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Discussion Paper



**The relative economic status of
indigenous Australians within the
jurisdiction of the Torres Strait
Regional Authority, 1986-91**

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- 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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ABSTRACT

On 1 July 1994 the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) replaced the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Regional Council for Torres Strait. The TSRA's role includes formulating and monitoring policies and one of its primary aims is the creation of a sustainable economic base for the region. The TSRA is responsible for preparing a Torres Strait Regional Development Plan and has established a Development Plan Steering Committee to this end. In response to these functions and goals this paper represents an initial step in establishing a regional database which could inform the TSRA. Using data from the censuses and from relevant primary research, an analysis of indigenous socioeconomic change in the TSRA area between 1986 and 1991, focusing on population, labour force status, education and training, and income is presented. The paper identifies change in several areas and draws out the policy implications. In particular, attention is given to high levels of population growth within the Outer Islands; and the continuing dependency of the TSRA area on government transfers and the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme. Apparent substantial improvements in aspects of indigenous labour force status are qualified with respect to the expansion of the scheme between the censuses. In conclusion it is noted that further analysis of census data would be useful, but census-based analyses alone will not be sufficient to assist the TSRA to meet all of its development planning goals, and additional and alternative research is proposed.

Acknowledgments

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Foreword

In 1994, CAEPR focused a significant proportion of its research effort on Torres Strait issues. This decision was influenced by a number of factors. First, a combination of the High Court *Mabo* decision in 1992, the passage of the *Native Title Act 1993* and the formation of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) in 1994, have given Torres Strait a special significance in contemporary indigenous affairs policy in Australia. Second, specialist staff resources were available in 1994 to focus on Torres Strait. Bill Arthur visited CAEPR on secondment from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for three months (April to July). Richard Davis, a doctoral student in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, ANU who also joined CAEPR for a short period, has resided on Saibai Island in Torres Strait where he undertook anthropological fieldwork. Third, CAEPR maintains a commitment to focus a proportion of its research effort on Torres Strait Islander issues.

This paper is one in a set of four CAEPR Discussion Papers, Nos 71-74, that are being released simultaneously. They focus on: socioeconomic change in Torres Strait between 1986 and 1991 (No. 71); socioeconomic differences between Torres Strait Islanders living elsewhere in Australia and in the Strait (No. 72); the development potential of commercial fisheries in Torres Strait (No. 73); and the new Torres Strait Regional Authority as a political structure and its potential implications for future regional government (No. 74). Richard Davis's discussion paper on the Saibai Island microeconomy and its development potential will be completed and published at a later date. It is anticipated that additional work on Torres Strait issues, some specifically for the TSRA, will be undertaken in 1995.

There is currently no readily available map that indicates coverage of the TSRA. A number of people assisted us in determining the current boundaries. These included Benny Mills, Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs, ATSIC, Canberra; George Menham and John Spottiswoode, TSRA, Thursday Island; David Singh, Gai Popovic and Jo Victoria, ATSIC, Canberra; Graham Glover, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Canberra; Alistair McGaffrey, DFAT, Thursday Island; and David Dobson, Australian Land Information Group, Canberra. The resulting map was drawn by Ian Heyward, Department of Human Geography, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU. The map is preliminary and presented for research purposes; it is based on best available information at October 1994.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
October 1994

On 1 July 1994, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Torres Strait Regional Council was superseded by the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) after passage of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Act (No. 3) 1993*. The TSRA has, for matters pertaining to indigenous people, authority over the islands in the Torres Strait (excepting Crab and Barn Islands) plus the two communities of Seisia and Bamaga which are located on the northern tip of Cape York (see delineation of TSRA area in Figure 1).

