

Careers and Aspirations: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999–2003

W.S. Arthur, J.P. Hughes, V. McGrath and E. Wasaga

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Professor Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR
The Australian National University
June 2004

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**CAREERS AND ASPIRATIONS:
YOUNG TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS, 1999–2003**

**W.S. ARTHUR, J.P. HUGHES, V. MCGRATH
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Bill Arthur is a Research Fellow and John Hughes is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University. Victor McGrath is a consultant in Torres Strait and Elizah Wasaga was, at the time of the 2003 survey, at the Torres Strait Regional Employment Centre.

FOREWORD

In 1998, The Australian National University (on behalf of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)) and the Department of Family and Community Services (Indigenous Policy Unit (IPU)) signed a five-year research agreement. As part of this agreement, CAEPR and IPU negotiated to devise a research project to explore the aspirations of young Indigenous people in remote regions. The resultant project consisted largely of an analysis of data obtained from a standard survey of a sample of Indigenous males and females aged between 15 and 24 years in Torres Strait. The study planned to survey this same sample at two different periods over the life of the project.

The first survey was carried out in late 1999 and resulted in three interrelated CAEPR Discussion Papers, No. 205, No. 206 and No. 207. These deal respectively with the job searching strategies, career aspirations, and education and training issues amongst young Torres Strait Islanders. This present paper is the final one of the project and represents the results of the second survey carried out in 2003. All four papers are related and readers are encouraged to consider them as a set.

Torres Strait Islanders Josephine David-Petero, Victor McGrath and Elizah Wasaga assisted CAEPR with the interviews in Torres Strait. Such collaboration is highly valued and represents an important element in CAEPR's Indigenous Engagement Strategy. Additional collaboration also occurred, of course, between the researchers and the young Torres Strait Islanders who greatly facilitated the research by agreeing to be interviewed.

Professor Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR
June 2004

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANU	The Australian National University
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority

ABSTRACT

Material on the careers and aspirations of Indigenous young people is limited. This paper presents some such material from Torres Strait. In 1999, 105 Indigenous people aged between 15 and 24 years were interviewed about their aspirations. A proportion of these people were reinterviewed in 2003 and this paper presents the results. The principal issues covered include the perceptions of young people of commercial fishing as a career, the factors that helped or hindered people in achieving their aspirations between 1999 and 2003, and the extent to which they use opportunities on the mainland to further their aspirations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Two Torres Strait Islanders provided assistance with the project in Torres Strait in 2003. Elizah Wasaga (of the Torres Strait Regional Employment Committee) helped carry out interviews on Thursday Island and Victor McGrath organised and carried out the interviews on Badu Island. In CAEPR, John Hughes prepared a database and analysed the data. While acknowledging the involvement of the above, any errors in the text are the responsibility of the principal author (Bill Arthur).

Robert Levitus, Jon Altman, Boyd Hunter, Nicolas Peterson, and Will Sanders provided useful comments on a draft of the paper. Frances Morphy edited the paper and prepared it for publication, and Melissa Johns proofread the final version.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, a sample of 105 young Indigenous people aged 15 to 24 residing in Torres Strait were interviewed about their career aspirations.¹ The results of the interviews were documented in three CAEPR Discussion Papers (Arthur & David-Petero 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). People were questioned about—amongst other things—what they were doing, what they thought they would like to do in the future, what might help them achieve their aims, and what might hinder them. During 2003, 59 of these people were interviewed again to determine if they had achieved their aims and what might have helped or hindered them in doing this. It was noted in 1999 that no one said they wanted a career in commercial fishing.

Since fishing is an important industry in Torres Strait, questions on this topic were included in the 2003 interviews. Other research has suggested that Torres Strait Islanders move quite extensively between Torres Strait and the mainland (Beckett 1987; Taylor & Arthur 1992). The 2003 interviews included questions aimed at determining the extent to which this movement is associated with people's careers and aspirations. This paper documents the results of the 2003 reinterviews (see Appendix A for a typical 2003 questionnaire).

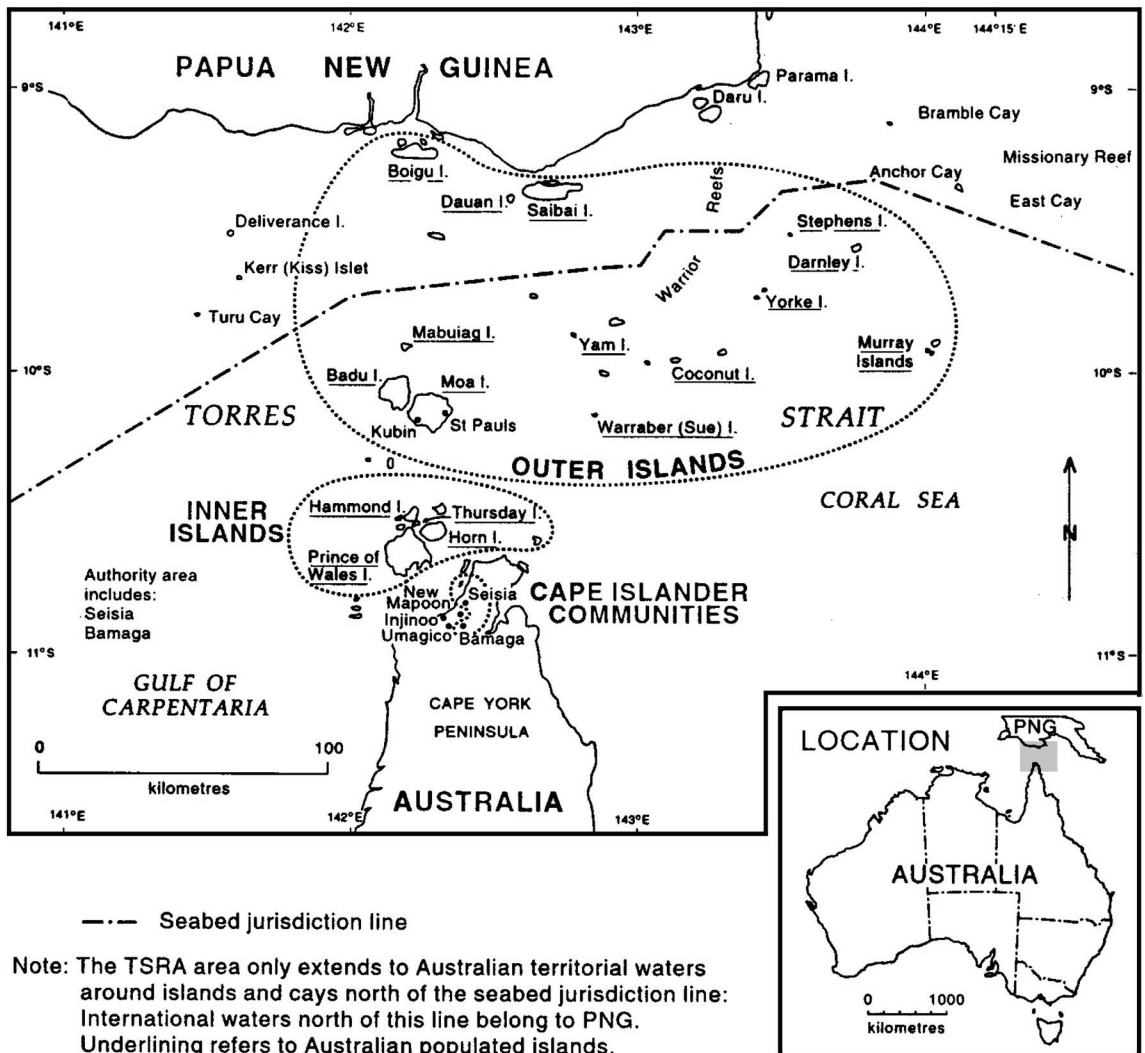
THE SAMPLE

The sample of 105 people interviewed in 1999 was structured so as to give a reasonable spread across the age distribution (15–24) and to include equal numbers of males and females (see Appendix B for details of the sample in 1999). The sample also tried to accommodate social and economic differences across the region. Although Torres Strait is recognised as a region it is not homogeneous socially, economically or politically (Arthur & McGrath 1990). The 17 inhabited islands each have their own characteristics and they also form clusters based on a variety of criteria such as traditional language, administration and economy. A distinction is also made between the Strait's 'Inner Islands' and 'Outer Islands' (Fig. 1).² In Torres Strait, the Inner Islands include Thursday Island, the regional service centre. The Inner Islands also contain the retail and wholesale outlets, government offices, and the majority of the region's population and non-Indigenous residents. On Outer Islands are small Indigenous communities where the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, commercial fishing, subsistence activities and some limited employment with Island Councils form the economy.³

