

# Royal Commission to Enquire into and Report Upon [inter alia] the Administration of the Aborigines Department and the Condition of the Natives, State of Western Australia

1904? – 1905

**Other Names:** • Roth Report

## Details

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The Royal Commission to Enquire into and Report Upon [inter alia] the Administration of the Aborigines Department and the Condition of the Natives took place in Western Australia from 1904 to 1905. One of the issues investigated in this Inquiry was the type of labour undertaken by young Aboriginal people in institutions. Questions were asked about whether wages were paid to the young people, or whether (and why) wages were withheld. Over 100 years later these questions about withholding of wages were still being asked in Western Australia, resulting in the 'Stolen Wages Reparation Scheme' in 2012.

Western Australian 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.' Green (p.781) described the 1905 *Royal Commission on the condition of the Natives* undertaken by Walter Roth who was the assistant Protector of Aborigines in Queensland:

*[Roth] directed his recommendations towards increasing the authority of the Western Australian Chief Protector, then Henry Prinsep...The Aborigines Act 1905 incorporated many of Roth's ideas and, while addressing the immediate concerns of injustice, such as the exploitation of children and women in the workforce, resulted in statewide discrimination that endured for more than fifty years.*

Father George Walter, who had been in charge of Beagle Bay Mission since 1901, gave testimony to the Roth Royal Commission in 1905. In his testimony, he described the living conditions at Beagle Bay, and the work carried out by children there.

Walter's testimony shows how he thought about missionary work:

*I should like to point out how important for the future of the State of Western Australia and for the future of the black race that the children, both half-caste and black, should be removed from those centres of vice, such as Broome and other places, and brought to this or any other institution which is working in the interests of the blacks. Father Nicholas, of Broome, states that he can find today about 35 half-caste children in Broome alone who really can be looked upon as neglected children, growing up in the vices of Asiatics, whites and blacks.*

Walter asked the Commission to appoint him as a 'local Protector' [of Aborigines] saying that 'perhaps' he already was a Protector but that he had 'received no official notice of such appointment' and stated that 'under the present state of the law, it is practically impossible to carry on earnest mission work.'

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Events

- [Royal Commission to Investigate, Report and Advise upon Matters in Relation to the Condition and Treatment of Aborigines 1935, State of Western Australia \(1934? - 1935\)](#)  
The Moseley Royal Commission upheld the Roth Report's view that 'Aboriginal protection' was a desirable policy.  
Date: 1935 -
- [Stolen Wages Reparation Scheme WA, State of Western Australia \(6 March 2012 - 30 November 2012\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Beagle Bay Mission \(1895 - 1976\)](#)  
The Roth Royal Commission inquired into conditions and practices at Beagle Bay Mission.  
Date: 1905 -
- [Orfelin Ecole \(Orphan School\), Broome \(1895? - 1898?\)](#)  
Father Nicholas Maria Emo ('Father Nicholas'), Parish Priest at Broome, gave evidence to the Roth commission.  
Date: February 1905 -
- [Sunday Island Mission \(1899 - 1934\)](#)  
Evidence in relation to Sunday Island mission was taken by the Roth royal commission.  
Date: 1905 -

#### Related Legislation

- [Aborigines Act 1905, Western Australia \(1906 - 1964\)](#)  
Recommendations from the Royal Commission to Enquire into and report upon the Administration of the Aborigines Department and the Condition of the Natives (Roth Report) were incorporated into the *Aborigines Act 1905*.  
Date: 1905 -

#### Related Concepts

- [Aboriginal Protection in Western Australia \(c. 1832 - c. 1972\)](#)  
Date: 1905 -

### Resources

- [The Aborigines Question](#), Western Mail, 18 February 1905
- [The Aborigines Report](#), Western Mail, 21 March 1935. *Relevance:* Newspaper reports discussed the Moseley Royal Commission (1935) in relation to previous findings in the Roth Report
- [The Roth Report](#), Sunday Times, 12 February 1905

- [The Treatment of Aborigines](#), Western Mail, 14 October 1905
  - [Steps to Improve Lot of Natives in W.A.](#), The West Australian, 21 June 1949
  - [The Aborigines Question. Evidence Taken by Dr. Roth](#), Western Mail, 25 February 1905
  - McDonald, Ashley, [Are We Family? And if so, Can I Still Sue You?](#), Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law, March 2000
  - Whittington, Vera, *Sister Kate: a life dedicated to children in need of care*, 1999
  - Swain, Shurlee, [History of Australian inquiries reviewing institutions providing care for children](#), October 2014
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