Col. Sec., 13 November 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 2853 of 1894, 'Report re condition of the blacks at Herberton'. The emissaries may not have been those he had brought in. Some settlers had established communications with a few Aborigines. See H.A., 11 February 1887, (a Mr. Loder of Atherton was attacked by Aborigines he had working for him) and F.T. Wimble, M.L.A., Brisbane, to Col. Sec., 20 March 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890. Moreover, in districts not far from the Atherton and Evelyn scrubs Aborigines had been let in. See H.A., 29 April 1887.
159. W.B. Kelly, on behalf of the settlers of the Upper Barron Valley, to Insp. Stewart [sic], Port Douglas, 23 February 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
understood how the plan would develop. However, it is clear that the government thought it was providing food to meet a short-term emergency while the settlers were seeking a long-term solution. If regular rationing was needed, the government would soon be expected to accept responsibility.

Zillman, John Newell, the Mayor of Herberton, and several other leading citizens who were very interested in any attempt to reconcile the Aborigines to the settlers proceeded to Atherton to investigate the situation. Many people in the district now wanted the experiment tried. Zillman strongly urged government support to follow up Hansen's breakthrough in establishing communications with the resisting Aborigines and was granted a tentative £20. Sub Inspector J. Brooke of the Native Police was ordered to investigate the situation.

As another group of forty had already come in, and eighty more were anxious to, but restrained by Constable Hansen because of lack of rations, Zillman requested an increase in government expenditure suggesting that in a month or two the Atherton Aborigines, like some on the Russell and Johnstone Rivers, would obtain employment. The Aborigines had agreed to cease raiding the selectors' crops if they were well treated and received some food and blankets. The Colonial Secretary cautiously allowed the scheme to continue.

The government was under pressure to provide a permanent solution to the problem. They were strongly urged to establish

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162. Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 15 March 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890. As Brooke's report conflicted with the previous reports, Zillman had to clarify the position. Kelly had claimed them to be 'literally starving': Brooke denied this. Zillman explained that while they were not 'literally starving', they raided the settlers when they were 'very hungry', apparently as a result of their diminished foraging area.
163. ibid., Minute B.D.M., Col. Sec., 22 March 1889.
a mission station or reserve to ensure that the Aborigines did not resume their raids for food. 164 There were two hundred Aborigines on the Mulgrave and Russell Rivers wanting to come in. Once again, the colonists' recurrent nightmare appeared: that these Aborigines and the ones at Atherton would resume their hostile activities from their forest fastness, more sophisticated through contact with the settlers and more determined because of their newly acquired taste for 'the good things of civilization'. 165 It was to offset this that an influential police officer, Inspector Stuart of Port Douglas, recommended that the rationing be continued. 166

The most influential man in developing the experiment was, however, Police Magistrate Zillman. Early in June 1889, he had already successfully indicated the necessity of continuing government expenditure 'until some permanent plan of dealing with them is formed'. He suggested a reserve under the control of Constable Hansen. 167 On 13 June Zillman reported on the three months' old experiment. He commented on the 'good understanding' established with the Aborigines and indicated this was not a completely one-way process. He now believed that the chief inducement for raiding the settlers 'was to procure the means of subsistence for

165. G.S. Davis, Clerk, Tinaroo Divisional Board, Herberton, to Col. Sec., 4 July 1889, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
166. Insp. J. Stuart, Port Douglas, to Pol. Com., 19 March 1889, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890. His was conventional colonial wisdom stated, however, with authority:

to civilize the wild aboriginal the primary step is to overcome his fear of the whiteman which can only be done through his stomach but once that is accomplished the remainder of his education is mainly a matter of time.

167. Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 7 June 1889, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
the old men and women’. The Aborigines had thus been able to communicate in part that they were forced to such dangerous measures to fulfil their traditional kinship obligations. Presumably the younger Aborigines had been able to eke out a living while foraging but could not bring back enough food to the old and feeble now confined to their rainforest camps. A good number of the young and able were already working for the selectors who paid them in rations, tobacco etc. Zillman now tried to ensure that the old people received government rations.

The economic success of the experiment was already manifest. Selectors were clearing and preparing land for crops which formerly had been considered too vulnerable to Aboriginal raids. Good crops were being harvested whereas previously only a small percentage, if any, could have survived. One selector had cleared £300 for produce in 1889 whereas in 1888 he had only received £50. Four other settlers were cited who had lost nearly all their crops in 1888 but had good harvests with pleasing returns in 1889. The prospects for an accelerated development and expanded settlement of the district where some of the colony’s finest land had been revealed were being fulfilled. Both Zillman and Hansen believed that a reserve of land for the Aborigines was necessary to maintain security and to capitalize on the opportunity to ‘civilize or tame’ them and to use their labour.

A dramatic expansion in the area of land under cultivation and the area under crop had indeed occurred. In 1888, the figures reveal a recovery to almost the level of 1886. In


169. ibid. See also Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 26 August 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
1886 there had been a blight on the maize crop, a plague of caterpillars, other insect pests, and a prolonged wet season which spoiled most of the oaten hay. These factors may have resulted in the diminished activity in 1887. In 1889, the year in which an accommodation was reached with some of the rainforest Aborigines, there was a 38% increase in the area under crop and a 26% increase in the area under cultivation. The 1,015 acres under cultivation in 1888 had increased by 237% by 1893 and the 905 acres under crop in 1888 had increased by 276% by 1893. There were other factors such as high freight charges, a limited market, and problems associated with the land legislation but these remained constant during the period 1888-1899. After 1893, there was a great decrease in agricultural activity associated with the general economic depression and combined with the various problems mentioned previously, although maize blight ceased to be a problem. Birtles remarked:

An exodus of disappointed miners, assomnent carriers, and disillusioned selectors had begun before 1897. The experiment to pacify the Aborigines had already passed the point of no return. Although there were some Aboriginal robberies and acts of violence, they were generally not molesting the settlers and were being allowed free movement throughout the district. By August, the Native Police Force in the district had been considerably reduced. It was not long before applications for similar assistance were made from other areas of Cape York Peninsula. Zillman tried to differentiate between those that were essential to

170. Birtles, op. cit., p. 155. See Table II.
172. ibid., p. 187. See also pp. 198-202.
174. Zillman to Col. Sec., 28 June 1889; Zillman to Col. Sec., 9 September 1889; Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 27 September 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
pacify troublesome Aborigines and those that were not. Thus the Colonial Secretary accepted his recommendation that William Atherton's request for an allowance for rations for the Aborigines at Chillagoe Station be refused. Zillman admitted there was justice in the claim on the general principle that the Aborigines should be the responsibility of the state. This would however divert funds from 'the more intractable ones':

At Chillagoe they have no scrub fastnesses into which they can penetrate and defy authority and are moreover not in that wild state which necessitates pacification in the first case. 175

Atherton had let the Aborigines in at Chillagoe for twelve months. As there were about two hundred in the tribe he found maintaining them in a pacific state almost unbearably expensive. Despite the fact that the station had been abandoned for some years previously on account of Aboriginal aggressiveness, the government had no intention of rewarding past initiatives. 176

On Waroora Station, about thirty miles south of Herberton, the Aborigines had been kept out till May 1889. They had continually speared horses and cattle, despite harsh retaliation, until the owner was encouraged by the Sub Inspector of Native Police to bring them in and supply them with rations. From May till November, the station owner had killed 33 head of cattle for the Aborigines and had been allowed £8 per month by the government. 177 On this station, a captured Aboriginal sent out by the Native Police Inspector, Brooke, and the owner had explained the new conditions to his

175. Zillman to Col. Sec., 9 September 1889, loc. cit.
176. W. Atherton, Herberton, to P.M., Herberton, 24 August 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
177. G.P.M. Murray, Relieving P.M., Brisbane, to Under Col. Sec., 13 November 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 2853 of 1894. See also Sub Inspector J. Brooke, Barron Water to Insp. Stuart, Port Douglas, 23 April 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
fellow tribesmen but they were still so frightened that they
sent down to the coast for a 'half civilized nigger to come
and talk' before approaching their former enemy. This
apparently trivial incident provided one of the few examples
of the Aboriginal attitude to this change of policy. Elsewhere Aborigines were described as responding automatically
to the new European initiative whereas it must have often
produced, as here, suspicion, caution, and an intelligent
appraisal of the situation.

In September 1899, Zillman informed his Minister that
he had

... long since come to the conclusion that to establish
friendly relations with the blacks is the best course
to pursue. The strongest argument in favor of this course is, that it is almost impossible to get at
them in any other way. ... Moreover past experience
with retaliatory measures proves that such a course of
treatment has not been successful. I cannot guarantee
that the present system will be successful, but it is the
more humane and is worthy of trial. 179

At this stage the Colonial Secretary and Premier,
B.D. Morehead, realized that there was a policy developing
on the frontier that was (a) potentially costly and (b) in
conflict with the previous policy based on 'dispersal' and
assistance to the selectors 'to keep the blacks out' until
their resistance was broken. Thus he sent relieving police
magistrate, G.P.M. Murray, from Brisbane to report upon
'the judiciousness or otherwise of this mode of dealing with
the Blacks in this locality.' Murray's instructions
stressed 'the temporary measures which have been taken, to
conciliate' the Aborigines and the Colonial Secretary's

178. F. Robinson, Waroora Station, to Sub Insp. J. Brooke,
Barron Water, 6 June 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
179. Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 27 September 1889, encl.
Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
180. ibid. Minute B.D.M., 7 October 1889.
realization that 'the whole matter must be dealt with in a more comprehensive manner than hitherto'.

Murray's experience of the Queensland frontier was very long as he had been a Native Police inspector in the 1860's. He visited areas likely to be involved. He believed, wrongly it seems, that the dense scrubs on the heads of the Johnstone, Tully, Murray Rivers on to the Herbert contained a plentiful supply of food, but realized they were also the Aborigines' strongholds. Everyone he spoke to agreed that the raids had diminished greatly or ceased since the Aborigines had been let in and supplied with rations. Thus he recommended the continuation of the experiment despite the fact that numerous requests for government aid would come in. He believed that certain precautions could be taken to regulate the scheme. Thus only the Aboriginal group normally occupying a troubled locality should be fed, not Aborigines merely attracted by the rations. This would limit the rationing to vulnerable centres of European population. Secondly he stressed the rations should be given only to the aged men and women and the children. The strong must forage for their own food or work for the settlers. He maintained that these two precautions would prevent the scheme attracting the large groups of Aborigines still living traditional lives in the scrubs. Indiscriminate rationing, he believed, could result in groups of up to five hundred suddenly assembling. He successfully advised the Colonial Secretary not to accede to Zillman's idea of a small reserve where the Aborigines could become self-supporting, suggesting instead a large conveniently placed hunting reserve or alternatively a series of reserves from which rations could be distributed.

181. W.H. Ryder, Assistant Under Col. Sec. to G.P.M. Murray, Relieving Police Magistrate, Brisbane, encl. G.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
182. G.P.M. Murray, Relieving P.M., Brisbane, to Under Col. Sec., 13 November 1889, encl. G.S.A. COL/139, 2853 of 1894.
Local initiative to solve the particular problem posed by the rainforests had thus led to a temporary expedient which had been accepted as government policy.

Not all Murray's recommendations for this area were implemented. Thus the suggestion that a hunting ground be established was not gazetted because the land was required for agricultural development. Murray had also recommended that the local authorities distribute the rations. Although the concerned divisional boards agreed to do so, police supervision of local suppliers was finally preferred.

The Europeans continued to report the experiment 'an unqualified success'. In September 1890, there were 250 to 300 rainforest Aborigines camping peacefully at Atherton, up to 200 being rationed, according to Murray's recommendations, on £12 per month. About 100 were employed by the settlers who appreciated this supply of cheap labour. Other Aborigines complained of hunger and would have come in with encouragement. The expenditure had to be increased to £20 per month because of fluctuations in the Aborigines' traditional food supply and the seasonal availability of employment among the settlers. In 1892, 400 Aborigines were still

183. Under Sec., Department of Lands, to Under Col. Sec., 4 February 1890, and B/C. 10800 Lands, 6 December 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
being controlled by this expenditure. 188

By this time the economic attraction of the scheme had become evident to the government officials. Sub Inspector Lamond of Herberton estimated that by 1892 one constable and two trackers were effectively controlling the Aborigines of the Barron Valley scrubs with rations valued at £240 per year whereas before 1889 two or three detachments of Native Police had been unable to do so. He estimated this saving to the police department was between two and three thousand pounds per annum. 189

Although each year more and more land was being cleared there were over 1800 square miles of rainforest still left as a refuge for the Aborigines around Atherton. Zillman was firmly convinced that they could not support themselves in the scrub especially as a large area of their hunting grounds had been taken from them. Thus if their food resources were not supplemented they would return to their former desperate measures. If traditional food became scarce, the Aborigines now expected to receive rations. 190 The scheme was thus self-perpetuating. As late as 1895, the Herberton Police Magistrate was recommending the continuation of rationing to the Aborigines at Atherton, now more than 400, as the settlers could not supplement the diet of such a large number. 192

The successful implementation of this new initiative

188. Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 30 June 1892, q.S.A. COL/1703, 8171 of 1892.
189. ibid.
190. ibid; Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 20 September 1893, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 823 of 1895. See also Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 14 December 1891, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 823 of 1895.
191. W.B. Kelly, Atherton, to B.D. Morehead, Premier, 11ate May 1890, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890.
192. A.R. MacDonald, P.M., Herberton, to Under Col. Sec., 7 June 1895, encl. q.S.A. COL/139, 16681 of 1896.
resulted from a variety of factors. Initially, the Aborigines' ability to resist aggressively from the rainforests had frustrated the normal method of dispossession. The settlers suggested adopting a new method of reaching an accommodation with the Aborigines but the establishment of meaningful relations depended heavily upon Constable Hansen. There are numerous testimonies to this man's determination, industry, humanitarianism, and special ability in winning the confidence of the Aborigines. There can equally be no doubt that the enthusiastic support of the Police Magistrate Zillman was a crucial factor in prolonging and expanding the scheme.

By the time of Murray's inspection in November 1889, rations were already being distributed at Atherton, Waroora Station about 30 miles south of Herberton, Thornborough on the Hodgkinson goldfield, Union Camp about sixteen miles from Thornborough and Mt. Orient on the Mulgrave goldfield near Cairns and about 36 miles from Herberton. This area was visited by up to ninety Aborigines from the Russell River, Johnstone River, Herberton, and Atherton. In October 1891, a group of Aborigines were let in on the Daintree River and given supplementary rations by a settler.

193. H.A., 1 March 1889; H.A., 29 March 1889; H.A., 14 February 1890: '... the selectors on the Mulgrave are anxious to obtain the services of Constable Hansen, but his removal from this district would be opposed, as all are conscious that he has done more to settle the Aboriginal difficulty than any of his predecessors'. See also W.B. Kelly, Atherton, to Insp. Stewart [sic], Port Douglas, 23 February 1889; Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 1 March 1889; Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 15 March 1889; Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 18 June 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 11961 of 1890. Also Murray to under Col. Sec., 13 November 1889, loc. cit.

After an official investigation the Colonial Secretary decided to assume this responsibility as an alternative to providing police protection. In 1892, rations were issued at California Creek west of Herberton to prevent the robbing of miners' camps while in 1896 supplementary rations were issued to a group of aged Aborigines near Fisherton on the Tate River who had refused to follow the young tribespeople to a mining camp thirty miles away. Unable to support themselves completely, these old people had been robbing the camps of the handful of old miners left at the Tate tin mines.

Expenditure was closely watched. Thus in 1893 the amount disbursed at Atherton was reduced from £20 to £15 per month on Zillman's recommendation. Officers were instructed to discontinue rations whenever sufficient natural food was readily available. Distribution centres were rationalised for administrative convenience wherever possible.

For example, Zillman successfully recommended that rationing be discontinued in 1893 at Thornborough and Montalbion, the affected Aborigines being supplied respect-


196. Sub Insp. J. Lamond, Herberton, to A.H. Zillman, P.M., Herberton, 3 June 1892, and Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 6 June 1892, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 16681 of 1896. See also C. Denford, Post Office Hotel, California Creek, to Haldane, P.M., Herberton, 3 December 1896, Q.S.A. COL/139, 16681 of 1896.

ively at the existing rationing centres of Union Camp and California Creek.198

The success of the Atherton initiative in changing official attitudes and government policy was clearly seen. In 1893, twenty-four residents of the Murray and Tully Rivers petitioned for adequate police protection because rainforest Aborigines of the Cardwell Range were killing their dairy cattle. The Colonial Secretary since 1890, Horace Tozer, accepted advice that the nearest Native Police detachment be instructed to patrol the area.199

In 1895, seventeen residents of the Murray and Tully Rivers again requested police protection pointing out that seven properties had been destroyed by fire by the Aborigines and an attempt made on the life of one of the settlers.200 This time Tozer demanded the Police Commissioner provide protection, but added:

If a distribution of food could be arranged by some competent person near this place all outrages would cease. I prefer this if it can be arranged to native police. 201

This was indeed a declaration of faith.

This did not mean that he embarked upon a campaign to institute the scheme widely. To another request for aid in 1895 Tozer retorted:

I am unable to supply all the blacks of Queensland with rations. When occasion calls for it a station is provided from which supplies are distributed. If a necessity


199. E.D. Collins and 23 other residents of the Murray and Tully Rivers to Col. Sec., 20 October 1893, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 13634 of 1896.

