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**The relative economic status of
indigenous people in Queensland,
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 Queensland, attention is focused 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, and not just quantity, of AEDP outcomes will be necessary if the overall aims of the AEDP are to be accomplished.

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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). I am 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 and Linda Roach provided their usual high standard of editorial assistance while Nicky Lumb and Hilary Bek 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, adopted an intentionally standard approach to the analysis of these data. The present series of papers on the situation in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory vary somewhat from this standard approach: Queensland data are presented for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people separately; and the analysis of Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory data takes 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 this series of discussion papers will be especially useful for policy development purposes at the State and Territory level.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
June 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 initially 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; and
- 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; and
- 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 (Kelty 1993; McKinsey and Company 1994), 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 Queensland. Unlike Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) State publications on indigenous people (ABS 1993a), 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.

Despite official recognition of two indigenous peoples in Australia, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, little is known about the extent to which they differ in socioeconomic status. From a public policy perspective this is somewhat surprising, given the special provisions in sections 79-88 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* which established within ATSIC the Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board and the Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs. These are charged with monitoring the development of Federal and State policies and programs affecting Torres Strait Islanders and evaluating the extent to which these programs meet Torres Strait Islander needs. Currently, moves to establish a separate Torres Strait Regional Authority, which will take responsibility for the indigenous population of the Torres Strait from 1st July 1994, are well advanced.

Notwithstanding these statutory arrangements, social and economic indicators are rarely available separately for the Torres Strait Islander population. This is of particular importance in Queensland which is the State that the majority of Torres Strait Islanders both originate from and presently reside in. Furthermore, they constitute more than 20 per cent of the State's indigenous population. To date, the tendency in social and economic policy analysis has been to consider Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as a single client group. This situation has been reviewed by Arthur (1992) who concludes that the lack of separate statistics on Torres Strait Islanders makes it difficult to determine their relative economic status and confounds attempts to analyse any intended or unintended differential impact of government policies. While there is no doubt that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders share relatively low economic status when compared to most Australians, there are, at the same time, significant differences between them in terms of culture, geographic distribution and the manner of their incorporation into wider institutional structures. These were sufficient in 1986 and 1991 to reveal a gap in economic status between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, with the latter occupying an intermediate position between Aborigines and the rest of the population across a range of relevant indicators (Taylor 1993a; Taylor and Gaminiratne 1992). The extent to which this gap exists between the indigenous populations of Queensland is one of the issues examined here.

Population size and distribution, 1986-91

To analyse change in the economic status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland 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 at the national level have identified an urban/rural gradient in regard to broad levels of economic status among indigenous Australians (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1991; Tesfaghiorghis 1991; Taylor 1993a, 1993b). 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 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 Aboriginal population

In contrast with earlier intercensal periods, the change in Aboriginal population counts between 1986 and 1991 is broadly in accord with expectations giving cause for confidence, for the first time, in its interpretation (Gaminiratne 1993: 5). One of the features of Aboriginal population distribution over the past two decades has been a gradual increase in the proportion resident in urban areas, particularly in Brisbane, Townsville and the Gold Coast (Hugo 1990: 148). For example, between 1971 and 1986 the proportion of the Aboriginal population living in rural areas declined from 60 per cent to 36 per cent while the proportion resident in major urban areas increased from 9 per cent to 20 per cent. Those residing in other urban areas also increased as a proportion of the total from 31 per cent to 44 per cent.

The migration flows involved in this redistribution and their underlying causes have not been adequately researched in Queensland. However they are likely to correlate with the findings of Gale (1967, 1972) and Gale and Wundersitz (1982) relating to the migration of Aboriginal people to Adelaide from rural South Australia. Briefly, movement to urban areas from mission and government reserves was stimulated by a search for employment and was added to by the better provision of urban social services as well as high rates of incarceration leading to enforced relocation. Once these metropolitan links were established, movement out of rural areas was sustained by a process of chain migration involving kin networks. In Gray's (1989: 133) view, this population shift has also been encouraged by a more active program of housing provision for indigenous people in large cities. Finally, the growing tendency for urban-based indigenous people to self-identify in the census, though unquantifiable, has undoubtedly played a role in augmenting urban population numbers (Altman 1992: 8).

