

Aborigines working for half dole rate

CANBERRA. — Some Aborigines employed under the Federal Government's Community Development Employment Project earn about half the amount they could get on the dole.

The Opposition spokesman on Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Keffe, believes the scheme may contravene the United Nations anti-slavery convention.

Under the scheme Aborigines work for their dole which is paid as a single cheque to community councils.

Individual Aborigines then forgo the right to draw the dole.

The councils allocate work and decide what wages will be paid.

At a private conference in Darwin earlier this year Aboriginal

From DAVID BROADBENT

Affairs Department officials expressed concern that the department's glowing picture of a pilot scheme in Bamyili, NT, could have misrepresented the project to the Minister, Mr. Viner.

The minutes of the Darwin meeting show Aborigines at Bamyili were averaging \$52 a week under CDEP compared with \$140 a week some with families could receive from unemployment benefits.

This was a result of a serious under-estimation of the number of unemployed Aborigines.

Before the scheme was started at Bamyili 38 men and eight women were receiving unemployment benefits.

But on the first day of the scheme 70 fit, able and willing men turned up for work. After a few days the number had grown to 91.

The director of the Aboriginal Affairs Department programmes branch, Mr. K. Thomas, told the Senate Estimates Committee last week that his department and the Employment and Industrial Relations Department had under-estimated the number of unemployed blacks.

"In fact some who were regarded as hard core unemployed and who we had assessed would never work have willingly and actively participated in the scheme," he said.

Pilot CDEP projects are in

operation at Ernabella and Frengom in South Australia as well as Bamyili.

Mr. Thomas told the committee it was possible and probable that unemployment had been underestimated in every Aboriginal community.

Meanwhile the latest Commonwealth employment statistics show unemployed Aborigines have a hard time getting unemployment benefits.

Officials estimate that 75 per cent of unemployed whites get the dole but only about 53 per cent of unemployed Aborigines got it.

In Victoria 712 Aborigines are registered as unemployed and 256 get benefits.

In New South Wales 3442 Aborigines are registered as unemployed and only 1444 get the dole.