



Information sheet 18: Australian South Sea Islanders Chronology

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- 1790s: Once New South Wales was established, so too was a food trade in salted pork to Tahiti. Pacific or South Sea Islanders began to arrive in Australia, to Sydney and Hobart, as boats' crews.
- 1788-1820s: The Pacific frontier was the most important economic element of British colonialism in Australia.
- 1847: First 122 indentured ASSI from the Loyalty Islands (now included in New Caledonia) and New Hebrides (Vanuatu) were brought to Eden in NSW by entrepreneur Ben Boyd. The whole venture was a disaster.
- 1840s-1850s: Some SSI made their way to Sydney as boats' crews. There were a few working on the docks in Sydney.
- 1860: The first Pacific Islanders are brought to work in the bêche-de-mer industry at Lizard Island in North Queensland.
- 1863: The first 67 South Sea Islanders arrived in Brisbane to work on Robert Towns' cotton plantation, Townsville, on the Logan River. There were the first of 62,000 contracted labourers brought in a variety of circumstances from kidnapping to voluntary enlistment to work in the Queensland pastoral, maritime and sugar industries, 1863-1904. Quite large numbers came more than once and the overall number of individuals is thought to have been around 50,000. Ninety-five per cent were males aged in their teens to mid-thirties.
- 1863-1870: All ASSI labourers to Queensland were from the Loyalty Islands (now part of New Caledonia) and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu)
- 1868: The *Polynesian Labourers Act* was passed by Queensland Parliament to regulate the labour trade.
- 1869: The Queensland Government created a Select Committee on the operation of the *Polynesian Labourers Act*.
- 1871: London Missionary Society missionaries arrived in Torres Strait.
- 1871: The first Solomon Islanders entered the Queensland labour trade.
- 1872: The Torres Strait Islands were annexed to Queensland (with a further extension in 1879).
- 1872: Britain passed the *Pacific Islander Protection Act* as an attempt to govern the labour trade to Queensland and Fiji.
- 1875: Britain annexed Fiji.
- Britain passed an amendment to the *Pacific Islander Protection Act* as a further attempt to govern the labour trade to Queensland and Fiji. This enabled the establishment of the Western Pacific High Commission.

- 1875: The Western Pacific High Commission (based in Fiji) was established by Britain with jurisdiction over British subjects on specified Pacific Islands.
- 1880: The Queensland Government passed the *Pacific Islanders Labourers Act*, the first major legislative revision since 1868.
- 1882: The Anglican Selwyn Mission was begun by Mary Robinson at Mackay.
- 1882-1884: Queensland labour recruiting was extended into the archipelagoes east of New Guinea.
- 1883: Queensland attempted to annex South-east New Guinea.
- 1884: Britain annexed South-east New Guinea as a Protectorate.
- The Queensland Government passed an amendment to the 1880 Act to limit the employment of ASSI to tropical agriculture but created an exemption category known as Ticket Holders who had arrived before September 1879 and were exempt from all further special legislation. There were 835 in 1884, 716 in 1892, 704 in 1901 and 691 in 1906.
- 1884 - 1885: The Queensland Government established a Royal Commission into Recruitment of Labour in New Guinea and Adjacent Islands.
- 1885: Queensland ceased labour recruiting in the archipelagoes east of New Guinea and henceforth recruited only from islands now included in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.
- Queensland signaled the end of the labour trade by 1890.
- Queensland introduced an amendment to the 1880 Act to begin the Pacific Islanders' Fund, partly to distribute the wages of deceased ASSI.
- 1886: The Queensland Kanaka Mission was begun in Bundaberg by the Young family (more informally the mission began in 1882).
- 1888: Britain and France established a joint naval administration in the New Hebrides.
- 1892: Queensland Premier Griffith announced the extension of the labour trade "for a definite but limited period of, say ten years".
- 1893: Britain annexed the British Solomon Islands Protectorate; further expanded in 1899.
- 1901: There were 9,327 ASSI in Australia, spread from Torres Strait to the Tweed District in Northern NSW. The new Commonwealth Government of Australia legislated for a 'White Australia Policy', including the Pacific Islanders Act which ordered the deportation of all ASSI.
- The Pacific Islanders' Association was formed in Mackay to argue against deportation and to achieve better conditions for ASSI.
- 1903: Between 1903 and 1906 eight petitions were presented to the Queensland and Commonwealth governments on behalf of ASSI due to be deported. In March, two hundred ASSI from Rockhampton petitioned the Governor of Queensland.
- In September, 3,000 ASSI signed a petition to King Edward VII.

