



## **Australian South Sea Islanders and their Kin Connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians**

62,475 indenture contracts were issued for Pacific Islanders to work as labourers in Queensland between 1863 and 1904. Given the rate of re-enlistments from the islands it seems likely that there were about 50,000 individuals. The vast majority (95 per cent) were healthy adolescent and young adult males. From the 1860s to the 1880s significant numbers were employed in the pastoral and maritime industries as well as in the sugar industry. Their descendants can be found mainly scattered through Queensland: along the eastern coast of Queensland and in northern NSW, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Charters Towers and many in Torres Strait.

After the 1901-1908 Deportation years around 2,000 to 2,500 South Sea Islanders remained in Australia, living mainly along the coast of Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Most of these were single men living in small rural communities alongside the few ASSI families. These men died between the 1920s and 1960s. With no regeneration from immigration, the Australian Government expected ASSIs to disappear as the original generation died and their children were absorbed into the Indigenous population. There were always men who married into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and a few that married Asians and Europeans. The total number who identify primarily as ASSI is probably numbers about 20,000 to 30,000.

### **Aboriginal Connections**

There are today about 100 ASSI families. Some of them have totally ASSI descent, from original marriages within the community, but these are the minority. All of them have kin connections, through blood or marriage with the Aboriginal community between Mossman in North Queensland and Tweed Heads in northern NSW. There has been more recent inter-marriage amongst the ASSI communities in Sydney and Brisbane. It is difficult to estimate numbers as primary official acknowledgement is as Indigenous Australians. The number is probably approaching 20,000.

### **Torres Strait Connections**

In the 1860s there were perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 Torres Strait Islanders. Hundreds of ASSI were taken into Torres Strait onwards from 1860, until about 1880. They worked in the pearl and bêche-de-mer industries and were supplemented by other (non-indentured) Pacific Islanders, mainly from the Loyalty Islands, Samoa and Tonga) who were part of the London Missionary Society outreach onwards from the early 1870s. Most of these intermarried into the local Torres Strait Islanders. The most significant ASSI 'colony' is on Mua (St Pauls) Island, established by the Anglican Church in the 1900s. Others are intermarried throughout

the Strait. There has never been a differentiation in census figure's but around 50 to 60 per cent of Torres Strait Islanders would have some ASSI ancestry. Torres Strait Islanders began to shift to the mainland from the 1940s and lived in the same towns as ASSI and worked alongside them on the railways and in rural industries. Intermarriage also occurred. Given the population estimates for Torres Strait Islanders in the Strait and on the mainland, there must be well in excess of 10,000 with some ASSI ancestry.

## Sources

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Sincerely,



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