

Inquiry into the treatment of Aboriginal Native Prisoners of the Crown, Crown Colony of Western Australia

1883 – 1883

Other Names: • Rottneest Commission

Details

This Inquiry set out to look at the treatment of Indigenous prisoners and the cost of putting them in prison. It also had to advise on missions and how to look after sick, aged or young Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The report of the Inquiry gave a view of Aboriginal people as unable to look after themselves 'properly'. This led to the policies of Protection, the removal of children and the destruction of traditional ways of living.

WA historian Neville Green has remarked that royal commissions and inquiries into Indigenous matters in Western Australia have generally been motivated by one of two themes: either to identify problems and improve legislation and/or policy; or to 'address concerns of abuse and injustice.' The Inquiry into the treatment of Aboriginal Native Prisoners of the Crown report 'emphasized the tragic impact of settlement on the Aboriginal population', according to Green.

The 'tragic impact' of settlement on the Aboriginal people that the Inquiry identified included:

- Sickness from settlers' diseases
- Aboriginal people dying as a result of these sicknesses
- Not following traditional practices, for example, using tea, flour and sugar from the stations instead of hunting
- Smoking tobacco
- Falling population in the North-West

The Inquiry was not in favour of Aboriginal Reserves: 'The difficulty of making large reserves for natives is, that they have a love for their own locality, and do not like to leave it under any circumstances.' They also found that the Aboriginal people did not want to live in brick houses like the settlers and wanted to live in 'their natural way'.

The Inquiry recommended building more missions with small reserves of land so that young Aboriginal people could be trained to live 'usefully and happily among the white population' as 'a servant of the white man.' Although they supported missions, the Inquiry did not believe that 'much will or can be done' and said that 'the experience of the past and the outlook of the future is far from hopeful.'

More info

Related Entries

Related Concepts

- [Aboriginal Protection in Western Australia \(c. 1832 - c. 1972\)](#)

Date: 1883 -

Resources

- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), [To Remove and Protect](#), 2014
 - [The Inquirer](#), The Inquirer & Commercial News, 3 October 1883
 - Swain, Shurlee, [History of Australian inquiries reviewing institutions providing care for children](#), October 2014
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