In an attempt to capture any difference in aspirations between the Inner and Outer Islands, the original sample of 105 people was split almost equally between Thursday Island (an Inner Island) and Badu Island (an Outer Island). Badu was selected because it has a reasonably large population (approximately 530) making it possible to locate 50 or so people between 15 and 24 years old (Appendix B).

Of the original 105 people interviewed in 1999, 59 were interviewed again in 2003 when they were aged between 19 and 28 years. Of these, 23 were on Thursday Island and 36 on Badu Island (Table 1).⁴ There were 30 women and 29 men. One reason that only 59 of the original 105 were interviewed in 2003 was that many of the 1999 respondents were no longer on either Thursday Island or Badu Island.⁵ The issue of mobility will

Fig. 1. Torres Strait Region



receive attention below. Because only 59 people were interviewed it was decided to aggregate the data for this paper rather than to discuss males and females and Badu Islanders and Thursday Islanders separately. However, where the data showed a strong pattern based on gender or location, this is highlighted in the text.

People's aspirations in 1999 are discussed in some detail in Arthur and David-Petero (2000b) and that discussion is not repeated here. The general industry categories into which they fell are shown in Fig. 2.

Table 1. Respondents to the survey in 2003			
	Thursday Is.	Badu Is.	Total
In Torres Strait, and interviewed in 2003	23	36	59
In Torres Strait, and unable to be interviewed in 2003	19	8	27
On mainland, and unable to be interviewed in 2003	12	7	19
No. originally interviewed in 1999	54	51	105

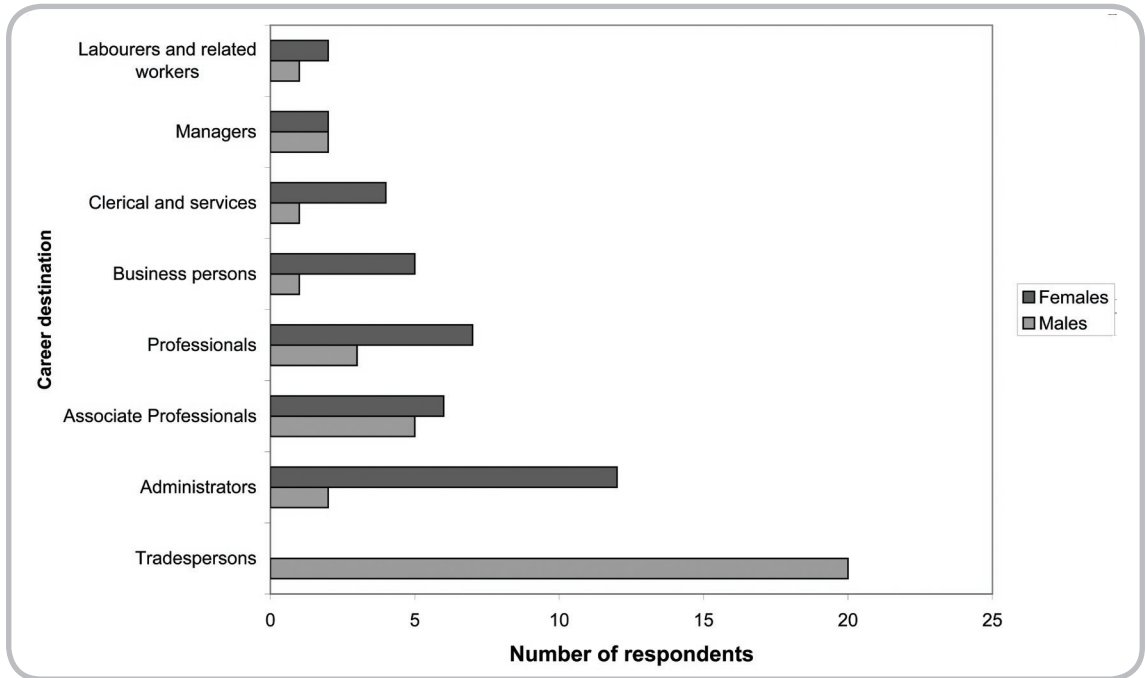
Though many people were working on CDEP which would fall into the category 'labourers and related workers', many aspired to work in trades and to jobs related to administration (Arthur & David-Petero 2000a). Males preferred jobs related to trades while females preferred those to do with administration.

Fifty-five of the 59 people interviewed classified themselves as employed including those working on CDEP. Of those employed, 90 per cent said they were very or somewhat satisfied with their work. People found satisfaction in jobs that were interesting, and which involved learning new and different tasks and skills. In addition they seemed to like jobs that involved a degree of social interaction, for example, meeting or dealing with other people. Understandably, a satisfying job was also one that interested the employee: women working in childcare centres enjoyed working with children. Jobs that provided little job satisfaction were described as boring. The majority of the jobs described in this way were in CDEP. These are similar to findings in 1999 (see Arthur & David-Petero 2000b).

FACTORS THAT HELPED THE RESPONDENTS TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS, 1999–2003

People had short-term goals or aspirations in 1999 (see Arthur & David-Petero 2000b). By interviewing them again in 2003 it was possible to see if these had been met and what helped them achieve their goal. Of the 59 people interviewed in 2003, 54 had had identified a short-term goal in 1999. Of these, 28 said in 2003 that they had managed to achieve their goal. The factors that people thought helped them achieve their goals are shown in Fig. 3. Assistance from 'family and friends' predominates. This included help from immediate family as well as from uncles and aunts. In some case these were relatives who already had jobs and who could provide some advice about careers and positions available. This is similar to one finding in 1999 (see Arthur & David-Petero 2000a), and mirrors findings from a recent study of Indigenous job-searching techniques (see Gray & Hunter 2000). Data from 1999 also suggested that young people who had at least one parent working in a mainstream job (not in CDEP) were slightly more likely to be clear about their vocation.

