



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**Centre for
Aboriginal
Economic
Policy
Research**



**Access to government programs and
services for mainland Torres Strait
Islanders**

W.S. Arthur

No. 151/1998

Discussion Paper

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Director, CAEPR
The Australian National University
March, 1998

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No. 151/1998

ISSN 1036-1774
ISBN 0 7315 2586 8

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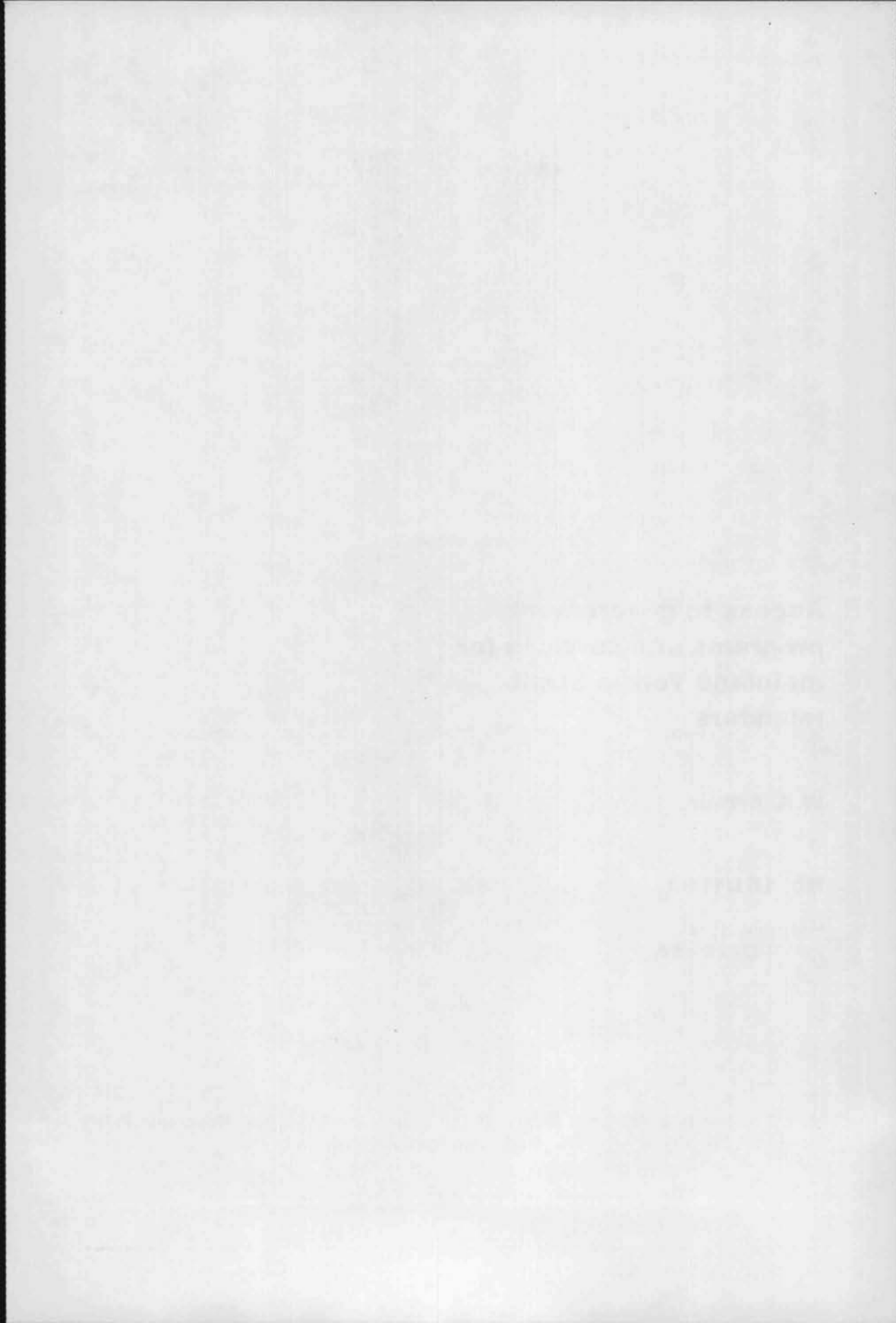
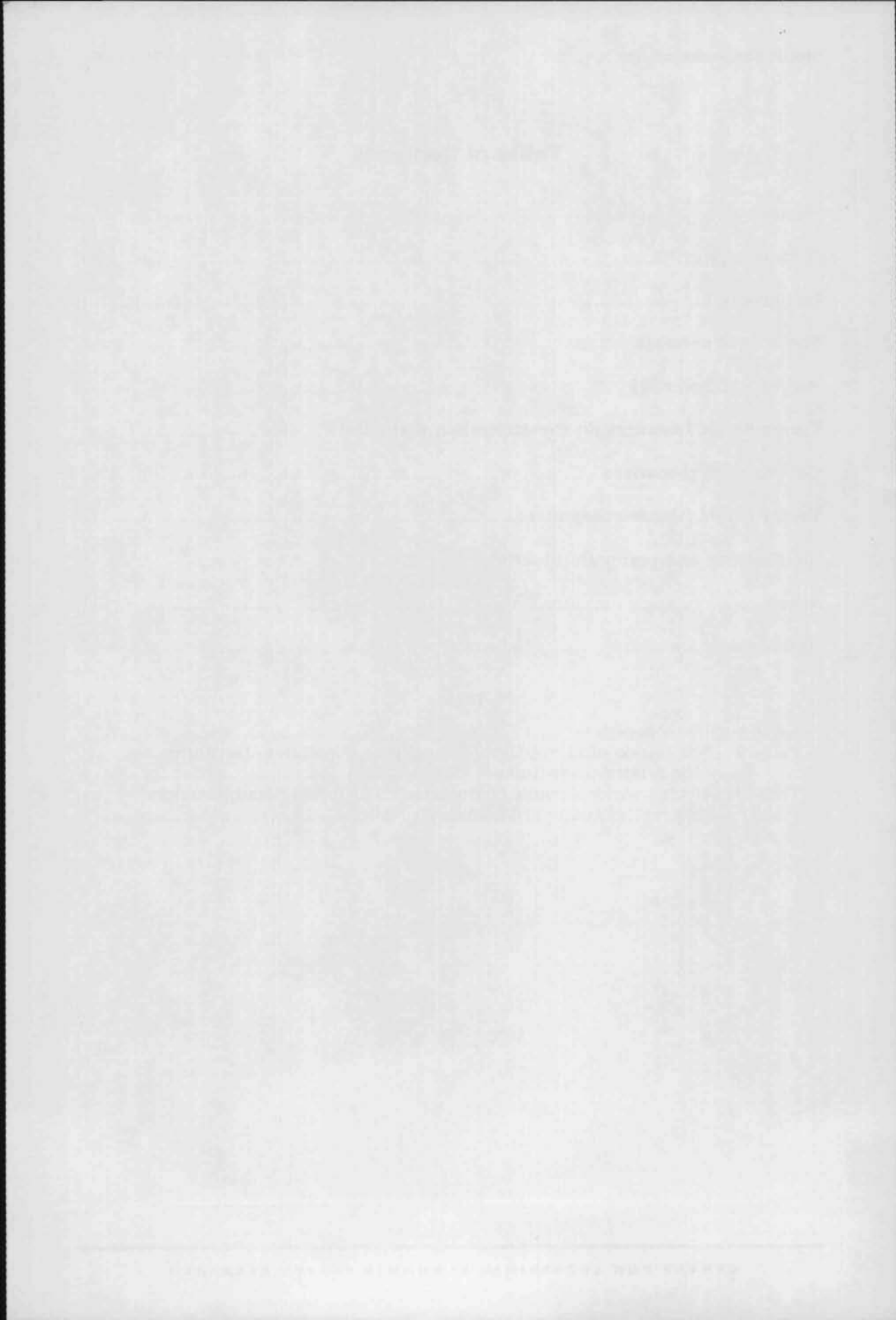


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Summary

This paper is an outcome of a survey of access for Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland of Australia to government programs and services, commissioned by the Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

The survey found that there were no data or statistics on access for Islanders to government programs and services, nor were there any specific government programs and services for mainland Islanders. The survey questionnaires did not reveal evidence that Islanders experience great difficulties accessing mainstream programs and services.

