

VOLUME 4  
PART 2

MEMOIRS OF THE  
QUEENSLAND MUSEUM  
CULTURAL HERITAGE SERIES

17 OCTOBER 2008

© The State of Queensland (Queensland Museum) 2008

PO Box 3300, South Brisbane 4101, Australia  
Phone 06 7 3840 7555  
Fax 06 7 3846 1226  
Email [qmlib@qm.qld.gov.au](mailto:qmlib@qm.qld.gov.au)  
Website [www.qm.qld.gov.au](http://www.qm.qld.gov.au)

National Library of Australia card number  
ISSN 1440-4788

NOTE

Papers published in this volume and in all previous volumes of the Memoirs of the Queensland Museum may be reproduced for scientific research, individual study or other educational purposes. Properly acknowledged quotations may be made but queries regarding the republication of any papers should be addressed to the Editor in Chief. Copies of the journal can be purchased from the Queensland Museum Shop.

A Guide to Authors is displayed at the Queensland Museum web site

A Queensland Government Project  
Typeset at the Queensland Museum

## CHAPTER 6

### WOLFRAM MINING AND THE CHRISTIAN CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT<sup>1</sup>

ANNA SHNUKAL

Shnukal, A. 2008 10 17: Wolfram mining and the Christian co-operative movement. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum, Cultural Heritage Series* 4(2): 225-259. Brisbane. ISSN 1440-4788.

During World War II and its aftermath, the Muan wolfram mining venture drew together the Muan communities of Kubin and St Paul's. The venture consisted of five major phases: official beginnings (1938-1940); wartime production (1941-1945); postwar production (1946-1955); co-operative societies (1956-1969); and Commonwealth intervention (1970-1973). Mining on Mua intersects with the beginnings of the Christian co-operative movement in Queensland's Indigenous communities, which seemed for a time to promise economic self-sufficiency and self-directed development independent of government action. Despite its eventual failure, some Muan political leaders still hope that a resurgence in the price of wolfram will lead to the reopening of the wolfram fields and contribute to a sustainable economic base for Islander autonomy. □ *Christian co-operatives (Queensland), Mua (Banks Island), Wolfram mining, Torres Strait.*

*Anna Shnukal, 75 Stanley Terrace, Taringa, Queensland 4068, Australia; received 24 July 2006.*

This chapter charts the history of wolfram mining on Mua, which, like the boat strike of 1936, has become an iconic Islander resistance narrative, although it has not before been told in any detail in print. It celebrates the growth of co-operation between the Muan communities of Kubin and St Paul's in their struggle for social, economic and political autonomy. The historical impetus for the following events arose from a need to unify in the face of a perceived external threat to land and income.

Despite their separate historical origins, ethnic composition, development and administration, the Muan settlements have always been linked in various ways (see Shnukal 'Historical Mua' chapter 4, this volume). Over time the communities became even more intimately connected: socially (through intermarriage, adoption, visiting and similar work experiences as boat crews and later as soldiers); religiously (through supervision by the same Church of England priest); ecologically (sharing traditional environmental knowledge); and ideologically (internalising the Queensland government's template for island development, with which the church was generally in sympathy).

Interwar policy was shaped by racist assumptions about Indigenous socio-political and industrial development and driven by the need to safeguard the financial viability of the Torres Strait island

reserves. The shelling industries, which were arguably Queensland's most successful Indigenous economic experiment, depended for their success upon a coercive policy of marine labour recruitment. A downturn in the late 1930s led to retrenchments and a search for a temporary replacement. Coming as it did towards the end of a decade of global depression and local natural disasters, the Queensland government was not disposed to be generous in funding its remote reserves. A few men had begun small-scale wolfram mining on Mua in 1938 and made returns. World War II broke out in 1939 and within a few years almost all able-bodied male Islanders had enlisted. A new, collective phase in the history of Mua began, the people of Poid and St Paul's collaborating in mining wolfram and establishing a Christian mining co-operative, which would have political and economic consequences reaching beyond Mua. The story of wolfram mining and its links with the co-operative enterprise to which it gave birth are the subjects of this chapter.

#### WOLFRAM MINING IN QUEENSLAND

Tungsten or tungstic acid, which is extracted from wolfram ore, is used to harden steel and therefore vital for weapons manufacture. Like all minerals, its value depends on its relative scarcity and the vagaries of world markets.



FIG. 1. Buziawar, the site of the spring from which water was extracted when mining for wolfram. There used to be houses near the spring used when wolfram mining. Photo: Bruno David, 2001.

Since the end of the Vietnam war tungsten mining has been uneconomic but in war time it can be highly profitable.<sup>2</sup> War times are good times for wolfram producers.

Wolfram mining began in northern Queensland over a century ago. Surveys carried out by the Queensland Department of Mines in Cape York at the turn of the 20th century had mapped metal seams stretching from Cape York through Torres Strait and into Papua New Guinea (John Scott, pers. comm., 2005).<sup>3</sup> In 1905, the state was producing about half the world's tungsten, much of it going to Germany (Kerr, 1991); and in December 1905 the first shipment of wolfram left from Thursday Island for London, mined not in Torres Strait but from a camp about 50km inland from Lloyd's Bay on Cape York.<sup>4</sup>

#### WOLFRAM MINING ON MUA

Deposits of wolfram and other minerals of varying quantity and quality on Mua and its neighbouring islands were the subject of prospecting talk from the 1880s and a few European prospectors regularly visited St Paul's Mission in search of ore.<sup>5</sup> Matilda Shadforth Savage told

Kylie Tennant (1959:196-197) that during World War I Revd Charles Walker of Pacific Industries Limited on Badu had encouraged the people of Mua to look for minerals, telling them to fill flour bags and send them to him: 'So we sent to Mr Walker two flour bag and he say, "You are lying on money." So St Paul's people come and dig too, and from other islands. They dig everywhere.'

The first recorded miner's right paid by an Islander was in late 1926 to Samuel Kawane, one of the founders of St Paul's but no information as to the metal sought is recorded.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1930s a few enterprising men and women began to shallow mine wolfram more systematically, eventually concentrating in three main localities: Ith Hill, Blue Mountain, and Gunagan and Buziawar (Fig. 1) near today's Kubin village.<sup>7</sup> Wolfram mining is first mentioned officially in the Aboriginal Sub-Department's annual report for 1938, when 'small, but remunerative consignments' were 'satisfactorily disposed of through the Chief Protector's office' (Annual Report 1937:13). This early phase of production was not government-supervised, nor were great amounts mined: annual average production

for 1938 to 1940 was officially reported as 3 tons, although the actual yield was apparently higher.<sup>8</sup> With the outbreak of the Pacific war and a surge in demand, the department became more interested in the potential profits of wolfram mining and encouraged it, maintaining close

TABLE 1. Annual wolfram production in Queensland and Mua, 1938-1973.<sup>9</sup> Source: Department of Mines annual reports 1938-1973; Department of Native Affairs correspondence; Shepherd (1942). \*Figures from Shepherd (1942: 12). However, elsewhere total production 1938-1940 is given as 17.6 tons valued at £3036.

Year	Amount (Qld)	Value	Amount (Mua)	Value	People employed (Mua)
1938	150.75 tons	£30,779	1.40 tons	£168	
1939	97.25 tons	£17,590	2.25 tons	£285	
1940	113.5 tons	£20,345	5.60 tons	£1017	
1941	120 tons	£22,627	20.35 tons	£3788	
1942	190.15 tons	£63,296	16.63 tons	£5919	c.50
1943	151.35 tons	£56,778	11.15 tons	£4091	c.42
1944	196.5 tons	£73,445	3.25 tons	£1240	c.13
1945	129.9 tons	£48,176	0.20 tons	£64	
1946	64.75 tons	£20,773	-	-	
1947	63.05 tons	£28,283	-	-	
1948	97.85 tons	£47,351	0.10 tons	£31	
1949	49.4 tons	£20,301	0.25 tons	£70	
1950	38.1 tons	£16,395	-	-	
1951	157.8 tons	£286,103	c.60 tons	£11,600	29
1952	230.05 tons	£382,597	18.65 tons	£32,138	c.100
1953	192.35 tons	£220,971	3.9 tons	£4,504	c.20
1954	58.05 tons	£40,591	0.2 tons	£173	c.20
1955	79 tons	£68,842	0.6 tons	£497	
1956	69.65 tons	£64,602	0.6 tons	£579	
1957	29.55 tons	£16,805	-	-	
1958	7.6 tons	£2,397	-	-	
1959	-	-	-	-	
1960	-	-	-	-	
1961	2.25 tons	£344	-	-	
1962	2.25 tons	£510	-	-	
1963	0.03 tons	£108	-	-	
1964	0.01 tons	£49	-	-	
1965	0.4 tons	£400	-	-	
1966	0.6 tons	£1200	-	-	(unsuccessful mineral lease application lodged)
1967	2.55 tons	£7003	-	-	
1968	2.08 tons	£6359	-	-	(2 companies began investigation of the deposits)
1969	251.1 tons	£869,897	-	-	
1970	203.95 tons	£855,154	-	-	(Moa Islanders' Christian Co-operative Society investigating wolfram deposits)
1971	92.15 tons	£282,085	-	-	(prospecting work carried out; 12 working ½ time)
1972	83.03 tonnes	£168,784	-	-	
1973	211.98 tonnes	£377,800	-	-	



FIG. 2. 'Peter Savage and the seven foot-long black cod or Queensland grouper, speared on the home reef'. Photo taken between 1921 and 1935 by Revd J.W. Schomberg. Source: Revd J.W. Schomberg's photograph collection in author's possession.

supervision of operations. Production peaked during the Korean War in the early 1950s but mining continued until world prices collapsed in 1973 and with them wolfram mining on Mua (Kaye, 1997: 66; Willmott et al., 1973: 69).

We can identify five major phases in the history of wolfram mining on Mua: official beginnings (1938-1940); wartime production (1941-1945); postwar production (1946-1955); co-operative societies (1956-1969); Commonwealth intervention (1970-1973). Annual production figures for Queensland and Mua between 1938 and 1973 are set out in Table 1.

**OFFICIAL BEGINNINGS (1938-1940).** The first mention of wolfram mining by Islanders on Mua in official correspondence occurs on 3 June 1938 when the local protector Cornelius (Con)

O'Leary telegraphed his superior in Brisbane: 'Have about half ton wolfram ore in quartz stop please ascertain Mines and advise best method realisation.' The reply came that the market was weak but that he should send a representative sample of five pounds (2.27kg) for a quality assessment.

Peter Savage (Fig. 2), an enterprising worker from St Paul's Mission, had brought in 16 bags of wolfram containing 10 cwt 2 qrs 8 lbs (approx. 615 kg) for assessment and possible sale.<sup>10</sup> He had recovered the ore by gouging (shallow digging) and wondered whether it was worth continuing. The amount of tungstic acid contained in the first sample was found to be 57.6% and, at current London prices of about £A175 (\$350) per ton for ore of that quality, his wolfram was expected to fetch about £65 (\$130)<sup>11</sup> or about 18 months' boat wages (then £3.5.0 per month). However, it contained too much quartz and needed to be hand-processed to render it suitable for sale. The Brisbane office, happy with the result, responded by offering to arrange for the wolfram to be extracted if regular supplies could be sent south. They designated Frank Hambridge Pty Ltd of Sydney as the buyer and John Burke Ltd quoted 45/- (\$4.50) per ton freight.

In late October, Savage brought in a second consignment of 14 bags of wolfram, which was duly sent from the Aboriginal Industries Board (soon to become the Island Industries Board) and netted him a first payment of £42.11.0 in early November. On 25 November his third consignment of 17 bags was sent south. While Peter Savage was deputed to make the initial enquiries, he is unlikely to have mined alone. A notable feature of wolfram mining was its co-operative aspect and the participation of women (some of whom took out leases in their own names) and children. When Thomas Lowah of St Paul's recalled those early years, he stressed this co-operation:

At Moa someone introduced us to the value of the mineral wolfram. Some years before the War samples had been picked from a certain hill. There was disagreement as to who was the first to have found the wolfram. But we mined it just the same, inexperienced though we were.

There were two groups formed to work this special mineral. One party worked the north side only, while the other worked the south side of the hill. Inexperienced, we walked and

picked from the surface. Most of the wolfram was attached to quartz.

One day while walking and surface picking, I saw a large piece of quartz with a portion of wolfram attached jutting out of the ground. There was more beneath the quartz and pure, large chocolate-like pieces. This was only two feet below the surface. When I dug deeper I found the reef.

I shared this knowledge and experience. Although [crow]bars, shovels and picks were the only tools used, tons of wolfram in bags were bought at T.I. at the price of 2/6 or 3/- per pound (Lowah, 1988: 75).

The year 1938 is significant in that it was the height of the depression and the worst year experienced by Torres Strait fishing industries for 20 years; moreover, there seemed to be little prospect of better times. Prices for marine produce had plummeted and 100 of the 540 Islanders engaged on the boats had been discharged (Annual Report 1938: 13). While under normal

circumstances the protector may not have taken much interest in wolfram mining, in the altered conditions he was keen to encourage it as an alternative source of employment, and one not limited to the people of Mua.

On 14 April 1939, a fourth consignment went south: 18 bags from Peter Savage and 7½ bags from Ellen Kawane, the first woman to market wolfram under her own name. This was followed a month later by 10 bags from Ned Morrison (see Table 2 for a list of recorded consignments). These were St Paul's residents but in early July 1939 Rupea Namai became the first recorded Poid resident to deliver his consignment. Wees Nawia told Sharp (1992: 113) that Kubin people 'walked to the wolfram and they dug it with picks and shovels, and little by little they carried it in bags on their backs to the rowing dinghies and sold it at Thursday Island.'

Australia entered World War II on 3 September 1939 but, contrary to the department's pessimistic forecasts, the marine industry improved during

TABLE 2. Wolfram despatched from Mua, July 1938-May 1942 (approx. gross weight per bag = 41 kg).<sup>12</sup> Source: Department of Native Affairs records (incomplete).

Date	Consignee(s)	Community	No. of bags
7/1938	Peter Savage	St Paul's	16
8/1938	Peter Savage	St Paul's	14
11/1938	Peter Savage	St Paul's	17
4/1939	Peter Savage	St Paul's	18
4/1939	Ellen Kawane	St Paul's	7½
5/1939	Ned Morrison	St Paul's	10
7/1939	Ned Ware	St Paul's	10
7/1939	Ned Morrison	St Paul's	6
7/1939	Rupea	Poid	5
9/1939	Harry Captain	St Paul's	8
10/1939	Ned Morrison, Ned Ware, Ellen Kawane	St Paul's	18
	Amo, Kaur, Opeta	Poid	
2/1940	Ned Ware, Nelam Kris, Ned Morrison	St Paul's	not known
7/1940	Ned Morrison, Salome Gela,	St Paul's	13
	Powanga Savage,	Badu	
	Amo	Poid	
9/1940	Harry Captain, Ned Morrison, Ned Morrison & Co.	St Paul's	22
	Amo, Kaur, Isaka, Rupea	Poid	
	Powanga	Badu	
2/1941	Opeta, Jacob Gabey, Wasaga, Napota, Manas, Amo, Parisa, Isaka, Rupea, Gaiba, Rattler, Kaur, Elikem Tom, Adidi Wigness, Japanea, Powanga Savage, Jacob Baira, Tom Cowley, Fred Bowie, Jimmy Luffman, Harry Captain		48
5/1942	Nelam Kris, Ned Morrison	St Paul's	not known

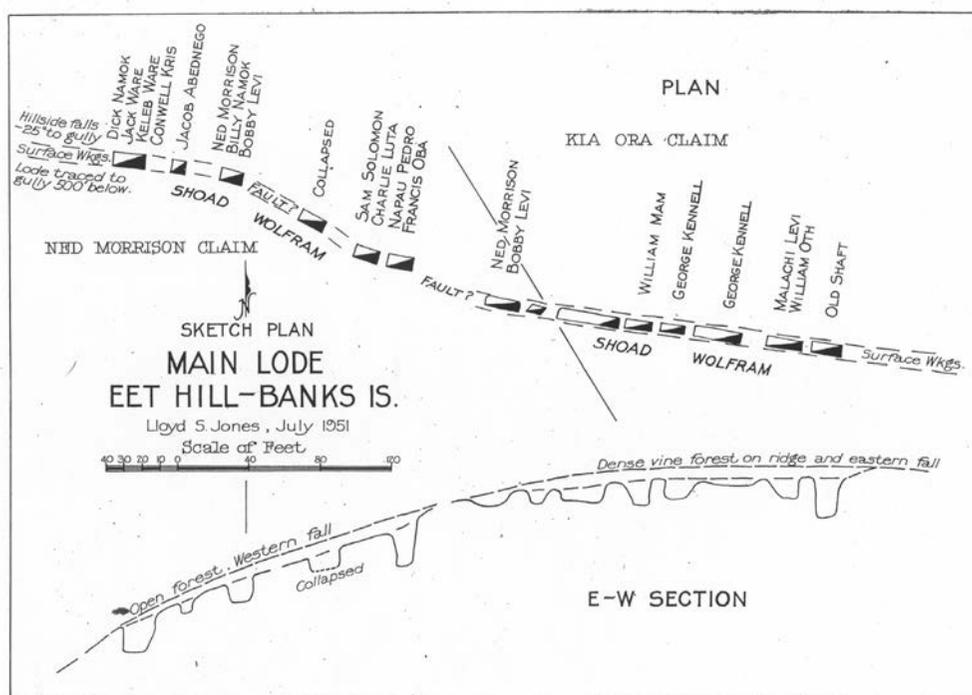


FIG. 3. Map of main wolfram-producing claims, Ith Hill. Source: Jones (1951: 725).

that year and some men rejoined the boats. Those who stayed ashore on Mua worked the local wolfram deposits, receiving a return 'similar to wages offered on the boats' (A.B.M. Review 1 August 1939:149-150). This was also the year in which Islanders were rewarded for their test of nerves with the Department of Native Affairs (DNA) during the 1936 boat strike by passage of *The Torres Strait Islanders Act* of 1939, which recognised them as a separate people and conferred on them a system of self-government under which they would 'control a considerable portion of the domestic life of their communities which previously was the responsibility of the government teachers' (Annual Report 1936: 14).

