



Media release

Minister for ATSI and Multicultural Affairs and Minister
Assisting the Premier

The Honourable Glen Elmes

Friday, August 24, 2012

Celebrating Australian South Sea Islanders

The significant contribution made by Australian South Sea Islanders to Queensland's cultural diversity and economic prosperity will be celebrated this Saturday with the annual Recognition Day.

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs Glen Elmes said Australian South Sea Islanders are a distinct cultural group with a unique history marked by disadvantage, discrimination and hardship.

"The heritage of modern day Australian South Sea Islanders extends back to the late 1800s when many men were cajoled, deceived and often just kidnapped from Pacific islands, and brought to Queensland to work mainly for the sugar industry," Mr Elmes said.

"Queensland became the home reluctantly for more than 60,000 people from Pacific islands including the New Hebrides – as Vanuatu was then known – the Solomon Islands, the Loyalty Islands, Samoa, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

"This practice, known as 'blackbirding', remains to this day a stain on the state's proud agricultural history.

"Decades later, the South Sea Islander community suffered further ignominy when many of their number were deported from 1906 onwards under the provisions of the White Australia Policy."

Mr Elmes said some were allowed to remain under various exemptions, including marriage to an Australian, and from that small cultural core, the state's South Sea Islander population has grown to nearly 20,000.

Among their number are counted some of our most celebrated community leaders like Faith Bandler and Bonita Mabo, as well as rugby league greats Mal Meninga, Sam Backo and Gordon Tallis.

"On Recognition Day, the Australian South Sea Islander community remember the Australian and Queensland Government formal recognition of them as a distinct cultural group.

"Next year marks the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first South Sea Islanders in Queensland.

"The majority of the population lives in Queensland, and I'm happy to offer my support so that next year's anniversary receives appropriate recognition."

[ENDS] 24 August 2012

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