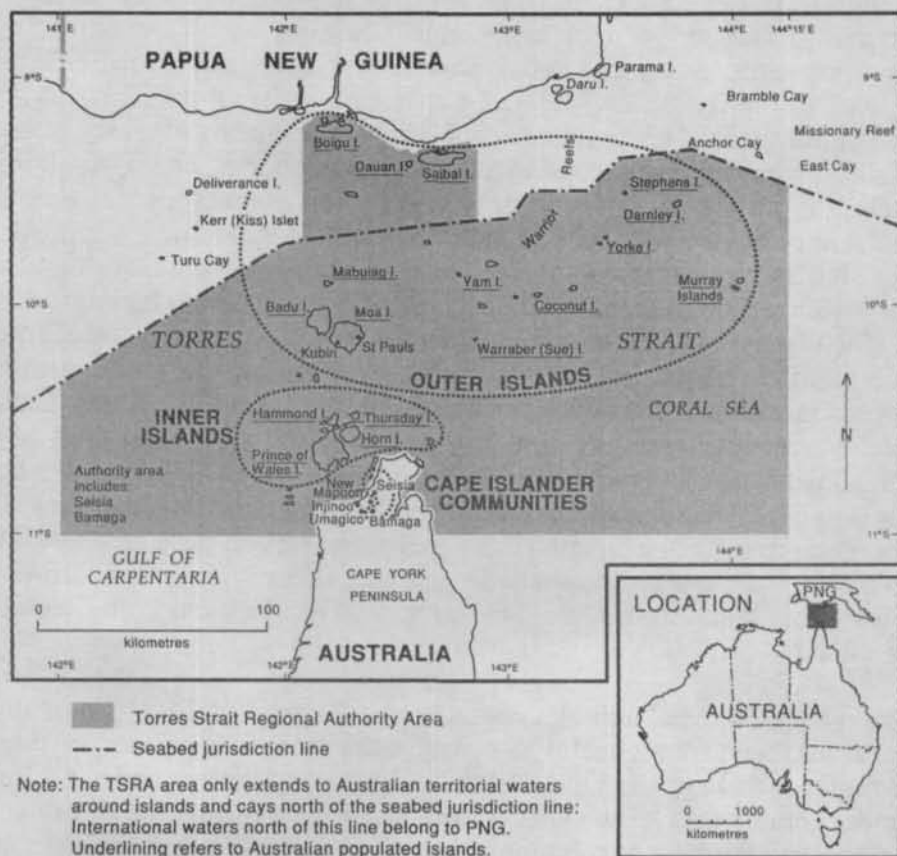
The TSRA's Corporate Plan states that the TSRA's broad functions and aims include: formulating, implementing and monitoring programs; developing policy proposals; improving housing and health services; increasing access to education and training; and coordinating Commonwealth, State and local government activities (Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) 1994).¹ A major objective of the TSRA is the creation of a sustainable regional economic base, elements of which would include increasing indigenous involvement in fisheries and agriculture; developing culturally appropriate tourism; and increasing indigenous control over marine resources (TSRA 1994). As a stipulation of the Act, the TSRA is required to prepare a Torres Strait Regional Development Plan, which will include the TSRA's stated objectives and, to facilitate this, the TSRA has set up a Development Plan Steering Committee. Draft Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee state that it must consider previous research on the TSRA, including the former ATSIC Torres Strait Development Plan (see Lea and Arthur 1992), and also build up a new regional database. The Committee's Terms of Reference also state that the Plan is to be a five-year rolling plan, with three-year planning horizons. In response to these developments, this paper represents an early step towards establishing a new regional database, and to providing longitudinal analyses that could inform the TSRA and its Development Plan Steering Committee.

Although the principal unit of analysis here is the whole TSRA geographic area, it has been found useful to consider the area as composed of three sub-regions, namely the Outer Islands; the Inner Islands; and the Cape Islander communities. The Outer Islands sub-region is made up of thirteen inhabited islands; the population, 95 per cent of whom are indigenous people, form small island communities. The formal economy of the Outer Islands is heavily dependent on government transfers and programs, and in particular the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme.² As well as participating in the CDEP scheme the indigenous population derives cash income from formal and informal commercial fishing and imputed income from subsistence fishing and gardening (Arthur 1991a).

The Inner Islands sub-region is made up of five islands clustered around the regional administrative and service centre of Thursday Island. Horn

Island is the site of the area's major airport and is gaining in importance as a residential centre because Thursday Island, measuring only some four by two kilometres, has limited land available for expansion. Compared to the Outer Islands, the Inner Islands are relatively multi-racial with non-indigenous people comprising as much as 39 per cent of the population. Unlike the Outer Islands, the Inner Islands presently have no CDEP schemes and unemployed indigenous people there receive unemployment benefits.

Figure 1. The Torres Strait region.



The Cape Islander communities sub-region of the TSRA is composed of the communities of Seisia and Bamaga, and indigenous people account for 82 per cent of the total population of these two communities. The majority of the indigenous residents of Seisia and Bamaga are the descendants of Torres Strait Islanders from the Outer Island of Saibai which is located close to the coast of Papua New Guinea. After severe flooding on Saibai in 1948 several hundred Torres Strait Islanders were relocated to Muttee Head on Cape York, west of the present community of Injinoo. Most of these people moved to the present site of Bamaga in 1954 and later still, a smaller group broke away to form the community of Seisia (Arthur 1990:

70). The CDEP scheme operates at Seisia and Bamaga. In the same general vicinity there are three other indigenous communities: Injinoo, Umagico and New Mapoon. Although these three communities are not part of the TSRA, Torres Strait Islanders form 29 per cent of their total population.³

Population change

Considering the total population (indigenous and non-indigenous), the TSRA population grew by 1,128 between 1986 and 1991, from 6,124 to 7,252. This represented an increase of 18.4 per cent (Table 1). Growth varied between the sub-regions with the highest occurring on the Outer Islands, followed by the Inner Islands and then the Cape Islander communities. If the total population in the TSRA area continues to grow at the rate shown in Table 1, then by the year 2001 it will be around 10,140 with some 4,800 people on the Outer Islands, 4,500 in the Inner Islands and 840 on the Cape.

Table 1. Change in the populations of the TSRA, 1986-91.

| | 1986 | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|--|--------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Per cent change | Number | Per cent change | Number | Per cent change |
| Outer Islands | | | | | | |
| Indigenous | 2,108 | 88.7 | 2,852 | 94.4 | 744 | 35.3 |
| Non-indigenous ^a | 266 | 11.3 | 168 | 5.6 | -98 | -36.8 |
| Sub-total | 2,374 | 100.0 | 3,020 | 100.0 | 646 | 27.2 |
| Inner Islands ^b | | | | | | |
| Indigenous | 2,112 | 70.3 | 2,124 | 61.5 | 12 | 0.6 |
| Non-indigenous ^a | 892 | 29.7 | 1,332 | 38.5 | 440 | 49.3 |
| Sub-total | 3,004 | 100.0 | 3,456 | 100.0 | 452 | 15.0 |
| Cape Islander communities ^c | | | | | | |
| Indigenous | 629 | 84.3 | 638 | 82.2 | 9 | 1.4 |
| Non-indigenous ^a | 117 | 15.7 | 138 | 17.8 | 21 | 18.0 |
| Sub-total | 746 | 100.0 | 776 | 100.0 | 30 | 4.0 |
| TSRA | | | | | | |
| Indigenous | 4,849 | 79.2 | 5,614 | 77.4 | 765 | 15.8 |
| Non-indigenous ^a | 1,275 | 20.8 | 1,638 | 22.6 | 363 | 28.4 |
| Total | 6,124 | 100.0 | 7,252 | 100.0 | 1,128 | 18.4 |

