



Information Sheet 3: Incidents of Abuse of Pacific Islanders during the Recruiting Process to Queensland

There were 870 labour-recruiting voyagers between Queensland and the Pacific Islands, 1863-1904. Illegal activity and abuses occurred on many of these voyagers.

King Oscar, 1867

The first adequately documented case of kidnapping occurred on the *King Oscar*, a 248 ton schooner owned by Robert Towns in 1867. The ship returned to Brisbane with 282 labourers from the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands. Ross Lewin, the recruiter, had induced Mii Islanders to come on board and used Mare Islanders placed around the ship to stop the leaving. At Apie, two men were kidnapped: when one escaped, two others were shot. Lewin ordered all houses and crops in a village to be burnt. Canoes were deliberately rammed or destroyed by dropping large iron weights from the ship's bow.

Syren, 1868

The *Syren* was accused of kidnapping a Tanna chief and six other men who unsuspectingly came aboard, and well as Malekulans who had swum out to inspect the vessel.

Jason, 1871

On 8 January 1871 a canoe paddle out to the *Jason* was pursued and its occupants abducted. On 7 June 1871 at Ambrym two large canoes were sighted: the *Jason's* boats captured nine men and one boy, after shots were fired. The Government Agent tried to stop the abuse but the captain had him hand-cuffed and chained to a ring-bolt for more than three weeks without bedding.

Hopeful, 1884

The most notorious cases of kidnapping come from the islands odd east New Guinea in the 1880s. On one voyage the *Hopeful* crew had kidnapped a mission teacher and shot two Islanders. On a second voyage the *Hopeful* kidnapped a number of Moresby Islanders, by dragging them into the boats. The Royal Commission report into the New Guinea phase of the labour trade observed that:

“The cruise of the *Hopeful*... is one long record of deceit, cruel treachery, deliberate kidnapping and cold-blooded murder. The number of human beings whose lives were sacrificed during the ‘recruiting’ can never be accurately known.” The case was tried in late 1884. Members of the crew were charged with murder and kidnapping. All were found guilty, the murderers receiving death sentences, and the others given long sentences, the initial years to be spent in chains. The Queensland public protested: 28,000 people signed a petition for clemency, including 60 members of Parliament. The death sentences were commuted and all were discretely released in 1889.

William Manson, 1894

The last documented case of kidnapping occurred in 1894, when the *William Manson* was recruiting at Malaita. Several Malaitans were kidnapped and there were other irregularities, including an allegation that the captain made one of the recruits pregnant. The captain, Government Agent and four crewmen were all charged with kidnapping but were acquitted.

Cultural Kidnapping

Although physical kidnaping decreased as the labour trade progressed, the entire process can fittingly be described as Cultural Kidnapping, as it involved taking Pacific Islanders out of their small-scale societies and using them as labour in colonial Queensland.

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Sincerely,



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