The first Torres Strait Islanders' Conference had met on Masig (Yorke Island) on 23 August 1937 to list demands which were to lead to the 1939 Act; at the second conference, which took place on Mabuyag from 22-25 May 1939, one of the issues discussed was exactly who was allowed to mine wolfram on the Muan reserve. It was agreed that the Poid Councillors (on whose land the deposit was located) had the sole right

of control (Torres Strait Islanders' Conference minutes 1939).

By 1940 wolfram mining from shallow alluvial workings had become the chief source of income for the people of St Paul's (Year Book 1941: 18). Although only one claim was registered (by Bana Kris, Malachi Levi, Samuel Kawane and Nasona Kris, all from St Paul's), returns supplied by local dealers to the Thursday Island mining warden indicated that other Islanders were also mining wolfram (Department of Mines Annual Report, 1940: 58). John Scott (pers. comm., 2005) tells me that the men were now selling their wolfram in hotels on Thursday Island: 'They would bring the heavy bags to the hotels, where the hoteliers would buy them and sell them on.'<sup>13</sup> There was increasing dissatisfaction with the department among the miners, who were experiencing considerable delays in settlement. Responding to a threat by the St Paul's men to dispose of their wolfram to any reliable firm that would guarantee sales within 60 days of shipment, the local protector, T.R. Pryor, wrote five increasingly exasperated memos between November 1939 and February 1940 requesting, if not actual payment, then at least

some official notification of the amounts so that he could make advances; but it was not until 2 April 1940, six months after the November shipment, that he received word that a cheque for the considerable sum of £124.2.6 (\$248.50) was on its way. Pryor, anticipating increased production, went so far in a letter dated 29 May 1940 as to suggest bypassing the current buyer and shipping the ore direct either to Port Kembla or Broken Hill:

For the benefit of your present buyer you might add that because of the delay in payment, much of the wolfram is being diverted through other channels and it will not be long before he is receiving little or none at all as the only natives which we can compel to market their wolfram through the Protector are Torres Strait Islanders, Saint Paul's men being free to make their own arrangements subject to the Superintendent of the mission.

Another cause of discontent among the Poid people was alleged claim-jumping. The Protector responded by making a short trip in October 1940 in company with two experienced miners, Ryder and Gordon, who inspected the find and gave advice on working methods. As a result of the visit, a set of rules based on Queensland Mining Regulations were drawn up and posted on the site, all current disputes settled and a number of claims pegged. This exercise was taken by all concerned as official sanction of existing claims and claim holders and the proposed extinguishing of their rights became the catalyst for the formation of a mining syndicate in 1969 (see below). Ryder and Gordon also proved that alluvial wolfram was present and easier to obtain in larger quantities than the existing method of picking from 'leaders.' However, they advised that the deposits were neither rich nor extensive enough to warrant importing machinery.

**WARTIME PRODUCTION (1941-1945).** Having established their right to determine who could mine wolfram on Aboriginal Reserve R.37, the Poid people were encouraged by the department in 1941 to begin prospecting in force. This was the beginning of the department's supervision of production through the Island Industries Board (IIB). The 48 bags of wolfram consigned by IIB that year for processing and transshipment south were mined almost exclusively by the inhabitants of Poid. By then a wide area was being gouged with picks and mattocks and treated by hand, mainly by the miners' mothers, wives, sisters and children. By the time of Tennant's visit in mid-1957 the

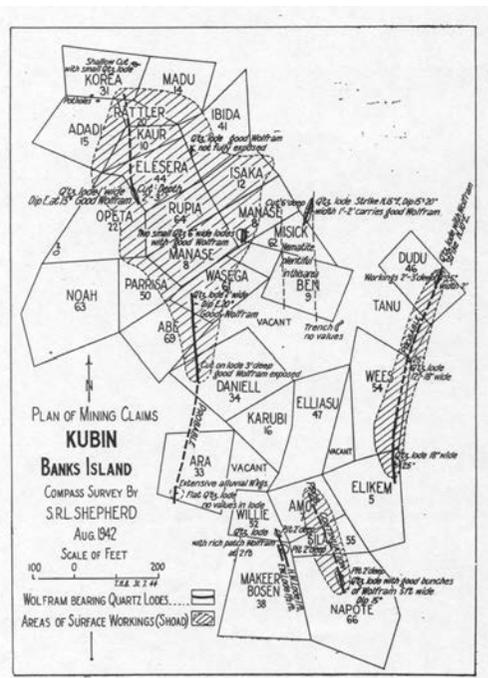


FIG. 4. Plan of mining claims near Kubin on Mua, 1942. Source: Shepherd (1942: no pages).

area was covered in 'great mango trees that had grown from fruit the people ate as they worked. Under these trees were depressions like grass-grown bomb craters where the Islanders had dug for wolfram' (Tennant, 1959: 194).<sup>14</sup> Matilda Savage told Kylie Tennant how 'men, women, children all come out here Friday afternoon, Saturday afternoon, dig wolfram', which was 'like big bars of soap', heavier than stone. At first they washed it in a large pool, which by the time of Tennant's visit had dried up, and then strained it. Matilda's son had the idea of taking the wolfram down to the sea to be washed by the tide and picked up as the tide receded and soon everyone was following his example (Tennant, 1959: 194).

The department was still unable to solve the ongoing payment delays and many of the St Paul's people turned to others willing to pay more promptly. No comparisons can therefore be made between the volumes produced by the inhabitants of each village, since bags sold privately by St Paul's people were not recorded by the department. The delays fed longstanding suspicions of the department's probity and competence, while at the same time adding considerably to its

workload in recording accounts and dealing with enquiries. By the time the final payment arrived, some miners had left the field to take up other work or, in one case, died. A partial solution was IIB's offer to purchase the wolfram immediately through a system of advances at a price based on the last known price for average quality ore but the protector continued to advise that a more prompt buyer should be found.<sup>15</sup>

Japanese entry into the war and the subsequent evacuation of non-Islanders from 28 January 1942 signalled Torres Strait's full entry into the war. The marine industries were closed down after most of the vessels were requisitioned for naval duties. The formation of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion on Thursday Island and a general call for enlistment solved the labour problem but war also brought increased demand for wolfram. On 21 April 1942 the price of wolfram concentrates was fixed by contract between England and Australia at 110 shillings per unit for concentrates containing not less than 65% tungstic acid and remained at that level until the expiry of the contract on 15 February 1946, 6 months after the end of the war (Department of Mines Annual Reports, 1942-45). By mid-1942 miners were receiving approximately £200 per ton, which rose to £350 by the end of the year, and Mua had become one of Queensland's leading producers.<sup>16</sup> Responding to the 'urgent necessity for increasing wolfram production' for the national war effort, the Department of Mines sent a senior geologist, S.R.L. Shepherd, to examine the deposits and recommend ways of increasing production.<sup>17</sup> However, with most of the men soon to enlist, it was considered premature to install a battery. There was also the 'problem' of the regulation that only men from Poid could hold claims: on 4 June 1942 W.C. Curtis, Manager of the IIB, advocated opening wolfram mining to 'more capable men than are now engaged in the game.' This he hoped to do 'without ill-feeling', presumably by appealing to the Islanders' desire to act in the national interest. This nicety of feeling was not shared by the deputy director, who on 10 June 1942 replied that '[i]n a job of international importance such as this, discrimination against Torres Strait labour including St Paul's men cannot be agreed to if such will hinder production' and Curtis was to 'make this plain' to the Mines Department officer.

Shepherd spent from 27 July to 6 August 1942 inspecting and surveying likely wolfram

sites on Mua. His report contains a plan of 30 mining claims, all but Tanu Nona's held by men from Poid (Shepherd, 1942) (see Figs 3-4).<sup>18</sup> Shepherd was on balance enthusiastic about the prospects for increased production, identifying Blue Mountain, Ith Hill and the Kubin area of Gunagan and Buziawar (Teske, 1991: 19)<sup>19</sup> as the localities of wolfram deposits, and his main recommendations – to hire a supervisor to direct operations, advise on the sinking of shafts and train the miners in the use of explosives – were agreed to. By mutual agreement Kubin would be reserved for Poid, Ith Hill for St Paul's and Blue Mountain for Badu. The whole operation was to be systematised: a warden's court was set up, headed by the Poid Council chairman, Wees Nawia, with committee representation from Poid, St Paul's and Badu; the Islanders' claims would be fully legitimised through leases; all expenditure would be charged against the wolfram produced; and a revised set of by-laws which mollified Poid sensibilities was drawn up.<sup>20</sup> The gouging method, while not optimal, suited wartime conditions; erecting a plant for bulk treatment would almost certainly be attacked by enemy planes.

Now that wolfram production was recognised as 'an essential war industry,' new rules were required. According to one official, probably Curtis, writing in September 1942, 'while the rights of individuals will be preserved as much as possible, the production of wolfram is the first consideration<sup>21</sup>:'

1. The control of production is with Island Industries, Badu Island.
2. Island Industries will provide plant, horses, tools and equipment (but not individual's tools), sea transport, freight and shipping.
3. Island Industries will provide and pay a white mining supervisor, who will direct and supervise production.
4. Island Industries will pay for wolfram in the Badu store at 2/8 per lb, viz. £304 per ton. Any further increase in market price shall be paid for at market price less 20%.
5. These payments are subject to adjustment of which producers shall receive due notice from the manager.
6. After meeting all expenditure and anticipating further expenditure on plant etc. distribution of profits, if any, will be made as approved by the Governor in Council.
7. The by-laws covering mining on Mua Island are accepted, but may be altered by the Manager

giving notice to the Warden's Court of such alteration should the war emergency situation and the necessity for greater production make such necessary.

8. Because this is a war industry no fee, charge or rental can be made by Poid people on any miner from Poid or other islands.

The man chosen as supervisor was an experienced miner, T.J. (Tom) Ahern, but his appointment was not finalised for some time. Mua lay within the military zone under Fortress Commander Colonel Langford, whose increased requirements for army recruits directly conflicted with mining labour requirements. Langford's reluctance to support the project was understandable: he had to consider competing demands for supply and transport of equipment, not to mention the potential problem of up to 200 men living virtually unsupervised on Mua. Army officials were not at this stage convinced of the Islanders' loyalty, suspecting that it was compromised by their long and close association with the Japanese. Langford could not in the end block Ahern's appointment but he could delay it, failing to reply to requests for assistance and seeking ever more information. Curtis had already discussed the matter with Langford at some length, stressing his desire to co-operate fully with the military authorities and assuring him that no gear or plant would be shipped to Thursday Island and the number of men to be employed would 'not materially exceed those now working.' All the department could do officially was call on other authorities for assistance and stress the urgency of the project. On 6 October 1942 the Under Secretary for Mines wrote to army headquarters in Brisbane, stating that Ahern's appointment was supported by his department as well as the Commonwealth Controller of Minerals Production and pointing out the 'urgent need for wolfram for war purposes, the importance of which you appreciate.' Meanwhile, the department was still fending off proposals from European prospectors: there was no question of opening Mua to them, since Indigenous administration policy remained unchanged.

On 15 October 1942 Curtis wrote to the department that the military authorities were proposing to engage all able-bodied men, including those engaged in mining. Langford had finally agreed that Ahern might come to Thursday Island to report to him personally on the extent of likely development and the amount of labour and transport required for maximum production. As a stop-gap measure he gave permission for 25

young men, exclusive of any from St Pauls, to continue mining on a reduced scale, along with several above the age for enlistment.<sup>22</sup>

In early November 1942 the director of the Department of Native Affairs reported to the Department of Health and Home Affairs on Ahern's wages and conditions, noting that his employment could be terminated by giving one month's notice on either side. Current production was then averaging 8 cwt (406kg) per week but this was expected to increase under his supervision to at least one ton per week, to be sold at approximately £350 per ton.<sup>23</sup> A major change was that all production would now be purchased by IIB at £250 per ton, the difference to be paid as Ahern's wages, freight costs, insurance, tools and equipment, bags and analysis charges, and any final profits would 'be distributed as approved by the Governor in Council in accordance with the requirements of the *Torres Strait Islanders Act* and in keeping with the procedure of distribution on existent trading activities.' In practice, this meant that the balance would be paid annually to the miners, minus an unspecified reserve retained for development. Thus, with an eye to a possible postwar replacement industry, the department had reasserted its economic control and oversight over wolfram production and Islander labour.

After many delays Ahern arrived on Mua on 20 January 1943. He made a close surface examination of the three areas to be worked and was 'greatly impressed with the possibilities.' He chose Kubin, not yet a permanent settlement, as the locality for immediate development and requisitioned equipment to open Ith Hill and Blue Mountain. On 1 February 1943 he began operations on the Kubin field. The idea was to employ island and mainland labour surplus to army requirements and in late April 1943, at the end of an extremely wet *kuki* (wet season), a general call went out throughout the islands for men to come to Mua to dig. They came from Badu, Mabuyag, Saibai, Nagi<sup>24</sup> and even Mer and, if they could not find a billet, they camped on the beach in tents or makeshift humpies.

Everyone went to the wolfram. They just walked. Each family sold its own bags of wolfram in TI. One man used to be there to buy it and IIB took it across by dinghy. It was hard; we got no outboards in those days, only sailing dinghy. So we used picks and shovels. Oh dear me, hard work! Some families went out there and camped; big place for camp out there. All of Kubin and St Paul's, even some people from Mabuig come out, Boigu,

Saibai; everyone come out and camp round there, some from Murray Island, Badu [...] all the families, some in tents and some got bark and made bush houses. Bushfires burnt it all out later. One St Paul's man got a truck and buy all the wolfram and take it in cargo boat, *Torres Herald II*, the Anglican Church supply boat.<sup>25</sup> Several hundred people were there. That's why people still talk about that wolfram mining today (Wees Nawia to Sharp, 1992: 130).

On 10 April 1943 Ahern reported that production during the first two months of mining operations at Kubin was estimated at 3½ tons, 2 tons of which was brought in by miners working independently and 2 tons 3 cwts had been sent to IIB. The wet season, which every year brought wolfram production to a standstill, had retarded the sinking of shafts and prevented the exploitation of Ith Hill, which could only be reached through swamps and long grass. A second reason for ignoring the Ith Hill and Blue Mountain reefs was the shortage of labour. Ahern therefore decided to concentrate on Kubin on account of the camps which had been established nearby. Tanu Nona from Badu, a strong supporter and client of the department, whose boats had been requisitioned for war work, was made foreman and the 20 registered miners were placed under his supervision. Nona told Margaret Lawrie that he learned the use of dynamite and winch from Tom Ahern and took out a claim at Blue Mountain but that he became ill and returned permanently to Badu. He named the wardens as Wees Nawia, Mikaire (Mika) Newie and Dick Namok (Lawrie, 1973).

At this stage, reported Ahern, the main reef would not 'average more than eight inches of quartz with patches showing wolfram occasionally and other places nothing.' This meant that the miners would have to work at depth and he was unsure whether the Kubin leaders would agree, despite all surface indications of excellent yields. Ahern viewed Kubin essentially as a training ground for mining at depth at the Blue Mountain and Ith Hill lodes, which he expected to maintain payable contents with a high proportion of ore. He was particularly impressed by the potential promise of wide-reefed Ith Hill, where wolfram was visible to a depth of 15 ft. Moreover, three promising new reefs had been recently located on the north side and a few bags had already been taken from surface scratching. What was needed, he argued, was a treatment plant on site. 'Under present conditions some of it is carried home in

bags, tins and various transports, for napping, washing and classing and jigging and may not appear in the finished articles for weeks.' Only then was it shipped to Badu for weighing and sorting and finally transshipment south from Thursday Island.

Most of the wolfram was dug out with crowbars and shovels in the open cut method and very little was more than a few metres down. The Torres Strait Islanders were unfamiliar with mining down deep and preferred working on the surface. However, at Ith Hill the mine was underground and some of the Islanders learned to use dynamite to extract the wolfram-bearing quartz.

Because many men had joined the army, the number of miners was limited to 20 or 50. This number often swelled during the holiday time when children and wives joined their husbands on the field. Many Islanders set up rough shelters near the mine-sites and only came home to the village when they had enough wolfram to sell.

Quartz containing the wolfram was dug out using a crowbar. This was then put in a bag and carried back to camp or home. A canvas sheet was spread on the floor and the quartz pounded by a hammer or tomahawk head. The crushed rock was washed in a dish and the wolfram which separated out was tipped into a tin.

When sufficient wolfram was obtained it was packed into small bags and taken or sent to the Island Industries Board store that operated at Dogai on Badu Island. At this time the Islanders were getting 50 cents a kilogram. The wolfram was then shipped to Thursday Island and further south (Teske, 1991: 19-20).

On 14 April 1943 the Queensland Governor, Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, visited Badu. Promising that no decisions would be made about the future of Torres Strait Islanders without consultation with island Councillors, he held an unprecedented private meeting with representatives from Badu, Poid and St Paul's. With Curtis, Tanu Nona and Ahern, he visited the store house for wolfram and praised Ahern's work. He 'went into the question of the payment made to the natives, and found that the distribution was entirely satisfactory' (Wilson, 1943).

