Australian South Sea Islander Community History
Australian South Sea Islander Community History

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 2
Australian South Sea Islanders - where they come from ......................................................... 3
Australian South Sea Islander’s identity .................................................................................. 3
Islanders come to Australia ....................................................................................................... 4
   The trade in labour ................................................................................................................ 4
   Recruiting or ‘blackbirding’? ............................................................................................... 4
   Indentured labour or slavery? ............................................................................................... 4
   High death rate ..................................................................................................................... 5
White Australia and black labour ............................................................................................. 6
Australia shuts the gate ............................................................................................................. 6
Islanders remain second-class citizens .................................................................................... 7
Australian South Sea Islanders in the 21st century ................................................................. 8
   Islanders go to war ............................................................................................................... 8
   Islanders’ sporting prowess ................................................................................................. 9
   Spiritual contributions ......................................................................................................... 9
   Political involvement .......................................................................................................... 10
The call for recognition .............................................................................................................. 12
   Recognition by the Commonwealth ................................................................................... 14
Queensland Government recognition ....................................................................................... 14
   Queensland Government Action Plan ............................................................................... 15
   Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation .................................................. 15
Respecting Australian South Sea Islander culture ................................................................. 17
Australian South Sea Islander organisations ......................................................................... 20
Further reading ....................................................................................................................... 25
Introduction

This information is designed primarily for use by the employees and staff of government departments and agencies charged with administering public policy concerning Australian South Sea Islanders and their families.

Private educators, arts professionals, consultants, voluntary agencies and community organisations may find this document a useful source of information about the rich culture and unique heritage of Australian South Sea Islanders.

Anyone reading this document is asked to respect the culture, protocols and customs that distinguish Australian South Sea Islanders from other ethnic groups. If you need further information you should contact one of the Australian South Sea Islander groups listed.

You may also call or write to:

**Multicultural Affairs Queensland**
GPO Box 806
BRISBANE  QLD  4001

Telephone:  13 74 68  
Facsimile:  (07) 3224 5691  
Email:  MAQcommunities@communities.qld.gov.au
Australian South Sea Islanders - where they come from

The story of South Sea Islanders in Australia begins in the 1860s. It is a story bound up with the birth of the sugar industry in this country and the growth of the new colony of Queensland.

Australian South Sea Islanders are not Indigenous to Australia. Over a period of about 40 years about 62,000 Islanders were brought here from Melanesia (mainly from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) to provide cheap labour for the burgeoning sugar industry in Queensland.

A small number of labourers came from the Polynesian and Micronesian islands such as Samoa, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

Between 1906 and 1908 South Sea Islanders were deported under various pieces of Commonwealth legislation. Those who remained, along with their descendants, were subjected to ongoing racial discrimination and harsh treatment, including restrictions as a result of government legislation.

The descendants of the Islanders who remained are known as Australian South Sea Islanders, distinguishing them from migrants from Pacific Islands.

Australian South Sea Islander’s identity

The ethnic origin of Australian South Sea Islanders can be found among more than 80 islands in the Western Pacific also referred to as the South Sea Islands.

The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides) and the Loyalty Islands are the main island groups from which modern Islanders can trace their origins.

Today, many Australian South Sea Islanders have mixed ancestry including Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander and recent migrants from the Pacific Islands.
Islanders come to Australia

The trade in labour

Most Australian South Sea Islanders are the descendants of the more than 62,000 South Sea Islanders recruited to Queensland between 1863 and 1904 for the main purpose of developing the sugar industry.

Queensland became a separate colony from New South Wales in 1859 and two major crops – sugar and cotton – helped drive the economy of the new colony.

In those early years sugar and cotton were labour-intensive industries and Queensland had a small population base. It was also widely contended that Europeans couldn’t (or perhaps wouldn’t) work in the tropical heat of Queensland.

Some captains of trading ships in the Pacific region saw the labour vacuum in Queensland as a commercial opportunity. Providing black labour to the emerging sugar cane industry in coastal Queensland was an easy way to make money. In the early years it was also easy to make contact with South Sea Islanders and to persuade them to leave their homes to work in Queensland.

Recruiting or ‘blackbirding’?

It is a fact of the 40 year history of the labour trade that, of the 62,000 South Sea Islanders who were contracted to become labourers on Queensland’s sugar cane fields, some were brought here illegally.

Just how many Islanders were kidnapped or ‘blackbirded’ is unknown and remains a controversial debate. The official documents and accounts we have from this period often conflict with stories that have been passed down through the generations of South Sea Islanders.

It is also important to realise that much of the history of this period has been written by white Europeans whose analysis and interpretation of events are often markedly different from that of the descendants of those first South Sea Island labourers.

Were Islanders legally recruited, persuaded, deceived, coerced or forced to leave their homes and travel by ship to Queensland?

It’s likely that all of these methods were used at some time during the 40 years in which Islanders were recruited. However, recorded stories of blatantly violent kidnapping were recorded in the first 10–15 years of the trade.

The Queensland Government has acknowledged that many Islanders were kidnapped or ‘blackbirded’. The term blackbird has entered the historical vernacular to describe ‘a Pacific Islander kidnapped and transported to Australia as a slave labourer’ (The Macquarie Dictionary Online. Accessed 19 March 2012)

Indentured labour or slavery?

