ChatGPT

Historical Connection Between Hull River and Palm Island (Queensland)

Introduction

The history of Hull River in Queensland and the forced removals of Aboriginal people to Palm Island is a poignant chapter in Australia's story. The Hull River Aboriginal Settlement (1914–1918) was established under colonial "protection" policies and became the precursor to the Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement. This report provides a comprehensive overview from pre-colonial times through to the present, examining the traditional owners (such as the Djiru and Jirrbal peoples), the impact of government acts like the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, the catastrophic 1918 cyclone that destroyed Hull River, and the subsequent establishment of Palm Island as a punitive Aboriginal reserve. Key events, policies, resistance efforts, and notable individuals are detailed, followed by a chronological timeline of major events.

Pre-Colonial Presence and Early Contact

For thousands of years before European colonization, the region around Hull River (near present-day Mission Beach) was home to the **Djiru people**, who spoke a dialect of the Dyirbal language [1]. They were part of a cultural bloc including the **Girramay, Gulngay,** and **Jirrbal** groups in the Tully and Murray River districts [2]. These Aboriginal peoples thrived as rainforest hunter-gatherers and expert fishermen, navigating rivers and coastal waters with canoes and rafts [2].

European contact began sporadically in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In 1770, Captain James Cook sailed by and named the Palm Island group (located off the coast further south) [3], observing signs of Aboriginal camps on the islands [4]. Throughout the 19th century, explorers and surveyors like Phillip Parker King (1819) and Edmund Kennedy (1848) encountered Aboriginal communities along Queensland's north coast, generally reporting peaceful interactions in the Cardwell/Tully region [5] [6]. However, with the opening of the **Kennedy district** to settlers in the 1860s, conflict erupted. As pastoralists and later sugar planters encroached on the land, **frontier violence** and armed reprisals by the Native Police decimated many Indigenous communities in the area from the mid-1860s to early 1880s [7] [8]. By the 1880s, the Djiru and related groups had suffered great losses due to disease, displacement, and violence.

In the late 19th century, a few attempts were made to set aside small Aboriginal reserves near Tully and Cardwell (1878, 1886, 1889), but these early reserves were never effectively used for Indigenous benefit and were soon repurposed by the government [9]. Meanwhile, the traditional lifestyle was further disrupted by new industries: Chinese farmers established banana plantations along the Tully River in the 1880s–1900s and often exploited Aboriginal labor, paying in meager rations, tobacco, or even opium [10]. This rampant opium trading and the general mistreatment of Indigenous workers became a growing concern for colonial authorities [11].

By **1882**, European settlers began taking up land on the coastal flat south of the Hull River (today's Mission Beach) [12] [13]. The Djiru and others, now greatly reduced in number, lived on the fringes of

these settlements. Tensions between Indigenous people and settlers persisted, prompting calls for more formal government control over Aboriginal populations as the 20th century approached.

Government "Protection" Policies and the 1897 Act

In response to such social issues, including the abuse of Aboriginal labor and opium distribution, the Queensland government introduced one of Australia's most controlling Indigenous policies: the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*. This Act gave the government **sweeping powers over Aboriginal people's lives**, unmatched by contemporary laws in other Australian colonies [14]. Under the Act, Aboriginal people became wards of the state, and officials (Protectors or the Chief Protector of Aboriginals) could **remove individuals or groups to designated reserves** and strictly regulate their employment, earnings, movements, and personal lives [14]. Section 9 of the Act explicitly empowered the Home Secretary to *"cause Aboriginals within any district to be removed to and kept within the limits of any reserve"* [15] [16]. This legislative framework laid the groundwork for the forced relocations that followed.

The philosophy behind the Act was paternalistic "protection" – ostensibly to shield Indigenous people from exploitation – but in practice it meant **segregation and control**. Aboriginal people could be forcibly separated from their land and communities "for their own good," and sent to government or mission-run reserves where their lives were strictly governed. The **Chief Protector of Aboriginals** (a role established by the Act) wielded significant authority, effectively the legal guardian of all Indigenous people (including controlling marriages and child removals).

