




Speech By
Brittany Lauga

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2022

MOTION

Australian South Sea Islanders

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (5.44 pm): I rise to speak in support of the amendment moved by the minister. I thank the member for Mirani for moving the original motion, which has brought on this dialogue in this place about a terrible part of Queensland's history but it is also about a very unique and distinct cultural group.

I acknowledge the 22nd anniversary on 7 September of the Queensland recognition statement made by then premier Peter Beattie. That statement recognises Australian South Sea islanders as a distinct cultural group. I am very pleased that the statement received bipartisan support at the time. I acknowledge the 28th anniversary of Australian South Sea islander recognition by the Commonwealth government on 25 August 1994. This is a very happy time for the Australian South Sea islander community in my electorate, with weeks of celebrations of this recognition all those years ago.

The Australian South Sea islander communities absolutely hold a unique place in the establishment of Queensland's cultural and economic fabric, with approximately 6,800 people with Australian South Sea islander heritage in Queensland. I was very lucky to grow up with many Australian South Sea islanders, playing netball and going to school together at Mount Archer State School. I have fond memories and I still have those friends today.

I am ashamed to say that, despite growing up alongside so many Australian South Sea islanders in my community, it was not until I was an adult that I learned the truth about what happened to them and their ancestors. Over 50,000 people, predominantly men, came from some 80 Pacific islands—primarily Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands—and the majority were kidnapped, blackbirded or deceived into coming here. It was absolutely terrible. I know, from talking with many of the people in my community, that there is ongoing intergenerational trauma that these people continue to experience as a result of what happened to their family.

I think it is important for all Queenslanders to know the truth about what happened to South Sea islanders who were blackbirded and treated as slaves in our state. I think of the quote—

Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat their mistakes.

...

Those who fail to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors are destined to repeat them.

I think that quote is quite pertinent in this instance. Telling the truth means that we then know and understand our history and are less likely to repeat it and are less likely to be condemned to repeat it. We need to talk about what actually happened, be honest about what happened and have it taught in the school curriculum and education system as well. I learnt at school alongside many Australian South Sea islanders, yet I had no idea about what had happened to them and our history until well after I had finished school.

Despite the hardship and discrimination faced by the community, Australian South Sea islanders have contributed significantly to the social, cultural and economic development of Queensland. Australian South Sea islanders provided labour to help build local economies and key industries, including in Central Queensland. They contributed to the development of farming and grazing, as well as the maritime industry, pearling, mining, the railways, domestic services and child care. They have also served the nation as members of the defence force in times of peace and war.

I am incredibly proud to have a very significant Australian South Sea islander community in Keppel, in both Joskeleigh and North Rockhampton, and currently there is a month of recognition celebrations underway. The Australian South Sea islander community in Keppel are beautiful people. They are kind. They are very generous. They are family people. They are community people. They are gentle. They are connected. I love spending time with them. I am always made to feel so welcome.

On 21 August there was a combined church service at St John's Church in Ford Street. Then a flag-raising ceremony and elders luncheon was held at the Rockhampton Town Hall and the All Blacks Sports Club on 25 August. The Joskeleigh community celebrated on 27 August with a welcome to country by Aunty Sally Vea Vea and with entertainment by the Solomon Boys.

Then, on 28 August, the Rockhampton Australian South Sea Islander Community Association hosted its recognition day celebrations at the RASSIC Hall in Berserker. Uncle Boisy Little and Aunty Tarsha Bickey provided beautiful entertainment and an array of food. I am told that the cooks worked for hours to prepare all kinds of delicious dishes, which included a whopping 75 kilograms of roasted vegies, 35 kilograms of five types of roast meats, yummy side salads and four hot dishes—chicken stir-fry, curry, spaghetti bolognese and rice. I thank the Australian South Sea islanders in my community and I commend the amendment to the House.