The survey did, however, reveal some perceptions about programs and services. For instance, some service providers and Islanders appear to believe that Islanders are supposed to access indigenous programs and services rather than mainstream programs and services. This is contrary to the generally held policy view that indigenous programs and services are intended to supplement rather than replace those in the mainstream.

Governments believe that Islanders do not experience access problems and that in any event there are too few Islanders to warrant any special forms of access for them.

Islanders meanwhile perceive that, within the system of indigenous programs and services, and especially within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), they are marginalised with respect to Aboriginal people. It is argued that this largely stems from the fact that Islanders are a numerical and cultural minority within the mainland indigenous system.

Two approaches to improve the situation are discussed. One is to strengthen the position of Islanders within the present indigenous system. It is felt that such an approach would have a limited impact unless resources were reserved for Islanders. The other approach is to establish an Islander system outside ATSIC. However, this approach has little government support because, as already discussed, there are relatively few Islanders on the mainland and a separate system for Islanders would be costly.

Acknowledgments

I am appreciative of the assistance given to me by all of the Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations who took part in the survey, and for the assistance provided by Mr Benny Mills and Mr Alex Woodcock of the Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I especially thank Mrs Maureen Newie of Cairns whose participation in the interview process was invaluable. Thanks also to Dr Will Sanders for his input into the design of the questionnaires and his advice regarding analysis of the data. Editorial assistance was provided by Linda Roach and Hilary Bek, and layout was by Jennifer Braid.

Introduction

Torres Strait Islanders are Australia's other indigenous people. The 1996 Census identified an estimated 38,850 Torres Strait Islanders, making them about 11 per cent of all Australian indigenous people. Torres Strait Islanders are of Melanesian stock and, culturally and politically, are a separate group from Aboriginal people.

Approximately 15 per cent of all Torres Strait Islanders live in Torres Strait and policies pertaining to them are the responsibility of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). The policy concerns of the remaining 85 per cent of Torres Strait Islanders—who reside outside the Torres Strait on the Australian mainland—are the responsibility of the Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OTSIA) in Canberra. Islanders on the mainland are also represented by the Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board (TSIAB) whose members are appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

Under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*, OTSIA has responsibility for monitoring Commonwealth, State and local government programs affecting Torres Strait Islanders, and for evaluating the extent to which these programs meet the needs of Torres Strait Islanders, particularly those living on the Australian mainland (see ss. 81(1)(a) and ss. 82 of the Act).

In 1997 OTSIA commissioned research by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) into access for Torres Strait Islanders residing on the mainland to the following government program and service areas:

- business development;
- employment;
- education and training (including vocational training and university education);
- health;
- housing; and
- arts and culture.

The scope of the research was limited to those programs and services provided by the Commonwealth Government, State/Territory Governments and local governments and so was not intended to include any of the programs and services provided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) or by indigenous bodies, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing cooperatives and medical services, or by other providers such as banks. In fact, the research revealed information about access to all of these areas and they are all discussed below.

The access network

Mainstream programs and services are provided by Commonwealth, State and local governments and by non-government agencies, and in theory, these can all be accessed by any citizen.

In addition, governments may provide indigenous programs and services which are only available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These can include specific programs and services provided by a mainline department, such as indigenous housing provided by a State housing department, or the special assistance provided to indigenous clients through the Commonwealth Department of Social Security's Aboriginal Liaison Officers. Indigenous programs and services may also be provided by a specific indigenous affairs department, such as the Aboriginal Affairs Department in Western Australia or by the Commonwealth's ATSIC.

Indigenous programs and services may also be provided by non-government indigenous agencies, such as legal services, or housing cooperatives and these are often funded by ATSIC.