- a. 'Non-indigenous' consists of all non-indigenous people including Papua New Guineans and the 'not stated' category.
- b. Thursday Island; Horn Island; Prince of Wales Island; Friday Island, and Hammond Island.
- c. This includes the TSRA communities of Seisia and Bamaga. Because of the arrangement of the Collection Districts in 1986, the 1986 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on the TSRA excluded Seisia but included New Mapoon, overstating the TSRA indigenous population by an estimated 191. The figures shown here have been adjusted accordingly by pro-rating the 1991 distribution.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses.

The indigenous population of the TSRA increased by 765 (15.8 per cent) from 4,849 in 1986 to 5,614 in 1991 (Table 2).⁴ This represents an annual rise of approximately 3.2 per cent which is slightly higher than the national rate of 3.0 per cent for the indigenous population as a whole (Gaminiratne 1993: 7). By far the greatest growth was on the Outer Islands, where the population increased by 744 (35.3 per cent) from 2,108 to 2,852. Fifty-seven per cent of all of the growth occurred on the three islands of Badu, Yorke and Yam, with almost 30 per cent occurring on the island of Badu. If sustained, this level of growth in the Outer Islands' population has implications for the provision of services such as housing and water reticulation and may become critical in those cases where there is a shortage of land.

Table 2. Change in the indigenous population of the TSRA, 1986-91.

| | 1986 Population | 1991 Population | 1986-91 Number change | 1986-91 Per cent change |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Outer Islands | | | | |
| Boigu | 186 | 243 | 57 | 30.6 |
| Saibai | 200 | 245 | 45 | 22.5 |
| Dauan | 117 | 104 | -13 | -11.1 |
| Yam | 131 | 219 | 88 | 67.2 |
| Darnley; Stephens | 138 | 214 | 76 | 55.1 |
| Murray | 275 | 306 | 31 | 11.3 |
| Yorke | 116 | 241 | 125 | 107.8 |
| Badu | 267 | 479 | 212 | 79.4 |
| Mabuiag | 167 | 172 | 5 | 3.0 |
| Moa | 266 | 321 | 55 | 20.7 |
| Coconut; Warraber | 245 | 308 | 63 | 25.7 |
| Sub-total | 2,108 | 2,852 | 744 | 35.3 |
| Inner Islands | | | | |
| Thursday | 1,857 | 1,642 | -215 | -11.6 |
| Hammond; Horn | 246 | 453 | 207 | 84.1 |
| Prince of Wales; Friday | 9 ^a | 29 | 20 | 222.2 |
| Sub-total | 2,112 | 2,124 | 12 | 0.6 |
| Cape Islander communities^b | | | | |
| Seisia | 47 | 100 | 53 | 112.8 |
| Bamaga | 582 | 538 | -44 | -7.6 |
| Sub-total | 629 | 638 | 9 | 1.4 |
| TSRA | 4,849 | 5,614 | 765 | 15.8 |

a. The 1986 Census data do not provide a racial breakdown of the population. This has been estimated from the proportion of population recorded as indigenous in the 1991 Census data.

b. This includes the TSRA communities of Seisia and Bamaga. Because of the arrangement of the Collection Districts in 1986, the 1986 ABS data on the TSRA excluded Seisia but included New Mapoon, overstating the TSRA indigenous population by an estimated 191. The figures shown here have been adjusted accordingly by pro-rating the 1991 distribution.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses.

Indigenous growth in the other sub-regions of the TSRA was insignificant by comparison, with the population of the Inner Islands increasing by only 12 persons and that of the Cape Islander communities by only nine persons. These changes are much lower than could be expected from natural increase and point to the likelihood of out-migration from these two regions. Indeed, as the census data reveal that few indigenous people moved into the TSRA from other places between 1986 and 1991, it is possible that out-migration from the Inner Islands and/or the Cape Islander communities has contributed to the large increase in the population of the Outer Islands.

Within the Inner Islands, Thursday Island's population decreased by 215 persons and that of Hammond and Horn increased by 207. This may well reflect effective planning in the TSRA where, due to the scarcity of land and potable water on Thursday Island, Horn Island is being developed as the new residential centre of the Inner Islands. In the Cape Islander communities, Seisia's population increased by 53 and Bamaga's dropped by 44. One likely explanation for Seisia's growth is the level of tourist and economic development occurring there since 1989 (Arthur 1990: 69-74).⁵

Change in labour force status⁶

Reducing the high levels of indigenous unemployment has been a key objective of the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) since August 1986 (Australian Government 1987). Using the standard indicators of employment rate, unemployment rate, and labour force participation, the data indicate improvement in indigenous labour force status between 1986 and 1991 (Table 3). The unemployment rate fell from 20 to 12 per cent, while the employment rate rose from 40 per cent to 52 per cent and labour force participation rose from 50 to 59 per cent. Both part- and full-time employment increased significantly but the growth in part-time work was much greater than that in full-time work (80 per cent for part-time versus 51 per cent for full-time) (Table 4).