Analysis of Aboriginal population change by section-of-State for the most recent intercensal period between 1986 and 1991 indicates that the trend towards residence in the metropolitan area and other large cities has continued (Table 1). At the same time, the proportion of the population located in rural areas has declined further, while that in country towns has remained relatively stable. This shift towards large city residence is partly illusory owing to the fact that residents of Townsville-Thuringowa were re-classified from the other urban section-of-State in 1986 to major urban in 1991 due to growth in population size. Regardless of whether changes in distribution by section-of-State have occurred due to re-classification or migration, the trend towards increased residence in large city environments remains unequivocal among Aboriginal people even though the majority still remain in smaller centres. This acquires policy significance in view of somewhat contrary tendencies apparent among the Torres Strait Islander population.

Table 1. Change in Aboriginal population by section-of-State: Queensland, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	9,695	20.2	13,922	25.1	4,227	43.6
Other urban	21,218	44.1	23,948	43.2	2,730	12.9
Rural	17,185	35.7	17,605	31.7	420	2.4
Total	48,098	100.0	55,475	100.0	7,377	15.3

The Torres Strait Islander population

Important caveats need to be attached to the analysis of census data regarding Torres Strait Islanders. First of all, difficulties exist in determining precisely what constitutes the census-derived Torres Strait Islander population given indications that this may contain unknown numbers from other population groups, such as Pacific Islanders, identifying incorrectly (ABS 1993b). Related to this are problems of adequate census coverage and intercensal variations in self-identification that have characterised the enumeration of indigenous Australians generally since they first self-identified in the 1971 Census. Although there appears to be improvement over time in the consistency of the Aboriginal count, it seems that problems with the Torres Strait Islander count persist. For example, Gray and Tesfaghiorghis (1993) found that intercensal discrepancies in the age structure of the Torres Strait Islander population between 1986 and 1991 were of such an order as to contemplate leaving them out altogether from their calculations of indigenous population change. However, unlike other States where the 1991 Census count of Torres Strait Islanders was generally much higher than expected, in Queensland the figures of intercensal change suggest a slight undercount in 1991 (ABS 1993b: 5). Estimates of any undercount of Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland are not available, although one experimental calculation for the total indigenous population of Queensland has produced a revised 1991 Census figure which is 6 per cent higher than the official published figure (Benham and Howe 1994).

For historical reasons, both the rate and extent of urbanisation among the Torres Strait Islander population has been more pronounced over the post-war period compared to that of Aborigines. Until the end of World War II, Torres Strait Islanders were restricted by law and administrative arrangements to a predominantly rural residence in the Torres Strait. There is little evidence of any permanent movement out of the Torres Strait prior to 1945, although during World War II a number of Torres Strait Islanders were evacuated to urban centres on the mainland. Due to subsequent out-migration for employment, however, as well as the natural increase of

Torres Strait Islanders in mainland urban centres, this pattern of distribution is now substantially reversed although there are signs that the shift to the mainland may have been arrested. For example, in 1971, 40 per cent of the Torres Strait Islander population of Queensland was located away from the Torres Strait on the mainland. By 1986, this had reached 62 per cent, a figure which remained the same in 1991 suggesting that the mainland proportion may now have peaked. The pattern of settlement which has emerged from this redistribution is quite distinctive, being focused primarily on the larger urban centres of coastal North Queensland in particular, or otherwise biased towards Brisbane.

Table 2. Change in Torres Strait Islander population by section-of-State: Queensland, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	1,397	10.6	2,730	18.6	1,333	95.4
Other urban	7,568	57.4	6,510	44.4	-1,058	-14.0
Rural	4,206	32.0	5,409	37.0	1,203	28.6
Total	13,171	100.0	14,649	100.0	1,478	11.2

Changes in the distribution of Torres Strait Islanders by section-of-State between 1986 and 1991 reveal a strengthening of their presence at opposite ends of the settlement hierarchy in major urban and rural areas, with negative growth in small and medium-sized urban areas (Table 2). This latter observation is significant because it points to the possibility that Torres Strait Islanders resident in places such as Cairns, Rockhampton and Mackay may have migrated in significant numbers either back to the Torres Strait or to Brisbane as postulated by Taylor and Arthur (1993). It is important to reiterate, however, that the shift in the section-of-State designation of Townsville-Thuringowa from other urban in 1986 to major urban in 1991 was also contributory.

