

Original on Native Affairs File 1002/58
Police Station,
ROEBOURNE,
21st October, 1940.
The Commissioner of Native Affairs,
PERTH.

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 17th inst. Numbered 1002/58 respecting an attached letter from Lang Hancock of Mulga Downs Station to the Hon. Minister for the North-West.

On September 14th last, vide my report to you dated 20th September, 1940, in company with your Inspector McBeath I was on a tour of inspection of the various stations throughout my district. When some four miles east of Tambrey Station we met Lang Hancock en route to Roebourne. Having pulled up Hancock took McBeath some distance away from our car and held a lengthy conversation with him, the nature of which I am not aware nor am I concerned as it evidently did not concern me. We did not know at this stage that we would find the child Minit or Cella at Mulga Downs otherwise Hancock would have been advised of our intentions in respect to Minit.

We proceeded on our way arriving at Mulga Downs at about 2pm and were met by the station cook, Mr. xxxx,

[Final paragraph of a statement by Constable Stan Wightman, Protector].

I consider that McBeath acted quite within his prerogative in removing these children and I am forced to the opinion that if Hancock considers that the fact of working two half-caste native females aged 18 and 9 respectively at the homestead during the day and sending them into the native camp to sleep, particularly when the camp must have been used by white men for the satisfaction of their sexual desires, is fair and proper treatment for these children, well then his sense of fairness is somewhat warped.

Stan Wightman
Protector

13th November, 1940
To Mr C. L. McBeath,
Inspector of Natives,
BROOME.

I am not satisfied with matters at Mulga Downs, via Roebourne, and feel it would be as well if we brought the station under close and constant supervision. In furtherance of this, I think you might make a point of visiting the station as opportunity offers.

Reading between the lines, it seems to me that sexual intercourse has been going on between white employees and native women, and from this standpoint alone it appears to be highly desirable to keep the station under supervision as far as possible.

You recently questioned two white men belonging to the station, and you also removed two half-caste girls, Cella and Dorrie. In addition to this we have a maintenance order against xxxxx, as an employee, and we believe that one of the other employees was infected from xxxxx.

I have advised Constable Wightman of my attitude and no doubt he will watch matters as far as it is convenient to do pending your visits from time to time.

COMMISSIONER OF NATIVE AFFAIRS

NOTE: This afternoon I talked over Mulga Downs affairs with Hancock, senior, the owner of the station. I told him I objected to his white employees camping with natives. I also said I was not pleased with the suspicious actions of xxxx and xxxx, and particularly in regard to the episode of the truck. In my opinion both men should have been prosecuted for camping with the natives.

Hancock, senior [George], was very hostile to me. He believed the statement of [Lang] his son's against those of Inspector McBeath and Constable Wightman.

Towards the end of the interview, Hancock began to see matters from my standpoint and I then told him I insisted on the dismissal of xxxx. Further, I required the management to take action for an improvement in native matters, but xxxx could remain on the station if he camped well away from natives and provided no complaints were received against him for intercourse with native women. If these conditions were not complied with, the station's permit would be cancelled. In this event the station would have the right of appeal to a Magistrate, but I reminded [George] Hancock that I would see that both Inspector McBeath and Constable Wightman gave evidence. Hancock then said he would dismiss xxxx.

C.N.A.
31/12/40

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATIVE AFFAIRS
BROOME

14th November, '40.

The Commissioner of Native Affairs,
57 Murray Street, Perth.

I have received your communication of the 29th ultimo. And also the attached enclosure., which is a copy of a letter addressed to the Hon. Minister, regarding the activities of Constable Wightman and myself whilst on patrol recently in the Roebourne District. B/S. 1002/38.

The tenor of this letter of complaint has occasioned me no surprise, it is an attitude common amongst those who employ natives, then again there is always to be met the type of individual who resents authority, and who almost invariably regards Government officials, and Public Servants as being parasites, but fortunately this section of the community is a minority.

I might mention that we met Hancock, his wife, and late overseer, along the road some seventy or eighty miles from Mulga Downs Station, he was proceeding to Roebourne to engage in a game of table tennis, when reaching home again he would have travelled well over four hundred miles to accomplish this purpose, but of course I was not supposed to know that stock happened to be dying all over his station, but these matters are all by the way and I only draw your attention to them so that you will be better able to judge the type of person that has penned this letter. Mr Hancock's management of Mulga Downs is criticised freely throughout the District, and it is generally thought by experienced station men that if he remained on the Station more, and spent less time running into Roebourne he would achieve much better results on the Station.

As I stated in other papers, Constable Wightman accompanied me on this trip, the object of visiting this area was to visit the Tablelands, and all the Stations in the District, thoroughly investigate the native situation and endeavour to find some solution to the native problem that has existed in the locality for some considerable time. I did not as Mr Hancock would have you think travel all the way from Broome to Roebourne for the sole purpose of visiting his station, but even if I had done so I would account the trip as being well worthwhile, in this particular instance my movements were regulated by instructions from Head Office.

