

# South Sea Islanders in Australia

Today there is a thriving community of South Sea Islanders in Australia. Some of these people are descendants of workers brought to Queensland in the late 1800s to work on sugar cane and pineapple plantations. Others have migrated to Australia in more recent times from the island nations of the Pacific.

### **South Sea Island Workers**

The trade in South Sea Island workers began in the 1860s. Ships travelled to the Pacific Islands including the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Kiribati and Tuvalu to recruit men and some women, often by threats or false promises. Sometimes large numbers of people were lured aboard the ship with the promise of food, trade or a religious ceremony, only for the ship to immediately set sail for Queensland.

While it is not possible to know the exact number, it is estimated that more than 60 000 South Sea Islanders were brought to Australia between 1863 and 1904. Most of them were sent back to their island homes between 1906 and 1908, as a result of the Federal Government policy to keep Australia a predominately European nation (the White Australia policy). However, some stayed, and their descendants today play an important part in Australian life.

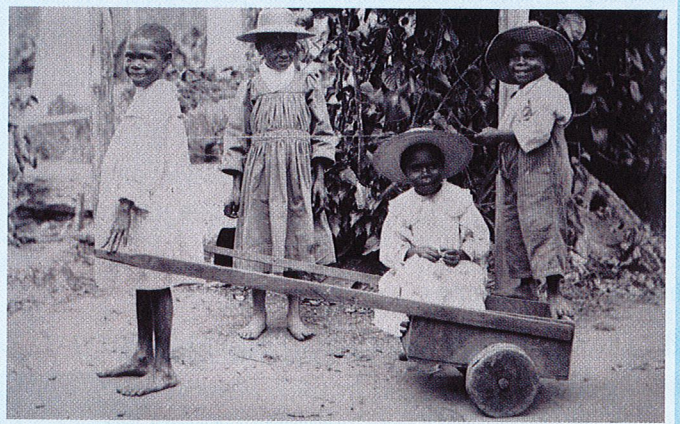
### **Sporting and Cultural Heroes**

Australian South Sea Islanders have excelled in sport. International rugby league players Mal Meninga, Gorden Tallis and Sam Backo are all members of the Australian South Sea Islander community. There have also been a number of Australian South Sea Islanders who have worked hard to bring about justice and worked for the rights of all Australians. These include Faith Bandler, Evelyn Scott and Bonita Mabo.

### **Working in the Plantations**



*These South Sea Island workers worked on a Queensland pineapple plantation in the 1890s. South Sea Islanders were once called 'kanakas', but this term is considered derogatory and no longer used in Australia to describe South Sea Islanders. Most of the original labourers working in Queensland were brought from the Solomon Islands and New Hebrides (Vanuatu), while the term 'kanaka' comes from Hawaii.*



*These South Sea Islander children are playing with a wooden hand cart in the very early 1900s. The photo was taken in the Queensland town of Innisfail.*

### **Blackbirding**

*Other nations also participated in the trade of workers from the Pacific Islands. The trade began in the early 1860s to provide labour for farms and mines in Peru, in South America. South Sea Islanders were also transported to Canada, the United States and Chile. Captains of whaling ships 'recruited' workers from the Pacific Islands and sold them to plantation owners. While some may have gone willingly, many of the workers were either tricked or kidnapped. The practice was known as 'blackbirding'.*