



Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**


**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 May 2017

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Marchetti, Mr F; Australian South Sea Islanders**

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (10.03 pm): On behalf of the entire Mackay community I send our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Francesco Marchetti, better known as Frank. Sadly, on Sunday Frank, one of Mackay's greatest adventurers, lost his life due to altitude sickness on Mount Everest. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all.

This year in Mackay, Australian South Sea islanders are engaging in several months of activities that include football games, the Australian South Sea islander 150th art exhibition, the launch of the Pacific Island history display, the commemoration of the hurricane lamp at Bluewater Quay and the unveiling of the Mackay Cemetery project. This will be done to mark the 150th anniversary of their arrival on the first ship that was brought up the Pioneer River and tied to the Leichardt Tree. Previously, vessels to Mackay were moored on offshore islands and passengers were loaded onto barges and taken to shore as blackbird labourers.

The anniversary is a significant milestone for the Australian South Sea islander community in Mackay and an important part of Queensland's history. At 9 pm on 14 August 1863, the *Don Juan* arrived at Moreton Island with 67 Pacific islander passengers. The labourers on the *Don Juan* were generally regarded as the initial participants of Queensland's island labour trade known as blackbirding. The islanders were brought to Queensland from approximately 80 Melanesian islands to work for the state in the cotton and sugar plantations. They were considered a source of cheap labour. Many were kidnapped or tricked by labour traders and many experienced harsh treatment and discrimination.

The 1889 inquiry into the sugar industry noted that between 2,000 and 3,000 white Europeans were employed in the industry, costing approximately £200,000 in wages per annum. By contrast, there were 6,000 South Sea Island labourers on sugar farms in Queensland, costing approximately £50,000 per annum. In 1901, after settling into the community and starting families, the South Sea islanders were harshly targeted for deportation under the White Australia policy, which split up families. South Sea islanders have a unique place in Mackay's history and culture, which should be acknowledged and recognised by all Queenslanders. These resilient Queenslanders play an important role in supporting the economic, social, political and cultural life not only in Mackay but also right across Australia. South Sea islanders work as artists, musicians, members of the Australian Ballet Co., teachers, social workers, academics and solicitors, just to name a few examples of their great work.

*(Time expired)*