It was afternoon time when we met Mr Hancock along the road between Tambrey and Coolawanya Stations and he certainly spoke to me with regard to a family named Dershaw, the latter person is a German, and supposed to be an exceptionally well educated and cultured man, and I have been told a Professor who received his Doctorate at some German University, he is married to, I think, a halfcaste woman, and this couple have a family of nine or ten children, I could not gather any definite information regarding these people, and I did not have the time to go chasing through the bush after them, at present they are somewhere in the bush in the vicinity of the asbestos field, and I might mention that this area extends for many miles along the Hamersley Ranges.

For some years Dershaw was in charge of a Mulga Downs Outcamp, but was dismissed some time ago for incompetence, I have heard that this man perished two or three thousand head of sheep, Hancock stated that this family was having a bad time.

I pointed out that Dershaw and his family did not come within the purview of the Native

Administration Act, and that their present condition was a matter for the Child Welfare Department, and not the Department of Native Affairs, I advised that the local officer in charge of Police was the direct representative of the Welfare Department, and suggested that the matter be placed before Constable Wightman for further enquiry, but Mr Hancock did not appear anxious to mention the matter to the Constable. At no time did I put forward a plea of economy in regard to this family, neither was the question of Departmental funds discussed in connection with this particular case in question.

Mr Hancock requested me to place the case before the notice of Constable Wightman, which I did. At this stage I should mention that Mr Hancock appeared to be antagonistic towards the Police, my conversation with him took place about thirty feet or so to the rear of the waiting motor cars, it was at Hancock's request that we proceeded out of earshot of the people in the cars, and he did not invite the Constable to participate in the talk that followed, I certainly thought this procedure [sic] rather strange and commented upon it after recommencing our journey along the road.

Mr Hancock refers to two halfcaste children that were left on an adjoining Station, and is good enough to further advise that the Manager was at home, his statement is correct in every particular, but he fails to give the details which he well knows alters the whole matter considerably.

The facts of this matter is as follows. Employed on a Mount Florence Outcamp about twenty-four miles from the main Station is a married halfcaste and his family, the man's name is Jack, and he is somewhere about forty years of age, his wife is a halfcaste woman named Carrie aged about thirty-seven, this couple have three children, Richard, the eldest is supposed to be a quarter caste, eighteen years of age, Amy a halfcaste ten years, and Fred a halfcaste five years. The children are well looked after and cared for, they are by no means in any danger, nor are their surroundings undesirable in any way, the parents can support them in a fitting manner, and they receive an education of sorts, and finally, when of age can be found useful employment on Mount Florence, and receive wages.

XX

Throughout the district there appears to be a decided undercurrent of feeling against Mulga Downs Station - one station manager in a conversation with me referred to the place as being "the home of combos", another stated that most of the venereal diseases emanated from this area,, and so Mr Hancock is annoyed because an official visit has been paid to his station, and probably because certain of white employees have been given a severe dressing down, and a stern warning issued to them as to what is likely to be their lot in the future if offenses should be detected.

Then there is the matter of rifles and dogs, when Mr Hancock mentioned this matter to me he said that he thought that several natives at Mulga Downs possessed firearms, but did not think that we would be successful in securing the arms, as the natives were on bush walkabout, both Constable Wightman and myself searched the Mulga Downs native camp, but we discovered no firearms. A native woman informed me that the native men in question were away bush, but she would not admit that they had rifles or guns, personally I consider that this complaint is an admission of very poor control by the manager, I cannot clearly remember the number of dogs in the camp, but I feel certain that there were only three or four, certainly no more than six.

Constable Wightman was to have submitted a full report covering the removal of the other half-caste child, Cella, and I should have done so, but owing to my very frequent quick movements shortly after the episode, I have omitted to do so...

About two miles south of Mulga Downs Station we met a motor truck on which two young white men were travelling, upon stopping, and in reply to my questions they informed the Constable and I that they were both engaged in sinking a new well about ten miles away from Mulga Downs Station, and we eventually ascertained that this was the spot where Minit alias Dorrie, and her parents were to be located. The two white men were named Arthur George Buckle, and James Virgo Hughes, aged twenty-seven and twenty respectively, and they further stated that they were proceeding into the main station to repair certain well -sinking gear that had through constant use become worn and damaged,

From the very first I noticed that the demeanour of both these men was that of persons caught in the act of doing something that they should not do, they both appeared to be most uneasy, and anxious to be on their way, I commented upon this observation to the Constable, and apparently this was no mere fancy because Constable Wightman agreed that something was wrong. During this conversation my attention was directed to the rear portion of the truck, and there I noticed a rather bulky object covered over with a canvas fly, as I watched I thought I could detect movement underneath the fly, Constable Wightman also saw this movement, as the driving side of my car was nearest to the truck I sprang out of the car and pulled the canvas fly partly off the object that it was covering, and disclosed the presence of two native women, and a half-caste child crouched upon the floor of the truck. The half-caste child proved to be Cella, and the two full-blooded women were Selina, single, and Ida, married, both quite young women.

