

Torres Strait Islanders in the 2001 Census

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANU	The Australian National University
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP	Community Development Employment Project
TAFE	technical and further education
TSI	Torres Strait Islander
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority

Abstract

Every five years, the national Census of Population and Housing provides data on the demographic, social and economic characteristics of Australia's Indigenous population. In this paper a number of socioeconomic characteristics from the 2001 Census are analysed by State for Torres Strait Islanders, other Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. The primary concern has been to investigate the extent to which Islanders are approaching parity with non-Indigenous people in these regions. Individual characteristics are presented in a set of tables with accompanying description. A summary table assesses the overall status of Islanders. The paper concludes that the socioeconomic status of Islanders with respect to non-Indigenous people may have improved slightly since the 1996 Census. The socioeconomic status of Islanders varies somewhat by geography, being lower in Torres Strait and higher on the Australian mainland. Again, this varies according to the social indicators being considered. Islanders lag behind non-Indigenous people most noticeably with regard to completing Year 12 schooling, obtaining a university degree, and home ownership. This paper can be read in conjunction with *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 199*, which analysed similar data from the 1996 Census.

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Introduction

This discussion paper, which is based on 2001 Census data, is part of a CAEPR commitment to providing information on the socioeconomic status of Torres Strait Islanders (see also Altman, Arthur & Bek 1994). As such, it can be read as a follow-up to CAEPR analysis of the 1996 Census (Arthur 2000). Indeed, much of the relevant background regarding the position of Torres Strait Islanders, and their movement to and from the mainland, was published in Arthur (2000) and is not repeated here.

Data and analysis

In the 1996 and 2001 Censuses people could identify either as:

- (a) an Aboriginal person;
- (b) as a Torres Strait Islander person; or
- (c) as both a Torres Strait Islander *and* as an Aboriginal person.

In this paper groups (b) and (c) have been combined to give the counts for 'Torres Strait Islanders'.¹ Figures for this combined group are set out under the abbreviation 'TSIs' in the tables included below. Further, all the Indigenous people not defined as Torres Strait Islanders are classified here as 'other Indigenous' people and this data is set out under 'other-Indig.' in the tables. The remainder of the population is classified as non-Indigenous and this data is under 'non-Indig.' in the tables. In the text those defined above as Torres Strait Islanders are referred to as 'Islanders'.

Generally, the data are provided and described by State and Territory. However, given that the Torres Strait Islander homeland is Torres Strait and that this region is administered by the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), Torres Strait is discussed as a separate geographic region. The remainder of Queensland has been classified as 'mainland Queensland'. Those data that apply to occupations (Table 12) are given only for the whole of Australia.

The parity calculation

On the assumption that the ideal would be for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to have a similar socioeconomic status, comparisons in this paper are mostly made between Islanders and non-Indigenous people. In each table, the right hand column indicates the degree to which Islanders have reached the same status as non-Indigenous people. This is given as an indication of parity between Islanders and non-Indigenous people. The closer that figure is to 1, the closer Islanders are to achieving the same status as non-Indigenous people (i.e. parity). For example, regarding home ownership (Table 5), Islanders have almost reached parity with non-Indigenous people in Tasmania (where the ratio is 0.8) but far below parity in South Australia (where the ratio is just 0.2). These parity data are summarised in Table 16. In most cases, the tables compare the status of Islanders, other Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people.

Population in 2001

Some 43,000 Islanders were identified by the 2001 Census (Table 1). Most reside in mainland Queensland—some 18,000—and between 6,000 and 8,000 are in each of Torres Strait and New South Wales. Around 2,000 reside in each of Victoria, Tasmania, Northern Territory and South Australia. Only about 300 reside in the Australian Capital Territory. The very small numbers in States and Territories other than Queensland should be borne in mind when considering the data in this paper. This is especially the case for the Australian Capital Territory.

Islanders comprise 10 per cent of the total Indigenous population, though this proportion varies with geography. In Torres Strait, Islanders are the vast majority—94 per cent of the Indigenous population. On mainland Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria, they are 17.7, 13.7 and 11 per cent respectively of all Indigenous people. The mainland Queensland figures are a result of Islanders moving from the Torres Strait since the 1950s. However, the quite high Tasmanian figure is harder to explain, and it has been suggested that the census count in Tasmania is inaccurate, and possibly skewed by people with connections to the islands of Bass Strait filling in the census form incorrectly (Arthur 2000).

