

Council to fly Australian South Sea Islander flag

Monday, 16 July 2018

Inner West Council has voted to recognise and acknowledge the contribution of Australian South Sea Islanders to Australia's history as well as shine a spotlight on Australia's shameful role in its exploitation of Pacific Islanders.

Australian South Sea Islanders are the descendants of South Pacific Islanders who were forced into Australia's indentured labour scheme – also known as Blackbirding – in the 19th and 20th centuries.

"Blackbirded" South Pacific Islanders were then made to work primarily on sugar cane and cotton plantations, but also in maritime and pastoral industries throughout NSW and Queensland.

With all the hallmarks of the African slave trade, many were kidnapped or tricked into this service, with some 15,000 dying as a part of the industry and then buried in unmarked graves.

Council has unanimously voted to support the Australian South Sea Islanders community by:

- Flying the Flag of the Australian South Sea Islands annually on South Sea Islander Recognition Day on 25 August.

- Liaising with the Australian South Sea Islanders Secretariat to investigate the inclusion of an Australian South Sea Islander mural as part of Council's Perfect Match program in 2019.

- Making Australian South Sea Islander historical resources available at Council libraries as soon as the academic information comes available.

"This is an awful blight on the history of Australia," said Inner West Mayor Darcy Byrne.

"Tens of thousands of islanders were transported, sometimes forcibly, from all over the South Pacific and forced to do backbreaking work in the plantations of Queensland and northern NSW.

"But the cruelty didn't end there. With the adoption of the White Australia Policy under the Pacific Island Labourers Act in 1901, more than 7,000 Pacific Islanders were then forcibly deported from the country.

"To add insult to injury, all of those deported were forced to pay for a portion of their fare home from the negligible – if any – wages they had received," he added.

"Only 2500 Pacific Islanders avoided deportation. And it is from those who remained that a distinct Australian South Sea Island community emerged.

"We as a nation have treated Australian South Sea Islanders in a shameful way and we need to right that wrong.

"I was recently approached by the Chair of the Australian South Sea Islanders Secretariat to discuss ways in which Council could support the recognition of their history in Australia.

"Inner West Council has a focus on reconciliation and acknowledgement of our Indigenous cultures, with whom the Australian South Sea Islanders have a kinship, and I'm proud we can support this community," said Mayor Byrne.

For further information, please contact John Roper on 0435 963 787.

Thanks for your feedback. We will use this data to improve the content of this page.

Page last updated: 30 Jul 2018