



APENDIX A

SPEECHES IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (16:46): I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the 20th anniversary of the Australian Government's recognition of Australian-born South Sea Islanders as a distinct ethnic group in Australia;

(2) expresses deep regret

(a) over the cruel treatment of the approximately 60,000 South Sea Islanders, mainly young men, who were blackbirded (or essentially kidnapped) or lured onto ships and then transported to Australia for the purpose of indentured labour; and

(b) that a number of discriminatory acts followed, chief among these being the forced repatriation of Pacific Island labourers back to their place of origin in 1906, in many cases against the will of those being repatriated;

(3) acknowledges the considerable economic contribution of Australians of South Sea Islander descent to the establishment of the sugar industry in the state of Queensland, and other agricultural and industrial development in the north;

(4) celebrates the contributions of so many Australians of South Sea Islander descent to Australian life in every field of endeavour, from the football field to the political sphere; and

(5) calls for consideration of measures to ensure that Australians of South Sea Islander descent can achieve equity and assistance in this present day through:

(a) inclusion on the national census as a separate people group, by the simple addition of an extra question;

(b) access to diabetes treatment in the same way this is available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and

(c) access to assistance in all areas of disadvantage such as health, housing, education and training.

[http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=\(Speaker%3APitt%20Date%3AcurParliament%20Dataset%3Ahan%20sardr,hansardr80\)%20\(Alert_Mod_Time%3A%3E%3D20140830090004%20%7C%20Alert_Create_Time%3A%3E%3D20140830090004\);rec=2](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=(Speaker%3APitt%20Date%3AcurParliament%20Dataset%3Ahan%20sardr,hansardr80)%20(Alert_Mod_Time%3A%3E%3D20140830090004%20%7C%20Alert_Create_Time%3A%3E%3D20140830090004);rec=2)

On the banks of the Pioneer River in Mackay there is an impressive piece of public art called *Sugar Cubes*. While the average man on

the street may not know what it represents, there are about 3,000 people in the area who do, and these are the descendants of South Sea Islanders brought to our shores by force, coercion or bribery more than 150 years ago. *Sugar Cubes*—a semicircle of tall piles of cubes crafted out of steel—tells the story of their ancestors. This period of our history—the blackbirding era—is the closest thing Australia has had to a slave trade. About 63,000 South Sea Islanders were brought to Queensland, and each sugar cube bears the name of a trade ship that carried human cargo as well as the name of the plantation they were sent to work on. These workers came mainly from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In one year alone—1881—1,789 people were brought to Queensland in 31 ships; 15 of those ships came directly to Mackay, sometimes at a rate of one each week, and their trade continued for 40 years.

Many are familiar with what happened, but I suspect that few have stopped to consider the sheer number of people who are affected. Many died during the long voyage to Queensland, and more died after arrival from diseases like dysentery, pneumonia and tuberculosis. You could probably call the next sad chapter of their story 'Discrimination by legislation'. The dawn of Federation in 1901 brought with it the push from the union movement for a white Australia, and thousands of South Sea Islander labourers were deported under the Pacific Island Labourers Act. Other racist legislation followed, like the 1905 Sugar Bounty Act, which rewarded producers who used white labour, and the 1913 Sugar Cultivation Act, which required islanders who wanted to grow cane to be able to read and write 50 words in any language. Between 1900 and 1940 there were at least 40 pieces of discriminatory legislation on the statute books. There were restrictions on voting, land ownership and fishing for pearl shell. South Sea Islanders were even banned from employment in butter factories. This was a bitter pill to swallow, particularly in relation to the sugar industry, because their labour in the cane fields and their contribution to the establishment and ongoing success of the sugar industry was significant.

And this is another chapter of the story that is rarely told. In 1902 about 84 per cent of labourers in Queensland sugar were non-white workers. Another source states that since these islanders performed all the fieldwork connected with the sugar industry it is probable that without them the initial enterprise would not have been forthcoming and very few of the old mills and plantations would have seen the light of day.

It was a significant contribution for one of the state's most significant and enduring industries, which accounted for 1.7 per cent of total exports in 1900 and grew to 25 per cent by 1980. More chapters in the story have unfolded throughout the lives of many Australian South Sea Islanders who have contributed to our culture.

