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**The relative economic status
of indigenous people in the
Australian Capital Territory,
1986-91**

J. Taylor

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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.

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Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR
Australian National University

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 the Australian Capital Territory, 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 the gap in labour force status between indigenous and non-indigenous people has widened and the relative income status and level of welfare dependency of indigenous people has not improved. This suggests that increased emphasis on both the quantity and quality of AEDP outcomes will be necessary if the overall aims of the policy are to be accomplished.

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John Taylor is Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Faculty of Arts, Australian National University.

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 current 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 (Kilty 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 the Australian Capital Territory. 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 the Australian Capital Territory compared to that of the rest of the region'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 1991a; 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. In most States and Territories, the tendency has been to develop community-based programs 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, and to maintain comparability with analyses for other States and Territories, the subsequent discussion is organised, where appropriate, according to the ABS section-of-State classification.¹ In the Australian Capital Territory this effectively involves a distinction between the urban population of Canberra and the rural population of the Jervis Bay Territory.

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 its interpretation (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1993). In the Australian Capital Territory, intercensal growth in the indigenous population was two and a half times higher than the national rate (7.3 per cent per annum as opposed to 3 per cent) representing by far the highest rate of growth of any State or Territory (Gaminiratne 1993: 3).

A number of observations are relevant to an understanding of this demographic discrepancy. First, the growth rate for the Australian Capital Territory is calculated from a far lower base than in any other jurisdiction with a large proportional change derived from a relatively small absolute increase. Second, the relative focus of economic activity in the Australian Capital Territory on the Commonwealth Public Service and the avowed aim of the AEDP to encourage the employment of indigenous people in the Commonwealth sector, enhances the Australian Capital Territory as a destination for potential Commonwealth employees. This is particularly so in areas of the bureaucracy concerned with servicing the indigenous population. As one measure of this, the number of indigenous people employed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs portfolio (Department of Aboriginal Affairs from 1986-89 and ATSIC since 1990) almost doubled between 1986 and 1991 from 66 to 104. Overall, more than half (53 per cent) of all indigenous people in employment in the Australian Capital Territory in 1991 were engaged by Commonwealth agencies compared to a national average of less than 10 per cent.

This specialised labour market role is manifest in high net rates of interstate migration gain. For example, between 1986 and 1991 the balance of migration flows in and out of the Australian Capital Territory among indigenous people of working age led to a net gain of 126 persons representing a rate of increase of around 152 per thousand of the average intercensal population. By contrast, the next highest interstate migration

gain for indigenous people was recorded in South Australia with a net rate of only 16 per thousand. Finally, it is worth noting the overall tendency for urban-based indigenous people to increasingly self-identify in the census. Though unquantifiable, this has undoubtedly played a role in augmenting urban population numbers (Altman 1992: 8).

Not surprisingly, given the Australian Capital Territory's unusual geographic structure, the bulk of the indigenous population (89 per cent) is located in the urban area of Canberra, a share which increased from 1986 (Table 1). The much smaller rural component is made up predominantly by the population of the Wreck Bay community in the Jervis Bay Territory. However, indigenous people comprised only 0.6 per cent of the total Canberra population in 1991, while in rural areas they accounted for 5 per cent of the population. Despite these minority shares, the growth rate of the indigenous population, particularly in Canberra, was far greater than the average (Table 2) highlighting the status of the indigenous population as an expanding community in one of Australia's most rapidly growing cities.

Table 1. Change in indigenous population by section-of-State: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	1,047	85.7	1,569	88.7	522	49.8
Rural	174	14.3	199	11.3	25	14.4
Total	1,221	100.0	1,768	100.0	547	44.8

Table 2. Change in non-indigenous population by section-of-State: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	247,194	99.1	274,590	98.7	27,396	11.1
Rural	2,213	0.9	3,725	1.3	1,512	68.3
Total	249,407	100.0	278,315	100.0	28,908	11.6

Non-indigenous residents of the Australian Capital Territory are even more concentrated in Canberra, although between 1986 and 1991 there was

much higher growth in the rural-based population which was most likely due to an increase in commuter settlement in rural areas around Canberra, as well as retirement migration to Jervis Bay (Table 2). Thus, unlike all other States and Territories, both the indigenous and non-indigenous populations of the Australian Capital Territory are almost entirely city dwellers. This has obvious consequences for any comparison of social indicators drawn between the Australian Capital Territory and other jurisdictions which have much larger rural populations.