By mid-June 1943 10 to 12 tons of wolfram concentrate had been shipped south at £370 per ton, of which the miners received £260 per ton as advance payment. It was expected that, with

the labour available,<sup>26</sup> June to December 1943 would maintain production of a further two tons per week, totalling 60 tons for the year. Based on these optimistic forecasts and again stressing the value of wolfram to Australia's war effort,<sup>27</sup> the director of Native Affairs wrote to his Under Secretary on 21 June 1943 recommending that representations be made to the Commonwealth authorities for an initial release of 100 Islanders from the Torres Strait forces.<sup>28</sup> This would bring the workforce up to 170 and eventually to 200, so as to increase yearly production to 120 tons, 'with the possibility of ultimately reaching 200 tons, as the men became experienced in hard ground mining.'<sup>29</sup> Ever mindful of postwar employment needs, he also urged that a Mines Department geologist investigate further possibilities at Mua as well as Dauan (Cornwallis Island). The department was particularly keen to discover whether there were payable quantities on Dauan with a view to eventual employment for the top western islands.

With increased production and increased supervision came more detailed record keeping. Curtis wrote to the director of Native Affairs on 26 July 1943 to report that the profit on operations to 31 January 1943 amounted to £1228.11.9 and that the IIB had decided, after consultation with the men and with the government's approval, to distribute all excess profits (£1169.16.6) to the miners – 244 men, women and children – according to individual production.<sup>30</sup> Since then, however, profits had considerably decreased. By September the quantity on hand was a mere 3¼ tons, with a further 2 tons remaining to be collected from the field. The decrease was in large part explained by reductions in the workforce through enlistment and transfers, down from 67 in July to 50 in September and most of those were not working at full capacity. In August 1943 the Poid people were resettled at Kubin (Beattie, 1944), said to be a healthier location but no doubt influenced by its proximity to the wolfram field; the 26 Poid men were busy constructing the new village and could mine only part-time. The workforce was also depleted through a severe outbreak of malaria among the Badu and Saibai Islanders living at the Gerain camp near their diggings at Blue Mountain, so it was decided to close the camp and move the men closer to the diggings at Ith Hill. These were now in production and showed great promise. As for the St Paul's men, they worked at most only four days per week, the fifth day being occupied in village work. Curtis noted too 'that their ambitions do not extend further

than obtaining sufficient in cash to feed and clothe themselves for the immediate future.'<sup>7</sup> Thus, if the department wished to increase production, more men had to be employed.

From 14-18 November 1943, O. Anderson, Inspector of Mines at Herberton, together with Ahern and departmental officials, inspected the diggings at Mua. His report of 25 November 1943 (Anderson, 1943) was far less enthusiastic than Curtis's memorandum to his superiors. Anderson expressed concern at the disappointing production figures for 1943 and stated 'there is little chance of improved production with the present method of mining.'<sup>7</sup> He noted that practically all the men on the wolfram field had been called up, leaving only about 12 or 13 men still working. Few additional improvements to the mines had been carried out and the Islanders in general were disinclined to use any kind of machinery, even hand jigs, or a treatment plant, fearing the loss of even a small amount of wolfram; nor were they interested in making more than a certain amount of money. While modern mining and treatment methods would greatly increase production, given the comparative costs involved, the existing mainland fields would show a much better return.

The report details the various wolfram fields in operation in late 1943 and the numbers of men involved. Eight men were working the numerous shallow shafts of the Kubin field but no men were working the Gerain lode, which ran south of and parallel to the Ith Hill lode and which contained the deepest workings on the island. No recent work had been done on Tanu Nona's Blue Mountain lode but Iona Asai and Keri Futuna from Saibai had opened up a continuance of this lode on the eastern side of Ith Hill and were recovering wolfram. The most promising lode, at Ith Hill, required systematic prospecting to determine the possibilities of the deposit. In two or three places the men were working at a depth of 12 to 14 feet (3.66m to 4.27m) but the other shafts were much shallower. Ith Hill, although technically not within their own reserve, was worked by St Paul's people, and they strongly objected to others taking up claims there. That they could exclude others was a result of weakness in the mining laws, some of which Anderson recommended be deleted. Other recommendations included limiting the size of each claim to 50ft by 50ft (15.25m by 15.25m) except on alluvial ground, ample for a family to work;<sup>31</sup> removing the right of a claimholder who did not work it for one week without warden's

permission; and giving the warden authority to order certain work for safety reasons. Islanders called up by the army would retain their rights to their claims.

Of particular concern to Anderson, apart from ineffective supervision and absenteeism, was the Islanders' unwillingness to adopt modern mining methods. Excellent seaman they may be, 'but mining is a new calling to which they are ill-suited.' They refused to use the jig and spring dolly which Ahern had erected at Kubin, nor would they use picks, favouring light crowbars instead. 'When a patch of ore is found, they gouge it out and keep the working area as small as possible.' Ahern had used explosives to create the larger workings but Islanders would dig out only as much ore as they could treat on the same day:

Quartz containing wolfram is picked out and put in a bag. Particles of wolfram, even down to minute sizes, are picked out and put in a tin which is then called pure wolfram. The bag of ore, usually from 6 to 20 per cent, is taken home for treatment by the wives. A ground sheet is spread out and the native women sit down with an axe blade or flat stone as a crushing block and a tomahawk head (without a handle) is used to crush the stone. Care is taken by tapping the stone lightly to prevent particles flying and so wasting wolfram. The dirt is then washed in a prospector's dish [...] It is realised that Mr Ahern's job is a difficult and unenviable position. The natives own their own mines and work them in their own way and Mr Ahern has no power to order them to work in any particular way, but only advise them, and, as is the case, they can ignore his advice' (Anderson, 1943: 3).

Curtis took issue with some of the details in Anderson's report in a memorandum dated 31 December 1943. He stated that there were 60 men, not 12 or 13, available for wolfram work, of whom 41 were of military age and 19 over military age. He reiterated the special circumstances of that year, namely the malaria outbreaks and the building of the new village, but had to admit that, apart from a committed few, the miners were not highly motivated to increase production: 'Under the present regulations, it is not possible to force the men to put in the 44 hours per week which is desired, nor is it possible to force them to work to correct methods.' Curtis proposed that as an experiment Ahern should be given until the end of February to train a number of young men to test the value of the Ith Hill field and demonstrate that greater production

could be achieved by more modern methods. The foremen and wardens were dismissed<sup>32</sup> and the St Paul's claim-holders warned that, if they did not attend more regularly, the military authorities would be informed that they were no longer required for wolfram work. Ahern's experiment was approved but on 6 January 1944 he tendered his resignation, citing not only his own but everyone else's inability to force the Islanders to work their claims in any systematic manner. Ahern left Mua on 4 February 1944 and Curtis handed over supervision of mining operations to Mikaire Newie,<sup>33</sup> 'a very reliable Islander [...] who will handle, when necessary, gelignite, caps and fuse for blowing.' Newie became a part-time employee of the IIB and was paid £8.0.0 per month.

The department's plans for future wolfram production received another setback in late January 1944, when the Commonwealth Controller of Minerals Production, no doubt influenced by Anderson's pessimistic report and the ample supply of wolfram already to hand, refused to request the release of men from the army. Under the changed market circumstances no new Queensland production was being encouraged and existing mines were being closed down. At the August 1944 councillors' conference at Masig, Wees Nawia blamed the failure of the venture on 'too many bosses and disputes between Poid and St Paul's people on the question of boundaries and ownership.' His proposal that the wolfram area on Mua be officially declared a mining field, 'that it be worked and developed in accordance with state mining laws' and 'that a competent European miner be engaged to supervise labour and production and to advise on the necessary material required to develop the field' was carried unanimously (QSA SRS1139/1/86).

Foreseeing that the 800 men then in the army would ultimately be discharged onto the labour market, the local director wrote on 27 September 1944 that 'the desire [of the department] is that they should be employed wherever possible in the Torres Strait area, and wolfram mining properly controlled would be a means of absorbing a portion at least of this labour.' The previous methods would have to be abandoned and new projects would have to be worked 'in accordance with the mining laws of Queensland and not as hitherto prevailed at the whim of individual Islanders.' Moreover, in the interests of any new mining venture, Mua's status as a reserve would have to be cancelled and the embargo on non-Muans removed, *a proposal which had*

*the support of the councillors' conference.* If markets continued favourable, possibly as many as 100 men might find employment as wolfram miners.

In either late 1943 or early 1944 the IIB had distributed the surplus profits of the Muan mining venture (£1169) to the miners, as they had requested. Complicating the matter was the fact that the board had initially paid an amount less than fair valuation of the wolfram (based on subsequent sale). In September 1945 the department received a reply from the Queensland Solicitor-General to its query about the legality, under Section (2) of the Schedule of the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939*, of distributing the profits to only one section of Islanders, namely the miners, rather than for the general welfare of all Islanders. It was told that this was illegal under the Act, that the profits should have been distributed to various island funds for use in capital formation, such as bridge building and road construction and repairs. The department responded by preparing an amendment to the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939* which retroactively legalised the distribution of all IIB profits since the original Act.

POSTWAR PRODUCTION (1946-1955). In September 1945 the Pacific war officially ended and the need for strategic minerals passed.<sup>34</sup> World market uncertainty meant around 50% of the previous price for wolfram – it was not stabilised until late 1946 – and a decrease in production. However, with no vessels available on Muan for shelling, P. Jensen, the new manager of IIB held a discussion on 4 April 1946 with Jacob Gabey, Manu Nona and Wees Nawia, three of the leading Kubin men, about the possibility of recommencing wolfram mining. They 'agreed that the price offered viz. 2/- per lb, on a 65% assay was most reasonable and that efforts would immediately be made to induce miners to commence operations.' Harry Captain indicated that there were men from St Paul's who were also interested in mining. By 26 April Jensen was advised that work was in progress but only a small quantity had been taken. The St Paul's people also were eager to begin mining again and Harry Awassie Captain, recently discharged from the army, advised that a team of men were prepared to begin mining as soon as they were offered a firm price. This time the ore was to be sent direct to Sydney, rather than to State Stores in Brisbane, forwarding it to Frank Hambridge's

Brisbane agent to conduct an analysis and then despatching it to Sydney for final payment.

Despite IIB encouragement and the initial lack of alternative employment, there was little real interest. On 31 October 1946 Jensen, now Protector of Islanders, wrote to his superior that he had visited Muan on three occasions 'in an effort to get any people there interested but without success.' He cited as the main cause the higher rate of wages being paid in the marine industry: 'at St Paul's and Kubin there are not five able-bodied men unemployed' and there appeared to be no prospect of obtaining labour for wolfram mining.

The department, however, did not entirely abandon the idea of resurrecting wolfram mining on Muan and in June 1949, an independent investigation was carried out by Jack Gordon, who had first inspected the field in October 1940. According to his report, the potentialities of the deposits had been grossly exaggerated and all easily accessible ore had already been taken. Before any decision was taken to work the deposits, Gordon recommended that they should be evaluated by a geologist from the Queensland Department of Mines. The idea was canvassed at the 1949 Torres Strait Islander Conference, where the Councillors agreed that in any future scheme involving an outside company Torres Strait Islanders must have preference as miners, truck drivers and tractor drivers; they should be paid a mining award wage; and the company would provide all engineers, technical foremen etc. The Department of Mines was again approached 'as to appropriate action for the greater development of the wolfram deposits on Muan (or Banks) Island, and the proper mining procedure to be followed.'<sup>35</sup> The price by then was £4.15.0 per unit and had been dropping all year.

Matters remained relatively unchanged on Muan in 1950: in the postwar 'buoyant' pearlshell market most of the men were employed in the marine industry. Throughout 1950, however, unsettled world conditions led to 'unprecedented' prices for wolfram: in January 1950 it fetched £4.15.0 per unit; in June £7.5.0; in December £16.0.0 (Department of Mines Annual Report, 1950: 5). Prices surged to £30 per unit and all known wolfram mines were taken up, including the Ith Hill and Kubin areas. Many St Paul's men stayed ashore to prospect and mining again began to play a significant role in the Muan economy.

TABLE 3. Miners' rights issued on Thursday Island 1946-1959 (after 1959 this information is not included).  
Source: Department of Mines annual reports 1947-1959.

Year	No of miners' rights	Year	No of miners' rights
1946	none	1953	14
1947	13	1954	8
1948	35	1955	15
1949	10	1956	4
1950	11	1957	8
1951	97	1958	15
1952	15	1959	3

Some people walked to the diggings every day but others built small huts and stayed the week, returning on Friday afternoon, since under the rules of the mission they had to be back for Sunday. Pauline Savage Mills (pers. comm., 2005) remembers going wolfram mining for a month in February 1951, when she was two months pregnant. She and her retired father, Tom Savage, along with Kawane Kris and his sister, Moira, were driven out from St Paul's with all their gear to the diggings in the mission jeep. Kalep Ware, an excellent self-taught mechanic, took people out to the wolfram camps with their supplies, which they bought at the mission shop. Some of the camps had cigarette names, e.g., Clifton and Mayfair. Tom Savage named their camp 'Clifton'.<sup>36</sup> They set up camp near a creek, where they would bathe at night, and then moved closer to the workings at Ith Hill (which they called Wolfram Hill). They sang hymns every night. They were afraid of a wild black stallion said to roam about and chase people and her father carried a gun with his bullets inside a Capstan A tobacco tin inside a layer of protective coverings in a knapsack on his back. The 'Kubin mob' came on horseback from their homes, didn't camp nearby but just came visiting. One man tied his horse to an anchor. The men worked on the hill and dug the big holes; they would strike it and take it out as heavy shales. The women washed the alluvial matter in the streams and creeks at the bottom of the hill: Pauline sat in the water to wash the smaller pieces but was warned by some of the women that it might be dangerous for the baby she was carrying. The women would hit the larger pieces to get at the pure wolfram 'black like silver lead' and then put the pieces into small bags. Only Islanders were permitted to mine wolfram and before they went to Mua they bought cheap miners' rights from the Court House (see Table 3). Kalep Ware, who carried

the heavy equipment and food, piled the wolfram on the mission boat to return to Thursday Island, where it was sold to the DNA at the court house for 'a pound a pound' (£1 per lb weight). The Protector, P.J. (Pat) Killoran, was there himself and told Pauline he would have to put her under the Act for the day to buy her takings of wolfram – which he did.<sup>37</sup>

Angela Ware Morrison (pers. comm., 2004) also went mining after the war:

The women took a flour bag and cut it in half. They carried it a long way. The husbands dug a hole, only men made the first dig to make a deep *awak* (hole) as big as this room. The women went around picking off the black stuff from the wall with a knife. You start with the low level and the women collected it, put it into a bag, hoisted it over both shoulders, half one side, half the other, and walked from the top of the hill to the village.

But she, like some other women, did not sell all their wolfram immediately: they kept bags of it in their homes and, when they ran short of money, they would break it up and sell it for cash at Gayai Ware's store in the village. Ware acted as agent for Burns Philp & Coy of Thursday Island and the amount of cash offered depended on weight.

In July 1951 Lloyd S. Jones, Inspector of Mines, Herberton, carried out a visit of inspection at Mua as part of a mineral survey of north Queensland. He reported that the Islanders confined their efforts to shallow working and all mining operations were carried out manually (Jones, 1951). The following month a St Paul's miner applied for registration of a mining claim over part of the St Paul's reserve (R.3). This was one of over 40 applications from St Paul's residents for registration of claims on the Kubin 'Aboriginal reserve' (R.37), which was under the nominal



FIG. 5. Wolfram mining at Ith Hill, 1953. Photo: Barbara Done Stevenson, 1953. Source: Queensland Museum EH7566

control of Western Islands Representative Tanu Nona. Technically, no St Paul's person could enter R.37 without the permission of the protector but a general permission had been in force for some time. The warden was disinclined to register the claims, fearing it would lead to an influx of European claims. In August 1951, after a failed meeting between Wees Nawia of Kubin, Tanu Nona of Badu, and the chairman of St Paul's, and after listening to the views of the Councillors' conference, the director of Native Affairs ruled that no claim on Ith Hill would be recognised as the property of any individual; any individual already working on Ith Hill could continue to work but only the mine was recognised; and all pegs were to be removed. This meant that 'whether pegs are in the ground or not, any Torres Strait Islander or St Paul's man can put down a hole or can work an old established hole providing he does not interfere with any shaft which the owner is now working' (Fig. 5). He reiterated that the men from St Paul's had an equal right to work wolfram on those terms, provided they had been issued with an official permit to enter the Kubin Reserve.

Also in 1951, for the first time a possible co-operative basis for mining among the St Paul's people was canvassed, 'so that the whole village might benefit, but there are yet many difficulties to be overcome' (Year Book, 1952: 23). One of these may have been the mooted extension of the mission boundaries, which was interpreted by other Islanders as a land grab, not for additional garden lands (the ostensible reason) but to secure mining rights to Ith Hill, by then the only potentially lucrative field. For many years St Paul's residents had worked wolfram sporadically on Aboriginal Reserve R.37, despite its location outside the area reserved for the mission. Resentment among Western Islanders, generally about St Paul's people pegging claims at Ith Hill, came to a head at a meeting of the chairmen of all Torres Strait Councils, including the St Paul's chairman. This was resolved by the acceptance by the bishop, Wilfred John Hudson,<sup>38</sup> on behalf of the St Paul's men and Tanu Nona as Western Islands Representative, of a communication dated 20 August 1951. Acceptance brought harmony between the two groups 'and the dispute over claim jumping, bargaining for claims, and pegging out

of claims which the owner had no intention of working has been rectified.' Mining at Ith Hill and Blue Mountain continued to support the Muan economy, employing 29 workers in 1951. In 1952, the market still buoyed by the demands of the Korean War, wolfram production on Mua was valued at £32,100. Most of the men and some women from St Paul's mined wolfram in 1952 (Year Book, 1953: 24)<sup>39</sup> and 60 workers were employed at the height of the boom but prices fluctuated throughout that year, falling from around £29.10.0 per unit in January 1952 to £19.10.0 in December (Department of Mines Annual Report, 1952: 5, 75).