One of the most controversial aspects of the labour trade in South Sea Islanders concerns the way they were treated by their employers in Queensland.

Australian legislators and social commentators in the 1860s had followed Great Britain in condemning the concept of slavery. That did not stop some early sea
traders flagrantly ignoring the tenets of free choice and physically forcing South Sea Islanders to come to Queensland.

Whether or not Islanders were deceived, forced or came voluntarily to Queensland, Australian legislation required Islanders to become indentured labourers once on Australian soil.

Islanders had to sign a contract or agreement with their employer for a period of three years after which employers were legally bound to return them to their home island.

Some Islanders were recruited to come here as indentured labourers for a second or third time and some even decided to stay permanently in Australia.

Of course, when it came to understanding and signing contracts, the Islanders could neither read the terms of their employment nor write or spell their names in English. Usually, they made a fingerprint on the contract and that bound them to work on the sugar plantation for the full three years.

The indentured labourers’ contracts set out the very basic conditions. Wages were a fraction of those paid to European Australians and employers worked them hard six days a week. Employers also had to provide their Islander labourers with work clothes, food and lodging.

There is some considerable disagreement between the descendants of those first Islanders and historians on the issue of indentured labour. Some contemporary Islanders claim their forebears were ‘slaves’. However, indentured labour contracts were a government condition of employment from the very beginning of the labour trade.

Historians reveal no records of slavery or restricted, unpaid bondage on Queensland sugar plantations. But oral history accounts often conflict with academic research over conditions on sugar plantations for Islander labourers.

The truth is that conditions varied considerably from plantation to plantation and depended on how considerate the owners and overseers were.

It is a fact, however, that few Islanders would have escaped some form of physical or mental violence from Europeans. That would have been in the form of beatings, medical neglect, withdrawal of food, deprival of leisure time and even the separation of married couples.

There are stories too of extreme abuse such as the use of whips and chains, although incidents of this kind were not common after the 1860s.

Even the use of demeaning names like ‘kanaka’ (meaning boy or young man) were meant to leave Islanders in no doubt as to their rightful place. Today the term ‘kanaka’ remains a symbol of European domination for some Islanders. However, others do not regard it as a derogatory term. It depends what people mean when they say the word.

**High death rate**

Perhaps the most telling picture of the condition of Islander labourers in those years is to look at their state of health. Facilities for the care of the sick on the plantations
were nonexistent or at best unsatisfactory. Most living quarters provided for Islanders were without toilets and visits by doctors were rare.

Although the authorities stipulated a food ration for Islanders it was a heavy European diet of beef or mutton, potatoes, bread, tea and sugar. One commentator of the time said that ‘the excessive mortality among South Sea Islanders … is owing to poor feeding, bad water, over-work and the absence of proper care when sick.’

The death rate in Queensland for Islanders over the 40 years of the labour trade was 50 Islanders in every 1000. These were mainly young men and women aged between 16 and 35. The equivalent rate for Europeans of all ages in Queensland was 15 in every 1000.

Islanders in those years died of what are considered avoidable illnesses today – gastrointestinal problems caused by typhoid or amoebic and bacillary dysentery.

The poor health and death rates for Islanders were largely the result of bringing Islanders to a new disease environment with a change of diet, and insanitary conditions. The lack of knowledge of bacteria, tropical diseases and how to treat them by authorities simply compounded the bad health outcomes for Islander labourers.

White Australia and black labour

By the early 1890s most members of the Queensland Parliament had decided that the employment of Islanders and the growing communities of Asian labour were not in the best interests of the colony.

Political argument in the community seesawed between those who wanted cheap labour but feared a growing black underclass, and those who argued against black labour on human rights and religious grounds. This became the first serious race debate in Australia.

To our contemporary eyes public debate at the turn of the century was raw and crudely expressed. Elements of raw prejudice, discrimination and flagrant racism featured in the print media of the day as well as in the Hansards of parliament.

Australia shuts the gate

During the election campaign for the first Commonwealth Government of Australia in 1901, the future of South Sea Island labour was a major issue. Newly-elected federal parliamentarians promised to end the labour trade between the South Sea Islands and Queensland.

Within three to four years, several pieces of legislation finally shut the gate on the labour trade. The Commonwealth also enacted the *Pacific Island Labourers Act* in 1901, which ‘may order a Pacific Island labourer found in Australia after 31 December 1906 to be deported from Australia’.

This highly controversial and scandalous piece of legislation was finally amended to allow certain Islanders to stay in Australia. Ticket-of-leave holders, lease-holders, the infirm, those who had married someone from another island or could convince the authorities that they would be in danger if they returned home were allowed to remain in Queensland.
Of the 9324 Islanders in Queensland in 1901, only 1654 were given permission to stay when the last Islander was deported in July 1908.

This *Pacific Island Laborers Act* ushered in the ‘White Australia’ policy. This became a broad web of legislative measures and union bans designed to keep non-Europeans out of Australia and severely restrict the livelihood of those already here.