By the early 20th century, Queensland had established several Aboriginal reserves and missions (such as Barambah/Cherbourg and Yarrabah). Within this context, local authorities and settlers in the **Hinchinbrook and Tully region** pushed for a reserve to be created to remove the remaining Aboriginal people from around the new farms and towns. In 1897, a Townsville-based Aboriginal Protection Association had even suggested using Palm Island as a reserve [17], but nothing came of that at the time. Eventually, attention turned to Hull River as a potential site for a northern settlement.

Establishment of the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement (1914)

In **1913**, the Queensland government approved a new Aboriginal reserve at **Hull River**, on the coast east of Tully [18] [19]. About **2,900 acres** were gazetted for this reserve [20], encompassing the traditional land of the Djiru people near the Hull River mouth. The goal was twofold: to *"protect"* Indigenous people and to remove them from proximity to white settlements where conflicts had arisen [21] [22]. The reserve's creation was a direct application of the 1897 Act's powers, reflecting an ongoing policy of concentrating Aboriginal populations under government surveillance.

The Hull River Aboriginal Settlement formally began operations in **September 1914**, when the first superintendent, **John Martin Kenny**, arrived to set it up [23] [24]. Kenny was a former Native Police officer and had worked at missions, bringing a disciplinarian approach to the role [23]. He chose a site at the northern end of what is now South Mission Beach – unfortunately, a low-lying coastal flat **exposed to onshore cyclonic winds** [25] [26]. By late 1914, basic infrastructure was in place: modest houses for the staff (superintendent, assistant, and storekeeper), a school, and makeshift barracks or huts for the Aboriginal residents constructed from ti-tree bark along the beachfront [25] [27].

From the start, **the population was multi-tribal**. Local Djiru people formed the core, but their numbers had already dwindled – only about *"one-fifth of the original population"* remained in the area by 1914, as many had fled or been displaced earlier [28] [29]. To populate the settlement, the government began

removing Aboriginal people from surrounding districts and farther afield. By 1915–1916, individuals and entire families were sent to Hull River from places such as Thursday Island, Cooktown, Atherton Tableland, Ayr, Hughenden and more [30] [31]. Many of these removals were explicitly for *"disciplinary reasons"* – the people were considered troublemakers or vulnerable and thus interned *"for their relief and protection"* under the Act [30]. In **1916 alone, 82 Aboriginal people** were relocated to Hull River from across North Queensland [30]. By that year the settlement's population swelled to roughly **490 people** [32].

Life at Hull River was tightly controlled and often harsh. Residents were expected to work either on the settlement's agricultural projects (they planted bananas, vegetables, and other crops) or hired out to local employers, with the government overseeing any wages [33] [34]. Food rations provided by the settlement were basic and often insufficient, forcing people to supplement their diet by gathering bush tucker, fishing, or hunting turtle when permitted [35]. Traditional practices were curtailed, and the settlement functioned semi-militaristically under Kenny's rules. Disease was another grim challenge – in **1917 a malaria epidemic** swept through the area, **killing around 200 Aboriginal residents** in the span of that year [32] [36]. This catastrophic death toll greatly reduced the population. Many of the survivors, demoralized and ill, **attempted to escape** whenever they found an opportunity, disappearing into the rainforest or attempting to return to their homelands [37]. By early 1918, the Hull River settlement's population had declined to roughly **300 people** [32] [36].

The 1918 Cyclone: Destruction of Hull River Settlement

On **10 March 1918**, a disaster struck that forever changed the course of this history. A massive tropical cyclone – later estimated as perhaps **Category 5 in intensity** – roared in from the Coral Sea and directly hit the Innisfail–Tully coastal region [38]. With wind gusts measured up to 240–290 km/h and a huge storm surge, this cyclone ranks among the worst natural disasters in Australian history [38] [39]. The eye of the storm passed over the Hull River Settlement around 10 p.m., bringing **a 12-foot (3.7 m) storm surge** that inundated the coast [40] [41]. Virtually **every building at the settlement was obliterated** – only the flour store and one shop shed were left standing [38]. **Superintendent John Kenny and his young daughter were killed** by flying debris during the tempest [40]. Their house, like all the others, was torn apart by the violent winds.

