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**The relative economic status of
indigenous people in New South
Wales, 1986-91**

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SERIES NOTE

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- investigate the stimulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development and issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and unemployment;
- identify and analyse the factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour force; and
- assist in the development of government strategies aimed at raising the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour market.

The Director of the Centre is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University and receives assistance in formulating the Centre's research agenda from an Advisory Committee consisting of five senior academics nominated by the Vice-Chancellor and four representatives nominated by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Department of Social Security.

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ABSTRACT

A mid-term review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) has recently been completed. While much of the associated policy-rhetoric and assessment of policy outcomes has been aimed at the national level, the fiscal environment in which AEDP goals are to be achieved is invariably one of regional labour markets and administrative systems operating in the economic context of States and Territories. In view of this reality, this paper responds to a need for regional-level analyses of change in the economic status of indigenous people compared to that of non-indigenous people in each State and Territory. Using 1986 and 1991 Census-based social indicators for New South Wales, attention is focussed on relative shifts in population growth and intra-State distribution, labour force and income status, and levels of welfare dependency (measured as non-employment income). A major finding is that while the gap in labour force status between indigenous and non-indigenous people has narrowed, the relative income status and level of welfare dependency of indigenous people has not improved. This suggests that increased emphasis on the quality of AEDP outcomes, and not just quantity, will be necessary if the overall aims of the AEDP are to be accomplished.

Acknowledgments

The rationale for individual State and Territory analyses of change in the economic status of indigenous Australians emerged from discussions with colleagues at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR). We are particularly indebted to Jon Altman for comments on early versions of this paper. The data used were purchased from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to inform Phase 2 of the 1993 review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy. A large part of the exercise was devoted to the design, acquisition and tabulation of these data. Raw table figures were provided on floppy disk by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics Unit of ABS in Darwin. Statistical manipulation was conducted by INTSTAT Australia Pty Ltd and by Liu Jin, Research Officer at CAEPR. Krystyna Szokalski provided her usual high standard of editorial assistance and Nicky Lumb contributed careful proof-reading.

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Foreword

During the second half of 1993, CAEPR undertook Phase 2 of the evaluation of the AEDP on a consultancy basis for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The major outputs from this consultancy have been published as CAEPR Research Monograph No. 5 *The Relative Economic Status of Indigenous Australians 1986-91* and No. 6 *Regional Change in the Economic Status of Indigenous Australians 1986-91*, both authored by Dr John Taylor. These monographs were based on special tables summarising and cross-tabulating 1986 and 1991 Census data ordered from ABS.

The large amount of data generated from the censuses could not be fully summarised in the two research monographs and as part of its consultancy, CAEPR also provided ATSIC with 32-page statistical summaries for each State and Territory for the use of the AEDP Review Secretariat and Review Committee. These summaries form the basis of a series of CAEPR Discussion Papers that focus on intercensal changes between 1986 and 1991 in the comparative economic status of indigenous Australians at the State and Territory level. The first five discussion papers in this series, CAEPR Discussion Papers No. 55 to No. 59, co-authored by Dr John Taylor and Ms Linda Roach, take an intentionally standard approach to the analysis of these data. Subsequent discussion papers on the situation in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory will vary somewhat from this standard approach: Queensland data will be presented for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people separately; and the analysis of Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory data will take into account the somewhat unusual population distribution in each jurisdiction.

This set of State-oriented discussion papers are a little different from most of CAEPR's research output, but are regarded as analytically valuable for two main reasons. First, CAEPR's research charter requires it to examine the economic situation of indigenous Australians at the State and Territory, as well as national and regional, levels of aggregation. Second, while ABS output on indigenous Australians is available in standard publications based on the 1986 and 1991 Census, there is little published that rigorously and systematically compares the economic status of indigenous Australians with non-indigenous Australians over time. It is hoped that each of these five discussion papers will be especially useful for policy development purposes at the State level.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
April 1994

A mid-term review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) has recently been completed (Bamblett 1994). The AEDP was originally developed as an immediate Commonwealth response to the *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* (Miller 1985) and launched in association with the 1986-87 Commonwealth Budget. Subsequently, the AEDP was expanded and officially launched in November 1987. In late 1992, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University negotiated with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to provide an analysis of official census statistics to assist the review process. This resulted in the publication of two monographs on national and inter-regional changes in the economic status of indigenous Australians between 1986 and 1991 (Taylor 1993a, 1993b).

The *Aboriginal Employment Development Policy Statement* (Australian Government 1987) highlighted that the overall objective of the AEDP is to assist indigenous Australians to achieve broad equity with other Australians in terms of employment and economic status. This objective was incorporated in three specific goals that emphasise both equity and statistical equality. These are:

- the achievement of employment equality with other Australians, that is to increase the proportion of indigenous Australians of working age, in employment to equal that of the total population;
- the achievement of income equality with other Australians, that is to increase median individual incomes to the median of the total population; and
- to reduce the welfare dependency of indigenous Australians to a level commensurate with that of other Australians, with a particular emphasis on unemployment-related welfare.