In August 1953, Karl. R. Fleischman, Inspector of Mines, Herberton, took samples across a 15-ft reef but they were 'not good' (Department of Mines Annual Report, 1953: 77). Dated 8 September 1953 before the severe decline in wolfram prices, his report is an excellent overview of the state of mining on Mua. Although he found no noticeable changes since Anderson (1943), Shepherd (1944) and Jones (1951), he reiterated that greater returns would follow a more systematic working of the deposits. However, given the prohibition on European miners, full development of the field's potential depended on training the local miners to become 'sufficiently familiar with mining methods to carry out developmental work.' Only a very limited number of men, about 2 or 3 were authorised by the local protector to use explosives. He recommended a program of shaft sinking at Ith Hill to test the lode and train the men in mining techniques.

The consensus of opinion appears to be that prospects on Moa, particularly on Ith Hill are promising, that further exploration is warranted, but that caution must be exercised in talking of the potentialities of the wolfram deposits on Moa, as far too little work has been done to enable a calculation of ore reserves and grade to be made [...] It is difficult to assess how many men are actually engaged in mining for wolfram on Moa. Probably a total of 20 men would cover Ith Hill and the Kubin workings. There are periods, however, such as school holidays, when a number of women and children engage in collecting floaters and alluvial on the flats. A considerable number of men are understood to have signed on for 12 months on pearling luggers, partly because the Ith Hill workings are rapidly approaching the state where the men will have worked themselves to a standstill, as they are not familiar with underground mining and timbering. Their efforts have been confined to gouging out, with bars and the occasional use of a little

fracteur, patches of wolfram occurring in the Ith Hill reef. All work is by open-cutting, and no open-cut worked at present is deeper than about 30 feet [...] wolfram gouging is carried out over a width of the Ith Hill reef of some 20 feet (Fleischman, 1953).

Despite Fleischman's reasonably positive report and the stated policy of IIB to develop wolfram mining along with other industries 'to guarantee employment for such workers who are incapable of employment in the marine industry' (Annual Report, 1952: 30), only 20 men were still mining by 1953. Those who returned to diving at the beginning of the 1953 season gave as their reasons their insecure future on the field, the vagaries of market price (which fell from £17.10.0 per unit in January 1953 to £7.0.0 in December), and the 30% difference between the prices paid at Thursday Island and Cairns. Fleischman suggested that the latter could be overcome if the St Paul's store became the direct buying agent for a southern ore-buying firm. He had no time to inspect the Kubin field, where only floaters and alluvial were being worked, but he did examine several workings on Ith Hill, including those of Tom Savage, Ned Ware and George Kennell.<sup>40</sup>

Fleischman's suggestion about the Thursday Island-Cairns price differential drew an immediate response from the director of Native Affairs, who would not, under any circumstances, countenance a shift of control over sales from the IIB to the mission. On 22 December 1953 he offered evidence that there was, in fact, no such differential and added testily: 'I have yet to learn that St Paul's Mission store could competently handle wolfram or any other commodity for sale and the information on this point furnished by your Inspector in an effort to obtain better prices for wolfram appears to be based on incorrect premises.'

World prices dropped suddenly towards the end of 1953 and in 1954 about 20 workers earned less than £200 for the 200 kg they retrieved by digging 'in a very unmethodical manner' (Department of Mines Annual Report, 1954: 73).<sup>41</sup> In December 1954 mining on Mua 'came to a standstill' as most of the able-bodied men went out on diving boats, mainly for trochus shell (Annual Report, 1954: 52). The 'dull' world market continued during 1955 and 1956, the last year of Muan operations recorded by the Mines Department. In 1955 about 5 miners earned £497.3.4; in 1956 around 11 part-time miners earned £578.18.6.

CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES (1956-1969)<sup>42</sup>. A first tentative proposal to establish a Christian mining co-operative had been made in 1951, just as wolfram prices rose to unprecedented levels, but the idea failed to gain traction. In 1952 Bishop Hudson again canvassed the idea at a meeting of the Church of England's Australian Board of Missions (ABM), which appointed Revd Alfred W. Clint its Australian director of co-operatives in mid-1953.<sup>43</sup> In October 1953 Clint initiated discussions with DNA about forming a co-operative society at St Paul's Mission, one purpose of which was to explore the mineral deposits of Mua and possibly other islands. The broad aims of the ABM were 'to raise the economic and social standards of the people under its care, and at the same time, to try and convince all missions and Governments of the wisdom of the co-operative approach' (Clint, 1956: 1). The department solicited various views and on 18 February 1954 submitted a cautious but not unfavourable response, agreeing that with exploitation 'along systematic lines following a training period under a practical mining supervisor' might just pay its way, given the small capital outlay and Islanders' comparatively low wages. Small losses would be justified by the educational advantages.

The financing of the scheme would be the responsibility of the Department of Native Affairs and/or St Paul's Mission, but this department might give consideration to subsidising to a moderate extent an approved type of development programme and would also be prepared to assist by reviewing qualifications of the applicants for the position of Mining Supervisor and examining development proposals submitted by the Mining Supervisor. In addition, arrangements would be made to have periodical inspections of the mining activities carried out by the Inspector of Mines, Herberton.

In January 1956 Clint visited the mission 'in order to enlist interest in the principles and methods of the Co-operative Movement' as a means of reviving the communities. The men were away on the boats for about 11 months of the year, placing a great burden of manual labour on the women and older children, and the island was losing its population to Thursday Island (Anon, 1956a: 135). After several meetings attended by both women and men, a representative meeting of the men, including the Councillors, voted unanimously in favour of setting up a local co-operative society (Annual Report, 1956: 62). Encouraged by the response, two 1956 articles

in the A.B.M. Review, almost certainly written by Clint, signalled the beginnings of a Christian mining co-operative on Mua. First, however, it was

necessary to obtain the services of a mining engineer, or a certified miner with practical experience. Here is a glorious opportunity for an Anglican miner who wants to help the people of Moa to build up their own economy. The work at the outset would be of the 'open cut' variety, but there are great possibilities for the future. There seems little doubt that the co-operative method is the most desirable for building up the economy of undeveloped people. They are accustomed to working as a community, and it is better that they should build up their own economy rather than continually be in the hands of Europeans economically. Some will always prefer to work for individuals and companies, but others would much prefer to work for themselves and the community as a whole. The Government encourages this point of view amongst them, and has done a great deal to build up a co-operative spirit on the islands (A.B.M. Review, 1 October 1956: 156-157).

Around the same time, Clint was unsuccessfully pursuing another source of funding (Clint, 1956). He wrote to F.T.M. White, Professor of Mining and Metallurgical Engineering at the University of Queensland on 17 September 1956, asking whether two (unidentified) men from Mua, potential leaders, could receive six months' training in mining culture and techniques at the university's experimental mine. He explained that wolfram mining was the first of several co-operative projects envisaged. An adult co-operative school had already been established to prepare the people for their co-operative life, raise their general educational standards and train them to manage their own businesses. Would it be possible, he asked, to include them in the Columbo Plan scheme<sup>44</sup> to train Asian students in the practice of mining? Regrettably, the ABM could not finance the training, which would cost an estimated £800 (£600 for wages for six months plus other expenses). White replied that the University was not in a position to subsidise the training. Having discussed the matter with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Home Affairs and also Killoran, he would reconsider Clint's proposition if funding and the full approval of the Queensland government departments concerned were obtained. His choice of expression in the letter suggests that he was given a somewhat negative

view of the scheme, either from Killoran or from the Department of Mines or both.

On 10 October 1956 a meeting was held on Thursday Island attended by Hudson, Clint, the deputy director of Native Affairs and a departmental official named Kirk.<sup>45</sup> Wees Nawia and Tanu Nona had previously agreed to support the formation of a co-operative 'with the ultimate object of exploitation of the wolfram deposits on Torres Strait Island Reserve of Mua Island.' Wolfram was then worth about £2000 per ton but it was agreed that no major steps would be taken to exploit the mineral until a suitable practical miner had been appointed. The director of Native Affairs left little doubt in his correspondence that, whatever the final structure of the co-operative, IIB was to remain in ultimate control by financing the workings and selling the produce. On the following day Clint travelled to St Paul's to prepare formal meetings and appoint an eight-member board of directors: one nominated by St Paul's people; two by Kubin people; one by Badu people; two appointees representing island interests generally; and two appointees of the Bishop representing the church and St Paul's interests.

On 16 October 1956 a meeting was held at Kubin to form the Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society Ltd. Clint prepared a statement of aims and objectives, based on those drawn up for Aboriginal co-operatives, to be approved by the board of directors before submission to the Queensland Registrar of Co-operatives. The board was comprised of Ben Nona (Badu), IIB Branch Manager; Saila Miskin (Kubin), seaman; Mota Charlie (Badu), seaman; Lui Mills (St Paul's), carpenter; Wees Nawia (Kubin), seaman; Jacob Abednego (St Paul's), seaman; Keri Futuna (Gerain camp), seaman and Tanu Nona (Badu), diver. Run from the church office on Thursday Island, its main objective was 'to improve the economical and cultural well-being of its members through mutual association in undertakings carried on in accordance with co-operative practices and principles' and various ways of achieving this were set out in detail.<sup>46</sup> A special ceremony, attended by the bishop as patron, marked the formation of the co-operative.

The idea of co-operative development was extremely attractive to Islanders. DNA officials were well aware of the power of the co-operative ideal and deliberately harnessed it to further their aims. In a revealing passage in his

annual report, O'Leary (Annual Report, 1952: 29) boasted:

Co-operation and co-operative effort in the industrial life of the Torres Strait island race was not particularly difficult to implement on scientific lines in that co-operation in all walks of life and industry is one of the outstanding traits of these 6,000 people [...] As with most coloured races, co-operative effort in food production, home building, village development, fishing and all phases of industrial pursuits are second nature to the Islanders, and with a knowledge of this psychology, the Queensland Government, as part of its protection and upliftment policy, determined an encouragement of the development of the people on progressive co-operative lines.

Islanders, however, saw the formation of such co-operatives, supported by wider Christian and industrial organisations, primarily as a means to free themselves from departmental control and this seemed to be confirmed by supportive letters from several interested bodies: Lockhart River Mission, the Co-operative Federation of Australia, the South Coast District Co-operative Women's Guild and at least one trade union. The Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia wrote from Sydney on 9 October 1956, congratulating the members and sending their 'sincerest wishes that this will prove to be a progressive step along the road to a better way of life for all concerned.' They added: 'Would you please convey to all the Moa workers our desire to assist them to reach the goal where all people can walk in dignity and equals in every way, enjoying to the full the fruits of their creative and collective labour and cultural development.'

The department's reaction to these expressions of outside interest is not recorded but, while they could hardly object publicly to the sentiments, they undoubtedly perceived it as unwelcome interference. Philip Frith, then government teacher at Badu, enclosed the union's letter in a confidential letter to the director of Native Affairs on 30 October 1956, drawing his attention to the above paragraph, which 'may or may not be cause for serious thought, and I therefore advise you accordingly so that you may know the position.'

Clint had hoped to begin the mining project on a small scale around the middle of 1957, 4 years after the collapse in prices, but his initial plans were blocked by the department. The

co-operative approached IIB for capital for a geological survey and possible development. Cornelius (Con) O'Leary, who had served as Protector of Aboriginals on Thursday Island and played an important role in resolving the 1936 strike, had become director of Native Affairs in 1942. While supporting the co-operative scheme in so far as it helped fulfil departmental policy, on 2 January 1957 he told Killoran, the local protector, that the co-operative as constituted was not an acceptable recipient of IIB funds, held in trust for Islander development and subject to government audit. His principal objections were that IIB was expected to finance operations decided not by the department but by the co-operative's directors; moreover, the St Paul's people were not legally Torres Strait Islanders and

This Office has no faith in the St Paul's men as workers either in wolfram or in the marine industry on co-operative basis. Individually some may be energetic but none can compare with the Nonas, Mosbys, etc., for sustained industry. Therefore, how Island Industries Board would provide funds – and without funds this co-operative will not function – to help these non-Islanders is a matter for serious consideration.

The IIB board dutifully fell into line at its meeting of 16 January 1957, voting not to commit to either grant or loan. Apart from lack of security, they thought that Islanders would object to the transfer of funds derived from trading operations on their behalf for the benefit of the mission. The political and social context of this refusal was St Paul's people's exemption from departmental control, which had long been an administrative anomaly and a source of irritation to its officials. The St Paul's Islanders provided a counter-model of individual enterprise and freedom from control and the department on many occasions exploited the envy this engendered as part of its divide-and-rule policy.

The correspondence between the invariably enthusiastic Clint and the decidedly unenthusiastic Killoran on the Muan co-operative is enlightening. Clint apparently kept the director fully informed of his activities, stressing that both were engaged in improving the education and development of Torres Strait Islanders and that the co-operative would 'cement the already happy relationships' between the department and church missions. If he were unaware of the deeper reasons for the constant setbacks, there is barely a hint of it. He made another short visit to Thursday Island in 1957 for consultations with the bishop and

Killoran, returning for a longer period a few months later, accompanied by the writer Kylie Tennant (1959).<sup>48</sup> Killoran wrote that he would not be able to meet with them but it seems that a courtesy call was made (Tennant, 1959: 145). During this visit the second annual meeting of the co-operative was held at Kubin at which Clint told the people: 'You must use your land or lose your land' (Tennant, 1959: 184). He announced that the bishop had appointed Jacob Abednego from St Paul's and Keri Futuna from Gerain to the board of directors and Killoran had appointed Tanu and Ben Nona from Badu. Abednego was now chairman of the co-operative and Wees Nawia vice-chairman.<sup>49</sup> Revd C.G. Brown was elected secretary and it was decided to transfer the registered office from Thursday Island to St Paul's. By this time Clint had found a consulting mining engineer, W.H. Williams, a retired director of mines and state engineer of Tasmania (and father-in-law of the new president of the ABM). Williams' initial estimate of costs for the proposed survey amounted to £3500, of which £390 was salary for 13 weeks. A horrified Killoran responded by finding his own authority, H.A. Adair, who had inspected the wolfram deposits at Ith Hill and expressed an opinion that it would be 'unwise' for large sums to be expended in prospecting the area, which did not have any reserves to warrant major capital investment. Moreover, no deep deposits of wolfram had ever been found in locations (such as Mua) on the east fall of Australia's Great Dividing Range. Nevertheless, Clint and Tennant took away rock samples from the diggings for Williams to analyse (Tennant, 1959: 191).

DNA files contain no more than a brief mention of this visit to Mua but Tennant (1959) provides an eye-witness account. She claims the DNA supported the venture, whereas the Department of Mines did not, and this is supported by the latter's annual reports and various memoranda. Shepherd (1953) had informed the chief government geologist that profitable extraction would only be possible using efficient large-scale mining methods 'beyond the capabilities of the natives.' After the sudden price drop from 300/- to 160/- per unit, Mines believed the project would be unviable and Williams' survey a waste of money (Tennant, 1959: 108). Clint was disappointed in the lack of progress<sup>50</sup> but, when he suggested deregistering the co-operative, Tennant (1959: 145) quotes Killoran as replying:

TABLE 4. Shareholders in the Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society Ltd. Source: Hand (1963).

Year	No. of new shareholders
1958/59	140
1959/60	292
1960/61	108

They're going to need that co-op if the price of shell falls. There are men working part-time on the wharves unloading cargo who come from Moa. They could be employed, just a few of them to begin with, to show the others that you're getting moving. We believe at this stage the co-operative is important for the Islanders' development.<sup>51</sup>

In early March 1958, the bishop, Clint and Williams visited Mua to conduct a mineral survey of the areas covered by the co-operative. A directors' meeting was held at St Paul's on 20 March. Because there was apparently nothing to show in the way of enterprises inaugurated since the formation in 1956, Killoran with some satisfaction described the organisation as 'defunct.' However, behind the scenes there was much planning activity. It had been decided to open a co-operative store and bank office at St Paul's and Clint himself was about to assume the key position of general manager.<sup>52</sup> Ada Ware Tillet of St Paul's (pers. comm., 2006) remembers her father, Andai Ware, the local police sergeant and mailman, collecting money from the householders for the co-operative in around 1958 and Wees Nawia coming over for meetings.

The third directors' and annual meetings were held on Kubin on 2 October 1958. Killoran wrote to his superior that the only Islander present at the meeting was Mota Charlie of Badu and 'the organisation itself is non-operative at the moment.' This assessment, however, follows from Killoran's stubborn exclusion of the St Paul's people from the 'Torres Strait Islander' category. In a news item about the meeting in the *A.B.M. Review*, Clint (1958) announced that an auditor, Basil Mottershead, a public accountant and consultant to the ABM Co-operative Department, had been appointed and Archdeacon C.G. Brown, rector of St Paul's Theological College, had been elected secretary until the return of Flora Namok, whom Clint had sent on scholarship to the Ipswich Commercial High School for training. There were now 83 shareholders. Tanu and Ben Nona had resigned as directors (although they kept their memberships), possibly at the

instigation of the department or because they considered the venture already unviable, and the department was requested to appoint two replacement directors. A financial statement was presented showing that share capital to the value of £33 had been banked with the Commonwealth Savings Bank. There were no other items of receipts or expenditure. The co-operative briefly considered cotton growing as a co-operative enterprise but research showed that the cost of transport to Cairns would make it unprofitable.