The non-indigenous population

The majority balance of the Queensland population also displayed a tendency to further concentrate in large cities particularly in the metropolitan area of south-east Queensland (Table 3). This continued growth of the major urban population has been viewed as an extension of the population turnaround involving the northward migration of people from southern States - a process which becomes self-sustaining by way of job creation to service an increasing population (Bell 1992: 297). As a consequence, half of all Queenslanders now live in the State's largest cities

and the prognosis is for a continuation of this trend with the Moreton region of south-east Queensland forming an extended metropolitan area.

Table 3. Change in non-indigenous population by section-of-State: Queensland, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	1.19	47.2	1.45	50.1	265,987	43.6
Other urban	0.81	32.2	0.85	29.4	44,752	12.9
Rural	0.52	20.6	0.59	20.5	73,763	2.4
Total	2.52	100.0	2.91	100.0	384,502	15.2

Change in the working-age population, 1986-91

As foreshadowed by Gray and Tesfaghiorghis (1991), the rate of growth in the indigenous population of working age in Australia 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 resulting in distinct shifts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander age structures (Table 4).

Table 4. Change in population aged 15-64 years: Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians, Queensland, 1986-91.

	1986	1991	Net change	Per cent change
Aborigines	27,597	32,072	4,475	16.2
Torres Strait Islanders	7,386	8,101	715	9.7
Total indigenous	34,983	40,173	5,190	14.8
Non-indigenous	1,652,729	1,917,928	265,199	16.0

In Queensland, however, the rate of increase of the Aboriginal working-age population was roughly equivalent to the State average while that of Torres Strait Islanders was substantially lower. While the indigenous working-age groups expanded mainly by natural increase, the high growth rate experienced by the rest of the working-age population was due primarily to interstate migration gains. Between 1986 and 1991, the balance of migration flows in and out of Queensland among indigenous

people of working age led to a net gain of only 103 persons representing a rate of increase of around three per thousand of the average intercensal population. By comparison, the non-indigenous population of working age was augmented by 88,814 representing a rate of increase of 52 persons per thousand.

Labour force status, 1986-91

Three standard indicators are employed to show the extent and direction of relative change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 (employed plus 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 Aboriginal people in Queensland showed distinct signs of improvement rising from 35 per cent to 42 per cent (Table 5). Among Torres Strait Islanders the equivalent rates were slightly higher and also rose from 38 per cent to 44 per cent. It is instructive to consider these positive trends in a wider labour market context as corresponding figures for the rest of the State's working-age population showed only slight improvement rising from 62 per cent to 64 per cent. Thus, a marginal degree of convergence in employment levels has been achieved in recent years between indigenous and other Queenslanders as indicated by the rise in employment ratios in Table 5. It is important to note, however, that employment rates for indigenous people remain at a level which is only two-thirds of that recorded for the rest of the population.

A similar closure of the gap in labour force status is apparent from intercensal shifts in unemployment rates (Table 5). The results point to a significant decline in indigenous unemployment rates at a time when non-indigenous rates have risen slightly. Also shown in Table 5, is the fact that the Aboriginal unemployment rate as a ratio of the non-indigenous unemployment rate fell from being just over three times higher in 1986 to being two and a half times higher in 1991, while that of Torres Strait Islanders fell from being nearly three times higher in 1986 to just over twice as high in 1991. Both rates still remain far above the level sought by policy initiatives, but are clearly lower than in the past.

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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15-64 years who are formally attached to the labour market has always been comparatively low. Evidence from the 1991 Census indicates that this is still the case (Table 5). Despite the fact that the Aboriginal labour force participation rate increased slightly from around 53 per cent in 1986 to almost 57 per cent in 1991, and that of Torres Strait Islanders increased likewise from 55 per cent to 59 per cent, the participation rate of non-indigenous Queenslanders also rose from 69 per cent to 72 per cent, thus maintaining substantially higher levels.

