



## Information Sheet 4: Incidents of Abuse by Employers of their Pacific Islander Labourers

In creating general work pictures about the lives of South Sea Islanders over the last 150 years it is easy to lose sight of the individuals involved and the atrocities which occurred. While most of these incidents come from the 1860s and 1870s, the level of physical abuse was a disgrace to Queensland. It is undeniable that coercion and cruelty towards Islanders was very prevalent before about 1890.

### 1868: Work on Pastoral Stations

“... twelve men engaged on Lawson and Stewarts station, *Boondooma*, in 1868 were severely beaten and half-starved. One of the number was extremely ill, yet received no medical attendance. When the Bench in Brisbane — (the men having, in desperation walked from the Western Darling Downs to the capital) — heard of their sufferings, it still ordered them to return to their employers.” (Saunders in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, 194-5)

### 1870s: Work on Pastoral Stations

“Rev. J.C. Kirby was alarmed to watch a group of Islanders passing through Dalby on their way inland. They were without shoes, whilst the overseers accompanying them were armed with pistols as they rode, mounted on horseback beside them. He described it as a “scene from Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, whilst William Brookes, MLA stated that: “the driver [would be] comfortably seated with a long stock-whop, on a horse, the Polynesians barefoot; day after day, plodding their weary way. Richard Sheridan, the Inspector at Maryborough in 1876, verified these statements, adding that “some of them die... on the road from weariness.” (Saunders in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, 178)

### 1870s: Work on Pastoral Stations

“In a newspaper article entitled “Only a Blasted Nigger!”, the death of a lad named Locy was exposed. The Melanesian who was engaged at *Pandora* Station near Rockhampton, was only a “half dingo-eaten corpse... whose hands were tied behind him with a rope” when he was discovered. John Murray, one of the Justices on the Bench at the subsequent inquest, blandly stated that there were “no traces of violence of anything to indicate the cause of death”. (Saunders in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, 195-6)

### 1872: Work on Pastoral Stations

“In 1872, a missionary-educated man, Vee Vat, who was engaged on Northampton Downs near Tambo, reported that several co-workers were:

...cruelly... flogged with a stock-whip, (one receiving 36 lashes on his bare back after he had been tied up by the two hands to a tree.) Three other South Sea Islanders underwent the same punishment for refus[ing] to work without rations. (Saunders in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, 199)

### **1874: Work on Sugar Plantations**

“Hammangi, a San Christobal Islander, who had been employed at Mackay, died in September 1874 from exposure, starvation and a fractured skull. He had left his place of service, *Branscombe* Plantation with two compatriots. Later, he was found dead, still tied to a tree. His master was not even called to testify at the Inquest into this atrocity, as it was conducted by Alfred Hewitt, JP, the proprietor of another local estate *Pleystowe*”. (Saunders in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, 195)

### **1870s-1880s: Work on Sugar Plantations**

“In 1876, a man called Jepson, an employee of *Te Kowai* had savagely assaulted an Islander named Collio to such a degree that he died. Previously, Jepson had been warned by the Bench against this persistent maltreatment of those under his control. Even after this tragic development, he was not charged with murder, as his manager, Hugh McCready, formerly a planter himself, shielded the culprit. All that the Bench would insist upon was Jepson’s dismissal. Melanesians had told Richard Sheridan in 1976 that High Monkton, the proprietor of *Nevada*, would “beaty boy, whip him boy”, whilst the overseer at neighbouring *Magnolia* Estate was also “grossly ill-treating” field-hands. Lewis Hoey, the field-supervisor employed by the Drysdales of *Pioneer* at Ayr, was frequently vicious to the Melanesians: On one occasion, he gouged out the eye of an Islander with his whip. On another occasion, he had nearly beaten Jimmy Santo to death. He subsequently set savage dogs onto Santo’s compatriots to deter them from complaining to the local Inspector. (Saunders in Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, 197)

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Sincerely,



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