

Pacific Islanders

Oceania

Colonial Queensland argued that tropical agriculture needed the cheap labour of South Sea Islanders or 'Kanakas', who were brought to Queensland through 'blackbirding'. Subsequently, thousands of workers from many different islands in the South Pacific were taken to Queensland. It was not intended that they become permanent settlers. Federal legislation caused these South Sea Islanders to be deported from 1906 to 1908, and only about 2000 remained in Australia, mainly in Queensland. They were allowed to stay because of a long residency in Australia, or through intermarriage, land ownership or by simply disappearing when attempts were made at rounding them up. Subsequent new arrivals to Queensland of South Pacific Island-born people were mainly European expatriates. Interestingly, in contrast, New Zealand granted settlement rights to Indigenous people from her dependencies, such as the Cook Islands and Western Samoa. For many decades Australia was virtually closed to Indigenous people from the many islands in Oceania.

When reciprocal settlement rights were given to Australian and New Zealand citizens, South Pacific Islanders with New Zealand passports began to settle in growing numbers in Queensland. Chinese from these islands also came to Australia. After completing study programs in Australian educational institutions, some international students from the islands in Oceania also became permanent settlers. During the 1980s and 1990s there was a growing shift of settlers from Oceania to Queensland, notably of trans-Tasman New Zealanders who, in 1996, represented 18.67 per cent of all the overseas-born in Queensland. Holders of New Zealand passports have ready access to settlement in Australia.

The people from Oceania, including Indigenous people from the islands who had first settled in New Zealand, are attracted to Queensland for climatic reasons, career opportunities or for family reunion purposes. The small and remote island States offer few modern professional careers,

though the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa and Vanuatu have developed a niche industry as offshore financial centres. An additional reason that has led to settlement in Queensland by some Islanders is the threat of rising water levels caused by the Greenhouse Effect. In the future, some atolls in the Pacific may become uninhabitable.

In response to continued community growth through migration of people from Oceania, new ethnic associations have been formed, such as the Queensland Tuvalu Community. A number of transnational cultural groups have also evolved in which people with non-Oceanic backgrounds participate: the Brisbane Polynesian Association; the South Pacific Island Dance Group, Jimboomba; and the Polynesian Dancing of Matealona Australia in Innisfail.



Brisbane Polynesian Dancers with Director Kalolaine Blaxland (second from right, standing)

Kiribati

Kiribati, an independent republic in 1979, used to be known as the Gilbert Islands. Rather than

a parliamentary system, a modified presidential system of government, with membership in the Commonwealth, was chosen. The people of Kiribati (population 75 000) are of Micronesian origin and are scattered over a huge area of about 2 million square kilometres in the west central Pacific. They are living on 33 coral atolls and islands, and on one volcanic island. More than 95 per cent of the population of Kiribati live on the Gilbert Islands. The country's main exports are copra and fish. In 1996 there were 112 Kiribati-born people in Queensland.

Nauru

Nauru was seized from the Germans in 1914 and, after a short occupation of the island by the Japanese, it came under Australian protection. Indigenous Nauruans could become naturalised Australians. Independence within the Commonwealth was achieved in 1968. The Micronesian Republic of Nauru consists of a raised coral island with rich deposits of phosphate. (These are now close to exhaustion.) Nauru is one of the world's smallest States with only 21.3 square kilometres. Its mixed population of less than 10 000 is composed of Nauruans (Polynesians, Micronesians and Melanesians), Chinese and Europeans. In 1996 there were 104 Nauru-born people living in Queensland.

Niue

In 1774 Captain James Cook was the first European to visit Niue, a coral island of 258 square kilometres. Niue has a population of 2200 and is located east of Tonga. It was annexed by New Zealand in 1901 and became self-governing in free association with New Zealand in 1974. Niueans are New Zealand citizens. More than four times as many Niueans live in New Zealand as in Niue. In 1996, 49 Niue-born people lived in Queensland.

Solomon Islands

Britain brought the Solomon Islands, which are culturally part of Melanesia, under its protection in 1899. After a short occupation by the Japanese during World War II, the islands became an independent State in 1978. With a population of 400 000 scattered over 35 islands, and many more atolls covering a huge area east of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands make up the second-

largest, and third most populous Pacific island country. The capital is Honiara on Guadalcanal. In addition to the official language, English, about 90 other languages are spoken. Exports include agricultural produce, copra, palm oil, fish and timber, with Australia being the major trading partner for imports. In 1996, 412 Solomon Island-born people lived in Queensland. As a result of ethnic discord, a coup in 2000 prompted the repatriation of many Australian citizens. Political instability is likely to continue for some time with an increasing number of Solomon Islanders likely to target Queensland as a migrant or refugee destination.

Tokelau

Tokelau comprises three coral atolls with a total surface area of about 12 square kilometres. It has a population of 1600 people. In 1925 New Zealand took over administrative responsibility, and it became an overseas dependency in 1949. Tokelauans are New Zealand citizens and more of them live in New Zealand than on the home islands. In 1996, 73 Tokelau-born people lived in Queensland, representing close to 5 per cent of the total population living in Tokelau.

Tuvalu

The Ellis group of islands in the western Pacific was renamed Tuvalu when it became an independent constitutional monarchy in 1978. At the time of independence, the nine islands had 7349 inhabitants. Over 90 per cent of the current population of 10 000 are Polynesians. This micro-state has a simplified parliamentary democracy with a cabinet of five and a Governor-General who reports to the Queen. Tuvalu's major trading commodities are copra, fish and stamps. Because of recent arrivals of people from Tuvalu, the Queensland Tuvalu Community has been founded.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu (capital Vila) was formerly known as the New Hebrides. It gained its independence in 1980. The 160 000 people of Vanuatu observe three official languages: English, French and Bislama. In addition to the majority population of Melanesians, there are also minorities of Europeans, Chinese, Vietnamese and others. In 1996 there were 267 Vanuatu-born people in Queensland.