The appearance of an article in the *Courier Mail* of 21 November 1958, entitled 'They'll sign with thumbs' and obviously initiated by Clint, foreshadowed the future opening of a Commonwealth Savings Bank office at the mission and a store, through which the Mua Islanders would be encouraged to market their pearl shell, wolfram, fish and handiwork more profitably than in the past and retain the profits on the island. Clint would open the bank – he was then in Sydney being instructed in savings bank procedure – and in time it was hoped that Islanders would work in the branch, as was already the case in Papua New Guinea. The article was taken as a direct challenge to the department's control of Islanders' wages, labour and production and set off a flurry of government correspondence. The department began pressing for annual reports, balance sheets or trading accounts but none was available.

The next annual meeting of the co-operative was held at St Paul's on 15 September 1959, during which its members directly confronted the department.<sup>53</sup> Concerned by the implications of granting of mineral leases on mainland Aboriginal reserves, they urged the leader of the Queensland opposition to press for a change of government policy and officially guarantee security of land tenure in Indigenous communities.<sup>54</sup> Copies of this resolution were sent to the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, the Co-operative Advisory Council and the Co-operative Federation of Queensland. Asked to explain this turn of events, the department blamed the St Paul's people, who constituted a majority of the co-operative's members. The local protector pointed out, correctly, that 'the St Paul people do not regard themselves as Torres Strait Islanders' and, therefore, the Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society was 'not competent to express resolutions in respect of the rights of the Torres Strait Islanders and their islands'; nor were they 'included in any Torres Strait Islander Councillors Conference which is

the official legal organisation to negotiate or discuss with the Government the rights and future welfare of the Torres Strait Islander people.' He poured scorn on the society's record, noting that 'until such time as this society demonstrates a practical approach to any problem particularly to sustaining families or providing a living standard for its peoples then it should not be considered as competent to express by resolutions on matters affecting the Torres Strait Islander race, or their home islands.'

The resolution continued to cause government concern during the following year: the sub-department was constantly asked for its views and invariably stated that it had caused 'confusion and discontent' among Islanders. The issue of granting leases on Aboriginal reserves was a sensitive policy area and the sub-department suspected that the co-operative wanted to push the government to grant Aboriginal leases over areas of Cape York Peninsula already being worked by mining and other companies. This it was not prepared to do.

Some men continued to mine wolfram but hopes for a fully-fledged production field with modern machinery did not materialise and no meeting of directors took place during 1960. Instead, the women members of the Muan co-operative produced shell and seed necklaces, hand-bags, table mats, floor mats, fans and serviette rings for sale to the department's curio section and men offered trochus shell for sale to IIB.

On 29 July 1962 the first Australian military advisers departed for the (still undeclared) war in Vietnam, which was to continue for over a decade. However with no immediate increase in wolfram demand and the co-operative's viability in question, by February 1963 it was due to be wound up. The main concern was the repayment of shares to 540 persons living on practically all the islands, as well as Bamaga and Cowal Creek (Injinoo) (see Table 4). The amount to be distributed was £581.7.10: each shareholder would thus receive £1 (the cost of the original share) plus a small dividend, but there remained the problem of actually distributing the money. The co-operative applied to Killoran for assistance and he agreed to help but could not refrain from reminding the members of Rule 56, which specified that the society

may be dissolved by the consent of three-fourths of the members for the time being testified by their signatures to an instrument

of dissolution in or according to the form prescribed by the Act or the Society may by special resolution be wound up in the manner provided by law.

On 10 July 1963 a general meeting was held at St Paul's which was intended to dissolve the co-operative and repay the shareholders. Although a quorum of members (12) was present, the chairman, Jacob Abednego, could not attend, being out on a boat working, and in his absence the meeting was unwilling to pass the resolution. A directors' meeting was later held on 5 December, which decided that the co-operative should continue as it was and that the shareholders' money should be used to buy St Paul's mission store from the Diocese of Carpentaria, an offer which was not accepted. The balance by the time of this second meeting was given as £601.

Various meetings were held during 1964 to resolve the problem of the co-operative's disbandment and the repayment to its shareholders. The stalemate was eventually broken when Tanu Nona, Western Island Representative, prevailed upon to recommend that the Western Islanders withdraw their deposits from the co-operative. A list of all shareholders from 13 islands was prepared and sent to O'Leary on 5 April 1965, when the account balance was £487.11.6. They stated they had no intention of winding up the co-operative and provision was made for individual members to retain their membership shares rather than having them repaid. The society, having made the offer of repayment, agreed to spend the money on a proposed bakery for St Paul's.<sup>55</sup>

The department had not abandoned its hope that wolfram mining might again be a source of economic prosperity for the Islanders. When, on 1 March 1966, the Department of Mines issued Authority to Prospect No. 314M for a period of two years to C.R.A. Exploration Pty Ltd over an area of approximately 270 square miles in the Torres Strait under Section 23(2) of current *Mining Act* – which included Mua – the department protested.<sup>56</sup> It was advised that a proper mining tenement, preferably a mineral lease, should be taken over any areas to ensure the Islanders' right to continue working their claims and was asked for a plan showing the specific location of the gouger plots for discussion with the company. The threat was less severe than it appeared, since the company was formally required to obtain the written consent of the department for any exploration on reserves. On 8 March 1966 a

directors' meeting was held at St Paul's, no doubt to discuss the matter, and attended by Jacob Abednego of St Paul's, Wees Nawia and Anu Ara of Kubin and Keri Futuna then at Badu. The department fought back and on 24 September 1966 the Authority to Prospect was revoked by proclamation; it then signalled its intention to take out a mineral lease over the areas to ensure the right of Torres Strait Islanders to work wolfram.

First, however, it had to prepare a detailed plan of the claims and their owners, some of whom had passed away. The task was given to Tanu Nona, who proved unable to complete it, and in January 1967 the Badu teacher, W.R. Low Choy, was asked to compile a list. Meanwhile the department lodged Mining Lease Application No. 36 over the areas to be heard in the warden's court, Thursday Island, on 24 February 1967. Low Choy sent in his completed list on 9 January 1967. It contains the names of 64 individuals, many of whom worked both Ith Hill and Kubin fields: 31 from Kubin; 32 from Badu; one from Mabuyag. Three of the claimants were women.<sup>57</sup> Tanu Nona did not provide his own, far less extensive, list of Islanders who previously held miners' rights until September 1968, after consultation with Wees Nawia, chairman of Kubin.<sup>58</sup> No St Paul's people are included in either list.

The saga continued into 1968 and on 25 June of that year M. Wilson of Geophoto Resources Consultants, Brisbane, arrived on Mua to conduct a two-day geological assessment of wolfram deposits. The assessment must have been positive, since on 25 July 1968 there were discussions between Killoran and Dr W. Layton of Layton & Associates Pty Ltd about 'possible extension and exploitation of the working of wolfram from deposits.' As an initial project, the company would put a European mining foreman in charge, employ 10-12 men, but not overcapitalise. It envisaged an output of some 70 tons daily so the profit would be small but later it might extend its operations to include drilling. The company insisted on a five-year lease, while the area would be retained as a reserve. It also guaranteed to consult the director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs (DAIA formerly DNA) and senior Councillors and buy out the Islanders' interests. In addition, it would pay award wages to all employees and, before any final agreement was reached, opinion on the proposition would be obtained from Crown Law and the Mines

Department and then submitted to Cabinet for general approval.

The co-operative idea was not dead but merely dormant among the people of Mua and in early 1969 a group of former claim owners from Kubin and St Paul's, organised by Wees Nawia and Dick Namok, hit on a different solution to their wish to mine wolfram independently of the department. The price of wolfram was rising and mining companies were showing great interest in obtaining leases. Government policy was now driven primarily by its desire to develop resources and all other considerations were secondary, as shown by the sale of oil concessions on the Great Barrier Reef.

For many years – before, during and after the war – the department had authorised and encouraged the St Paul's claimholders to mine wolfram and to sell it for the highest possible price. This was about to change with the department's policy decision to excise the Muan diggings from the *Queensland Mining Acts* and encourage mining companies to exploit them. Some had already begun survey work. Outraged at what they considered the department's support for claim-jumpers and anxious to safeguard their claims, Dick Namok and Ned Ware from St Paul's formally approached a Cairns resident, John Lee Jones, for assistance and the St Paul's men began to apply for formal miners' rights: in April 1969 more than 20 miners' rights were issued, mainly to St Paul's residents.

A meeting was held on 23 March 1969 with the intention of forming first a syndicate and then a mining co-operative and inviting 'certain other members of the local community' to join them.<sup>60</sup> The co-operative would retain the ownership of the mineral rights and negotiate with a mining company (at that stage unnamed) which would 'undertake to control the mining operation on a profit sharing basis.' The original syndicate members, not all of whom attended the meeting, were Malachi Levi, Bana Kris, Jacob Abednego, Ned Ware, Harry Captain (of St Paul's); and Wees Nawia, Parisa Nawia, Napota Savage, Anu Ara, Philip Wasaga, John Manas (of Kubin). They appointed Jones to represent them.

By-passing the department, which the men suspected of preparing to cancel all former mining claims on Mua and sanction the leasing of the island to an outside company, Jones applied to the Minister for Mines on 2

April 1969 for a prospecting lease over the whole of Mua for Dick Namok, Malachi Levi, Bana Kris, Jacob Abednego, Ned Ware, Harry Captain, Jack Ware, Ezra Saveka, Peter Namok, John Levi, Fred Ware, Kosia Ware (from St Paul's); and Wees Nawia, Parisa Nawia, Anu Ara, Napota Savage, Mislam Savage, Moses Neliman, Oza Bosun, John Manas, Noah Betu, Whap Charlie, Isiaiah Wigness, Suma Kaitap, Wigness Seriat, Katua Namai, James Misick and Dubi Eseli (from Kubin).<sup>61</sup> Suspicions were confirmed when, on 3 April 1969, both Mua and Badu were removed by proclamation from the general application of the *The Mining Acts 1898-1967* and *The Mining on Private Lands Acts 1909-1965*, supposedly to stop outsiders pegging claims on native reserves (Queensland Government Gazette, 5 April 1969: 1140-1141). Losing no time, on 23 April 1969 the department invited Layton & Associates Pty Ltd, on behalf of the Antelope Company,<sup>62</sup> and Consolidated Mining Industries Ltd,<sup>63</sup> companies with the capital to sink deep shafts and with whom they had long been in communication, to submit applications by noon on 15 May 1969, stating their maximum offers to develop the mineral deposits on Mua and Badu.<sup>64</sup>

A second meeting of the syndicate, now with 53 members, was held on 22 June 1969, according to the Torres News of 24 June 1969, to form the Torres Strait Mining Co-operative. Jones had been busy during the past three months, supposedly contacting mining companies on the men's behalf. He reported that most of them proposed to mine the island for 90% of the net profits, which was consistent with Queensland mining regulations but not acceptable to the members, especially since one company (Island Mining Company) was prepared to be employed by the co-operative on a 50% profit sharing basis. Syndicate members, mindful of the problems faced by mainland Aboriginal people in asserting their mineral rights, were determined to do everything they could to protect their own. Seven directors were elected: Dick Namok (chairman), who was also reappointed as mining warden, Ned Ware, Kaio Levi, Jacob Abednego, Andai Ware, Talapasa Nona and George Abednego.<sup>65</sup> The secretary, Simeon Namok, was deputed to inform the DNA, the Church of England and the local Federal and State members of Parliament as to the aims of the society.

Within the next few weeks the Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd, now with about 70 members, including almost all the adult males

of Mua, entered into a 5-year contract, dated 12 July 1969, with Island Mining Company, which undertook to manage and administer mining operations on Mua. The company would begin operations on the Kubin field, before surveying Ith Hill and Blue Mountain to determine the nature of future operations. It would also arrange sales, supply technical officers and finance, and share the net profits equally with Islanders retaining all mineral rights.<sup>66</sup> It was even prepared to pay standard mining industry wages to the 20 to 25 men it expected to employ (unprecedented in Torres Strait) and had already bought some of the Islanders' production at 60 cents per lb, or 60% of the sale price for small amounts, to show good faith and provide quantities for testing. The price of wolfram was then nearly \$4,000 per ton and Island Mining Company expected to gross about \$10,000 per week. Under favourable conditions, the co-operative and the company could each receive a return of \$3,500 per week.

On 9 July 1969 the co-operative directors requested departmental permission to send its mining consultants to Mua but was refused on the grounds that Mua (and Badu) were specially reserved by the proclamation of 3 April – although, as Dick Namok pointed out in a letter to Killoran on 21 July 1969, the department already had permitted representatives from several different mining companies to visit Mua that year. Jones had also written to the Queensland Minister for Lands, seeking permission to enter the reserve, although Lands' position was that anyone who was prepared to take the risk could survey possible mining sites.

It had come to a direct battle of wills between the Muans and Killoran. Wees Nawia, the long-standing and respected chairman of Kubin, who with his Councillors legally controlled the reserve's domestic affairs, defied the department and gave permission for Jones and his mining consultant, Patrick Bethel, to visit Kubin.<sup>67</sup> Demonstrating how little respect it had for Nawia's authority and where power truly lay, the department laid a complaint against Jones and Bethel for entering a reserve illegally, i.e., without the authority of the manager or district officer, on 11 July 1969. The pair was found guilty and fined \$20 in the local Magistrate's Court.<sup>68</sup> Nawia gave evidence that he had indeed given permission for the pair to visit Kubin, as was his right, since it was up to the Kubin Council 'to arrange business and other activities that will benefit the islanders and their economy.'<sup>69</sup>

Jones' report was extremely positive: on one 30-acre alluvial field, considered one of the poorest, they had found 400,000 yards of soil with an average assay of 10 lb of wolfram a yard, which on current prices would be worth about \$6 million; another estimate of the total value of the ore deposits was \$30 million (Horner, 1969a). J.C. Horner, General Secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), accused the Queensland government of frustrating the Islanders' attempts to develop mining deposits (Horner, 1969a) and the Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs declared in Parliament that he had 'no intention of allowing the deposits to be exploited to the disadvantage of the Islanders' (by whom he meant only 'assisted' Islanders).<sup>70</sup> Briefed by the department, which had begun its own checks on Jones' background and activities, the minister stated that no official application for registration by the co-operative had yet been received and, significantly, that Jones was the sole owner of Island Mining Company.<sup>71</sup> In a signed affidavit, Jones (1969) explained that there had been attempts to prevent the registration of the co-operative and that the agreement between Island Mining Company and Torres Strait Mining Co-operative, which he had attached to the original application forms, was missing from the Registrar's office after a visit from a departmental officer.<sup>72</sup>

The failure to register was rectified at a special meeting at Ned Ware's home on Thursday Island on 16 November 1969 by completing a new application and the agreement with Island Mining Company was accepted.<sup>73</sup> More members were being recruited to the co-operative at a fee of \$1.00 and there were now about 80 members, 94 by the end of the year. The directors wrote to the minister informing him of developments and congratulating him on his determination to protect Islanders' mineral rights. Some men were already prospecting with the expectation that they would begin in earnest the following year with heavy machinery. For the people of Mua the struggle was not only economic – to control their own resources and provide a good income for their families – but also cultural – to build up their communities and stop the postwar haemorrhaging of the island's population in search of better jobs, education and life chances. The two Councils had agreed to divide all profits equally and use the money to provide more employment through the installation of reticulated water, electricity, bitumen roads and a jetty.

COMMONWEALTH INTERVENTION (1970-1973). The 1960s and 1970s were years of prosperity for Australia, due in large part to a mining boom; these years also saw the beginning of the modern struggle for Indigenous land rights.<sup>74</sup> Both factors ensured a good deal of attention for the Muan mining co-operative and Jones skillfully used the press to criticise the department's attempts to frustrate his mining venture. He blamed Killoran for his company's inability to obtain a state government permit to begin operations, despite support from Kubin Council, which, he said, had legal jurisdiction over mining on Mua. For Killoran, the matter was non-negotiable: the responsibility for minerals on reserves rested with the government, which held them in trust for Torres Strait Islanders (who by legal definition excluded St Paul's people).

In January 1970 a new entity, Arafura Investments Pty Ltd, was formed with two Newcastle investors, A.G. Earle and Bruce Moir, as directors. The Arafura directors would also become directors of Island Mining Coy Pty Ltd and provide the finance to purchase the equipment necessary to begin mining operations. With finance apparently guaranteed, four directors of the mining co-operative, Wees Nawia, Ned Ware, Henry Joseph and Dick Namok, arrived in Brisbane for talks on 6 February 1970 with Killoran, L. McDonald and C.F. Reardon of the DAIA and representatives of the Island Mining Company.<sup>75</sup> They also planned to see representatives of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council and seek an interview with the Minister for Mines. In May the co-operative received support from the Australian Council of Churches as part of its campaign for Indigenous land rights.

The constant controversy and pressure from the Commonwealth government prompted Cabinet Submission No. 12822, in which the Minister, after consulting delegates to the March 1970 Torres Strait Councillors Conference (including the chairmen of Kubin and St Paul's), recommended inviting public tenders from private mining companies to provide capital, the profits to be used generally for Torres Strait development; that is, despite its location on Mua, the wolfram deposit should not be considered the unique property of its inhabitants.<sup>76</sup> Cabinet approved the submission on 12 May 1970 (Decision No. 14454). Then, on 1 September 1970, at last becoming mindful of its responsibilities to Torres Strait Islanders, the Commonwealth government announced it would provide \$100,000 plus technical and legal assistance to the Moa Island

Investment Co-operative Society Ltd through the Commonwealth Capital Fund for Aboriginal Enterprises administered by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), to back the Islanders' application for prospecting rights. If initial results were favourable, 'it would make available additional capital funds, as required, to ensure that maximum ownership and control remained in the hands of the Torres Strait Islanders' (Anon., 1971).

