



Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**


**MEMBER FOR HILL**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2022

**MOTION**

**Australian South Sea Islanders**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (5.40 pm): In speaking to the motion that has been put forward by the member for Mirani, I acknowledge that this issue is a very emotional one and close to the member for Mirani's heart, as a fourth generation South Sea islander. The member for Mirani is very protective of his heritage and in 2019 became an honorary Vanuatu tribal chief, which is a great honour.

Australian South Sea islanders are descendants of the Pacific Islands blackbirding trade that started in New South Wales in 1847 which resulted in the transportation of Australian South Sea islanders to Queensland in 1863. Between 1863 and 1904, around 60,000 Pacific islanders were forcibly transported to Queensland, where they laboured to create the sugar plantations of North Queensland. The member for Mirani's great-great-grandmother was one of those Pacific islander workers who was transported to Queensland to work in either the sugarcane fields or domestic services. As terrible as this period was, without the Australian South Sea islanders and the Italians, we would not have a sugar industry today.

From what I understand, there were at least 40 pieces of discriminatory Queensland legislation introduced between 1900 and 1940 which applied to the South Sea islanders who stayed on in Australia. Next week, 7 September is the 22nd anniversary of the Queensland government's recognition statement made in parliament by former premier Peter Beattie. I will not forget this date because I was born on 7 September.

I was very proud to have the opportunity to work with many South Sea islanders during my 20 years working on the Queensland railways. They were mates, extremely hard workers, tough as nails, very spiritual, had gentle natures and would do anything for anyone.

I was involved with the railway 'Silver Spike' team. One of the teams comprised all South Sea islanders who took out the Central Queensland championship and then competed in Brisbane at the Ekka and became the third best team in Queensland. During my railway and Rugby League years, I had the opportunity to work with so many South Sea islanders whom I have fond memories of and a huge respect for.

I commend the member for Mirani for his passionate representation of his people and for bringing this motion to the House. The KAP will be supporting the motion moved by the member for Mirani.