Rowena Trieve from Mackay and Joe Leo from Rockhampton are both OAM recipients. Mal Meninga has made a legendary contribution to the sport of rugby league. Faith Bandler, who championed recognition long before others, was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2009.

Proud Australian South Sea Islanders did not shirk their duty when it came to serving their country. Sadly, Mackay man, Frank Fewquandie, was the first Australian killed in the Vietnam War. And Percy Mooney Senior, who still lives in his family home at Habana, enlisted and served in World War II. Others who made significant contributions in Mackay include Cedric Andrew, Greg Sutherland, Jeanette Morgan, Christine Andrew, Winnie Boah, Kay Fatnowna and the late Noel Fatnowna.

There is no doubt that the day of official recognition in this parliament on 25 August 1994 was a landmark moment, and I want to pay tribute to the efforts of former member for Dawson, Ray Braithwaite, who pressured the Keating government at the time to respond to the call for recognition. Mackay's Greg Sutherland, who is also chair of the National Australian South Sea Islanders Governance Working Group, remembers the day well. He said, 'A lot of us were excited and pleased to be finally recognised for our heritage and our contribution to the state, and I guess we were hoping a bit more would come from it'.

At the time of recognition it was noted that the government of the day needed to assess how it was servicing the needs of Australian South Sea Islander people. Twenty years on, the time is right to again take stock as the next chapter of their journey unfolds. Why is it that proud Australian South Sea Islanders cannot tick a box on the national census forms acknowledging their distinct heritage? And why is it that Australian South Sea Islanders in need of special treatment for conditions like diabetes need to deny their heritage in order to access what is readily available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders? These questions need to be answered, and as chair of the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, I will call for a roundtable to give full and proper consideration to those issues.

Member for Hinkler, Keith Pitt – seconder

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (16:57): The northern end of my electorate is completely flat. From the air, the cane fields look like a giant patchwork quilt. There is only one blemish on the otherwise flawless landscape—it is an extinct volcano known today as the Hummock. Just 96 metres above sea level, the Hummock Lookout offers ocean views to the east, to the west cane fields encircle the city of Bundaberg, and then there are the smokestacks that belong to the sugar mill and of course the rum distillery. The beaches are covered in volcanic rock but if you look closely you can see the fields have

been cleared.

Dotted across the landscape are stone walls that were built by South Sea Islander labourers who worked the district's plantations. These walls serve as a physical reminder of the blood, sweat and tears South Sea Islanders shed for the establishment of Queensland's sugar industry. Most Australians have no idea that, even some 30 years after the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States, slavery was still rife in this country. Between 1863 and the early 1900s, South Sea islanders as young as 12 were ripped from their communities to work on Australian farms.

There is not enough time here today, in this place, for me to provide a detailed chronology of political and cultural events, but research shows about 60,000 South Sea islanders were blackbirded and in 1902 about 84 per cent of Queensland sugar labourers were non-white workers. It is widely regarded that, without Kanakas, very few of the old mills and plantations would have seen the light of day. In Queensland there are at least 40 pieces of discriminatory legislation on the statute books between 1900 and 1940—this includes the White Australia policy that resulted in many of them being forcibly repatriated. The practice of blackbirding was at one point rebranded indentured labour, to circumvent the slavery laws of Britain.

Australian South Sea islanders were not officially recognised as a distinct ethnic minority group by the Commonwealth until 1994. The Queensland parliament only formally recognised Australian South Sea islanders in July 2000 and in August last year the New South Wales parliament passed a motion acknowledging the ASSI community's contribution to the state. As I understand it, the government in Vanuatu is now granting dual citizenship to Australian South Sea islanders. Their blackbirding history is now taught as part of the Vanuatu school curriculum. Australian South Sea islanders are defined as being those who are the descendants of the South Sea islanders brought to Australia as blackbirds or Kanakas. There are thousands of Kanaka descendants living in Australia, many in my electorate. Sadly, an official number has not been established.