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 continued to outstrip that of the rest of the working-age population during the 1986-91 intercensal period. This was, in part, 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. Even in the Australian Capital Territory, with its overall youthful age profile, this difference in growth rates is still readily apparent with the working-age indigenous population growing at a rate more than three times that of other residents (Table 3). Despite higher rates of natural increase among indigenous people, the most likely explanation for this discrepancy is the much higher net rate of interstate migration gain among the indigenous population of working age (152 persons per thousand compared to only 23 per thousand recorded for the remainder of the population).

Table 3. Change in population aged 15-64 years among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	1986	1991	Net change	Per cent change
Indigenous	739	1,078	339	45.9
Non-indigenous	170,272	194,384	24,112	14.2

Labour force status, 1986-91

Three standard social indicators are used here to show 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.

Table 4. Change in labour force status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Indigenous		Non-indigenous	
	1986	1991	1986	1991
	(1)	(1)	(2)	(2)
Employment rate	61.0	57.8	73.6	72.6
Unemployment rate	15.0	18.9	4.7	7.3
Participation rate	71.8	71.3	77.2	78.3
Ratios (1/2)				
Employment rate	0.83	0.80		
Unemployment rate	3.2	2.6		
Participation rate	0.93	0.91		

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

Between 1986 and 1991, the overall employment rate of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory declined from 61 per cent in 1986 to 58 per cent in 1991 (Table 4). This negative trend was also evident among the wider labour force, although corresponding figures for the rest of the region's working-age population show a smaller reduction from around 74 per cent to below 73 per cent. Thus, the relative gap in employment rates between the two groups widened marginally in recent years. As a consequence, the employment rate for indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory can be described as fixed at a level distinctly below the average.

A similar worsening in the absolute labour force status of indigenous people is apparent from intercensal shifts in unemployment rates (Table 4). The figures show a marked increase in the indigenous unemployment rate, from 15 per cent in 1986 to around 19 per cent in 1991. Although increase in the rate among the non-indigenous population was slightly less, the proportional change was greater. As a consequence, the indigenous unemployment rate as a ratio of the non-indigenous unemployment rate, actually fell slightly, from 3.2 times higher in 1986 to 2.6 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. This is because the proportion of the indigenous population

that is formally attached to the labour market has historically been well below the national average. Evidence from the 1991 Census indicates that this is less so in the Australian Capital Territory with the labour force participation rate among indigenous people only marginally behind the level recorded for the population generally, even though the gap between rates showed signs of widening.

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 indigenous participation rate equivalent to the rest of the population would have required a proportionally greater increase in numbers joining the labour force. Likewise, with regard to the employment rate, greater success in gaining employment would have been required among indigenous people simply to maintain the rate at a constant level, to say nothing of actually improving it. Another factor, which may have served to dampen the growth of labour force participation among indigenous people, is the move to encourage higher levels of 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 indigenous people aged 15 years and over who were reported by the census as attending an educational institution in the Australian Capital Territory, either full-time or part-time, rose from 155 in 1986 to 268 in 1991 which is an increase of 73 per cent - the highest level recorded for any State or Territory and considerably higher than the national rate of 15 per cent (Taylor 1993a: 16). While this growth in attendance at educational institutions may result in employment dividends at some later stage, this is most likely to occur outside the Australian Capital Territory. In the meantime, the local impact would have been to dampen growth in the rate of labour force participation.

Section-of-State and gender variations

An alternative 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 line with trends nationally, both indigenous and non-indigenous females fared better in the labour market than their male counterparts. The main source of this difference among the indigenous population was the worsening labour force status among males in Canberra with their employment level falling by almost 12 percentage points and their unemployment rate rising by more than 6 percentage points. This contrasts with a marginal increase in the employment rate among indigenous females in Canberra and a much lower rise in unemployment. In rural areas the situation is reversed with a general increase in employment levels, while female unemployment also rose markedly (Table 5).