Also, the number of people in employment increased from 996 to 1,464, a growth of 47.0 per cent, which is slightly lower than the 50.8 per cent growth in overall indigenous employment that occurred across all of rural Australia in the same period (see Taylor 1993b: 30). These changes suggest a very noticeable improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people in the TSRA. However, it is necessary to note at the outset that much of the change in the labour force is likely to be related to an expansion of the CDEP scheme between the censuses (Taylor 1993a: 21). In 1986 there were four communities participating in the scheme in the TSRA and by 1990 this had risen to 13 (Arthur 1991b), with an attendant increase in the total number of participants of 690, from 181 to 871.

Following Taylor (1994a: 12), if it is assumed that a minimum of 60 per cent of CDEP participants are workers in the scheme, then the estimated growth in employment that can be attributed to the CDEP scheme in the TSRA is 414, or 88 per cent of the 468 shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Change in the labour force status of indigenous people aged 15-64 years in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Labour force status | 1986 ^a | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|---|-------------------|------|--------|------|------------|-----------------|
| | Number | Rate | Number | Rate | Net change | Per cent change |
| Employed ^b | 996 | 40.4 | 1,453 | 51.7 | 457 | 45.9 |
| Unemployed ^c | 248 | 19.9 | 202 | 12.2 | -46 | -18.5 |
| Labour force participation ^d | 1,244 | 50.4 | 1,655 | 58.8 | 411 | 33.0 |
| Total 15-64 years | 2,464 | | 2,810 | | | |

a. Because of the arrangement of the ABS Collection Districts, the data on indigenous characteristics from the 1986 Census included the community of New Mapoon and excluded the community of Seisia. This overstated the indigenous population by an estimated 191 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the numbers shown here in 1986 include these additional people.

b. Those employed as a percentage of the population aged 15-64 years.

c. Those unemployed as a percentage of those in the labour force (those employed plus those unemployed and looking for work).

d. Those in the labour force as a percentage of the population aged 15-64 years.

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

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

Table 4. Change in the hours worked by indigenous people aged 15 years and over in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Hours worked/week | 1986 ^a | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|----------|--------|----------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent change |
| Total part-time (< 35 hours) | 303 | 30.4 | 547 | 37.4 | 244 | 80.5 |
| Total full-time | 541 | 54.3 | 819 | 56.0 | 278 | 51.4 |
| Not stated | 152 | 15.3 | 98 | 6.6 | -54 | -35.5 |
| Total employed | 996 | 100.0 | 1,464 | 100.0 | 468 | 47.0 |

a. Because of the arrangement of the ABS Collection Districts, the data on indigenous characteristics from the 1986 Census included the community of New Mapoon and excluded the community of Seisia. This overstated the indigenous population by an estimated 191 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the numbers shown here in 1986 include these additional people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

Some of the changes shown in indigenous occupations point to an improvement in labour force status (Table 5). For example, there was a slight rise in the managerial and trades categories, and a significant reduction in the proportion employed as labourers. However, the conclusions that can be drawn from the data may be limited by the high proportion of people in 1991 who did not state their occupation or did not do so adequately enough for it to be assigned to a particular category.⁷

Table 5. Change in occupation of employment of indigenous people in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Occupation | 1986 ^a Per cent | 1991 Per cent |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Managers and administrators | 2.4 | 3.8 |
| Professionals | 7.8 | 7.1 |
| Para-professionals | 8.2 | 8.4 |
| Tradespersons | 8.6 | 10.0 |
| Clerks | 13.0 | 11.4 |
| Personal services and sales | 8.0 | 8.5 |
| Plant and machine operators | 4.0 | 4.1 |
| Labourers and related workers | 40.4 | 28.0 |
| Inadequately described | 1.8 | 10.0 |
| Not stated | 5.8 | 8.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Total number | 845 | 1,453 |

a. The available 1986 Census data on the characteristics shown here do not include the TSRA Cape Islander communities of Seisia and Bamaga. This understates the indigenous population by an estimated 625 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the proportions shown here in 1986 exclude these people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

Regarding changes in industry of employment (Table 6), there was a considerable increase in those employed in public administration and in community services. These are both industries associated with the community-based work of the CDEP scheme (Taylor 1993a: 26), and it is likely that this change relates to the expansion of the CDEP scheme in the TSRA area between the censuses. In 1990, an estimated 53 indigenous people were working either full-time or part-time at a gold mine on Horn Island. The mine started production in 1988 and closed in 1990 due to insufficient returns (Arthur 1991c: 6). The fact that in 1991 there were no people recorded as employed in the mining industry demonstrates the direct employment impact of this closure (Table 6).