Tragically, many Aboriginal residents also perished. The cyclone's storm surge swept through the flimsy coastal humpies where families sheltered, carrying people out to sea [42]. Palm trees and structures alike were flattened. **Official records** after the disaster were incomplete, but initially **12 Aboriginal deaths** were documented at Hull River alongside the two Kenny family deaths [43]. However, the true toll was almost certainly higher. Contemporary estimates and later research suggest **at least 40 Indigenous people died** in the cyclone [44], and some accounts put the number as high as 60 or more. A local Djiru descendant recalls oral history of the storm, describing how the ocean receded and then surged violently over the low-lying camp, leaving little chance to escape [45]. Indeed, *"there are no complete records, but it has been estimated at least 40 Indigenous people died in the cyclone"* (known to the Djiru as **gumbudda**) [44]. Some survivors later recounted scenes of people clinging to trees or debris, and others running for the hills as their homes were destroyed.

In the cyclone's aftermath, chaos reigned. With communications down, a **rescue party from Townsville** only arrived days later, hacking through fallen jungle to reach the site [46]. They found devastation: the majority of the **Hull River community had either been killed, injured, or were missing**. Many survivors were traumatized, without shelter, food, or medical care (a government Medical Officer did not arrive until three weeks later on 31 March) [46]. In total, considering the broader region, the *"Innisfail cyclone"* of 1918 caused an estimated **100 fatalities** across all communities [47] – a significant

portion of whom were the Aboriginal residents at Hull River and nearby. One Indigenous elder's account noted that **some Hull River survivors fled into the bush** during and after the storm – *"people ran south, people went north up into Mamu country and tried to hide in other groups"* [48] rather than face continued life under the settlement regime. This indicates that even amid tragedy, some saw an opportunity to escape the control of the Protectorate system.

The Hull River Settlement was **never rebuilt** [49]. The cyclone had accomplished what perhaps the government had contemplated already – it wiped the slate clean. Superintendent Kenny and his daughter were buried on site (a separate grave from a mass grave for Aboriginal victims) [50]. In 2018, a century later, the community unveiled the **Mija Memorial** at South Mission Beach to commemorate those who died in the disaster [51] [52].

Forced Removal to Palm Island (1918)

In the wake of the cyclone, Queensland authorities wasted no time in executing an alternative plan for confining the region's Aboriginal people. Fortuitously (or by design), **Palm Island** – a large island in Halifax Bay about 60 km northeast of Townsville – had already been gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve in June 1914 [53]. At that time, very few Aboriginal people lived on Palm Island; it was mostly uninhabited rainforest, traditionally home to the **Manbarra people** who had largely been removed or died off in the 19th century. Palm Island's remoteness and isolation made it attractive to officials like Chief Protector W.E. Roth and his successor John Bleakley, who saw it as an ideal location for a penal settlement for Aboriginal people *"we desire to punish"* [54].

After the Hull River cyclone, on **1 April 1918** (within weeks of the disaster), the government **relocated the surviving Hull River residents to Palm Island** [55] [56]. Police and patrol officers also rounded up those Hull River survivors who had fled into the surrounding Tully and Cardwell hinterlands [57]. These men, women, and children – traumatized, some injured – were herded together and transported, *"forcibly"* in many cases, by boat to Palm Island [57]. Essentially, the entire Hull River Aboriginal Settlement (people and any salvaged materials) was picked up and moved to Palm. This **June 1918** transfer marked the beginning of Palm Island's new role as the primary Aboriginal settlement in Queensland [57].