The second most helpful category of person can be classified as 'mentors'. These included schoolteachers, bosses and employers. Training and help from the Community Council were also significant factors. In some

Fig. 2. Preferred career destinations, 1999

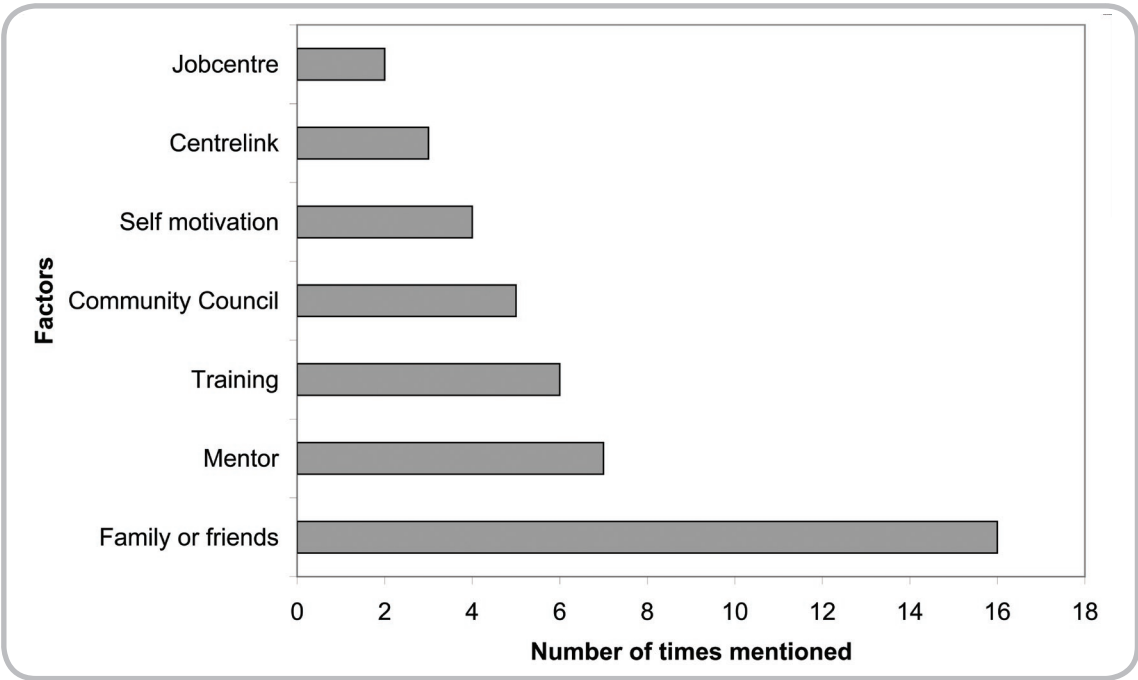
Source: Arthur & David-Petero (2000b: 27).

Note: The categories shown follow generally, but not exactly, those used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

respects the categories of 'family and friends', and 'mentor' can be aggregated as they both represent assistance through personal contact and social relationships. This can be contrasted with the degree to which people mentioned Centrelink and the Jobcentre⁶ as places where they would get assistance. What seemed to emerge from both the 1999 and the 2003 interviews was that people valued information about careers from people who had direct knowledge about them, rather than from institutions or officers whose role might be more to 'place' people in courses. Without being completely decisive, when taken together the 1999 and 2003 findings tend to suggest that contact with or access to relatives or friends in the mainstream labour market may increase the chance of young people being able to identify and further their work career.

People were also asked what they thought might help them get the job they wanted in the long term (i.e. by the time they were 30 years old). Most commonly people thought that post school qualifications, including apprenticeships and attending university would help them, as would assistance from their families. People did not think that the Jobcentre or Centrelink would be very helpful. People's perceptions of the importance of qualifications mirrors results from 1999 (see Arthur and David-Petero 2000b, 2000c).

Fig. 3. People and factors that helped respondents to achieve their goals, 1999–2003

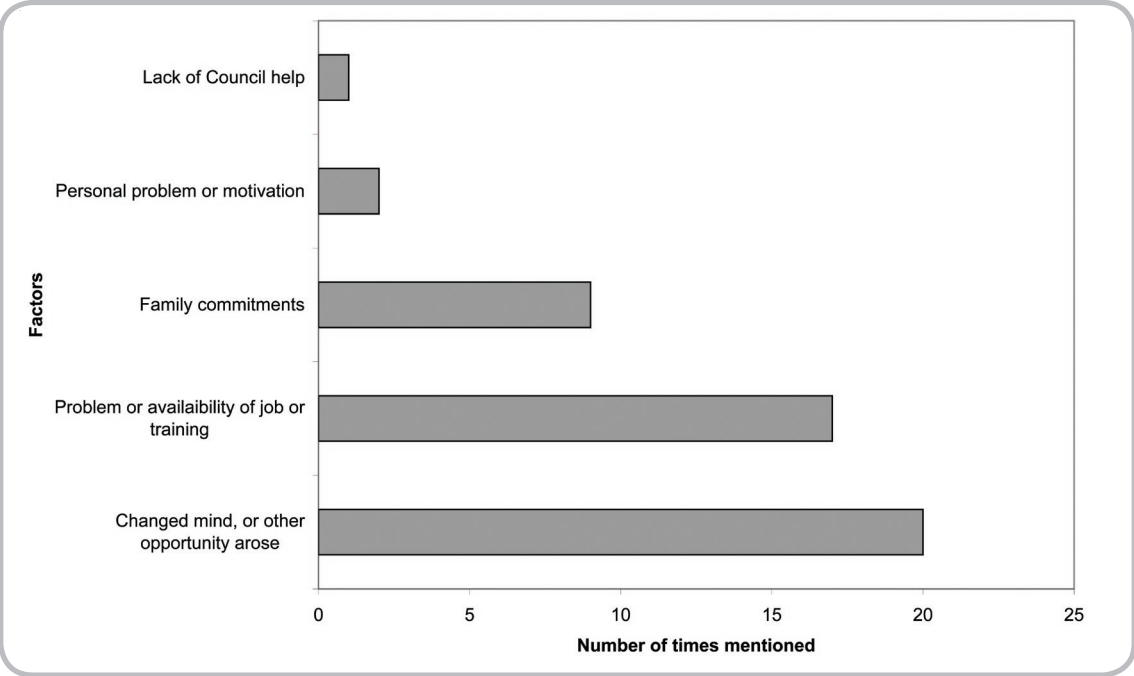


FACTORS THAT HINDERED THE RESPONDENTS FROM ACHIEVING THEIR GOALS, 1999–2003

Fig. 4 shows the factors that people felt hindered them from achieving the goal that they had in 1999. The most common were either that they changed their mind about what they wanted to do or that another opportunity presented itself to them, and they took it. This can be viewed quite positively—it represents them achieving a goal, just a different one from their original one. On the other hand, it could also indicate that they were not sure of what they really wanted to do in the future and so did not have a clear idea of their career. The former interpretation seems more likely to be correct for Torres Strait, where job and career options are quite limited. In such an environment, it is commendable that many young people seem to take any opportunity that presents itself, which is what Fig. 4 suggests. Gray and Hunter also found that Indigenous people were likely to take whatever job opportunity was presented to them (2000: 45).

Fig. 4 also shows that problems relating to the availability of jobs or training were likely to have hindered people from achieving the goal they had identified in 1999. People who gave this type of response included those for whom the job or the training place (e.g. an apprenticeship) that they wanted was unavailable. However, others referred to a training problem of a different kind. In 1999, a significant amount of

Fig. 4. People and factors that hindered respondents from achieving their goals, 1999–2003



Note: Some people mentioned more than one factor.

Table 2. Characteristics of preferred 'workmates', 1999	
Characteristic	%
Anyone	34
Friends, family, Islanders	30
People with skills, who can help me	21
People who are approachable and able to communicate ^a	14
Self	1
Total	100
No. of responses	113
Source: Arthur & David-Petero (2000b).	
Notes: a. Including those who know Island 'cultural ways'.	

infrastructure, including community housing, was being put in place on Badu Island and the Community Council had established several apprenticeships. These included apprenticeships in mechanics and carpentry. Of those interviewed in 1999, seven were apprentice mechanics or carpenters. The goal for these people had been to continue or complete their apprenticeship. In four cases this did not happen.⁷ The reason given in the 2003 interviews was that problems had developed between the apprentices and the instructing tradesmen and so they broke their apprenticeships. In 1999 we noted that although a significant proportion of people indicated they could work with anyone, many of the responses indicated that a valued workmate was someone with special qualities including approachability and the ability to communicate (see Table 2). It would seem that several people left their apprenticeships because although the tradesmen may have had the necessary technical or practical skills, the apprentices thought they were not approachable and they could not communicate with them. In areas like Torres Strait, apprenticeships and tradesmen are few and it is likely that several apprentices will be attached to one tradesman. Therefore, if the relationship does not work the impact can be significant (in all fairness we must add that the survey did not canvass the tradesmen's accounts of why people broke their apprenticeships).