This motion supports calls by the Australian South Sea islander community for a specific question in the Australian census to count them as a unique ethnic group in a similar method to questions 18 and 19 on some Centrelink forms. There is widespread confusion among many Australian South Sea islanders about how they should identify themselves on paper. In many cases, such as question 7 on the 2011 census, their only choice is between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. ASSI community leaders say this has resulted in many people slipping through the cracks. Without the necessary statistics to create a demographic, social and economic profile, government programs and services will not be as well targeted as

they otherwise could be. Community leaders are working to finalise a national ASSI association constitution. In 2012, they held their inaugural conference in Bundaberg. I congratulate Matt Nagus, Joe Eggmosses and Emelda Davis and many others for their efforts in seeking recognition for their people.

I worked in the sugar industry in Bundaberg from a young age both as an electrician and as a cane farmer. I grew up hearing stories about Kanakas and the backbreaking work they did it very difficult conditions. I have moved some of those rocks! To give the House some understanding of what they endured, I will read from a local newspaper clipping dated 4 October 1884: 'John Arthur, the white man who put an ounce of lead through a Kanaka recently at Bingera, has been acquitted on charges of murder brought against him because Polynesian witnesses who were to give evidence could not be made to understand the nature of an oath or declaration.' The report goes on to say: 'Arthur made 12 Kanakas share a single ration,' which was one pound of meat per man per day. The potatoes he gave them were not fit for pigs.

There are unmarked Kanaka graves on farms right across my electorate, and I have seen them. In some cases, they were buried right where they died in the field. The former member for Hinkler, Brian Courtice, fought to have 29 graves on Sunnyside farm heritage listed for protection. His family purchased the farm in the 1920s from local businessman Edward Turner. Turner financed the slave ship *Ariel* to bring South Sea islanders back to work on the local plantations. Brian continues to be an effective advocate for recognition of Australian South Sea islanders. A memorial garden and community centre is being created at the unmarked mass grave site on Johnston Street near Bundaberg cemetery.

It is important that we continue to ensure ASSI graves across the district, and indeed the country, are preserved. The contribution Australian South Sea islanders made to Queensland's sugar industry and Bundaberg's social fabric is extraordinary. Their story is one that is so little known but it deserves to be recognised for what it is—that is, an integral part of Australia's history and its future.

Member for Shortland, New South Wales

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:52): I would like to congratulate the member for Dawson for bringing this motion to the House. This is a sad period in Australia's history, and one that not a lot of people know and understand. I also acknowledge that the member for Hinkler, as a Northern Queenslander, and a member who has sugarcane and sugar farming within his electorate, is here to speak on this piece of legislation today.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence in the chamber of members of the Australian South Sea Islanders (Port Jackson) Limited group. It is fantastic that you could be here today to hear

us make our little tribute towards the South Sea Islanders in Australia, and their contributions to our country.

As I was preparing this speech, I went through a lot of information and it reminded me just how cruel and brutal the treatment of South Sea Islanders was in Australia. They were used as slaves in their indentured labour. The member for Dawson was, I think, a little bit generous when he said it was the closest we came to slavery, I actually think that those South Sea Islanders working there were, in effect, slaves. They had no rights and they did not receive the same wages as other workers. It is a blight on the history of our country. The White Australia policy contributed to this also. The simple fact that South Sea Islanders were deported, were treated even more appallingly after 1901, is another blight on our country.

But I would like to make some positive statements about the enormous contribution that South Sea Islanders have made to our country. There have been many fields and many endeavours in which they have made positive contributions, but none more so than rugby league. As a proud member of parliament coming from the Newcastle region, I have to say that the South Sea Islanders have made a fantastic contribution. Last Sunday the Newcastle Knights defeated Parramatta and at the forefront of that defeat were three outstanding people from Australian-Samoan origins—there was Leilua, who scored one try, and the Mata'utia brothers, who are sensational football players. They really show what South Sea islanders can do for the game of rugby league. These are two young brothers that have spent the whole of this season basically in junior football, and because of injuries they have been elevated to first grade, and between them they scored not one try, not two tries, but five tries. To top it off their brother Peter Mata'utia plays for St George, and he is also a sensational player. These young guys were brought up in a household where there was no money, where they talked about having to eat bread to survive, and despite that disadvantaged background they have managed to be sensational rugby league players. So I think we need to pay real tribute to South Sea islanders, particularly in the area of rugby league and rugby union.