I questioned both white men regarding the presence of these native women on their vehicle, and also requested an explanation as to why these people had covered themselves over with a fly. Buckle stated that they had picked this party up about half a mile along the road, he said that the women had been walking along the road, and had stopped them and asked for a lift back into the Station, he said that he did not know why they had covered themselves up with the fly. The women informed me that they had left the Station earlier in the day to search for bush tucker, and that they had struck the road just before the truck had come along, they then pulled the truck up and asked for a ride back into the Station, they said that they pulled the fly over because they were frightened, but I rather fancy that the two white men told them to do so after sighting my car travelling along the road.

Upon making further enquiries I learnt that the parents of the child Cella were at present in Roebourne attending the local hospital as out-patients. After consultation with Constable Wightman, we both were of the opinion that the present surroundings were unsuitable for this child, and I took charge of her forthwith. We informed the two white men that we would speak further with them upon arrival back at the Station again, we then proceeded on to the new well site.

After leaving the motor truck we then proceeded along the road in the direction of the new well site. When about thirty or so yards from the camp the girl appeared from out of a bush shelter and rushed away into the bush. Constable Wightman immediately jumped from the moving car and it is wholly due to this Officer's energy that we were successful in apprehending this child, after a chase of a hundred yards or so Dorrie was captured and brought back to my car, and placed in with Cella, the foster father came along to the car and in a conversation with me said that he would prefer that this child be taken away and given some education, the mother went bush, but the father gathered Dorrie's clothes together and brought them along to the car. This child was not under the direct supervision of any responsible person, and was living in a camp where three single men were residing, two of these men had already been discovered travelling in company with native women concealed against possible discovery, not very desirable company for a young female half-caste child whose parents, according to

my information had already attempted to trade her to white men, yet Mr Hancock points out that we had no grounds to remove them because they were well clothed and fed, and their parents presumable insured by his station.

Upon return to the main Station, Constable Wightman strolled over to the blacksmith's shop to further interrogate the two white men of the truck episode, xxxxxx and xxxxx. I proceeded to the camp and questioned the inmates, when the Constable returned to the car the informed me that xxxxx had admitted to have had intercourse with the native woman, xxxxx, but would not make any admission regarding his association with native women on the Station. I questioned the women, they informed me that xxxxx and xxxxx had been intimate on various occasions, but I could get no such similar admission regarding xxxxx and the women.

This report is based on concrete facts gleaned from personal investigation, and no trimmings added, and in all fairness to Mr Hancock does he expect to prove these surroundings to be suitable for half-caste female children, and further does he honestly believe that these same children could possibly grow up to be useful members of the community whilst being in daily contact with this type of person, yet in the face of all that I have recounted, and of which he should be aware, he has the audacity to suggest that these children be returned to the Station.

Throughout the District there appears to be a decided undercurrent of feeling against Mulga Downs Station, one station manager in a conversation with me referred to the place as being "the home of combos," and other stated that most of the venereal diseases emanated from this area, and so Mr Hancock is annoyed because an official visit had been paid to his station, and probably because certain of white employees have been given a severe dressing down, and a stern warning issued to them as to what is likely to be their lot in the future if offences should be detected...

I left Roebourne the next day at 10.30 a.m., but before leaving I requested Constable Wightman to endeavour to contact Mr Hancock on arrival and advise him of the removal of the two half-caste children, and the reason for this action, and also to warn him regarding the conduct of certain of his white employees, and point out the possible consequences in relation to the issue of the general station permit. Judging from the letter it would appear that Mr Hancock passed through Roebourne without seeing the Constable...

As regards Mr Hancock's references to the number of half-caste children born at Missions in proportion to full-bloods, coming from such a person this statement is rather amusing, and I would suggest that he gain a little more practical experience regarding this subject before he airs his views any further, or expresses opinions on which he has very scanty, or no knowledge.

In conclusion I would like to say that I found Constable Wightman to be a most capable and thoroughly energetic Officer, and I think that the native affairs of the Roebourne district are quite safe in his hands, he has taken over a district where these matters have been allowed to slide along in any old manner, the Constable is determined that there shall be definite control and he does not go behind peoples' [sic] backs to let this fact be known, in his duties, especially as regards native matters he has brushed up against various residents, but the sensible type realise that the district has improved as a result of control, such as is now exercised.