South Sea Islanders, for example, were excluded from the wool, sugar, pearl shell, dairy and banana industries by the application of a rigorous 50-word dictation test. Given the almost universal illiteracy of Islanders in the English language this was a disgraceful regulation.

What was scandalous about the dictation test was the deliberate attempt to suggest that it was a fair test when in fact it was cruelly designed so that Islanders and intending migrants would fail it.

The dictation test continued to be used as a barrier against ‘undesirable’ migrants into Australia for almost 60 more years.

**Islanders remain second-class citizens**

Those Islanders who had chosen to stay in Australia after 1906 continued to be discriminated against and marginalised as second-class citizens. For example, throughout the early part of the 20th century Islanders were restricted to fieldwork in the sugar industry or cultivation on small farms.

The adult award wage for a 48 hour week for fieldwork without food and accommodation was 5 pounds 6 shillings in 1920. By comparison, white cane-cutters were earning 9 pounds a week.

Employment, private rental accommodation and access to government services remained the main areas of discrimination for Islanders. Sadly, government policies well into the 1980s encouraged Islanders to identify with Australian Aborigines, because that was their only way of accessing public welfare programs.
**Australian South Sea Islanders in the 21st century**

Despite remarkable obstacles, both from Australian government and the wider community, Australian South Sea Islanders have retained their identity as a distinct cultural group.

Islanders are different to Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They have their own social and family mores as well as cultural and historical roots that are quite separate to those of Australia’s Indigenous people.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census reported that there were 4100 Australian South Sea Islanders in Australia with the majority (3030 or 74 per cent) living in Queensland mainly long the east coast. The largest community is in the Mackay Statistical Division where the Census reported that 779 Islanders live.

It is likely that the Census significantly undercounted the Australian South Sea Islander population. The 1992 Call for Recognition report published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission estimated that there were 15,000 to 20,000 descendants of the original labourers in Australia, many with mixed ancestry and including some who do not identify as Australian South Sea Islanders. The report estimated that there were between 10,000 and 12,000 self-identified Australian South Sea Islanders Australia-wide.

Throughout the 21st century, Australian South Sea Islanders endured discrimination, racial prejudice, physical and emotional mistreatment or had simply been ignored by the society in which they lived. Largely through their own efforts Islanders have raised public awareness of their plight, spurring Commonwealth and Queensland governments to recognise their unique history and important contribution to Australian and Queensland society.

**Islanders go to war**

Australian South Sea Islanders have made significant contributions to Australia’s war efforts. They have seen active combat in both World Wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf. They have also made contributions in civilian roles.

Although Islanders were considered ‘aliens’ under the law during the second World War, when it came to military service many of them enlisted voluntarily to fight overseas. Still others were called up into the Civilian Construction Corps to work on railway and road construction in North Queensland.

Interestingly, it was the acute labour shortages in Australia during the second World War that broke down the resistance of the trade unions to Islander labour. For the first time, Islanders found jobs in meatworks, in road and rail construction and they moved from rural areas to the towns.
Islanders' sporting prowess

Despite discrimination in sport over colour, a significant number of Australian South Sea Islanders have achieved the highest levels in their chosen sports. In the 1940s and 1950s Alex McColl was the schoolteacher at Eimeo State School. He helped form the ‘Pioneers’ rugby team in the Mirani league. He also recruited most of the players from among young Aboriginals and Islanders in the district.

Other Islander rugby players have excelled themselves locally. Des Eggmolesse for example, played for the Queensland state champion team from Wide Bay in 1966 and for the Bundaberg champions, the ‘Wanderers’.

Some Islanders have reached the top of their chosen sport. Baden Choppy represented Australia in hockey in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. Ken Nagas, Mal Meninga and Sam Backo were formerly teammates at the Canberra ‘Raiders’ rugby league team.

Mal Meninga has captained the state and Australian rugby league teams and is widely regarded as one of rugby leagues greatest players.

Spiritual contributions

Most of the Islanders who came to Queensland between 1863 and 1904 were not Christians. They followed their own religions, believing in the power of spirits, ancestors and one or more gods.

By the time recruitment ended in 1904 most Islanders had been converted to Christianity and many of those who stayed in Australia joined one of the Australian churches or missions.

For example, within one year of the opening of the Queensland Kanaka Mission (QKM) in July 1882, it had classes and services in 17 different centres. By 1900 every big Queensland plantation had its own mission teacher.

The Presbyterian (now Uniting Church) Mission and Anglican Church Mission baptised hundreds of Islanders during the last two decades of the 19th century. The missionaries were also teachers and most Islanders received their early education at the missions.

Many Islanders who converted to Christianity also became missionaries themselves in Queensland, Papua New Guinea or in the home islands. While there are no statistics that break down the denominations, most early Islanders appear to have converted to Anglican, Presbyterian or primitive Methodist faiths. During the 1920s and 1930s many more converted to Assembly of God and Seventh Day Adventism.

Today most Australian South Sea Islanders are devoutly Christian and their faith has become an integral part of what it means to be an Australian South Sea Islander.

Over the years Christian churches have provided Islanders with a much-needed support system and the means to organise community action. A strong commitment to Christian values has also tended to reinforce loyalty to the extended family.