200. Ernest Brooke and 16 other residents of the Tully and Murray Rivers, Cardwell District, to Col. Sec., 23 March 1895, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 13634 of 1896.

exists for a station at Myola that fact must first be proved to me. 202

Yet the system did develop not only in size but in complexity. The government, if pressed, began to accept responsibility for Aborigines who were not necessarily providing an insurmountable problem of frontier resistance. Thus the Aborigines at Myola were old men and women and younger women and children. They had been given supplementary rations by a settler who claimed the cost was too great. 203 £10 a month was granted. At Bowen, in response to a complaint from a local clergyman and the recommendation of the Police Magistrate, some medicine was supplied by the medical officer for the Aborigines and an Aboriginal enlisted as a tracker to visit the Aboriginal camps bringing in cases of disease for treatment and reporting cases of destitution to the Police Magistrate. 204 The discovery of about eighty starving old blacks and orphaned children near Thornborough produced a flurry of telegrams and the purchase of half a ton of flour within twenty-four hours. The police officers, the responsible minister, and his senior administrators regarded this as a matter of great urgency. 205

Prior to the need to spend money on a comparatively large scale to pacify the Aborigines, the Queensland government had

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202. P.M., Cairns, to Under Col. Sec., 31 August 1895, Minute, H.T. /Col. Sec. Tozer\(^7\) 11 September 1895, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 10689 of 1895.

203. E. Hennam, Northbourne, Myola, to Col. Sec., 3 October 1895, Q.S.A. COL/139, 12189 of 1895. See Minute H.T. /Col. Sec. Tozer\(^7\) 19 October 1895.

204. F.W. Myles, P.M., Bowen, to Under Col. Sec., 1 February 1890, Minutes: H.T. /Col. Sec. Tozer\(^7\), 12 November 1890 and Pol. Com. B.T. Seymour \(^7\) and A. Barton, Sec. Kennedy Hospital Board, 11 February 1893, Minute H.T. /Col. Sec. Tozer\(^7\), 23 February 1893, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 1211 of 1890.

provided rations for destitute Aborigines sporadically and haphazardly. The new initiative on the Atherton Tableland had involved three Colonial Secretaries, their senior administrative officers, and local Police Magistrates, as well as two Commissioners of Police, some of his senior officers, and some local non-commissioned officers. An alternative was offered which in very difficult but settled terrain was much cheaper and more effective than the Native Police, provided that the local Aborigines believed coming to terms with the intruders was preferable to continued resistance.

The new policy, however, helped to focus a growing government awareness on problems posed by Aborigines as a whole. The Colonial Secretary from 1890–1891, Horace Tozer, was obviously interested in these problems and began to think in terms of an Aboriginal policy. Expenditure on the Aborigines associated with rainforest resistance was coupled with rationing Aborigines in inaccessible mountainous areas like Mt. Orient and Thornborough. These were associated with occasional emergency rationing of destitute Aborigines, the supply of medicines at Bowen, and Cloncurry, and financial grants which were especially designated for secular purposes to missions. A de facto Aboriginal policy had been emerging within the Queensland government bureaucracy from the late 1880's. The emergence of a new frontier policy to cope with the rainforest resistance seems to have played an important part in making manifest the new needs of the administration. When Zillman wrote in November 1891 concern-

206. Murray to Under Col. Sec., 13 November 1889, loc. cit. He Thornborough, Murray wrote: 'there are no large scrubs in this part of the district, the country is very mountainous but open'. He wrote of Mount Orient mine: 'the country is very mountainous and broken almost impossible to take horses through it'.

207. See ch. 10 for missions and ch. 11 for the evolution of government policy.
ing the starving but harmless Aborigines at Woodville and
Waterford near Thornborough,

The principle of feeding and caring for the blacks having
been adopted by the Government there remains only now
the necessity of making proper and satisfactory
arrangements for the distribution of the allowance', 208
he was indicating that the initiative which began functioning
in February 1889 had moved beyond the narrow confines then
envisaged.

The resistance of rainforest Aborigines had thus
illustrated the inadequacy of Queensland's frontier policy.
It had provoked a settler response which aimed at controlling
unpacified Aborigines by seeking their co-operation in a
scheme in which the invaders agreed to compensate the
Aborigines, in part, for the loss of the productivity of
their land by the distribution of rations. The full significa-
cance of the experiment was not initially understood by
either race, but certainly least by the Aborigines who no
doubt thought they would retain ownership and use of their
tribal territories.

Regrettably, the Aborigines are shadowy actors in this
drama. There is enough evidence to suggest that they
intelligently assessed the situation and sought to accommo-
date the changed circumstances. During the period of frontier
conflict they had utilized the products of the invader's
culture in their rainforest existence. Constable Hansen
found knives, axes, etc., in their jungle camps. There
was also ample evidence that European foods such as maize
had become an essential part of their diet. As noted previously,
on one occasion, the Aborigines had even approached an
isolated shop to demand flour and billy cans209 and on another
had tried to effect a trade with stolen money. 210 A more

208. Zillman to Under Col. Sec., 27 November 1891, encl.
Q.S.A. COL/139, 823 of 1895.
complex cultural response resulted from the displacement of those Aborigines who had occupied the fringes of the rainforest or parts of it which had been cleared. Such groups had moved to areas which still offered refuge from the invaders. Then, in an alien Aboriginal environment, they had begun to utilize the European material wealth, thus making a two-fold adaptation.

The dramatic success of the experiment to control frontier resistance by rationing depended on the willingness of the Aborigines to accept such a scheme. The Aborigines had only agreed to cease raiding the selections if they were well treated and received food and blankets as compensation. As Zillman had pointed out, 'a good understanding' had been reached. An important incentive for the Aborigines seems to have been their inability to meet their kinship obligations adequately in conditions of frontier conflict, especially with regard to the support of the aged members of the tribe. Indeed, the Aborigines obviously assessed the Atherton initiative and the alternatives available before accepting the truce with the invaders. The best example of such deliberation occurred at Waroora Station where they called in for consultation an Aboriginal from a coastal tribe who had experienced co-existing with the settlers.

The truce forced on the settlers by the rainforest resistance was, of course, but a temporary victory for the Aborigines concerned. It had proved Queensland's frontier policy inadequate to cope with the colonization of North Queensland's rainforest and resulted in a new frontier policy after thirty years of implementing the policy of

Native Police dispersal inherited from New South Wales experience. However, as European control was effectively instituted following the accord neither the Europeans nor the Aborigines concerned realized the significance involved in changing from bullets to beef. The enthusiasm of Zillman and Tozer at having a more humane mechanism of control was but a very minor note in the dominant theme of dispossession.
CHAPTER 7

THE SEA FRONTIER

The recurrent colonial fear encountered on the pastoral, mining, and rainforest frontiers that the settlers would have contacts with 'knowing' but hostile or potentially hostile Aborigines became a reality when the invaders were induced to exploit the wealth of the sea in North Queensland. From the early years of Australia's settlement beche-de-mer fishermen had periodically intruded into North Queensland waters. By the 1840's a 'little trade' had been developed in Torres Straits by vessels from Sydney and Hong Kong in beche-de-mer and such items as tortoise shell which could be obtained by barter with the natives. Beche-de-mer had been a major item of New South Wales' very limited early trade with the far east while during the 1860's Captain Robert Towns had exploited the Barrier Reef to supply the local Chinese market. In the mid 1860's, beche-de-mer boats occasionally put in to Somerset on the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula while the Prince of Wales Islanders, by 1869, were coming to Somerset to barter tortoiseshell for tobacco and probably other European merchandise. After fluctuations in this industry it prospered when access to the large Hong Kong and Chinese markets was firmly established. In 1874, over 60 tons of beche-de-mer worth at least £3,000 was obtained in the Torres Straits. In 1880, Queensland exported 98 tons

1. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 76.
2. See ch. 3, pp. 89, 90.
3. Bolton, op. cit., p. 76. See also f.n. 4, below.
4. Cannon, Savage Scenes from Australia, p. 30: Cannon mentioned that small vessels collecting beche-de-mer for the Chinese market called at Somerset, 'manned by Solomon Islanders, Fijians, and "other Kanakas"'. The settlement was established in 1864.
TABLE III

RETURN SHOWING QUANTITIES AND VALUE OF BECHE-DE-MER
EXPORTED FROM QUEENSLAND, 1880-1889

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Queensland Weight</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Foreign New Guinea Weight</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Total Weight</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>3,199</td>
<td>14,614</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>3,729</td>
<td>3,974</td>
<td>18,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>4,971</td>
<td>23,336</td>
<td>1,264</td>
<td>5,950</td>
<td>6,235</td>
<td>29,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>5,093</td>
<td>25,032</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>5,882</td>
<td>6,342</td>
<td>30,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>4,299</td>
<td>21,208</td>
<td>2,542</td>
<td>10,373</td>
<td>6,841</td>
<td>31,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>4,314</td>
<td>18,474</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>6,393</td>
<td>5,694</td>
<td>24,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>4,028</td>
<td>19,209</td>
<td>1,156</td>
<td>4,571</td>
<td>5,174</td>
<td>23,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>3,945</td>
<td>15,551</td>
<td>1,188</td>
<td>3,959</td>
<td>5,133</td>
<td>19,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>3,255</td>
<td>12,959</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>3,757</td>
<td>14,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>4,418</td>
<td>18,379</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>1,669</td>
<td>4,837</td>
<td>20,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>4,190</td>
<td>18,349</td>
<td>1,445</td>
<td>4,391</td>
<td>5,635</td>
<td>22,740</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 cwt. valued at £18,343 and, in 1883, a nineteenth century record of 342 tons 1 cwt. valued at £31,581 was exported, all except a few hundredweight going each year to the China market. Over 100 boats were licensed for the industry in 1889, 62 from Port Kennedy on Thursday Island, 27 from Cooktown, and another half-dozen each from Cairns, Ingham, and Townsville. Mackay was the southernmost point at which the beche-de-mer fisheries had been worked. Beche-de-mer was the second most important fish export after pearlshell, exceeding slightly in value the export of edible oyster from southern Queensland.

The pearlshell industry developed from this earlier exploitation of the sea. The Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula had early been observed to have pearl shell ornaments but it was not until 1868 that a Captain Banner revealed the existence of extensive beds of high quality pearl shell at Warrior Reef north-east of Thursday Island and about 40 miles from the New Guinea Coast. Shortly afterwards shell was discovered in Endeavour Strait and in various other areas in or near the Torres Straits. In 1870, there were five vessels on the grounds employing 160 kanakas which had collected 50 tons of shell by mid October. The Police Magistrate at Somerset,

7. 'Beche-de-mer and Pearl-Shell Fisheries of Northern Queensland', 1890 V. & P., Vol. III, p. 4. See Table III for returns for the industry 1880 to 1889.
9. ibid., p. 3.
C. D'Oyly Aplin, issued the first comprehensive report of the new industry early in 1875, pointing out that 'the enterprise ... seems almost to have escaped notice in Queensland'.

The pearl fisheries were almost completely within the maritime boundary of Queensland which extended then to within about nineteen miles of New Guinea. There was some activity at Newcastle Bay immediately south of Somerset and along the west coast of Cape York Peninsula as far south as the Jardine River, but most of the fishing was to the north of Cape York. In 1874, 18 vessels plus 40 boats employing 707 people had raised 137½ tons of live shell valued in Somerset at £200 per ton and 8½ tons of dead shell valued at £40 per ton. The total, £27,840 for pearl shell and over £3,000 for beche-de-mer at this time produced no revenue for the Queensland government in the form of duties or licences, yet increasingly the northern government outpost was having to service and exercise some supervision of the industry. The fishermen were already requesting that the government establishment be moved from Somerset to a more accessible central position among the islands. By this time pearl fishing stations, some of which were small villages, had been established at Warrior Island, Mt. Ernest Island, Somerset, and Prince of Wales Island. In 1877, there were 16 firms using 109 vessels and boats employing an estimated 700 non-Europeans and 50 Europeans. In 1875, 280 tons of shell was produced at an average price of £180 per ton and, in 1876, 460 tons but at an average price of £110 per ton so that the total value of shell, £50,600 was only £200 more than the previous year.

15. ibid.
TABLE IV

STATISTICAL TABLE SHOWING THE VALUE OF THE TEN LEADING QUEENSLAND EXPORTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles Exported</th>
<th>1884</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1886</th>
<th>1887</th>
<th>1888</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wool</td>
<td>£1,889,504</td>
<td>£1,779,855</td>
<td>£1,413,908</td>
<td>£2,368,711</td>
<td>£2,255,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>£923,010</td>
<td>£1,119,170</td>
<td>£1,232,330</td>
<td>£1,432,376</td>
<td>£1,662,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>£454,995</td>
<td>£720,921</td>
<td>£855,510</td>
<td>£758,215</td>
<td>£384,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin</td>
<td>£228,457</td>
<td>£156,777</td>
<td>£192,564</td>
<td>£223,274</td>
<td>£230,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hides</td>
<td>£109,291</td>
<td>£125,603</td>
<td>£101,870</td>
<td>£101,086</td>
<td>£30,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl-shell*</td>
<td>£94,152</td>
<td>£88,210</td>
<td>£63,596</td>
<td>£49,780</td>
<td>£50,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Stock</td>
<td>£78,400</td>
<td>£4,461</td>
<td>£43,113</td>
<td>£37,295</td>
<td>£3,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserved Meats</td>
<td>£57,274</td>
<td>£171,638</td>
<td>£2,303</td>
<td>£105,340</td>
<td>£79,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallow</td>
<td>£76,031</td>
<td>£97,706</td>
<td>£33,434</td>
<td>£99,094</td>
<td>£75,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Ore</td>
<td>£24,756</td>
<td>£20,601</td>
<td>£22,127</td>
<td>£22,422</td>
<td>£7,297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tortoise-shell, having an annual export value of from £400 to £500 only, is included with the sum representing Pearl-shell in the original statistical table quoted.


Pearlshell had soon become Queensland's most important fishery and one of its more important export earners. From 1884 to 1888, pearlshell's average annual value was £39,000 and it occupied a position fluctuating between sixth and eighth on the list of most important exports. Queensland pearlshell attracted the highest prices on world markets. In the late

17. Saville-Kent, The Great Barrier Reef, p. 204. See Table IV.
## TABLE V

**STATISTICS:**

**PEARL-SHELL AND BECHE-DE-MER FISHERY, QUEENSLAND, 1890–1910**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pearl-shell Value</th>
<th>Tons</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>Beche-de-mer Value</th>
<th>Tons</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>No. of Vessels Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>64,666</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>9,691</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>78,941</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6,910</td>
<td>183</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>92,698</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4,556</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>1,214</td>
<td>106,564</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3,881</td>
<td>210</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>1,190</td>
<td>94,350</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3,522</td>
<td>203</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>71,708</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,624</td>
<td>245</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>94,886</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2,421</td>
<td>252</td>
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*Source: Q.S.A. HAR/48.*
1880's there were about 100 craft licensed to collect pearlshell based at Thursday Island and, all told, about 1,000 people engaged in the industry.19

The industry in North Queensland was primarily concerned with pearlshell, the pearls being appropriated by the diver and sometimes other crew members as a right. Although the pearls were generally inferior in quality to, and less numerous than, those collected in Western Australia, their value was not negligible. Working owners claimed that the pearls found paid their expenses.20 Nevertheless, the prevailing custom had early become established in North Queensland and the marketing of the pearls was mainly beyond government control or supervision.21

The number of vessels engaged in the pearlshell and beche-de-mer fisheries and the rewards won are indicated in Table V for the years 1890-1910. A large number of lugger's left for the Aroe Islands in 1905 and did not return. The values were estimated by exporters for Customs purposes.22

The beche-de-mer fishery was carried on chiefly by small lugger's of five or six tons which made daily voyages from the curing-station to nearby reefs or by a fleet of lugger's which stayed in the vicinity of the reefs while one or more conveyed the catch to the curing station and brought back supplies. A few large schooners or ships of from twenty to fifty tons carried small boats and were fitted out as mother ships to cure the fish.

19. ibid., p. 206.
The beche-de-mer were collected by wading or diving from the reefs during the low spring tides. Immediately upon their arrival at the curing stations, the beche-de-mer was boiled in large iron cauldrons for twenty minutes, slit longitudinally, gutted, and dried in the sun. Then the fish was placed for twenty-four hours in the smoke house which was generally made of corrugated iron with two or three tiers of wire netting upon which the beche-de-mer were laid. Finally, the dried smoked fish was packed and despatched to the nearest market.

Throughout its history this industry needed a very large supply of cheap labour to gather the fish and to process it. The simplicity of both aspects of the industry meant that even women and children could be valuable as a source of labour. Aboriginal labour was early utilized although the number and proportion of mainland Aborigines are not clear. Commentators did not always differentiate between mainland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. One is often left wondering if the commentators estimating numbers employed in the industry have included all the mainland Aborigines or sometimes, especially when describing working conditions or rates of pay, whether they have taken them into consideration at all. As well as the more permanent employment there was much casual use of local Aborigines as opportunity and need arose. Thus, the Queensland Commissioner of Fisheries, W. Saville-Kent, remarked in 1890:

24. e.g. H.M. Chester, Autobiography and Parodies, p. 13. Talking of employment in the pearlshell industry, he wrote: 'They employed aboriginals and Kanakas and treated them well ...'. See also Aplin to Col. Sec., 3 March 1875, 'Records of Somerset 1872-1877' (D.L.).
numbers of the natives at remote distances from the shipping ports, while willing to work for a month or two, or for a limited number of tides on the reefs in the immediate neighbourhood of their settlements, have a strong aversion to being transported to the shipping ports for registration. 25

While John Douglas, Government Resident at Thursday Island for the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, admitted, in 1890, 'very little is known of the natives casually employed on the stations'. 26 He believed that, if any attempt was made to prevent such casual employment of labour, the industry would be destroyed.