Torres Strait Islanders can, in theory, access any of the above but whether they access one or another sector will depend both on their ability to access them and on their choice (Schaffer and Wen-hsien 1975). Because choice is involved, a measure of access in one area may not necessarily indicate an access problem. Moreover, access is not an end in itself but should be seen as a strategy to achieve the goal of equity between citizens (Commonwealth of Australia 1992: 18). As shown below, the available census data indicate that Torres Strait Islanders have a lower socioeconomic status than non-indigenous Australians and so it can be argued that their access to all programs and services should be as open as possible, until the statistics show that equity has been reached. Taking this view, difficulties that Torres Strait Islanders experience accessing any of the programs and services are of concern, and this is the approach adopted here.

Survey methodology

The government departments and Islanders surveyed are shown in Table 1. Standard questionnaires were issued and where appropriate, these were followed up with personal interviews.

The Commonwealth Government was surveyed through its head offices in Canberra and the State/Territory governments through their mainline departments responsible for the program areas in the survey. Thirteen local governments which have sizeable Torres Strait Islander populations were also surveyed.

The questionnaires to all government departments addressed several main themes, namely: whether they provided any programs and services designed

specifically for Torres Strait Islanders; whether they collected any statistics specifically about Torres Strait Islanders; whether Torres Strait Islanders were included in any consultative committees; and whether there were any staffing strategies specifically for Torres Strait Islanders.

Table 1. Survey schedule

Body surveyed	Questionnaires issued	Questionnaires completed	Interviews
State/Territory departments	56	9	14
Commonwealth departments	6	4	0
Local governments	13	6	5
Islander organisations	21	5	21
TSIAB representatives	3	1	3
Islander individuals	5	0	5
Total	111	24	48

There are Torres Strait Islander organisations in most Australian cities and in the larger coastal towns of Queensland. These organisations, the TSIAB members and several individuals, were surveyed. The rationale for this approach was that Torres Strait Islander organisations and TSIAB members would act as spokes-bodies for the wider Torres Strait Islander community in each State.¹ The questionnaires to Torres Strait Islanders addressed the following main themes: the programs and services that organisations and individuals attempt to access; their level of success and the nature of any problems they encounter; and their involvement in government consultative committees.

Although the 1996 Census revealed a population of 1,850 Torres Strait Islanders in Tasmania, it is thought that these people are not in fact Torres Strait Islanders, but are descendants of Aborigines who were relocated to the islands off the north-east coast of Tasmania in the early nineteenth century.² This group invariably refer to themselves, and have been referred to in government policy, as 'Straitsmen' or 'Islanders' and it is thought that they are incorrectly marking the 'Torres Strait Islander' box on the census forms (ABS/CAEPR 1997: 30; Commonwealth of Australia 1997a). Because of the doubt about the validity of the census figures for Tasmania, it was not included in this section of the survey. Victoria was also excluded, due to difficulties in meeting with Torres Strait Islander representatives there. More than half of the Torres Strait Islanders surveyed were in Queensland, reflecting the fact that almost half of the mainlanders live in that State (see Table 2).

Torres Strait Islanders on the Australian mainland

Torres Strait Islanders began moving in significant numbers from Torres Strait to the Australian mainland just after World War II, largely to improve their socioeconomic status and to increase their independence (Arthur and Taylor 1994). They first worked as sugar cane cutters in Queensland and then when this work became mechanised, they found a niche as fettlers in the Queensland railways. Later they performed the same work on the construction of mine railways in Queensland and Western Australia. Initially, almost all Islanders lived in Queensland. Nowadays they are found in many urban centres along the east coast and in the State and Territory capital cities. The only major exceptions to this are those who live in the Aboriginal communities on Cape York and in the north of Western Australia. Therefore, they are, like the vast majority of non-indigenous Australians, predominantly urbanites. Despite this, and the fact that many of these Torres Strait Islanders were born and raised on the mainland, they still identify strongly with Torres Strait and with Torres Strait Islander culture (ABS/CAEPR 1997: 7).