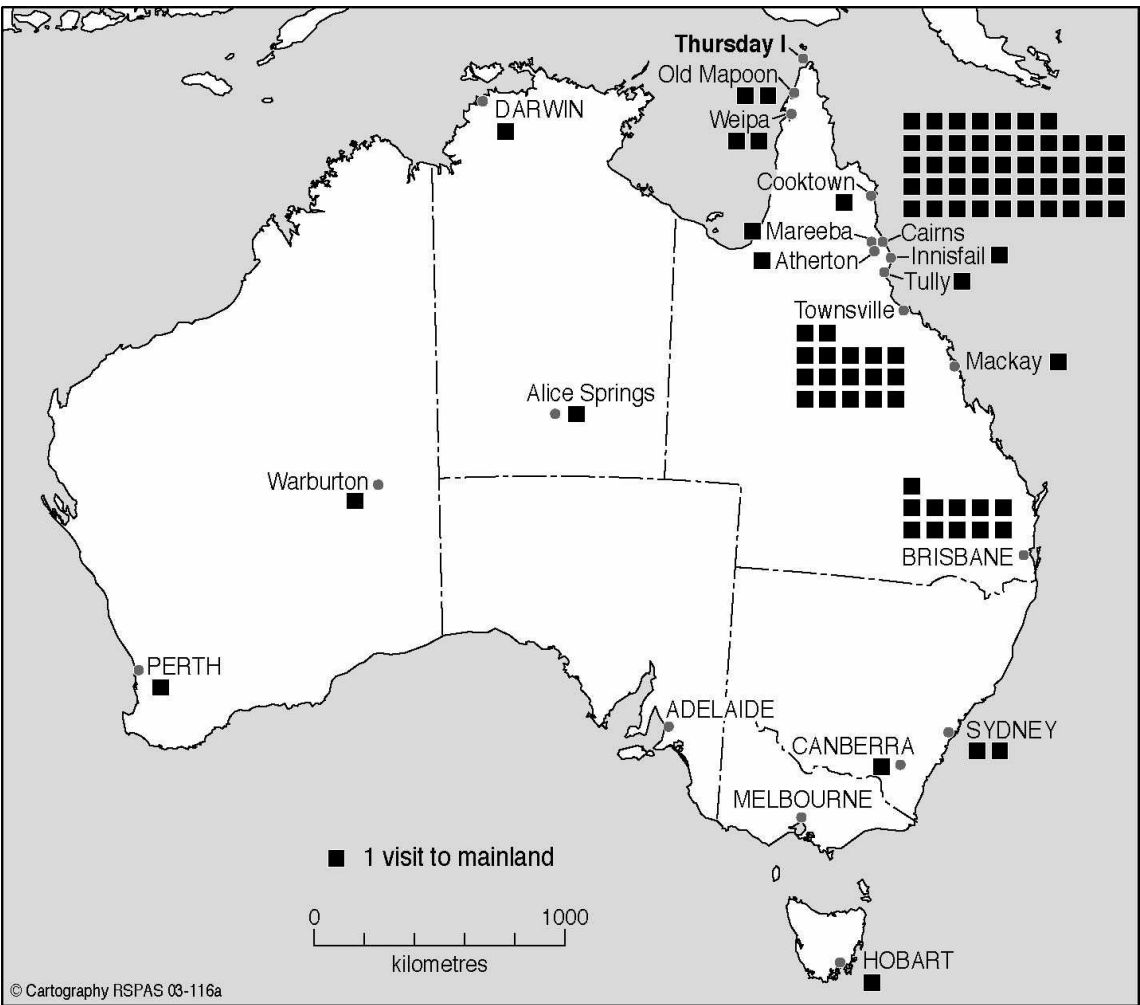
Some people indicated that their family commitments had stopped them achieving their goals (see Fig. 4). However, Fig. 3 shows that people also feel that it is their family and friends who might help them achieve their goals. This mirrors findings from the 1999 interviews, where although people indicated that they were likely to get a job through family connections, they also felt that family commitments might stop them from furthering their education or career (Arthur & David-Petero 2000a). This represents a tension stemming from the significance of social relations and responsibilities. Family links are very important to Torres Strait Islanders, as they are to other Indigenous Australians. It is hard for young Torres Strait Islanders to put their career before a family commitment and it may be that, to meet family commitments, career and aspirations sometimes have to take a back seat.⁸ One Islander made the observation that while non-Indigenous families often quarantine certain years for the development of their children's careers, this is not always the case for Islanders, whose family may take them out of school or a course if they are needed at home.⁹

The impact of this is likely to be compounded by the fact that so much schooling and training occurs outside the area, making it harder for people to attend a job or course and to simultaneously fulfil a family commitment (Arthur & David-Petero 2000c). People thought that a lack of qualifications would be one of the major factors that would stop them getting the jobs they wanted in the long term. To a lesser degree they thought other obstacles would include family obligations, a lack of suitable jobs and a lack of personal self-confidence.

MOBILITY AND CAREER

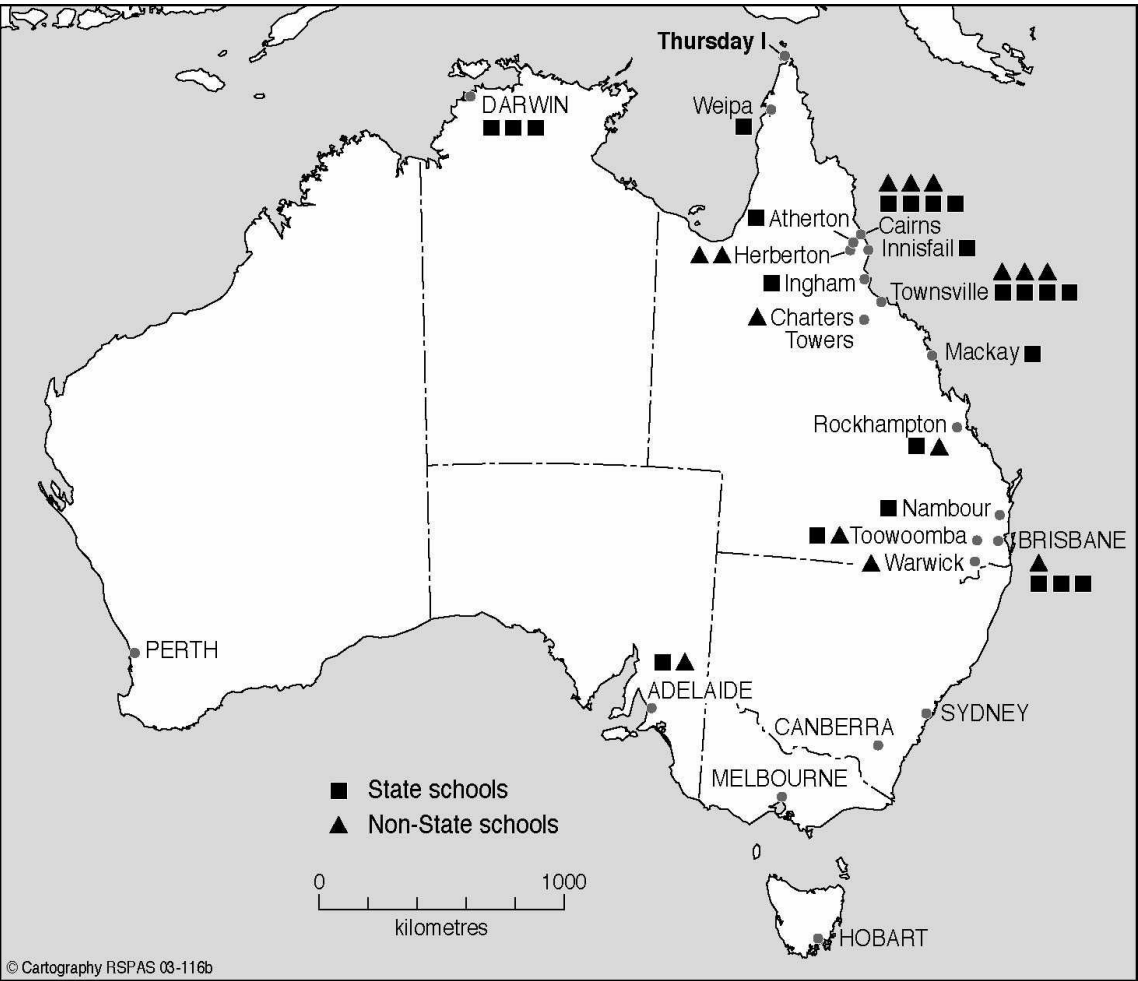
Earlier research (Beckett 1987; Taylor & Arthur 1992) has shown that there is some considerable movement between Torres Strait and the mainland. The interviews sought to gauge the level and nature of this movement, and if it related to careers and aspirations.¹⁰