It has been understood for some time that an assessment of AEDP outcomes, in broad policy and statistical terms, would be almost entirely dependent on labour force statistics collected in the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing (Altman 1991: 168-70, 1992). In this context, it was fortunate that a degree of correlation emerged between the 1986 Census, the official launch of the AEDP, the availability of 1991 Census data in 1993 and the timing of its mid-term review. With this in mind, the terms of reference for Phase 2 of the evaluation of the AEDP agreed upon between the inter-agency AEDP Review Co-ordinating Committee and CAEPR stated specifically:

In order to assist in assessing the impact of the AEDP, conduct a detailed analysis of 1986 and 1991 Census data to ascertain the degree

to which the AEDP objectives have been achieved and in particular examine:

- the extent to which the income status of indigenous people has improved since 1986;
- the extent to which the employment status of indigenous people has improved since 1986;
- the extent to which the dependency of indigenous people on welfare (non-employment income) has declined since 1986.

Where possible, the analysis should also seek to identify:

- comparative changes in income status, employment and welfare dependence over the period since 1986 for the general Australian population;
- changes in overall macroeconomic conditions and employment opportunities in the mainstream labour market;
- other relevant factors like demographic, gender and locational issues impacting on the achievement of AEDP targets.

In recognition of renewed policy interest in regional issues, both within ATSIC and the Federal Government (Keltly 1993), and to allow information on the contemporary economic status of indigenous Australians to be disseminated as widely as possible, these issues have now been analysed for each State and Territory and the findings are presented in a series of CAEPR Discussion Papers. This paper is concerned with New South Wales. Unlike Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) State publications on indigenous people (ABS 1993), the focus of attention here is on intercensal change in labour force and income status with direct comparison drawn between indigenous and non-indigenous populations.

Population size and distribution, 1986-91

To analyse change in the economic status of indigenous people in New South Wales compared to that of the rest of the State's population, an appreciation of respective population growth rates and spatial distributions is crucial. This is because different pressures are brought to bear on the need for new job creation by variable rates of growth in working-age population while the economy itself varies in its capacity to create employment in different places.

Previous analyses have identified an urban/rural gradient in regard to broad levels of economic status among indigenous Australians nationally (Gray and Tesfaghiorgis 1991; Tesfaghiorgis 1991; Taylor 1993a, 1993b) and

in New South Wales specifically (Ross 1988, 1991). It has also been noted that the delivery of economic policy initiatives under the AEDP has a rationale based on the size of localities where clients live. Community-based programs are predominant in small, mostly rural places where labour markets are poorly developed, while mainstream initiatives are more evident in urban places (Taylor 1993a: 5-6). Given the policy significance of these structural distinctions, the subsequent analysis is organised according to the ABS's section-of-State classification, although for analytical convenience the standard four-way taxonomy has been reduced to three components by amalgamating data for bounded localities and the rural balance to create a single 'rural' category (0-999 persons).¹

The indigenous population

In contrast with earlier intercensal periods, the change in the census count of indigenous people in Australia between 1986 and 1991 accords more closely with demographic expectations giving some cause for confidence, for the first time, in their interpretation (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1993). At the same time, according to Gaminiratne (1993: 5) growth in the indigenous population of New South Wales was notably higher than expected based on projections from the 1986 Census (3.4 per cent per annum as opposed to an expected rate of 2.6 per cent per annum). A number of observations are relevant to an understanding of this demographic discrepancy. First, is the suggestion that higher growth partly reflects real increases in fertility at a time when life expectancy among indigenous people in New South Wales has risen at a faster rate than in most other States (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1993: 87-91). Second, is the continued prospect of mis-identification on the part of census respondents who classified themselves as Torres Strait Islanders. Concerns regarding the veracity of counts for the Torres Strait Islander population in Australia have been expressed at successive census rounds (Choi and Gray 1985; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993) and the large proportional increase in Torres Strait Islanders in New South Wales between 1986 and 1991 (46.4 per cent) only serves to heighten such doubts. Finally, Gaminiratne (1993: 8) raises the possibility of improved coverage in the 1991 Census and/or an increase in the tendency for individuals in New South Wales to identify as indigenous Australians (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1993).

One of the distributional features of the indigenous population distribution over the past two decades has been a gradual increase in the proportion resident in Sydney, as well as in other major urban areas such as Newcastle and Wollongong. For example, between 1971 and 1986 the proportion of the State's indigenous population living in large cities increased from 27 per cent to 37 per cent while the proportion living in rural areas declined from 33 per cent to 17 per cent. The proportion resident in country towns has remained relatively stable, increasing only slightly from 33 per cent in 1971 to 46 per cent in 1986. This shift towards more urban, and

particularly metropolitan, location has occurred as a result of migration for employment and housing (Ball 1985; Beasley 1970; Burnley and Routh 1985; Gray 1989; Taylor 1992) as well as a growing tendency for urban-based indigenous people to self-identify in the census (Altman 1992: 8).