The early failure of some commentators to differentiate between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders was atoned for by the more precise observers like Saville-Kent who was commissioned by the Queensland government to investigate the fisheries of Queensland in 1889 and 1890. He stated then:

The crews employed in gathering beche-de-mer consist chiefly of mainland Aborigines, or "Binghis", as they are termed in the North, with a frequent admixture of Torres Straits and South Sea Islanders and Manila men; these latter are frequently entrusted with the command of the separate boats. 28

In earlier years natives of New Guinea were extensively used and highly regarded, but this labour was denied to the Queensland based fishermen by a New Guinea ordinance in 1889, a fact greatly regretted by the fishermen some of whom had ventured along the southern coast of New Guinea. 29

27. ibid.
It is probably impossible to estimate with any accuracy the number of Aborigines employed as regular labour in the beche-de-mer industry in the early years. In his first report from Thursday Island, the Government Resident, John Douglas, estimated there were 500 men and boys employed in the beche-de-mer trade of whom there were probably 170 and possibly 250 mainland Aborigines. In the light of the activity in the industry at the time, and later estimates, this seems an underestimate unless it refers only to the area under his jurisdiction. In 1898, when Walter Roth, the first Protector of Aborigines in North Queensland, began his supervision of the industry, he estimated that about 300 Aborigines were employed in this industry. This apparently did not include Aboriginal women later picked up for the boats without official knowledge. Douglas reported in the same year that there were about 300 Aborigines employed in the fisheries on articles. As Douglas refused to agree to employment of women or children below the age of puberty, there must have been a significantly larger number working in the fisheries casually or illegally.

The precise number of Aborigines employed in the pearl-shell industry is equally difficult to estimate. Until 1874 the shell was entirely obtained by 'swimming divers', non-Europeans who would gather the shell at depths of up to fifty feet. Boys of twelve to fourteen years of age

31. Dr. W. E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines, Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 6 May 1898, Q.S.A. POL/142. See Table III.
32. Insp. J. Stuart, Brisbane, to W.E. Parry-Okeden, Pol. Com., Gayndah, 10 March 1898, Q.S.A. POL/1, p. 29, quoting from a telegram from the Government Resident, John Douglas. See also Roth to Pol. Com., 6 May 1898, loc. cit., for Douglas's attempt to prevent women and children being employed.
could dive and bring up shell at depths of up to 24 feet. Much of the diving was done at low tide for about two to three hours. Such 'swimming diving' required a large unskilled work force and it seems that in these early years the fishermen in North Queensland water might collect beche-de-mer as well as pearlshell. In 1874, several boats introduced diving suits which allowed depths of up to ninety and later up to 120 feet to be fished. By 1877, 63 out of 109 boats were equipped with diving apparatus. Despite the heavy capital outlay at this time of £200–£250 for each suit and pump, the working out of the shallower beds and the ability of one diver to stay under water for an hour or two soon established this as the standard method of obtaining pearlshell. This change meant a need for fewer but more skilled and more reliable labour.

Saville-Kent described the operations of the industry in 1890:

The vessels employed in the Queensland pearlshell fishery consists chiefly of strong lugger-rigged craft, averaging ten tons burden, supplemented in some instances by cutters of larger size, which serve as purveyors to the luggers and to bring the shell collected into port. The crews manning these luggers comprise the diver, who takes command and acts as sailing master, one tender, who holds the life-lines and attends to all signals from the diver when at work, and four working hands, who, in pairs, take alternate shifts at the manual pumping apparatus for supplying air to the diver. With but few exceptions, the entire crews consist of coloured men of various nationalities. Mainland aboriginals, South Sea Islanders, and natives

34. F.L. Jardine, P.M., Somerset, to Col. Sec., 1 January 1872, 2 of 1872: Active had 47 tons of beche-de-mer and one ton of pearlshell. See also Jardine to Col. Sec., 1 May 1873, 106 of 1873, 'Records of Somerset 1872–1877' (D.L.).
37. Aplin to Col. Sec., 3 March 1875, loc. cit.
from the Torres Strait Islands furnish the greater number; while some of the best divers are represented by Manilla-men, Chinese, Japanese, and Malays. 38

At this time, the industry employed approximately 1,000 men including boat's crews, those repairing boats and equipment, and those involved in preparing and packing the shell for export. 39 Swimming diving was never wholly abandoned and at various times, for example in the late 1890's, when new pearlshell beds were discovered there was an upsurge in demand for Aborigines, experienced or inexperienced, to collect the shell. 40

* * * * *

The Aboriginal way of life was obviously vulnerable to European intrusion from the sea as had been demonstrated by the early navigators, the various waves of seaborne colonists to Bowen, Cardwell, Cairns, Cooktown, Somerset, Burketown, etc., and the larger numbers of craft, small and large, which landed with impunity in the Aborigines' tribal land. There were circumstances, however, when such European contacts rendered the Europeans vulnerable to Aboriginal reaction, as when the Aborigines had superior aggressive or tactical capability, or when the settlers forced or prolonged an unwelcome liaison.

Indeed the first recorded fatalities from Aboriginal attack in North Queensland occurred on the sea frontier when two men on board the Ellida were killed at Shaw Island in the Whitsunday group after they had foolishly placed themselves at the mercy of an Aboriginal group whom

39. ibid.
40. ibid., p. 205. See also Roth to Pol. Com., 6 May 1898. loc. cit.
they had then unintentionally alarmed. There were seven other examples revealed in this study where men in boats who were not professional fishermen were killed. By the 1870's it had become part of the conventional wisdom of the sea frontier that boats must not anchor at night in vulnerable situations. Thus, after an unsuccessful attack was made on the crew of the cutter Prospect off Hecate Point on 3 February 1879, the Sub Collector of Customs at Port Hinchinbrook commented:

I would beg respectfully to state that the extremely treacherous nature of the blacks on this Coast cannot be too widely made known and that it is downright unsafe for any vessel to anchor off any of these Islands without the strictest watch being kept on land.

Another group of people involuntarily placed themselves at the mercy of the Aborigines: those shipwrecked. It is impossible to determine how many castaways were succoured by the Aborigines and how many were killed by them. Instances of men like James Morrill and Narcisse Pelletier who were


42. J. Jardine, P.M., Rockhampton to Col. Sec., 14 June 1862, Q.S.A. COL/A30, 1618 of 1862: 'another of the many instances of the folly of putting any faith in the Natives of our North coast'; Sheridan, P.M., Cardwell, to Col. Sec., 3 February 1872, Q.S.A. COL/A166, 254 of 1872: two men, Smith and Clements, killed on a fishing expedition at Gould Island about eleven miles from Cardwell; P.D.T., 27 January 1877: three prospectors landed at Cape Smidmouth; M.M., 14 September 1878; and P.D.T., 17 August 1878 and 24 August 1878: the cook, John Morrison, of the Louisa Maria. See also file: Q.S.A. TR2/A19, 1818 of 1875 for Louisa Maria.

43. G.J. Griffin, Sub Collector Customs, Port Hinchinbrook, to Col. Treasurer, 5 February 1879, Q.S.A. TR2/A20, 343 of 1879. See also P.D.T., 4 July 1874, for account of an attack by Aborigines upon two men in a boat anchored off Great Palm Island for the night.
accepted into widely separated tribes as relatives returned from the dead are well known. Others, however, were killed by Aborigines after surviving the shipwreck. This investigation has revealed nineteen castaways reliably claimed to have been killed by Aborigines and another four who were probably killed or abducted. The best known case involved the brig Maria which was wrecked on 26 February 1872 on a voyage from Sydney with a party of miners bound for New Guinea. Fourteen of the survivors of the shipwreck were killed by Aborigines to the north of Cardwell while inexplicably others were treated most kindly by neighbouring Aboriginal groups. There were no doubt other unknown castaways killed by Aborigines and others unknown who were succoured for varying periods of time.

The killing of Europeans so helplessly at the mercy of Aborigines appalled and infuriated the settlers and drew determined reprisals wherever this was possible. Such chance contacts with unpredictable Aborigines were however seen in some ways like acts of God which could only be

45. J. Hall Scott, Bowen, to Col. Sec., 26 October 1865, Q.S.A. COL/A72, 2993 of 1865; P.D.T., 26 October 1867; M.M., 18 September 1878, two of crew of Eliza; P.D.T., 14 September 1878, two of crew of Riser. See also f.n. 46 following.
46. P.D.T., 28 March 1872; Brisbane Courier, 22 March 1872; 'New Guinea Expedition per Brig "Maria"', 1872 V. & P., of N.S.W., encl. Q.S.A. COL/A172, 1812 of 1872.
47. P.M., Cooktown, to Col. Sec., 8 July 1887, Q.S.A. COL/A508, 5503 of 1887: two shipwrecked sailors attacked by some Aborigines and rescued by others.
48. See P.D.T., 28 March 1872. The paper reported the murderers of the Maria castaways were punished 'for their inhuman treatment of the unfortunates'. 
prevented by extermination of the problem, a solution which was sometimes seriously urged at the height of passions. 49

* * * * * *

The fishermen of North Queensland were in a different position. They needed the labour of the Aborigines but knew that after a short time most Aborigines would want to return to their native lands. Indeed, it was the conventional wisdom of the fishing frontier throughout the period of this study that even willing recruits, legally signed on, well-treated and receiving their promised wages would desert within a few months if the opportunity arose. 50 The Aborigines' desire to return to their sacred tribal land, to participate in the religious ceremonies that sustained their way of life, to enjoy the warm social life and the varied economic pursuits was inexplicable to the fishermen. They dubbed it 'nostalgia' and were convinced that it could be such a severe malady as to cause death. 51

In the early years of the fisheries conditions were

49. F. Byerley, Northern Engineer of Roads, Rockhampton, to Col. Sec., 23 September 1861, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A22, 2787 of 1861; M.M., 31 August 1878, editorial; P.D.T., 14 September 1878.

50. C.C., 22 April 1892, 'The Fisheries Act'. This report of a petition of Cairns fishermen to the Chief Secretary indicated how completely accepted this belief was:

1st. - We would point out that payment of wages every three months is quite unworkable when applied to floating stations (i.e. fishing carried on by large vessels, schooners, etc.), which start on a cruise of from 6 to 10 months at a stretch, and extending from the reefs off Keppel Bay in the South to the reefs off Thursday Island in the North. ... loss of time would occur when the seamen are paid, as they would certainly require a few days or weeks to spend their wages, and in the case of aboriginals, if paid anywhere near their homes, they would clear out, in most cases for good.

51. H.M. Chester, P.M., Somerset, to Col. Sec., 19 December 1876, 'Letterbook of the Somerset Settlement, Cape York Peninsula 1 January 1872 - December 1877', Q.S.A.
Accession Number: 13/5.
quite chaotic and the wishes and well-being of the native labour were disregarded by many of the fishermen. Some of the earliest extant records reveal kidnapping and retention of Torres Strait Islanders against their will, while conflict was reported between the natives of New Guinea and some pearlshell fishermen who sent 'kanakas' out to plunder their villages. Indeed the British government's interest in the Pacific Islander labour trade focused a revealing light on the fisheries. An investigation by Captain J. Moresby of H.M.S. Basilisk, in 1872, indicated that a large number of Pacific Island labourers were employed under the British flag at the various fishing stations and some were being detained beyond their period of service. The fisheries were described as 'uncontrolled' which was literally true as it was more than twenty-five years since the Torres Strait Islands and the adjacent coasts had been visited by a man-of-war. Yet during this time trade had increased greatly. Some beche-de-mer fishermen had settled on islands in the Torres Strait and were conducting their industry with kidnapped natives, principally women, from other islands. The Police Magistrate reported, 'They have already become a terror to the Natives of the smaller Islands in the Straits'. Thus, the mate of the "Margaret & Jane" was in the habit of compelling recruits to dive

52. Chester to Immigration Agent, Brisbane, 30 November 1869, 'Somerset Letterbook 2 September 1868 - 30 December 1871', 19 of 1869 (D.L.).


for shell by firing at them with a revolver and had shot two Torres Strait Islanders trying to escape.\textsuperscript{56} It was common not to put 'natives' on "Ship's Articles", consequently the land-bound Police Magistrate at Somerset could not investigate rumours he heard of their deaths. Several vessels avoided Somerset to prevent official inquiries.\textsuperscript{57} Aborigines were rarely specifically mentioned in these early reports, however, it is clear they were involved in such abuses.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, in August 1874, the then Police Magistrate, G.E. Dalrymple, reported that the captain of the schooner J.S. Lane was carrying and working 'natives of Queensland' without signing them on ship's articles and urged that action be taken to prevent this or no other master would go to the expense of shipping men at Somerset and they would then, as previously, be put ashore unpaid after a few months.\textsuperscript{59}

The type of men in both fisheries in the early years were such that maltreatment of the Aborigines was to be expected. Police Magistrate Chester, in July 1877, wholeheartedly agreed with the opinion of his predecessor, Dalrymple, who had written:

\begin{quote}
There are of course among these men some of excellent character and integrity of purpose; but there are others of whom to say that they are about as bad a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Chester to Col. Sec., 2 August 1876, 'Records of Somerset 1872-1877', 73 of 1876 (D.L.). Chester remarked that there were about five hundred natives engaged in the industry, exclusive of Aboriginals. See also C.E. Beddome, P.M., Somerset, to Col. Sec., 11 November 1873, 'Somerset Letterbook 1 January 1872 - December 1877', Q.S.A. Accession Number 13/5. Jardine reported there were large numbers of the natives of the mainland and adjacent islands employed by pearlshellers as divers.
\textsuperscript{59} E.L. Brown, pro G.E. Dalrymple, P.M., Somerset, to Col. Sec., 10 August 1874, 'Records of Somerset 1872-1877', 24 of 1874 (D.L.). Dalrymple was too ill to write.
lot as sail out of any port on the earth, is not to say too much. 60

The pearlshell industry lost much of this reputation possibly because the higher capital investment dictated the need for more responsible management and the need for more skilled and more reliable boat's crew left little scope for dragooned labour. The beche-de-mer industry retained its reputation throughout and beyond the period involved in this research. Thus in 1882, Captain C. Pennefather of G.G.S. Pearl, after cruising among the islands of the Torres Straits, commented:

Some of these men belong to the lowest grade and from my knowledge of their characters, I do not consider them fit people to be allowed to hold licenses [sic]/61.

In his 1897 report, W.E. Parry-Okeden, the Police Commissioner, claimed the beche-de-mer industry was 'dirty' but profitable, attracting the 'lowest class of whites and manilla men'. 62

It should be noted, however, that, whenever the pearlshell fishermen needed cheap Aboriginal labour as swimming divers to exploit newly discovered, shallow beds, they treated the Aborigines just as callously as the beche-de-mer fishermen. 63 Thus the nature of the intruders' industry seems to have been an important factor in determining race relations on the sea frontier as it was on the frontiers previously discussed in this study.

There were three factors which exacerbated the situation. Firstly, as Pennefather noted, 'Drink [was]
the great curse of the Straits'. This was not only at
Thursday Island, where there were 'scenes of drunken rioting'
when the boats congregated to meet the steamers, but also
among the boat crews at the fisheries. The disruptive
effect heavy drinking had on this sensitive culture contact
situation was indicated in nearly all of the law cases. 64
Secondly many outrages committed upon Aborigines, especially
upon women, were never reported because they were unable
or unwilling to come to Thursday Island or Cooktown to make
complaints and give evidence. Thirdly, the fishermen usually
would not bear witness against one another, especially on
behalf of Aborigines. Pennefather reported that he knew of
several men being killed and their bodies thrown overboard
'during these orgies on the boats' but the criminals went
unpunished. 65
Thus in a very sensitive culture contact
situation, many of the intruders were irresponsible and
unrestrained while the native labourers were almost completely
denied legal protection.

It is difficult to estimate the proportion of the labour
force that were initially kidnapped by force, the proportion
that were duped into undertaking engagements in the fisheries,
the proportion that misunderstood the nature of their future
employment, the proportion of those who were initially
willing to embark but later wished to return to their tribal

64. Pennefather to Col. Sec., 31 October 1882, loc. cit.,
Lt. De Hoghton noted in his report on the pearl fisheries
of Torres Strait, 'Further Correspondence in re Pearl-
shell etc. Fisheries', 1880 V. & P., p. 1164: 'No
spirits are allowed to the men, as a rule, spirits
seemed to be little used at the stations'. His report
is generally optimistic. See also C.C., 3 July 1888,
'Piracy' for indication of heavy drinking at the beche-
de-mer stations and the disastrous effect this could
have on lives of Aborigines involved in the industry.
65. Pennefather to Col. Sec., 31 October 1882, loc. cit.
land, and the proportion who were recruited willingly and remained contented with their employment. One can say with confidence, however, that the abuses associated with the fisheries were very serious, common, often harmful to relations between the intruders and the Aborigines, destructive of the traditional Aboriginal societies, and a revealing reflection on the men associated with the industry and the government that failed to control the abuses known for thirty years.

In 1877, Brinsley Sheridan, Police Magistrate and Land Commissioner at Cardwell, brought to the notice of the government abuses concerned with the pearl-shell and beche-de-mer fisheries. Subsequently his submission was published in the Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

I ventured to bring under your notice the practise, which I trust is not common of vessels engaged in the Pearl and Beche-de-mer Fisheries in Torres Straits and its neighbourhood, kidnapping the natives along the coast and the adjacent islands, and forcing them to act as divers, etc. This offence is commonly known to the seafaring men frequenting the coast as "shanghai-ing them"/the natives/. Sheridan described briefly four instances that had come under his notice when Aborigines had suffered at the hands of intruders from the sea. Two of these were associated with Dunk Island, one with Palm Island, and one with Townsville. He even proposed that the two islands mentioned above, the Family Islands, and an area of land on the coast north of Cardwell should be declared reserves for Aborigines and hoped that his report would 'put an end to an abominable traffic' and save the lives of whites and blacks involved in it.

66. See ch. 11.
Several well-documented examples will illustrate the nature of this 'abominable traffic' and educe the opinion of well-qualified witnesses as to the correctness of Sheridan's hope that kidnapping Aborigines was 'not common'.

* * * * * *

The first example was termed the 'Douglas Tragedy' in the Queensland press and even in official correspondence because three Europeans were killed by Aborigines on board the schooner Douglas and three others were severely wounded. It is suggested that the term 'tragedy' is accurate but for other reasons.