Palm Island thus **inherited the multi-tribal population** from Hull River and soon expanded far beyond. The initial group included Djiru and other local mainland peoples, but over subsequent years the population was deliberately augmented with Aboriginal people from all over Queensland. In fact, between **1918 and 1972, about 3,950 documented removals** of Aboriginal (and some Torres Strait Islander) people were carried out, sending them to Palm Island [58] [59]. Some individuals came from as far afield as Brisbane, Charters Towers, Cloncurry and Cape York [59]. Eventually, **at least 57 different language groups** were represented among the internees on Palm Island [55] [56]. These disparate people collectively came to call themselves the **Bwgcolman** – meaning "many tribes, one people" in the language of the Manbarra [60] [61].

Palm Island: The "Punitive" Aboriginal Settlement

Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement (1918–1975) became notorious as the most punitive and largest Aboriginal reserve in Queensland [62]. Administratively, it was a direct continuation of Hull River's purpose, but on a grander scale. The first superintendent on Palm was the same John Kenny – except he was dead. So an acting administration took over until **Robert Henry Curry** was appointed superintendent in the 1920s. All authority flowed from the **Chief Protector of Aboriginals** in Brisbane down to the Superintendent on Palm [63]. The Aboriginal residents were legally classified as **"wards of**

the state," with **every aspect of their lives regulated** by the government [63]. They could not leave the island without permission, their mail was censored, their wages (if any) were controlled, and strict routines governed daily life [64] [65].

Palm Island quickly earned the moniker **"penal settlement"** among Aboriginal people [64]. Removals to Palm were often used as a form of punishment under the 1897 Act. People could be exiled there for **trivial "infringements"**: speaking their language, resisting assimilation, being deemed "disruptive," having an illegitimate baby (especially if the father was white), or even after serving a prison term elsewhere (a *"second punishment"* for the same crime) [64] [65]. By the early 1920s, Palm Island's population surpassed all other missions – it held over **1,600 Indigenous "inmates" by the 1930s** [66], far more than its initial few hundred transferees. Notably, the **death rate** on Palm exceeded the birth rate until after World War II, with the population only sustained by continuous new arrivals from the mainland [67]. This grim statistic led one observer, Dr. Thomas Bancroft in 1932, to label Palm Island *"the Blackfellows' Graveyard"* due to the high mortality and squalid conditions [68].

Daily life on Palm Island under the reserve system was tightly regimented. A **bell tower** (still standing today as a historic relic) rang every morning at 8:00 a.m. sharp, summoning everyone to line up for roll call and work assignments [69] [70]. Anyone late – even by a minute – could be punished by having their rations cut [69]. At 9:00 p.m., the bell signaled lights-out and a nightly curfew [70]. This quasi-military discipline remained in force well into the 1960s [71] [72]. *"They were treated as rather dull retarded children,"* one account described, highlighting the patronizing and repressive attitude of authorities [73]. Aboriginal residents were **forbidden to speak their traditional languages** or practice cultural ceremonies; doing so could result in punishment such as exile to smaller nearby islands [74] [75]. Indeed, Superintendent Curry infamously used tiny **Eclipse Island** (part of the Palm group) as a **"Punishment Island"** – sending men there in isolation with only bread and water for weeks, for offenses like gambling or speaking language [74] [75].

Religion and education were also imposed. Various Christian missionaries (Baptist, then Catholic) were active on Palm in the 1920s and 1930s [76]. A Catholic mission school and convent were established by 1937 [76]. Meanwhile, the government built **dormitories** to segregate children from their parents. By 1923, under the *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865*, a **girls' dormitory** was operating (followed by boys' dorms), ostensibly to care for orphans or neglected children [77]. In practice, any child under five whose parents were sent to Palm (often "under punishment") was automatically taken to these dormitories, and unmarried mothers were also confined there – a policy deeply resented by the women, who felt they were treated like children themselves [78] [79]. This system contributed to the **Stolen Generations**, as Palm Island was later cited in the *Bringing Them Home* report for housing many children removed from their families [80] [81]. (The Palm dormitories remained until they were finally closed in 1975 [82].)