Table 1. Torres Strait Islander and other Indigenous population by State/Territory, 2001

	TSIs (n)	Proportion of total Australian TSI population (%)	Other Indig. (n)	TSI proportion of total Indig. population (%)
Torres Strait	6,734	15.5	403	94.4
Mainland Queensland	18,716	43.0	86,919	17.7
New South Wales	7,677	17.6	112,188	6.4
Australian Capital Territory	298	0.7	3,278	8.3
Victoria	2,753	6.3	22,325	11.0
Tasmania	2,167	5.0	13,606	13.7
South Australia	1,362	3.1	22,063	5.8
Western Australia	2,204	5.1	56,292	3.8
Northern Territory	1,649	3.8	49,136	3.2
Other Territories ^a	14	0.0	219	6.0
Total Australia	43,574	100.0	366,429	10.6

Notes: n = number.

a. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Change in Torres Strait Islander population, 1996–2001

The total Indigenous population increased by some 57,000 or by 16 per cent between 1996 and 2001. In the same period, the Torres Strait Islander population increased by 4,724 or 12 per cent. However, this change varied amongst that population. The number of people choosing to identify as only Torres Strait Islander actually fell by 2,698 or 9 per cent, while the number of those electing to identify as both Islander and as Aboriginal increased by 7,422 or 73 per cent (Table 2).

Table 2. Change in Indigenous populations, 1996–2001

	1996 Census (n)	2001 Census (n)	Change 1996– 2001 (n)	Change 1996–2001 (%)
Aboriginal	314,120	366,429	52,309	16.7
Torres Strait Islander	28,744	26,046	-2,698	-9.4
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	10,106	17,528	7,422	73.4
Total Torres Strait Islander	38,850	43,574	4,724	12.1
Total Indigenous	352,970	410,003	57,033	16.2

Note: n = number.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Location and identification, 1996–2001

The distribution of those identifying as both Islander and Aboriginal varies between Torres Strait and the mainland. For instance, Table 3 shows that in 1996 only 6 per cent of all Islanders in Torres Strait identified as both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal. In that census, the figure for dual identification on the mainland was 29 per cent.

The increase between 1996 and 2001 of people identifying as Islanders and Aboriginal has occurred both in Torres Strait and on the mainland. Table 3 shows that, between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of the population identifying as both Islander and Aboriginal increased from 6.0 per cent to 11.0 per cent in Torres Strait and by 29 per cent to 45 per cent on the mainland. The difference between these rates of increase should be treated with caution, as the base figures for Torres Strait are very small.

As noted, Torres Strait Islanders have been migrating to the mainland since the 1950s (Arthur 2000). The quite high proportion of those now identifying as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is probably a reflection of intermarriage between the two groups. Statistics on intermarriage have not been included in this paper. However, a change in identification between censuses suggests a

cautious approach to comparisons between censuses for the other socioeconomic data in this paper.

Table 3. Islander location and identification, 1996–2001

	Identifying as only TSI (n1)	Identifying as both TSI and Aboriginal (n2)	Total n1+n2	n2 as proportion of total n1+n2 (%)
Torres Strait, 1996	5,396	364	5,760	6.0
Torres Strait, 2001	5,362	638	6,000	11.0
Mainland Australia, 1996	23,348	9,742	33,090	29.0
Mainland Australia, 2001	20,684	16,890	37,574	45.0

Note: n = number.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Median individual weekly incomes

Table 4. Individual median weekly incomes in dollars, 2001

	Other Indig.	TSIs	Non-Indig.	TSI and non-Indig. parity
Torres Strait	194	251	535	0.5
Mainland Queensland	274	304	396	0.8
New South Wales	279	307	435	0.7
Australian Capital Territory	445	550	587	0.9
Victoria	318	304	422	0.7
Tasmania	285	269	344	0.8
South Australia	234	280	378	0.7
Western Australia	230	326	422	0.8
Northern Territory	185	393	582	0.7
Other Territories ^a	191	146	558	n.a.
Australia	245	295	419	0.7