- The Commonwealth Government introduced the *Sugar Bounty Act* to subsidize sugar produced only with white labour.
- 1905: The Governor of Fiji agreed to take Queensland Islander deportees.
- Prime Minister Watson visited Rockhampton and received a petition.
- 1906: A Queensland Royal Commission into the Sugar Industry recommended certain categories of ASSI be allowed to remain in Australia.
- The Pacific Islanders' Association was revived and wrote to Winston Churchill, Secretary of State. 200 Islanders attended a meeting to plan tactics at the Royal Commission.
- In September H.D. Tonga and J. Bomassy went to Melbourne to meet Prime Minister Deakin.
- In October 1906 the *Pacific Islanders Act* was amended.
- The QKM, Anglican and Presbyterian Missions to ASSI were closed. The QKM moved to the Solomon Islands and became the South Sea Evangelical Mission (later Church).
- 1907: 427 ASSI left to work in Fiji. Along with the existing labour recruits there they form the base of the present-day Solomon community.
- 1907-1908: Except for the exempted categories, all remaining ASSI were deported. Around 2,000 remained and form the nucleus of the present-day ASSI community.
- 1908: Britain and France established the New Hebrides Condominium. The Pacific Islanders Branch of the Queensland Immigration Department was closed.
- Amongst the ASSI who remained, there were 150 farmers in the Mackay district. The trend had been since the late 19th century to lease small plots of land on steep hill sides, shunned by Europeans, to the Islanders for cane growing.
- 1913: Queensland's *Sugar Cultivation Act* required non-Europeans to apply for certificates of exemption in order to be employed in any capacity in sugar growing. They were forced to take a reading and writing test with 50 words in any language as directed by the Inspector before they were allowed to grow or cultivate sugar cane in Queensland.
- 1919-1921: Queensland's Arbitration Court ruled that no 'coloured' labour could be employed on cane farms, except where the farm was owned by a countryman, and in 1921 the Court granted preference in employment to members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU). The effect of the 1900s-1910s occupational restrictions was to relegate ASSI, notably the original immigrant generation, to the more menial poorly paid and itinerant farm work.
- 1920s: Banks refused to lend money to ASSI, leaving them increasingly insecure given increasing mechanization in the sugar industry.
- In the 1920s and 1930s most of the ASSI followed prominent Islanders into the Assemblies of God and Seventh-day Adventist Churches. In Rockhampton several families remained Anglican.
- 1930s: By the late 1930s only a handful of Islander farms remained.
- Elderly ASSI were paid an 'Indigence Allowance' in the 1930s, that was converted to an Old Age Pension in 1942 once the restriction on non-Europeans receiving the pension was removed.