By November Cabinet had received advice from both the Mines Department and Treasury on tenders received from four companies, including the Moa Island Investment Co-operative Society Ltd.<sup>78</sup> Both departments, perhaps bowing to the inevitable, favoured the co-operative, with the proviso that they provide a capital share participation of not less than 20%, and the Minister recommended that this choice be approved. The announcement of Cabinet Decision No. 15203 was made on 16 November 1970 and, although the Islanders had secured only an Authority to Prospect and not the right to mine, they were assured of obtaining a lease. Moa Island Investment Co-operative Society Ltd then formed a wholly-owned subsidiary company, Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd, with Wees Nawia as original director,<sup>79</sup> to prospect for the deposits over the following two years and received a loan to finance the venture. Prospecting was to be managed by Queensland Mines Ltd (QM).<sup>80</sup> QM, however, had no financial interest in the venture but agreed to act as consultants for a fee of 10% of the total costs of the project (Anon., 1971).

Authority to Prospect 921M was granted to Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd for a two-year period from 30 March 1971. The four directors of the new company, Wees Nawia, Elia Ware, H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs (Chairman of the Council of Aboriginal Affairs) and H.W. Westaway (from the legal firm of MacDonnell Harris & Coy), held their first meeting on Thursday Island on 18 March 1971, after briefly visiting Mua, and their second meeting at St Paul's on 19 July 1971. QM had defined two conditions to be met for the implementation of its program: the inclusion of the Pacific Islander reserve into the Authority to Prospect (which was agreed to by the trustees and St Paul's Council); and the acceptance by Moa Island Mining Co-operative members of a below-award rate of \$30 per week.

The first QM quarterly report dated 30 June 1971 was quite positive: a treatment plant had been delivered to Mua and a power generator

from the Queensland government was expected the following week; ore sampling was expected to begin towards the end of the month and by the end of the year it was hoped to determine whether further exploration or development was warranted. The report can be read as an indictment of the department responsible for Islander welfare: infrastructure, facilities and communications on the island were almost non-existent and much of the early work involved putting them in place. QM, which received a management fee of \$1010 out of a total cost, so far, of \$25,409, was forced to spend the first two months building a new 15-mile access road from St Paul's to Kubin over high ground, since 'the existing low level foot track was too swampy to be used' and upgrade the 7-mile track from St Paul's to Ith Hill, as well as cutting other access tracks. An earth dam was pushed across Dinner Creek to conserve water for a sample treatment plant operation and a light aircraft landing ground cleared and levelled.<sup>81</sup> In addition to two European QM employees, 13 Islanders were employed by Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd, the men from Kubin leaving home on Sunday afternoon for the mine and returning on Friday night. 'Labour relations have been good and there has been a nil turnover to date. The Islanders have shown keenness and an aptitude for the work which suggests that efforts to train them in mining practice will be successful.'

There was still a great deal of interest in the mining venture and in early August 1971 the ABC TV Four Corners program spent some time filming on Mua. After years of stagnation and struggle, the mine at Mua and its associated infrastructure development generated intense interest among Islanders, who began to purchase \$10 shares in the Moa Island Investment Co-operative Society, the major shareholder in Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd.<sup>82</sup>

By the time of the quarterly report from Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd for the period ended 30 September 1971, the \$100,000 Commonwealth loan had been almost exhausted and the mine was preparing to suspend operations from 27 November until the end of the wet season. The lack of a suitable water supply for the treatment plant had caused delays and increased costs. QM had replaced the fortnightly chartered launch service from Thursday Island, with which it supplemented the 'occasional' service of the Diocesan and DAIA vessels, with a cheaper charter air service from Horn Island. Like the Islanders, QM could communicate only through the DAIA

radio link on Thursday Island.<sup>83</sup> Although it could as yet make no firm recommendation on the value of the deposit, nor make specific plans for development, Davison believed that it still held interest and warranted further testing. Additional funding of \$20,000 had been approved on 20 November.

Davison's third quarterly report for the period ended 31 December 1971 was pessimistic. The adit in the Ith Hill vein, begun at the end of July, had been advanced by mid-November to a depth of 100 ft, far deeper than previously, and several new discoveries had been made. But the Ith Hill channel samples were found to contain only low-grade wolfram. By then \$17,320 had been expended, of which \$1227 was QM's management fee, and only 12 Islanders were working half time. Killoran now the director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs, in forwarding the report to the Minister, commented that 'prospects for any major development appear remote.'

QM ceased its management at the end of 1971 and a new consultant manager was appointed to supervise operations from May to August 1972, along with a new foreman, Alfred Eric (Curly) Irwin.<sup>84</sup> To conserve the remaining funds, all employees were retrenched from 2 September 1972. The report for the 12 months ending 1 September 1972 used far more technical detail to reach almost identical conclusions: a viable mining operation could not be developed from the known occurrences of wolfram ore; only the Ith Hill and Blue Mountain areas showed any promise, with some residual wolfram perhaps recoverable by gouging. It recommended no further expenditure on exploration but possibly a subsidised gouging operation by putting those three areas under lease and seeking Commonwealth funds to support the operations at the rate of \$10,000 per year for two years. The Commonwealth should also be requested to convert the loan, then amounting to \$120,000, to an outright grant. The Authority to Prospect should not be renewed but before the expiry date the company should apply for mining leases in its name covering the three fields. Assets were few: the estimated value of unsold concentrate was \$1200; the estimated resale value of the equipment was about \$6000, less shipping costs back to Cairns of about \$3000-\$4000. If these or similar recommendations were not acceptable, the only alternative was to shut down operations completely and dispose of the equipment.

The directors of Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd met in Townsville on 5 September 1972 to discuss the report's implications.<sup>85</sup> The consensus, after long discussion, was 'that it was unwise to contemplate a continuation of mining operations on Moa Island if further expense would be involved.' The directors also decided not to extend the Authority to Prospect beyond 13 March 1973 but apply for ordinary mining leases for sites at Kubin, Ith Hill and Blue Mountain. The company would apply to the Commonwealth for additional finance to retain Irwin's services for a further 12 months to supervise and train a small number of Islanders. The company would pay each man an advance of \$30 per week against ore delivered and treated at its treatment plant, contingent upon his operating on a 40-hour week basis and recovering reasonable quantities of wolfram ore. After the sale of the ore concentrates, the proceeds, minus costs of materials, treatment, marketing and sale, would be divided between the miners and the company. It was resolved that the company should investigate new ways of utilising its assets for future wealth creation. The Commonwealth agreed to an additional grant of \$20,000 to enable operations to continue until approximately August 1973 and cover all expenses, Irwin's wages and advances to the miners.

Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd continued limited mining operations, while seeking assistance from federal and state bodies to investigate other possible ventures on Mua. The directors met again on 21 January 1973 to discuss the situation: lack of rain meant that no water was available to operate the crushing plant and no mining was being carried out.<sup>86</sup> The only good news was that 580 lbs (263 kg) of concentrates had been sold to Jack Hilton Minerals (Australia) Pty Ltd in December 1972 for a net amount of \$175.94.

Meanwhile, the directors of the Moa Island Investment Co-operative had met on 27 October 1972 to survey the wreckage and a new board of directors appointed Wees Nawia as chairman of the board. They did not understand exactly what had happened but felt that in some way they had been cheated and the moneys wasted. They also objected to continuing Irwin's employment and suggested an Islander be trained to take over so as to save expense. They met again three times in July 1973 to discuss ways of salvaging the situation, including amalgamation or takeover of the Moa Island Christian Co-operative and the setting up of other economic ventures. The unanimous decision was that the \$1000 loaned

to the Torres Strait Wolfram Co-operative should be withdrawn and added to the Investment Co-operative assets. The co-operative was on a sound financial basis and its accountants were prepared to finalise the books to the end of June 1973.

Wolfram mining on Mua effectively collapsed with its Authority to Prospect on 31 March 1973, although, according to Mica Newie (pers. comm., 2004), it was Irwin's death on 29 July 1974 that marked the complete closure of the mine. Reporting to the 1972 Senate Estimates Committee, Barry Dexter, Head of DAA, which had by then provided grants totalling \$120,000,<sup>87</sup> blamed the considerable drop in the world market price for wolfram and the disappointing nature of the deposits (Canberra Times, 18 October 1973). With the end of mining the Moa Island Investment Co-operative also lapsed. During 1973-1974 John Scott (pers. comm., 2005) arranged for the assets to be used to install a freezer on Mua to establish a crayfishing industry centred at Kubin. On 29 September 1976 the Queensland Commissioner for Corporate Affairs issued a 'Final Notice' on the Torres Strait Wolfram Company on account of its failure to lodge annual returns; however, the formal winding up of the company and the acquittal of the loans took many more years.<sup>88</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The first time I heard about wolfram mining on Mua was at Bamaga in 1981 during a discussion about providing a sustainable economic base for future Islander autonomy. Grace Ware (now Fischer), Elia Ware's daughter, who was to become the first female chairperson of St Paul's, told me that St Paul's was rich in wolfram and that when the Islanders were granted their independence, they would open a mine for the benefit of all St Paul's people. They would hire someone to teach them how to proceed and then take over themselves. She told me that the people of Mua 'won a contract through the Queensland High Court [*sic*] in 1972 and no government can get in.' The venture had collapsed, however, after her father resigned (Grace Ware Fischer, pers. comm., 1981). At the centenary of St Paul's Community in September 2004, the St Paul's-born, Brisbane-based politician, Stephen Mam, spoke publicly and privately about reviving wolfram mining as a source of economic self-sufficiency.

Like the boat strike of 1936, the history of wolfram mining on Mua has become a highly charged, semi-mythologised resistance narrative of Islanders' struggle for social, economic and political autonomy. From its beginnings in 1938 all parties concerned – Islanders, the Queensland government and the Church of England – hoped wolfram mining would become a source of employment and wealth creation for Torres Strait Islanders. For the inhabitants of Mua it carried the hope of finally changing their existing patron-client relationship with the state, controlling their own resources and income and revitalising their communities without recourse to the department. This ensures that individuals and families continue to tell stories about their experiences, most notably Wees Nawia in Sharp (1992). Nawia's recollections naturally place Kubin at the centre of the narrative but this chapter has offered a range of additional perspectives including various St Paul's people and the DNA, which administered the wolfram fields as part of Reserve R.37. It is to the Government's credit that, despite many and varied temptations to open wolfram mining to outsiders, it continued to regard the wolfram deposits on Mua as the property of the Torres Strait Islanders to be worked only by them – even if the primary motive were to maintain its hegemony and preserve a pool of Islander labour to be organised for the greatest profit to the state. It was only after the election of August 1957 that these objectives came into conflict with those of the Queensland government's aggressive new minerals policy.

An objective assessment of the economics of the Muan wolfram mining venture can be made at this remove by comparing wolfram production on Mua between 1938 and 1973 with that of Queensland as a whole (Table 1). This shows the close relation between demand for wolfram for wartime weapons production and price, between price and amount mined (supply), and between Queensland and Muan production. The first mention of wolfram mining on Mua in the Mines Department annual reports occurs in the local mining warden's report 1940 (based on DNA figures), shortly before Mua became one of Queensland's leading producers between 1942 and 1944 (wartime); but the post-war drop in prices meant that no wolfram (or extremely small quantities) was mined from 1945 until 1951, when high demand during the Korean war caused prices to soar. An extraordinary number (97) of local miners' rights were issued that year and about 6 tons of wolfram was mined

to the value of £11,600. In 1952, the height of the boom, the Muan deposits yielded 18.65 tons and returned £32,138, falling to £4504 in 1953, again in line with the state trend. Since that time the wolfram deposits have not been able to be worked profitably.

This raises the question of why the Church of England, the DNA and the DAA ignored the economic fundamentals of the venture and the increasingly pessimistic advice of the Queensland Mines Department and continued to pursue wolfram mining on Mua as a source of employment and self-sufficiency. Indeed, the department was even prepared to make a slight loss in the pursuit of other, less tangible, goals. This chapter has attempted to show that economic sustainability was not the overriding rationale for the venture, which was pursued for a complex mix of ideological, cultural, social and political motives.

A second theme of this chapter is the rise of the co-operative movement on Mua, which had its genesis in the wolfram venture and was inextricably linked with it for some 20 years. We can only speculate as to the reasons for the success of the co-operative ideology, which went beyond the inspiration and tenacity of its leaders, the most notable of whom being Wees Nawia. Beckett (1987:79) identifies its appeal as an immediate one – ‘an alternative both to the pearling industry and to the government Island Industries Board’ – which, while correct as far as it goes, ignores the deeper resonances in traditional culture and Christian teaching, both of which were harnessed by Papuan Industries Limited (PIL), which ‘set up a simple form of co-operative organisation, teaching the Islanders to build their own boats for pearling, and to plant coconut plantations for copra’ (Tennant, 1959: 167) and later by the DNA to further its own aims of self-sufficiency, albeit within tightly constrained parameters.

The co-operative ideology could also be shaped to appeal to Islanders’ aspirations for unity and self-sufficiency, themes which have guided most of Torres Strait’s post-war social and political activity. In 1978 the co-operative movement had resurfaced in the guise of MAW, a housing co-operative run by Islanders independently of the department and linking three self-managed community investment companies at Mua, Adai (Northern Peninsula Area) and Waiben (Thursday Island) (Sharp, 1992: 113-114, 123-125, 132).

We may never know the precise beginnings of Islander involvement in wolfram mining on Mua; we have only the record of departmental interests. Evidently, what began as a bipartite activity, with the St Paul’s people gouging at Ith Hill and the Poid people at Kubin – mirroring the traditional Torres Strait moiety division discussed in Shnukal (‘Traditional Mua’ chapter 2, this volume) but in historically modified form – evolved under the pressure of external events into a far more inclusive operation and ultimately a more formal and enduring exercise in co-operation between the two Muan communities.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Margaret Reid of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy for locating the wolfram mining files and Kathy Frankland for permitting me to view them. I also thank Pauline Savage Mills, Angela Ware Morrison and Mica Newie (son of Mikaire Newie) for their recollections of wolfram mining on Mua and Ada Ware Tillett for her reminiscences about her father’s participation; John Scott, formerly of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, for his recollections about wolfram mining on Mua and for checking the first draft; Loretta Asai Manas and Patrick Whap and for their information about the Saibai people at Gerain; Fr Dalton Cowley for information about Martin Ropeyam’s mining activities; and Grace Ware Fischer and Stephen Mam for their comments about the contemporary political significance of the project for St Paul’s Community. Ruth Kerr kindly sent me a copy of her major paper on wolfram mining to 1914; Nonie Sharp generously discussed with me aspects of her Kubin research; Jane Grant was kind enough to try to ascertain the date of Tennant’s visit to Mua. The helpful staff of the former Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water Library Service provided material from their early publications and files.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- A.B.M. REVIEW. 1939, 1956, 1957 (Australian Board of Missions: Sydney)
- ANDERSON, O. 1943. Report to State Mining Engineer, Department of Mines, Brisbane, 25 November 1943. 6 pp. QS505/1/9F/16 No. 1-Torres St-Produce-Investigation Wolfram Production-Moa Island. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE CHIEF PROTECTOR OF ABORIGINALS. 1938. Votes and Proceedings of Queensland Parliament. (Government Printer: Brisbane).

- ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIVE AFFAIRS. 1939-1965. Votes and Proceedings of Queensland Parliament. (Government Printer: Brisbane).
- ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AND ISLAND AFFAIRS. 1966-1973. Votes and Proceedings of Queensland Parliament. (Government Printer: Brisbane).
- ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MINES. 1938-1973. Votes and Proceedings of Queensland Parliament. (Government Printer: Brisbane).
- ANON. 1888. [Report of] regular monthly meeting of the Torres Divisional Board. *Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* 8 September 1888: 3.
- ANON. 1953. Field survey: Christian co-operation. A.B.M. Review, 1 June 1953: 84-87.
- ANON. 1956a. Field survey: Torres Strait trek. A.B.M. Review, 1 September 1956: 134-137.
- ANON. 1956b. A.B.M. Review, 1 October 1956: 156-157.
- ANON. 1958. They'll sign with thumbs. *Courier Mail*, 21 November 1958. Typed copy of extract in A/59569: 9N/25: Islands-Moa Island. Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society Ltd. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- ANON. 1971. Moa Islanders prospect for wolfram. *Identity* 1(2): 15-16.
- BEATTIE, G.R. 1944. Suggested scheme for organisation of medical services in Torres Straits area. Typescript report compiled during tour of islands in August 1944, dated 31 August 1944, copy in possession of the author. 19 pp. MLC 1791-281. (John Oxley Library: Brisbane).
- CAIRNS POST. 1969. 31 May 1969.
- CANBERRA TIMES. 1973. 18 October 1973.
- CLINT, A.W. 1953. Special article on the Co-operative Movement. A.B.M. Review, 1 June 1953: 81.
- CLINT, A.W. 1956. Letter to F. T. M. White, Professor of Mining and Metallurgical Engineering, University of Queensland, 17 September 1956. A452/1/1956/789: Training of Torres Strait Islanders in mining. (National Archives of Australia: Canberra).
- CLINT, A.W. 1958. News of a recent meeting held of the Moa Island Christian Co-operative. A.B.M. Review 1 December 1958: 177.
- COURIER MAIL. 1958, 1969.
- DAVIES, S. 1947. Diocese of Carpentaria diary entry, 21 July 1947. OMLAV 114/1. (John Oxley Library: Brisbane).
- DONE, J.J.E. 1987. Wings across the sea. (Boolarong: Bowen Hills).
- FLEISCHMAN, K. R. 1953. Inspection of the Lockerbie (Cape York) area and wolfram workings on Moa, Torres Strait. *Queensland Government Mining Journal* 54: 933-937.
- HAND, P. 1963. Letter to Diocese of Carpentaria registrar, 5 February 1963. A/59569: 9N/25: Islands-Moa Island. Moa Island Christian Co-operative Society Ltd. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- HORNER, J.C. 1969a. Remarks on wolfram mining. *The Australian*, 8 October 1969. Cutting in QS505/1/9F/32 File No. 1: Torres Strait-Produce-C of E Co-operative-Wolfram mining Moa Island. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- HORNER, J.C. 1969b. Letter to Rt Revd Eric Hawkey, Bishop of Carpentaria, 13 November 1969. QS505/1/9F/16 File No. 2: Torres St-Produce-Investigation Wolfram Production-Moa Island. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- JONES, J.L. 1969. Typed Paper II [affidavit signed on each page by J.L. Jones], undated but written after October 1969. 4pp. QS505/1/9F/16 File No. 2. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- JONES, L.S. 1951. Banks Island and mainland Cape York inspection, July, 1951. *Queensland Government Mining Journal* 52: 722-726.
- KAYE, S. 1997. *The Torres Strait*. (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague).
- KERR, R.S. 1991. The German demand for wolfram, tin and copper from north Queensland 1890-1914. *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte* 36(2): 61-75.
- LAWRIE, M. 1973. Notebook I. MS MLC 1791-277. (John Oxley Library: Brisbane).
- LOWAH, T. 1988. *Edded mer (my life)*. (Rams Skull Press: Kuranda).
- MILMAN, H. 1888. Annual report of the Acting Government Resident Thursday Island for year ending 31 December 1887. *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*.
- O'LEARY, C. 1942. Letter to Under Secretary, Department of Mines, Brisbane, 29 May 1942. A/8352. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- PRIDE, P. 1956. Lockhart River – Cape York Peninsula. *North Australian Monthly* 2(12): 42.
- QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT GAZETTE. 1966, 1969. (Government Printer: Brisbane)
- QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES: n.d. QS 505/1/9F/16 No.1-Torres St. – Produce-Investigation Wolfram Production-Moa Island.
- QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES: n.d. QS 505/1/9F/16 No.2-Torres St. – Produce-Investigation Wolfram Production-Moa Island.
- REES, C. & L. REES. 1960. *Coasts of Cape York: travels around Australia's pearl-tipped peninsula*. (Angus and Robertson: Sydney).

