




Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Thursday, 1 November 2012

SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS, SESQUICENTENARY

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (3.09 pm): As many members would no doubt be aware, 2013 is a significant year for the South Sea Islander population of Queensland, being the sesquicentenary of the arrival in Queensland of the first South Sea Islanders who had been recruited against their will to work in Queensland, originally in the cotton industry but principally in the sugar industry. The first South Sea Islanders arrived in Queensland aboard the *Don Juan* to work on the cotton plantation that was owned by Captain Towns, which was located on the banks of the Logan River. There were 67 Islanders on board the *Don Juan*, one having died on the journey. This was reported in the *Courier* of 17 August 1863. However, as cotton proved to be not viable, around this time the sugar industry began to develop and most South Sea Islanders who were brought to Australia worked as manual labourers in the sugarcane fields. This forced migration continued until 1904. A 1992 census of South Sea Islanders found that there are around 10,000 descendants of these labourers living in Queensland. It is believed that this figure is an understatement and that the number of descendants is much higher.

I believe that it would be appropriate for the minister to appoint a state-wide coordinator to help organise the commemoration of the sesquicentenary of Australian South Sea Islanders. The minister has provided funding to local government and community groups in the south-east corner to coordinate this event. Because of the large number of Australian South Sea Islanders who live outside the south-east corner, I think it would be worthwhile for the minister to provide funding for areas such as Bundaberg and Rockhampton and also Mackay, which has the largest population of Australian South Sea Islanders in Queensland.

As I said, 2013 marks the 150th year of the arrival of Australian South Sea Islanders to Queensland. Many events will be held right across the regions to commemorate the importance of their struggle. Mayor of Mackay, Councillor Deirdre Comerford, Councillor Chris Bonanno, members of the Australian South Sea Islander community and I have met and mapped out a plan for the next 12 months. I believe that the government should set aside funds for this event. I know that some funds have been set aside for the commemoration, but we need to work with local government to leverage the best opportunities.

The sesquicentenary is also an opportunity to review the South Sea Islanders action plan, especially considering the number of employment programs that have been axed by this government. Last Sunday in Mackay I met with the minister at the multicultural festival where we discussed these issues. I urge the minister to consider appointing a state-wide coordinator, to set aside specific funds and to work with local government to commemorate this important event.

(Time expired)