During the last couple of weeks there has been a great deal of publicity about aborigines. The full spotlight of publicity has been turned on the question of aboriginal welfare and their future place in Australian society.

The Commonwealth will have an inevitably increasing role to play in these matters.

Following the referendum, placing additional responsibilities on the Commonwealth and following Prime Minister Gorton’s election as Leader, Mr Wentworth has been appointed as Minister in Charge of Aboriginal Affairs.

Over a long time, Mr Wentworth has been a controversial figure, always stimulating and often provocative. But he has had an enduring interest in the welfare of aborigines, and was a foundation member of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

And in the Northern Territory he got down to the basic problems involved in lifting the level of the aboriginal and in educating the public in a wider understanding of the problems that are involved.

Bill Wentworth's theme was how to help the aborigines help themselves and that this is the only approach that will lead to a long-term solution to the position of the aborigines.

He stressed the importance of this view at the different missions we visited... Hermansberg in the Centre, at Groote Eylandt, at Yirrkala in the North East of Arnhem Land, at Maningrida, at Daly River.

He was concerned to find out what the Commonwealth can do to assist in this process.

Some time ago a small tribal group of aborigines, the Gurindjis, walked off the Vestey-owned Wave Hill property because they were dissatisfied with conditions on the property and because they wanted their own place.

Mr Wentworth set off from Darwin to visit them and to discuss their problems.

He listened to the problems of the Gurindjis, who asked for enough land to set up a village and paddocks for a brumby breaking centre.

He listened and later said he believed they should receive and deserve help, although he could not make promises at that time.

He said, 'Like other aborigines, they should be brought to the state at which they look after themselves.'
'It seems to me they have been making moves in that direction and deserve support. They were good types with a native dignity and a good deal of resolution.'

The Northern Territory Pastoral Lessees Association, through its Executive Secretary, cautioned that the subdivision of any property could cause innumerable managements problems and disputes.

But while I know that the view of other people will be well taken into account by Mr Wentworth and the Government, Mr Wentworth will be pressing for what he believes to be right for the aborigines.

Summing up his Northern Territory visit, Mr Wentworth said Australians had given aborigines the feeling that all people were out to exploit them. They had been left with the idea that they could not work for their own good.

He said, 'They have got the idea that if they work somebody else jumps in and takes all the profits. This is not going to be so in the future'.

He strongly believes the aborigines should be made less dependent than they are now.

The Government faced genuine difficulties in education of aborigines, and one of the major problems concerns the lack of motivation which seems to be a retarding factor at about the ages of 12 and 14. Up to this age they hold their place with other children.

This is a problem which my own administration faces in a number of schools in the Northern Territory and it is a problem which Mr Wentworth will be facing at the schools in aboriginal settlements.