Palm Island settlement scene, circa 1935, showing the guest house and school. By the 1930s Palm Island had developed significant infrastructure under government control, even as Aboriginal residents endured strict supervision. [83]

Notable incidents and resistance: The oppressive conditions on Palm led to numerous individual acts of defiance and a few large-scale confrontations. The most dramatic was the **"Palm Island Tragedy" of 1930**, when Superintendent Robert Curry – by all accounts a harsh disciplinarian – had a mental breakdown. On 3 February 1930, Curry ran amok: he **shot and wounded two people** and **set several buildings on fire**, **killing his own son and stepdaughter** in the blaze [84]. Armed and dangerous, Curry was later *shot dead* by an Aboriginal man, Peter Prior, under the direction of the Assistant Superintendent [84]. An inquiry followed, and Prior (along with the assistant) was charged with murder, but a court ruled that the killing of Curry was justified to protect the community [85] [86]. This incident

highlighted the volatility and stress within the settlement. It also led to administrative changes – Curry's brutal methods (exiling men to Eclipse Island, flogging prisoners, etc.) were scrutinized, though punitive practices certainly continued under subsequent superintendents.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Palm Island remained under firm control. During WWII, ironically, a military flying boat base was established on one side of Palm Island (the Black Cat Squadron's Catalina aircraft used the island's waters), with U.S. Navy facilities present by 1943 [87] [88]. This brought some outside attention, but did not alleviate conditions for residents. Anthropologist **Norman Tindale** visited in 1938 and documented family genealogies, recording that Palm Islanders represented *"a large number of tribal groups from across...Queensland"* [89].

In the **1950s**, Palm Island saw its first organized challenge to authority. By that time, Superintendent **Roy Bartlam** enforced rules so strictly that minor lateness or infractions led to arrest [90]. All residents were required to work 30 hours a week, often without pay (up to the 1960s, most work was unpaid) [91]. In **1957**, tensions boiled over. When Bartlam tried to deport a man (Albie Geia) for disobeying an order, the community erupted in the **Palm Island Strike of 1957** [92]. Fed up with *"Dickensian"* conditions – no wages, poor food and housing, harsh punishments – a group of Aboriginal workers and families staged a strike and demanded the superintendent's removal [92] [93]. Bartlam was besieged; he had to flee and radio for help. The Queensland government's response was swift and heavy-handed: **armed police arrived by boat from Townsville**, and they arrested the strike leaders [93]. Seven Aboriginal families, including the main ringleaders, were **deported in chains** to the mainland or other reserves as punishment [94]. (One of those banished was the mother of future Olympian **Cathy Freeman**, illustrating how these events reverberated through generations [95].) The strike was crushed, but it is remembered as a courageous act of resistance against oppressive governance.

Later Reforms and Ongoing Legacy (1960s–Present)

By the 1960s and 1970s, government policies toward Aboriginal people began to shift from segregation to **"assimilation"**. The old Protection Act was replaced by new legislation in 1965, and in **1967** Australians overwhelmingly voted in a referendum to include Indigenous people in the national census (indicating changing attitudes). In Queensland, the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939* had already signaled a policy change – at least on paper – aiming for gradual integration and granting limited citizenship rights to some Aboriginal people [96]. Practically, however, Palm Island remained under tight control well into the 1970s. Morning parades and nightly curfews persisted until the early 1970s [71]. The official title of the institution changed in 1939 to "Director of Native Affairs, Palm Island", but the regime of control continued (followed by the "Aboriginal and Island Affairs Department" in the 1960s) [97].

A turning point came in **1975**, when the Queensland Government formally **ended the reserve status** of Palm Island. The last of the children's dormitories were closed in December 1975 [98], marking the end of the era in which Palm functioned as a government-run penal settlement. Control of the community was eventually handed over to the people. In **1985**, Palm Islanders elected their own Community Council for the first time (under a Queensland law establishing local governance for Indigenous communities) [99] [100]. In 1986, the land was transferred via a Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT), effectively giving the Palm Island Aboriginal Council trusteeship over the former reserve [100]. By 2005, this council was transitioned into a standard local government authority, the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council [101].