Government agencies interacting with Islander communities need to be aware of their strong religious affiliations, particularly when arranging community meetings.
Family ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings and funerals are occasions for bonding and usually draw in the wider community.

**Political involvement**

Throughout the last four decades of the 19th century Australian South Sea Islanders had little opportunity to become unionised or to have any effect upon the political system to improve their conditions of indenture or social welfare.

Their indentured employment confined them to isolated plantations so the opportunities to meet and air their views were extremely limited. However, when the Australian Government passed the *Pacific Island Labourers Act* in 1901 Islanders were galvanised into organised protest.

The Act aimed at deporting all Islanders by the end of 1906 and despite widespread illiteracy, there was a broad consensus that they should fight the Act. Islanders gathered around a well-educated Mackay Melanesian, Tui Tonga, and formed the Pacific Islanders’ Association.

Islanders became determined agitators, presenting at least eight petitions to the Queensland and Australian governments between 1903 and 1906. A 3000 signature petition to the King was circulated in Queensland in 1903, receiving widespread support from missionary advisers.

Such strong and unexpectedly united pressure from South Sea Islanders and their European supporters led to a royal commission in 1906. The then head of the Pacific Islanders Association, Henry Tongoa, forcefully told the commission that his people should be given a land reserve so they could make their own way as settler/farmers.

The Commonwealth accepted that its 1901 Act was deficient and provided for several categories of exemption from deportation. Almost 1700 Islanders were allowed to remain and it is likely that another 500 escaped into the bush, often assisted by European farmers.

The deportation of Islanders had been considered a scandal by many Australian officials, mission staff and a broad range of Queenslanders. It is likely that the political agitation by Islanders had an important impact in changing the deportation process.

According to prominent Queensland historian Clive Moore, the Australian Pacific Islanders’ Association was the largest European-style political movement organised by Melanesians anywhere at that time. ‘When one looks over the 40 years of the Queensland labour trade,’ says Moore, ‘it is clear that part of the process involved the Melanesian immigrants ‘working the government’ to their advantage.’ *(Working the Government: Australia’s South Sea Islanders and the Government, 1863-1908. History Department University of Queensland)*.

It is only since the 1960s that Islanders came together once more as a community to politically activate for recognition and for their citizens’ rights. Islander activists like Faith Bandler not only drew attention to the plight of Islanders, but to the more politically sensitive condition of Indigenous Australians.

Ironically, this political agitation further disenfranchised Islanders as they were excluded from Indigenous organisations and the welfare support that came with
them. Many Islanders chose to hide their Islander heritage and be regarded as Indigenous Australians to continue receiving support.

The Commonwealth Parliament was well aware of the poverty and disadvantage experienced by Islanders in Australia. A Royal Commission on Human Relationships report in 1977 highlighted the disadvantage and hardship suffered by Islanders. The report recommended that Islanders should at least receive the same benefits as Aboriginals, excluding land rights. But no action was to follow from this report.
The call for recognition

By the late 1980s Australian South Sea Islanders were again motivated by deteriorating social and economic circumstances. Their leaders persuaded the Evatt Foundation to fund a report in 1991, ‘on the current situation of South Sea Islanders in Australia’.

This time the Commonwealth was alerted to the remarkable fact that Australian South Sea Islanders had become a forgotten people within the fabric of a multicultural Australia.

The Attorney General requested a further inquiry from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). The commission’s 1992 report, The Call for Recognition, was based firmly on a census of almost 1200 Australian South Sea Islander households.

A key element of the HREOC research was the first census of Australian South Sea Islanders. Islander groups realised the importance of this study and gave freely of their time and cooperation to Commission researchers.

This combined household and individual census asked 39 questions on information as broad as racial discrimination, ancestry, telephones, urban/rural location, benefits received and business loans.

About 2700 Islander households were identified and 1189 forms returned which represented a very high return rate of 45%.

The report identified that Australian South Sea Islanders “suffer persistent and pervasive poverty” when considered against standard economic indicators of disadvantage including home ownership, health, education and employment.

The Commission report drew five substantial conclusions and made six recommendations to the Federal Government. They are:

Conclusions:

First, South Sea Islanders have suffered from a century of racial discrimination and harsh treatment which are the major factors contributing to their being in a state of disadvantage today. In fact, the statistical profile indicates that they are one of the poorest groups in Australia.

Second, South Sea Islanders as a group are in a situation of high need, with particular difficulties observed in school retention, employment skills, home ownership and health.

Third, until recently, it has been relatively easy and common for South Sea Islanders to access a broad range of government programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Both officially and unofficially, governments have developed de facto policies, which permit such access.

Fourth, while giving material benefits to South Sea Islanders, governments have denied South Sea Islanders recognition as a distinct black minority group. This lack of recognition has over time contributed to increased tensions amongst the South Sea Islanders themselves, and between them and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Fifth, as South Sea Islanders are now being denied access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, they are forced into mainstream programs which are seen by them to be culturally inappropriate, with the result that they are not used.

Recommendations:

(1) The Government should formally recognise Australian South Sea Islanders as a unique minority group which is severely disadvantaged as a consequence of racial discrimination.