Notes: a. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Nationally, the individual incomes of all Indigenous people are lower than for non-Indigenous people. Islanders have similar, though generally higher, individual incomes compared to other Indigenous people (Table 4). Islander incomes are highest in the Australian Capital Territory (by a significant amount) and they are lowest in the Torres Strait (by a very significant amount). In no region are Islander incomes higher than those of non-Indigenous people and in Torres Strait they are only half those of non-Indigenous people. Even in those areas where Islanders are approaching parity in incomes with non-Indigenous people, the dollar difference

between the two groups is substantial. For instance, if we consider Western Australia, although the parity ratio is 0.8, Islander incomes are still almost \$100.00 lower than those of non-Indigenous people.

Home ownership

In this paper, home ownership refers to that group of people who have purchased or are presently purchasing their house/residence. Nationally, Islanders are only half as likely to be home owners than are other Indigenous people (Table 5). Indeed, compared to the other two groups examined in this paper, Islander home ownership is extremely low (at about one-quarter the rate of non-Indigenous home ownership). Islander home ownership varies considerably across the country. It is much higher in Tasmania than in other places and is extremely low in Torres Strait and the Northern Territory, though this is somewhat similar to the pattern for non-Indigenous people. Islander home ownership is also low in mainland Queensland and this correlates with the finding that Islanders tend to rent government housing in Queensland (Arthur 2000). With the exception of Tasmania, the gap between Islander and non-Indigenous home ownership is extreme. With the exception of Tasmania, the parity ratio ranges from a low of 0.1 in the Northern Territory to a high of just 0.5 in the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

Table 5. The proportion of all dwellings owned or being purchased, 2001

	Other Indig. dwellings (%)	TSI dwellings (%)	Non-Indig. dwellings (%)	TSI and non-Indig. parity
Torres Strait	11.8	7.0	13.7	0.5
Mainland Queensland	32.4	14.9	67.3	0.2
New South Wales	37.1	27.2	69.1	0.4
Australian Capital Territory	41.0	36.7	71.1	0.5
Victoria	42.7	38.8	74.7	0.5
Tasmania	56.4	60.5	72.9	0.8
South Australia	31.8	15.7	71.9	0.2
Western Australia	31.5	13.9	72.2	0.2
Northern Territory	21.5	5.1	52.9	0.1
Other Territories ^a	13.6	0.0	37.0	n.a.
Australia	35.5	16.4	70.7	0.2

Notes: a. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Employment

Table 6. Rate of employment by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSI and non- Indig. parity
Torres Strait	53.5	58.0	68.9	0.8
Mainland Queensland	42.6	41.3	57.7	0.7
New South Wales	39.2	42.7	57.5	0.7
Australian Capital Territory	57.5	60.3	68.1	0.9
Victoria	44.7	46.2	58.8	0.8
Tasmania	47.5	39.7	52.8	0.8
South Australia	37.8	43.2	55.8	0.8
Western Australia	40.4	48.3	60.0	0.8
Northern Territory	30.6	52.3	71.1	0.7
Other Territories ^b	32.9	27.3	67.6	0.4
Australia	39.7	45.4	58.1	0.8

Note: a. Rate of employment is those in specified group aged 15 and over employed, divided by the total population in specified group aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Table 7. Proportion in labour force, by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	Percentage point difference between TSI and non-Indig.
Torres Strait	59.3	61.2	71.3	0.9
Mainland Queensland	53.7	54.1	62.7	0.9
New South Wales	51.2	53.2	61.8	0.9
Australian Capital Territory	66.5	70.4	71.7	1.0
Victoria	54.6	55.0	63.0	0.9
Tasmania	58.8	51.4	58.5	0.9
South Australia	47.7	51.3	60.3	0.9
Western Australia	49.9	58.6	64.7	0.9
Northern Territory	35.4	60.3	74.8	0.8
Other Territories ^b	51.3	54.5	72.7	n.a.
Australia	49.8	55.4	62.6	0.9

Notes: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Nationally, Islanders are slightly more likely to be employed than are other Indigenous people (Table 6). However, both of these groups are much less likely to be employed than are non-Indigenous people. The rate of employment amongst Islanders is higher in Torres Strait than on the mainland, possibly due to a high level of Community Development Employment Project² (CDEP) participation in Torres Strait. Islander employment on the mainland is highest in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory and is lowest in Tasmania.