Analysis of indigenous population change by section-of-State for the most recent intercensal period between 1986 and 1991 indicates that the trend towards 'metropolitanisation' has continued (Table 1). The rate of population increase was highest in major urban areas and such places account for a growing share of the indigenous population. Away from the cities, a reversal of previous trends is apparent with the highest rates of growth occurring in small rural places while intermediate-sized country towns experienced below average growth and a reduction in their share of the population. As a consequence, in 1991, the indigenous population of New South Wales was slightly more concentrated in major urban areas and slightly more likely to be found in rural settlements such as Wilcannia, Collarenebri and Bodalla. Although the proportion resident across the wide range of 'other urban' places declined, the indigenous population remains most heavily concentrated in this settlement size category.

Table 1. Change in indigenous population by section-of-State: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	21,416	36.3	26,427	37.7	5,011	23.4
Other urban	27,352	46.4	30,994	44.3	3,642	13.3
Rural	10,243	17.3	12,601	18.0	2,358	23.0
Total	59,011	100.0	70,022	100.0	11,011	18.7

The non-indigenous population

The majority of the New South Wales population displayed an equivalent tendency to vary its overall distribution between 1986 and 1991 (Table 2). However, to the extent that change is evident according to section-of-State, the trends in distribution are contrary to those apparent among indigenous people. Unlike the indigenous population, the majority of the State's residents are now slightly less prevalent in major urban areas and slightly more likely to be located in other urban and rural areas. A major factor underlying this trend is a continuing process of 'counterurbanisation' involving net migration flows in favour of non-metropolitan places within commuting zones and places of high amenity value, particularly in coastal areas away from large urban centres (Hugo and Smailes 1985; Bell 1992:

46-87; Burnley 1988; Sant and Simons 1993). Notwithstanding this difference in spatial redistribution, the overwhelming contrast with the indigenous population remains the far greater concentration of the majority of the State's residents in the major urban areas of Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong and Central Coast (Gosford-Wyong).

Table 2. Change in non-indigenous population by section-of-State: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No. (million)	Per cent	No. (million)	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	3.63	68.1	3.79	67.0	159,362	4.4
Other urban	1.06	19.9	1.16	20.6	104,724	9.9
Rural	0.63	12.0	0.69	12.4	59,987	9.4
Total	5.33	100.0	5.66	100.0	324,073	6.1

Change in the working-age population, 1986-91

As foreshadowed by Gray and Tesfaghiorgis (1991), the rate of growth in the indigenous population of working age continued to outstrip that of the rest of the working-age population during the 1986-91 intercensal period. This was the inevitable outcome of demographic processes set in train during the early 1970s, culminating in distinct shifts in the age structure of the indigenous population across Australia.

Table 3. Change in population aged 15-64 years among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
					Net change	Per cent change
Indigenous	34,180		40,547		6,367	18.6
Non-indigenous	3,528,355		3,747,318		218,963	6.2

Table 3 indicates that the rate of increase of the indigenous working-age population in New South Wales was three times higher than that of the rest of the population. Apart from higher rates of natural increase, this differential also derived from a lower rate of net interstate migration loss among the indigenous working-age population. Between 1986 and 1991, the State's indigenous population was reduced by 431 persons due to

interstate migration representing a net rate of migration loss of around 10 per thousand of the average intercensal population. This compares with a net loss of 65,608 among the rest of the working-age population, or 19 per thousand.

Labour force status, 1986-91

Three standard social indicators are used here to highlight the extent and direction of relative change in indigenous labour force status: the employment rate, representing the percentage of those aged 15-64 years who indicated in the census that they were in employment during the week prior to enumeration; the unemployment rate, expressing those who indicated that they were not in employment but had actively looked for work during the four weeks prior to enumeration as a percentage of those in the labour force (those employed plus those unemployed); and the labour force participation rate, representing those in the labour force as a percentage of those of working age.

Between 1986 and 1991, the overall employment rate of indigenous people in New South Wales showed sign of improvement, rising from 33.6 per cent to 38.0 per cent (Table 4). It is instructive to consider this positive trend in a wider labour market context as corresponding figures for the rest of the State's working-age population showed only slight improvement from 63.1 per cent to 64.8 per cent. Thus, a marginal degree of convergence in employment levels between the two groups has been achieved in recent years, although it should be noted that the rate for indigenous people remains substantially below the State average. At the same time, the relative improvement in indigenous labour force status has been achieved against a background of sustained higher growth in the population of working age.

A similar closure of the gap in labour force status between indigenous people and the rest of the population is apparent from intercensal shifts in unemployment rates (Table 4). The results point to a significant decline in the indigenous unemployment rate at a time when the non-indigenous rate has risen noticeably. Using the data in Table 4, it can be calculated that the indigenous unemployment rate as a ratio of the non-indigenous unemployment rate fell from being 4.0 times higher in 1986 to 3.2 times higher in 1991.

It is important to qualify discussions of relative employment and unemployment rates with data on relative rates of labour force participation since the proportion of the indigenous population formally attached to the labour market has historically been well below the State average. Evidence from the 1991 Census indicates that this is still the case (Table 4). Despite the fact that the indigenous labour force participation rate increased

slightly from 56.0 per cent in 1986 to 59.0 per cent in 1991, the non-indigenous participation rate also rose from 70.0 per cent to 72.3 per cent, thus maintaining its substantially higher level.