(2) Government agencies should consider whether their programs or activities have particular relevance to Australian South Sea Islanders, and where the programs are not relevant or are culturally inappropriate, the agencies should consult with the South Sea Islander people and take account of their particular needs and wishes. These agencies must take cognisance of the socio-psychological aspects of disadvantage. In particular, agencies providing employment, education, housing and health services should review the application of those programs or the development of new programs aimed at the specific needs of South Sea Islanders.

(3) Australian South Sea Islanders should be identified as a high-need group in equal opportunity, access and equity programs, and they should be employed in government agencies dealing directly with the South Sea Islander community, most particularly in the Department of Social Security CES, and Housing Department offices in Queensland and New South Wales.

(4) The Government should, as soon as possible, make available to Australian South Sea Islanders, schemes comparable to Abstudy and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational support programs currently provided by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), with the development and (where appropriate) the implementation of such schemes to be the responsibility of DEET.

(5) The Government should make a specific allocation in the 1993–1994 Budget for the provision of culturally appropriate programs for Australian South Sea Islanders and organisations (such as programs to include housing, legal, child care and financial services). Community development workers could be employed through Grant-In-Aid type programs to liaise between South Sea Islanders and mainstream services, provide organisational assistance so that South Sea Islanders are better able to continue examination of their past and present situation, and present cogent arguments to governments for action as and where required.

(6) The Government and relevant government agencies should take steps to increase public awareness of South Sea Islanders and their role in Australia’s history, including through inclusion in school curricula, preservation of South Sea Islander historical sites and archival material (including oral histories).

Recognition by the Commonwealth

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report was the first major government initiative in the 20th century to review and improve the status of Australian South Sea Islanders.

The profile of Islanders and their status as a forgotten people was now squarely in the forefront of Australia’s social agenda. A national summit meeting on Islander affairs was held in Mackay in 1993 and in the same year a Mackay Islander, Nasuven Enares, addressed the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and Minorities in Geneva, Switzerland.

In 1994 the Commonwealth Government formally recognised Islanders as a disadvantaged group and announced a package of grants, programs and special funding for the Australian South Sea Islander community. Cultural revival programs, including a large-scale curriculum development project and schemes to renew links with the western Pacific islands, were initiated.

The former Attorney-General Michael Lavarch said in Federal Parliament, ‘Australian South Sea Islanders are a unique minority group who have been severely disadvantaged through racial discrimination. Yet until now they have not even been formally recognised as a distinct ethnic group in Australia. In other words, they have not existed officially. Perhaps this is the greatest insult that can be paid to any group. More than an insult, this deflates the community’s self-esteem. It also threatens the collective heritage of the Australian South Sea Islanders.’

Queensland Government recognition

In September 2000 the Queensland Government received bipartisan support to launch a Recognition Statement of the Australian South Sea Islander community. In this statement the state government formally recognises Islanders as a distinct cultural group.

In a more formalised way the Queensland Recognition Statement acknowledges the discriminatory treatment of Islanders throughout their time in Australia. It also recognises their various contributions to the cultural, economic and regional development of Queensland:

‘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.’

The government also drew attention to how the Islanders’ unique spirituality, identity and cultural heritage have enriched Queensland’s culturally diverse society. More importantly, the statement was an opportunity to acknowledge past wrongs and to promise a whole-of-government approach in the future to the economic and social welfare of 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."

Queensland Government Action Plan

Following the recognition statement in 2000 a whole-of-government action plan for the Australian South Sea Islander community was endorsed by the Queensland Government in 2001.

The action plan identified five main areas of need that came from public consultations with the Australian South Sea Islander community:

1. improvement of Australian South Sea Islanders’ access to mainstream services
2. need for better awareness within government of Australian South Sea Islander issues
3. Need for enhanced community awareness of Australian South Sea Islanders
4. Need for community development
5. Need to address discrimination against Australian South Sea Islanders.

A summary of actions taken across government agencies were included in the annual Report to the Premier on the Implementation of the Multicultural Queensland Policy.

In 2004 the Queensland Government introduced a new multicultural policy called Multicultural Queensland, Making a world of difference.

Under this policy each government agency was responsible for developing and implementing its own Multicultural Action Plan. Achievements of the government in implementing the policy were published in annual Multicultural Highlights reports.

In 2011, after community consultation, a new multicultural policy was developed titled A multicultural future for us all. A three-year whole-of-government action plan has been developed to support the implementation of the Multicultural Policy.

The Australian South Sea Islander Action Plan, Reports to the Premier and Multicultural Highlights reports as well information on the current multicultural policy can be found at: www.communities.qld.gov.au/multicultural or by contacting Multicultural Affairs Queensland for a hard copy (07) 3224 5006.

Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation

On 2 October 2001 the Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation was launched in Brisbane by His Excellency the Governor of Queensland.

The Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation is a perpetual trust fund that provides university scholarships for Australian South Sea Islanders. This public, charitable trust is a partnership between the Queensland Government and the
corporate sector that provides a permanent legacy for the Australian South Sea Islander community.

The fund has been established and is managed by the Public Trustee of Queensland, who is completely independent of the government.