Captain Harris of the Douglas had experience in North Queensland waters and considered he knew at which islands he could obtain Aboriginal labour. After bringing a cargo from Melbourne to the new port, Cairns, on Trinity Bay the Douglas was to collect guano and beche-de-mer at the Chilcot Islands. The Captain wanted ten or twelve Aborigines and had made various unsuccessful attempts to obtain them.

68. See Q.S.A. TRE/A18, 1306 of 1877, Memo 28 May 1877.
69. These attempts are themselves interesting and illuminating. See fn. 70 below for reference. At his first attempt, probably at Fraser Island, the captain had induced two Aboriginal men and three women on board, given them presents of bread, pipes, and tobacco and sent one of the men ashore to fetch other Aborigines. The other man and two women were prevented from leaving but, when no other Aborigines appeared by the following day, the captain was so confident he would obtain labour elsewhere that he allowed them to return to their island. It is possible he thought he would obtain recruits willingly or that he thought the three he had were too few to worry about with such a long time to elapse before he sailed for the guano islands. At the next island they tried, the captain, the owner's brother, and two or three of the crew had gone ashore armed to obtain Aborigines but met none. After other failures, he asked two of the crew to obtain Aborigines while they were ashore at Townsville. They persuaded four Aborigines to come down to the boat that night, but as the Captain got drunk and did not return to the boat that night, the Aborigines left. The captain and members of the crew spent a night on Magnetic Island trying to contact Aborigines but failed.
After a month's delay at Cairns the Douglas had sailed to Dunk Island to obtain wood, water, and, if possible, Aborigines. Two Aborigines were induced on board, given pipes, tobacco, and biscuits, but allowed to leave in the hope that they would bring others. They understood no English and did not even understand the use of tobacco. Just as the Douglas was getting under way the following day these two Aborigines and two others rowed out from Dunk Island where they had been watching these apparently generous Europeans. Three were persuaded to come on board but the fourth refused though repeatedly asked. The Douglas set sail, stopped at Cape Upstart, and then passed through Flinders Passage to the guano islands. The Aborigines certainly did not understand where they were going or why they were on board.

They seemed contented on the boat doing light work and later, at the islands, collecting guano and beche-de-mer. A brig, the Alexandra, was at the islands when the Douglas arrived, both boats being owned by the same man. The Alexandra departed six days after the Douglas arrived. By this time, the Aborigines had learned they were to be left at the islands to collect guano and beche-de-mer when the Douglas set sail. In desperation, they tried to gain control of the boat.

On the night the Alexandra left and they decided to regain their freedom, two Aborigines slept ashore with two of the eleven man crew and killed them during the night with axes which the crew had habitually left lying about. In accordance with a pre-arranged plan, these two then joined the third Aboriginal on board the boat and attacked the nine sleeping members of the crew, killing one and wounding three. The Captain and four others, including two of the wounded, barricaded themselves in the captain's cabin all night despite the fact that they had two loaded revolvers. The other three had been chased into the riggings by the axe-wielding Aborigines.
After a night of repeated but unsuccessful Aboriginal attacks, one Aboriginal was shot. The two surviving Aborigines conversed whereupon one dived overboard. The three Europeans in the riggings descended and were attacked by the remaining Aboriginal who was eventually killed by a concerted attack by the three crew. The other Aboriginal swam off and was not seen again. 70

There are several aspects here worthy of note. The Aborigines were treated roughly only occasionally. 71 The captain was restrained in his dealings with the Aborigines and believed it was good policy to obtain willing recruits, if possible, as he had apparently done before. Despite the fact that the Europeans had kidnapped the Aborigines and were holding them in bondage, they took no precautions against Aboriginal resentment. They either were not expecting any or believed that, as the Aborigines were stranded remote from their own country, they were harmless. There are indications that the Aborigines were resentful of their situation but concealed this because of their dependence on the Europeans for a return to their homeland. The departure of the *Alexandria*, which meant the removal of a large proportion of the Europeans, plus the information that they were to be left to work on the island, caused them to adopt extreme measures. Their desperation is indicated by the fact that, had they succeeded in killing the eleven remaining Europeans, they themselves had almost no chance of a return to Dunk Island, or even of survival.

The effect of such kidnapping on race relations on the sea frontier was illustrated before the year was out.


71. Deposition of James Russell, loc. cit.
Dunk Island Aborigines attacked another European craft, killing the crew and destroying the vessel. An inquiry revealed that this was 'in revenge for the kidnapping of the people on board of the Douglas'.

The Water Police Magistrate at Cooktown who inquired into the Douglas tragedy, B. Fahey, commented in his report:

The abduction of natives from their Islands and haunts along the coast of Queensland by masters of pearl and beche de mer, as well as those in search of guano and following various other pursuits, has frequently resulted in the loss of life and valuable property and to this inhuman practice must undoubtedly be traced the murder of Coughlin, Mackintosh and Troy by the natives taken by Capt. Harris from Dunk Island. He urged that those responsible for the Douglas kidnappings be punished to prevent a repetition of the offence as previously kidnapping had been carried on with impunity.

Such action was supported by Fahey's departmental superior who regarded

the conduct of the unfortunate blacks as above all praise. Had three whitemen attempted to free themselves from bondage in the same way they would have been exalted to be heroes of the first order.

The findings of the inquiry were forwarded to the Premier but no action was taken although the depositions and official comments suggested that kidnapping of Aborigines was not uncommon, was causing loss of European and Aboriginal lives, and loss of European property and capital.

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73. B. Fahey, Water P.M., Cooktown, to Water P.M., Brisbane, 19 May 1877, loc. cit.
74. ibid.
75. ibid., Memo, 28 May 1877. The signature is indecipherable. It may be that of the Water Police Magistrate in Brisbane or the Colonial Treasurer. The memo and file were forwarded to the Premier. Such an enlightened response to Aboriginal resistance was very rare.
Two cutters, tenders on the fishing smacks Reindeer and Pride of the Logan left Cooktown about the end of January 1882 for Townsville to recruit 'boys' in company, returning to Cooktown at the end of February with eighteen Aborigines of both sexes varying in age from nine to forty years. The Sub-collector of Customs, B. Fahey, believed they had been procured 'under very suspicious circumstances' from Hinchinbrook Island, Dunk Island, and in the vicinity of the Johnstone River. On arrival in Cooktown the two captains drafted the Aborigines after the manner of sheep, each captain casting lots for nine, (9), mixed sexes, without reference to the inclinations or feelings naturally induced by the filial or friendly instincts of the parties concerned, some of whom, I know, manifested a strong aversion to their separation. 76

Nothing of the above would have been known except that the mate of the Reindeer tender, Steve Barry, boarded the other boat and took possession of an Aboriginal girl aged between ten and twelve years of age claiming her as his own. He then literally dragged her through the main street of Cooktown and lodged her at a public house. He ignored Fahey's personal remonstrances, refused to obey the Police Inspector's orders, and only surrendered the girl when the Police Magistrate authorized the Inspector to take her into custody. She was then returned to Hinchinbrook Island. There was little doubt that Barry had already had sexual relations with her and intended to continue doing so at the fisheries. The remaining seventeen had to be engaged before Fahey under the Pearl Shell and Beche-de-mer Fishery Act of 1881 despite his suspicions.

Fahey, like Sheridan in 1877, believed the Aborigines were 'far better off' when usefully employed, and believed

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76. B. Fahey, Sub-collector of Customs, Cooktown, to Collector of Customs, Brisbane, 2 March 1882, Q.S.A. COL/A333, 1385 of 1882.
in most cases they were willing to work for the fishermen
but I would point out that the mode of obtaining
their services should, in the interests of common
humanity, be more legitimately pursued than
"indiscriminately decoying" them at every
convenient spot along the coast and its islands,
irrespective of age or sex. 77

Howard St. George, then Police Magistrate at Cooktown,
believed there were 'numerous instances' of Aborigines
being induced on board vessels fishing in unfrequented
parts of the coast and being taken to distant reefs or
islands and detained there. He knew of at least three
massacres resulting from such forcible detention. 78

Fahey and St. George both stressed the need of a govern-
ment vessel to check such abuses. 79 The Police Inspector
at Cooktown regretted he could not prosecute Barry 80
and the Police Commissioner, Seymour, informed the Colonial
Secretary that such was the case:

This forcible carrying away of Gins is the cause
of much of the ill feeling existing towards whites but
I do not know any way of preventing it. 81

An interesting flurry of minutes between Premier McIlwraith
and the Attorney General's department had already revealed
that the Imperial Slave Act 5 Geo. 4 was the only possible
way of punishing these men and, as Seymour had pointed out,
this would not succeed. 82

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77. ibid. Extracts from this report were read to both
houses of parliament in the debate on the 1884 Native
Labourers Protection Act.

78. H. St. George, P.M., Cooktown, to Col. Sec., 3 March
1882, encl. q.S.A. Col/A333, 1385 of 1882.

79. ibid., Fahey to Collector of Customs, 2 March 1882,
loc. cit.

80. Insp. H. Fitzgerald, Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 2 March
1882, encl. q.S.A. Col/A333, 1385 of 1882.

81. ibid. See Minute, D.T. Seymour to Col. Sec., 14 March
1882.

82. q.S.A. Col/A333, 1385 of 1882; encl. Minutes: T.MI
McIlwraith to Attorney General, 2 March 1882: 'Is
there no way of punishing these men'. [Indecipherable
signature, presumably the Attorney General]; 2 March
1882: 'I don't think there is any means of punishing
these men'. [A third handwriting]: Imperial Slave
Act 5 Geo 4.
with the sympathetic interest of the Queensland government, was helpless to meet the challenge confronting it on the sea frontier. 83

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In February 1884, Andrew Anderson, the master of the alarm, was following the boat Mary Lee, captained by Frank Lee. Both men were beche-de-mer fishermen. Off Cape Flattery, Anderson asserted, a canoe containing about ten Aborigines came out from the mainland. Lee changed direction, ran the canoe down, and sank it. Two of Lee's crew, Maryborough Aborigines, then dived into the water and captured three of the struggling Aborigines who were then detained on the Mary Lee in chains. Lee ordered three members of his crew to fire at the Aborigines struggling in the water, two of whom refused. However, shots were fired and blood was seen in the water but it could not be claimed with certainty that someone was hit. 84

The Colonial Secretary, Griffith, the Colonial Treasurer, the Inspector of Police and the Police Magistrate at Cooktown believed Lee guilty of kidnapping and attempted murder and made very determined efforts to have him convicted of a serious charge. He was charged with intent to murder and kidnapping. 85 The charge of kidnapping had no chance

83. B. Fahey, Sub Collector of Customs, Cooktown, to Under Sec. Treasury, 1 August 1884, Q.S.A. TR5/A28, 2534 of 1884. Steve Barry was later left at low tide on a reef by his Aboriginal labourers from the Malgrave and Daintree River.
84. Deposition of Andrew Anderson, Court House Cooktown, 16 May 1884, and H. Milman, P.M., Cooktown, to Under Col. Sec., 9 June 1884, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A394, 4516 of 1884.
86. Milman /sic/ to Under Col. Sec., 16 June 1884, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A394, 4516 of 1884.
of success as the Aborigines had not been taken beyond Queensland's three mile offshore limit although they had been taken over 150 miles from their tribal territory. Griffith recommended Lee's rearrest for assault and false imprisonment which were offences at common law. Lee was fined for a breach of the 1881 Pearl Shell and Heche-de-mer Fisheries Act, charged as Griffith had advised, and committed for trial to the Circuit Court 30 October 1884, but not convicted despite the enthusiastic determination of all concerned.

Police Magistrate Milman reported that kidnapping of Aborigines was 'rife' and urged that he be allowed to visit the fisheries. The concern shown by Griffith and reflected by his subordinates indicated the motivation behind the 1884 Native Labourers Act which will be examined later.

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It is clear from these examples and the comments of experienced government officials that kidnapping was very

87. ibid. See Milman to Under Col. Sec., 13 June 1884, also encl. above.
88. Milman to Under Col. Sec., 13 June 1884, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A394, 4516 of 1884. See minute S.W.G. Col. Sec. and Premier Griffith, 23 June 1884: 'Assault and false imprisonment is an offence at Common Law for which he may be punished whether the offence is technically kidnapping or not'.
89. Milman to Under Col. Sec., 21 June 1884, and J. Hartley, C.P.S., Cooktown, to Under Col. Sec., 24 June 1884, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A394, 4516 of 1884. The 1881 Act will be examined in ch. 11.
90. Milman to Under Col. Sec., 25 June 1884, and Milman to Under Col. Sec., 26 April 1884, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A394, 4516 of 1884. Note date for second telegram. The sequence of correspondence and Griffith's minute, 26 June 1884, indicate that the date should be 26 June 1884. Numerals were used and a "4" was written instead of a "6". The first telegram is numbered '554', the second '558'.
common and that this abuse had a deleterious effect on Aboriginal-European relations. The early reports of Walter Roth, first Northern Protector of Aborigines, indicated that the situation had not changed significantly by the end of the century. Thus, in February 1898, he wrote:

The whole story of this beche-de-mer trade which, until my arrival here and opportunity of enquiry, I could scarcely have credited, is one long record of brutal cruelty, bestiality and debauchery: my heart almost bleeds at what has come to my knowledge. I am determined however to remedy matters, and though it may take time, and many difficulties will have to be contended with, I feel confident of ultimate success. 92

Roth devoted a large section of his published report for 1899 to abuses associated with the pearlshell and beche-de-mer fisheries. 93

There are many facets of the forced labour trade in the fisheries that deserve special emphasis. It is clear that when recruiters first moved into a new area the Aborigines at the very least were deceived into entering into an engagement they would not have otherwise undertaken. With regard to an area where the Aborigines had little contact with the


93. 'Report of the N.P.A. for 1899', 1900 V. & P., Vol. 5, pp. 583-585. He agreed, however, that the situation had improved in 1899 with the appointment of a special protector at Thursday Island and the granting of a prospector's authority to the superintendents of each northern mission. Despite this, in 1900 on one patrol, the Thursday Island protector came across three boats with unsigned male Aborigines, one of them at least having female Aborigines illegally on board. See 'Annual Report of the N.P.A. for 1900', 1901 V. & P., Vol. 4, p. 1332.
intruders, Roth remarked:

I may mention that the natives here are mostly "myall" not too safe to travel amongst, and that in the absence of contact with "civilizing influences" they can neither understand nor speak English; consequently no recruits are obtainable here except by strategy. It simply means that if unscrupulous people remove boys from here, the next to come will run greater chances of meeting with outrage. 94

It is also clear that if decoying was not successful forcible abduction was resorted to if the opportunity and need arose as was the case with the Mary Lee and the cutters Reindeer and the Pride of Logan. In the latter case whether the Aborigines were decoyed or forcibly taken on board is not clear. However, their later disposal against their wishes and without consideration of family or tribal affiliations had much the same effect as forcible abduction. Even in the case of the Douglas the fine line between decoying and forcible abduction blurs as once the Aborigines were on board they could leave only if the captain agreed. Finally, if communications with Aborigines could have been established and the nature of the employment fully explained, it is clear that uncontacted or little contacted Aborigines would not wish to be absent from their tribal lands for as long as most shellers wanted them. This was stated as a truism in the Cairns fishermen's petition. 95

The kidnapping of women not only for their labour but also to satisfy the sexual needs of an otherwise almost entirely male fishing population was very common on this frontier as on all the others. It also caused much conflict on the sea frontier. Thus, in his published report for 1892-93, John Douglas explained one example of conflict by

95. C.C., 22 April 1892, 'The Fisheries Act'.
pointing out that the 'Manilla men took their gins away from them'. In the Cooktown Courier in April 1890, a report explained that a beche-de-mer fisherman had been attacked and severely injured by eight mainland Aboriginal employees in retaliation for the abduction of four of their wives by his 'Manilla men'. The article accepted the normality of this situation. Police Magistrate Chester at Thursday Island was informed by the police that six Aboriginal women were on a schooner, the Tarrigal Pocket, 'for the purpose of prostitution'. Chester could not obtain evidence of prostitution and fined the master £5 and costs for a breach of the eleventh clause of the 1881 Pearl Shell and Beche-de-mer Fishery Act. He observed most of the shelling boats carried one or more women for this purpose but that, as no complaint had hitherto been made, he had not interfered. He urged that the practice be stopped.

If this practice was common on the shelling boats, it was almost universal in the beche-de-mer trade. In almost any court case, the evidence revealed that, as well as the Aboriginal employees commonly having their wives with them, each non-Aboriginal fisherman commonly had 'his gin'. Thus, a Japanese giving evidence at the trial of George Dillon for fatally shooting an Aboriginal who refused to obey his order to pick up a rope, remarked that he was working at Cockburn Reef with 'George Dillon and his gin, George Rotumah and his gin'.

97. C.C., 11 April 1890.
98. Chester to Col. Sec., 29 December 1882, Q.S.A. COL/A353, 328 of 1883. The Pearl-shell and Beche-de-mer Fishery Act of 1881, 45 Vic. No. 2, Clause 11, prohibited the employment of Polynesian and native labourers except under a written agreement.
99. C.C., 1 March 1889. Dillon was acquitted as there was no proof that the wounded Aboriginal had died. It was claimed he had absconded with a boat. See also trial of Edward Moran below: C.C., 22 January 1889; C.C., 25 January 1889; C.C., 19 April 1889.
The trial of Edward Moran, alias Jerry, for the murder of an Aboriginal, Almah, was in many ways exceptional but it did indicate the normality with which non-Aboriginals in North Queensland thought they could appropriate and discard Aboriginal women. Edward English, a collector of natural history, described how he met Moran of the *Jessie* and a Captain Walters of the *Ellengowan* in an oyster parlour in Cooktown. The three men returned in company to these boats in the Cooktown harbour. While at the *Jessie*, Captain Walters said: 'That is a nice looking gin, I should not mind having her'. Moran told Walters he could have her despite the fact that she was the wife of an Aboriginal called Dick. Moran then took her struggling and screaming to the *Ellengowan*. The Aboriginal, Almah, on the *Irish Lass* then shouted: '... what for take'm gin, police, police; what for take'm gin, what for wake'm up altogether; plenty white women what for take'm gin'. The woman was then returned to the *Jessie* but someone in the *Ellengowan* again urged that she be brought over. Moran then rowed over to the *Irish Lass* and shot dead the vociferous Aboriginal, Almah.

