

Queensland Government Recognition Statement Australian South Sea Islander Community

The Queensland Government hereby formally recognises Australian South Sea Islanders as a distinct cultural group.

Australian South Sea Islanders are the Australian-born descendants of predominantly Melanesian people who were brought to Queensland between 1863 and 1904 from eighty Pacific Islands, but primarily Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

Australian South Sea Islanders are not indigenous to this country. South Sea Islanders were brought to Australia as a source of cheap labour for Queensland's primary industries. Many people were tricked into coming, others were kidnapped or "blackbirded". Men, women and children were forced to work long hours at exhausting manual work for low or no wages while living in very poor conditions. Many were treated like slaves. In the early 1880s, the death rate among South Sea Islanders was five times higher than the comparable European population.

Between 1906 and 1908 South Sea Islanders were deported under the White Australia Policy. South Sea Islanders protested and petitioned the Government against deportation. The descendants of those who remained in Australia are known today as Australian South Sea Islanders. The generation of South Sea Islanders who remained after deportation were subjected to ongoing racial discrimination and harsh treatment, including restrictions as a consequence of government legislation. Some trade unions also adopted exclusionary practices which disadvantaged the community. Many Australian South Sea Islanders are today still living in conditions well below the standard of living enjoyed by most other Australians.

The Australian South Sea Islander community has played a major role in the economic, cultural and regional development of Queensland. Australian South Sea Islanders provided labour to help build local economies and key industries.

They played a significant role in the sugar industry. They also contributed to the development of farming and grazing, as well as the maritime industry, pearling, mining, the railways, domestic services and childcare. Individual Australian South Sea Islanders have excelled in politics, government, religion, sports, art, business, health and education. They have also served the nation as members of the defence force in times of peace and war. While their work benefited the State as a whole, Australian South Sea Islanders remained in a state of poverty.

Australian South Sea Islanders' unique spirituality, identity and cultural heritage enrich Queensland's culturally diverse society. For more than a century their culture, history and contribution to Queensland have been ignored and denied. Even today there is little knowledge or understanding among the Australian community about Australian South Sea Islanders.


The Government acknowledges and regrets that Australian South Sea Islanders experienced unjust treatment and endured social and economic disadvantage, prejudice and racial discrimination. The Government also recognises that Australian South Sea Islanders continue to face significant disadvantages.

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring that present and future generations of Australian South Sea Islanders have equality of opportunity to participate in and contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural life of the State.

The Queensland Government requires its departments and other agencies to act on this commitment through their policies, programs and services.


The Honourable Peter Beattie MLA
Premier


The Honourable Ray Hollis MP
Speaker - Queensland Parliament


The Honourable Rob Borbidge MLA
Leader of the Opposition