Surprisingly, in both censuses, only a very small number of people were recorded as working in the fishing industry and this dropped further as a

proportion of the total employment between 1986 and 1991, from 3.9 per cent to 1.6 per cent. This is clearly an underestimation as in 1990 there were an estimated 35 full-time fishers in the TSRA and another 177 who mixed part-time fishing with part-time work in the CDEP scheme (Arthur 1990: 38-39; Arthur 1991a: 112). The data in Table 6 suggest that it may be only those who fish full-time who are recorded by the census as being involved in the fishing industry, and that those who fish part-time are designated to some other industry category, such as community services. That is to say, these people are identifying or being identified in the first instance as (part-time) community workers rather than (part-time) fishers.⁸

Table 6. Change in industry of employment of indigenous people aged 15 years and over in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Industry | 1986 ^a | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------|--------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent | Net Change | Per cent Change |
| Agriculture, fishing, hunting | 39 | 3.9 | 24 | 1.6 | -15 | -38.4 |
| Mining | 2 | 0.2 | 0 | 0.0 | -2 | -200.0 |
| Manufacturing | 0 | 0.0 | 9 | 0.6 | 9 | - |
| Electricity, gas and water | 5 | 0.5 | 18 | 1.2 | 13 | 72.2 |
| Construction | 38 | 3.8 | 30 | 2.0 | -8 | -21.0 |
| Wholesale, retail trade | 110 | 11.0 | 102 | 7.0 | -8 | -7.3 |
| Transport and storage | 52 | 5.2 | 43 | 2.9 | -9 | -17.3 |
| Communication | 12 | 1.2 | 12 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Finance services | 9 | 0.9 | 15 | 1.0 | 6 | 66.6 |
| Public administration | 178 | 17.8 | 381 | 26.0 | 203 | 114.0 |
| Community services | 360 | 36.1 | 611 | 41.8 | 251 | 69.7 |
| Recreation, personal services | 31 | 3.1 | 62 | 4.2 | 31 | 100.0 |
| Not classifiable | 10 | 1.0 | 9 | 0.6 | -1 | -10.0 |
| Not stated | 151 | 15.3 | 147 | 10.3 | -4 | -2.6 |
| Total employed | 997 | 100.0 | 1,463 | 100.0 | 466 | 46.7 |

a. Because of the arrangement of the ABS Collection Districts, the data on indigenous characteristics from the 1986 Census included the community of New Mapoon and excluded the community of Seisia in the TSRA. This overstated the indigenous population by an estimated 191 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the numbers shown here in 1986 include these additional people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

Most employed indigenous people in the TSRA are recorded as wage or salary earners (Table 7). The increase in the numbers in this category again reflects the expansion of the CDEP scheme. However, the proportion in this category decreased slightly during the intercensal period at the expense of those who were self-employed or employers. Indeed, the proportion of self-employed and employers more than doubled from 25 to 55 suggesting that indigenous people were starting small businesses. This is reflected in

data from a survey of the regional economy in 1989-90 (see Arthur 1990). For instance, in 1989 it was noted that there was usually at least one small privately-owned retail outlet in each community on the Outer Islands, though these were often part-time ventures and their owners also worked on the CDEP scheme (Arthur 1990: 33). At the same time, there were several small indigenous retail outlets, predominantly selling take-away food, on the Inner Islands (Arthur 1990: 85-6). On the other hand, Table 6 shows that the number of people employed in the wholesale and retail industry actually decreased slightly between the censuses. As commercial fishing is largely undertaken on a self-employed basis (Arthur 1990) the figures in Table 7 could indicate that an increasing number of people are entering the fishing industry, though as explained earlier an opposite trend is suggested by the data in Table 6. These contradictions reveal some of the limitations of the census data for detailed analyses of labour force status.

Table 7. Change in employment status of indigenous people aged 15 years and over in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Employment status | 1986 ^a | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------|--------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| | Number | per cent | Number | per cent | Net change | Per cent change |
| Wage/salary | 963 | 96.3 | 1,404 | 95.9 | 441 | 45.8 |
| Self-employed/employer | 25 | 2.5 | 55 | 3.7 | 27 | 108.0 |
| Unpaid helper | 11 | 1.2 | 5 | 0.4 | -8 | -61.5 |
| Total | 999 | 100.0 | 1,464 | 100.0 | 460 | 45.8 |

a. Because of the arrangement of the ABS Collection Districts, the data on indigenous characteristics from the 1986 Census included the community of New Mapoon and excluded the community of Seisia in the TSRA. This overstated the indigenous population by an estimated 191 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the numbers shown here in 1986 include these additional people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

Between 1986 and 1991, the proportion of indigenous people employed by local government and in the private sector rose, and the proportion employed by the Queensland Government and Commonwealth Government fell (Table 8). The increase in local government employment can be attributed first, to the changes in coding procedures in the 1991 Census which classified employment in the CDEP scheme under local government rather than private sector as was the case in 1986 (Taylor 1993a: 31); and second, to the expansion of the CDEP scheme in the TSRA. In 1989-90 an estimated 33 indigenous people were employed by the Torres Shire out of a total Shire work force of 39 (Arthur 1990: 33). Despite the fact that these figures were only for local government employment on the Inner Islands, they are well below the level of local

government employment suggested by the data in Table 8, and lend weight to the argument that CDEP scheme employment is skewing the data.