Table 5. Change in labour force status of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Aborigines		Torres Strait Islanders		Others	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
	(1)	(1)	(2)	(2)	(3)	(3)
Employment rate	34.9	42.1	38.4	44.3	62.0	64.2
Unemployment rate	35.0	28.2	30.0	25.0	10.8	11.1
Participation rate	52.8	56.6	55.0	59.1	69.5	72.2
Ratios	(1/3)	(1/3)	(2/3)	(2/3)		
Employment rate	0.56	0.65	0.62	0.69		
Unemployment rate	3.20	2.50	2.80	2.20		
Participation rate	0.76	0.78	0.79	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 higher intercensal growth rate of the Aboriginal working-age population compared to that of Torres Strait Islanders (16.2 per cent per annum compared to 9.7) has meant that increases in Aboriginal participation rates equivalent to the Torres Strait Islander population have required a proportionally greater increase in numbers joining the labour force. Likewise, with regard to employment rates, greater success in gaining employment has been required simply to maintain rates at constant levels, to say nothing of actually improving them. One factor, which may have served to restrict the rate of growth in labour force participation for both groups is the move to encourage higher levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance and retention in educational institutions under the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. In this context, it is worth noting that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over who were attending an educational institution in Queensland, either full-time or part-time, increased from 6,233 in 1986 to 7,323 in 1991. This represented a slightly higher rate of growth than the national average (17.5 per cent as

opposed to 14.6 per cent). While this growth in attendance at educational institutions may result in employment dividends at some later stage, its most likely immediate impact has 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 have some validity (Daly 1992).

Section-of-State and gender variations

A quite varied 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 6, 7 and 8 for Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and others respectively, while the actual rates from which these are calculated are shown in Tables 9, 10 and 11. In major urban areas, contrary to what might be expected, employment and unemployment rates among both Aboriginal and Torres Strait males run counter to their overall positive trends with employment levels and labour force participation rates falling and unemployment rising. A similar, though less pronounced trend is also apparent among Torres Strait Islander males in other urban areas. This contrasts with the situation among Aboriginal females generally in urban areas whose labour force status has notably improved, although the same cannot be said of Torres Strait Islander females whose employment status in large cities declined. 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 8). This suggests that in areas where mainstream labour markets predominate, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are more prone to the forces shaping work patterns in the population generally.

Table 6. Net change in Aboriginal labour force status by section-of-State and gender: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-3.5	4.8	11.1	5.1
Unemployment rate	4.1	-5.7	-11.8	-5.5
Participation rate	-0.8	1.3	3.1	1.5
Females				
Employment rate	4.9	5.0	11.7	7.5
Unemployment rate	-1.9	-6.1	-18.3	-8.8
Participation rate	5.6	3.8	7.5	5.8

The greatest shifts in labour force status are apparent in rural areas where, regardless of gender, increases in employment rates have been substantial and unemployment rates have shown a remarkable decline. The Aboriginal employment rate in rural areas, for example, increased by more than 11 percentage points for both males and females, while the unemployment rate correspondingly fell by nearly 12 percentage points for males and over 18 percentage points for females. Similar positive trends in rural areas are apparent among Torres Strait Islanders.

Table 7. Net change in Torres Strait Islander labour force status by section-of-State and gender: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-11.0	-1.9	16.3	4.0
Unemployment rate	7.3	3.6	-12.5	-3.0
Participation rate	-7.9	1.1	8.5	2.6
Females				
Employment rate	-9.2	8.8	10.8	6.7
Unemployment rate	5.1	-7.1	-14.0	-7.6
Participation rate	-10.4	8.5	7.0	4.9

Table 8. Net change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-1.8	-1.7	-1.4	-1.6
Unemployment rate	1.8	1.2	0.5	1.3
Participation rate	-0.3	-0.8	-1.1	-0.6
Females				
Employment rate	6.2	6.3	5.6	6.3
Unemployment rate	-0.6	-1.6	-1.8	-1.1
Participation rate	6.5	6.3	5.1	6.3

Relatively favourable shifts in the labour force status of indigenous people in rural areas are unlikely to have occurred from the effect of market forces. More realistically they reflect the impact of widespread program intervention primarily in the form of participation in the Community

Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme.² At the time of the 1986 Census there were eight communities in the CDEP scheme in Queensland with 1,405 participants. By 1991, 35 communities were participating in the scheme with a total of 7,070 participants, all of whom were resident in rural localities.

Employment growth and the AEDP

The likelihood that AEDP initiatives have served to enhance the relative labour force status of indigenous people is suggested by their much higher rate of intercensal employment growth compared to other residents of Queensland, albeit starting from a much lower base (Table 9). Between 1986 and 1991, the number of Aboriginal people in employment grew by 3,578, representing an increase of 38 per cent, more than twice the rate recorded for the rest of the population. The rate of employment growth among Torres Strait Islanders was somewhat less than this but still above the general State level.