Moran's claim that the Aboriginal had committed suicide fell down mainly on the evidence of Captain Wallace and his wife of the missionary cutter, *Fairy Queen*, who observed the above proceedings and informed the police. The Supreme Court Judge, Justice Cooper, virtually advised the jury to convict the prisoner of murder and compensated for

100. C.C., 22 January 1889 and 25 January 1889. See C.C., 19 April 1889 for Supreme Court trial.
101. C.C., 22 January 1889; C.C., 25 January 1889.
102. C.C., 22 January 1889, evidence of Captain Wallace.
103. Ibid.
the surprising verdict of manslaughter, by sentencing Moran
to penal servitude for life. 104

A similar case was revealed in 1888 when Christie Christison
was charged with feloniously assaulting George Rotumah on
the high seas and stealing a Martini Henry rifle i.e. with
piracy. In the evidence it was revealed that Christison
offered to trade his 'gin' for 'Rotumah's gin' and when
refused, had fired several shots into the boat and on
either side of Rotumah's head. Rotumah had then advised
the Aboriginal woman to go with Christison or she would
be shot. Christison then ordered 'his gin' to change
boats which she did after a shot was fired in her direction.
Christison later claimed he was drunk at the time. He
returned the woman to her employer with the rifle several
days later when he was informed Rotumah was going to complain
to the Cooktown police. 105 Once again the charge of abduction
was not pressed. There were a number of white men on
Christison's vessel who would apparently have supported
him in court.

The whole of the fishing industry in North Queensland
was suffused with the abuse of Aboriginal women. The Water
Police Magistrate at Cooktown informed his Colonial Secretary
and Premier, McIlwraith, that this was one of the revolting
features of recruiting Aborigines along the coast of North
Queensland. McIlwraith instructed shipping masters not to
enter women on ship's articles but the problem was far
from solved. 106 It was claimed that the Aboriginal men had
every right to have their wives with them and would not enrol
without them.

104. C.C., 19 April 1889.
105. C.C.: 3 July 1888, 'Piracy' and 6 July 1888, 'Charge
   of Piracy'.
106. B. Fahey, Water Police, Cooktown, to Col. Sec., 23 June
   1882, g.S.A. Col/A346, 3552 of 1882. See minute T.M.I.
   /Col. Sec. and Premier McIlwraith/, 5 July 1882.
Moreover they could with impunity be carried with or without the women’s wishes in defiance of Government intentions. Abduction was normally only discovered by accident. The Government Resident, Douglas, pointed out that even then it was impossible to sustain the change in a court of law to the satisfaction of the judge and jury. To obviate this, the kidnapping of Aboriginal women could be dealt with on a lesser charge. Thus in a clear cut case of abduction for the purposes of prostitution, the Manilla men involved were sentenced to six months’ imprisonment on a charge of criminal assault. Such legal stratagems were publicly reported. Despite McIlwraith’s edict, the paternalistic concern of the Government Resident, Douglas, and Northern Protector, Roth, the callous abuse of Aboriginal women still persisted in 1900.

Another facet of the fishing industry was the frequent refusal of the masters of the boats to return the Aborigines they had recruited to their tribal homeland. There were various reasons for doing this. Firstly, it would often require time and hence labour and expense unless the boats happened to be passing the area on the return voyage. Secondly, by dismissing them at an alien port the fishermen were often assured of retaining their services for another

109. See also ‘Reserves for aboriginals, Cardwell District’, 1877 V. & P., Vol. II, pp. 1245, 1246: ‘The then Colonial Secretary directed me to prosecute the master for kidnapping, but the Attorney General, Mr. Bramston, said I could only lay an information and proceed against him for assault, and there was so much delay about the matter that at last the whole thing fell through’.
110. See f.n. 107.
voyage, thus saving the effort and expense of recruiting. For either of these two reasons an experienced labour force was gradually built up, some of whom probably became satisfied with or used to the life on the boats. From the evidence taken at the trials mentioned above it is clear that some Aborigines were veteran fishermen. 111

The Acting Government Resident at Thursday Island, Milman, reported in 1887:

I have not the least doubt that they (the mainland natives) have been when their term of service is expired, turned adrift at the nearest and most convenient point of land possibly among hostile tribes. 112

An Aboriginal who could speak no English arrived at Cooktown in 1882, demonstrating the difficulties facing Aborigines on beche-de-mer boats. The Police Magistrate at Cooktown believed that he and four other Aborigines had run off with a beche-de-mer boat. They could just as easily have been placed ashore by fishermen. They were attacked by alien Aborigines and four killed and the survivor badly speared. 113

In Roth’s first reports in January 1898, he emphasized the seriousness of this problem even at that late date:

In connection with the beche-de-mer trade it has come to my knowledge ... that there are blacks from certain districts outside the Cook who are practically forced to go on these vessels: thus, they have originally been shipped, say, from ports lower south, but notwithstanding their agreements to be returned to the places whence they were shipped (according to the Beche-de-mer Act) have

111. C.C., 22 January 1889, and C.C., 25 January 1889. See also Fahey to Under Sec. Treasury, 1 August 1884, loc. cit. The two Aborigines left stranded with Steve Barry were old hands from Townsville.


113. P.M., Cooktown, to Col. Sec., 5 April 1882, Q.S.A. Coll/AS34, 1684 of 1882.
been re-shipped at the expiration of their time on Articles from another port, either through the carelessness or passiveness of previous Shipping Masters. 114

When Roth wrote, there were eight or ten Aborigines from the Johnstone River who dared not go overland because of the intervening hostile tribes and could not stay in Cooktown for the same reason. They were thus obliged to return to the fisheries. 115

In his report for 1899 he reported similar circumstances at Thursday Island despite Douglas's efforts since 1885 to have the Aborigines returned to their homes. Even with co-operation between Douglas and the missionaries at Mapoon and Weipa, Douglas was not able to control recruiting in that area. Lacking effective legal control, Douglas had made local regulations ultra vires which he believed the fishermen obeyed. As Dr. Roth remarked sadly:

his confidence in the recruiters became grossly abused and his voluntary self-imposed labours in the interests of the aboriginals practically emasculated ... Often, the blacks were never returned at all. 116

Dumped at Thursday Island they too had no choice but to reship. Roth cited two examples of Aboriginal boys of school age from these mission stations who had been recruited in January and September 1898, and two other children who had been recruited in 1895 and 1896. None had been returned although three of the recruiters were known. If recruiters refused to return Aborigines to Mapoon and Weipa with co-operation between concerned Europeans there and at the government establishment at Thursday Island, there can be

115. Ibid.
little doubt that even at the end of the century this abuse was common. 117

As so many Aborigines were virtually imprisoned in the fisheries, many others detained longer than they expected or wished, and still others incensed at the treatment they or their women received on board boat, it is not surprising that they often ran off with boats. They also frequently attacked the non-Aboriginal members of the crew either in retaliation for their previous suffering or to enable them to escape in the boats. Sometimes no doubt both motives were present. In his 1888 report, the Government Resident mentioned the 'outrages of the natives', adding:

on more than one occasion, the crews have decamped with the boat - in one instance leaving their employers to perish on a reef and on another occasion mercifully killing them before they cleared out. 118

The Government Resident believed that this had been to a great extent responsible for the decrease in beche-de-mer production, as did the Commissioner of Fisheries, Saville-Kent. 119 He noted in his 1890 report:

A matter demanding serious attention with relation to the beche-de-mer fisheries of Northern Queensland is associated with the employment of native labourers. Of late years, and in the Torres Straits district more particularly, outrages committed by these labourers, in which the boat-owners or their agents have been assaulted and lost their lives, or the boats with stores on board have been stolen, have become so frequent as to paralyse the industry to a very large extent. 120

119. Ibid.
He claimed in this Queensland publication that occasionally the outrages had been provoked by unjust treatment or interference with the Aboriginal women but in most cases the temptation of obtaining loot had been the motive. Yet in his very important book, *The Great Barrier Reef*, published afterwards in England, he wrote:

Doubtless, many a tale could be told throwing discredit on their trustworthiness: tales of ... boats and stores decamped with, and of the European or Manilla 'boss' being marooned on a coral islet, or left to perish on a temporarily exposed reef. There is usually, however, an obverse side to these tragic pictures, which show that the aboriginal was not the initial aggressor. 121

He went on to specify frequent kidnapping, forced detention, interference with Aboriginal women and wages not being paid as such provocations but implied these abuses were more controlled by Queensland's 'excellent regulations'. Saville-Kent had helped to formulate these. 122

Yet Douglas, in his 1894 report, linked the 'languishing condition' of the beche-de-mer industry with the sudden increase, during 1893, in the number of Aboriginal attacks upon the non-Aboriginal members of the crew. Seven men (four Europeans and three 'coloureds') had been killed in waters under the jurisdiction of the Thursday Island administration. 123 Douglas lamented that it was impossible to supervise the beche-de-mer trade properly and as a result the indigenous people and the fishermen both suffered. 124

Indeed, in the course of this research a surprisingly large number of deaths resulting from Aboriginal attacks have been discovered in the pearl-shell and beche-de-mer

122. Ibid.
124. Ibid.
fisheries of North Queensland. Before 1873 only two deaths have been discovered. This was probably caused by, firstly, the small number of boats working in the waters and, secondly, the fact that the fisheries were still virtually unsupervised at this time and, thus, such deaths might not have been recorded. With the establishment of both the 'swimming' pearlshell industry and the beche-de-mer industry in the early 1870's, there was apparently an increased demand for Aboriginal labour, inevitably in areas where there had been very limited contact previously. There was soon conflict in the fisheries. In 1873, Aborigines killed at least seven fishermen, six of these being at Green Island, on two separate occasions. The surprising proportion at Green Island possibly resulted in part from unrecorded deaths at remote places. Throughout the 1870's 25 deaths have been reliably recorded, probably another two, and possibly three others.

The most flourishing period of the Queensland beche-de-mer trade before 1907 occurred between the years 1881 and 1883 when record catches were recorded. This whole decade, however, saw great activity in this trade which was followed by a great dropping off in 1890 which accelerated during the 1890's with an even more marked dropping off from 1895 onwards. It is probably no coincidence that the decade of the 1880's saw an increase in the number of deaths caused by Aborigines at sea. In 1879 five fishermen were killed at Raine Island in one incident and in 1880 one possible death was recorded. In 1881, when there was

127. This may have occurred in 1881 as the reference is imprecise as to date. See Appendix B, no. 289.
a dramatic expansion in the beche-de-mer industry there was an equally dramatic expansion to ten in the number reliably reported killed, with the possibility of another one. In fact in the high activity years of 1881 to 1885, 26 deaths have been reliably reported with the possibility of another two. From 1880 to 1889, 39 deaths were recorded, probably another one, with the possibility of six more. From 1888 to 1890, 11 fishermen were killed by Aborigines, and probably another one, this being the period when Douglas and Saville-Kent complained that men were frightened of participating in the industry. 128

During 1891, two deaths have been discovered in this investigation. This conflicts in part with Douglas's claim that in the waters under his jurisdiction 'not a single serious offence had been committed' during 1890, 1891, and 1892. In Appendix B, seven deaths are recorded. James Pratt was reported as being killed on 3 January 1890 and Charlie Weir on 11 May 1890, the inquests in both cases being held at Port Kennedy, Thursday Island. Douglas had included these two in a special report he submitted on 27 August 1890 upon the working of the 'Native Labourers' Protection Act of 1884' and thus excluded them from the statistics of his next account of Aboriginal attacks. Three other deaths occurred in one incident within the jurisdiction of the Cooktown administration. 133

128. See footnotes 118, 120, 121, 123.
130. Q.S.A. Inquests, date of death 3 January 1890. Inquest at Port Kennedy. See Queensland, 18 January 1890.
131. C.C., 20 May 1890, Q.S.A. Inquests, date of death, 11 May 1890, inquest at Port Kennedy.
133. See Queensland, 22 November 1890, p. 1002; C.C.: 18 November 1890 and 27 January 1891.
Douglas associated the lull in Aboriginal attacks with the attempt at Thursday Island to win the friendship and confidence of the mainland Aborigines and the influence of the Mapoon missionaries. Flour and tobacco were sent to some Aboriginal groups and some leaders induced to visit Thursday Island. Douglas confidently attributed the lack of conflict in the latter half of 1890 and in 1891 and 1892 to this attempt at opening up a dialogue with the previously offending Aborigines. 134

The events of 1893 soon destroyed this optimism. This study has revealed reliable reports of thirteen deaths resulting from Aboriginal attacks, seven of which Douglas admitted had occurred in waters under his jurisdiction. 135 Yet Douglas reported that, from 1890 to 1893, the number of beche-de-mer boats had dropped from 65 to 43. 136 Local fishermen who were resentful of the Mapoon missionaries' influence on their free access to labour blamed them for disturbing the relationship between the fishermen and the Aborigines on that area of the coast. Douglas dismissed this charge completely and claimed the late loss of life and property was due to specific causes such as 'manilla' men abducting Aboriginal women. He added that significantly all the clashes were involved with boats, implying presumably that the Aborigines concerned were removed both from the direct influence of either their tribe or the missionaries. Douglas's lament that it was impossible to supervise the beche-de-mer industry indicated his belief that the industry's

137. Ibid., p. 912. Mapoon was founded in 1891.
use of Aboriginal labour was responsible.

There is, however, another possible factor. There was a great increase in activity in the pearlshell industry with a corresponding increase in the number of boats. In 1890, 157 boats had been involved in both industries in North Queensland waters and had produced 632 tons of pearlshell and 104 tons of beche-de-mer; in 1891, 183 boats had produced 769 tons of pearlshell and 70 tons of beche-de-mer; in 1892, 190 boats had produced 931 tons of pearlshell and 61 tons of beche-de-mer; and in 1893, 210 boats had produced 1,214 tons of pearlshell and 50 tons of beche-de-mer. Thus from 1890 to 1893, the production of pearlshell almost doubled, the production of beche-de-mer more than halved, while the number of boats requiring labour increased by almost one-third. As those in the beche-de-mer industry had decreased, the increase in craft solely engaged in pearlshelling must have been proportionately greater.

It is possible that the increasing demands made on the labour supply by the more prosperous pearlshell industry, forced the beche-de-mer fishermen to tap new or less reliable sources of labour. There is some, although by no means conclusive, evidence to support this hypothesis.

Firstly, the beche-de-mer industry could only survive if it had very cheap labour, indeed the cheapest possible labour. After the loss of life and property during 1889 and 1890, the Government Resident, Douglas, had recommended some natives of Saibai then visiting Thursday Island to a respectable beche-de-mer man for employment as being 'infinitely more trustworthy than the "Bingi" [Aboriginal] natives'. Douglas suggested that they were well worth £2

138. ibid., p. 907.
139. 'Statistics: Pearlshell and Beche-de-mer Fishery, Queensland', Q.S.A. H47/48, 'Folder: Pearlshell Acts and Regulations'. See Table V.
a month but the fisherman confessed he could not afford more than £1 a month, a wage which Douglas considered unacceptable for such good workers. In 1879, the tenders and crew on the pearlshelling boats were 'mostly Kanakas, Malays, Australian blacks, and natives of the islands about the Straits', the Kanakas and Malays manning the pumps almost invariably receiving £2 per month while the Torres Strait Islanders and the Aborigines received from ten shillings to £1 per month, the wage in that year tending towards the higher figure. In 1891, Douglas had reported that it would not pay to employ labour in the beche-de-mer industry at a higher scale than ten shillings a month 'which is the usual covenanted scale for the natives'. It would thus seem that as the beche-de-mer industry languished in the 1890's its ability to attract and hold labour diminished as its need for the cheapest possible labour grew.

Secondly, the beche-de-mer fishermen continued to recruit at areas such as the Batavia River and Cape Grenville where the Aborigines had a reputation for 'treachery'. In 1890, Douglas believed both of these areas should be prohibited for recruiting purposes. 'These Bingi natives [of the Batavia River and Cape Grenville] are most treacherous, and when they see a chance will inevitably take it'. Yet, after Batavia River Aborigines had killed one fisherman in June 1888, John Williams, in July 1889, recruited from this

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144. ibid., p. 1565.
area although he was warned, and believed, that one of the Aborigines was 'a dangerous character'. In August 1890, after several more 'outrages' involving Batavia River and Cape Grenville Aborigines, a fisherman named Andrew Johnson recruited two Aborigines from the Batavia one of whom, Charley, had a particularly bad reputation. He let them have the free run of the vessel making no attempt to protect his food, arms, or ammunition. While Johnson was at 'a house of entertainment' on Thursday Island, the two Batavia River Aborigines ran off with the lugger. Douglas remarked in exasperation:

Johnson ... with that singular fatuity which seems to possess the souls of those who deal in Batavia River 'boys', took no precaution to secure the safe custody of the property he had on board. 145

In June 1893, the beche-de-mer fishermen were still recruiting at Batavia River as well as forty miles south of this at Pine River. In June 1893, two 'Manilla' men were killed by two Batavia River Aborigines whom they shipped, allegedly because the Manilla men stole the Aboriginal women. On 24 July, seven Pine River Aborigines attacked the four Manilla men who had recruited them, killing one. On 4 October, Batavia River Aborigines attempted to kill their captain. On 24 October, Pine River Aborigines killed two men in revenge for an incident when the captain brutally struck one of the tribesmen. On the 25 November 1893, a beche-de-mer fisherman, Bruce, with a crewman, Rowe, recruited eight Aborigines who had no experience of the fishing industry from Jardine's inland cattle station, Bertie-haugh, on the Ducie River. Jardine warned him these Aborigines were 'dangerous' and Bruce was well aware of the risk he ran. The Aborigines either left Bruce and Rowe to drown or killed them, ran off with the boat, and made their way back to Bertie-haugh. 146 The cases referred to above are,

145. ibid., p. 1567.
admittedly, a select group of those who were killed by Aborigines in waters under the jurisdiction of the Thursday Island Government Resident. However, the repeated use of the ill-reputed Batavia River Aborigines and those with less experience of contact from the Pine River, forty miles further south, coupled with the attempt of Bruce and Rowe to obtain raw recruits from the inland at the Ducie River suggests a degree of desperation. Other fishermen were also recruiting at the Batavia and Pine Rivers. It seems likely that the beche-de-mer fishermen were finding labour difficult to attract and were being forced to recruit in areas where the Aborigines were least likely to tolerate for long the life on these boats with these men.