The Torres Strait Islanders are the majority of the population in Torres Strait which is their traditional country. Those on the mainland meanwhile, are a minority with respect to both non-indigenous and Aboriginal people and are not living on their traditional lands. There are an estimated 32,792 mainland Islanders, making them about 9 per cent of the indigenous population on the mainland. Almost 40 per cent of these people live in Queensland (Table 2). Census data show that, using standard indicators, mainland Islanders have a lower socioeconomic status than non-indigenous Australians (see Table 3).

Table 2. Distribution of Torres Strait Islanders in the States/Territories of the Australian mainland, 1996

State/Territory	Torres Strait Islanders ^a	Per cent
Queensland (Torres Strait) ^b	5,760	15
Queensland (mainland)	15,094	39
New South Wales	7,501	19
Victoria	3,102	8
Tasmania	1,850	5
Western Australia	1,788	5
Northern Territory	1,769	5
South Australia	1,508	5
Australian Capital Territory	180	<1
Australian mainland ^c	32,792	85
Australia Total	38,552	100

Notes: a. In the 1996 Census people could chose to identify both as Torres Strait Islander and as Aboriginal. The figure shown here is the total of those who identified as Torres Strait Islander and as both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal.

b. This represents the Torres Strait Islanders resident within the jurisdiction of the TSRA.

c. Including Tasmania.

Source: ABS Census, 1996.

As noted earlier, OTSIA and the TSIAB have responsibility for policy issues relating to mainland Islanders. However, Islanders have also established some 22 of their own non-government organisations from a variety of funding sources. The distribution of the organisations tends to reflect the distribution of the Islander population: there are 13 in Queensland, three in Western Australia, two in the Northern Territory and one in each of the other States/Territories except Tasmania which has none. These organisations are generally small, with an average membership of around 50, several have only recently been established, and not all appear to have an active membership. The organisations tend to focus on cultural activities though some attempt to diversify into areas such as employment and economic development.

Table 3. Selected socioeconomic characteristics of Torres Strait Islanders living on the Australian mainland, 1996

	Per cent	
	Torres Strait Islanders ^a	Non-indigenous
Self-empld/employers ^b	4	9
In State/Territory gov't. employment ^b	15	12
In private sector employment ^b	69	79
Overall employment rate ^b	42	57
Having a post-school qualification ^c	9	25
Owning/buying a house ^c	36	70
Attending a tertiary institution ^d	4	6

Notes: a. Includes those who identify only as Torres Strait Islanders.

b. Tasmania and Victoria excluded due to the limitations of the data.

c. Tasmania excluded.

d. TAFE College, university or other tertiary institution, Tasmania excluded.

Source: ABS 1996 Census.

Government responses

Governments cannot provide information that will allow an accurate assessment of Torres Strait Islander access to either mainstream or indigenous programs and services. This is principally because, with few exceptions, they do not keep statistics on, or have specific programs for, Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland. The extent to which Torres Strait Islanders are specifically recognised in programs varies between the level of government and between the States/Territories as follows.

At the Commonwealth level, Torres Strait Islanders were first identified by name in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* and in its primary instrumentality, ATSIC. The Act also created the ATSIC Torres Strait Regional Council;³ the TSIAB;⁴ and OTSIA in Canberra. The Act goes some way to

recognising the special circumstances of mainland Torres Strait Islanders by giving OTSIA specific responsibility for monitoring government programs with respect to mainlanders. However, although Torres Strait Islanders are identified in various Commonwealth program areas, this is not comprehensive (Commonwealth of Australia 1992: 1). For example, the Commonwealth's rental housing program is referred to as the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program. Furthermore, the Commonwealth does not maintain programs or statistics specifically for Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland. Only one Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) publication is specific to Torres Strait Islanders. This is an analysis of the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey for Torres Strait Islanders (NATSIS) and even this only covers Islanders in Queensland (see ABS/CAEPR 1997).⁵

