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Netherlands Born Community of Australia

Summary

There is a long history of contact between Holland and Australia. In early 1606, William Jansz of Amsterdam, captain of the Duyfken (Little Dove) landed on Cape York Peninsula. A number of Dutch ships sank off the Western Australian coast in the 1600s and survivors reportedly established relationships with local Aborigines. By 1644, Abel Tasman had completed a partial circumnavigation of Australia which revealed, for the first time, the size of the continent. The resulting incomplete map of New Holland was not superseded until the arrival of Captain Cook in 1770.

During the 1850s gold rushes Dutch merchant ships continued to visit Australia but immigration of the Netherlands-born remained negligible. Until 1947, when the Census recorded 2,174 Netherlands born, the number of people arriving from the Netherlands were offset by a large proportion of departures of Netherlands-born from Australia. This trend has continued to the present day, apart from a period of high migration during the 1950s and 1960s.

After the Second World War, many Dutch people suffered severe economic and social dislocation in Holland. With an already high population density, a relatively small land area and the highest birth rate in Europe, the Netherlands faced a severe housing crisis and rising unemployment, due mainly to the mechanisation of agriculture. Dutch authorities actively supported emigration as a partial solution to the problem of overcrowding.

Meanwhile, immigration policy change meant that Australia was looking for acceptable migrants from non-British sources. The hard working rural Dutch, with their linguistic and cultural affinities with the Australian population, were seen to be ideal immigrants. Both the Australian and Netherlands Governments contributed to the cost of passage, while the Australian Government accepted the responsibility for assisting settlement. As a result, during the 1950s Australia was the destination of 30 per cent of Dutch emigrants and the Netherlands-born became numerically the second largest non-British group. Their numbers peaked in 1961 at 102,134.

Details

The latest Census in 2001 recorded 83,250 Netherlands-born persons in Australia, a decrease of 5 per cent from the 1996 Census. The 2001 distribution by State and Territory showed Victoria had the largest number with 24,280 followed by New South Wales (20,290), Queensland (15,290) and Western Australia (10,470).

The median age of the Netherlands-born in 2001 was 57.4 years compared with 46.0 years for all overseas-born and 35.6 years for the total Australian population. The age distribution showed 1.1 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 1.9 per cent were 15-24 years, 13.2 per cent were 25-44 years, 51.8 per cent were 45-64 years and 31.9 per cent were 65 and over. Of the Netherlands-born in Australia, there were 43,190 males (51.9 per cent) and 40,060 females (48.1 per cent). The sex ratio was 107.8 males per 100 females.

At the 2001 Census, the rate of Australian Citizenship for the Netherlands-born in Australia was 79.0 per cent. The rate for all overseas-born was 75.1 per cent.

Published resources

Edited Book
The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins, Jupp, James, 2001

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