After 1893, only two incidents have been discovered in this study involving deaths from Aboriginal attack. (See Appendix B). This did not mean that the mainland Aborigines were completely contented nor that maltreatment of Aboriginal labour had ceased. In his report for 1894-5, Douglas reported that boats had occasionally been run away with simply to allow the Aborigines to escape but that they were recovered intact. He still had found no way of taking effective legal action against the stealing of Aboriginal women as "the only way in which the law can be vindicated is by a prosecution for abduction which is a most clumsy and almost impracticable method". As has been observed, according to Roth, Douglas was unaware of many of the abuses. It can be seen from Table V that from 1895 to 1900 there was a great contraction in the beche-de-mer industry. In 1893 and 1894, about fifty tons of beche-de-mer were produced, but in 1895, 22 tons, 1896, 30 tons, 1897, 147. See f.n. 145 above.

147. See p. 145 above.
17 tons, 1898, 15 tons, 1899, 14 tons and 1900, 13 tons. It is most likely that the number of fishermen moving out of this industry was the biggest single factor leading to the diminution of European fatalities. In 1896, Douglas reported the industry in the doldrums adding:

I only know of one successful beche-de-mer fisherman, and I think on the whole he deserves his success. He treats the natives fairly and he gets willing work from them. 149

There were other factors that had led to such a great change from the situation existing in the 1880's when the industry had been paralysed by Aboriginal retaliation. Indeed, important changes in the relationship between Aborigines and beche-de-mer fishermen were ignored when Douglas reported to a government commission in 1897 of the 'untouched Myalls'.

They do not understand our ways and are apt to run away with the boats, and in the old days they did not stop at knocking on the head the owners of boats to get possession of them. Those days I think have completely passed. 150

The autumnal tone of the last sentence reflected only the effect of the industry on the intruders.

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When it became evident that the intruders' visits were more than accidental and occasional, the Aborigines reacted intelligently to the new situation in a variety of ways. Firstly, as has been indicated above, they sometimes retaliated against the intruders if they were

149. ibid.
still in striking range or against the next vulnerable intruders, who often did not suspect their enmity.  
Secondly, after the normal initial stage of recruiting by force or deception, some Aborigines were returned to their tribal territories or taken back to act as willing or unwilling intermediaries to recruit more labour. It is clear that in many areas recruiting was normalized so that kidnapping by force or decoy was not needed at all, or only seldom. Presumably the Aborigines came to understand the nature of the fishing industry.

Significantly, the first detailed accounts of recruiting such as that of the Douglas suggest that certain places like Fraser Island, the Whitsunday Islands, Palm Island, and Dunk Island where the Aborigines had already had some contact with passing vessels were resorted to for recruiting. In fact, by December 1876, the Whitsunday Islands had already developed a reputation for producing 'particularly intelligent natives' who understood what was required of them.  

It was not long before there were references to recruiters frequenting such places as the Jardine River, the Batavia River, and Cape Melville. In fact Roth's report of 1900 indicated that recruiting had progressively moved from one area to another to satisfy the needs of the fishing industry.

By 1900, all Aborigines on the eastern side of Cape York Peninsula from the tip of Cape York to as far south as the

151. e.g. See 'Reserves for Aboriginals, Cardwell District', 1877 V. & P., Vol. II, pp. 1245, 1246.
152. ibid. See Q.S.A. TRE/AL8, 1308 of 1877, the file on 'The Douglas Tragedy'.
153. Chester to Col. Sec., 21 December 1876, Q.S.A. 'Somerset Letterbook 1872-1877'.
Thursday Island recruiters would care to go were familiar with the industry and, relative to the uncontacted Aborigines, 'able to take care of themselves'. Roth clearly believed the damage to traditional Aboriginal life in this area was already irreparable.

On the western side of Cape York Peninsula, Roth differentiated three stages of contact, graded in degree of contact from south to north. The first was from Cape York to Port Musgrave near Mapoon Mission which was at the same stage of contact as the east coast. The second from Port Musgrave to Albatross Bay near Weipa Mission was then the main recruiting area. It was also the main sphere of influence of these two Presbyterian missions, Mapoon and Weipa, which had become by this time consistent opponents of the recruiters. While Roth stayed at Mapoon for two weeks, eleven boats arrived to recruit not only for the beche-de-mer industry but also for the pearlshell industry which had experienced a revival in swimming diving in newly discovered beds in this area. The third area was from Albatross Bay to beyond the mouth of the Archer River. Roth described the Aborigines in this area as "myalls not too safe to travel amongst' who could only be recruited 'by stratagem'. He had been informed in May 1898 by a missionary of some recruiters in the pearl-shelling industry who had locked eight recruits of this kind in the hold of the ship with their hands tied. The Aborigines had managed to escape by untying their bonds and forcing the hatch.

With the example of the other areas before him and the fear of Aboriginal reprisals if this area was allowed to

156. E. Brown, Missionary at Mapoon, Thursday Island, to Dr. Roth, 3 May 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 6944 of 1898.
be further opened up, Roth decided to disallow recruiting in this area. This move itself at this late stage when government legislation, government protectors, adjacent missions, and some seaborne supervision had been instituted reflected gravely on the nature of the industry's use of labour and on the previous efforts of the Queensland government to mitigate the abuses. These will be examined in a later chapter. 157

The progressive nature of opening up new recruiting areas can be further illustrated. The Jardine River is situated on the western side of the Peninsula in the area Roth designated at the same level of contact as the east coast, thus requiring no special consideration from Roth, while the Batavia River was in the second area, that most resorted to by recruiters, yet in early 1887, Acting Government Resident Hugh Milman wrote: 'The Natives in the neighbourhood of the Jardine and Batavia Rivers are a most determined and savage race...' 158 The necessity for opening up new areas was also indicated by Roth in another report in 1899 when he noted that the area on the west coast from Cape York to Port Musgrave was 'becoming more and more worked out'. This fact, together with the danger to the recruiters involved in opening up a new area, contributed to the popularity of the middle area between the two missions. 159 The missionaries believed that their presence


had pacified the Batavia River Aborigines which, in turn, attracted more recruiters. Roth believed he could protect this area of coast from the recruiters only by having the area between the two missions proclaimed an Aboriginal reserve. In fact, the extension of Aboriginal reserves along the west side of Cape York Peninsula was in large part a deliberate attempt to deny the recruiters access.

There would seem to be conflict between the accepted belief that Aborigines would desert their employers if they could and the fact that once an area was opened up recruits were more readily obtained and conflict on the boats was less likely. The observations of the missionaries and Roth in this area soon clarify the problem.

Firstly, such abuses as kidnapping, forced detention and the refusal to return Aborigines to their tribal territory persisted but were less necessary. Traditional values and tribal cohesiveness were changing. The recruiters sought mainly young men and boys because they worked better and were more tractable. The tribal elders were often only too willing to use their influence to provide such recruits. They were no doubt convinced of their powerlessness to prevent such contacts and wished to appease the recruiters. Moreover, in a situation where their authority was seriously challenged by the intruders they were provided with a new opportunity for wealth and power.

An initially sceptical Roth was surprised to discover that the labour of a large proportion of these young men was traded to the recruiters by the old men of the tribe, the exchange rate generally being a bag of flour and, perhaps,

a pound of tobacco. The missionary, Hey, estimated that less than 50% went willingly and when Roth examined three new recruits he found that not one wished to go. When he prevented their leaving, the Manilla man recruiting lost his temper and informed Roth he had already paid a bag of flour for each. Another recruiter also admitted 'buying' his labour. 162

Nor were Roth and the Presbyterian missionaries the only witnesses to the practice of Aboriginal elders selling their children's labour. In June 1882, the Colonial Treasurer was informed that, at Thursday Island, 'At present any man, white or black, can go over to the coast and secure a number of natives by means of a bag or two of flour. The men come willingly enough as they are in a state of semi-starvation ...' 163 It is not clear who received the payment but it is probable that at least some went to the dependents of the recruits. In his first report from Thursday Island, John Douglas observed 'that a lot of mere children had been purchased from their relatives on the Jardine and Batavia Rivers'. The routine nature of the process was indicated when the recruiters even brought them to Thursday Island to place them on ship's articles. Douglas ordered them to be returned to their homes at the recruiter's expense. Thereafter the fishermen apparently took more trouble that Douglas should not discover their recruiting procedures. 164 Roth himself discovered at Cooktown a child from the Starcke River who had been sold to a beche-de-mer fisherman by his

162. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept., 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
163. Report presumably from the Police Magistrate or Shipping Master to the Col. Treasurer, 12 June 1882. This was read in the Legislative Assembly by S.W. Griffith and recorded in Hansard. This extract is taken from the Northern Miner, 5 August 1884, editorial: 'Native Labourers Act'.
father for a bag of flour, a pound of tobacco and a pipe. 165

How widespread this practice was it is difficult to say but the evidence spans eighteen years and suggests that it was common. It also helps to explain the acceptance of the recruiters in an area where one might have expected continued overt hostility.

The motives of the Aboriginal elders can only be guessed at. Roth saw the trade as a means by which the old men gained material wealth for themselves as well as an increased share of the women of the tribe. He believed that with the surplus of unattached women, they discarded their older wives taking the wives or betrothed of the men at sea. He added:

Indeed, it is to the personal and selfish interest of the aged males that the younger ones be kept out of the way as long as possible. 166

This is too simple an explanation.

It is clear from Roth's reports that the recruiters, even at Mapoon, used a great deal of direct and indirect intimidation. They anchored for a week or more at a time and visited the camps of the Aborigines with guns sometimes firing them to frighten or impress their hosts. 167 On one day, Roth reported five boats anchored in front of the Mapoon Mission seeking recruits. It is not difficult to imagine the potential threat of such a body of intruders, either in co-operation or competition, especially as the number available for the fisheries had greatly diminished. While Roth was at Mapoon four Aborigines were so terrified by one of the recruiters who visited their camp daily trying to force them to sign on with him that they sought Roth's assistance. 168

In his report to Parliament in 1900

165. Roth to Pol. Com., 24 June 1898, Copy, Q.S.A. COL/139, 'Roth's 1898 Reports'.
166. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
167. ibid.
168. ibid. See especially insertion dated 6th October, at the end of the letter.
Roth asserted that the recruiter was commonly offered a bonus of 30 shillings for each Aboriginal recruited by his employer, an incentive which must have resulted in much harassment of the Aborigines.\(^{169}\) It is unclear whether Roth believed there was a separate class of men who recruited Aborigines or whether some employees specialised in recruiting for their employers as the need arose. The latter seems more likely. In 1884, the Police Magistrate at Cooktown had informed the Griffith government that a regular traffic takes place on the coast for smart young lads, the current price being £4.\(^{170}\) There was thus considerable financial advantage in obtaining Aboriginal recruits.

In the face of such an overt threat to Aboriginal society offered by the fishermen, it is difficult to decide whether the elders were trying to adapt to the new situation while preserving their own authority which they might have seen as conserving the knowledge of ritual and religion entrusted fully to them alone; whether they were trying to accept the fishermen into trading or kinship relationships; or whether they entered into these agreements fully expecting that the children and young men would benefit and be returned. It is unlikely that Aboriginal elders would be able to trade any but their closest kin and unlikely they would act as heartlessly as Roth believed. Finally, it is possible that sometimes the Aborigines were finding it so difficult to earn a subsistence that a spell on the boats might have seemed desirable to the elders, the young men, or both groups. There were references to the Aborigines being better off on the boats than half-starving at home. Thus Milman, the Acting Government Resident at Thursday Island in 1886 wrote:


\(^{170}\) P.M., Cooktown, to Under Col. Sec., 24 June 1884, Q.S.A. COL/A374, 4517 of 1884.
That much kidnapping has gone on of natives from the mainland is undoubted, but there is no question that the natives so employed improve much in their general appearance and physique after being a very few months away from their homes, where they are half-starved and in a most miserable state. 171

It is clear that sometimes the intruders were responsible for the impoverished economic circumstances and likely that the observed conditions of the Aborigines referred to those who had experienced some contact. However, Aboriginal tribes undisturbed by alien intrusion also experienced famines and the recruiter may have profited from them. 172

There was very little benefit to anyone else but the fishermen. The elders and their dependents received the bag of flour which was consumed in a few days. The recruit, regardless of the wage he was signed on at, returned home with nothing or almost nothing to show for his six months or more on the boats. Douglas had insisted the recruits be paid off at the shipping office where the Aborigines received what was due to them. There are several witnesses to testify to the adequacy of the payment of the recruits. 173

However, in the only area where Europeans could observe tribal Aborigines returning with their pay, the situation


seemed very different. As Roth remarked:

Now, whatever may be done at Thursday Island there
is no doubt that there is often a leakage somewhere,
for, by the time the boy arrives at Mapoon he rarely
has anything adequate to show for the results. He
may have a bag of flour, a tomahawk, some clay pipes,
a lb. of tobacco, a cheap blanket, and a pair of trousers.
But this is the rare exception, for as I am assured
by Mr. Hey, who is in the best position to judge,
the supply of goods which is brought back here would
be dear at twenty shillings. 174

While Roth was at Mapoon he saw one time-expired Aboriginal
recruit return with one bag of flour and two tomahawks.
Another four were given only five shillings bonus each for
two months' extra labour. Roth also saw another example
where an Aboriginal was credited with having received a
coat that he and his companions denied he had ever received.
There was even one case where the Aborigines working for a
fisherman were persuaded or forced to buy their goods to
take home at his store, associated presumably with his
fishing station. One can imagine how easy it would be to
effect this. The opportunities for channeling much of the
Aborigines' wages back to the employer are even easier to
imagine. 175

A variation of this theme of robbing Aboriginal recruits
of their rightful wages was simple and long standing. Just
before the end of the cruise the skipper would anchor close
to land and manufacture an excuse to quarrel violently
with recruits until they deserted the ship in fear of their
lives. If the boat waited for two days and the Aborigines
did not return, the captain could charge them with desertion
and confiscate any unpaid wages. 176 There were no doubt
captains who simply discarded such tribal Aborigines at

175. ibid.
176. Roth to Pol. Com., 4 February 1898, Q.S.A. COL/139,
'Roth's 1898 Reports', [Copy]
the end of a voyage before putting into port and claimed desertion. Thus, Government Resident at Thursday Island, John Douglas, noted:

Desertions often take place not long before the expiree of agreements and the wages due thus become forfeited to the employer ... 177

There is no satisfactory way of calculating how often such stratagems were used: but Roth felt the question important enough to warrant a special clause in legislation then being drafted, and was supported by Douglas and the shipping master at Thursday Island. 178

From the evidence of the missionaries and Roth it appears that many Aborigines were working for their keep and a small bonus at the end of their voyage, some only for their keep, before they were forced to leave the vessel. Their elders in the kinship structure might also have received a small bonus at the beginning of their voyage.

It must again be stressed that this same report which indicated recruiting procedures also indicated, in the same area, kidnapping by deception and force, detention for longer periods than the Aborigines wished, and refusal to return the Aborigines to their tribal areas. Thus Roth gave examples of Aborigines having completed service on one boat being stranded at Thursday Island and forced to ship again. He even gave one example of Aborigines being diverted from one boat to another. Again one probably only sees the tip of the iceberg with regard to practices of this sort as the victims were rarely able to complain and the employers little likely to discuss the practice openly. 179 The 30 shillings or £4 incentive for each recruit obtained offered

179. ibid.
by employers to the recruiters was an obvious inducement to recruit in whatever way was possible and easy.\footnote{180}

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Alongside unmistakeable evidence of kidnapping persisting in the labour traffic to the end of the nineteenth century, there is also evidence of willing volunteering. By 1900, near Mapoon, which had been the most favoured recruiting area in the far north since the 1880's,\footnote{181} even the missionary, Nicholas Hey, admitted that approximately 50\% of the recruits would volunteer willingly for service in the fisheries. This was not due solely to the attractions of the new life. Often conditions at home were unsatisfactory. Returning recruits frequently found their wives or betrothed had been appropriated by other Aborigines, generally the elders who had not been recruited. This led to altercations and general dissatisfaction, especially as those recruited realized they had brought little of permanent value off the boats. The recruiters were frequently able to profit by such unrest with the result that the young men could return to the fisheries to escape the authority of the elders, altercations, or a tribal life that was now less satisfying.\footnote{182}

J.G. Ward, a missionary at Mapoon, testified that the fishermen liked to strike a camp just after a big quarrel as the weaker party was often anxious to enlist en masse in the first available boat.\footnote{183} Certainly some joined in

\footnotetext[181]{'Beche-de-mer and Pearl-shell Fisheries of Northern Queensland', 1890 V. & P., Vol. III, p. 732. In 1890, Saville-Kent referred to the Batavia River as the main recruiting ground for the Torres Straits beche-de-mer fishery 'for years past'.}
\footnotetext[182]{Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept., 4 October 1899, loc. cit.}
\footnotetext[183]{Moravian Messenger, 3 February 1894, IV, 82, p. 25 (M.L. MSS 1893 carton no. 4).}
the belief that only a brief voyage was involved, but this cannot have happened often at any popular recruiting centre. Others joined with the intention of making the voyage brief and it is to this aspect of recruitment that we now turn.