Labour force participation

Nationally, Islanders participate in the labour force at a slightly higher rate than other Indigenous people but both of these groups are less likely to be in the labour force than are non-Indigenous people (Table 7). The Islander participation rate is highest in the Australian Capital Territory and lowest in South Australia.

Private sector employment

Private sector employment excludes employment in CDEP and employment at any level of government. Nationally, Islanders are more likely to be in this form of employment than are other Indigenous people but both groups are considerably less likely to be employed in the private sector than are non-Indigenous people (Table 8). Islanders on mainland Australia are much more likely to be employed in the private sector than are those in Torres Strait. Again, this is probably due to the relatively small private sector in Torres Strait compared to mainland Australia.

Table 8. Proportion in private sector employment by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSI and non-Indig. parity
Torres Strait	9.5	9.6	32.7	0.3
Mainland Queensland	23.7	25.7	46.3	0.6
New South Wales	25.1	31.7	47.1	0.7
Australian Capital Territory	26.6	27.6	39.2	0.7
Victoria	32.3	35.7	49.2	0.7
Tasmania	37.4	33.8	41.6	0.8
South Australia	18.1	32.9	46.0	0.7
Western Australia	17.6	33.6	49.5	0.7
Northern Territory	7.7	28.3	48.3	0.6
Other Territories ^b	16.4	27.3	36.3	n.a.
Australia	21.6	26.3	47.4	0.6

Notes: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Graduate degrees

Table 9. Proportion with a graduate degree by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSI and non- Indig. parity
Torres Strait	1.1	1.1	15.5	0.1
Mainland Queensland	2.2	2.3	8.8	0.3
New South Wales	2.6	2.4	10.7	0.2
Australian Capital Territory	10.8	7.5	17.9	0.4
Victoria	4.1	2.7	11.1	0.2
Tasmania	2.8	0.7	8.0	0.1
South Australia	2.1	1.7	8.5	0.2
Western Australia	1.8	2.6	9.9	0.3
Northern Territory	0.8	2.7	11.0	0.2
Other Territories ^b	0.0	0.0	9.4	n.a.
Australia	2.3	2.1	10.2	0.2

Notes: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Table 10. Proportion attending university and other tertiary institutions by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSI and non- Indig. parity
Torres Strait	0.0	1.1	3.2	0.3
Mainland Queensland	2.9	3.3	5.1	0.6
New South Wales	3.1	2.3	4.8	0.5
Australian Capital Territory	9.3	7.5	9.3	0.8
Victoria	4.2	3.9	5.4	0.7
Tasmania	3.1	1.6	3.9	0.4
South Australia	2.6	2.8	4.3	0.7
Western Australia	3.0	3.8	5.1	0.7
Northern Territory	1.4	5.8	5.6	1.0
Other Territories ^b	2.0	0.0	2.8	n.a.
Australia	2.9	2.9	5.1	0.6

Notes: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Nationally, Islanders and other Indigenous people are equally as likely to have graduate degrees (Table 9). However, both are much less likely to have degrees than are non-Indigenous people. Islanders on the mainland are more likely to have a degree than are those in Torres Strait, except in Tasmania. Islanders living in the Australian Capital Territory are considerably more likely to have a degree than are Islanders living in other places. This is probably due to the fact that qualified Islanders have moved to the Australian Capital Territory to take up employment in the public service (Arthur 2000).

Attending university

Nationally, Islanders attend universities at the same rate as other Indigenous people, but at a significantly lower rate than non-Indigenous people (Table 10). Mainland Islanders are much more likely to attend university than are those in Torres Strait. This is explained partly by the fact that in Torres Strait people only have access to university annexes or distance education. University attendance for Islanders is highest in the Australian Capital Territory.