Table 9. Employment growth among Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Number employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Aborigines	9,316	12,894	3,578	38.4
Torres Strait Islanders	2,683	3,418	735	27.4
Others	1,003,929	1,194,822	190,893	19.0
Total	1,015,928	1,211,134	195,206	19.2

In estimating the proportion of this employment growth due to 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 more than the total increase in employment for indigenous people between 1986 and 1991. According to Table 10, the net increase in rural jobs for indigenous people was only 2,090 whereas the estimated increase in CDEP scheme jobs recorded by the census was 3,400. The policy message from this is clear. Without increased participation in the CDEP scheme, overall employment in Queensland

would have increased by barely 1,000 jobs and rural labour force status would have been far worse than indicated by 1991 Census data. In urban areas, the rate of job growth for indigenous people was less than in rural areas, particularly among Torres Strait Islanders, but achieved without access to the CDEP scheme. Furthermore, indigenous residents of urban areas recorded higher growth in jobs than the rest of the urban population suggesting that the public and private sector initiatives of the AEDP left some mark in a depressed labour market, although precisely in what manner, to what extent and over what time frame, is difficult to determine.

Table 10. Employment growth among Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by section-of-State: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Aborigines				
Major urban	23.1	24.9	1,060	49.3
Other urban	41.0	38.2	1,100	28.8
Rural	35.9	36.9	1,418	42.4
Total	100.0	100.0	3,578	38.4
Torres Strait Islanders				
Major urban	13.6	15.8	175	48.1
Other urban	55.9	40.6	-112	-7.5
Rural	30.5	43.6	672	82.2
Total	100.0	100.0	735	27.4
Others				
Major urban	48.6	51.9	132,143	27.1
Other urban	30.6	27.6	22,772	7.4
Rural	20.8	20.5	35,978	17.2
Total	100.0	100.0	190,893	19.0

Unfortunately, it is not possible to be precise about the 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 database 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 loss of rural and urban jobs in the non-CDEP scheme sector would have been greater still.

Likewise, information on the number of placements in the Training for Aborigines Program (TAP) and other DEET labour market programs in

Queensland over the course of the intercensal period is difficult to obtain. However, figures published by DEET for the year 1989-90 indicate that a total of 4,760 indigenous people commenced placements in all labour market programs in Queensland (DEET 1991: 38). 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 job subsidies and program support combined with the withdrawal of some participants from the 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, that may have been expected to occur in urban areas 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 Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by gender: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Aborigines				
Males	66.3	62.2	1,836	29.7
Females	33.7	37.8	1,742	55.6
Total	100.0	100.0	3,578	38.4
Torres Strait Islanders				
Males	64.7	62.1	388	22.4
Females	35.3	37.9	347	36.6
Total	100.0	100.0	735	27.4
Others				
Males	61.7	57.9	71,905	11.6
Females	38.3	42.1	118,988	31.0
Total	100.0	100.0	190,893	19.0

Whatever the case, it is apparent that in urban areas particularly, the AEDP has fallen behind in its task of achieving employment equality or substantially improving employment status, particularly for indigenous males. The worsening labour market position of indigenous males is further underlined by the fact that almost half of all new jobs for indigenous people (48 per cent) went to females. Because of their far fewer numbers in the labour force, this level of job acquisition meant that

indigenous females experienced much higher rates of employment growth (Table 11) consistent with the gender pattern of job growth generally in Queensland. Thus, in the deteriorating labour market conditions of the early 1990s one important impact of the AEDP, and the CDEP scheme in particular, may simply have been to ameliorate potentially worse employment statistics for indigenous males.

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 a relative improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people in Queensland there would appear to be statistical grounds for expecting that the income gap between them and the rest of the population may have narrowed.