The Queensland Government identifies Torres Strait Islanders in the name of its indigenous department (The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OATSIA)) but it only has specific legislation for Torres Strait Islanders residing in the Torres Strait. However, OATSIA believes that it does have a fairly full working relationship with mainland Torres Strait Islanders, primarily as a result of the Queensland Government's historical relationship with Torres Strait Islanders in the Strait (see Beckett 1987). Mainline Queensland departments also give some attention to Torres Strait Islander issues. For example, the Mackay Health District has a language program specifically for Torres Strait Islanders and reserves positions for Islanders on its advisory committees, and the Townsville Health District maintains records specifically on Torres Strait Islanders. Also, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing unit within the Queensland Department of Public Works and Housing maintains records on whether applicants for rental housing are Torres Strait Islanders. Outside Queensland, Islanders are not mentioned or recognised specifically in State/Territory government programs or policies or in their relevant indigenous departments.⁶

The overall approach of all levels of government to Torres Strait Islanders is that they make no distinction between them and Aboriginal people and encourage them to participate in all of the programs and services that are available. Indeed, government responses to the survey indicate that most State/Territory Governments perceive that there are either no, or very few, Torres Strait Islanders in their jurisdiction. In addition, there is the perception that those that do exist, manage quite well without specific programs and services. This perception is to some extent understandable, because, as noted, there are very few Islanders outside Queensland and as these mostly live in urban centres, they are relatively 'invisible'. Also, Islanders on the mainland, unlike those in the Strait and Aboriginal people, have, to date, maintained a fairly low political profile and have tended to find their way in mainland society through the labour market very much like other Australians (Beckett 1987).⁷ Further, although their socioeconomic status is lower than that of non-indigenous Australians, it is generally higher than that of Aboriginal people (Taylor and Gaminiratne 1992; ABS/CAEPR 1997). Governments therefore, probably feel that there is little need to have programs and services specifically for Torres Strait Islanders.

Torres Strait Islander responses

Islanders' responses to the survey suggest that, with the exception of business development programs,⁸ they are able to access many of the government's mainstream programs and services on the mainland although the quality of the access may be influenced by the form of contact. For example, access which depends on personal contact or by completing complex forms, such as in hospitals or at the Department of Social Security, can be influenced by whether staff are approachable and able to use simple English. It appears that people value the opportunity to meet with departmental staff and discuss issues face-to-face, rather than by letter or telephone. And, while some Islanders suggest that it is important that contact or counter staff are Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal, others appear to place more value on the staff's professionalism.

However, comments by Islanders show that they perceive that they are disadvantaged with respect to Aboriginal people in accessing government *indigenous* programs and services. For instance, despite the fact that the Queensland Government gives Islanders some recognition, Islanders believe that they are marginalised in that State's indigenous policies compared to Aboriginal people. Examples cited are that they are often not included with Aboriginal people on interview panels for State government jobs; they feel there is little Torres Strait Islander cultural content in State government training programs; and that they are not allocated reserved positions in any State government indigenous training or employment programs. If Torres Strait Islanders feel marginalised in Queensland's indigenous programs, they feel totally excluded from those in other States/Territories. For instance, because, as noted above, they are not identified by name in any of the State/Territory programs or departments, Islanders feel they are not eligible to access the indigenous programs and services.

Torres Strait Islanders also feel that they are marginalised within the ATSIC system. Here, elected regional councils decide which funding applications should be supported and Islanders believe that Aboriginal applications are favoured over their own (see also Commonwealth of Australia 1997b). Islanders also claim that regional councils have, on occasions, referred their applications to the TSRA on Thursday Island, in the belief that the TSRA is the appropriate body to deal with all programs and services for Torres Strait Islanders. This is not the case, as the TSRA is only responsible for Islanders in Torres Strait (Commonwealth of Australia 1997b).

There are, however, no good data that would reveal whether Torres Strait Islanders are less able to access indigenous programs and services than Aboriginal people. On the other hand, as noted earlier, data from the censuses suggest that the socioeconomic status of Islanders on the mainland is generally no worse than that of Aborigines. Furthermore, in the 1996 Census some 9,600 people identified as both Torres Strait Islander *and* as Aboriginal people, presumably as a result of intermarriage. The corollary of this is that these 9,600 people (about 30 per cent of mainland Torres Strait Islanders) should experience

fewer difficulties accessing indigenous programs and services and this was confirmed to an extent in the survey, that is to say, it is thought that those people who identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enjoy the best access to all indigenous programs and services.⁹ This would suggest that Torres Strait Islanders could improve their access to indigenous programs and services by increasing their links with Aboriginal people.