Attending TAFE

Table 11. Proportion attending TAFE by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig (%)	TSI and non- Indig. parity
Torres Strait	5.1	4.3	2.6	1.6
Mainland Queensland	3.6	4.7	2.7	1.7
New South Wales	6.9	5.4	3.9	1.4
Australian Capital Territory	4.3	7.0	4.2	1.6
Victoria	6.5	5.0	3.2	1.5
Tasmania	7.8	7.3	3.9	1.9
South Australia	7.6	4.7	3.2	1.5
Western Australia	4.7	4.5	3.7	1.2
Northern Territory	1.3	2.8	2.5	1.1
Other Territories ^b	0.0	0.0	1.9	n.a.
Australia	5.0	4.9	3.4	1.4

Notes: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Nationally, Islanders attend technical and further education (TAFE) at the same rate as other Indigenous people (Table 11) but at a much higher rate than non-Indigenous people. Their attendance is highest in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory and lowest in the Northern Territory. Comparing Tables 10, 11

and 12, suggests a correlation between the type of institution attended and people's occupations. That is, many Indigenous people attend TAFE and have parity with non-Indigenous people in trades-related occupations. But, they attend university less and do not have parity with non-Indigenous people in the professions and managerial occupations, where a university education may possibly be a prerequisite.

Field of occupation

The data in this section apply to Australia as a whole. Table 12 shows the rate at which people have occupations in fields that can be specifically identified in the 2001 Census. The data indicate that Islanders and other Indigenous people are likely to have many of the same occupations. The data also show that Islanders are much more likely to be labourers and transport workers than are non-Indigenous people. Compared to non-Indigenous people, Islanders have parity in trades-related occupations but are much less likely to be found in the professional or managerial occupations.

Table 12. Proportion employed in each occupational field, Australia, 2001^a

Occupational field	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSIs and non-Indig. parity
Labourers and related workers	24.9	23.3	8.6	2.7
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	19.0	19.0	16.8	1.1
Tradespersons and related workers	10.5	12.2	12.5	1.0
Intermediate production and transport workers	10.0	11.0	8.2	1.3
Professionals	11.8	9.9	18.7	0.5
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	8.9	9.9	9.7	1.0
Associate professionals	8.9	9.2	12.0	0.8
Managers and administrators	4.0	3.8	9.5	0.4
Advanced clerical and service workers	2.0	1.7	3.8	0.4

Note: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.
Source: ABS Census 2001.

Year 12 schooling

Table 13. Proportion who have completed Year 12, by State/Territory, 2001^a

	Other Indig. (%)	TSI (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSI and non-Indig. parity
Torres Strait	20.0	28.0	42.7	0.7
Mainland Queensland	21.5	26.8	38.6	0.7
New South Wales	16.0	17.9	39.9	0.4
Australian Capital Territory	36.4	45.2	59.8	0.8
Victoria	21.2	20.2	40.4	0.5
Tasmania	15.9	9.7	28.4	0.3
South Australia	14.8	16.5	35.0	0.5
Western Australia	14.1	17.2	40.2	0.4
Northern Territory	6.7	20.6	41.5	0.5
Other Territories ^b	14.5	27.3	36.4	n.a.
Australia	16.1	23.0	39.5	0.6

Notes: a. Refers to the population aged 15 and over.

b. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Table 14. Proportion of persons using a computer by State/Territory, 2001

	Other Indig. (%)	TSIs (%)	Non-Indig. (%)	TSI and non-Indig. parity
Torres Strait	3.2	4.5	32.0	0.1
Mainland Queensland	19.0	16.9	43.5	0.4
New South Wales	21.7	22.0	43.4	0.5
Australian Capital Territory	41.0	44.6	58.6	0.8
Victoria	28.4	26.9	45.1	0.6
Tasmania	32.5	23.2	39.0	0.6
South Australia	16.9	20.4	42.2	0.5
Western Australia	12.2	20.9	46.0	0.5
Northern Territory	5.0	17.5	43.1	0.4
Other Territories ^a	11.0	0.0	36.4	n.a.
Australia	18.0	17.3	44.1	0.4

Notes: a. Refers to Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australia's other external territories.

Source: ABS Census 2001.

Nationally, Islanders are considerably more likely to complete Year 12 schooling than are other Indigenous people (Table 13). However, Islanders are much less likely to complete Year 12 schooling than non-Indigenous people. The highest rate of Year 12 completion is in the Australian Capital Territory and the lowest is in Tasmania.