Table 4. Change in labour force status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Indigenous		Non-indigenous	
	1986 (1)	1991 (1)	1986 (2)	1991 (2)
Employment rate	33.6	38.0	63.1	64.8
Unemployment rate	40.1	35.6	9.9	11.1
Participation rate	56.0	59.0	70.0	72.3
Ratio (1/2)				
Employment rate	0.53	0.59		
Unemployment rate	4.00	3.20		
Participation rate	0.80	0.82		

All figures exclude those who did not state their labour force status.

A number of points are relevant in interpreting these data. First, the much higher intercensal growth rate of the indigenous working-age population means that an increase in the participation rate at a level equivalent to the rest of the population has required a proportionally greater increase in numbers joining the labour force. Likewise, with regard to the employment rate, greater success in gaining employment has been required among indigenous people simply to maintain it at a constant level, to say nothing of actually improving it. Another factor, which may have served to dampen the rate of growth in labour force participation, is the move to encourage higher levels of Aboriginal attendance and retention in educational institutions under the Federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

In this context, it is worth noting that the proportion of indigenous people aged 15 years and over who were reported by the census as attending an educational institution in New South Wales, either full-time or part-time, rose by as much as two-thirds (67.3 per cent) representing an increase from 3,937 in 1986 to 6,587 in 1991 which is considerably higher than the national rate of 14.5 per cent (Taylor 1993a: 16). While this growth in attendance at educational institutions may result in employment dividends at some later stage, its most likely immediate impact would have been to dampen growth in the labour force participation rate. At the same time, standard explanations advanced by labour economists of apparently intractable low participation, due to a variety of factors operating to

discourage indigenous people from seeking employment, may also have some validity (Daly 1992).

Section-of-State and gender variations

A quite different picture of intercensal change in labour force status emerges from a disaggregation of the data by section-of-State and gender. The magnitude and net direction of such shifts are shown in Tables 5 and 6, while the actual rates from which these are calculated are shown in Tables 7 and 8. In major urban areas, contrary to what might be expected, change in the labour force status of indigenous males runs counter to the positive trend observed overall, with employment and labour force participation rates falling and unemployment remaining at the same level. This contrasts with the situation among indigenous females in urban areas whose labour force status has notably improved.

Table 5. Net change in labour force status of indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-1.1	2.0	11.0	2.8
Unemployment rate	-0.1	-2.3	-15.1	-3.9
Participation rate	-1.7	0.7	1.3	0.0
Females				
Employment rate	4.9	5.2	9.2	6.0
Unemployment rate	-2.6	-4.9	-12.3	-4.9
Participation rate	4.9	5.8	7.8	5.9

Table 6. Net change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-2.3	-1.7	-0.2	2.8
Unemployment rate	2.4	1.8	0.0	-3.9
Participation rate	-0.3	-0.3	-0.3	-0.2
Females				
Employment rate	5.3	6.4	5.5	5.5
Unemployment rate	0.4	-1.3	-1.5	-0.1
Participation rate	6.2	6.4	5.2	6.1

One point worth noting is that the variation in changing labour force status between males and females in urban areas follows the pattern found in the workforce generally (Table 6). This may indicate that in Sydney and other large cities where opportunities are restricted to mainstream labour markets, indigenous people are more prone to the economic forces shaping work patterns in the population generally.

Table 7. Change in labour force status of indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Other urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males								
Employment rate	54.5	53.4	36.2	38.2	32.3	43.3	42.3	45.1
Unemployment rate	29.7	29.6	48.2	45.9	52.0	37.0	41.5	37.6
Participation rate	77.6	75.9	69.9	70.6	67.4	68.7	72.3	72.3
Females								
Employment rate	34.5	39.4	19.9	25.1	17.7	26.8	25.2	31.2
Unemployment rate	27.0	24.4	45.7	40.8	47.9	35.7	37.5	32.6
Participation rate	47.2	52.1	36.7	42.4	33.9	41.7	40.3	46.2

Table 8. Change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Other urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males								
Employment rate	76.7	74.4	73.3	71.6	73.8	73.5	75.7	73.7
Unemployment rate	9.0	11.4	11.1	12.9	12.1	12.1	9.7	11.8
Participation rate	84.2	83.9	82.4	82.1	83.9	83.6	83.8	83.6
Females								
Employment rate	52.1	57.4	44.5	50.9	48.2	53.7	50.2	55.7
Unemployment rate	9.5	9.9	12.7	11.4	11.4	9.9	10.2	10.1
Participation rate	57.5	63.7	51.0	57.4	54.4	59.7	55.9	62.0

The greatest shifts in labour force status are apparent in rural areas where, regardless of gender, increases in indigenous employment rates have been substantial and unemployment rates have shown a marked decline. The rural employment rate, for example, increased by around 10 percentage points for both males and females, while the unemployment rate correspondingly fell by as much as 15 percentage points for males and 12

percentage points for females. Notwithstanding these differential shifts based on settlement size, the labour force status of indigenous people in major urban areas remains noticeably higher than elsewhere in the State with country towns displaying the lowest status (Table 7). Spatially, it appears that the situation observed in 1986 whereby employment levels among indigenous people in the North Coast, Murray and Western regions of the State were far lower than elsewhere, has been sustained (Ross 1988, 1991). This is quite different from the pattern among the rest of the population where only slight variation in labour force status is apparent between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Table 8).

