

# **Australian South Sea Islanders Strategy**

ACTU Congress September 1991

## **1. Australian South Sea Islanders**

1. In supporting the Federal Government's desire to assist disadvantaged groups, Congress believes that the process must also extend to South Sea Islanders.

2. The South Sea Islanders now living in Australia are the descendants of South Sea Islanders most of whom were brought forcibly to this country in the 19th century as slaves and indentured labour in the canefields of Queensland and northern NSW, commonly referred to in derogatory terms as Kanaks by some Australian historians.

3. Australian South Sea Islanders are a black minority group, who have been and are discriminated against because of their colour. Because of a fairly high rate of intermarriage with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders they are often assumed to be of these groups (especially in statistics which determine the level of services made available to them) and are discriminated against in similar ways.

4. South Sea Islanders' distinguishing feature is that they have no claim for land rights. South Sea Islanders were forced from their lands and brought unwillingly to Australia. Their land cannot be restored to them. They cannot claim land in their new country, neither can they claim the land of their forebears.

5. Unlike Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, they are not an indigenous people although they suffer discrimination and hardship for similar reasons.

6. South Sea Islanders are discriminated against in regard to employment, housing, health services, training, and their children are discriminated against in education. They are recorded in disproportionate numbers among the unemployed, the poorly educated and untrained, the impoverished, those in prison and the unhoused. South Sea Islanders are not eligible for the special benefits available to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders unless they claim to be Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders, a denial of their origins and culture.

7. South Sea Islanders have for a long time retained pride in their identity, but have recognised that for all intents and purposes they were treated as Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders. They sometimes identified themselves as such on the census because there appeared to be no other appropriate category. They identified themselves as such for benefits because they knew that their people had been instrumental in obtaining those benefits. They knew also that they would not be able to maintain their households, educate their children or find employment without the assistance of these benefits.

8. South Sea Islanders ask that they be eligible for the same special benefits given to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders (excluding land rights) as they consider they should be entitled to these benefits, many of which were won with their support.

9. Australian South Sea Islanders are seeking to be recognised as a group in their own right and to have their national organisation, Australian South Sea Islanders United Council, acknowledged as the appropriate body for their representation.

10. The Government must implement immediately remedial programs to redress the disadvantages suffered by this minority group because of their ethnic origin.

11. Congress resolves that the A.C.T.U. will work to assist South Sea Islanders being recognised as a group in their own right and to this end the A.C.T.U. will encourage the Federal Government to:-

- give consideration to the introduction of federal legislation for South Sea Islanders, recognising their history, their contribution to the Australian Society and their special needs
- make South Sea Islanders eligible for benefits similar to those provided to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in relation to Housing, Education and Training, Health and Legal Services, and economic development (but not land rights benefits).
- give responsibility for the co-ordination of all policies and programs relating to South Sea Islanders to the Prime Minister's Department through one of its already existing units such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs.
- provide for a specific reference to South Sea Islanders on future census forms.
- recognise a national organisation representing the South Sea Islanders such as the Australian South Sea Islanders United Council and make available adequate funding for the effective operation of such a body which would provide a channel of communication between governments and the South Sea Islander communities
- provide core funding to the order of \$100,000 to enable the Evatt Foundation to commission a proper population survey in known areas of concentration of South Sea Islanders to bring to attention the extent of poverty, unemployment, lack of education and skills training, health, housing and other special needs within the South Sea Islander communities
- put in place urgent remedial programs aimed at redressing discrimination suffered by South Sea Islanders because of their ethnic origin and in particular that South Sea Islanders be included as an identified category in the Commonwealth Public Service Equal Opportunity Program
- provide adequate funding to train South Sea Islanders in skills for staffing resource centres including health, legal, mediation and conflict resolution