

Chief Protector of Aborigines

1898 – 1936

Details

The Chief Protector of Aborigines was an official role first held in 1898. The Aborigines Act 1897 abolished the Aborigines Protection Board, and created both the Aborigines Department and its head, the Chief Protector. The role was given legal authority by the Aborigines Act 1905. The Chief Protector was the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child in Western Australia to the age of 16 years with the power to remove Aboriginal children from their families and place them in Homes or in 'service' (work). The role Chief Protector became the Commissioner for Native Affairs in 1936.

The role of Chief Protector followed various government officials responsible for Aboriginal 'protection' in Western Australia, known variously from 1832 as the Superintendent of Natives, Protector of Aborigines, Guardian of Aborigines and Guardian of Aborigines and Protector of Settlers.

Henry Charles Prinsep was the first Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1 April 1898. This role was without any legal authority until the passage of the Aborigines Act 1905. Under the 1905 legislation, the position of the Chief Protector was formally established.

Regional protectors were to be appointed with power to grant permits for employment of Aboriginal males less than 14 years and Aboriginal females. No person was to remove any 'aboriginal', any male 'half-caste' under 16, or any female 'half-caste' without the written authority of a protector. The Act provided that regulations may be made for 'the care, custody and education of the children of aborigines and half-castes' and 'enabling any aboriginal or half-caste child to be sent to and detained in an aboriginal institution, industrial school or orphanage'.

According to the Bringing Them Home report (1997), after 1909, the removal power in relation to 'half-caste' children under eight years [was] delegated to police protectors and Justices of the Peace. By making the Chief Protector or Board their guardian, 'they were not in law guilty of wrongful imprisonment of Indigenous children' (pp.220-221).

The Chief Protector of Aborigines, with the government's assistance, utilised regional Aboriginal protectors, mainly magistrates, police and missionaries, to monitor Aboriginal people in their areas...As well as reporting on the general state of Aboriginal communities, they also informed the Chief Protector...of the presence of fair-skinned and half-caste Aboriginal children. Though families hid their children when the Aboriginal protectors or the police appeared, many were caught. These children were then removed and placed in homes, missions or settlements; they were members of the stolen generations. (Van den Berg, p.37)

Charles Frederick Gale became the second Chief Protector of Aborigines on 1 October 1908. Gale came to this position because of an amalgamation between the Fisheries and Aborigines departments (he also had the title of Chief Inspector of Fisheries). The new Department of Aborigines and Fisheries continued to administer the Aborigines Act 1905. According to the website of the State Records Office, the amalgamation of the two

departments was partly due to financial constraints and partly due to the expediency of running as one the two departments whose interests lay mainly in the northern part of the State.

In 1911, with the appointment of a new Chief Inspector of Fisheries, Gale's duties were limited to that of Chief Protector of Aborigines. Gale was dismissed from office in 1915 at an age of 54, ostensibly as an 'excess officer' and was vindicated by a Royal Commission appointed to inquire into his dismissal.

Gale's successor, appointed on 7 May 1915 was Auber Octavius Neville. Neville served as Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915-1936.

Between 1920 and 1926 the Chief Protector was responsible for Aboriginal people north of the 25th Parallel of Western Australia, as Secretary of the Department of the North West. During these years the Fisheries Department was responsible for the welfare of Aboriginal people south of the 25th Parallel.

Neville became the Commissioner for Native Affairs from 1936. It was in this role that Neville promoted most forcefully the policies of Aboriginal assimilation and child removal.