Table 5. Net change in labour force status of indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males			
Employment rate	-11.6	2.1	-9.6
Unemployment rate	6.4	-3.9	5.0
Participation rate	-7.2	-1.8	-6.4
Females			
Employment rate	1.2	5.7	2.9
Unemployment rate	1.2	13.2	2.2
Participation rate	2.3	18.9	5.0

Table 6. Net change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males			
Employment rate	-4.3	-1.1	-4.2
Unemployment rate	3.4	2.4	3.4
Participation rate	-1.5	1.1	-1.4
Females			
Employment rate	2.4	8.7	2.5
Unemployment rate	1.7	-0.9	1.7
Participation rate	3.8	8.6	3.8

Table 7. Change in labour force status of indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males						
Employment rate	79.4	67.8	42.6	44.6	74.6	65.0
Unemployment rate	10.8	17.2	45.9	42.0	15.0	20.0
Participation rate	89.1	81.9	78.7	76.9	87.7	81.3
Females						
Employment rate	51.6	52.8	24.5	30.2	47.7	50.6
Unemployment rate	13.4	14.6	31.6	44.8	15.1	17.3
Participation rate	59.6	61.9	35.8	54.7	56.2	61.2

Notwithstanding these relative shifts, the employment level among indigenous females remains much lower than that recorded for indigenous males, as well as that of other females of working age (Tables 7 and 8). Similarly, the much poorer performance of indigenous males compared to other males in the Canberra labour market was responsible for a widening of the gap in labour force status between them.

Table 8. Change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males						
Employment rate	83.1	78.8	85.8	84.7	83.1	78.9
Unemployment rate	4.1	7.5	3.7	6.1	4.1	7.5
Participation rate	86.6	85.2	89.1	90.2	86.7	85.3
Females						
Employment rate	63.8	66.3	60.5	69.2	63.8	66.3
Unemployment rate	5.4	7.1	7.3	6.3	5.4	7.1
Participation rate	67.5	71.3	65.3	73.9	67.5	71.3

The somewhat anomalous position in this analysis of the Wreck Bay community and other rural residents in the Australian Capital Territory is underlined by their far worse labour force indicators compared to those displayed by the indigenous population in Canberra. Essentially, this reflects the differences in labour market opportunities that exist in the rapidly developing national capital compared to those in rural communities of south eastern Australia (such as Wreck Bay) that are not participating in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme.² In spite of this, the labour force status of rural-based indigenous people showed signs of improvement, while the enhancement of urban labour force status that may have been expected to occur due to the application of private and public sector employment programs administered by DEET does not emerge from the data.

The possibility that some positive impact on the relative standing of indigenous people in the labour market may have been achieved by AEDP initiatives is suggested by their much higher rate of intercensal employment growth compared to other residents of the Australian Capital Territory (Table 9). Between 1986 and 1991, the number of indigenous people in employment grew by 173 representing an increase of 39 per cent, more than three times higher than the rate of increase recorded for the rest of the population albeit from a much lower numeric base. As elsewhere in Australia, there was a distinct gender pattern to this job growth. Just over

half of all new jobs for indigenous people (54 per cent) went to females, but because of their fewer numbers in the labour force, the rate of female employment growth was conspicuously higher than that of males (Table 10). As a consequence, the distribution of indigenous males and females in employment in the Australian Capital Territory is approaching parity. This follows the overall gender pattern of job growth as the number of non-indigenous males in employment grew slowly at a time when female employment rose substantially. Thus, the ratio of male to female workers among both the indigenous and non-indigenous populations has fallen and stands at an almost equivalent level.

Table 9. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Number employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous	441	614	173	39.2
Non-indigenous	123,207	138,347	15,140	12.3
Total	123,648	138,961	15,313	12.4

Table 10. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by gender: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Males	60.5	56.5	80	30.0
Females	39.5	43.5	93	53.4
Total	100.0	100.0	173	39.2
Non-indigenous				
Males	57.0	54.2	4,708	6.7
Females	43.0	45.8	10,432	19.7
Total	100.0	100.0	15,140	12.3

The assessment of AEDP impacts on job creation is a difficult task because precise information on the number of placements in the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP) and other DEET labour market programs in the Australian Capital Territory over the course of the intercensal period is difficult to obtain. However, figures made available by DEET for the single year 1989-90 indicate that a total of 4,643 indigenous people commenced placements in all labour market programs in the combined

area of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. If the latter's share of these placements occurred in proportion to its relative population size then it can be estimated that 120 of these placements were made in the Australian Capital Territory in that year. Even though this level of placement is unlikely to have been fully sustained throughout the five-yearly intercensal period, the lack of positive impact on census-based job growth and labour force status in Canberra 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 that may have eventuated from program placements could simply have been relinquished by census time (Daly 1993).