It soon became clear that some Aborigines were embarking for the adventure of a short spell on board the boats. They enlisted with the firm intention of absconding with a boat at the first opportunity although the earliest instances were doubtless not planned from the outset. Thus, in 1891, Douglas described the conflict between the attraction of the glamorous new life and the Aborigines' yearning for their homeland:

They are recruited often willingly enough. They have heard strange tales of the sea from their friends, and they are willing to go on a cruise for a time. They are shipped with the vaguest possible idea of their duties or their obligations. They perhaps work willingly enough for a time, especially if they are well fed. But whether they are fed well or ill, whether they are badly treated or not, there comes over them long before the expiry of their legal agreement, an irrepressible desire to return to their own country and to the tribal usages.\footnote{Douglas to Col. Sec., 16 December 1891, \emph{[Copy]}, 1894 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 920.}

However, there seems little doubt that, in time, successful desertions convinced some Aborigines they could satisfy both yearnings. Thus there is evidence that the Batavia River became 'an Alsatia' for recruits who had run off with boats.\footnote{Report of the Govt. Res. at Thursday Island upon the Working of \textit{The Native Labourers' Protection Act of 1884'\textbf{,}} 1890 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 1567.} Indeed, Saville-Kent noted the frequency with which 'individuals known to have been associated with previous massacres and outrages \textit{had} been re-engaged by other employers'.\footnote{\textit{Beche-de-mer and Pearl Fisheries of Northern Queensland}, 1890 V. & P., Vol. III, p. 731.} He described a recognized refugee trail by which absconders recruited on the west coast of Cape York
Peninsula at the Batavia River, ran off with boats and stores on the opposite east coast at Cape Grenville, and made their way back, via the Ducie River, to the Batavia River. There, when they felt so inclined, they would enlist on another boat. 187 The Kanoon missionary, Nicholas Hey, testified that 'many' Aborigines intended running away and had only recruited to get the bag of flour paid to their relatives. Their confidence derived from the fact that they had succeeded 'so many times in stealing boats for their journey home, without receiving punishment'. 188 The fishermen found it difficult to accept the ingenuity of the Aborigines and found a scape-goat in the missionaries. Thus their spokesman, the Torres Strait Pilot, remarked:

The natives who had absconded with a boat have not this time committed any great crime; and they can consequently be accepted with full confidence in to the hallelujah band at the Batavia River until they are again tempted to get a free cruise to this port and out again to some island, from whence they can elope with a good supply of stores. 189

The evidence of such planned desertions after a brief adventure on the boats is convincing: it comes from reliable witnesses with varied attitudes towards Aborigines. In the virtually uncontrolled contact situation on the sea frontier, some Aborigines were obviously exploiting the exploiters.

187. ibid., p. 732. Saville-Kent's description of this process is worth repeating:
The natives engaged for the Torres Straits and Northern Barrier fisheries are recruited chiefly from the Batavia River district, on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. On committing outrages or stealing the boats and stores, they most usually land on the east coast, in the neighbourhood of Cape Grenville, and make their way back via the Ducie River track to the Batavia district. This was corroborated by Douglas. See 1890 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 1567.

188. Report published in an unidentified newspaper on 21 July 1897, Newspaper Cutting Book (M.L. MSS 1898, carton no. 4). The cover is entitled: 'Australian Rough Diary 1907'.

189. C.C., 19 October 1894. From Torres Strait Pilot, 13 October 1894.
However, as the Rev. J.G. Ward of Mapoon remarked in 1893 during one of the Torres Straits' worst outbreaks of Aboriginal violence:

The boys were of course unreliable, but their services were ever in demand, which showed that their labour was worth more to the trader than the remuneration they received, or the cost they occasioned when a fit of homesickness induced them to make off with a boat. 190

The risk to life and property was inescapable if the fishermen had to use tribal Aborigines to harvest the produce of the sea.

Indeed, Ward has indicated clearly the symbiotic situation which was developing. The coastal Aborigines were used to the sea and many soon found the idea of limited periods in the fisheries attractive. Some employers accommodated to this situation. They returned valued workers to their homes, waited for them for up to a fortnight, and then recruited them again. Thus not only was the value of Aboriginal labour indicated but also the understanding that could develop between recruiter and recruits. 191

There were developments as well in the fisherman's exploitation of Aboriginal women. As has been noted, women were as capable of working in the fisheries as men. They often accompanied their husbands on the boats and were frequently used willingly or unwillingly to satisfy the sexual needs of the fishermen. This practice persisted beyond the period of this research and was the cause of much Aboriginal hostility. 192 Indeed, Douglas believed that the fact that the beche-de-mer industry had associated with it 'a good deal of illicit intercourse with native

191. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept., 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
women' was one of its attractions to some fishermen.\footnote{193}

In addition to this ruthless exploitation of Aboriginal women for sexual purposes on boats, there was also a good deal of what Europeans saw as systematic prostitution ashore. Thus in a report on the pearlshell fisheries in 1879, Lieutenant Commander Thomas DeHoughton noted that the shellers were generally very healthy but added:

The chief sickness amongst the shellers is, I believe, venereal, which they pick up from the native women, there being camps of natives along the Australian coast where regular prostitutes are kept who are badly diseased. \footnote{194}

Prostitution did not exist in any really strict sense in Aboriginal society. Therefore the prostitution referred to above probably arose as an extension of the Aboriginal practice of proffering the sexual services of selected women as a means of ending or averting hostility with another group.\footnote{195} It is thus likely that the principal consideration of the Aboriginal groups concerned was keeping

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item 193. Douglas to Col. Sec., 16 December 1891, loc. cit.
\item 194. DeHoughton, H.M.S. Beagle, Thursday Island, to Commodore J.C. Wilson, H.M.S. Wolverine, Sydney, 22 September 1879 \textit{[copy]}, encl. 'Further Correspondence in re Pearl-Shell, etc. Fisheries', \textit{1880 V. & P.}, Vol. II, p. 1164.
\item 195. A.P. Elkin, \textit{The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them}, (Sydney, Third Edition, 1956), pp. 127-130. R.M. and C.H. Berndt, \textit{The World of the First Australians}, pp. 85, 164-5. Note Berndt's definition of prostitution. 'It is a matter for debate whether sexual relations outside marriage, accompanied by gifts, can be classified as prostitution. But prostitution can be defined as the selling of sexual favours without the expectation of marriage, and without the setting up of a specific dyadic relationship as between sweethearts or lovers; a transient association in which recompense, or payment is crucial. The contract, implied or explicit, is relatively impersonal: one partner can be substituted for another without altering the nature of the arrangement ... In contrast in most instances of pre- and extra-marital relations in Aboriginal Australia, the gift, if any, seems to be incidental; however acceptable, in itself, it is regarded as a love token rather than payment'.
\end{itemize}}
the majority of their women free from molesting. Clearly such limited prostitution could be maintained only as long as traditional values remained strong. Thus at such places as Palm Island where small vessels regularly anchored the crews habitually landed and had intercourse with the women in exchange for tobacco and other articles of trade. Indeed, there is one reference which indicated that two young Aboriginal men were exploiting this situation whether the women were willing or not. At much frequented recruiting areas, such as the Batavia River, the prostitution of the women completely disrupted the camps and was a major factor in changing the traditional way of life, second only to recruitment itself. Thus, at Mapoon under the eyes of the missionaries and the Northern Protector of Aborigines, fishermen of all races went to the Aboriginal camps or took women on board their boats for varying periods of time. Roth commented:

The continual presence of these recruiters on this particular portion of coast line - eleven boats visited

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196. DeHoghton to Wilson, 22 September 1879, loc. cit. The fishermen knew the women available to them were badly diseased but made use of them bolstered by the nineteenth century belief that they could successfully treat venereal disease. Thus DeHoghton wrote: 'At all stations a plentiful supply of medicines is kept, and the venereal and other diseases are generally successfully treated'.

197. Lt. Commander G.E. Richards, H.M.S. Paluma, Townsville, to Rear Admiral H. Fairfax, Diamond, Townsville?, 24 September 1887, encl. q.S.A. COL/AS21, 8237 of 1887. Two young Aboriginal men called by the Europeans, Jimmy and Sammy, apparently decided to use this traffic to their own advantage and suggested to a young woman that she should co-operate and pass the purchase price on to them. The young woman refused and was strangled in the presence of the rest of the Aborigines. An old man protested and was also killed by the two men who then ritually consumed portions of the bodies of their victims. Richards believed the two men were trying to take control of the whole prostitution business.
at Mapoon during my fortnight's stay there - was also having a demoralizing effect on the Aboriginal women; these creatures used similarly to be bought, for temporary use, flour and tobacco being brought into requisition. 198

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The effect of the exploitation of the fishing industry on the traditional life of Aborigines on the sea frontier of far north Queensland was unequivocally disastrous despite the fact that they were left in possession of their tribal lands. After nine years as Government Resident at Thursday Island, Douglas commented:

The natives have gained little or nothing from their schooling; their women have been debauched and appropriated; their young men have in too many instances been taught the accomplishments of drinking and swearing, and some tribes have been so decimated that there is nothing of them left but the old people and the young children. 199

Despite the claims that those Aborigines employed in the fisheries were better off because they would at least be well fed, Douglas pointed out that for everyone 'Life on board one of these boats, or at the stations on the islands which are resorted to, is unspeakably squalid and dirty'. 200

In October 1899, Roth was able to describe the adverse effects of life on the boats in the region that had been the most frequented recruiting area for the Torres Strait fisheries since probably the middle 1880's, that near Mapoon. He was informed by the missionary, Hey, that there were 600

198. 'Report of the N.P.A. for 1899', 1900 V. & P., Vol. V, p. 584. See also Roth to Under Sec. Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit. In a report from Mapoon he noted:

... only last week, James Nickle ... had women on his boat at night: 'taxed about it, he admitted the circumstance in my presence to Hey, and asked him to overlook it.


Aboriginals between Mapoon Mission at Cullen Point and Weipa Mission at Albatross Bay. These were categorised as follows:

A. 200 women designated as females over puberty.
B. 200 old men designated as useless for boats.
C. 100 young and middle aged men, all of whom except about 10-14% were then on the boats.
D. 100 children designated as males and females under puberty.

Although this is not a detailed analysis, one is impressed by three factors: firstly, the sexual imbalance above the age of puberty where there are 300 males to 200 females; secondly, the absence of almost everyone in category C at the fisheries - the remainder in this category were being urged to recruit at the time; thirdly, the small number of children under the age of puberty. The society had already been much disturbed.

It is difficult to account for the dearth of females in category A in comparison with the males in categories B and C, except by suggesting that some, at least, had been taken away to the fisheries and not returned. Douglas had commented that by 1891: 'Most of the young men and many of the young women [near Mapoon] had been carried off as food for the fisheries'. Since the recruiting had commenced in this area in the 1880's it is not impossible that by 1899 there had been an average, permanent loss of three to seven young women a year. However, it is surprising that Roth and Hey did not emphasize this aspect of the fisheries.

201. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept., 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
202. 'Report of the Govt. Res. at Thursday Island for 1892-3', 1894 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 914. See Periodical Accounts, March 1895 (M.L. MSS 1893, carton no. 4). In a letter dated Mapoon, 1 December 1894, the Missionary, J.G. Ward, described the return of four women from the fisheries, one of whom had been on the boats since she was a girl.
Roth gave seven examples of boys of school age not being returned to the mission, three having been kidnapped or taken without their parents' consent. Five were taken and had not yet been returned in 1899, two in 1898, one in 1896, and one in 1895. Another had just arrived back by a process of reshipping. 203 In fact the missionary, Hey, at Batavia River had informed Roth earlier that each year some young Aboriginals were not returned. 204 This was then a constant drain on the area's limited number of young men.

Roth pointed out: 'The boys who are actually recruited here constitute the pick and flower of the tribe'. 205 There were about 100 young and middle aged men then on the boats and only about another twelve who would be available for the boats if willing. Boys below the age of puberty had already been prevented from recruiting. The withdrawal of almost the whole of this age group from the tribe must have had a profound effect on the life of the tribe socially and economically for these were the males who would have been most important in the hunting and fishing expeditions and the support through kinship obligations of a large number of dependents, especially the older women. 206 In addition, about one-third of the hundred recruits were married and thus their wives and young children were denied their contribution to the family economy. 207

The situation at the Batavia River was ameliorated greatly by the presence of Mapoon which was established in 1891, a few years after this region became the most favoured

203. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
204. Roth to Pol. Com., 11 March 1898, [copy], Q.S.A. COL/13, 'Roth's 1898 Reports'.
205. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
206. ibid. Roth: 'It is these young men to whom their aged mothers look for support'. See R.M. and C.H. Berndt, The World of the First Australians, pp. 104-5; 107-8; 118-9; 178.
207. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
recruiting area for the Torres Straits. The missionaries found themselves supporting the numerous relatives dependent on the absent recruits although they received nothing of what Roth estimated was a minimum of £300 wages the recruits should have received. 208 In a similar situation at Clump Point on the east coast near the present town of Tully, the Cutten Brothers had claimed the Aborigines on and near their property were destitute because the able-bodied men had been recruited for the beche-de-mer fisheries in a time of drought. 209

It would thus seem that even if the recruits benefited physically from their work in the fisheries, the tribe was economically weakened. It must also have had its social relationships weakened, especially as, according to Roth, their wives or betrothed had been appropriated by others, mainly the older men. The quality of the religious life must also have been threatened because of the absence of the younger initiates and of the non traditional influences upon these men.

Life on the boats was not as beneficial as some had alleged. Douglas pointed out that there were occasional cases of gross ill-treatment of Aboriginal labour generally involving a starvation allowance of food, but sometimes involving physical and psychological cruelty. 211

208. ibid. This was estimated on a minimum wage of 10 shillings a month for six months of the year for 100 Aborigines. The average time spent in boats was apparently longer than this and the wages should have been higher; especially as in the late 1890's there was a marked increase in swimming diving for pearlshell.
209. Cutten Brothers, Clump Point, to A.S. Cowley, M.E.A., Ingham, 25 January 1889, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A739, 7458 of 1893; claimed the recruiters eagerly sought their Aborigines because they were quiet and trustworthy.
210. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
211. ibid.
no way of estimating the frequency of such conditions but it is relevant to notice, as Douglas observed, 'it is quite impossible to exercise any such supervision as is found necessary in the employment of gangs of South Sea Islanders or other coloured labourers on sugar plantations'.

With the type of men involved in the beche-de-mer industry and the constant economic need to employ the cheapest labour, it would not be surprising if working conditions and rations, and the availability of medical aid, were at a worse standard than in the earliest days of the kanaka labour trade in Queensland.

Roth claimed that many returned in poor health, even seriously ill. He listed eight deaths over a period of two and a half years of boys and young men who had recently returned from the fisheries that he attributed directly to exposure and the life led on the boats. All were apparently in sound health when they left; all returned with similar symptoms of a similar duration: coughing, spitting blood, pains in the back and chest, and general emaciation. No deaths associated with similar symptoms resulted in this age group among Aborigines who had not recruited. Roth suggested that the extreme youth of the dead recruits was an important factor as no deaths had occurred since the missionary, Hey, had prevented recruiting at such an early age.

It seems apparent that some very young Aborigines found the constant diving for shell or beche-de-mer an exhausting, unhealthy occupation, a situation that might well have been exacerbated by a lengthy period of unbalanced diet and exposure to exotic diseases. The deaths that had

212. ibid.
214. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
occurred at Mapoon were probably a feature of the fisheries in less supervised areas and would have been another drain on the tribe's human resources.

There were others, Roth reported, who came back too ill to hunt for their own food. The bag of flour they brought back was shared out according to kinship obligations, and soon eaten whereupon the ill recruit became a burden on the community or the mission. Hey informed Roth that after about four years' work on the boats, they were not fit enough for diving. Roth also attributed the low birth rate to the absence of 'the actively virile portion of the community'. Thus he made a survey of 100 females of childbearing age and found that, though they had given birth to 225 children, 109 - almost half - had died. Roth apparently believed that the older men had fathered more children, and that as a consequence the women had given birth to feeble children. There seem to be two misconceptions here. Firstly, Roth believed that healthy babies were not produced by fathers of advanced age, and secondly, he did not realize the high infant mortality rate among uncontacted Aborigines. Abbie reported that 13% of all children were dead within their first year and 25% by the end of their fifth year. Near the fisheries, the birth rate had probably been lowered by venereal disease and the survival rate by the malnutrition of the infants. It is also probably that an increase in deformed births associated with venereal disease led to increased infanticide. Regardless of the factors involved,

215. ibid. See also f.n. 206 above.
216. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.
217. ibid.
it was apparent to contemporary observers that the populations of Aborigines contacted by the fishermen were markedly diminished. Although the missionaries at Mapoon tried at first to co-operate with the interests of the fishing industry, they found it a destructive influence on Aborigines within their sphere of influence and welcomed the assistance of the protectors appointed as a result of the 1897 Aborigines Protection Act in controlling it.