More info

Chronology

- **Chief Protector of Aborigines (1898 – 1936)**
 - Commissioner for Native Affairs (WA) (1936 - 1954)
 - Commissioner of Native Welfare (WA) (1954 - 1972)
 - Department for Community Welfare, State of Western Australia (1972 - 1985)
 - Department for Community Services, State of Western Australia (1 January 1985 - 1 October 1992)
 - Department for Community Development, State of Western Australia (1 October 1992 - 1 July 1995)

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [Beagle Bay Mission \(1895 - 1976\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Beagle Bay Mission.
Date: 1905 - 1936
- [Forrest River Mission \(1913 - 1968\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Forrest River Mission.
- [Lombadina \(1909 - 1975\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Lombadina.
- [Mount Margaret Mission \(1921 - 1975\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Mount Margaret Mission.
- [Norseman Mission \(1935 - 1985\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Norseman Mission.
Date: 1935 - 1936
- [St Mary's Mission, New Norcia \(1848 - 1974\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at St Mary's Mission, New Norcia.
Date: 1905 - 1936
- [Warburton Mission \(1933 - 1977\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Warburton Mission.
- [Child Welfare Department, State of Western Australia \(22 December 1927 - 15 June 1972\)](#)
The Child Welfare Department shared responsibility for the 'care and control' of Aboriginal children who were wards with the Chief Protector of Aborigines.
- [Aborigines Department, State of Western Australia \(1 April 1898 - 31 December 1908\)](#)
The Chief Protector was head of the Aborigines Department.

Date: 1905 - 1908

- [Department of Aborigines and Fisheries, State of Western Australia \(1 January 1909 - 1 January 1920\)](#)
The Chief Protector was head of the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries.
- [Department of the North West, State of Western Australia \(1 January 1920 - 1 January 1926\)](#)
The Chief Protector was Secretary for the Department of the North West.
- [Aborigines Department, State of Western Australia \(1926 - 1936\)](#)
The Chief Protector was head of the Aborigines Department.
- [Sunday Island Mission \(1899 - 1934\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Sunday Island Mission.
Date: 1905 - 1936
- [Aborigines Protection Board, Colony of Western Australia \(1890 - 1898\)](#)
The role of Chief Protector, head of the Aborigines Department, took over the responsibilities of the Aborigines Protection Board..
- [Sister Kate's Children's Cottage Home \(1934 - 1980\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of Aboriginal children at Sister Kate's Children's Cottage Home.
- [Dulhi Gonyah \(25 February 1909 - 1918\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Dulhi Gonyah. Maintenance payments for some children at Dulhi Gonyah were received from the government.
- [Wotjulum \(1934 - 1937\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Wotjulum.
- [Port George IV Mission \(1912 - 1951\)](#)
Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Port George IV Mission.

Related Legislation

- [Aborigines Act 1897, Western Australia \(1898 - 1906\)](#)
The Aborigines Act 1897 created the role of Chief Protector.
- [Aborigines Act 1905, Western Australia \(1906 - 1964\)](#)
The *Aborigines Act 1905* created the role of the Chief Protector.

Resources

- State Records Office of Western Australia, of Western Australia, [An Index to the Chief Protector of Aborigines Files, 1898-1908](#), 1998
- Staples, A.C., [Prinsep, Henry Charles \(Harry\) \(1844-1922\)](#), Australian Dictionary of Biography Online [website], 2006
- [Prinsep, Henry Charles \(1844-1922\)](#), Trove, 2012
- [Neville, A. O. \(Auber Octavius\) \(1875-1954\)](#), Trove, 2012
- Williams, J.G., [Gale, Charles Frederick \(1860-1928\)](#), Australian Dictionary of Biography Online [website], 2006
- [AU WA A67 - Aborigines Department \[1\]](#), State Records Office of Western Australia - Organisations & People, 2015
- [The Aborigines Question](#), Western Mail, 18 February 1905
- [The Roth Report](#), Sunday Times, 12 February 1905
- [The Treatment of Aborigines](#), Western Mail, 14 October 1905
- Aborigines Department, Western Australia, [Collection of typed copies of annual and other reports by and to the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia dated 1910 and 1911](#), 1910 - 1911

Records

Records

- [Files - Chief Protector of Aborigines \(1898 - 1908\)](#)
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