- 1940s-1950s: After the war occupational restrictions were lifted, however, the increasing mechanization of the harvesting process in the sugar industry meant that jobs as cane-cutters and field labourers disappeared and ASSI men were forced to find work labouring or blue collar work, often less well paid, in the sugar mills, on the railways, or in the new coal towns in central Queensland. In the non-sugar areas, they engaged in cash-crop farming, in tropical fruit production (such as banana growing in northern NSW) , or in seasonal employment in the meatworks in Rockhampton, Mackay and Bowen.
- 1960: University of Queensland history postgraduate student Peter Tan interviewed 19 ASSI, including some of the original immigrant generation. He did not complete his research or publish his findings.
- 1963: Alex Daniel Solomon, from Guadalcanal Island, died at Mackay in 1963, the second last of the original immigrants there.
- 1964: Ohnonee (Thomas Robbins) died at Mackay, the last of the original immigrant generation in that district.
- Linguist Tom Dutton recorded interviews with Peter Santo and Tom Lammon, two of the last survivors of the original immigrant generation in North Queensland. These interviews were published in 1980. Tom Lammon died on 11 August 1965 and Peter Santo died on 27 March 1966, said to have been 105 years old.
- 1965: The Queensland Government removed legislative restrictions imposed on non-Europeans, principally through the *Aliens Act* of 1965, which repealed legislation such as the *Sugar Cultivation Act* of 1913.
- 1967: Peter Corris, then a PhD student at the Australian National University, interviewed descendants of ASSSI in Solomon Islands, Fiji and Australia. None of his interviews have survived.
- George Dan (also known as George Melekula) died in Cairns, thought to have been the last of the original immigrant generation. (The death may have occurred early in 1968.)
- 1972: The Australian South Sea Islanders United Council was established by Robert and Phyllis Corowa. By 1974 there were branches in several areas of NSW and Queensland.
- 1973-1981: Between 1973 and 1981 Clive Moore and Patricia Mercer, PhD students at James Cook University and the Australian National University, recorded more than 100 tapes with ASSSI.
- 1975: Papua New Guinea becomes an independent nation.
- The first national ASSIUC conference was held in Mackay in May. Delegates attended from Ayr, Mackay, Rockhampton, Townsville, Gladstone, Nambour, Bowen, Tweed Heads, Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra.
- Prompted by an ASSIUC delegation, in August 1975 the Commonwealth Government established an Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) to investigate ASSI claims of disadvantage.
- 1976: The Queensland Government under Premier Bjelke-Petersen appointed Noel Fatnowna as Special Commissioner for Pacific Islanders and recognized ASSI as a "distinct ethnic group". Noel Fatnowna held this position until 1984 when the Commission replaced by an Aboriginal Coordinating Council, the functions of which excluded ASSI.
- 1977: Faith Bandler published *Wacvie*.
- The Interdepartmental Committee Report was published in July 1977. It concluded that "Their socioeconomic status and conditions have generally been below those of the white community thus giving the group the appearance of being a deprived coloured community." Thirty-seven per cent of

those surveyed lived below the poverty line (as defined by the Federal Commission of Inquiry into Poverty). The comparative figure for the total Australian community was 12.5 per cent.

- 1978: Solomon Islands became an independent nation.
- 1979: *The Forgotten People*, three hours of ABC Radio programs of interviews with ASSI, produced by Matthew Peacock, were put to air, and published as a book, *The Forgotten People: A History of the Australian South Sea Island Community*, edited by Clive Moore, in 1979.
- 1970s: By the late 1970s ASSIUC ceased as a political force, beset by internal rivalries and splits, although in name ASSIUC continued to operate until the 1990s.
- 1980: Vanuatu becomes an independent nation.

Faith Bandler and Len Fox published *Marani in Australia*.
- 1984: Faith Bandler published *Welou: My Brother*.
- 1988: The Queensland Government gave ASSI full access to the programs of the Department of Community Services, which primarily catered for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Thomas Lowah published *Ebed Mer (My Life)*.
- 1989: Beset by internal rivalries and splits, ASSIUC ceased to operate.

Noel Fatnowna published *Fragments of a Lost Heritage*.

Faith Bandler published *Turning the Tide: A Personal History of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*.
- 1991: Evatt Foundation released a report on ASSI.
- 1992: The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published *The Call for Recognition* on ASSI.