Fig. 5. Places visited on the mainland, 1999–2003



Two kinds of movement were noted in the period between 1999 and 2003. One was between the islands and communities of the Torres Strait area, and the other was between Torres Strait and the mainland. Twelve people could not be interviewed because they had moved either from Thursday Island or from Badu Island to another part of Torres Strait. Other interviewees suggested that these people had moved for a variety of reasons. In some cases they were students who had finished schooling on Thursday Island and had returned to their home island. In other cases, they had moved to other islands for personal reasons or simply for a change.

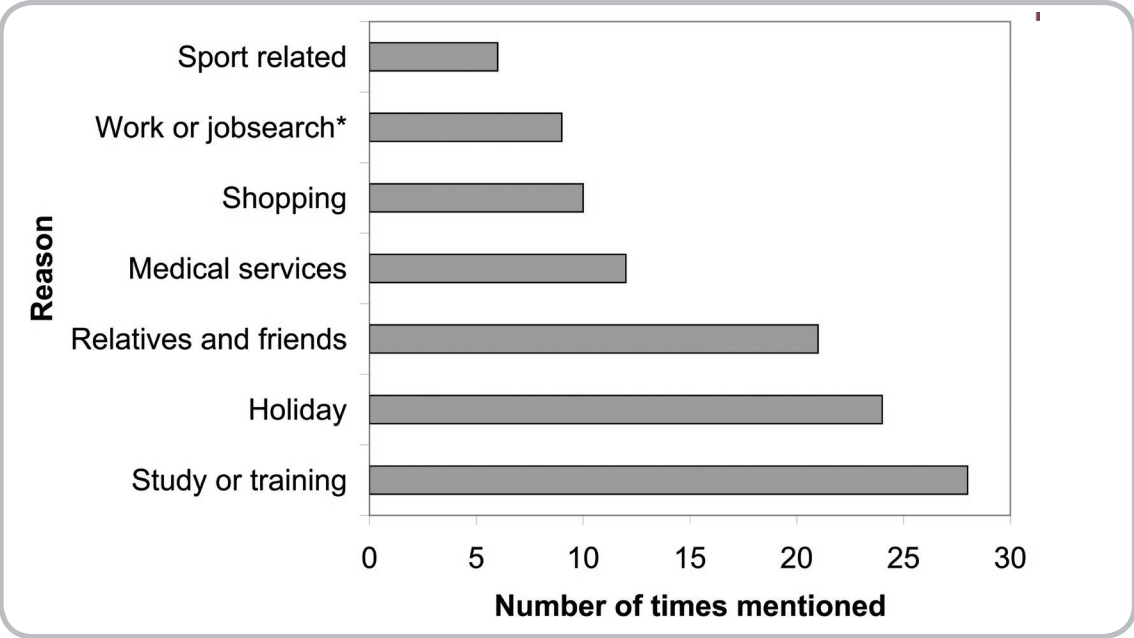
Fig. 6. Locations of secondary schools on the mainland attended by the respondents, 1999



Of the 59 people interviewed 50 (85%) had visited the mainland between 1999 and 2003, and of these, 29 (50%) had visited it more than once. The locations visited and the number of visits to each are shown in Fig. 5. Of the 19 different locations visited, 12 were in Queensland.¹¹ The vast majority of the visits were to Cairns (47), Townsville (17) and Brisbane (11).

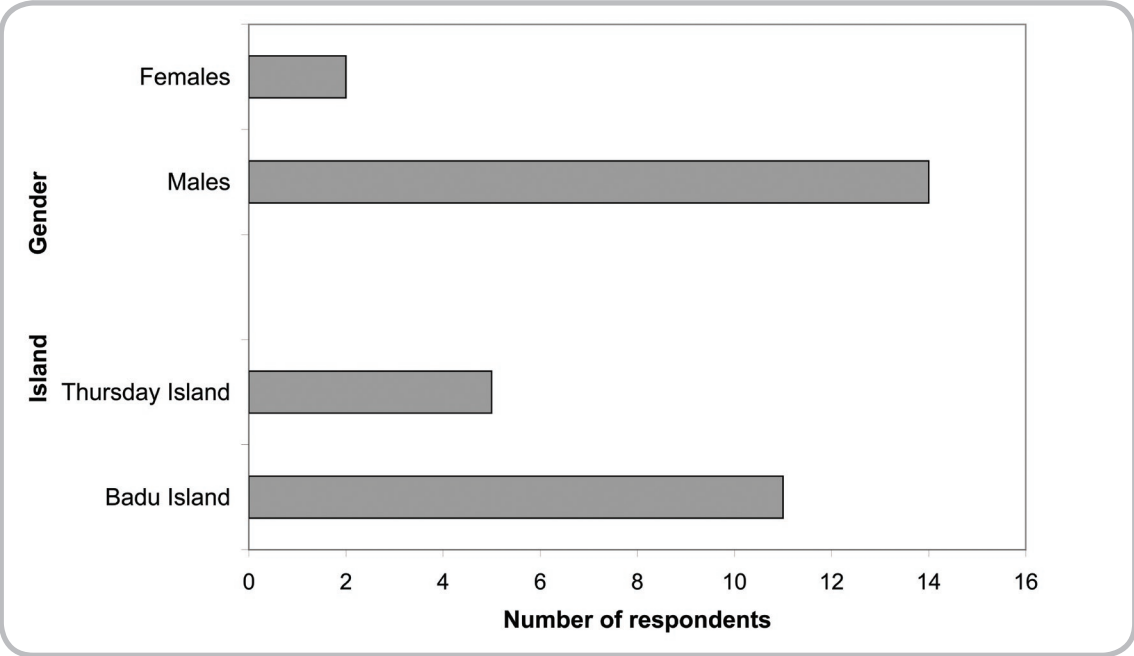
There are no secondary schools on the Outer Islands, and only one on Thursday Island, so many students attend boarding schools on the mainland for their secondary education (Arthur & David-Petero 2000c). Fig. 6 shows the location of the secondary schools on the mainland attended by those interviewed in 1999. These are mostly in Queensland and it is possible that this pattern of schooling helps establish the pattern and frequency of mainland visits later in life.

Fig. 7. Reasons respondents visited the mainland, 1999–2003



Note: *Includes five people working on the mainland at the time of the 2003 interviews.

Fig. 8. Respondents who had fished commercially, 1999–2003



The 1999 data also showed that a student might attend several different secondary schools on the mainland. More than half of the people interviewed had attended two schools and 15 per cent had attended three or more schools (Arthur & David-Petero 2000c). Although there were insufficient data to be conclusive, they suggest that those students who attended fewer schools (that is, changed schools less often) were more likely to stay on to Year 12 (Arthur & David-Petero 2000c).