Torres Strait Islanders also feel that they are disadvantaged in terms of accessing land. The mainland is not their traditional territory, and so unless they marry into an Aboriginal land-owning group or can make some other arrangement with local Aboriginal land-owners, they cannot access land by recourse to traditional forms of ownership. In one case, despite protracted negotiations with land-owners and ATSIC, a Torres Strait Islander group in Western Australia have been unable to obtain any form of rights to either land or the sea for commercial purposes. Further, it seems that Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland may experience some difficulty accessing land through the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC). The ILC states that, where possible, it will aim to assist 'traditional owners (or people with traditional links to the land)' to become title-holders (ILC 1996: 15). Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland will find it hard to meet these criteria. The intent of the ILC's policy is to avoid causing conflict and tension at the regional level and so it does it not wish to 'purchase land for one group in what is the traditional country of another group' (ILC 1996: 15). Although Torres Strait Islanders are not traditional owners of land on the mainland, they may, in some instances, have fairly long-standing historical connections with certain areas. The ability of Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland to obtain land through the ILC will hinge very much on how the ILC defines notions of traditional ownership and traditional links.

Access may also be affected by some misconceptions about the role of policies. For example, some Islanders indicate that they think ATSIC is the appropriate and primary provider of programs and services for them, and so they do not attempt to access any mainstream programs or services.¹⁰ In other cases, when Islanders *do* approach ATSIC they say it is unable to provide them with information about alternative program or service providers, say, in mainstream departments. On the other hand, mainstream service providers may reject Islander applicants. For example, Islanders who have approached banks for loans have been referred by the banks to ATSIC as the appropriate lending body. Also, mainline State/Territory housing departments, have referred Islander applicants to the indigenous housing section, on the understanding that this, and not the mainstream, is where they should access their housing.

Conclusions and policy implications

In the absence of hard data, the results from the survey are ambiguous. In the main, comments from Torres Strait Islanders suggest that they enjoy reasonable access to *mainstream* programs and services and this is also the perception of

government. But other comments indicate that when they approach the mainstream, they can be referred back to the indigenous program section. Yet others suggest that some Islanders do not attempt to access the mainstream because they feel that their appropriate point of access is through ATSIC. These results suggest that some people view indigenous programs and services as replacing those in the mainstream. This is contrary to the general intention of policy which is that indigenous programs and services are supplementary to those in the mainstream (ATSIC 1997: 7, 39, 78). The implication of this is that some effort should be made to clarify—for both clients and service providers—the purpose of indigenous programs and services, and to encourage them to utilise the mainstream.

As noted, there are no hard data on Islander access to mainstream programs. Further, it is unlikely that governments will put systems in place to measure this access if for no other reason than that they have not set up such systems for the much larger total indigenous population and to do so for Islanders alone would be prohibitively expensive. It is likely, therefore, that measures of the socioeconomic status of Islanders will continue to rely on data from the national censuses and so it is important that these data are at least as accessible for Islanders as for Aboriginal people. In this regard, the commitment by the ABS to publish data specific to Torres Strait Islanders could be increased.

Similarly, all levels of government appear to operate in the belief that Torres Strait Islanders can access *indigenous* programs and services and that, therefore, they have little need to provide programs and services specifically for Islanders. In addition, they feel that there are too few Islanders to make it efficient to provide such programs and services. Islanders, meanwhile, feel that within the indigenous system they are disadvantaged and marginalised with respect to Aborigines.

This situation appears to suggest two possible policy approaches: one is to establish a system of programs and services for Islanders separate from Aboriginal people, and the other, to strengthen the position of Islanders within the existing system alongside Aboriginal people. These can be classified as the separation, and the inclusion approach, respectively.