Computer use

The 2001 Census was the first census to include a question on computer use. Nationally, Islanders and other Indigenous people use computers to about the same extent, but are much less likely to do this than non-Indigenous people (Table 14).

The highest rates of use occur amongst Islanders on the mainland and the lowest rate amongst Islanders in Torres Strait. This may reflect patterns of residence. People on the mainland tend to live in urban areas where access to computers will be greater than in Torres Strait where many people live in small remote island communities (Arthur 2000). The highest rate of use is amongst Islanders in the Australian Capital Territory.

Summary and discussion

The composition of the Torres Strait Islander population changed between 1996 and 2001, with a greater proportion of people electing to identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This change was greatest on mainland Australia. This is not surprising because Islanders have been migrating to the mainland since the 1950s and sometimes intermarry with Aboriginal people there (Arthur 2000). It is to be expected that this trend will continue.

In summarising the remainder of the data, I have selected the ratio of 0.7 as the figure that might demonstrate the extent to which Islanders are approaching parity with non-Indigenous people. This is the same ratio used in the analysis of the 1996 data (Arthur 2000). Using this ratio, the characteristics and the locations in which parity is being approached are shown in the shaded boxes in Table 15.

In terms of location, Islanders are doing best in the Australian Capital Territory where they are approaching parity in all indicators except obtaining degrees and home ownership. We should remember however, that the population in the Australian Capital Territory is very small (Table 1). The situation in other regions is more mixed and no other single region stands out.

Several socioeconomic characteristics have been analysed in this paper for change over the period 1996–2001. In all regions except Torres Strait, Islanders are approaching parity in individual incomes, though the difference in dollar terms is still quite significant. The Torres Strait figure almost certainly relates to the high level of CDEP employment there. The Islander employment data are also quite encouraging: Islanders are approaching parity in all regions in their rates of

employment and labour force participation. In all areas, except Torres Strait, mainland Queensland and the Northern Territory Islanders are approaching parity in private sector employment. As discussed earlier, the low Torres Strait figure for private sector employment is possibly the result of the limited labour market there. Conversely, the higher mainland figures are probably due to a more developed labour market. A further explanation for the higher mainland figures is that mainlanders have a higher propensity to live in towns and cities where the labour market is the most developed (Arthur 2000).

Fair results are also evident for attendance at university. Again, parity is closest in several mainland States, namely the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. On the other hand, Islanders lag far behind non-Indigenous people in obtaining tertiary qualifications. Similarly, Islanders are approaching parity completion of Year 12 schooling in only three locations (Torres Strait, mainland Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory). Apart from the Australian Capital Territory, Islanders have a much lower rate of computer usage than non-Indigenous people and this gap is especially large in Torres Strait.

Islander home ownership is very low in all areas except Tasmania and as explained at the start of this paper, the data for Tasmania are somewhat questionable. Although it is dangerous to compare data from just two concurrent censuses, especially when dealing with such small populations, the level of Islander home ownership does not seem to have increased since 1996 and may have dropped slightly in some regions.

Not all of the characteristics in Table 15 were dealt with in the analysis of the 1996 Census in Arthur (2000), and so a comprehensive assessment of change between 1996 and 2001 is not possible here. Those characteristics that were dealt with by Arthur (2000) and for which Islanders were approaching parity then, are marked with an asterisk in Table 16. These data suggest that the position of Islanders, compared to non-Indigenous people, is improving in some cases and holding in many others. For instance, Islanders are now approaching parity with regard to the rate of employment in Torres Strait and the Northern Territory; and approaching parity in university attendance in South Australia and the Northern Territory. Thus, in general, some optimism is warranted. However, I would propose that, if parity is the goal, then Islanders, their organisations and government give some thought to how to improve Year 12 completion rates, success in obtaining graduate degrees, and the likelihood of home ownership.