Table 12. Change in income status among Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Aborigines		Income (\$000s) Torres Strait Islanders		Others	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Mean	8.0	11.6	8.3	12.2	12.4	18.1
Median	6.4	9.3	6.7	10.3	10.4	15.3
Ratio Aborigines/others						
mean	0.65	0.64				
median	0.61	0.61				
Ratio of Torres Strait Islanders/others						
mean			0.67	0.68		
median			0.65	0.68		

Overall, however, the census indicates little change with Aboriginal mean income as a ratio of non-indigenous mean income falling slightly from 0.65 in 1986 to 0.64 in 1991 and the Torres Strait Islander ratio rising fractionally from 0.67 to 0.68.³ Median incomes were somewhat lower as a ratio of the non-indigenous median and remained static among Aborigines at 0.61, while the ratio for Torres Strait Islanders rose slightly from 0.65 to 0.68. This lack of improvement in relative incomes may partly be explained by the fact that a large share of net employment growth for

indigenous people has been generated by participation in the CDEP scheme which provides for income at levels more or less equivalent to welfare entitlements. At the same time, it also suggests that employment outside of the scheme continues to be concentrated in relatively low-wage occupations. If further expansion of employment opportunities for indigenous people continues to be characterised by low-wage work, such as currently provided by the CDEP scheme, there seems little prospect that the overall income gap between indigenous people and the rest of the population in Queensland 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. 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). Despite the fact that intercensal improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people has been most noticeable in rural areas, income levels remain inversely related to settlement size. Furthermore, the rural/urban income gap appears to be widening, at least among Aborigines.

Table 13. Change in income status of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by section-of-State: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Income (\$000s)							
	Major urban		Other urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Aborigines								
mean	8.5	12.8	8.2	11.9	7.5	10.2	8.0	11.6
median	7.0	10.7	6.3	9.6	6.0	8.0	6.4	9.3
Torres Strait Islanders								
mean	9.0	12.0	8.8	13.0	7.2	11.4	8.3	12.2
median	7.6	9.8	7.3	11.4	5.5	9.6	6.7	10.3
Others								
mean	12.9	18.7	12.3	17.9	11.3	16.9	12.4	18.1
median	11.3	16.3	10.2	14.9	8.8	13.7	10.4	15.3
Ratio Aboriginal/others								
mean	0.66	0.69	0.67	0.67	0.66	0.60	0.65	0.64
median	0.62	0.66	0.62	0.65	0.68	0.59	0.61	0.61
Ratio of Torres Strait Islanders/others								
mean	0.70	0.64	0.72	0.73	0.64	0.68	0.67	0.68
median	0.67	0.60	0.72	0.76	0.63	0.70	0.65	0.68

For example, the ratio of mean incomes for Aboriginal people in rural areas compared to those in major urban areas fell from 0.88 in 1986 to 0.79 in 1991. Comparing rural income with other urban income, the ratio of mean incomes fell from 0.91 in 1986 to 0.85 in 1991. The opposite trend emerges for Torres Strait Islanders, as well as for other Australians. Among Torres Strait Islanders, for example, the rural/major urban ratio of mean incomes rose from 0.80 to 0.95 while the rural/other urban ratio increased from 0.82 to 0.88. This result for Torres Strait Islanders is interesting as a large proportion of those in rural areas are located in the Torres Strait and participate in the CDEP scheme with associated low incomes. Thus, the convergence of rural and urban incomes is an indication of the worsening labour force status of Torres Strait Islanders in urban areas. More in line with expectation is the widening of the urban/rural income gap among Aborigines. This reflects the structural disadvantage of rural compared to urban areas where a much greater proportion of jobs are full-time and based on awards. However, as the situation among Torres Strait Islanders demonstrates, this rural disadvantage is relative to the level of success in securing employment in mainstream urban labour markets.

Income change by gender

The primary cause of the lack of relative improvement in income levels for indigenous people was a decline in the real incomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males (Table 14). Using the figures for nominal mean incomes in 1986, Aboriginal male income was just over three-quarters (78.2 per cent) of the total mean for non-indigenous Queenslanders. By 1991, this proportion had fallen below three-quarters (72.4 per cent). Although the income level for Torres Strait Islander males was higher, it also fell as a proportion of the total non-indigenous mean (from 81.4 per cent in 1986 to 77.3 per cent in 1991).

In contrast, mean income for Aboriginal females rose as a proportion of the total non-indigenous mean income from 51.6 per cent in 1986 to 55.2 per cent in 1991, while a similar rise occurred among Torres Strait Islander females from 54 per cent to 57.4 per cent. 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 Aboriginal male income falling from a real mean of \$13,197 in 1986 to \$12,440 in 1991 and the female equivalent showing a clear counter-tendency by rising from \$8,707 to \$9,497. A similar pattern emerges for Torres Strait Islanders. This convergence in male and female incomes is consistent with the trend revealed by Treadgold (1988) and Daly and Hawke (1994) for the intercensal periods between 1976-86 and is most likely to be linked to the 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 sustained growth of indigenous female employment in full-time and skilled

work at a time when the growth of equivalent male employment has been sluggish (Taylor 1993a).