Such relatively favourable impacts in rural areas are unlikely to have derived from market forces alone and point more realistically to the effect of widespread program intervention, particularly in the form of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme.² At the time of the 1986 Census there were no CDEP schemes operating in New South Wales. By 1991, 31 communities were participating in the scheme with a total of 1,530 participants. Just over half of those participating (51 per cent) were in rural communities while most of the remainder (43 per cent) were in country towns such as Leeton, Brewarrina and Warren. The balance were located in the Sydney area, notably in Redfern.

Employment growth and the AEDP

The likelihood that AEDP initiatives have served to enhance the relative standing of indigenous people in the labour market is suggested by their much higher rates of intercensal employment growth compared to other residents of New South Wales (Table 9).

Table 9. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Number employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous	11,081	14,825	3,744	33.8
Non-indigenous	2,175,769	2,351,894	176,125	8.1
Total	2,186,850	2,366,719	179,869	8.2

Between 1986 and 1991, the number of indigenous people in employment grew by 3,744 representing an increase of 33.8 per cent, more than four times the rate recorded for the rest of the population. In estimating the proportion of new employment growth due to this participation in the CDEP scheme, much depends on assumptions made regarding the ratio of

CDEP scheme workers to participants as the participant schedules include non-working spouses. A 60 per cent ratio is employed here as a best estimate using the scant evidence available from the 1993 review of the scheme (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu 1993: 51). Clearly, a higher ratio would increase the contribution of CDEP scheme employment to total employment with associated policy significance.

Using the minimum ratio, it is estimated that expansion of the CDEP scheme accounted for an increase of 918 jobs between 1986 and 1991. Of these, 468 were generated in rural areas, 398 in country towns and 52 in the metropolitan area. According to Table 10, the net increase in rural jobs for indigenous people was 1,053. Thus, almost half (44 per cent) of all rural job growth can be accounted for by participation in the CDEP scheme. In country towns, the figure was just over one-third (37 per cent). The policy message from this is clear. Without increased participation in the CDEP scheme, rural labour force status would have been far worse than indicated by 1991 Census data, as would the situation in many country towns. In Sydney, the rate of job growth for indigenous people was far less than in rural areas but achieved almost entirely independent of the CDEP scheme. Furthermore, indigenous residents of Sydney recorded a much higher rate of job growth than the rest of the metropolitan population suggesting that the public and private sector initiatives of the AEDP left some mark, although precisely in what manner, to what extent and over what time frame, is difficult to determine.

Table 10. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Major urban	49.6	48.0	1,614	29.3
Other urban	37.4	35.2	1,077	26.0
Rural	13.0	16.8	1,053	73.2
Total	100.0	100.0	3,744	33.8
Non-indigenous				
Major urban	70.7	69.5	96,272	6.3
Other urban	17.7	18.4	48,328	12.6
Rural	11.6	12.1	31,525	12.5
Total	100.0	100.0	176,125	8.1

Unfortunately, it is not possible to be precise about the true impact of CDEP scheme participation on employment change given that calculations are based on assumptions regarding the ratio of actual workers in the

scheme to those registered as participants. Furthermore, the data are drawn from an administrative data base which is not strictly comparable with census data. If anything, the estimate of the CDEP scheme's contribution to intercensal employment growth is likely to be a minimum figure judging by early returns from ATSIC's newly instituted CDEP Census (Taylor 1993b: 35-6). If this is so, then the importance of CDEP scheme participation in explaining the improvement in non-metropolitan labour force status would be greater still.

Information on the number of placements in the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP) and other DEET labour market programs in New South Wales over the course of the intercensal period are difficult to obtain. However, figures made available by DEET for the year 1989-90 indicate that a total of 2,329 indigenous people commenced placements in all labour market programs in the State. Even though this level of placement was not sustained throughout the five-yearly intercensal period, and assuming that some placements were made in rural areas, the gap between recorded urban job growth and placement data is striking. One explanation may be that many TAP placements do not represent 'new' entrants to 'new' jobs, but simply reflect the recycling of individuals several times through a constant, or even declining, pool of positions (Johnston 1991: 73). Another may be found in the short duration of subsidies and program support combined with the failure of some participants to remain in programs. Finally, any positive employment outcomes from program placements may simply have disappeared by census time (Daly 1993). Thus, improvements in labour force status, particularly among males in Sydney, that may have been expected to occur due to the application of private and public sector employment programs administered by DEET do not emerge from the data.

Table 11. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by gender: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Males	61.7	58.1	1,770	25.9
Females	38.3	41.9	1,974	46.6
Total	100.0	100.0	3,744	33.8
Non-indigenous				
Males	60.6	57.5	33,324	2.5
Females	39.4	42.5	142,801	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	176,125	8.1

Whatever the case, it is apparent that in Sydney and many other urban areas, the AEDP has fallen behind in its task of achieving employment equality or even improving employment status, particularly for indigenous males. The worsening labour market position of indigenous males is underlined by the fact that just over half of all new jobs for indigenous people (53 per cent) went to females. Because of their far fewer numbers in the labour force, however, indigenous females experienced a much higher rate of employment growth (Table 11). This is consistent with the general gender pattern of job growth in the State and it is worth emphasising that the rate at which non-indigenous males gained new employment was substantially below that of their indigenous counterparts. Thus, in the deteriorating labour market conditions of the early 1990s one important impact of the AEDP may simply have been to ameliorate potentially worse employment outcomes for many indigenous males seeking opportunities in mainstream urban labour markets.