Mabel Edmund published *No Regrets*.
- 1994: The Commonwealth Government recognized ASSI as a disadvantaged ethnic group.
- 1995: ASSI historical exhibition toured in Australia and the Pacific.
- 1995: NSW Premier Bob Carr sent a memorandum to his departments asking that they support inclusion of ASSI as a special needs group.
- 1996: Nasuven Enares began the ASSIUC Secretariat, located initially in Sydney.

Jacqui Wright and Francis Wimbis published *The Secret: A Story of Slavery in Australia*.

Mabel Edmund published *Hello, Johnny!*

Australian South Sea Islanders – Storian blong olgeta we oli bin go katem sugarken long Ostrelia, by the Australian National Maritime Museum.
- 1997: Clive Moore, Max Quanchi and Sharon Bennett published two books of curriculum materials in collaboration with the ASSI community: *Australian South Sea Islanders: A Curriculum Resource for Primary Schools*, and *Australian South Sea Islanders: A Curriculum Resource for Secondary Schools*,

- Brisbane: Australian Agency for International Development, in association with the Department of Education, Queensland, 1997.
- 2000: The Queensland Government recognized ASSI as a disadvantaged ethnic community.
- Cristine Andrew and Penny Cook edited, *Fields of Sorrow: An Oral History of Descendants of the South Sea Islanders (Kanakas)*.
- 2001 *Refined White* – Centenary of Federation Project
- A touring exhibition and secondary school resource which examines the struggle that governments and the sugar industry had in meeting the demands of the White Australia policy and its social impact on Australia's the South Sea Islander people. The project celebrated the culture and contribution of the Australian South Sea Islander people. Australian Sugar Industry Museum, This exhibition toured 12 national, state and regional venues in ACT, Queensland and NSW, 2001–2004
- 2002: “Across the Coral Sea: Loyalty Islanders in Queensland” exhibition.
- A photographic exhibition based on historical images from the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland which portray the way in which South Sea Islanders arrived, lived and worked in Queensland in the nineteenth century.
- Marilyn Lake published *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gently Activist*.
- Terese Fatnowna published *Faith of Our Fathers: A journey of Three Fatnownas, 1866-1999*.
- 2011: “My Island Homes”, Exhibition, Floating Lands Festival 2011 Butter Factory Arts Centre, Cooroy, Sunshine Coast Regional Council
- Collin Terare and Brisbane community hosted an ASSI / ni Vanuatu delegate forum at Bald Hills Queensland which initiated the call for the establishment of a national voice.
- 2012: Cedric Andrew Andrew, born at Sandy Creek outside of Mackay in 1911, died on 16 October 2012. He was then the oldest ASSI in Australia. In 1931 he married Marva Rutha Malasum with whom he had seven children. His grandparents, Charles Querro and Lucy Zimmie were kidnapped from Ambae (Oba) Island in Vanuatu.
- Wantok 2012 conference held in Bundaberg. ASSI (Port Jackson) Branch elected as the Interim National Body, with the main coordinators Emelda Davis and Danny Togo.
- Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore opened 2012—20 Years on since The Call for Recognition dinner for the ASSI.PJ.
- 2013: The 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first ASSI in August 1863 was commemorated in various places in Queensland and New South Wales in various forms, from formal dinners to exhibitions and booklets.
- Joskeleigh: Homeward bound*, Joskeleigh Museum
- Exhibitions as part of ASSI 150 SEQ Commemorative Program:
- Echoes ASSI 150*, The Centre Beaudesert
The Australian South Sea Islanders, State Library of Queensland
Journeys to Sugaropolis, City of Gold Coast
Two islands, one home, the story of belonging, Artspace Mackay
Sugar, Queensland Art Gallery
Journey blong yumi: Australian South Sea Islander 150, Logan Art Gallery

Key Events as part of ASSI 150 SEQ Commemorative Program:

Weaving the Way, Multicultural Art Centre
Memories of a Forgotten People, Cultural Precinct, Brisbane
This is Our Story, Commemorative Walk, Harvest Point Christian Outreach Centre, Beaudesert

Publications as part of ASSI 150 SEQ Commemorative Program:

Journeys to Sugaropolis, City of Gold Coast
ASSI 150 SEQ Newsletters August 2012 - November 2013, ASSI 150 SEQ Committee
ASSI 150 Website, ASSI 150 SEQ Committee <http://www.assi150.com.au>
ASSI Blog, State Library Queensland <http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/assi/>

A Commemoration Ceremony was held in Port Vila on 28th July in remembrance of the anniversary of the first ni-Vanuatu to go to NSW and Queensland, hosted by the Vanuatu Government. The PM called for an apology for descendants. Guest speakers Mrs Bonita Mabo, Emelda Davis and symposium participants Professor Clive Moore, Associate Professor Doug Hunt. Over 100 ASSI community delegates attended the ceremonies.

The New South Wales Government recognized ASSI as a disadvantaged ethnic group. The motion was put by the Member for Sydney, Alex Greenwich. There were seven recommendations that saw bipartisan support.

Sydney University partnered with the ASSI.PJ to deliver 'Sydney Ideas - Human Rights for a Forgotten People' symposium in recognition of 150 years for ASSIs in Queensland.

A digital media campaign focused on historical awareness of the atrocities faced by SSI/ASSI was produced by the ASSI.PJ in recognition of 150 years for Queensland.

The Commonwealth approved significant funding under the 'Community Cohesion' grants initiative to capacity build in ASSI communities, to the value of \$50,000.

In November the Wantok 2013 conference was held at the Queensland State Library in Brisbane 1-3 November. The result was nomination of a national representative secretariat and board.

Wantok Tweed Heads was held between 7-8 December in support of a national voice, supported by 200 community members.

2014: Wantok Mackay QLD was held between 28-31 March and saw the election of a national governance working group to develop a national constitution.

May 15th National Solomon Islands Museum 'Blackbirding' exhibition as a part of the International Museums day saw ASSI delegates participate, on invitation from the Solomon Islands Government, as a part of the opening ceremony speeches and in the day 2 symposium accompanied by Professor Clive Moore, Clacy Fatnowna, Emelda Davis and Marcia Eves.

Raechel Ivey (née Togo) was the first Australian South Sea Islander to obtain dual citizenship with Vanuatu, September under a new provision of the Vanuatu Constitution.

September 1st saw a Federal Parliament motion of regret and a call for inclusion of ASSI in census, education, training and health programs as well as diabetes research

Emelda Davis president of ASSI.PJ of the NSW Australian South Sea Islanders (Port Jackson) (ASSI.PJ) was invited deliver a paper on ASSI History and the Melanesian perspective on indentured labour at the Port Louis, Mauritius international conference "Towards the establishment of the Indentured Labour Route" in acknowledgement of the 180th Anniversary of the first arrival of Indian

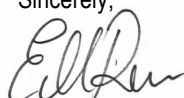
indentured labour at Aapravasi Ghat on 2nd November 180 years ago. Her presentation received a standing ovation.

MUA VOYAGE arrival ceremony saw ASSI.PJ Emelda Davis Mau committee member and Shireen Malamoo present to over 1,000 people at the Maritime Museum Sydney docks where Pacific Leaders sailed into Sydney Harbour bringing a message of people, oceans and climate change on the opening day of the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014

Christensen Fund supported Capacity-Building Workshop held in Honiara, Solomon Islands National Museum between 28 November to 1 December titled Findem Baek Famili

2015: Wantok NSW Lismore from 19th to 22nd January in collaboration with Shelly Nagas and ASSI.PJ an historical 4 day capacity building workshop hosted at the Historical Museum.

Sincerely,



Emelda Davis – President - Australian South Sea Islanders (Port Jackson) Limited

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