Table 14. Change in income status of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by gender: Queensland, 1986-91.

	Males		Income (\$000s) Females		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Aborigines						
mean	9.7	13.1	6.4	10.0	8.0	11.6
median	8.6	10.6	5.5	8.6	6.4	9.3
Torres Strait Islanders						
mean	10.1	14.0	6.7	10.4	8.3	12.2
median	9.6	12.6	5.3	8.8	6.7	10.3
Others						
mean	16.5	22.9	8.1	13.1	12.4	18.1
median	15.4	20.4	5.7	10.3	10.4	15.3
Ratio of Aborigines/others						
mean	0.59	0.57	0.79	0.77	0.65	0.64
median	0.56	0.52	0.96	0.83	0.61	0.61
Ratio of Torres Strait Islanders/others						
mean	0.62	0.61	0.83	0.80	0.67	0.68
median	0.62	0.62	0.92	0.85	0.65	0.68

Despite the income gains experienced by indigenous females, they failed to keep up with the rate of growth in income experienced by non-indigenous females. For example, nominal mean income for Aboriginal females increased by 56 per cent and that of Torres Strait Islander females by 55 per cent. Non-indigenous females, on the other hand, increased their mean income by 62 per cent starting from a higher base (Table 14). Thus, ratios of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and other incomes reveal that the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous females has widened slightly as has the gap between indigenous and other males. At the same time, in purely monetary terms, indigenous females remain behind their male counterparts with the average nominal income for Aboriginal females rising by only a slightly greater amount than that of Aboriginal males, while the increase among Torres Strait Islander females was marginally less than that among Torres Strait Islander males.

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.

Table 15. Change in total income of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by labour force status: Queensland, 1986-91.

	1986		1991	
	Income (\$ million)	Per cent	Income (\$ million)	Per cent
Aborigines				
Employed	117.6	61.6	205.3	63.2
Unemployed	24.8	13.0	38.6	11.9
Not in the labour force	48.5	25.4	81.1	25.0
Total	190.9	100.0	325.2	100.0
Torres Strait Islanders				
Employed	32.4	65.7	55.3	66.0
Unemployed	5.5	11.3	8.8	10.6
Not in the labour force	11.3	23.0	19.6	23.4
Total	49.4	100.0	83.9	100.0
Others				
Employed	16,542.3	86.7	26,959.6	86.2
Unemployed	640.1	3.4	1,177.6	3.8
Not in the labour force	1892.8	9.9	3,131.4	10.0
Total	19,075.4	100.0	31,268.7	100.0

Overall, there is little change in the contribution of employment income to total income. If anything, a slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal income derives from employment while among Torres Strait Islanders and the rest of the population there is essentially no change. This suggests that the longer-term trend of a decline in employment income relative to total income, noted in respect of indigenous Australians by Daly and Hawke (1993) for the period 1976-91, has continued in Queensland despite improvements in employment during the most recent intercensal period. The most likely reason for this is an increase in the proportion of total employment income derived from CDEP scheme participation. Given this, it could be argued that the fall in the proportion of total income derived from employment should have been considerably greater as income based

on notional citizen entitlements should arguably be classified as welfare-related rather than employment-based.

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 much lower level 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 Queensland than before the introduction of the AEDP.

Table 16. Change in mean employment/non-employment income of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians: Queensland, 1986-91.

Labour force status	Mean income (\$000s)		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Aborigines				
Employed	13.23	16.50	3.27	24.7
Unemployed	5.33	8.35	3.02	56.7
Not in the labour force	4.84	7.52	2.68	55.4
Total	8.10	11.66	3.57	44.1
Torres Strait Islanders				
Employed	13.28	16.88	3.61	27.2
Unemployed	5.61	8.88	3.27	58.3
Not in the labour force	4.63	7.76	3.13	67.6
Total	8.39	12.31	3.93	46.9
Others				
Employed	17.02	23.49	6.47	38.0
Unemployed	5.55	8.61	3.06	55.2
Not in the labour force	4.26	7.21	2.94	69.0
Total	12.46	18.19	5.73	46.0
Ratio of Aborigines/others				
Employed	0.78	0.70	-0.07	-9.6
Unemployed	0.96	0.97	0.01	1.0
Not in the labour force	1.13	1.04	-0.09	-8.0
Total	0.65	0.64	-0.01	-1.3
Ratio of Torres Strait Islanders/others				
Employed	0.78	0.72	-0.06	-7.9
Unemployed	1.01	1.03	0.02	2.0
Not in the labour force	1.09	1.08	-0.01	-0.8
Total	0.67	0.68	0.00	0.6

