



Committee: More needs to be done for Australian South Sea Islanders

Australian South Sea Islanders still struggle to access Government services and little is being done to help them overcome severe social and economic disadvantage, according to a Federal Parliamentary Committee.

The House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs has recommended that the Australian Government form a taskforce to address the political, social and economic hardship faced by Australian South Sea Islander people.

Australian South Sea Islanders are the Australian-born descendants of the labourers brought here from the Pacific Islands in the 18th century. Although some came by choice, many were either tricked or kidnapped by recruiters and forced to endure difficult conditions working in Australia's primary industries. Those who remained in Australia after Federation faced ongoing racial discrimination and economic hardship.

Committee chair Mr George Christensen MP said that Australian South Sea Islander people have faced a long history of injustice and that the Government's promises to address that injustice have so far gone unfulfilled. 'The treatment of Australian South Sea Islanders is one of the darker chapters in Australian history,' Mr Christensen said. 'Even today Australian South Sea Islander people are not given the recognition and assistance that they deserve. Australia should be doing more.'

The Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee says that the Government is not doing enough to address this legacy of exclusion. The Committee's new report *Revisiting recognition: report on the roundtable with Australian South Sea Islanders* calls on the Government to follow through on the promises it made in 1994, when it recognised Australian South Sea Islanders as a distinct ethnic group and acknowledged their unique culture and their history of disadvantage.

The Committee's report follows a roundtable discussion held last year to mark the 20th anniversary of Australian South Sea Islander recognition.

To further mark the event, the Committee has also published a podcast and photo gallery about Australian South Sea Islanders on its website at www.aph.gov.au/spla. The podcast features excerpts from the roundtable held in November last year and is accompanied by a sequence of historical photographs documenting the lives and experiences of South Sea Islanders in Australia.

The Committee's report is available at this link:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/South_Sea_Islanders/Report .

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair, Mr George Christensen MP, on (07) 4944 0622 or (02) 6277 4538.