Whatever the case, it is apparent that in the Australian Capital Territory the AEDP has fallen behind in its task of achieving employment equality or even improving employment status, particularly for indigenous males. To be fair, it should be pointed out that non-indigenous males also performed poorly in the intercensal period. 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 the mainstream labour market.

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 lack of relative improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory there would appear to be no statistical grounds for expecting that the income gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people may have narrowed. This is precisely what the census data indicate.

Mean income for the indigenous adult population expressed as a ratio of that of the rest of the population improved marginally from 0.76 in 1986 to 0.78 in 1991 (Table 11).³ The median income for indigenous adults was somewhat lower as a ratio of the median for non-indigenous adults and the gap between them increased slightly. 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 closure in the income gap is not surprising given the relative worsening of the employment rate for indigenous people, although some shift might have been expected from the higher rate of new job growth among the indigenous population. From a policy perspective this signals that the creation of job opportunities will not be sufficient to enhance relative income status if they do not impact on overall labour force status and the relativities of welfare dependence.

Table 11. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Income (\$000s)			
	Indigenous 1986	Indigenous 1991	Non-indigenous 1986	Non-indigenous 1991
Mean	13.4	18.7	17.7	24.0
Median	12.2	15.8	16.1	21.8
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous				
Mean	0.76	0.78		
Median	0.76	0.73		

Income change by section-of-State

The proposition that overall income levels are influenced as much by the nature of work available in different places 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 12).

Table 12. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Income (\$000s)					
	Major urban 1986	Major urban 1991	Rural 1986	Rural 1991	Total 1986	Total 1991
Indigenous						
Mean	14.2	19.4	7.9	12.8	13.4	18.7
Median	13.1	16.7	5.4	10.7	12.2	15.8
Non-indigenous						
Mean	17.7	24.0	15.9	23.0	17.7	24.0
Median	16.1	21.8	14.8	22.2	16.1	21.8
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous						
Mean	0.80	0.81	0.50	0.56	0.76	0.78
Median	0.81	0.77	0.36	0.48	0.76	0.73

Despite the fact that intercensal improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people has been most noticeable in rural areas, substantial variation in income levels remain between those resident in Canberra and those in rural areas of the Australian Capital Territory. This is indicated by the ratio of mean income for rural-based indigenous people compared to those in Canberra which was barely more than half (0.56) in 1986 and remained low in 1991 at 0.66. Compared to other Australian Capital Territory residents, the incomes of indigenous people lag behind regardless of location, but particularly so among rural dwellers.

Income change by gender

Although incomes for indigenous females remain substantially below those of indigenous males some convergence in income levels between the two groups is apparent (Table 13). One way of assessing relative gender-based movement in income levels is to calibrate changes against a common denominator, in this case the total income for the rest of the population. Using the figures for nominal mean income in 1986 and 1991, indigenous male income remained fixed at a level 86 per cent of that of the total mean for the non-indigenous population.

Table 13. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by gender: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	Males		Income (\$000s)		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Indigenous						
Mean	15.3	20.8	11.4	16.6	13.4	18.7
Median	14.4	18.7	8.5	13.7	12.2	15.8
Non-indigenous						
Mean	23.2	29.8	12.0	18.1	17.7	24.0
Median	21.4	27.6	10.5	16.1	16.1	21.8
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous						
Mean	0.66	0.70	0.95	0.92	0.76	0.78
Median	0.68	0.68	0.81	0.85	0.76	0.73

In contrast, mean income for indigenous females rose as a proportion of the total non-indigenous mean income from 64 per cent in 1986 to 69 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 \$20,816 in 1986 to \$19,753 in 1991 and the female equivalent showing a slight counter-tendency by

rising from \$15,510 to \$15,764. This convergence in male and female incomes, though modest, is consistent with the trend revealed by Treadgold (1988) and Daly and Hawke (1994) for the intercensal periods between 1976 and 1986 and, in the Australian Capital Territory, is linked to the relatively better performance of females in terms of securing employment as well as their upward mobility into more skilled and senior positions.