Income status, 1986-91

A key goal of the AEDP is to achieve an improvement in income levels for indigenous Australians to a point where they are equal to those of the general population. In this endeavour, much depends, not just on accelerating the rate of employment growth among indigenous people above that of the rest of the workforce, but also on ensuring that the types of jobs created generate incomes that are commensurate with those of the general population. Given the relative improvements in the labour force status of indigenous people in New South Wales there would appear to be statistical grounds for expecting that the income gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians may have narrowed.

Table 12. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Income (\$000s)			
	Indigenous 1986	Indigenous 1991	Non-indigenous 1986	Non-indigenous 1991
Mean	8.4	12.6	13.4	20.2
Median	6.4	9.8	11.5	17.0
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous				
Mean	0.63	0.62		
Median	0.56	0.58		

Overall, however, the census indicates little change with mean incomes for the indigenous adult population as a ratio of that for the rest of the

population, showing a slight fall from 0.63 in 1986 to 0.62 in 1991 (Table 12).³ Median incomes were somewhat lower as a ratio of non-indigenous medians but display a slight improvement. This divergent trend is only minor and no doubt reflects the different bases for calculation. The essential conclusion to be drawn from both measures is simply that income relativities have not changed during the intercensal period. This lack of improvement in relative incomes is not surprising given that such a large proportion of new jobs for indigenous people have been generated by participation in the CDEP scheme which provides for income at levels more or less equivalent to welfare entitlements. If the CDEP scheme, with its current emphasis on low-wage work, continues to provide the bulk of new employment for indigenous people, there seems little prospect that the overall income gap between them and the rest of the population in New South Wales will narrow. If anything, it is likely to widen further. This is of crucial policy significance as it signals that improvements in labour force status alone are not sufficient to enhance income status, unless the CDEP scheme becomes more oriented to the stimulation of income generation. Of equal importance to job creation is the nature of the work involved and the income it generates.

Income change by section-of-State

The proposition that overall income levels are influenced as much by the nature of work as by the rate of employment growth is supported by data showing change in the income status of indigenous people by section-of-State (Table 13).

Table 13. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Income (\$000s)				Total	
			Other urban		Rural			
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Indigenous								
Mean	9.7	14.3	7.7	11.6	7.2	11.0	8.4	12.6
Median	7.9	11.5	5.9	9.2	5.6	8.3	6.4	9.8
Non-indigenous								
Mean	14.2	21.5	11.9	17.5	11.1	17.3	13.4	20.2
Median	12.6	18.3	9.8	14.6	8.3	13.7	11.5	17.0
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous								
Mean	0.68	0.67	0.65	0.66	0.65	0.64	0.63	0.62
Median	0.63	0.63	0.61	0.63	0.67	0.60	0.56	0.58

Despite the fact that intercensal improvements in the labour force status of indigenous people have been most noticeable in rural areas, income levels

remain inversely related to settlement size. At the same time, the rural/urban gap appears to be closing. The ratio of mean incomes for rural-based indigenous people compared to those in major urban areas, for example, increased from 0.74 in 1986 to 0.77 in 1991. Comparing rural incomes with other urban incomes, the ratio of mean incomes also rose from 0.93 in 1986 to 0.95 in 1991. A similar trend is apparent for other State residents with the ratio of rural to major urban mean incomes rising from 0.78 in 1986 to 0.80 in 1991. The narrowing of the urban/rural income gap among indigenous people is somewhat surprising given the composition of much rural employment as part-time work with remuneration based on close welfare equivalents via the CDEP scheme. Notwithstanding signs of improvement, rural areas remain structurally disadvantaged compared to urban areas where a much greater proportion of jobs are full-time and award-based.

Income change by gender

The primary cause of the widening gap between indigenous and non-indigenous incomes was a relative decline in the income levels of indigenous males (Table 14). Using the figures for nominal mean income in 1986, indigenous male incomes were almost three-quarters (73.9 per cent) of the total mean for the non-indigenous population. By 1991, this proportion had fallen to just over two-thirds (69.8 per cent). In contrast, mean incomes for indigenous females rose as a proportion of total non-indigenous mean incomes from 51.5 per cent in 1986 to 54.4 per cent in 1991. If these figures are expressed in terms of 1989-90 prices (using a Consumer Price Index of 73.5 in 1985-86 and 105.3 in 1990-91), the real gender-based shift in incomes is apparent with indigenous male incomes falling slightly from a real mean of \$13,469 in 1986 to \$13,390 in 1991 and the female equivalent showing a clear counter-tendency by rising from \$9,387 to \$10,446. This convergence in male and female incomes is consistent with the trend revealed by Treadgold (1988) for the intercensal periods 1976-86 and is linked to the relatively better performance of females in sectors of the labour market less affected by the vagaries of the economy. Also, it probably reflects growing gender differentials in the nature of work with indigenous females employed for relatively longer hours and in more skilled employment (Taylor 1993a).

