

# Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department, State of Western Australia

1953 – 1953

## Details

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'Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks' was a review of child welfare facilities and administrative structures that was commissioned by the Premier of Western Australia in 1953. Subsequently, the Child Welfare Department was restructured, the Seaforth Salvation Army Boys' Reformatory was closed and a new boys' reformatory at Stoneville (Hillston) was opened. Mr Hicks' report has never been publicly released, although parts of it have been reported in the press.

RH Hicks, Director of Child Welfare and Social Services in New South Wales, undertook a review of Western Australian child welfare facilities and administrative structures and practices in 1953.

*"Mr. Hick's investigation and advice will cover almost entirely the actual child welfare angle of the department's activities," said the Premier. Sunday Times, 30 August 1953, p.18*

Hicks' report has never been released, though elements of it were given to the press by the Premier and it was made available, in confidence, to certain members of the Western Australian parliament. Extracts from the *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* show that the report was received by the Premier in 'early October' 1953, with assurances that it would be tabled in due course and, later, that interested members could view it confidentially. Summary information about the recommendations of the report is included in *Hansard* and in limited press coverage.

The Premier (who at that time was also the Minister for Child Welfare) said that the Hicks report was given to the press so that they could publish Hicks' recommendations. However, articles from that period show that most coverage was given to Hicks' comments about child welfare institutions, particularly his criticisms of the Seaforth Salvation Army boys' homes. Almost a year after Hicks' review was completed, *The West Australian* newspaper (7 August 1954, p.4) reported that Hicks:

- found 'conditions at subsidised institutions used by the Child Welfare Department varied, but generally they were not good'
- 'condemned various conditions at the Seaforth Home', finding that boys at Seaforth 'dressed in unclean, secondhand' clothes that were torn or patched, and with hair that 'had not used comb or brush for some considerable time'
- found the buildings at Seaforth were 'dilapidated and depressing' and the dormitories, ablution blocks and dining room were 'grim'
- approved of the schoolrooms and educational program for the boys at Seaforth, noting that the teachers were 'competent, interested and zealous'

- found the 'physical and emotional welfare standards' of children at the Swan Homes were 'very good'.

The article outlined the following recommendations made by Mr Hicks:

- the government should not upgrade Seaforth, but should establish its own 'training school' which could be 'developed on the right lines'
- children who were wards of the State should not be kept in institutions 'for years'
- the Children's Court should be reorganised so that its relationship to the Child Welfare Department was more separate and its 'rather vague ideas' of its 'functions or purposes' were clarified
- the terminology of the 'Child Welfare Act' should be modernised.

The Government also made changes to the structure of the Child Welfare Department (CWD) along the lines recommended by Hicks. Mr JA McCall was appointed as the first Director of Child Welfare, having been seconded from the Education Department where he held the position of District Superintendent of Guidance and Handicapped Children's Branch. The new Director of Child Welfare would, according to the Premier, be 'in charge of the child welfare activities'. The traditional position of Secretary of the CWD was to in future be 'in charge of the administrative work'. A 'new division' of the CWD that would 'specialise in work devoted to the individual care of those migrants, wards of the State, and delinquent children who are in the care of the Child Welfare Department' was outlined to parliament by the Chief Secretary on 4 August 1954.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Organisations

- [Seaforth Salvation Army Boys' Homes, Gosnells \(1920 - 1955\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks reviewed the Seaforth Salvation Army Boys' Homes.  
Date: 1953 -
- [Swan Homes \(1943 - 1959\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks reviewed conditions at Swan Homes in 1953.  
Date: 1953 -
- [Child Welfare Department, State of Western Australia \(22 December 1927 - 15 June 1972\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks made recommendations about the way the Child Welfare Department was organised, its practices and the institutions it subsidised.  
Date: 1953 -
- [Children's Court of Western Australia \(1907 - current\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks made recommendations about the way the Children's Court was organised, its practices and purpose.  
Date: 1953 -
- [Seaforth Salvation Army Boys' Reformatory \(1920 - 1955\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks reviewed the Seaforth Salvation Army Boys' Reformatory.  
Date: 1953 -
- [Anglican Farm School, Stoneville \(1955 - 1961\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks was influential in the government's decision to establish the Anglican Farm School, Stoneville, as a boys' reformatory.

#### Related Legislation

- [Child Welfare Act 1947, Western Australia \(1948 - 2006\)](#)  
The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks made recommendations about the *Child Welfare Act 1947*.

Date: 1953 -

## Resources

- Gill, Alan, [Bad girls do the best sheets](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 2003
  - Peterkin, A. Roy, *The Noisy Mansions : the story of Swanleigh 1868-1971*, 1986. *Relevance*: The Investigation into the Administration of the Child Welfare Department of Western Australia by RH Hicks and the outcomes in terms of the development of Hillston, at Stoneville, is mentioned in 'Noisy Mansions' at pp.146-149
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