The point I would like to finish on is around diabetes. Diabetes is a disease that has a really big impact on the community. It is a disease that I do not think your community has come to terms with. South Sea islanders really are affected by diabetes, probably more than just about any sector of the population, and I think there is a need for programs and education directed towards combating diabetes in your community.

Member for Chisholm, Victoria

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (17:02): I also rise to speak on the motion, acknowledging the 20th anniversary of the Australian government's recognition of Australian-born South Sea islanders as a distinct ethnic group in Australia. I commend the member for Dawson for bringing the motion before the House. I also recognise the member for Hinkler and the constituents from his electorate who have made the long journey to Canberra—we hope you survive the cold weather while you are here. South Sea islanders came to Australia in 1863, not as immigrants seeking a new life; instead, enticed onto ships and in some cases kidnapped, in what was often classified as blackbirding, to work on sugarcane fields in Queensland. Indeed, as many speakers have said, they were not enticed to work; it was slavery.

I too express deep regret at the treatment in bringing the islanders to Australia and the subsequent discriminatory acts that followed. In 1901, the Pacific Island Labourers Act ordered the recruitment of Pacific islanders to cease up to 1903. In 1906, after enduring decades of hardship and discrimination, the Pacific island labourers were forcibly deported back to their place of origin, leaving behind a life they had built and a country they now called home. At this time, roughly 10,000 who identify as South Sea Islanders remain in Australia. From 1909 until 1942, the remaining South Sea islanders living in Australia experienced considerable hardship. Legislation prohibited their employment in the sugar industry, unions registered their employment elsewhere and they could not obtain financial assistance from banks. An example of the discrimination acts that South Sea islander women had to ensure was being relegated to the black ward at Rockhampton base hospital which was separated from the from the main maternity section and overlooked the morgue. What a terrible way to treat women giving birth to children.

After decades of discrimination, in 1991 the Congress of the Australian Council of Trade Unions committed itself to assisting South Sea islanders to be recognised as a group in their own right and we are continuing that journey today. The Australian government, in response to *The call for recognition report*, official recognises the South Sea islander community as a distinct ethnic group in Australia with its own history and culture. But we still have not managed to get it on the census, in recognition and acknowledgement by the Australian government of the injustice of the indentured labour system and the severe disadvantage suffered by the South Sea Islanders and their descendants, as well as their contribution to the culture, history and economy of Australia. Australia is a migrant nation, and this is another great subset of that migrant identity. It should be celebrated for what it is. The response included a number of initiatives especially designed for the

Australian South Sea Islander community, including several projects to strengthen community membership awareness and pride in their culture. We acknowledge the 20th anniversary of this recognition that the economic and cultural contribution made by the first Australian South Sea Islanders and their descendants should not be forgotten.

I know it is slightly different, but I have visited the communities on Christmas Island and on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and it is a very similar story. They were taken from their homelands. On Christmas Island it was the Malays who were taken to work there and now their descendants who are there. And of course on Cocos (Keeling) they were taken by Clunies-Ross to literally work as slaves in the coconut plantations. There are incredible cultures that we need to nurture, and we need to recognise that that is what makes Australia the great place it is today.

I have also had the distinct honour of working with the parliaments of Australia and the Pacific island nations in our parliament partnership program, trying to encourage more women into parliaments around the Pacific. This initiative is taking female parliamentarians from Australia and various Pacific nations. I have just returned from a visit to Tonga where I met some amazing women throughout the South Pacific who are attempting to get into parliament. One of my friends whom I met there is attempting to stand and be elected in the upcoming Fiji election. This woman was amazing. Another woman I met, who was from Samoa, is also seeking election. I took her out doorknocking in Melbourne before the last election. When I complained about the rain, she told me about taking her canoe down crocodile-infested waters. I applaud these amazing cultures, these amazing natures, and what they strive for.

We have a phenomenal relationship with those from the South Sea islands who have called Australia home since 1901 and should be recognised. I deeply regret the cruelty and I endorse the motions moved in this to ensure that the census is updated so this additional question can give recognition to this specific group.

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