Despite the income gains experienced by indigenous females, they failed to keep up with the rate of growth in income experienced by their non-indigenous counterparts. Nominal mean income for indigenous females, for example, increased by 59.4 per cent during the intercensal period. Non-indigenous females, on the other hand, increased their mean income by 65.2 per cent starting from a higher base (Table 14). Thus, ratios of indigenous to non-indigenous incomes reveal that the gap between female incomes has widened, while that between males has remained relatively unchanged. At the same time, in monetary terms, indigenous females

remain behind indigenous males with the average income for indigenous females rising by a slightly higher amount than that of indigenous males but from a lower base.

Table 14. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by gender: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	Males		Income (\$000s) Females		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Indigenous						
Mean	9.9	14.1	6.9	11.0	8.4	12.6
Median	7.9	10.9	5.9	9.3	6.4	9.8
Non-indigenous						
Mean	17.7	25.3	8.9	14.7	13.4	20.2
Median	16.3	22.1	6.5	11.6	11.5	17.0
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous						
Mean	0.56	0.56	0.77	0.75	0.63	0.62
Median	0.49	0.50	0.90	0.80	0.56	0.58

Welfare dependency

In the AEDP, welfare dependency is equated with dependency on unemployment benefit. Altman and Smith (1993: 21) take the view that this definition is somewhat narrow, reflecting the labour market focus of the AEDP. They take a broader definition of welfare to include all transfer payments from the Federal Government to indigenous citizens. Such a wider definition is also necessitated by the limited availability of official sources of income data for indigenous Australians. At an aggregate level, the most comprehensive indication of the reliance of indigenous people on welfare income is available from census data. This is derived from a cross-tabulation of individual incomes by labour force status. Using this source, Table 15 shows the proportion of total income accruing to each category of the labour force, and to those not in the labour force, in 1986 and 1991.

Overall, there is little change in the contribution of employment income to total income. If anything, a slightly higher proportion of income among the indigenous population derives from employment while among the rest of the population it is slightly less. This seems to suggest that the longer-term trend of a decline in employment income relative to total income, noted by Daly and Hawke (1993) for the period 1976-91, has been arrested by improvements in employment income during the most recent intercensal period. However, the most likely reason for this is the classification of a high proportion of income from the CDEP scheme as employment income

and it might be questioned whether income based on notional citizen entitlements should properly be classified either as employment or non-employment income. At the same time, even if income from the CDEP scheme is accepted as employment income, the proportion of total income derived from non-welfare sources remains fixed at a level much lower among indigenous people than among the rest of the population. This is despite their relatively greater improvement in labour force status. Thus, the policy objective of a reduction in welfare dependency among indigenous people to a level commensurate with that of other Australians is no closer to being achieved in New South Wales than before the introduction of the AEDP.

Table 15. Change in total income of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by labour force status: New South Wales, 1986-91.

	1986		1991	
	Income (\$ million)	Per cent	Income (\$ million)	Per cent
Indigenous				
Employed	154.02	60.7	280.4	63.0
Unemployed	37.3	14.7	60.5	13.6
Not in the labour force	62.3	24.6	104.5	23.5
Total	253.8	100.0	445.4	100.0
Non-indigenous				
Employed	39,087.1	88.3	59,881.2	88.0
Unemployed	1,238.0	2.8	2,313.4	3.4
Not in the labour force	3,961.6	8.9	5,854.2	8.6
Total	44,286.8	100.0	68,048.9	100.0

Actual shifts in mean employment and non-employment incomes are shown in Table 16. The most striking feature is that mean employment incomes for indigenous people have increased at a considerably slower rate than for others in employment. This is further indicated by the decline in ratios of indigenous/non-indigenous employment income from 0.78 in 1986 to 0.75 in 1991. As already noted, this is to be expected given that a substantial share of new employment income for indigenous workers is essentially fixed at a rate roughly equivalent to unemployment benefit (now Jobsearch and Newstart allowances). As for welfare income, the mean individual income of unemployed indigenous people in 1986 was \$5,530, which was substantially less than half (38.3 per cent) of the mean income for those in employment. By 1991, this gap had closed somewhat but unemployed indigenous people still had incomes which were less than half of that recorded for people in employment (40.6 per cent). Furthermore, compared to the non-indigenous population, the ratio of mean

incomes for indigenous people who were unemployed, as well as for those not in the labour force, actually fell.

Table 16. Change in mean employment/non-employment income of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: New South Wales, 1986-91.