The income gain experienced by indigenous females was insufficient to keep up with the rate of growth in income experienced by their non-indigenous counterparts. In nominal terms indigenous female income now lags further behind that of other females with an increase of 45 per cent during the intercensal period compared to 51 per cent for non-indigenous females who also started from a higher base (Table 13). Overall, the ratios of indigenous to non-indigenous incomes point to only marginal change, although the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous female incomes is clearly much smaller than the equivalent gap for males. In purely monetary terms, however, indigenous females remain substantially behind indigenous males with their average nominal income rising by a lesser amount from a lower base.

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 too narrow as it only reflects the labour market focus of the AEDP. They take a broader definition of welfare to include all transfer payments from the Commonwealth 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 14 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.

Generally in the Australian Capital Territory, there has been a decline in the contribution of employment income to total income. However, the proportion of total income for indigenous people derived from employment has fallen the most and is now more firmly fixed at a lower level than for the rest of the population. In 1986, 87 per cent of total indigenous income was from employment sources and this fell to 82 per cent in 1991. While a similar downward trend was apparent for the rest of the population, both the level and rate of increased dependence on non-employment income was low compared to the indigenous population. This seems to suggest that

the longer-term trend of a decline in employment income among indigenous Australians relative to total income, noted by Daly and Hawke (1993) for the period 1976-91, has been sustained in the Australian Capital Territory.

Table 14. Change in total income of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by labour force status: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

	1986		1991	
	Income (\$ million)	Per cent	Income (\$ million)	Per cent
Indigenous				
Employed	7.9	86.6	15.2	81.7
Unemployed	0.5	5.6	1.0	5.6
Not in the labour force	0.7	7.9	2.3	12.7
Total	9.1	100.0	18.6	100.0
Non-indigenous				
Employed	2,688.6	93.6	4,004.2	92.2
Unemployed	28.5	1.0	77.4	1.8
Not in the labour force	155.2	5.4	260.9	6.0
Total	2,872.4	100.0	4,342.6	100.0

Table 15. Change in mean employment/non-employment income of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Australian Capital Territory, 1986-91.

Labour force status	Mean income (\$000s)		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Employed	18.28	25.54	7.26	39.7
Unemployed	6.98	7.92	0.94	13.4
Not in the labour force	4.16	8.94	4.78	114.8
Total	13.47	18.77	5.30	39.4
Non-indigenous				
Employed	22.18	29.48	7.29	32.9
Unemployed	4.95	7.82	2.86	57.8
Not in the labour force	4.47	7.47	3.00	67.1
Total	17.77	24.04	6.27	35.3
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous				
Employed	0.82	0.87	0.04	5.2
Unemployed	1.41	1.01	-0.40	-28.1
Not in the labour force	0.93	1.20	0.27	28.6
Total	0.76	0.78	0.02	3.0

Actual shifts in mean employment and non-employment incomes are shown in Table 15. While the mean income of indigenous people in employment remained lower than for others in the workforce, the gap between employment incomes has narrowed. This is indicated by the rise in the ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous employment income from 0.82 in 1986 to 0.87 in 1991. Although lower than the overall income level in the Australian Capital Territory, the mean income for employed indigenous people (\$25,540 in 1991) was slightly higher than the Australian average (\$25,070 in 1991) and provides a measure of the increasing movement of indigenous people into senior and middle management positions within the Canberra-based Australian public service. In contrast with other States and Territories, this specialised occupational profile reflects both the availability and over-representation of higher-status jobs for indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory and the human capital characteristics of the individuals attracted to them. As for welfare income, the increase in non-employment income as a proportion of total income for indigenous people appears to derive largely from an increase in payments to individuals who are not in the labour force. This will have been augmented in part by an influx of students on ABSTUDY grants attending educational courses in the Australian Capital Territory. Even though mean income for the unemployed increased by a much smaller amount, the contribution of unemployment income to total income has also expanded in line with an increase in the numbers unemployed.

