

Torres Strait Islanders celebrate 150 years since the adoption of Christianity

The Coming of the Light Festival marks the widely-recognised anniversary of the end of conflicts between the islands' various groups.



It's been 150 years since Christianity was first introduced to the people of the Torres Strait Islands, with a four-day festival kicking off on Thursday to mark the occasion.

As a part of the celebrations, people from Erub (Darnley Island) will reenact the historic moment Reverend Samuel MacFarlane of the London Missionary Society arrived in 1871.

Torres Strait Regional Authority Chairperson, Mr Napau Pedro Stephen, said July 1 was an important part of celebrating the unique history, tradition, and culture of Torres Strait Islanders.



A crowd gathers on Erub Island during the 150th anniversary of Christianity in the region.

Source: Supplied.

"While the Torres Strait is a diverse group of islands and communities who all have differing needs and aspirations, it is our faith that unites us all," he said..

Saibai woman and Queensland Elder of the year, Aunty McRose Elu said the annual event provided an opportunity for anyone to learn more about Torres Strait Islander culture and traditions.

"As many are not able to return to the Islands, we wanted to do something not just for South-East Queensland Torres Strait Islander community, but for all residents," said Ms Elu.

"This is an opportunity for people to learn more about Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and histories, through food, dance, song and

more."



Auntie McRose Elu says the Coming of the Light Festival is an opportunity for people to get a better understanding of Torres Strait Islander people. Source: Australian of the Year (Facebook).

Torres Strait Islanders celebrate July 1 as 'The Coming of the Light', with a yearly holiday and church services.

The 1st of July, 1871 is widely seen as marking the end of conflicts

between various groups among the islands.

Until that point, Christianity as a concept had been unheard of in the Torres Strait.

However, the religion aligned in many ways with the existing beliefs of the Island people, which is thought to be why it was largely embraced.

Over four days each Island region will perform a reenactment, with traditional costume, dance and music.

Dabad, a Warrior Clan Elder on Erub, welcomed the London Missionary Society clergymen and South Sea Islander evangelists and teachers in 1871.

His descendants will be participating in the Brisbane festival which has been postponed to the weekend due to COVID-19 lockdown.

The South-East Queensland Torres Strait Islander community will mark the anniversary by transforming Colmslie Park into a mini-Torres Strait Islander village.

"We've been organising this for over six months. There's been a lot of planning and contingency COVID planning," said Ms Elu.

"We want to bring the Torres Strait Islands to Brisbane and showcase its beauty, uniqueness and diversity for everyone to enjoy and experience."

Torres Strait housing shortage is ongoing two years after Morrison election promise

Indigenous communities in the Torres Strait fear that overcrowding caused by high rates of government employee housing will have long-term repercussions on health and wellbeing.