The first patron of the foundation is Mal Meninga AM, a highly regarded member of the Australian South Sea Islander community. Mal is a legend of Australian rugby league football and an ideal role model for young Islanders.

An independent Board of Advice provides advice on the administration of the foundation. It makes decisions about attracting investment from the corporate sector and the allocation of scholarships to young Islanders. The board comprises members of the Australian South Sea Islander community along with representatives from the business and corporate sector.

At the launch of the Australian South Sea Islander Foundation, the former Premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, said, ‘I am delighted to announce the Queensland Government has committed $100,000 to establish a special scholarship fund to give young Australian South Sea Islanders a better chance of gaining a tertiary education. The new Foundation will encourage more Australian South Sea Islanders to continue their education. We are determined to improve access to higher education by young members of this community.’

Companies and organisations are invited to make additional financial contributions to the foundation and to directly fund university scholarships. They are also encouraged to enter into arrangements to provide work experience and future employment opportunities for young Australian South Sea Islanders.

Scholarships through the fund are provided annually to Islander students who have been accepted into a university course at any campus of James Cook University, Central Queensland University, Queensland University of Technology and the University of the Sunshine Coast.

For more information about the Australian South Sea Islander Community Foundation contact:

**Multicultural Affairs Queensland**
GPO Box 806
BRISBANE   QLD   4001

Telephone:  13 74 68
Facsimile:  (07) 3224 5691
Email:   MAQcommunities@communities.qld.gov.au
Respecting Australian South Sea Islander culture

One of the most significant barriers to ways the broader Australian community communicates and interacts with Australian South Sea Islanders has been the lack of understanding of the Islanders’ culture, heritage and values.

For example, many Australians may assume that the ethnicity of Australian South Sea Islanders is the same as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people or Papua New Guineans.

In fact, most Islanders in Australia trace their origins to the Solomon Islands or Vanuatu and they are ethnically very different to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or the indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea.

An understanding of ethnicity and cultural heritage is an essential part of our sense of identity. This is as true for Indigenous Australians and Australians or European heritage as it is for Australian South Sea Islanders.

It is appropriate therefore that anyone who has contact with Australian South Sea Islanders, through work or leisure associations, is aware of their unique culture and ethnicity and how it infuses their community and family life, values and personalities.

According to the 1992 HREOC Report, ‘the lack of easily identifiable and broadly representative “gatekeepers” and close loyalty to extended families can make consultation very difficult, and this is one of the most significant impediments to access and equity for Australian South Sea Islanders’.

Cross-Cultural Awareness

Multicultural Affairs Queensland, in consultation with community representatives, has produced an Australian South Sea Islander Community Information Sheet (CIS) which includes basic cultural information and protocols. The full CIS can be found at www.communities.qld.gov.au/multicultural/community/mag-and-the-community

An extract from the CIS is below:

Key beliefs
Queensland's Australian South Sea Islanders are very proud people who have retained significant aspects of their culture and customs. They tend to be family oriented, Christian and have great respect for their elders and believe strongly in kinship.

Greetings, names and titles
Younger members of the Australian South Sea Islander community often refer to senior members of the community as uncle or auntie.

Meeting information
Meetings should be arranged in consultation with the relevant members of the Australian South Sea Islander community so as to determine appropriate location. No meetings should be held during the time of a death or mourning period for a community member. Seek community advice should this situation arise.

Social structure
Elders are highly respected and their advice is often sought relating to community issues. Delegated role models within the community are also
accepted as advocates on behalf of the broader Australian South Sea Islander community.

Organisations within the community have usually been established within the extended family network and are influenced by religious and island of origin background.

Dress and appearance
As per the broader Queensland community. During cultural celebrations, some members of the Australian South Sea Islander community may decide to dress traditionally.

Body language and behaviour
Australian South Sea Islanders generally tend to laugh and joke a lot. In discussions, some non-Australian South Sea Islander community members may misinterpret as being rude, something that may be said by a member of the Australian South Sea Islander community, where there may be a different meaning.

A physical show of affection between members of the Australian South Sea Islander community is common. However, physical shows of affection such as physical contact should be avoided by people who are not from the Australian South Sea Islander community as it may offend.

Food, drink and fasting
Fish, rice and vegetables are common. During cultural celebrations, a large feast of meat, chicken and vegetables, including taro is cooked underground.

Language and communication
English is the common language. Australian South Sea Islanders prefer to be contacted in writing and also like to be given the opportunity to speak for themselves.

The sharing of information among the broader Australian South Sea Islander community is common. It is common through an act of politeness for an Australian South Sea Islander who has not understood something to acknowledge that they have in order to save any embarrassment.

Younger members of the community are also able to speak on behalf of the community when delegated.

Awareness and sensitivities
It is important to distinguish between Pacific Islanders and Australian South Sea Islanders. Pacific Islanders are migrants, whereas Australian South Sea Islanders are Australian born descendants of South Sea Islanders.

During 1906 – 1908 many Australian South Sea Islanders were deported under the White Australia Policy. Those who remained were subjected to ongoing racial discrimination both in the wider community and through government legislation. Many Australian South Sea Islander community members state they are still living in conditions below what is enjoyed by many other non-Australian South Sea Islander Australians.

