



**For Community Consideration from the interim National Secretariat for
Australian South Sea Islanders - 22nd January 2014**

A Happy New Year to our community, friends and family,

It is with much excitement that we advise you that the Mackay Regional Council Queensland have confirmed a date when the Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) Community are happy to proceed with the third of our funded capacity building workshops namely Wantok 2014. To date a venue has not been identified however we are close to securing one. The dates for Wantok Mackay 2014 are 28th to 31st March.

The acting President of the Secretariat Board of Directors – Chief Dennis Bobongie has advised the national board of the imperative need to properly address the points 1 to 5 which will be discussed further at the boards convenience to meet.

Wantok 2014 is significant in that it represents 39 years since the first national conference was held in Mackay in 1975. It also as reminder to the Commonwealth of a community that has achieved much in recognition for our forefathers, foremothers and their descendants, stemming back to 1901 when a Mackay-based Pacific Islanders Association was established with branches in other areas. In 1906 two members of the Association voyaged to Melbourne to have interviews with Prime Minister Deakin, and wrote to Winston Churchill, British Secretary of State. 200 Mackay also Islanders attended a meeting to plan tactics at the 1906 Royal Commission, which saw the Pacific Islanders Act amended to allow certain categories of ASSI to stay in Australia.

In all honesty Wantok Brisbane 2013 was indeed one of the most robust and heavily debated workshops delivered which saw the better part of the ASSI community not in attendance however those participants who travelled long distances from across the nation and the Pacific engaged effectively in a much needed and straight forward debate which saw a vote of YES (by show of hands) to proceed with the national body model that's was presented to the community, the nomination of delegates and the election process.

Wantok Brisbane saw registrations from 245 participants whose attendance varied greatly over the three days due to peoples work commitments and travelling distances.

The vote to proceed with the election count (by show of hands) was 58 YES / in favour and 32 NO / against. Those in the room who were not of ASSI descent abstained from voting. Although 32 ASSI people voted against moving forward with the elections a number of these people stayed on to participate in further dialog and the election process, which was commendable.

Nominated groups to be elected as the National Secretariat were (by show of hands) 1. Bundaberg 28 votes 2. Australian South Sea Islanders (Port Jackson) 42 votes and those not of ASSI descent abstained from voting.

Community membership registrations to date for the National Secretariat collated at Wantok national workshops saw Brisbane 234 Tweed Heads 119 registered members.

The ASSI.PJ would like to take this opportunity to thank dignitaries, community leaders who attended and our international families and community organisations.

I wish to draw to your attention that there were a number of compliance issues in that the nomination and election process of the Board lacked the appropriate protocols and has been questioned by well-respected members of the community. They have also recommended that there should be a review of our current position and corrections made where necessary. This could lead to the five points below.

Some of our largest communities / regions such as Mackay, Rockhampton are not represented on the Board. The ASSI.PJ board believe there is scope in this infancy stage of setting up governance structures for our community to restructure the board representation at Wantok Mackay 2014.

As the president of the ASSI.PJ I take full responsibility and apologise for this oversight to elect a truly representative ASSI Board. It was a highly intense part of the election process coming at the end of the day with little time at hand to complete the election. In particular, facilitators were under considerable pressure by the venue time constraints and delegates needing to leave early to get to pre booked, return-home, airline flights.

In summary, we have taken great steps together as a community. Our record of registered participation for the last four workshops held from 2011 to 2013 is evidence of this as collectively the numbers equate to 1,091 community participants over a 3 to four day period.

The community does want to progress from our current national status and general consensus from leaders in the Mackay, Townsville, Burdekin, Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Tweed and Sydney regions who state a national body will be well supported, providing the election process is compliant, fair and just.

This is what we are working to achieve in the upcoming Wantok Mackay forum.

Wantok Mackay 2014 will revisit, assess and debate the following criteria:

1. Consider the restructure of the board to ensure that there is no over representation from region organisations or clans. All board members should be appropriately nominated from their regions and meet the requirement of their organisations constitution and government accreditation.
2. Elect to the Board, qualified leaders from highly populated regions that at this stage are not represented as well as an Ethics Council of standing.
3. Re-elect the National Secretariat (administration body). This would give other compliant and accomplished ASSI organisations apart from ASSI.PJ the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities in being elected.
4. Adopt a currently DRAFTED constitution (presented at Mackay Conference) or develop/draft a new constitution. When the constitution is adopted at a this conference or a future conference and the national body is registered with ASIC a final conference can be held for Registered Member organization/regions to elect a new board and appoint an Auditor.
5. The elections to be conducted through a secret ballot.

To date, personally I have been engaged in a significant number of phone consultations with respected leaders from our community who have been empathetic, straight forward and respectful in assisting with advice / strategies on how to best unite our communities for the greater good.

As a united community we can aim to address the lack of national representation from some of our largest and significant regions in north Queensland and other state representation.

As a National Body we can address the most recent critical matter of the Queensland Government cancellation of the ASSI Scholarships for 2014 and the inclusion of ASSI History in the national curriculum, which is being addressed at this current time. The National Secretariat has initiated investigations in both these areas of need and concern for our communities.

It is imperative that the current board reflect rightful and just ASSI community representation by committed leaders of Australian South Sea Islander compliant organisations that demonstrate a level of commitment and proficiency.

We invite and encourage everyone to participate in a democratic and respectful dialogue to address our community representation.

As stated by myself at Wantok Brisbane we hope that our community can appreciate what we have strived for in continuing the critical administration and consultation work in progressing the ASSI agenda and what ever happens we will continue to work in solidarity with our community in seeing a true reflection and sustainable national representative body established for our generation and the future.

Please see attached mandate that came from the people at Wantok 2011 / 2012 , National Secretariat Election doc 2013 and Media release from Wantok 2013 Brisbane.

Further queries please contact:

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Sincerely,



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