However, the legacy of the earlier era has left deep imprints. Social and economic challenges on Palm Island have been severe and persistent – high unemployment, housing shortages, substance abuse

issues, and intergenerational trauma are often linked back to its history as a place of **forced exile and institutionalization** [102] [103]. As late as 2006, life expectancy on Palm was around 50 years – some 30 years below the Australian average [104]. One commentator described Palm Island's history as *"apartheid-like"*, blaming it for many of the community's modern problems [103].

There have been efforts to seek justice and reconciliation. In **1985**, a group of Palm Island Elders lodged a landmark human rights complaint about **"stolen wages."** They asserted that the Queensland Government had systematically underpaid them (below award wages) even after laws changed in 1975, purely due to their race [105] [106]. A 1996 inquiry vindicated their claims, finding the government had *"intentionally... knowingly discriminated"* against the Palm workers [107]. Although the state initially resisted, public pressure eventually led to an apology and compensation for thousands of Indigenous Queenslanders for these underpayments [108]. Palm Island's Elders thus sparked a statewide movement to recover stolen wages.

In the 21st century, Palm Island again drew national attention for unrest tied to historical grievances. In **2004**, local resident **Mulrunji Doomadgee** died in police custody on Palm Island, triggering outrage. When the autopsy revealed he'd sustained horrific internal injuries, the community erupted in a **riot**, burning down the police station and barracks in protest [109] [110]. This incident echoed the resentment of decades of injustice. Eventually, a police officer was tried (and acquitted) for Mulrunji's death, and a major inquiry examined police handling of the case [111] [112]. The 2004 Palm Island riot, like the 1957 strike, stands as a stark reminder of the community's will to resist oppression and demand equal treatment.

Despite its painful past, Palm Island today is also a place of cultural resilience. The descendants of those many tribes – the **Bwgcolman people** – have forged a unique identity. From at least **43 tribal groups** originally, they have become one people on Palm [113], united by a shared history of exile and survival. Notable individuals with Palm Island heritage have risen to prominence in sports, arts, and activism, using their platform to shed light on Indigenous issues. And there have been positive centennial reflections: in **2018**, Palm Islanders and Mission Beach locals commemorated 100 years since the Hull River cyclone and the founding of Palm's community. The Mija Memorial was unveiled at South Mission Beach, and efforts were made to **tell the hidden history** behind the idyllic tourist scenery [114] [115]. As one Djiru elder noted, *"it looks nice when you get here but there's another story... every time I walk around I see it"* [114].

Timeline of Key Events (Pre-Colonial to Present)

- **Pre-1788 (Time Immemorial):** Djiru, Jirrbal, Girramay, Manbarra and other Aboriginal peoples inhabit the Hull River, Tully, and Palm Island areas, living off rich rainforest and marine resources.
- **1770:** Captain James Cook charts the east coast and names the Palm Island group, noting evidence of Aboriginal camps on the islands [3] [116].
- **1864–1880s:** European settlement of the Cardwell–Tully region begins. Violent conflict and Native Police campaigns drastically reduce the Aboriginal population [117] [8]. Hinchinbrook Island's Aboriginal community is wiped out by 1874, and early reserve lands (e.g., Tully River 1886) are gazetted but not effectively used [9].
- **1897:** Queensland passes the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. The Act authorizes the government to remove Aboriginal people to reserves and tightly control their lives [14] [118]. Local Protectors are appointed in districts like Cardwell, Tully, etc., to enforce the Act [18] [119].