Labour force status	Mean income (\$000s)		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Employed	14.43	19.81	5.38	37.3
Unemployed	5.53	8.05	2.52	45.6
Not in the labour force	4.96	7.72	2.76	55.6
Total	8.46	12.65	4.19	49.6
Non-indigenous				
Employed	18.41	26.27	7.86	42.7
Unemployed	5.44	8.75	3.31	60.8
Not in the labour force	4.24	7.21	2.97	69.9
Total	13.48	20.27	6.79	50.4
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous				
Employed	0.78	0.75	-0.03	-3.8
Unemployed	1.02	0.92	-0.10	-9.4
Not in the labour force	1.17	1.07	-0.10	-8.5
Total	0.63	0.62	0.00	-0.5

Policy implications

This analysis of change in the relative economic status of indigenous people in New South Wales during the intercensal period 1986 to 1991 provides the first comprehensive indication of the impacts of the AEDP in the State since it was implemented in 1987. The results, in terms of stated policy objectives, appear to be mixed. On the one hand, employment and unemployment rates among the indigenous population show distinct signs of improvement leading to a closing of the gap in these indicators (albeit slowly) with the rest of the population. On the other hand, when the data are disaggregated by section-of-State and the nature of employment growth is investigated, the achievement is revealed to be a predominantly rural phenomenon due to the introduction of CDEP schemes since the last census.

In contrast with the expansion of the CDEP scheme, employment in urban-based public and private sector jobs shows a much slower rate of growth. While this runs counter to expectations, given the strength of program efforts to encourage urban employment, it may be that the impact of AEDP public and private sector programs, in the context of a depressed mainstream labour market, has been to simply ameliorate what might

otherwise have been a far worse outcome. This proposition cannot be validated from census data alone and requires close scrutiny of DEET's program placement and post program monitoring data in order to examine the precise nature and spatial application of labour market programs, as well as their links with employment outcomes. However, in terms of acquiring new jobs in urban labour markets, it is clear that indigenous people performed at least as well, if not better, than other job-seekers during the intercensal period and this suggests that focused labour market programs have left their mark.

The relative lack of improvement in the income status of indigenous people in New South Wales in the context of much improved labour force status emphasises the need for quality, as well as quantity, in job creation schemes if the overall aims of the AEDP are to be achieved. This is given added weight when account is taken of growing income inequalities for the population as a whole. Indigenous people appear to lag behind in an economy which is increasingly divided between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' (Saunders 1992). From a labour market perspective, one difficulty continues to be the substantial proportion of indigenous adults of working age who are not in the labour force. This accounts, in large part, for the persistence of relatively high levels of welfare dependence. Given that much new employment growth has involved a shift into CDEP scheme employment of individuals formerly on unemployment benefit or outside the labour force, it could be argued that levels of welfare dependence are actually higher than revealed by the census. This is because income derived from such employment merely represents the transfer of social security entitlements under a different guise.

Aggregate State-level data showing economic change clearly have the capacity to conceal important intra-State and gender variations. In brief, marginal improvements in labour force status evident at the State level are seen to be reversed for indigenous males in urban areas and enhanced in rural areas. Despite this, rural incomes remain firmly behind those in urban areas. Likewise, the economic status of indigenous women shows distinct improvement compared to that of men, which in income terms at least, has regressed. This clearly underlines the importance of assessing policy impacts on the economic status of indigenous people at varying scales of analysis and for different sub-groups in the population.

Given a continuation of intercensal trends in economic status among indigenous people in New South Wales a number of outcomes seem likely in the medium term. First, given continued growth in CDEP scheme employment, the gap in labour force status between indigenous and non-indigenous residents will further recede but overall indigenous people will remain half as likely to be in employment and two to three times more likely to be unemployed. Depending on the rate of growth in CDEP

scheme participation, reliance on welfare (non-employment) income may show a tendency to decline but levels of such support will remain notably higher among indigenous people not least because of sustained lower labour force participation. One unknown factor is whether increased enrolments in educational institutions will start to translate into increased employment in private and public sector jobs. Much will depend here on the pace and nature of economic recovery while special labour market programs and other funding regimes for indigenous organisations have a demonstrated capacity to provide some buoyancy even in depressed economic circumstances. Whatever ensues, it is important that the enhancement of occupational status, and not just labour force status, be the key target of policy. To date, improvements in labour force status have not impacted on the gap in average incomes. For this to change, indigenous people will need to acquire employment at a faster rate and in positions that provide an income at least commensurate with those obtained by the rest of the workforce.

Notes

1. The ABS sections-of-State within each State and Territory are as follows: major urban - all urban centres with a population of 100,000 and over; other urban - all urban centres with a population of 1,000 to 99,999; bounded locality - all population clusters of 200 to 999 persons; rural balance - the rural remainder of the State or Territory.
2. The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme is a Commonwealth Government program in which unemployed indigenous people of working age forgo their entitlements to payments from the Department of Social Security but receive the equivalent from a local community organisation in return for work. For a full description of the scheme and the policy issues surrounding it, see Altman and Sanders (1991) and Sanders (1993).
3. In estimating mean incomes, the mid-point for each income category has been taken on the assumption that individuals are evenly distributed around this mid-point. The open-ended highest category is problematic, but following Treadgold (1988) it is arbitrarily assumed that the average income received by individuals in this category was one and a half times the lower limit of the highest category. Clearly, estimates of mean incomes will vary according to the upper level adopted. In this analysis the full range of income categories has been utilised with \$50,000+ as the highest category in 1986 and \$70,000+ in 1991.

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