Actual shifts in mean employment and non-employment incomes are shown in Table 16. The most striking feature is that mean employment incomes for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have increased at a

considerably slower rate than for other employed Queenslanders. This is further indicated by the decline in the ratios of employment income between Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and the rest of the population. As already noted, this is to be expected given that a substantial share of new employment income for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders is essentially fixed at a rate roughly equivalent to Jobsearch and Newstart allowances. As for non-employment income, the mean individual income of unemployed Aborigines in 1986 was \$5,330, which was less than half (40 per cent) of the mean income for those in employment. By 1991, this gap had closed somewhat, but unemployed Aborigines still had incomes only half the level of those in employment (51 per cent). A similar pattern emerges for Torres Strait Islanders.

Policy implications

This analysis of change in the relative economic status of indigenous people in Queensland during the intercensal period 1986 to 1991 provides the first comparative basis for considering the State-wide impacts of the AEDP 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people showed 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 have been a predominantly rural phenomenon and related to the expansion of the CDEP scheme during the intercensal period.

In contrast with the growth of rural employment, urban-based public and private sector jobs showed a much slower rate of increase. While this runs counter to expectations, given the strength of program efforts to encourage urban employment it appears that the impact of AEDP public and private sector programs, in the context of a depressed mainstream labour market, has been to 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. Despite some signs that focused labour market programs left a mark, indigenous people in Queensland clearly remain marginalised in terms of acquiring new jobs in urban labour markets.

The relative lack of improvement in the income status of indigenous people 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 (Saunders 1992). Indigenous people appear to lag behind in an economy which is increasingly bifurcated into the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. 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 is realistic to suggest 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 changes clearly have the capacity to conceal important intra-State and gender variations. In brief, the improvements in labour force status evident at the State level are reversed in urban areas and considerably enhanced in rural areas. Despite this, rural incomes remain behind those in urban areas. Likewise, the labour force and income status of indigenous women show distinct improvement compared to those of men, which in relative income terms at least, has regressed. Variation is also evident in the relative economic status of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders with the latter maintaining their intermediate position between that of Aboriginal people and the rest of the population to much the same extent as observed nationally using 1986 and 1991 Census data (Taylor and Gaminiratne 1992; Taylor 1993a). Investigations currently underway point to a further refinement of this variation with Torres Strait Islanders in the Torres Strait displaying lower economic status than those on the Australian mainland (Arthur 1994). This clearly underlines the importance of assessing policy impacts on the economic status of indigenous people at varying levels of aggregation and for different sub-groups in the population.

Given a continuation of intercensal trends in economic status among indigenous people in Queensland a number of outcomes seem likely in the medium term. With continued growth in CDEP scheme employment as envisaged in the government's white paper on employment (Commonwealth of Australia 1994: 136-8), the gap in labour force status between indigenous and non-indigenous residents will further recede, but overall, indigenous people will remain around two-thirds as likely to be in employment and twice as likely to be unemployed. Depending on the rate at which CDEP scheme participation expands in Queensland, reliance on 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 the extent to which dependency levels will be reduced by increased funding to improve the operation of CDEP schemes

and to expand the Community Enterprise Incentive Scheme, both announced in the white paper on employment. Also difficult to predict is the degree to which enrolments in educational institutions will translate into increased employment in private and public sector jobs. Much will depend here on the pace and nature of economic recovery in Queensland. At the same time, special labour market programs and other funding regimes for indigenous organisations have received a boost in the employment white paper and these have a demonstrated capacity to provide for some labour market buoyancy even in depressed economic circumstances. A further unknown factor is the employment effect from any native title-led mining or other joint venture arrangements that may ensue in remoter parts of Queensland. That such potential exists is exemplified by the employment of Hope Vale community residents at the Cape Flattery silica mine (Altman, Ginn and Smith 1993: 35-6). Whatever the case, 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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