Policy implications

This analysis of change in the relative economic status of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory during the intercensal period 1986 to 1991 provides the first comprehensive indication of the local impacts of the AEDP since its launch in 1987. The results, in terms of stated policy objectives, are negative and somewhat ironic. Evidence from the 1986 Census indicated that indigenous people resident in the region had substantially higher economic status than those living elsewhere in Australia (Tsfaghiorghis 1991a, 1991b). Furthermore, the gap in economic status relative to that of other residents of the Australian Capital Territory was much less evident than in other States and Territories. This was despite the higher than average economic status of the region's non-indigenous residents. Clearly, of all the jurisdictions in Australia, the Australian Capital Territory was the one where AEDP goals of statistical equality in labour force and income status were very close to achievement at the time the policy was launched. While this is still the case, and while indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory have retained their pre-eminent economic status compared to indigenous people elsewhere, after five years of AEDP implementation their overall status has regressed compared to that of other Australians, both locally and nationally.

Although the employment rate among non-indigenous residents of the Australian Capital Territory declined, it fell to an even greater extent among indigenous people. Likewise, the gap between the unemployment rates of the two groups narrowed, but not because unemployment among indigenous people fell, rather because the increase in the unemployment rate was greater for the rest of the population. At the same time, the rate of new job growth among indigenous people was higher than for the rest of the population, though from a much lower base. This lack of impact on labour force status in the face of a proportionally greater increase in new jobs is no doubt explained by the above average growth rate of the indigenous working-age population. Although this intercensal expansion of the base population complicates the assessment of change in indicators of economic status, certain conclusions can still be drawn.

Despite a fall in relative labour force status, indigenous people performed at least as well, in terms of securing new employment, than other job-seekers during the intercensal period. In the context of a depressed labour market, this suggests that focused job programs left some mark, although public and private sector jobs for indigenous people appear to have expanded at a much slower rate than might have been expected given the strength of program efforts to encourage such employment. Precisely what job growth resulted from AEDP initiatives is not certain, nor can it be validated from census data alone. This would require close scrutiny of DEET's program placement and post-program monitoring data in order to examine the precise nature and application of labour market programs, as well as their links with employment outcomes.

Worsening labour force status is reflected in an overall lack of improvement in the relative income status of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory. This is underscored by the fact that those with jobs substantially enhanced their incomes, a contrast which is given added weight when account is taken of growing income inequalities for the population as a whole. In line with this trend, there is some indication that a growing number of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory are lagging behind in an economy which is increasingly divided between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' (Saunders 1992), although this is far less the case in the Australian Capital Territory than elsewhere in Australia (Taylor 1993b). Furthermore, the emergence of relatively high local welfare dependence among indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory has less to do with chronically low levels of labour force participation or excessive unemployment, as elsewhere in Australia, and is more directly a consequence of comparison with the high economic status of other Australian Capital Territory residents. Compared to the Australian population as a whole, the dependency level of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory is close to the national average.

Aggregate data showing economic change clearly have the capacity to conceal important intra-regional and gender variations. In brief, the fall in the employment rate and increase in the unemployment rate were confined to Canberra, as indigenous people in rural areas of the Australian Capital Territory displayed an improvement in their labour force indicators, albeit from a much lower initial status. Likewise, the labour force status of indigenous women showed greater improvement than that of men, whose overall economic position has regressed. Individuals in employment, however, acquired added status with their incomes now approaching the average level. These variations clearly underline the importance of assessing policy impacts on the economic status of indigenous people at varying levels of disaggregation and for different sub-groups in the population.

Given a continuation of intercensal trends a number of outcomes seem likely in the medium term. With signs of recovery in the economy, the economic position of indigenous people in the Australian Capital Territory is unlikely to fall any further behind that of the rest of the population. This is based on their slightly better than average performance in terms of acquiring new jobs in more difficult economic times, although much depends on the success of labour market programs announced in the white paper on employment (Commonwealth of Australia 1994) to ensure full participation in a more buoyant job market. Also, a high level of dependence on employment in the Australian public sector leaves indigenous workers in Canberra vulnerable to decentralisation tendencies within organisations such as ATSIC. In terms of improving relative labour force status, much also depends on the rate of growth in the working-age population. If this continues to expand at a faster rate than for the rest of the population then the task of matching, let alone exceeding, any improvement in the local employment rate will be encumbered. Ironically, it may well be family dependants of successful indigenous migrants, particularly youth, who accompany those drawn to Canberra because of work who find jobs hardest to acquire and fall behind in the local labour market. Depending on the rate of growth in employment and the size of the working-age population, overall reliance on welfare (non-employment) income may show a tendency to decline as the income due to indigenous people in employment has a demonstrated capacity to expand. However, it seems that levels of such support will remain notably higher among indigenous people than among other Australian Capital Territory residents, not least because of their higher unemployment rate and somewhat lower labour force participation.