- **1900s:** Chinese banana farmers and others in the Tully region employ Aboriginal labor under poor conditions (paying with opium, rum), contributing to social problems that the Protection Act was meant to address [11].
- **1912:** Queensland's Chief Protector of Aboriginals visits Palm Island and notes a small Indigenous camp there [120]. Palm Island's potential as a remote penal reserve is recognized.
- **Sep 1913:** The Queensland government gazettes ~2,900 acres at **Hull River** (Mission Beach area) as an Aboriginal reserve [19].
- **1 Sep 1914: Hull River Aboriginal Settlement** is officially established. John M. Kenny arrives as Superintendent and selects the site at Mission Beach [23] [24]. Aboriginal people (Djiru and others) are relocated there under the 1897 Act.
- **1915–1916:** The settlement population rapidly grows as Indigenous people from across North Qld are sent to Hull River "for protection or discipline." By 1916, about **490 residents** live there [32].
- **1917:** A **malaria epidemic** devastates Hull River, killing roughly **200 Aboriginal people** in one year [32] [36]. Many others flee the settlement. Population drops to ~300.
- **10 Mar 1918:** The **Great Cyclone of 1918** strikes. Hull River Settlement is **completely destroyed**, Superintendent Kenny, his daughter, and at least dozens of Aboriginal men, women, and children are killed [40] [44]. This effectively ends the Hull River Settlement.
- **Apr–Jun 1918:** Survivors of Hull River are **removed to Palm Island** by the government [55] [57]. Police round up those who had fled into the bush. Palm Island (gazetted 1914) now becomes an active settlement.
- **1920s:** Palm Island settlement expands. Missions (Baptist, then Catholic) begin operating schools and churches [76]. **1921:** Smaller nearby islands (Eclipse, Curacoa, etc.) are gazetted as part of Palm reserve [77]. **1923:** Girls' dormitory established (followed by boys'), institutionalizing children [121] [122].
- **3 Feb 1930: "Palm Island Tragedy."** Superintendent Robert Curry goes on a rampage, **shooting residents and burning buildings**; two of his children die in the fire [84]. Curry is killed by an Aboriginal man acting in defense of the community [84]. After a trial, those who stopped Curry are exonerated [85].
- **1930s:** Palm Island becomes infamous as a **penal colony** for Indigenous people. New arrivals come constantly; by 1932 conditions prompt Dr. Bancroft's label "Blackfellows' Graveyard" due to high death rates [68] [123]. Anthropologist Tindale documents the multi-tribal population in 1938 [89].
- **1939:** The *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939* (Qld) is enacted, shifting policy toward assimilation. Palm Island Settlement is nominally renamed and administration reorganised [96]. In reality, strict controls persist.
- **1940s:** During WWII, a military air base is built on Palm (1943) for Catalina flying boats [87]. No significant change for residents; Palm continues as the largest Aboriginal settlement (population ~1,600).
- **1957: Palm Island Workers' Strike.** Fed up with poor conditions, lack of wages, and authoritarian rule under Superintendent Bartlam, residents stage a strike [92]. The protest is crushed by armed police; **seven families are exiled** from Palm as punishment [94]. The strike draws wider attention to conditions on Queensland reserves.
- **1960s:** Gradual reforms – **1965** brings a new *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Act*, phasing out some of the old system [124]. Some restrictions (like the colour bar, curfews, etc.) begin to relax late in the decade. **1967:** Women's dormitory closed [82].
- **1970s:** Movement toward Aboriginal self-determination. **1975:** The Queensland Government closes the Palm Island settlement dormitory system [82] and ceases using Palm as a penal settlement. Control is shifted to the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. Morning parades and other strict practices are discontinued in the early 1970s [71] [72].

