

In places such as Ayr, Innisfail, the beach and river areas of Mackay, Joskeleigh near Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, the Sunshine Coast and Tweed River, small sustainable communities started to develop. Most South Sea Islanders continued to live in small Islander communities on the outskirts of the major port towns. They lived in little shanty huts usually made of bark, slab or grass on the banks of rivers, beach fronts or on the land of more tolerant employers.

Others started to settle in predominantly 'white' communities. They continued to grow market gardens, make cast nets, gather turtle eggs and continued customs such as knowing when to fish by the look of the water or the night sky. They lived in the extended family network.

The South Sea Islander family unit changed a little as the next generation of South Sea Islanders began to grown older. Women were left to look after the extended family unit while men travelled to find work as stockmen, on the railways, at meatworks or fruit picking. Young women would work as maids in the local towns or on farms and large stations.



ASSI workers at Freeman banana plantation of Tomewin, Currumbin Valley, 1950s.  
**Source:** City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library.



Bli Bli Rugby League Football Club, 1934.  
J.Eggmolesse (Captain) bottom row, third from left.  
**Source:** Sunshine Coast Libraries.



Buderim Mountain School Pupils with head teacher Jon McKeon, 1899.  
**Source:** Sunshine Coast Libraries.

Today, community gatherings remain an integral part of community life. During these times family connections are maintained, stories and information are passed on and decisions are made. Funerals are a special time for the extended community and important decisions can only be made collectively.

In 2000, the Queensland Government recognized that the descendants, Australian South Sea Islanders, have their own distinct culture. For many, this was a defining moment in their history of struggle, recognition, and reconciliation.

“Australian South Sea Islanders' unique spirituality, identity and cultural heritage enrich Queensland's culturally diverse society. For more than a century their culture, history and contribution to Queensland have been ignored and denied. Even today there is little knowledge or understanding among the Australian community about Australian South Sea Islanders.”

## Queensland Government's Recognition Statement September 2000



Recognition Day, Brisbane, 2000. Photo by Imelda Miller.

“Our knowledge lines were broken, children were asked by 'the old people' to speak only in English. They believed this was our new home and that we no longer needed the language, the dances and the songs of the islands. We built our own place here. A place for our families to gather, to call home; a place to return to when we need to connect with our ancestors and our roots. A place to remember 'the struggle' to give us courage and strength to go forward every day.

These places were once filled with grand markets gardens, mango trees, citrus trees, corrugated iron huts with dirt floors, and cane fields as far as the eye could see. Some near the ocean, up rivers, creeks and swamps. There was singing, a guitar strumming, and the hum of a harmonica, with bursts of laughter all around. Stories were shared, from the outback adventures of the stockman to the local fishing excursions along the banks of the river.

The children played and their parents and grandparents watched on. We remember.”

**Imelda Miller, ASSI Curator 2013**

Australian South Sea Islanders are proud of their heritage and their achievements and contribution to Australia. Despite the recognition of the Federal and Queensland Governments, 150-years on the community continues to struggle for cultural awareness, recognition and equality.