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

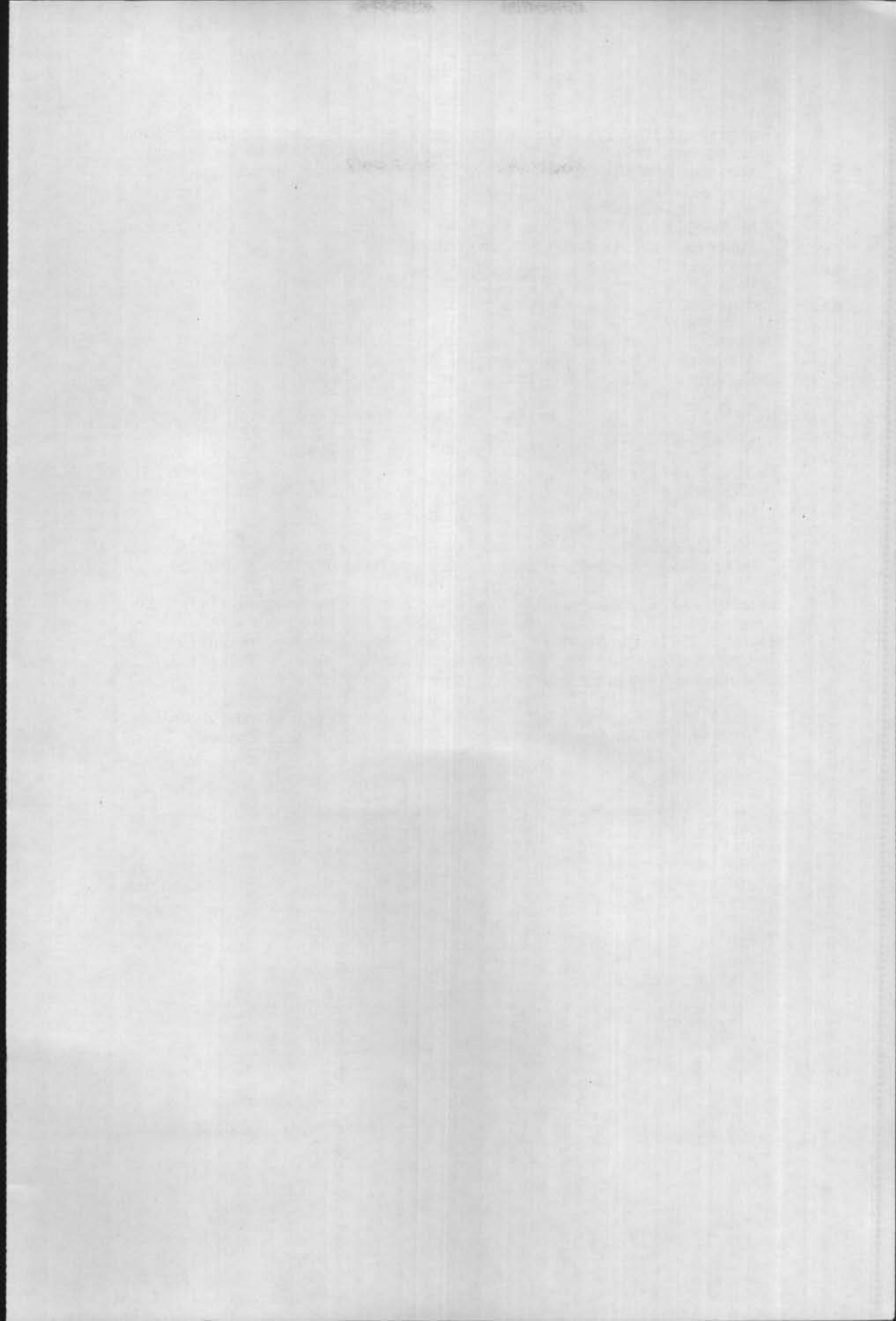
population clusters of 200 to 999 persons; rural balance - the rural remainder of the State or Territory. In the Australian Capital Territory there is only one urban category - major urban, while the two rural categories are combined here to form a single classification (0-999 persons).

