




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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ADJOURNMENT

Australian South Sea Islanders

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.12 pm): Australian South Sea islanders hold the dubious honour of being the only people ever subjected to a mass deportation order in Australia. Between 1904 and 1908, up to 8,000 Kanakas were uprooted from their friends and families and forcibly returned to the islands that most could barely remember. For those who remained, life became one long round of poverty, neglect and discrimination by law. South Sea islanders were not allowed to become citizens, vote, buy alcohol, take out a loan, open a bank account, rent a house or own land. Worst of all, they were legally prevented from working in the only industry they knew: agriculture.

In 1941 the then member for West Moreton asked the Labor government to help the South Sea islanders, who he said lived in 'great misery and distress and dependent on local charity for their existence'. He asked the House—

Do we not owe a debt to these men ...

...

Much of the prosperity that has come to our Northern cities and districts because of the great sugar industry has been made possible by the efforts of these men who in the prime of their lives were taken away from their homes and brought to this country to help in its pioneering and development.

Unmoved, the government denied the member's request. Until well into the 1960s, the South Sea islanders suffered extraordinary levels of hardship and discrimination in Queensland. In Central Queensland, islander women were relegated to what was called the 'black ward' at the Rockhampton Base Hospital. It was strictly separated from the main maternity section for white women and overlooked the morgue. Many found this experience very terrifying.

One historian has counted at least 40 pieces of discriminatory Queensland legislation between 1900 and 1940 which applied to the South Sea islanders. The prohibition on black labour in the agriculture industry was actually not abolished until as late as 1964. The call for recognition was a cry for help for the people who had borne many misdeeds in the past but who had now laid their case before the government and patiently waited for justice to be done. What did they get in return for that patience and trust? Nothing. A few flowery speeches and a couple of fancy-looking plaques on the wall—like the one that is hanging over on floor 5 in the corridors of this very building.

In 2012 the then member for Mackay, Tim Mulherin, asked the government exactly what had been done to implement the government's South Sea islander action plan. He was fobbed off by the minister again and again. His last words before his time expired were—

What about the action plan, Minister?

The question went unanswered in 2012 and it remains unanswered to this very day, which is so sad.