Table 8. Change in industry sector of employment of indigenous people aged 15 years and over in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Sector | 1986 ^a Per cent | 1991 Per cent |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Commonwealth Government | 6.0 | 2.7 |
| State Government | 32.0 | 21.2 |
| Local government | 17.3 | 28.5 |
| Private sector | 29.6 | 36.7 |
| Not stated | 15.1 | 10.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Total number | 845 | 1,453 |

a. The available 1986 Census data on the characteristics shown here do not include the TSRA Cape Islander communities of Seisia and Bamaga. This understates the indigenous population by an estimated 625 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the proportions shown here in 1986 exclude these people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

The apparent fall in the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments' share of employment appears surprising given the aims of the AEDP (Australian Government 1987), but it does mirror a trend across the whole State (Taylor 1993b: 47-8). Indeed, as Taylor points out, the intercensal period saw a dramatic fall in such employment among the population generally, due to downsizing of the public sector, and changes in indigenous employment in the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments must be viewed in this context (Taylor 1993b: 47-8). Nonetheless, the decrease in the State Government's proportion of public sector employment may be explained by the fact that employment that was once within the State Government is now being carried out under the CDEP scheme; or the decrease is due to the reclassification of the CDEP scheme employment noted above.

Education and training

In a similar vein to the AEDP, the Commonwealth government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) launched in 1989 includes equity of access and equality of outcomes as its goals (Daly 1993: 2). The ability of education to contribute to socioeconomic change has been highlighted by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET)

1994: 3) and the ATSIC Regional Plan prepared in 1992 for what is now the TSRA, which made education and training a priority issue (see Lea and Arthur 1992).

Changes in educational status can have a fairly long lead-time and therefore it is unrealistic to expect dramatic changes between just two censuses.⁹ Nonetheless, Table 9 does indicate that the proportion of people staying at school until 17 years of age and over increased notably between 1986 and 1991, a change also recorded by Daly (forthcoming) for the indigenous population as a whole. On the other hand, this result must be treated with some caution as there was also a significant decline in the 'not stated' response in Table 9.

Table 9. Change in the age at which indigenous people left school in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| Age left school | 1986 ^a | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------|--------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent | Net change | Per cent change |
| Under 15 years of age | 381 | 12.8 | 389 | 12.1 | 8 | 2.1 |
| 15-16 years | 1,177 | 39.5 | 1,265 | 39.2 | 88 | 7.5 |
| 17 years + | 566 | 19.1 | 980 | 30.3 | 414 | 73.1 |
| Still at school | 246 | 8.3 | 154 | 4.8 | -92 | -37.3 |
| Never attended school | 77 | 2.6 | 48 | 1.5 | -29 | -37.7 |
| Not stated | 518 | 17.7 | 391 | 12.1 | -127 | -24.5 |
| Total | 2,963 | 100.0 | 3,227 | 100.0 | 264 | |

a. Because of the arrangement of the ABS Collection Districts, the data on indigenous characteristics from the 1986 Census included the community of New Mapoon and excluded the community of Seisia in the TSRA. This overstated the indigenous population by an estimated 191 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the numbers shown here in 1986 include these additional people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

Again, because of the long lead-times involved in gaining results from increasing levels of education, it is also unrealistic to expect a great change in the level of people's qualifications between just two consecutive censuses and, considering the indigenous population of the TSRA, with its small numbers, this can make percentage changes somewhat misleading. Nonetheless, some changes can be identified from the data in Table 10. There are now three people with Bachelor degrees in the TSRA and the number of people with diploma level qualifications has increased. Almost 30 per cent of those with qualifications (202 out of 684), are at the diploma or vocational level, which is similar to the national proportion, indicating indigenous people are involved in preparatory courses rather than in courses that are more strictly technical or academic (DEET 1994: 30-1).

The proportion of indigenous people in the TSRA without qualifications increased from 68.3 per cent to 78.8 per cent (Table 10). However, this may be attributed to the fact that the proportion who did not state their qualifications fell markedly. In addition, the figure of 78.8 per cent is somewhat lower than the national proportion for indigenous people without qualifications of 90.2 per cent and lies almost midway between the national indigenous and non-indigenous levels calculated by Daly (1993: 8).¹⁰

Table 10. Change in the level of qualifications of indigenous people in the TSRA, 1986-91.

| | 1986 ^a | | 1991 | | 1986-91 | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------|--------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent | Net change | Per cent change |
| Higher degree/diploma | 2 | 0.1 | 3 | 0.1 | 1 | 50.0 |
| Bachelor degree | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 0.1 | 3 | 300.0 |
| Other diploma | 42 | 1.4 | 82 | 2.5 | 40 | 95.2 |
| Vocational | 103 | 3.5 | 120 | 3.7 | 17 | 16.5 |
| No qualification | 2,026 | 68.3 | 2,542 | 78.8 | 516 | 25.5 |
| Not stated | 792 | 26.7 | 476 | 14.8 | -316 | -39.9 |
| Total | | 100.0 | | 100.0 | | |

a. Because of the arrangement of the ABS Collection Districts, the data on indigenous characteristics from the 1986 Census included the community of New Mapoon and excluded the community of Seisia in the TSRA. This overstated the indigenous population by an estimated 191 persons. As it is not possible to disaggregate the characteristics, the numbers shown here in 1986 include these additional people.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

There are no universities in the Strait, thus one would not expect the census to show people attending such tertiary institutions. However, there was an increased government commitment to the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College on Thursday Island in the 1980s; this may account for the rise in the census numbers of TAFE students from 11 to 42. A new TAFE campus on Thursday Island was officially opened in 1992 but there is no residential facility, which limits access for people on the Outer Islands. In an attempt to fill this gap the TAFE has set up an outreach facility. The impact of this facility and the TAFE campus on Thursday Island should be evident in the 1996 Census.