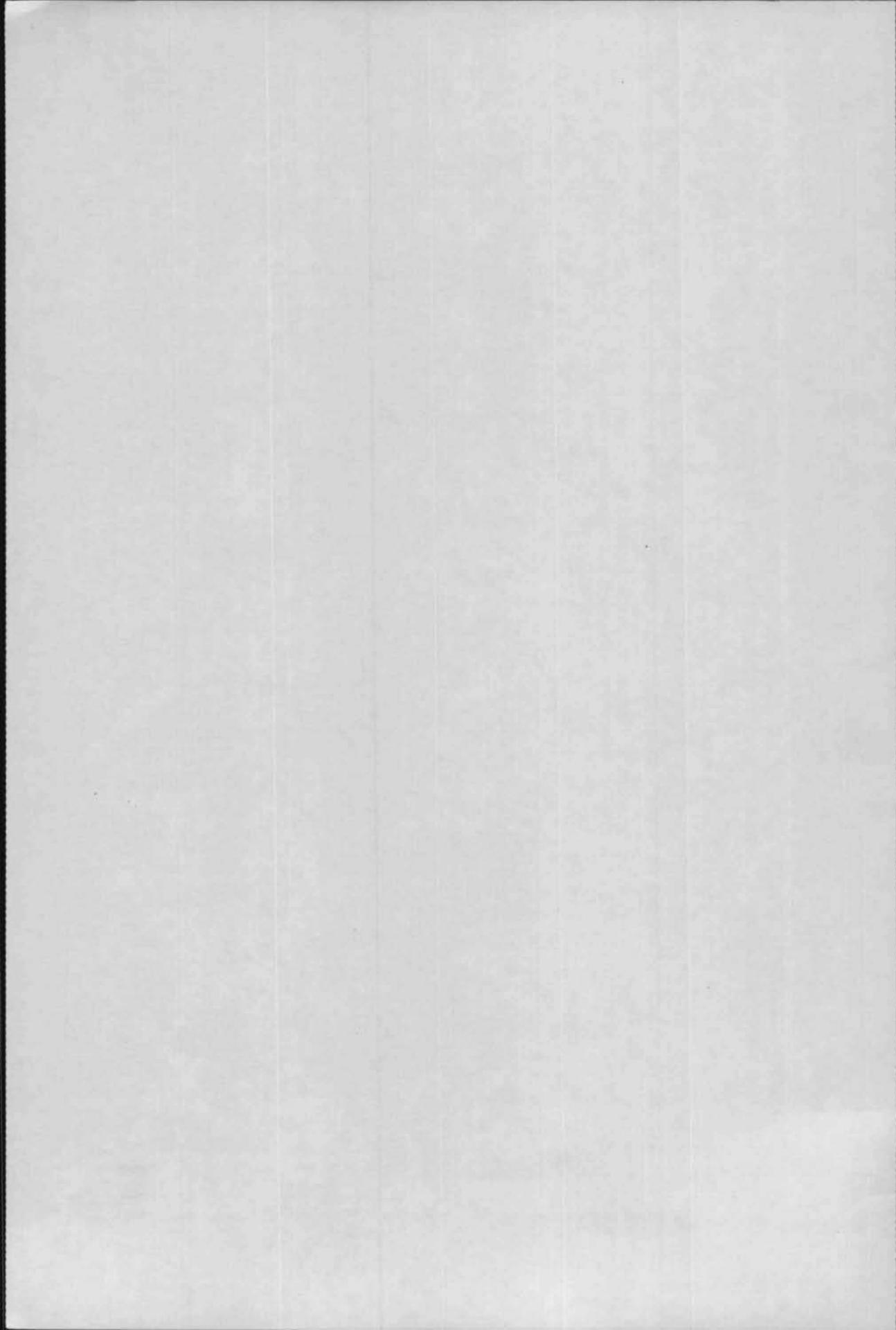
2. The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme operates as a workfare program for indigenous people in most other States and Territories and has had the effect of statistically transferring large numbers of unemployed persons and those not in the labour force into the census category, 'employed'.
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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