- **1985:** The Palm Island community holds its **first council elections**, establishing the Palm Island Aboriginal Council with local governance powers [99].
- **1986:** Palm Island lands are transferred under a **DOGIT (Deed of Grant in Trust)**, giving the Aboriginal Council ownership/trusteeship of the island (former reserve) [100].
- **1994:** Remains of **Kukamunburra (Tambo)**, a Palm Island man who was taken to the US in 1883 and died there, are repatriated and returned to Palm Island for burial with ceremony [125] [126]. This was a powerful cultural moment, reconnecting community with an ancestor lost to history.
- **1996:** The Human Rights Commission finds in favor of Palm Island "**Stolen Wages**" complainants, ruling Qld Govt had discriminated by underpaying them in the 1970s [107]. Eventually, thousands of Indigenous workers across Qld receive compensation (late 1990s–2000s) [108].
- **19 Nov 2004: Death in Custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee.** Mulrunji's death in the Palm Island police lockup and the failure to immediately hold the responsible officer to account sparks riots on the island [109] [111]. The incident leads to multiple inquiries and is a flashpoint for Indigenous justice issues in Qld.
- **2005:** Palm Island's Council transitions to become the **Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council** under new local government legislation [127], integrating it into Queensland's standard local government framework.
- **2018: Centenary of Palm Island Settlement.** Commemorations are held. On 10 March 2018, the **Mija Memorial** is unveiled at South Mission Beach, exactly 100 years after the cyclone, to honor the Aboriginal lives lost and the resilience of their descendants [128]. Palm Island community reflects on 100 years since the first removals; despite hardship, Palm Islanders celebrate their survival and cultural heritage.
- **2020s (Present):** Palm Island remains a vibrant Aboriginal community of over 2,000 people, predominantly descendants of the Bwgcolman and Manbarra. Efforts continue to overcome social challenges, preserve culture, and document the true history of places like Hull River and Palm Island so that it is not forgotten. The story of Hull River and Palm is now taught and acknowledged as a crucial part of Queensland's Indigenous heritage, illustrating both the devastating impacts of past government policies and the strength of Aboriginal people in the face of adversity.

References (Key Sources)

- Queensland Government – **Community History of Hinchinbrook Region** (Cassowary Coast): provides historical context on traditional owners, European contact, frontier violence, and the establishment of Hull River reserve [7] [18] [20] [43].
- Queensland Government – **Community History of Palm Island**: a detailed chronology of Palm Island settlement from 1914 gazettal, through removals (1918–1970s), to contemporary governance [58] [129] [130] [131].
- **Hull River Aboriginal Settlement** (Wikipedia & Kiddle facts): information on the settlement's operation (1914–1918), population, the 1918 cyclone impact, and aftermath [30] [38] [57] [132].
- **Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement** (Wikipedia): details on Palm's establishment, multi-tribal population (57 language groups) and conditions as a penal reserve [55] [64] [65]; also covers Curry's 1930 incident [84] and the 1957 strike [92] [94].
- **ABC News (2018)** – *"Cyclone that flattened Innisfail 100 years ago"*: includes Indigenous perspectives on the 1918 cyclone, estimates of Aboriginal fatalities (at least 40), and accounts of survivors fleeing and later being recaptured for Palm Island [44] [48] [133].
- **Legislation**: *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld)* – foundational policy enabling forced removals [14] (summary available via Founding Documents [14]).

(Additional citations are embedded in the text above, following the format 【source†line range】. These include archival records, government reports, and historical analyses that document the events and policies discussed.)

---

1 2 10 11 12 14 21 23 25 28 30 32 33 34 35 37 38 40 42 46 47 50 51 57 Hull River Aboriginal Settlement - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hull_River_Aboriginal_Settlement

3 4 15 16 17 58 59 60 68 71 72 78 79 87 88 99 100 101 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 116 120 121 122 123 125 126 127 129 130 131 Palm Island | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples | Queensland Government
https://www.qld.gov.au/firstnations/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts/community-histories/community-histories-n-p/community-histories-palm-island

5 6 7 8 9 18 19 20 43 117 119 Hinchinbrook region | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples | Queensland Government
https://www.qld.gov.au/firstnations/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts/community-histories/community-histories-e-i/community-histories-hinchinbrook-region

13 22 24 26 27 29 31 36 39 41 118 132 Hull River Aboriginal Settlement Facts for Kids
https://kids.kiddle.co/Hull_River_Aboriginal_Settlement

44 45 48 114 115 133 Locals barely got a warning before the cyclone that flattened Innisfail 100 years ago - ABC News
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-10/100-years-on-from-the-cyclone-that-flattened-innisfail-qld/9533920

49 53 54 55 56 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 69 70 73 74 75 76 77 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 102 103 104 113 124 Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palm_Island_Aboriginal_Settlement

52 128 South Mission Beach Facts for Kids - Kids encyclopedia facts - Kiddle
https://kids.kiddle.co/South_Mission_Beach