Key events
• The Australian Government recognition of the Australian South Sea Islander community on 25 August 1994.

• The Queensland Government recognition of the Australian South Sea Islander community on 7 September 2000.

• Vanuatu Independence Day on 30 July 1980.

• Solomon Islands Independence Day on 7 July 1978.

Queensland Health has also developed an online cross-cultural awareness training package to assist health care workers and professionals to provide appropriate health care to Australian South Sea Islanders. The package was developed in consultation with the Australian South Sea Islander community and can be found at www.health.qld.gov.au/assi/default.asp.

In 2000, the Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association, in partnership with the Mackay City Council and Multicultural Affairs Queensland, produced a protocols guide relating to Australian South Sea Islanders in Mackay titled Drumming the Story: It's our Business! A copy of the guide can be obtained by contacting MADASSIA on the details listed below:

Ms Marcia Eves
Treasurer
Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association
Phone:  0457 954 762

There are numerous sites of cultural significance to Australian South Sea Islander communities throughout Queensland. These places are significant to communities, families and individuals for different reasons but are often associated with local community history.

Further information on culturally appropriate engagement and/or significant places should be obtained from the Australian South Sea Islander organisations listed below or by contacting the Australian South Sea Islander Multicultural Community Worker at the Mackay Regional Council funded under the Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) program:

Ms Erryn Tomarra (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday)
Multicultural CAMS Worker
Phone: (07) 4961 9545
Fax: (07) 4944 2421
Email: erryn.tomarra@mackay.qld.gov.au
Website: www.mackay.qld.gov.au

**Australian South Sea Islander organisations**
Australian South Sea Islander community organisations grow out of community interest and commitment. Many of them are interconnected although Islanders themselves acknowledge that some groups don’t always see ‘eye to eye’.

The following is a list of Australian South Sea Islander groups from the Queensland Multicultural Resource Directory www.communities.qld.gov.au/multicultural/services-and-resources/multicultural-resource-directory.

In addition to these community organisations, local city or regional councils may also be a useful source of information or contacts for the local Australian South Sea Islander community.

**Australian South Sea Islander Fraser Coast Cultural Heritage Research Project**
Address: 8 Meadow Drive Dundowran Qld 4655

Contact 1: Mr Jon Vea-Vea
Chairperson
Phone: (07) 4128 7225
Mobile: 0428 195 666
Fax: (07) 4128 3021

Contact 2: Ms Erica Neate
Research Officer
Phone: (07) 4128 7225

**Australian South Sea Islander Independent Rockhampton**
Address: PO Box 788 Rockhampton Qld 4700

Contact 1: Mr Joe Leo
President
Phone: (07) 4934 8230
Fax: (07) 4934 8133

Contact 2: Ms Kerri Dorman
Secretary
Phone: (07) 4936 2868
Fax: (07) 4934 8133

Contact 3: Ms Joanne Warkill
Phone: (07) 4930 8133
Mobile: 0417 842 762
Fax: (07) 4934 8133

**Australian South Sea Islander Research Association**
Address: 6 Todman Street Carina Qld 4152

Contact 1: Mr Alton Budd
Chairperson
Phone: (07) 3899 5990
Mobile: 0434 974 431
Fax: (07) 3899 0779

Contact 2: Ms Christine Barney
Vice-Chair
Australian South Sea Islander United Council Inc Ayr/Home Hill
Address: 18 Albert Crescent Ayr Qld 4807
Contact: Mrs Marlene Henaway
Phone: (07) 4783 3090
Fax: (07) 4783 3090

Australian South Sea Islander United Council Inc Brisbane
Address: PO Box 3189 Yeronga Qld 4104
Contact: Mr Jacob Ryan
President
Mobile: 0439 713 297
Fax: (07) 3392 7313

Brisbane Kanaka Community
Address: 42 Yulan Street Inala Heights Qld 4077
Contact: Mrs Jeanette Kirk
Phone: (07) 3372 4025

Daralata Australian South Sea Islanders Association
Address: PO Box 1230 Hervey Bay Qld 4655
Contact 1: Mr Les Muckan
Deputy Chairperson
Phone: (07) 4125 5595
Mobile: 0407 653 133
Contact 2: Mr Steven Obar
President
Phone: (07) 4125 6380
Mobile: 0428 188 167

Frangipani Australian South Sea Islander Association
Address: 4B Trojan Street Hudson Qld 4862
Contact 1: Mr Robert Tanner
President
Phone: (07) 4061 3538
Fax: (07) 4061 6732
Contact 2: Ms Theresa Darby
Phone: (07) 4061 3538
Fax: (07) 4061 6732

Innisfail Jubilee Community Housing Association
Address: PO Box 1978 Innisfail Qld 4860
Contact 1: Ms Gloria Holst
Secretary/ Treasurer
Phone: (07) 4061 9999
Contact 2: Ms Bernice Walsh  
Phone: (07) 4061 8870

'Innisfail Jubilee Community Housing Association' Newsletter  
Address: PO Box 1978 Innisfail Qld 4860

