

Media Release

WANTOK 2014 (Mackay) Prioritizes Governance Education and Democratic Representation at the Mackay March Forum Cook Lecture Theatre – Central Queensland University Mackay 28 – 31 March 2014

Emelda Davis, President of the Interim National Body for the Australian South Sea Islanders announces: *"The WANTOK 2014 Australian South Sea Islanders Mackay Forum will prioritise governance education and democratic representation when South Sea Islanders from all around the region meet in Mackay. This national forum will determine how to work together to draft a constitution."*

The forum will be hosted at the Central Queensland University in Mackay 28 – 31 March and will be facilitated by independent moderator, Michael Chapman. Over the last five year Michael has worked with many culturally diverse organisations.

The first day of the Forum will see the important educational session "Working together to draft a constitution" facilitated by Darren Fittler from Gilbert and Tobin, one of the nation's leading law firms. Delegates will explore vital issues associated with understanding what a constitution means and how it operates, the status and responsibilities of an unincorporated working committee, and how a governance model for a federation may work.

One of the key initiatives for the Forum will be to consider a motion to dissolve the former Wantok 2013 Governance Model and replace this with the selection of a National ASSI Governance Working Group (NASSIG) and the formation of Friends of NASSI initiative. The proposed brief of the Work Group is to deliver a Constitution for an incorporated association which will be presented to the ASSI community for possible adoption by Friends of NASSI at a special meeting.

Emelda Davis stated: *"The proposed new structure will give our people the necessary means to deal with important ASSI matters that have remained largely invisible to the political processes that direct government policy. Tens of thousands of people in our communities have been disadvantaged through the impact of an indentured labour trade akin to slavery which was imposed on their forebears who were brought to this country to establish the economical base of Australia in sugar and cotton plantations of the mid 19th century."*

"Today there are issues of educational, social and economic disadvantage to address amongst our people. We also need assistance to strengthen our culture and connect back to our families in the Pacific," Ms Davis continued.

"The delivery of the structure for a national body has been several years in the making. Considerable work has been undertaken by ASSI (Port Jackson), the Interim National ASSI Secretariat, which was given this responsibility at the 2012 WANTOK (Bundaberg) conference," said Ms Davis.

Conference delegates will also be discussing opportunities to educate ASSI communities about the importance of the National Census and to influence how information about our communities is defined and collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Forum will be opened by the Mackay Mayor Deirdie Comeford and Jason Costigan, Member for Whitsunday (Representing Glen Elms, Queensland Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs) with speeches given by Tim Mulherin, Member for Mackay, Patron Mrs Bonito Mabo - AO, Aunty Rowena Trieve – AO (former MADASSIA President), Starret Vea Vea (MADASSIA President), Emelda Davis (ASSI.PJ President).

For more information and interview with Emelda Davis please contact:

Marie Geissler: 0416 285 727

Emelda Davis:0416 300 946