Options regarding separation have centred around the notion of creating a distinct Commission for Islanders outside ATSIC (see Sanders and Arthur 1997).¹¹ However, this approach was not supported in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' report on Islander autonomy in 1997 (Commonwealth of Australia 1997b) on the basis that the Torres Strait Islander population is too small and dispersed to make this efficient or effective. Rather, the report takes the inclusion approach recommending that Islanders remain part of the ATSIC system but with a strengthened position. For instance, the report recommends that there should be an Islander contact staff member in each ATSIC regional office, and that each ATSIC regional council should report annually on the measures it has taken to meet Islander concerns (Commonwealth of Australia 1997b: 107–109). The report

also recommends that ATSIC develop a program which would encourage governments to develop partnerships and joint ventures with Torres Strait Islander community groups to provide assistance for them (Commonwealth of Australia 1997b: 106). Following the present survey, we would recommend that this approach should also include the identification of Torres Strait Islanders by name in government indigenous policies, programs and departments.

The survey also shows that 30 per cent of Islanders now identify as both Aboriginal people and as Torres Strait Islanders and this cross-identification and mixing appears to aid access. Therefore, increasing links between the two groups could also be beneficial. However, it is important to note that Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people are two distinct cultural groups. Islanders in the Strait enjoy majority status because they are the largest group, and the traditional inhabitants. Hence the system of indigenous programs and services in the Strait is basically an Islander system. This is not the case on the mainland. Here Aboriginal people are the cultural and numerical majority and the system of indigenous programs and services is an Aboriginal system and Torres Strait Islanders are a cultural and numerical minority. It may be that Islander access to indigenous programs and services is not lower than that for Aboriginal people. However, the survey indicates that Islanders perceive that it is lower, a perception which possibly derives from the fact that they are a minority group competing for resources with the Aboriginal majority. It is unlikely that the initiatives noted above in the inclusion approach will alter this perception, for they do not remove the competitive relationship between the two groups. It is likely, therefore, that Islanders will continue to lobby for some greater degree of separation. However, in the event that this separation does not occur, the situation could be ameliorated somewhat by reserving resources for Islanders within the ATSIC system. Islanders would then compete with each other for these resources and this might lessen any perceptions of disadvantage with respect to Aborigines at least at a regional level.

Notes

1. The names of those in the survey were provided by OTSIA.
2. For example, Aboriginal people were moved to Cape Barren Island under the *Cape Barren Island Reserve Act 1912*. These people became known as Cape Barren Islanders and even today are referred to as Islanders (see Commonwealth of Australia 1997a: 91-3).
3. The 1993 amendments to the Act changed the Regional Council into the TSRA giving it the powers of a Commission (Sanders 1994).
4. TSIAB is responsible for advising the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs on issues affecting Torres Strait Islanders nationally. The TSIAB members are appointed by the Minister. There is one from mainland Queensland; one from New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory combined; one from Victoria and Tasmania combined; one each from South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. TSIAB is chaired by ATSIC's Torres Strait zone commissioner (Sanders 1994: 15).
5. Other States/Territories were not included in this analysis because of the limitations of the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey data (see CAEPR/ABS 1997).
6. No indigenous-specific State/Territory government department outside Queensland has the words Torres Strait Islander in its title.
7. Torres Strait Islanders have a high cultural profile in mainland centres by virtue of their very attractive traditional dances and songs which they are often asked to perform at public events including the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee. However, this does not detract from the fact that at other times Islanders have a relatively low profile.
8. Several comments suggested that Torres Strait Islanders do experience difficulty accessing both mainstream and indigenous programs related to business development. Indeed, respondents were unable to cite any cases where Islanders had successfully established businesses.
9. Other Islanders who experience better access to indigenous programs and services are those who work in Aboriginal organisations or who network with Aboriginal people.
10. It must be added that Torres Strait Islanders are also aware of other reasons for accessing ATSIC, such as its concessional loans and grants.
11. Islanders did not want to be part of ATSIC when it was first established in 1989 and several Islander submissions to the 1997 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' Inquiry into greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders requested a separate commission (see Commonwealth of Australia 1997b).

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