Contact: Mr Holst Togo  
Editor  
Phone: (07) 4061 9999

Joskeleigh Community Association  
Address: 356 Joskeleigh Road Joskeleigh Qld 4702

Contact 1: Mr Cecil Parter  
President  
Phone: (07) 4934 4926  
Fax: (07) 4934 4996

Contact 2: Mrs Doris Leo  
Secretary  
Phone: (07) 4934 4926  
Fax: (07) 4934 4996

Joskeleigh South Sea Islander Community Development Association  
Address: c/- 137 Stanford Street Rockhampton North Qld 4701

Contact 1: Mrs Deanne Toby  
President  
Fax: (07) 4921 4052

Contact 2: Ms Bronwyn Warcon  
Treasurer  
Phone: (07) 4934 4835

Kanaka Town Collective Housing (Katch)  
Address: PO Box 5752 CQMC Rockhampton Qld 4702

Contact 1: Mrs Leonee Bickey  
Chairperson  
Phone: (07) 4926 5166  
Fax: (07) 4926 7114

Contact 2: Mrs Sharon Youse  
Administrator  
Phone: (07) 4926 5166  
Fax: (07) 4926 7114

Mackay South Sea Islanders Community Funeral Fund  
Address: 7 Morley Street Mackay South Qld 4740

Contact: Mrs Gladys Andrew  
Secretary  
Phone: (07) 4957 6049

Mackay Yamadi Lera Yumi Meta Association
Address: PO Box 1656 Mackay Qld 4740

Contact 1: Ms Natalie Farmer
Treasurer
Phone: (07) 4957 8121
Fax: (07) 4951 1686

Contact 2: Ms Elizabeth Warren
Coordinator
Phone: (07) 4957 8121
Mobile: 0402 331 646
Fax: (07) 4951 1686

‘Nuis Blong Yumi’ ASSIUC, Independent Rockhampton and District
Address: PO Box 788 Rockhampton Qld 4700

Contact: Ms Nicole Lee
Editor
Phone: (07) 4934 8133
Fax: (07) 4934 8600

‘Qld State Branch ASSIUC Newsletter’ Qld State Branch ASSIUC
Address: PO Box 2465 Bundaberg Qld 4670

Contact: Mr Jacob Ryan
Editor
Mobile: 0439 713 297

Rockhampton Australian South Sea Islander Community
Address: 285 Creek Street Rockhampton North Qld 4701

Contact: Mr Lloyd Willie
Coordinator
Phone: (07) 4928 8317
Mobile: 0402 716 999
Fax: (07) 4926 1794

Sandhills Art Gallery and Eco-Tourist Farm
Address: PO Box 1013 Keppel Sands Qld 4702

Contact 1: Mr Mark Warcon
Phone: (07) 4934 4908

Contact 2: Dr Pamela Croftwarcon
Visual Artist, Lecturer, Curator, Master Tutor
Phone: (07) 4934 4908

South Sea Island Housing Collective
Address: PO Box 1718 Mackay Qld 4740

Contact 1: Ms Moira Davis
Secretary
Phone: (07) 4944 1564
Fax: (07) 4944 1564
Contact 2: Mr Curtis Bobongie  
   Chairperson  
   Phone: 07 4953 1068

Whitsunday Australian South Sea Islander UC - Bowen/Proserpine Branch  
Address: PO Box 949 Bowen Qld 4805

Contact 1: Mrs Gwen Watego  
   President  
   Phone: (07) 4786 2276

Contact 2: Mrs Larisha Youse  
   Secretary  
   Phone: (07) 4785 1637
Further reading

The following publications are selected to provide broader and in-depth perspectives on the heritage of Australian South Sea Islanders and their current status within a multicultural Australian society.

- **A History of South Sea Islanders in Australia**
  Accessed 28 March 2012

- **Australian South Sea Islanders: A curriculum resource for secondary schools**
  Ausaid, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade and Education Queensland 1997

- **After Recognition – Access and Equity for Australian South Sea Islanders**
  Rural Social and Economic Research Centre Central Queensland University 1996

- Corris Peter 1973
  *Passage, Port and Plantation: A History of Solomon Islands Labour Migration 1870 - 1914*
  Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

- Docker, Edward Wyberg 1970
  *The Blackbirders*
  Angus & Robertson

- Fatnowna, Noel 1989
  *Fragments of a Lost Heritage*
  Angus & Robertson, Sydney

- Markus, Andrew 1994
  *Australian Race Relations 1788-1993*
  Allen & Unwin, Sydney

- Mercer, Patricia 1995
  *White Australia Defied – Pacific Islander Settlement in North Queensland*
  James Cook University, Townsville

- Moore, Clive (ed.) 1979
  *The Forgotten People: A History of the Australian South Sea Islander Community*
  Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney

- Moore, Clive 1985
  *Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay*
  Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and the University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby.

- Moore, Clive 1999
  *Working the Government: Australia’s South Sea Islanders & the Government*
  History Department, University of Queensland, Brisbane

  Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association Inc.
September 2001

- *The Call for Recognition: A Report on the Situation of Australian South Sea Islanders*
  Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1992

- Wawn, W. *The south sea islanders and the Queensland labour trade* 