- SHARP, N. 1992. Footprints along the Cape York sandbeaches. (Aboriginal Studies Press: Canberra).
- SHEPHERD, S.R.L. 1942. Wolfram on Banks Island. Report to Chief Government Geologist, Brisbane, 28 August 1942. 18 pp. Wolfram commodity file 4-8-4. Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water Library Service.
- SHEPHERD, S.R.L. 1944. Wolfram on Banks Island. Queensland Government Mining Journal, 21 August 1944: 209-214.
- SHEPHERD, S.R.L. 1953. Memorandum from S.R. Leonard Shepherd, District Geologist, Rockhampton, to Chief Government Geologist, Brisbane, 12 November 1953. Wolfram commodity file 4-8-27. Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water Library Service.
- TAFFE, S. 2005. Black and white together: FCAATSI: the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders 1958-1973. (University of Queensland Press: St Lucia).
- TENNANT, K. 1959. Speak you so gently. (Gollancz: London).
- TENNANT, K. 1986. The missing heir: the autobiography of Kylie Tennant. (MacMillan: South Melbourne).
- TESKE, T. 1991. Kubin Village, Moa Island: island of Torres Strait. (Far Northern Schools Development Unit: Cairns).
- THURSDAY ISLAND COURT HOUSE CASH BOOK. 1924-1929.
- TORRES NEWS. 1969.
- TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS' CONFERENCE 1939. Minutes of Second Torres Strait Islanders Conference, Mabuiag, 22-25 May 1939. A/69774. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- TORRES STRAIT PEARLER. 1905.
- WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN. 2005.
- WILLMOTT, W.F. et al. 1973. Igneous and metamorphic rocks of Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait. Commonwealth Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics Bulletin 135. (Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra).
- WILSON, L.O. 1943. Report from Governor to the Premier, 28 April 1943. GOV/93. (Queensland State Archives: Brisbane).
- YEAR BOOKS OF THE DIOCESE OF CARPENTARIA. 1941, 1952-1953. (Diocese of Carpentaria: Thursday Island).
- many more events and individual names known to the older people of Mua. This was deliberate. Since the chapter was written in response to a request from the community, I have tried to give them the fullest possible account of wolfram mining in a reasonably accessible way and include as many Islander voices as possible. The chapter is a condensation of Queensland State Archives (QSA) restricted files A/8352, A/59569/9N/25 and QS505/1/9F/16 Nos 1 & 2; National Archives of Australia file A452/1/1956/789; annual reports of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Director of Native Affairs and Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs 1938-1973 (hereafter cited as Annual Report); annual reports of the Department of Mines; and various articles in the A.B.M Review, The Carpentarian and Year Book of the Diocese of Carpentaria (cited as Year Book). The name of the island is now 'Mua' and I have used that spelling throughout except when quoting from a source document.
- 2 Recently, the United States military was reported to be conceptualising new kinds of weapons, among them 'tungsten rods launched from platforms in space ('A sequel we don't need,' Weekend Australian Inquirer 4-5 June 2005:25).
  - 3 Mua, Badu and Dauan were believed to contain good deposits, although for various reasons almost no mining was carried out in the islands until the 1930s and then only on Mua.
  - 4 Torres Strait Pearler, 6 December 1905.
  - 5 In 1887, for example, Milman (1888) reported that experienced miners were confident the country had mining potential and in 1888 Vivien R. Bowden, manager of Burns Philp, moved that the Torres Divisional Board ask the government geologist to give an opinion on the silver, gold and other mineral deposits on Thursday Island and its neighbours, particularly Mua and Kirriri (Anon., 1888). The inhabitants of Mua are said to have begun surface mining wolfram in the 1920s (Anon., 1971); no source is given but it was probably the Islanders' statements made to Horner (1969a). It was common knowledge that wolfram existed on Mua and small prospectors regularly approached the Mines Department requesting permission to explore deposits.
  - 6 See Thursday Island Court House Cash Book 1924-1929, 27 October 1926, when Kawane paid 5/- to the Mines Department for a miner's right to prospect.
  - 7 Ith Hill rises to the west of Mt Augustus, about 8km northwest of St Paul's and near Gerain; Blue Mountain lies north of Ith Hill, about 2km from the north coast of Mua; the workings near Kubin are located about 2km northeast of the village and about 1 km from the coast (Willmott et al., 1973:70). For a detailed description of locations and lodes see Shepherd (1942, 1944).
  - 8 Australia changed to the decimal system in 1966 but in the chapter I have generally retained the original imperial units of contemporary documents. Conversions to the metric system are as follows: 1 pound = 454 grams; 1 ton = 1.02 tonnes; 1 hundredweight = 50.8 kg; 1 foot = 30.5 centimetres; 1 mile = 1.61 kilometres; 1 acre = 0.405 hectare; 1 square mile = 2.59 square kilometres.
  - 9 There are discrepancies between the figures in DNA departmental memoranda and those in the Department of Mines annual reports. Unless otherwise indicated, I have used the latter for tables.
  - 10 Two men named Peter Savage have a connection with St Paul's. The miner was Peter Savage, son of Jimmy Savage from Niue (Savage Island) and his Muan wife, Tuku. Peter Savage was born c.1889 at Dabu and was

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 This chapter is not a conventional account in either content or structure, being far more detailed and discursive than would be appropriate to an academic paper and containing

- a pearl diver before becoming captain of the mission schooner, Banzai. A churchwarden and church builder at St Paul's Mission, he died in 1939 and is buried at Thursday Island.
- 11 The net proceeds of £472.0 were sent by cheque made out to Savage on 28 September 1938.
  - 12 The Thursday Island cash record books 1936-1941 and 1941-1949 show the following people purchased miner's rights for 5 shillings between 1938 and 1942: Harry Captain 10 November 1938, 27 September 1939; William Oth 25 October 1939; Jack Ware 9 October 1940; Uelu Laza 25 March 1941; Cissie Captain 17 February 1942.
  - 13 The main agents were Burns Philp and Coy and Kum Hun Chong and Coy (Department of Mines Annual Report 1941:59). After the civilian evacuation of Thursday Island in 1942, sellers had little choice of agent other than the department.
  - 14 These shallow depressions are still visible (Teske, 1991:19).
  - 15 Islander Industries Board (IIB) advanced up to 1/4-2/8 per lb against future sales, deducting costs of transport, bags, commission of 3¼% and other handling charges.
  - 16 During the 12 months ended 17 February 1942, 20 tons of wolfram were produced, which realised £4200 (\$8400).
  - 17 So important was Shepherd's investigation to the Department of Native Affairs that they uncharacteristically agreed to facilitate all aspects, including transport and guides, and pay the cost of launch hire, fuel, Islander labour and tools 'as part of their contribution'.
  - 18 Korcia Charlie, Madu Paul, Adadi David, Rattler Tom, Kaur Geia, Elisara Nawie, Ibida Kanai, Isaka Ghee, Rupea Namai, Manase Savage, Opeta Kanai, Noah Batu, Parisa Nawia, Abea Maki, Wasaga Billy, Misick Genai, Ben David, Dudu Johnny, Tanu Nona, Daniel Maratta, Karabai Kopi, Eliasu Tom, Wees Nawia, Ara David, Willie Namai, Amo Kanai, Sailsa Miskin, Elikem Tom, Makeer Bosun, Napota Savage (Shepherd, 1944:212). I have added surnames and changed some spellings to conform with contemporary preferences.
  - 19 On this map Kubin is located inland, northwest of Gibbes Head and, unlike Poid, not designated a village. The people did not move from Poid to Kubin until August 1943.
  - 20 The main changes were as follows:
    - 131: No native can peg a claim on Poid Island Reserve without the permission of the Poid Island Council.
    - 133: Every claim must be clearly pegged on four corners with the name marked on the pegs.
    - 135: On receipt of report from a claimant, the Mining Warden must investigate the claim, enter it in the Mining Register and issue the registered number or name plate within one day, and advise the Manager, Island Industries, Badu. Each claim owner must pay the sum of 6d for his number plate.
    - 137: Any person who has been granted a claim, and does not work it for one month, shall lose all right to it, and the ground will be open to anybody else.
    - 141: The Poid Island Council may permit Islanders from other islands to work crew and hold claims on Poid Island Reserve.
    - 142: Any Islander, other than a Poid Islander, who commits an offence against the Poid Island by-laws shall be punished in the Poid Island Court and dealt with according to the Poid Island by-laws and the Council has the right to order such offender off the Reserve immediately.
  - 143: Any Islander other than a Poid Islander, shall not visit Poid Village on any working days or on any night, without the permission of the Poid Council. Any Islander who commits an offence against this by-law, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding 10/- or imprisonment for 14 days to be served where the Poid Council considers fit.
  - 146: The first obligation of the owner upon selling his wolfram at Dogai shall be to clear his wolfram working debt and the Manager, Island Industries Board, is empowered to deduct sufficient sum from the proceeds to cover slop-chest given.
  - 147: It shall be the duty of the Mining Warden and committee, in the absence of the government teacher and his assistants, to report any cases of sickness or disease within twelve hours. However, it should be pointed out that the chief geologist, in his cover note dated 28 August 1942 on Shepherd's report 'warned against undue optimism in view of the universally sporadic distribution of wolfram in quartz'.
  - 21 A faint copy of the rules, handwritten and undated, can be found in QSA QS505/1/9F/16 No. 1 between correspondence dated 9 September 1942 and 22 September 1942.
  - 22 At the time there were approximately 4½ tons of wolfram ready to be sent south.
  - 23 It would continue to be marketed through Frank Hambridge Pty Ltd, despite their previous delays in payment.
  - 24 Songhie Mills from Nagi, youngest son of James Mills, gave his occupation as 'miner' in 1943, as did Johnny Hankin from Mabuig in 1952. Martin Ropeyarn from Injinoo also mined wolfram on Mua (Fr Dalton Cowley, pers. comm., 2007).
  - 25 This may have been Kalep Ware (see below).
  - 26 There were now 73 men working, of whom 54 were of military age.
  - 27 Wolfram was in great demand not only in Australia but in the United States and Great Britain, although shipping arrangements at the time precluded the export of wolfram to the latter. Nevertheless the market for all wolfram from Mua was assured.
  - 28 The enlistment provisions for members of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Forces precluded their use outside the Torres Strait zone. QSA QS505/1/9F/16 No. 1-Torres St-Produce-Investigation Wolfram Production-Moa Island: Memorandum from Public Service Commissioner to Secretary for Health and Home Affairs, 25 June 1943.
  - 29 Rather than release additional men, the army authorities called up many of the men then employed.
  - 30 On 29 September 1943 the miners' representatives, Tanu Nona, Talapasa Nona, Bana Kris, Lui Mills, Wees Nawia and Jacob Gabey, wrote to the director of Native Affairs, indicating that they wished 'all profit made by the [IIB] on wolfram operations to 31/1/1943 viz. £1228.11.9 be distributed to the miners on an individual production basis'. QSA QS505/1/9F/16 No. 1-Torres St-Produce-Investigation Wolfram Production-Moa Island.
  - 31 The rationale for restricting the size of claims was to free up more ground and force the holders to work to greater depth.
  - 32 The wardens were Tanu Nona of Badu (chief warden), Wees Nawia of Kubin, Mika [Mikaire] Newie of St Paul's and Dick Namok also of St Paul's.

- 33 Mika Newie is sometimes referred to as Mika Savage. His father, Harry Newie, was born at Niue (Savage Island).
- 34 A total of 76,600 lb of wolfram was sent to Sydney during the war years, according to the annual report of the chief protector dated June 1946.
- 35 That report, dated 29th September 1949, warned of wide fluctuations in the market for wolfram and set out a series of points to consider.
- *The Mining on Private Land Acts* declare that all minerals (with certain exceptions not relevant in this case) on or below the surface of all land in Queensland which was not alienated from the Crown on 1/3/1910, are the property of the Crown.
  - *The Mining Acts* 1898-1948 defines 'Crown Land' as including reserves for Aborigines. These Acts also prescribe methods of acquiring, and conditions attaching to, titles to mine minerals on Crown Lands.
  - Section 21 of *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act* prohibits the holder of a miner's right from being within any reserve for Aborigines except under written permit of a protector, and also declares that every application for a mining lease for any area within a reserve shall be referred to the Director before approval.
  - The present position is therefore that minerals within a reserve for Aborigines are the property of the Crown and exploitable under the provisions of the *Mining Acts*, but the consent of the Director is necessary to any person other than an aboriginal being within a reserve.
  - The Department of Health and Home Affairs has asked this department for advice as to appropriate action for the greater development of the wolfram deposits on Moa Island, and the proper mining procedure to be followed [...]
  - It is felt that the proper approach to opening these deposits to exploitation would be for the Director of Native Affairs -
    - (A) to call tenders by wide public advertisement for the acquisition of a tribute or tributes for a specific period over a Mineral Lease or Mineral Leases subsequently to be taken up by the Director of Native Affairs.
    - (B) to afford prospective tenderers the right to inspect the deposits.
      - The advertisement might require tenderers to:
        - (i) undertake to deposit a substantial cash deposit (say £500) if successful, to ensure due performance of conditions;
        - (ii) show in detail exactly how it is proposed to work the deposits, the capital, plant and technical control proposed to be used, tenderer's experience in, and bona fides to undertake, such work;
        - (iii) the period of tribute desired;
        - (iv) the tribute royalty payable to the Director, on the basis of a percentage of the gross value of proceeds of ore won (or any other basis that may appear suitable). The Director could then apportion the tribute royalty as a bonus to employees.
- Any such advertisement should also make it clear to prospective tenderers the conditions as to employment of Islanders which will operate.
- Any tenders received could be referred to this Department, which would offer all necessary advice on the merits of each tender.
- 36 In August 1953 Tom Savage was still working his claim near the Ith Hill reef, 'open-cutting down to 15ft on a reef some 4ft wide' (Fleischman, 1953: 936). Ned Ware and George Kennell, also from St Paul's, were working claims nearby.
- 37 The significance of this is that St Paul's inhabitants were exempt from the *Protection Acts* and held full citizen rights, including the rights to vote and to consume intoxicating liquor.
- 38 Bishop Hudson was consecrated on 21 September 1950, succeeding Stephen Davies, who retired in September 1949. Hudson was a strong supporter of the co-operative movement and it was he who invited Revd Alf Clint to his diocese to set up co-operatives (Tennant, 1959: 179).
- 39 Wolfram prices in 1951 were so attractive that during the year an application for a mineral lease of 41 acres on neighbouring Kulbi (Portlock Island) was granted to non-Islanders, J. B. (Johnny) Witts and party. There was no fresh water on the island and only 60 lbs of wolfram was recovered during the 'long, dry spell' that year (Department of Mines Annual Report, 1951: 71). No further work was carried out and the lease was soon abandoned. Kulbi was not gazetted an Aboriginal Reserve (R.91) until 1957.
- 40 Savage was open-cutting down to 15ft (4.6m) on a 4ft (1.2 m) wide reef near the Ith Hill reef; Ware was open-cutting only at a shallow depth on the main Ith Hill reef over an 18ft (5.5m) width; Kennell was working on the 'old ground' on the east end of the Ith Hill reef on open-cut workings about 10 feet wide (3m) to a depth of almost 30 feet (9.1m).
- 41 The Department of Native Affairs (DNA) figures from its annual report for 1954 (p.34) are £236.4.1 from 4 cwt 1qr 5lb of wolfram.
- 42 Beckett (1987: 79) states that the co-operative was established in 1958 but does not give a source.
- 43 The working model for the Australian Christian co-operative movement among Australian Indigenous people was established at Gona in New Guinea by Revd Clint in 1948. Clint was particularly impressed by the ideas of Conrad Noel, leader of the Christian Socialists, whom he had met at the Socialist Christian Conference in England in 1938 (Tennant, 1986: 97-98, 109). 'When the Australian Board of Missions met in Sydney in 1952, they were told by the Bishop of Carpentaria of the need for co-ops amongst the people of the Torres Strait islands, particularly in the field of wolfram mining. The Board determined that something practical must be done, and they decided to appoint the Revd Alfred Clint as Director of the Christian Co-operatives' (Anon., 1953: 87). The first Aboriginal Co-operative Society was opened at Lockhart River Mission on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula on 25 August 1954. It 'began with the incorporation of the mission's four-year-old trochus industry, which works three boats, one of which, launched recently, was rebuilt on the mission slipway by the aborigines, under the direction of Torres Strait Islander William Namok'. For an approving eyewitness account of Clint's work at Lockhart and Mua see Tennant (1959).
- 44 The full title was 'The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia' and it was administered by the Commonwealth Department of External Affairs. Only citizens from countries in that region were eligible for assistance.