Fig. 5. also shows that people visited locations in Western Australia, New South Wales, Canberra and Tasmania, though to a lesser extent than they did places in Queensland. This may reflect the fact that Torres Strait Islanders now live in all of these locations (Arthur 2003).

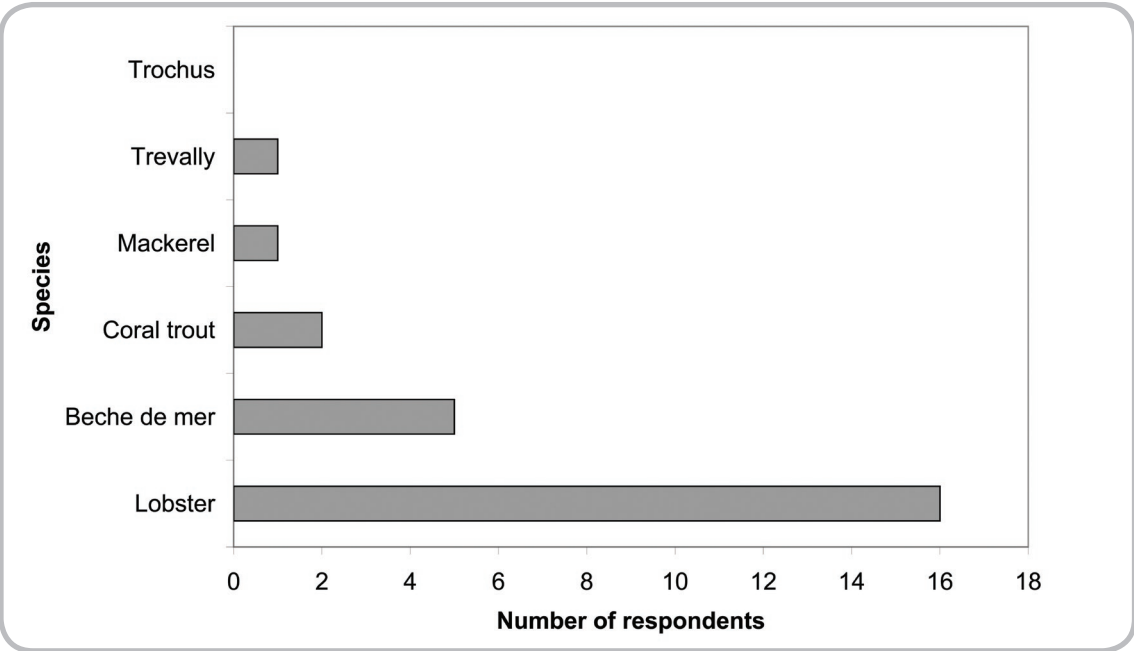
The reasons people gave for visiting the mainland are shown in Fig. 7. Few visits were made specifically for work or job related reasons. However, in many cases they were made for 'study and training', which possibly reflects the limited training opportunities in Torres Strait. Study and training are also related to a person's vocation. Thus, adding 'study or training' to 'work or jobsearch' in Fig. 7 suggests that activities related to vocation or career formed the rationale for a significant number of visits to the mainland. In addition, although we were unable to get information on all of those people who were on the mainland in 2003, the data we did get suggested five were working there, or had gone there for work.¹² Some visits were for medical reasons, again possibly reflecting the greater level of these services on the mainland. Many visits were made for family and recreational purposes. Hence, although some visits were for matters that can be associated with furthering people's careers, quite a few were not. In general, the data suggest that there is some considerable movement between Torres Strait and the principal coastal towns of Queensland.

COMMERCIAL FISHING, 1999–2003

In 1999 several people indicated that they would like to have a job associated with the marine environment, for example as a coxswain on one of the numerous boats and ferries in Torres Strait. However, although several indicated that they derived part of their income from commercial fishing, an activity that they said

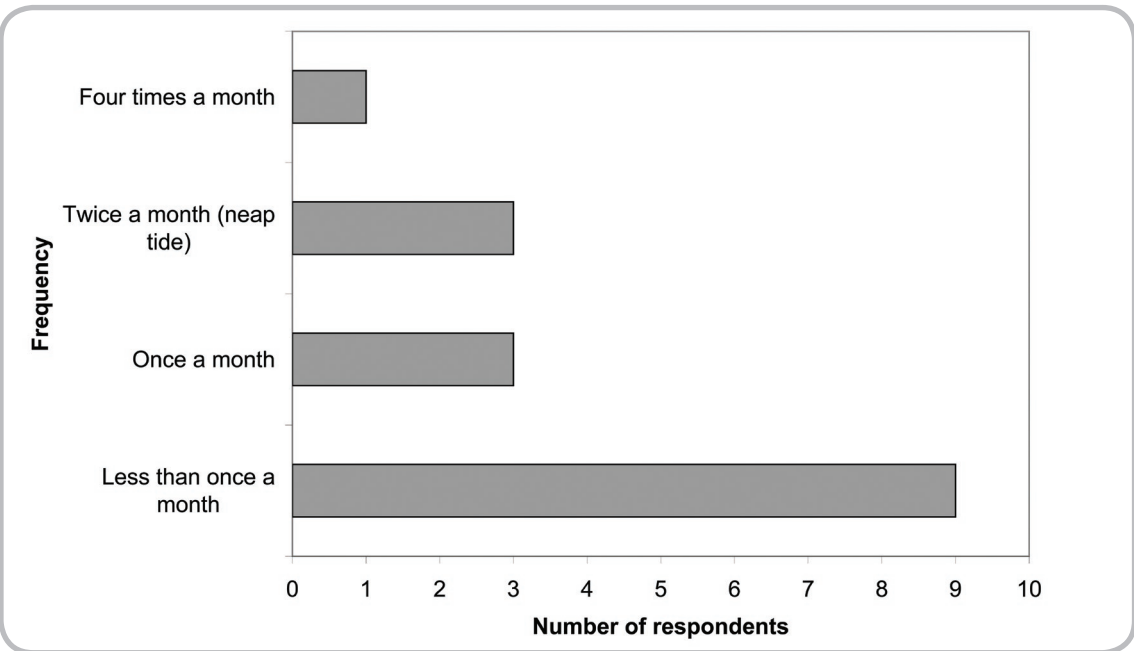
Table 3. Types of Commercial Fisher, 1990	
Type	Description
1	Those who fished regularly and were not CDEP participants
2	Those who fished regularly and were also CDEP participants
3	Those who fished irregularly and were also CDEP participants
4	Those who fished very occasionally, often when they needed extra cash
5	Schoolboys who fished during school holidays, often with a father or uncle
Source: Arthur & McGrath (1990: 47).	

Fig. 9. Species fished commercially by respondents, 1999–2003



Note: Some people had fished for more than one species.

