




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 13 November 2018

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

South Sea Islanders

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (2.43 pm): I rise to speak on behalf of the disadvantage that continues to beset the South Sea islander communities. The Australian South Sea islands people were brought to Queensland as slaves and a cheap source of disposable labour to work the colonial sugar fields from the 1870s. Many died in the canefields establishing an industry which to this day remains a key tenet of the Queensland economy.

As I spoke about in my maiden speech, the White Australia Policy, enacted at the turn of the 20th century, along with the implementation of the Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901, led to many South Sea islanders being sent home. Tragically, if near immediate deportation was not harsh enough treatment, many did not finish the journey alive at the hands of those tasked with transport duty. For those who sought to remain on Queensland soil, especially those who had subsequently been born here, the list of parliamentary legislation enacted between 1901 and 1921 and through to the Aliens Act as late as 1965 is a sobering indictment of how nasty white Australians could be.

In 1903 the Sugar Cultivation Act sought to remove non-Europeans working in the sugar industry, whilst the Sugar Bounty Act of the same year paid more for cane cut by white workers. A series of openly racist acts of parliament restricted South Sea islanders along with a number of other races who could not pass a 50-word English literacy test from working for the local authorities, holding a mining license or seeking employment within the pearling, dairy or banana industries. At that point in time Queensland agriculture had benefited greatly from the Kanakas' service, as did the establishment of the railways and main roads which continued to offer up lowly positions involving the toughest of work. Despite this adversity, the South Sea islanders were a hardworking and happy people, presenting little threat to anyone, yet the rotten treatment tested their resolve to stay and contribute to a young, growing nation that in many ways was still refusing to accept them.

Sadly, to this day I do not believe the shackles of slavery have been removed. Based on my personal observations and from seeking the advice of others, I believe the South Sea islander people still face a range of difficulties such as establishing small businesses and being appointed to positions of employment beyond the menial grades. In general, their education and health standards continue to lag. I have seen this. I know that after what happened with the CAMS office in Mackay we can count less than 10 people in the South Sea island community in Queensland who actually own a mainstream business, and I think that is an absolute shame.

Within my local electorate of Mirani, the South Sea islander community is a well recognised feature of the district and is fortunate to have the support of the Mackay Regional Council—and also the Palaszczuk government—employing a community liaison officer with a South Sea islander background. For many decades the Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association has been proactive in seeking better recognition of the Australian South Sea islanders at both state and

federal levels. As part of a recent listening tour conducted by Ms Marion Healy, formerly a Fatnowna, her diligent work has confirmed a statewide Australian South Sea islander body, which has been sought for many decades, is very much needed in our community.

The forming of a statewide Australian South Sea islander body will also provide a better level of assistance to the established regional groups, establish a recognised forum for discussion on socioeconomic disadvantage and provide efficient advocacy for all Australian South Sea islander descendants who are even more dispersed across the state. As such, I am keen to seek the formal support of the Minister for Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs, the member for Sandgate, and to receive acknowledgment of the establishment and funding of a statewide Australian South Sea islanders council. This would be a positive step in finally addressing the legacy of a countless number of human rights breaches committed against the Australian South Sea islander peoples. This would finally establish proper socioeconomic equality after 150 years of disadvantage. This has been a long time coming. We would like to see bipartisan support for this. We would also like to see this supported by the federal government going forward.