(letter from Inspector C M McBeath, Department of Native Affairs, Broome, to Commissioner of Native Affairs, Perth, 14 November 1940).

22 October, 1941

To Constable B. P. McGeary
Protector of Natives
ROEBOURNE.

Information had reached me again of the undesirable conditions at Mulga Downs Station. Some months ago the conditions there were investigated and found to be very unsatisfactory, and action was to be taken against the man named xxxxx employed there, but unfortunately there was a misunderstanding between Inspector McBeath and Constable Wightman and a prosecution did not take place for a breach of Section 46 of the Native Administration Act.

My resent information is that the principal offenders are xxxx (with native woman xxxxx), Dignam, and xxxx of the Mount Bruce Station. It is alleged that this latter man visits Mulga Downs and stays two to three days.

Gertie, xxxx and Selina are sisters, and the other women concerned in the allegations are xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, and xxxxx. It is said that Egypt has had a child to a white man named Peet. He has since left the station and is now believed to be cook in the Air Force. Some time ago instructions were issued that Hughes was not to be employed on the station. If he is still so employed, then I think action ought to be taken straight away for a breach of the conditions of the permit. I previously instructed that the permit was to be endorsed stipulating that Hughes was not to be employed. However, in view of these latter allegations it may be wise to delay any action except in respect to Hughes for the time being, and re-investigate the whole of the circumstances of the station. I appreciate the difficulty in doing this, and realise that it is not possible to secure convictions against any of the men concerned unless they are detected in the act of sexual intercourse with the native women concerned. It therefore occurs to me that it might be as well if you could arrange to visit the station in mufti, and remain and raid the native camp and white man's quarters at night time without the station being previously aware of your presence. Quite possibly you could get somebody to accompany you on the journey.

Of course you would have to be regardful of the presence of dogs. They would alarm the natives and white employees.

If you do not think this scheme feasible I can only suggest that the matter remain in abeyance until the appointment of the new Inspector of Natives. He is likely to be appointed shortly and possibly I could arrange for him to visit Mulga Downs and report generally on it within the next two or three months.

I can assure this information has reached me from a fairly reliable quarter, but unfortunately I am unable to disclose the source. Mulga Downs has a bad history for half-castes, I told Hancock, senior, so some months ago. This sort of thing cannot go on. Of course it will mean money to suppress the practice, and possibly the station's permit will be involved or it may even be withdrawn, but I am determined that on this occasion there must be a general clearing up of the situation.

Commissioner for Native Affairs

NOTE: Mr Xyz, the cook on Yanrey Station, Onslow, called to see me this week, in reference to sexual intercourse between station hands and native women. He was lately employed at Mulga Downs but describes the conditions there as very bad indeed, four of five young native girls being concerned with the white station employees. It is going on nearly every night, and the men mainly concerned are xxxxx (with xxxxx), xxxxx and xxxxx. Mr Xyz is naturally reluctant that his name should be known in this matter, and realises that we would meet with difficulties in proving the allegations of sexual intercourse with the native women. However, he gives us the information for what it is worth, and mainly in the hope that we will be able to secure some result in suppressing the undesirable traffic.

Mr Xyz mentioned the names of the women. Three of them are sisters, named Gertie, xxxxx and xxxxx. The other native women are xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx and xxxxx [names redacted].

In Mr Xyz's opinion it would be better to have somebody at the station for a few nights, when the camps could be raided, but care would have to be exercised in regard to any raids owing to the dogs creating alarms.

C.N.A.

22/10/41

3rd February, 1942
To Constable B. P. McGeary
Protector of Natives
Roebourne

Further to my communication of the 22nd October last, which was in regard to Mulga Downs Station general native matters, I had hoped that it would be possible to arrange for an early visit to your district by Inspector O'Neill, the newly appointed Inspector of Natives for the North, but it would now appear that this officer will not be able to visit your district until late in March or April. However, he will proceed to Roebourne as soon as the roads and weather permit.

I am afraid I cannot agree with your suggestion that matters have improved on Mulga Downs Station. Recent advice indicates that sexual intercourse between the white employees and various native women still continues, and therefore I can only conclude that the Manager is making no serious endeavour to comply with my wishes...

In view of the foregoing and in the light of later information, it does not appear that Hancock is treating the situation in the serious manner which it deserves; therefore, I should be pleased if you would arrange to recall the station general permit and impose a condition under Subsection (4) of Section 19.

A/C Commissioner of Native Affairs

Reply to Commissioner of Native Affairs, Perth, from Constable B. P. McGeary, Roebourne,
19.2.1942

Dear Sir,

Quoting file 459/39 and your memo dated the 3rd inst. Re Mulga Downs. I have personally interviewed xxxx and requested his permit to be sent in to have the required condition endorsed and he stated that he has sent the current permit to the Head Office of the Mulga Downs Pastoral Co Ltd Howard Street Perth.