

immunity. These diseases included influenza, smallpox, and tuberculosis. It is probable that smallpox had arrived in the area of Port Phillip Bay by the beginning of the 19th century (at least one man with the distinctive pockmarks left by the disease was seen by the 1802-03 Grimes exploratory party in the vicinity of Geelong - Flemming 1803). More Aborigines were killed by these diseases than by any other cause in the early years of European settlement in the Port Phillip District (Barwick 1971, 1998; Broome 2005; Butlin 1983, Clark 1999). There are also many references in the literature to venereal disease—syphilis or gonorrhoea—in the Aboriginal population, which could only have come from sexual contact with Europeans. There is a possibility, however, that what was being recorded as venereal disease was really a non-sexually-transmitted treponemal infection, which was already within Australia.

On the grassy plains around the Kulin territory there were numerous species of herbs with underground tubers that were sources of food. These plants were a staple of the Aboriginal diet and thus the focus of much attention by foraging bands, particularly in the warmer seasons. With the pasturing of tens of thousands of sheep on the plains from 1835, it wasn't long before these native plant species were eaten out by the introduced stock (Broome 2005). Once stripped in this way, the native vegetation did not quickly re-generate (Bolton 1981). At the same time, the presence of large numbers of stock drove away many of the native animal and bird species, compounding the problems of resource depletion for the local clans (Broome 2005).

In the earliest years of European settlement, the township of Melbourne presented an abundant source of food for Aboriginal people. Large numbers were to be seen around the settlement, on the lookout for gifts of food from the non-Indigenous residents (Broome 2005). At first this supply was readily forthcoming, and, as the original owners of the land, Aborigines expected to receive such offerings in reciprocation of their hospitality, as well as recognition of that ownership. As Indigenous people had increasing difficulty in sustaining themselves with traditional sources of food, a dependence on European food developed. Alcohol dependence amongst Aborigines was also seen as an increasing problem (Barwick 1971).