The status of Islanders is not appreciably higher in mainland Queensland than in other States. Though attendance at Year 12 is high, private sector employment is not high and home ownership there is very low indeed. Arthur (2000) showed that Islanders in mainland Queensland were very likely both to work for the government and to rent government housing. Queensland is the Islanders' home State, and that the Queensland State government is the one with which they have the longest and most enduring relationship. Arthur (2000) noted that Queensland was the only State making special provision for Islanders in its policies and

programs. However, the impression from the data here and in Arthur (2000), is that Islanders in Queensland remain slightly more dependent on the State government than they do in other States. Though generalisations based purely on census data must be treated with caution, it seems possible that the apparently lower dependency on governments in other States is because Islanders there have to make their own way without additional government assistance (see Arthur 1998).

In the early 1990s it was suggested that the socioeconomic status of Islanders lay about mid-way between that of Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people (Taylor & Gaminiratne 1992). It is harder to see such a strong distinction in the 2001 Census data. Table 16 summarises the data contained in the body of this paper, comparing Islanders and other Indigenous people for the whole of Australia. The shaded cells show where Islanders presently have a higher status than do other Indigenous people. Certainly Islanders have a higher status than other Indigenous people in the various areas of the labour market, and in Year 12 schooling, and they have a slightly higher individual median income, though the difference is not great (see shaded areas in Table 16). In several areas there is no appreciable difference between the two groups, though in area of home ownership other Indigenous people are way ahead of Islanders. However, comparing these data with those from pre-1996 Census is fraught. As noted at the start, the method of identification changed in the 1996 Census (and this new method was continued in 2001). Therefore, the groups that formed the basis of the 1992 analysis in Taylor and Gaminiratne (1992) did not have the same make-up as those counted in the 2001 Census. Nonetheless, the data in Table 16 suggest that Islanders are at the same or higher rates for the various socioeconomic indicators than are other Indigenous people, except in relation to home ownership. Again, though census data can provide only a partial analysis of any social and economic situation, the slightly improved position enjoyed by Islanders according to 2001 Census data, may reflect the effects 50 years of migration to mainland towns and cities.

Table 15. Parity ratios for Islanders, 2001

	Median individual income	Home owner -ship	Employment	Labour force participation	Private sector employment	Graduate degree	Attending university	Attending TAFE	Year 12 complete	Computer use
T. Strait	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.9	0.3	0.1	0.3	1.6	0.7	0.1
Main/Qld	0.8	0.2	0.7*	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.6	1.7	0.7	0.4
NSW	0.7	0.4	0.7*	0.9	0.7*	0.2	0.5	1.4	0.4	0.5
ACT	0.9	0.5	0.9*	1.0	0.7*	0.4	0.8*	1.6	0.8	0.8
VIC	0.7	0.5	0.8*	0.9	0.7*	0.2	0.7	1.5	0.5	0.6
TAS	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.1	0.4	1.9	0.3	0.6
SA	0.7	0.2	0.8*	0.9	0.7*	0.2	0.7*	1.5	0.5	0.5
WA	0.8	0.2	0.8*	0.9	0.7*	0.3	0.7*	1.2	0.4	0.5
NT	0.7	0.1	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.2	1.0	1.1	0.5	0.4
Australia	0.7	0.2	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.2	0.6	1.4	0.6	0.4

Notes: 1. The shaded cells indicate where Islanders are approaching parity with non-Indigenous people.

2. An asterisk indicates where Islanders were approaching parity according to the 1996 Census (see Arthur 2000).

Source: The data are derived from tables in the body of this paper.

Table 16. National rates for selected characteristics, Islanders, other Indigenous, and non-Indigenous people, Australia, 2001

	Other Indig. rate (%)	TSI rate (%)	Non-Indig. rate (%)
Median individual income	\$245	\$295	\$419
Home ownership	36	16	71
Employment	40	45	58
Labour force participation	50	55	63
Private sector employment	22	26	47
Graduate degrees	2	2	10
Attending university	3	3	5
Attending TAFE	5	5	3
Year 12 schooling	16	23	40
Computer use	18	17	44

Notes: 1. The shaded cells show where Islanders have a higher status than other Indigenous people.
 2. Median incomes are shown in dollars, all other cells show rates.

Source: The data are derived from the tables in the body of the paper.

Notes

1. This new form of identification makes it impossible to compare the 1996 or 2001 data with data from earlier censuses.
2. This is an Indigenous-specific 'work for the dole' scheme which was established in 1979.

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