Fig. 10. Frequency of commercial fishing by respondents, 2003



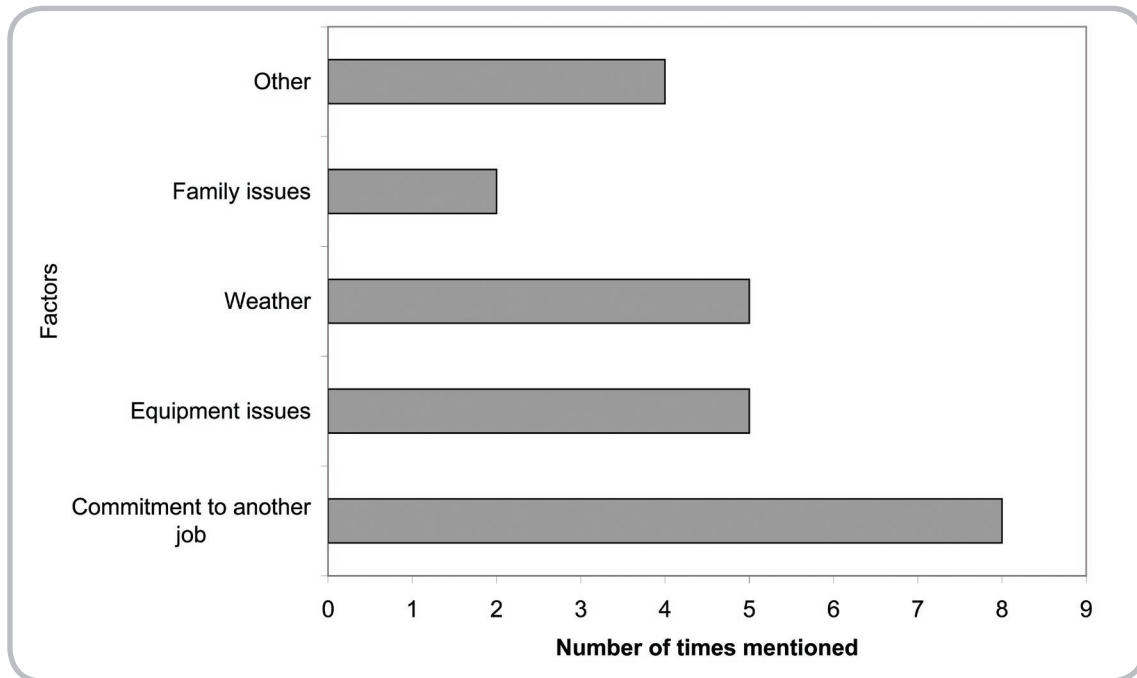
they enjoyed, no one gave this as their desired job. Since commercial fishing is a major industry in the Strait, questions were included about fishing in the 2003 interviews (see Appendix A).

Of the 59 people interviewed in 2003, just over one-quarter (16), had done some commercial fishing between 1999 and 2003. Many more of these were males than were females (Fig. 8), suggesting that commercial fishing is predominantly a male activity. Indeed, one woman said that the reason she did not go commercial fishing was because she considered it to be men's work. However, the two islands surveyed are in the centre of the lobster area (Arthur 1991a; Harris et al. 1994) and lobster fishing is a dive fishery, which is physically fairly demanding. A survey in other parts of the Strait, for instance where *bêche de mer* is more common, may have shown more female fishers (see Harris et al. 1994).¹³ Thus the data might more accurately suggest that lobster fishing, rather than commercial fishing in general, is a male fishery. Also, the survey only asked people about commercial fishing, which they probably took to mean the catching of a particular species. It may be that women were involved in other parts of the industry such as processing and marketing, and the survey would have failed to pick this up (see e.g. McDonnell 1999). In any event, several women in the survey did take part in commercial fishing and a couple of those did, in fact, dive for lobster.¹⁴

Commercial fishing is not only an adult activity; children will also participate. Research during the late 1980s suggested that, based on style and effort, commercial fishers could be divided into five categories (Table 3; and see Arthur & McGrath 1990). One of these was secondary school students who would help relatives fish during the school holidays. The 1999 survey also found that school students might fish commercially but that this was not restricted to the holidays. Attendance of Year 11 and 12 pupils at Thursday Island State School can fall by as much as 30 per cent at the height of the lobster-fishing season (Arthur & David-Petero 2000c: 12). It is suggested that this is due to students breaking their schooling to help relatives in the fishery.

Most of those who had fished commercially were on Badu Island which, as noted, is in the centre of the lobster grounds. Not surprisingly, lobster was the species that people were most likely to have fished commercially between 1999 and 2003 (Fig. 9). The best conditions for diving for lobster are at the 'neap' tides, which occur twice a month. In fact, relatively few people indicated they would fish at these times, and most said they were likely to fish less than once a month (Fig. 10). This accords with earlier work which suggested that people's fishing effort can be irregular and might be stimulated by the need for extra cash (Arthur & McGrath 1990; Beckett 1987). Table 3 suggests that some people fished only when they needed extra cash. This can be likened to 'target working' where people become involved in a commercial activity only long enough to meet a specific and relatively immediate cash commitment (see Peterson 1977). Anecdotal evidence from Thursday Island in 2003 suggests that this may still be the case, and it may in part help account for the pattern of commercial fishing shown in Fig. 10.

Fig. 11 shows some factors that people identified that might stop them from commercial fishing. Principal of these was commitment to another job and in these cases several people said they preferred to do other work. This included a preference for their present full-time jobs or for their part-time work on CDEP. Weather conditions were also a factor, as were things to do with their access to the necessary equipment. The latter

Fig. 11. Factors that stopped respondents fishing commercially, 2003

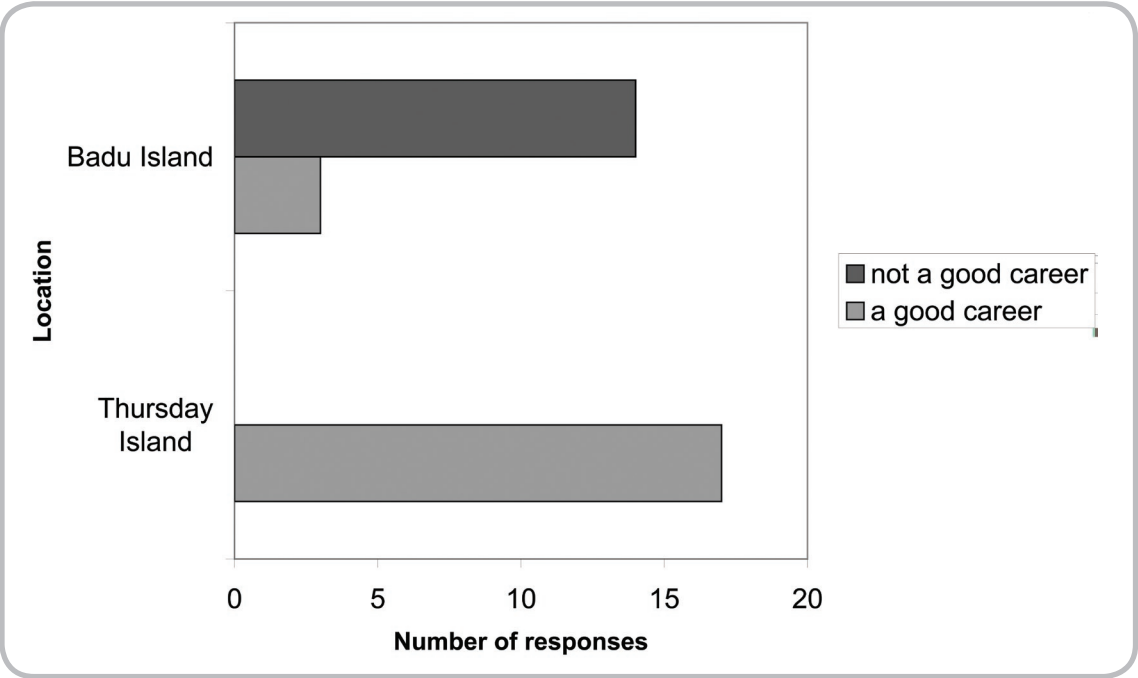
Note: Some respondents gave more than one reason.

included problems with their dinghy or its motor, or with the availability of fuel. In a couple of cases, people also said they had to look after their children. The 'other' factors included a preference for sport, or to some problems with their personal health. In general, the impression from the responses is that commercial fishing was not seen as a priority activity.

Over half of the people interviewed thought that commercial fishing might be a good career (Fig. 12). However, almost all of these were on Thursday Island.¹⁵ Conversely, no one on Badu Island thought commercial fishing would be a good career. This split is surprising. Both islands are in the lobster-fishing region. However, Badu is and always has been quite a major player in the lobster fishery (see Arthur & McGrath 1990; Harris et al. 1994). And, like other Outer Islands, it does not have many employment options other than work on CDEP. We might have expected people on Badu to view commercial fishing as quite a good career.