Data on the field in which people are qualified first became available from the 1991 Census and show that the highest proportion (28 per cent) have qualifications in education, reflecting the interest in this area in the TSRA (Arthur 1990; Lea and Arthur 1992; Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Consultative Committee 1992). The next highest proportion (20 per cent) were qualified in business management and administration.

Income status

Income growth has been one of the key areas targeted by government policy for indigenous people (Australian Government 1987; Taylor 1993a: 38). To estimate the changes in Islander incomes between 1986 and 1991, the dollar amounts given in both censuses have been presented in real terms deflated by the Consumer Price Index (see Taylor 1993a); the adjusted and unadjusted figures are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Change in the individual incomes of indigenous people in the TSRA, 1986-91.^a

| | 1986 | 1991 | Net change | 1986-91 Per cent change |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| | (\$) | (\$) | (\$) | |
| Unadjusted first quartile | 1,724 ^b | 5,599 ^c | 3,875 | 224.8 |
| Unadjusted median | 6,259 ^b | 10,137 ^c | 3,878 | 62.0 |
| Unadjusted third quartile | 11,544 ^b | 15,899 ^c | 4,355 | 37.7 |
| Adjusted first quartile | 2,345 ^d | 5,317 ^e | 2,972 | 126.7 |
| Adjusted median | 8,515 ^d | 9,626 ^e | 1,111 | 13.0 |
| Adjusted third quartile | 15,706 ^d | 15,098 ^e | -608 | -3.9 |

a. All calculations exclude those who did not state their incomes.

b. 1986 dollars.

c. 1991 dollars.

d. 1986 dollars adjusted for the CPI of 75.3 in 1985-86.

e. 1991 dollars adjusted for the CPI of 105.3 in 1990-91.

Source: 1986 and 1991 Censuses, Community Profile for the Torres Strait Regional Council area.

The adjusted figures show that median income has increased by 13 per cent from \$8,515 in 1986 to \$9,626 in 1991 (Table 11). This median is considerably higher than that for indigenous people in some other rural parts of northern Australia. For example, the median indigenous income in 1991 in the rural areas of the Northern Territory was only \$7,100 and in rural Western Australia it was \$8,100 (Taylor 1994b: 15; Taylor and Roach 1994: 14). Table 11 also shows that the first quartile has more than doubled from \$2,345 to \$5,317. These are both positive outcomes for policies that aim to increase indigenous incomes. However, in the same period the third quartile dropped by 3.9 per cent from \$15,706 to \$15,098. When taken together, these figures clearly demonstrate that there has been a bunching in the lower income range so that by 1991 it was more usual for people to have low incomes and less usual for them to have high incomes than it was in 1986.

Conclusions and policy implications

The indigenous population of the TSRA increased by 16 per cent between the censuses. This level of population growth is significant and has implications for the creation of employment and for the provision of key services, such as housing and health. The Regional Plan prepared by the former ATSIC Regional Council and the new TSRA Corporate Plan both emphasise the importance of improving the supply and quality of housing in the TSRA (Lea and Arthur 1992; TSRA 1994) and indeed census data show that the average size of indigenous households did not change between the censuses. It is important to note that the indigenous population increased most on the Outer Islands despite the fact that, due to a severe shortage of land and potable water, some islands in this sub-region are the most sensitive to population growth.

The Commonwealth Government's AEDP aims to increase levels of indigenous employment and income to levels commensurate to those of non-indigenous people, and although this analysis does not deal with the issue of relative socioeconomic status, the data suggest there have been some gains in the TSRA. The employment rate among indigenous people has increased, as has median income. However, both of these apparent gains have to be qualified.

Although the level of employment has increased, the gain has mostly been in part-time work. Median incomes have also increased but there has been a downward shift within the range of incomes. That is to say, more people are now earning a low income and fewer are earning a high income. These trends are indicative of employment in the CDEP scheme and most probably reflect the scheme's expansion in the TSRA since 1986 (Taylor 1993a).¹¹ On the other hand, indigenous people gain cash and imputed income from commercial fishing, subsistence fishing and gardening (Arthur 1991c; Altman and Allen 1992). It is not known if this income is recorded in the census or only forms part of an unquantified 'informal economy' in the TSRA area. Therefore, it is possible that actual incomes may be higher than those indicated by the census data.

It is likely that the expansion of the CDEP scheme accounts for some of the other apparent changes in the labour force. The large increase in the proportion of people working in public administration, community services, and in local government, for example - all areas associated with community-based work which are synonymous with participation in the scheme (Taylor 1993a: 26). Further, the very small numbers of fishers noted in the censuses is likely to be because those who work part-time on the CDEP scheme and part-time as fishers, are recorded as working in the community services industry, not in the fishing industry.

This analysis has dealt with intercensal socioeconomic change in the TSRA between 1986 and 1991 with the principal aim of providing data analysis for the TSRA that will assist in formulating and monitoring policies, and with regional development planning. While the analysis has dealt with all indigenous people in the TSRA in aggregate, similar census-based analyses could usefully be carried out focusing, for example, on the relative status of indigenous males, females and youth. This would inform government policies, such as the AEDP, Priority One and the Social Strategy for Young Australians, which are targeted at these groups within the indigenous population. The government's employment and income policies also include as their goals statistical equality between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Further analysis of census data, comparing the economic status of indigenous and non-indigenous people, could reveal what movement there has been towards achieving these goals in the TSRA. Similar census-based research that can assist with policy direction and regional planning and development could also be carried out at the level of the TSRA's sub-regions and communities.