When the fishermen had virtually unchecked contact with the Aborigines, they left in their wake diseased, depleted, and demoralized tribes. Thus on the north-east coast of Cape York Peninsula and on the north-west coast, to as far south as Port Musgrave, Roth reported that the Aborigines were rapidly decreasing in number and were past the stage where his concern for their participation in the fisheries could be of much permanent benefit to them. Although they were still in possession of their land, Roth already regarded them as 'a doomed race' because of their contact with the fishermen. Their death rate was high and infant survival rate low. He believed they were 'able to take care of themselves' in the same manner as Aborigines in pacified areas further south had been able to take care of themselves. He added by explanation:

I do not mean they are on as high a scale of civilization as the Torres Strait islanders, but having been so long used to the presence of the boats, they know what drink is; they recognize and appreciate the monetary value of their women; they suffer markedly with venereal disease; they have picked up the vices of their visitors, with the result that they are rapidly diminishing in numbers. 221

This was the area influenced most markedly by the fisheries of the Torres Strait but all along the east coast of North Queensland were areas which also must have been affected by the fisheries based on Cooktown, Townsville, Cairns,

Ingham - such places as the Whitsunday Islands, Palm Islands, Hinchinbrook Island, Dunk Island and the numerous other inhabited islands as well as some areas on the mainland such as Bloomfield River and the Johnstone River. Records of the effect of the fisheries on such areas are almost non-existent. However, Archibald Weston, the first Southern Protector of Aborigines, who had edited newspapers in several northern towns and knew the fisheries well, informed the Police Commissioner:

I would most earnestly advise that no women be allowed to go in any boats in the beche-de-mer or any other trade ... My ten years northern knowledge of the beche-de-mer men and average pearling crews have strongly prejudiced me against any Aboriginals being allowed in their service at all. 223

222. B. Fahey, Sub-Collector Customs, Cooktown, to Under Sec. Treasury, 30 September 1884, Q.S.A. TRE/A23, 3303 of 1884. The boat Alarm from Boydong Island was stolen by some or all of a crew of eight Aborigines from Hinchinbrook Island and Cleveland Bay. N.Q.R., 11 October 1893, mentioned that Aborigines for the beche-de-mer and pearlshell fisheries were recruited on the east coast from as far south as Bowen and on the west coast to as far south as the Archer River. Fahey to Under Sec., Treasury, 1 August 1884, Q.S.A. TRE/A23, 2534 of 1884. The Ruby had three Aborigines from the Daintree River, two from the Mulgrave River, and two from Townsville: 'old and tried servants'. Both to Pol. Com., 28 January 1898, Q.S.A. COL/142, 2780 of 1898. Both mention eight or ten Johnstone River Aborigines stranded in Cooktown. Chester to Under Col. Sec., 6 June 1892, Q.S.A. COL/A712, 12344 of 1892. Boats were in the habit of calling in at Bloomfield River for recruits without notifying the Customs at Cooktown. See also C.C., 6 June 1890, for earlier account of use of Bloomfield River Aborigines. 'Reserves for Aborigines, Cardwell District', 1877 V.A.P., Vol. II, pp. 1245, 1246; mentions recruiting from Dunk Island, Townsville, and a boat decoying women on board at Palm Island.

Thus, both the northern and the southern protectors desired to deny the fishermen all access to Aboriginal labour where the Aboriginals were living viable traditional lives. Unfortunately, the coasts of North Queensland had been virtually naked before the depredations of the fishermen for the whole nineteenth century despite government attempts to introduce some controls from as early as 1879. The attempts to formulate effective, or at least hopeful, legislation will be examined in a later chapter.

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Although it went unnoticed at the time among the prophecies of the doom of those Aboriginal tribes with extensive contact with the fisheries, there were indications that new, changed Aboriginal societies were emerging in these very areas. Depleted, often very greatly, in population by exotic diseases and the permanent or semi-permanent loss of their human resources to the fisheries, most of the Aboriginal tribes were not doomed to complete extinction. Thus Lauriston Sharp was able to describe aspects of the totemism of north-eastern Australia by interviewing members of many of the tribes in the late 1930's. 224 The various Aboriginal tribes were experiencing revolutionary changes through contact with the fisheries.

Saville-Kent had noticed the attraction of the new way of life:

The attachment of the aborigines to fishing pursuits is practically demonstrated by the persistence with which the same families, or individuals, will year after year seek re-engagement at the hands of honest employers. 225

Although direct evidence is not available, there can be little doubt that their own way of life now lacked the security and satisfaction it had once held: economically, socially, and religiously. Thus there was this willingness to absent one's self or one's family from activities that had once seemed the only reality.

The fisheries must have offered to many a new, if often unpredictable, social and economic security. To the boys and young men, Aboriginal religion must have seemed increasingly irrelevant. Their religious knowledge was incomplete and they were removed for such long periods from the influence of their elders. Their role in the fisheries with powerful aliens, who were yet dependent on them, must have provided some emotional and social security. The sustaining philosophy of Aboriginal religion found no adequate substitute but the spiritual vacuum was replaced for some with a purpose for life associated with the fisheries. Then there were the exotic blessings brought by the intruders that could make one forget home, relatives, and tedium: travel, tobacco and alcohol, sugar and tea, new foods, new material wealth, and sexual licence. Frequently uninitiated children were taken away because they were regarded as more tractable and, no doubt, less dangerous if detained against their will. These, especially, were susceptible to non-traditional influences. At Palm Island, which had such a long association with traders and fishermen, the oldest man indigenous to the island spoke warmly, if with an old man's nostalgia for his youth, about his people's involvement in the beche-de-mer fisheries, the existing

226. 'Report of the Govt., Res. at Thursday Island for 1892-3', 1894 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 914. See 'Police Court', the trial of James Underwood for murder of Aboriginal Maori, C.C., 10 June 1892, C.C., 14 June 1892, and C.C., 8 July 1892, for good examples of wild and exciting life at the fishing stations.
Tradition being that they had provided a life of freedom and adventure. 227

Aborigines, with little or no previous contact with non-Aborigines, were brought into intimate contact with Europeans, Asiatics, South Sea Islanders, Torres Strait Islanders, Aborigines regularly recruited from as far south as Bowen, and Aborigines much more familiar with European culture who had become veteran members of the cheap coloured labour work force. 228 Aborigines who had never left their tribal area found themselves stranded in Cooktown or Thursday Island or living on an island in Torres Strait for six months or more. Direct evidence as to the effect of such new experiences on the Aborigines is lacking but the effect must have been profound.

Indirectly, Hey, the missionary in charge at Mapoon, witnessed to the dynamic force that had entered into the lives of the Aborigines when he had to allow the recruiters to come to the mission. Had he excluded them, he was aware that the Aborigines would have moved away from the mission to areas where he could exert no supervision. 229 In 1896, Douglas reported 'that the number of Australian aboriginal natives who have become efficient sailors has increased'. 230 It was a truism of the industry that once an area had been opened for recruiting for a period, there were fewer attacks by the Aborigines on the rest of the crew and fewer examples

227. Interview with Mr. Reg. Palm Island at Palm Island, 20 December 1972. He was referring to the later stages of contact after traditional values had changed greatly.

228. Fahey to Under Sec., Treasury, 1 August 1884, loc. cit. The two Aborigines from Townsville were described as 'old and tried servants'. See also N.O.R., 11 October 1893, for mention of extent of regular recruiting from Bowen to Archer River.

229. Roth to Under Sec., Home Dept, 4 October 1899, loc. cit.

230. 'Report of the Govt. Res. at Thursday Island for 1894-95', 1896 V. & P., p. 502. He was possibly including Torres Strait Islanders under this category.
of their running away with boats. By 1890 the Torres Strait fisheries were notorious mainly because they had to use Aborigines from areas where the recruiting for the fisheries was not as well accepted, despite the fact that the area between Port Musgrave and Albatross Bay had been the most popular recruiting area for the Torres Strait fisheries for some years. Thus, it can be seen that many important changes relevant to the European observers were noticed in the lives of the Aborigines. It is reasonable to believe that there were other important changes in the very fabric of tribal life that were occurring unrecorded. Lauriston Sharp's description of the effect of the introduction of steel axes upon the Yir Yoront on the eastern side of Cape York Peninsula strongly supports this idea despite the fact that his emphasis was on the destruction of traditional society rather than the emergence of a changed society.

In fact, it was the swiftness with which raw recruits gained an insight into the fishermen's way of life and understood some of its mysteries that posed one of their biggest problems. Aborigines learned how to handle the boats and could run off with them and, once back in their own territory, were extremely difficult to punish. Indeed it was alleged of the Torres Strait fisheries by an objective witness like Saville-Kent that 'the impunity with which they have been committed ... has contributed materially to the increase of these originators of these outrages

232. 'Report of the Govt. Res. at Thursday Island for 1892-3', 1894 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 914. Douglas stated that the Aborigines near Mapoon 'had already been utterly demoralized by the beche-de-mer men' when the missionaries arrived in 1891.
of late years'. Some Aborigines — Saville-Kent claimed 'many' — who had been responsible for the loss of life of the fishermen re-enlisted, presumably drawn back to the fisheries by the attraction of the life or the attraction of the possibility of more loot. Thus, the intruders were made more vulnerable by the awareness that uncowed Aborigines rapidly gained of their culture.

The growing acculturation of the Aborigines was exhibited in a variety of ways, especially the ability to exploit the contact situation and to resist the dominance of the intruders. This was evidenced in the record of Aborigines running off with boats and killing obstructive seamen. There are some other records which enable the historian to catch glimpses of such developments. In 1887, the killing of the owner of the cutter Chance, apparently for robbery, at the Jardine River led to the capture of six Aborigines 'well known as great ruffians' who had been the terror of the district for four years. The Acting Government Resident, Hugh Milman, described two of those arrested, Bannis and Brown, as 'notorious scoundrels' and the Jardine and Batavia River Aborigines as 'most determined and savage'. As Bannis was the 'chief' or leader of one large camp, it would seem that the Jardine River Aborigines who had been enlisting for the fisheries since the 1870's were involved in not only exploiting the vulnerability of the fishermen but in aggressively resisting the intruders through this exploitation.

All of the Aborigines arrested were known by name and were alleged to have a long list of previous offences. There was also the suggestion that Aboriginal men from inland

235. ibid.
236. Milman to Chief Sec., 28 February 1887, encl. Q.S.A. COL/4492, 1884 of 1887.
camps were moving to the coast to participate similarly in the fisheries. 237

When Dunk Island was in a similar stage of contact, a beche-de-mer boat, the Captain Cook, fishing in the islands off Cardwell, saw portions of wrecked vessels and cedar logs washed up on the shore. When the boat pulled in to Dunk Island hoping to discover any castaways, they were met by three adult male Aborigines and two boys giving all appearance of amity. They soon understood the purpose of the boat's visit to Dunk and led a party of sailors into a well-prepared ambush of about thirty men and women from which they were lucky to escape. 238 One Aboriginal who had been to the boat and received presents grappled with the Captain who had the only gun they had taken, trying to take this off him. The ability to mount this determined, co-ordinated aggression in such a short time suggests more than a desire for loot.

There were many examples of the Aborigines' ability with boats being used to the detriment of the intruders. In one incident, a lugger stolen by certain Batavia River Aborigines was recaptured by the Queensland Government Steamer Albatross after the Aborigines tried to outtrace and outmanoeuvre her. 239 In the 'Wild Duck massacre', a South Sea Islander and eighteen Aborigines killed four Europeans, using one boat to move to another to attack those on board, sank one boat, robbed the three boats of the fishing station of everything valuable, and then all embarked in the North

238. C.C., 10 April 1878.
Star. They disembarked the Flinders Island Aborigines at their home with a share of the loot, three others landed at Restoration Island in a dingy, and the others sailed to Townsville where the South Sea Islander and four of the Aborigines were captured. Here was a combination of inexperienced sailors and recruits to the fisheries, the Flinders Island Aborigines apparently doing most of the killing. In another incident, a South Sea Islander in charge of the lugger Annie was killed and two fishermen on another boat were attacked and seriously wounded. The Aboriginal attackers then made off in a cutter, the Adha, and tried to take off the Aboriginal women at the distant station. They were prevented from doing this but all afternoon sailed the cutter among the nearby islands before sailing away. It is clear that such skills were attained by Aborigines in their initial stage of acculturation and were potentially dangerous to the fishermen.

Another skill that was easily learned on board ship was the use of guns. It was an ever present fear on the frontier that Aborigines would become familiar with the use of guns but it was on the sea frontier that this was most possible and where this occurred to a limited extent. On the other frontiers, Aborigines frequently stole guns and ammunition when they were robbing a hut or a mining camp because they understood how the settlers used these even if they themselves couldn't. One example has been discovered

240. C.C., 12 March 1889; C.C., 7 May 1889, 'The Wild Duck Massacre'.
241. C.C., 20 May 1890.
242. A. Morisset, Inspector of Native Police, to Pol. Com., 26 November 1887, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A528, 9775 of 1887. In a Petition from Barron River farmers for increased protection, great stress was placed on the stealing of firearms. Morisset pointed out that there was not a single instance where the Aborigines had used firearms but that they realized what firearms did to them. They sometimes kept them in their camp but were inevitably found in an unusable condition.
where one of the Aborigilles on the Barron River who had not been let in stuck up and fired at a man whose pistol he had taken. 243 There was also a report that a group of about one hundred Aborigines, some armed with rifles, attacked the camp of fourteen Chinese on the Johnstone River, shooting one, carrying off one severely wounded, and stealing among other things a revolver, a rifle, and some ammunition. 244 Significantly both of these reports are associated with the rainforest resistance where the contact situation was more complex than in most areas of north Queensland.

On the sea frontier there are reports of the Aborigines being able to use guns and more reason to accept these as significant because of the contact situation they, in part, illustrated: Aborigines worked with fishermen who regularly used guns. In an attack in early 1887 on the two prospectors, Goodshaw and Thompson, on a boat at the Jardine River, it was reported that one of the attacking Aborigines fired at the wounded men with a Snider rifle. 245 The police, had found these Aborigines with loaded Snider rifles which they didn't use, apparently considering themselves in an inferior tactical position. 246 In another incident, a police party seeking the killers of the crew of the Lenora exchanged shots with one of the runaway Aborigines before killing him. The gun he used belonged to one of the fishermen on the Lenora. 247

Although the above were the only examples discovered

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243. H.A., 4 January 1889. See also Queensland, 19 January 1889, p. 102 for some story from Herberton Advertiser.
244. P.D.T., 10 December 1886, 'Telegraphic News', 6 December 1886.
245. P.D.T., 19 March 1887, from Carpentaria Times; Queensland, 26 March 1887, p. 509.
247. N.O.R., 21 June 1893; P.D.T., 17 June 1893; Queensland, 10 June 1893 and 17 June 1893.
of the Aborigines using guns against the intruders, there
were other indications that the Aborigines were much more
aware of the use of guns on the sea frontier. The Police
Magistrate at Thursday Island in 1882, Henry Chester, was
alarmed to discover the master of the schooner, Rover, had
been supplying Aborigines near Cape Grenville with firearms
and ammunition, presumably to those working for him and
possibly others associated with them. It is possible his
Aboriginal workers demanded guns as payment for their labour
which was apparently Chester's worry. Chester commented:
'If this is the case the light ships may be attacked at any
time'. There were also reports of the Aborigines stealing
firearms and ammunition. The Aborigines attacking the
fishermen normally used weapons they were familiar with or
implements of the fishermen similar to their own, such as
steel axes, but there is some indication that the fishermen's
fear that the Aborigines would turn their own weapons against
them was better founded than on the other frontiers in
North Queensland.

It is regrettable that the evidence of partial accultur-
ation derives largely from what is relevant to the intruders
but there is enough of this, even, to suggest that this process

248. Chester to Col. Sec., 30 June 1882, Q.S.A. COL/A342,
4002 of 1882.

249. B. Fahey, Sub-Collector of Customs, Cooktown, to Under
Sec., Treasury, 9 November 1881, Q.S.A. TRE/A24, 2070
of 1881. This report gives two examples of Aborigines,
one group from Cape Grenville and one from Night Island,
stealing guns and ammunition. C.C., 4 May 1894. The
Aborigines attacked a camp of Batavia River miners
killing one and seriously wounding two. They took
away rifles, revolvers and cartridges. J. Douglas,
P.M., Cooktown, to Under Col. Sec., 16 December 1895,
Q.S.A. COL/A801, 15033 of 1895. Aborigines stole
firearms and ammunition from Lee's station. This
presumably, is the Lee involved in the sinking of the
Aborigines' boat and kidnapping of some of the survivors.
Lee was killed by the Aborigines in Princess Charlotte
was taking place in a situation that did not involve dis-
possessio11. The effects of the intrusion of the fishermen
in large numbers from the early 1870's were profound.

Traditional Aboriginal society was experiencing revolutionary
changes only superficially discernible to the historian
and as yet largely ignored by the anthropologist and
archaeologist. Interdependent societies were developing
in and near the Torres Strait that were removed largely
from the influences of the other frontiers of dispossession
except at Somerset. Into this frontier came the missionaries
and the protectionist bureaucrats to establish yet another
frontier in North Queensland.

The fishermen asserted their authority which was
gradually accepted by the Aborigines in one area after
another partly through necessity and partly through the
attraction of the new way of life the fishermen forced them
to experience. The intruders were dependent on the Aborigines
for their labour and their women. The Aboriginal tribes met
these needs because they, themselves, had generated new needs
of their own: psychological, social, and material. The
vulnerability of the fishermen to Aboriginal assertiveness
and Aboriginal exploitation resulted in a surprisingly
large loss of life and property but never enough to make
the industry a totally unacceptable risk. It appears that
the industry could not have continued if the younger Aborigines,
after their first experience of it, found the life on board
boats totally distasteful and if the older Aborigines had
not been willing to allow their children to go to the
fisheries. The necessity of kidnapping all, or even a
majority of the recruits, with the subsequent Aboriginal
reprisals would probably have destroyed the industry. There
are indications that even the badly fragmented societies
left in the wake of the recruiters were accepting the presence
of the fishermen and adapting to meet the new challenges.
A generation of partially acculturated but unconquered Aborigines was being produced. The culture the Aborigines were being introduced to was not representative of the rest of the colony but was in fact that of a group of many nationalities who were fringe dwellers in that society. Rough and crude and often cruel and vicious, they had nevertheless accepted their dependence on the Aborigines and lived in intimate contact with them on their small boats and isolated stations. These men, too, were being partially acculturated by their life on the sea frontier in contact with Aborigines especially through their association with Aboriginal women. The result of another generation of such uncontrolled contact would have been interesting but was not to be. Queensland's sea frontier was to be brought under the influence of a paternalistic bureaucracy and supported by an equally paternalistic theocracy. The price of protection was the loss of freedom.