- 45 This may have been Arthur Kirk.
- 46 Any person aged 16 or over living in the Torres Strait islands could be a member. The first applicants for membership were Ben Nona (Badu), Jacob Abednego (St Paul's), Mota Charlie (Badu), Lui Mills (St Paul's), and Wees Nawia, Saila Miskin, Kitty Manas, Lily Rattler, Danangai Namai and Makeer Bosun (all of Kubin). The first Honorary Secretary was Ben Nona and the first directors were Ben Nona (Badu), Saila Miskin (Kubin), Mota Charlie (Badu), Lui Mills (St Paul's), Wees Nawia (Kubin), Jacob Abednego (St Paul's), Keri Futuna (Gerain) and Tanu Nona (Badu). Thus, of the original 31 members, 21 were from Kubin, nine from St Paul's and one from Badu. A notable feature is that there were slightly more females (16) than males (15).
- 47 Tennant gives an amusing account, probably relayed by Clint, about these first co-operative meetings. The DNA 'sent out word telling the pearling fleet to come in and hear him. The leaders of these native boat-owners were the [Nona] family, originally Samoans, great fat handsome men with property and fine houses, intelligence and ability. [Clint] told Tanu Nona, the reigning head of the wealthy clan, that there must be meetings to explain to the people what co-operatives were about, and to allow them to discuss and vote amongst themselves.
- 48 Tanu Nona thumped his enormous chest. "I am the people", he roared. "If I say there will be co-op, there will be co-op!"
- 49 This was one of the reasons why Alf was proceeding so deliberately with the plans for the Moa Island Co-operative. Profoundly democratic himself, he was determined that the co-operatives at Moa should not be imposed from above, but must come from the people understanding what it was about. That was why he intended to have a series of co-operative classes at Kubin and at Badu' (Tennant, 1959: 168).
- 50 Much earlier, the Revd J.J.E. Done, who began working in Torres Strait in 1915, commented in his diaries that the Islanders 'have the communal system fairly well developed, and it works well as a general rule. A man wants his garden, and at once his numerous friends come along to help him. The time is set and all repair to the appointed place and commence work, he in his turn helping other men with their gardens. The same thing applies to house building' (Done, 1987: 57).
- 51 Tennant (1959) does not specify the date of her visit and I have found only one external reference to it (in A.B.M. Review November 1957:157). Her most recent biographer, Jane Grant, tells me that the book is rarely discussed by critics and she cannot find any mention of the visit in Tennant's correspondence. I originally based the date of mid-1957 on internal textual evidence. It was probably August 1957, when Kiu Miskin died at Kubin, and certainly between August and October 1957: it was the year before Flora Namok went to Brisbane in 1958 for training; there had been a dramatic fall in wolfram price (Tennant, 1959: 108), which occurred in 1957; Williams had been chosen as the geologist but not yet visited Mua (which he did in March 1958 and October 1959); a new Queensland government had been elected (in August 1957); Alice Hann, who left St Paul's for Lockhart River Mission in July 1947, had been 10 years at Lockhart when Tennant stayed there on her way to Mua (Davies, 1947; Tennant, 1959: 51); after her return to Sydney Tennant learned of the deaths on 30 November 1957 of two St Paul's divers from the lugger Sylvia, who had visited while she was there (Tennant, 1959: 143); Clint was planning to make a trip in the dry season in 1958 with his friend George Point, northern secretary of the Australian Workers' Union (1959: 224).
- 52 The other members were Anu Ara from Kubin, Mota Charlie from Badu and Napau Pedro from St Paul's.
- 53 With the election of a new Queensland government on 3 August 1957, he must also have known that he would not now receive the £3000 promised him by the former government to help develop Indigenous co-operatives (Tennant, 1959: 100).
- 54 Departmental policy in mid-1957 was that the Islanders 'should be self-supporting' (Rees & Rees, 1960: 62).
- 55 By 1960 this position seems to have been held by Williams.
- 56 Also present were Clint, Mottershead and W.M. Hughes, director of Portland Co-operative Society Ltd (Annual Report, 1960: 53).
- 57 In the late 1950s an unnamed official, probably Killoran, made clear to Tennant (1959:146) Queensland's official policy regarding Aboriginal rights to crown land reserves, which 'were only declared reserves by Orders-in-Council signed by the State Governor. They can be undeclared again. The missions have no right there either. They're just allowed to occupy that Crown land by the Government [...] Sooner or later we'll have white mining companies in the islands too. We don't object. But we feel that co-operatives are better at this stage of development if they can be worked.' In 1981 Killoran clearly set out the official government position: 'Queensland law vests ownership of all sub-surface mineral rights in the Crown. No individual or group of individuals has an ownership right to sub-surface minerals, irrespective of the form of tenure in which the land itself may be held' (Annual Report, 1981: 3).
- 58 Shukul, 'Historical Mua' chapter 4 (this volume) tells the story of St Paul's bakery.
- 59 Proclamation was issued on 10 February 1966 in respect of this area and appeared in Queensland Government Gazette of 12 February 1966. Williams, the ABM's mining consultant, informed Tennant (1959: 134) that '[a]n authority to prospect overrides anything else'.
- 60 The names collected by Low Choy, with an asterisk indicating that the individual worked in two locations, are (Badu residents): \*Tanu Nona, \*William Blanket, deceased, \*Morris Nona, \*Titom Tamwoy, \*Joey Nona, \*Hebrew Baira, \*Philemon Nona, \*Iona Asai, \*Aiona Nona, \*Manu Nona, \*Ben Nona, \*Akilipa Harry, \*Tallie [Talapasa] Nona, \*Moses Akiba, \*Solomon Nona, \*Eccles Tamwoy, \*Powanga Savage, Noah Gagai, Mota Charlie, Napaire Morseu, Jimmy Kanai Baira, Keri Futuna, \*Waria Getawan, Jacob Baira, \*Eseli Sagigi, Mast Bamia, Atie Joe, Zanguar Babia, Sariba Sagigi, Ephata Sepon, Sampton Gagai and Bent Maik William (Kubin area only); (Mabuyag resident): \*Gaiba Yellub; (Kubin residents): \*Wees Nawia, \*Misick Genai, deceased, \*Napota Savage, \*Ara David, \*Elikem Tom, \*Rattler Tom, Saila Miskin, Isaka, Kosam Nawia, \*Dudu Johnny, \*Sattrick Young, \*Soria Kaitap, \*Willie Namai, \*Opeta Kanai, \*Parisa Nawia, \*Jacob Gabey, \*Poey Nawia, \*Wasaga Billy, \*Abea Maki, \*Kaur Geia, \*Elesepeta Hammond, \*Rupea Namai, \*Ram Wasaga, \*Duruga Nakau, \*Nazareth Passi, Manas Savage, Amo Kanai, Japania Hammond, Asera Billy, Ubai Bagie and Elisara Nawie. Those names without an asterisk worked the Ith Hill area only. Again, I have slightly amended the spellings to conform to contemporary practice.
- 61 The people named were: Tanu Nona, Morris Nona,

- Joey Nona, Jim Baira, Mota Charlie, Philip Nona, Powanga Savage, Timothy Tamwoy, Solomon Nona, Mobi Savage, John Wacando, Israel Baira, Aileen Asai, Philemon Nona, Naseli Nona (Tamwoy), Daniel Blanket, Iokabeda Mast (of Badu); and Napota Savage, Wees Nawia, John Manas, Anu Ara (of Kubin) This included the names of people who held rights from their deceased fathers.
- 62 The buyers included not only the IIB but also Burns Philp and Johnny Witt.
- 63 This may be understood to exclude most of Tanu Nona's list of mine workers from Badu.
- 64 Dubi Eseli from Mabuyag had married Lela Rattler from Kubin and was then living at Kubin.
- 65 This was headquartered in Brisbane and was a subsidiary of Rothschilds. The company had been in consultation with the department over a considerable period.
- 66 Another mining company with an office in Brisbane, which already had geologists operating in Cape York area and had sought an opportunity to prospect and develop wolfram.
- 67 Reports of the formation of the Islander syndicate were printed in the Courier Mail and Cairns Post on 31 May 1969 and in Torres News on 9 June 1969. According to the latter the number of syndicate members had almost doubled to 47 – about 40% from St Paul's and 60% from Kubin – and they were offering to negotiate with mining companies on a joint venture which would employ as many locals as possible.
- 68 This list of directors is taken from the news cutting; however, in Dick Namok's court deposition during the Jones case, he stated that the directors were himself, Talapasa Nona, Wees Nawia, George Abednego, Harry Captain and Kaio Levi.
- 69 A photocopy of the agreement, signed by Jones, Talapasa Nona, Dick Namok, George Abednego and Ned Ware can be found attached to a letter from Jones to N.T.E. Hewitt, Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs, dated 13 January 1969 in QSA QS505/1/9F/16 File No. 2. Its provisions are as follows:
1. The Island Mining Company will undertake to manage and administer mining operations for Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd.
  2. The Island Mining Company will arrange sales of minerals.
  3. The mining areas are on Banks Island and any other areas that Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd may determine.
  4. Island Mining Company will supply technical officers and finance to set up the initial operations which includes survey and testing.
  5. After surveys are completed, Island Mining Company will submit to Torres Strait mining Co-operative Ltd a detailed report on equipment and methods that would be suitable for a large scale operation. It will then be determined to what extent both parties will participate in the finance of such equipment.
  6. Time of Agreement is to be five (5) years with an option of a further five (5) years.
  7. Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd and Island Mining Company will each receive 50% of nett profits after operational expenses are deducted.
  8. Island Mining Company will declare detailed operational costs and profits at the end of each quarter of three (3) calendar months, beginning from twentieth June 1969. The share of profits for Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd will be deposited into a Bank account that will be stipulated.
9. The date of the beginning of this Agreement is the twenty-second day of June 1969, the date of the formation of the Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd. As of that date, the registration of Torres Strait Mining Co-operative Ltd was not effected with the Registrar of Co-operatives, nevertheless, this Agreement will be binding on both parties.
- 70 Jones and Talapasa Nona travelled on Hockings' boat the *Taniwha*, camping overnight at Gerain. Jones returned alone the following day.
- 71 According to the judgment, delivered on 18 September 1969, Jones was in breach of Regulation 13 of The Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Regulations of 1966: 'Any person who enters or remains on a reserve or in a community without authority of the manager of such reserve or community shall be guilty of an offence and may be summarily ejected from the reserve or community by or by order of the District Officer or Manager'.
- 72 According to Jones' affidavit (1969), the department had instructed the Kubin community to appoint another chairman prior to the trial but the instruction was ignored.
- 73 Apparently Wees Nawia was twice refused permission to travel to Brisbane to inform the Minister for Mines of the claimholders' intentions, the first occasion being 24 October 1969. It was Tanu Nona and not Killoran who prevented him from going on the second occasion – the ostensible reason being that Nona required Nawia's presence at a Councillors' meeting on Thursday Island which did not eventuate – but it is clear that Nona was acting under Killoran's instructions (Horner 1969b; Jones 1969). His interference was greatly resented by the Kubin Councillors.
- 74 The company was registered at Cairns under the *Business Names Acts*, as was Coral Reef Sea Foods Limited, of which Jones was manager. He had, apparently, tried to negotiate the use of Torres Strait Islander-owned vessels to fish *bêche-de-mer* but had been unwilling to provide either a bank or any other business references.
- 75 The Church's role in the affair is also intriguing and merits more research. Jones' letter to the Minister for Mines in April 1969 gave the new mining co-operative's address as 'c/- Ned Ware, Church of England Office, Thursday Island', thus implicating the church in its formation; but there had been no discussions with the newly-installed bishop, Eric Hawkey. According to Dick Namok's deposition in the trespassing case, the bishop had originally given permission for Jones and Bethel to visit St Paul's but withdrawn it, presumably after learning it might be construed as defying the department's wishes and undermining its authority. Hawkey and Killoran were joint trustees of St Paul's and the church could not afford to antagonise the department. Letters written in 1969 by members of the co-operative to the diocesan registrar were routinely passed on to departmental officers and, according to Jones (1969), Clint had advised the registrar of companies that in his opinion the co-operative would not succeed because of transport problems. If the men expected automatic church support for the new co-operative venture, believing that it was simply a continuation of the previous one and there was no need for consultation, they were naive in their assessment of the political situation and the

- personalities and stakes involved and bound to be disappointed.
- 76 Present at the meeting were Wees Nawia, the chairman of directors, and Anu Ara, Dick Namok, Talapasa Nona and Ned Ware, also directors. Henry Joseph was now secretary.
- 77 The beginning of the modern struggle for Australian Indigenous land rights is usually sourced to the strike by Aboriginal stockmen in the Northern Territory on 27 August 1966. The following year FCAATSI revised its fifth principle to read: 'Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders should be guaranteed ownership rights, collective or individual, over the lands they traditionally occupy' (Taffe, 2005: 201).
- 78 Wees Nawia was chairman of the co-operative, Henry Joseph secretary, Dick Namok mining warden and Ned Ware deputy chairman of St Paul Village Council.
- 79 One recommendation from the conference was that any profit coming from the Islanders' share should 'be paid to a Trust and used for the benefit and the development of the Torres Strait generally under terms and conditions recommended to the Minister by a Board of Trustees', comprised of the chairmen of Kubin and St Paul's and the three island group representatives.
- 80 The others were Consolidated Mining Industries, VAM. Ltd, Metals Investment Holdings NL and Nickel Mines Ltd.
- 81 Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd was incorporated in the office of the Registrar of Companies, Brisbane, on 16 March 1971. Its share capital was \$10,000 divided into one 'A' class share (held by the director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs held as trustee for and on behalf of assisted Islanders), and 9,999 'B' class shares.
- 82 This was always a great source of satisfaction to Wees Nawia, whose tombstone is inscribed: 'Director on the Torres Strait Wolfram Company and Moa Island Investment Co-operative'.
- 83 QM's parent company was Kathleen Investments (Australia) Ltd; the Manager of Field Operations, who visited the site every month and wrote the QM reports, was C. N. Davison.
- 84 On 18 May 1971 the first shipment of cargo, about 150 tons, arrived by barge from Cairns: 'bulldozer, land cruiser, tip truck, compressor, trucks, light gauge railway, prefab building and fencing, diesel fuel and petrol, plus small tools, hardware and dry goods foodstuffs and camp equipment'. The earthmoving and mining equipment were used to construct the first airstrip on Mua, only the third in Torres Strait, close to Ith Hill, where the first aircraft landed on 19 July 1971. Ada Ware Tillett (pers. comm., 2006) remembers a photograph of the railway trolley at Ith Hill with Curly Irwin and some St Paul's miners standing next to it. According to Teske (1991: 20), 'the machinery left behind is rusted and the airstrip is now overgrown'.
- 85 Mrs Moilang Pedro Ware of Thursday Island was the secretary.
- 86 It had made application for a radio telephone connection to Thursday Island in conjunction with the Diocese of Carpentaria but this was not expected to be installed until early 1972.
- 87 Irwin was a friend of Barry Dexter, director of the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs, and possibly an employee of Mt Isa Mines (John Scott, pers. comm., 2005). He stayed on at St Paul's until his death in 1974 and is buried in the local cemetery.
- 88 Those attending were H.W. Westaway, H.C. Coombs, Wees Nawia, Elia Ware and D. O'Rourke from the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The annual general meeting of Torres Strait Wolfram Pty Ltd was held on Thursday Island on 1 June 1972.
- 89 Irwin had written that 'only one man, Willie Namok, had been engaged since 26 January and he was carrying out maintenance work'.
- 90 By mid-1973 the grants totalled \$140,000.
- 91 Despite all the setbacks, various approaches continued to be made to the department for prospecting for minerals during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In July 1980, for example, Halekka Pty Ltd applied for permission to prospect on Mua. In a letter to the local officer, the director of DAIA pointed out that the history of the wolfram deposit had for 30 years been one of 'heightened expectations' and subsequent 'frustration and animosity'. He added that it was a project more properly worked locally 'than a massive development which will do little to help the local economy and probably engender those sentiments I have already expressed'. In the event Halekka Pty Ltd, did receive an Authority to Prospect, which expired as from 20 May 1983 with apparently no greater success than the previous attempts. Most recently, on 23 October 2006, a small north Queensland mining company based in Cairns, Denjim Pty Ltd, lodged an official application for an exploration permit for all of Mua (EPM 15949). Having now passed the native title consultation process, the company has been granted a five-year exclusionary permit to prospect by the Queensland Department of Mines and Energy.