However, there are limits to the policy-relevant analyses that can be generated from census data. For example, the goals of the TSRA Corporate Plan include developing culturally appropriate and controlled tourism and extending indigenous involvement in agriculture and fisheries (TSRA 1994: 9-10), but the census provides little information about the present real involvement in such areas, and as noted earlier with respect to fishing effort, what the census can reveal may be misleading if misinterpreted. Also, the official sources for data on the allowable and actual fishing effort in the TSRA do not presently differentiate the extent of indigenous involvement (see Williams 1994). Therefore the census and other official sources cannot provide all of the information needed to formulate, implement and monitor the TSRA's policies. Some considerable primary data collection and analysis will be required (Altman et al. 1994). Research carried out in 1989-90 provided base-line data on the regional economy, including estimates of indigenous fishing effort (Arthur 1990), and a comparison of this work with new primary research could provide an additional measure of change in the TSRA over the last five years.

In the early 1970s, research showed that the TSRA economy was highly dependent on government transfers (Beckett 1987; Treadgold 1974). The impact of the CDEP scheme on the TSRA economy identified here highlights that this dependency remains in a somewhat different guise, today. In addition, this paper suggests that a relationship has developed between a major government labour market program (the CDEP scheme) and commercial fishing, in which many people work part-time in both. Further, there is some evidence from other research that people may fish if and when they need income over and above the limits available via the CDEP scheme (Arthur 1990). The predominance of part-time over full-time fishing is lamented by the TSRA in its Corporate Plan (TSRA 1994),

the inference being that the preferred option is full-time employment. But if the present system provides people with sufficient income then there is little incentive to increase fishing effort. Also, if as is possible, the TSRA area is unable to generate sufficient full-time paid employment for indigenous people (Arthur 1991a), then a realistic option for the future would be to continue to mix part-time employment in the CDEP scheme with part-time employment in other industries, where such a mix is appropriate. These issues generate policy questions such as: to what extent is the CDEP scheme preparing people for full-time employment; and, is sufficient full-time employment available in the TSRA area? To further analyse these policy-related issues would require additional primary research of the type mentioned above.

Notes

1. These functions are presently limited to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of the TSRA region, according to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Act (No. 3) 1993* (see also TSRA 1994). For a comprehensive analysis of the TSRA and its functions see Sanders (1994).
2. The 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 for work. For a full description of the scheme and the policy issues surrounding it, see Altman and Sanders (1991) and Sanders (1993).
3. These three Cape Islander communities which are not part of the TSRA had a total population in 1991 of 974 persons made up as follows: Aborigines 440; Torres Strait Islanders 283; non-indigenous people 251.
4. In 1991, the Census showed that Torres Strait Islanders formed 96 per cent of the indigenous population and almost 75 per cent of the total population of the TSRA. Census figures suggest that this represents only 20 per cent of all Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, but it is quite likely that this proportion is incorrect. Both the 1986 and 1991 Censuses show intercensal increases in the Torres Strait Islander population which are too large to be accounted for by natural increase, and it is thought that the increases are due to island people from other places, such as the Bass Strait and the Pacific, identifying wrongly in the censuses (Arthur 1992; Evans et al. 1993: 27). As these island people from other places live predominantly outside the TSRA, it is there that the misidentification is most likely to have occurred. Therefore, it is possible that the figures given in the censuses for the total Torres Strait Islander population are incorrect, and that the error inflates the proportion of the Torres Strait Islander population living outside the TSRA. A corollary of this is that a higher proportion of all Torres Strait Islanders may live in the TSRA than is suggested by the census.
5. Because of the arrangement of ABS Collection Districts in 1986, separate figures for the population of Seisia and Bamaga were not available. It has therefore been necessary to estimate the indigenous populations of Seisia and Bamaga in 1986 by pro-rating the distribution in 1991. This may have affected the accuracy of the estimates of population change in this sub-region. Further, in 1991 Seisia was part of a collection district which included the 'remainder' of the Cape outside the other collection districts. These factors may account for the significant change in the Seisia population shown in Table 2.
6. Unless stated otherwise, the remainder of this paper deals solely with the indigenous people of the TSRA.
7. This was a feature common to the 1991 Census category which dealt with indigenous labour force occupations (Taylor 1993a: 29).

8. The likelihood of this occurring is increased by the inability of the census to identify multiple industries of occupation. However, ABS's 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey is designed to identify individual participation in the CDEP scheme and also multiple occupations. The Survey was carried out at six locations in the TSRA area and may help clarify some of the points raised here with respect to employment when available early in 1995.
9. An analysis of the educational status of indigenous people from all censuses from 1971 to 1991 can be found in Daly (1993) and Daly (forthcoming).
10. Given that Torres Strait Islanders form 96 per cent of the TSRA population, these data appear to support the finding by Taylor and Gaminiratne (1993) that the socioeconomic status of Torres Strait Islanders lies between that of Aborigines and non-indigenous Australians.
11. During a recent review of the AEDP, the former ATSIC Torres Strait Regional Council (now the TSRA) expressed concern about the trend for CDEP schemes to lead to part-time low-paid employment (Bamblett 1994: 198).

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