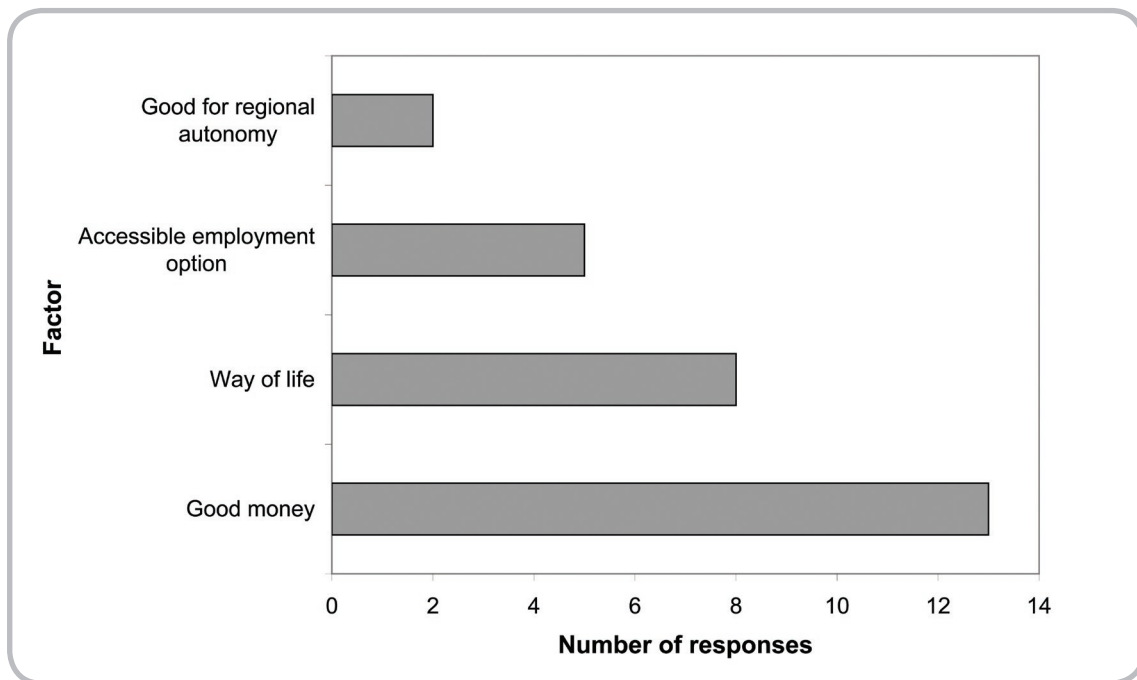
The factors that brought people to consider commercial fishing as a good career path are shown in Fig. 13. As noted above, most of these responses were from people on Thursday Island. Several people felt that commercial fishing gave the possibility of earning quite good money. Again, we should note that both islands in the survey are in the lobster fishing region of the Strait, and certainly returns to lobster fishers can be relatively high (Arthur & McGrath 1990). In fact, lobster fishing has been described as a 'high profit fishery'. People in other parts of the Strait, outside the lobster area and not in the survey, might not have

Fig. 12. Perception of commercial fishing as a career, 2003



given this positive response. In addition, this response was qualified by other comments people made about the availability and prices of lobster. We will return to this point when considering the negative aspects of commercial fishing below. People also seem to value the way of life associated with commercial fishing. In this case several said they liked the open air and free aspects of the work, they felt they were in an environment (the reefs and waters) that they knew and that somehow this all matched their view of an Islander way of life and tradition.

Some people felt that fishing presented an easy and accessible employment option, in particular when other employment was not available. While we have included this as a positive or good aspect of fishing, it may also reflect a more negative view of the industry, namely that fishing is something that one does when there are no other employment opportunities, when nothing else is available—it is seen as a fallback activity rather than a main job. It would also tie in with comments we have made above that people might fish only when they need extra cash, that is they use it as a reserve. Nonetheless, people do see fishing as an accessible job and one that they can participate in easily.

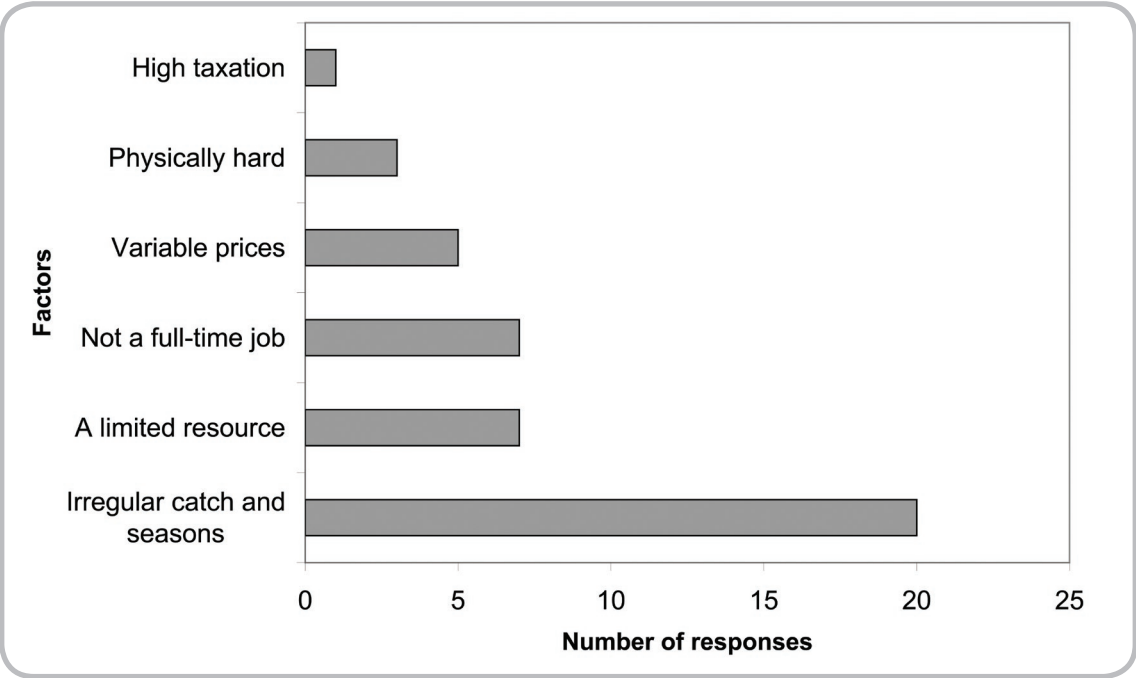
Fig. 13. Positive aspects of commercial fishing, 2003

In a couple of instances young people commented that fishing was good for regional autonomy. Though not directly related to their own careers, the significance of these comments is that they indicate that some young people are aware of the issue of regional autonomy (see Sanders & Arthur 2001).

The factors considered as making commercial fishing a poor career path are shown in Fig. 14. Again, we should note that most of the negative comments set out in Fig. 14 were from people on Badu Island. Principal among these was the feeling that lobsters were not always available and therefore could not be relied on to provide a regular income. This related to the concern that seasons were very variable. Another negative aspect of the industry is that demand, and therefore prices, fluctuate. This has been the case recently in the lobster fishery, where demand in the period of the survey (1999–2003) has been very low. No doubt this influenced the perceptions of young people towards the fishery. If the survey had been carried out in the late 1980s or mid 1990s, when lobster were much more abundant and prices were high, then the young people interviewed might have seen commercial fishing as a good career path.

Young people are also concerned that the marine resources are limited and that they risk being depleted by overfishing or by some other agent, and so this makes fishing dubious as a long-term career. Another negative view was that commercial fishing is physically demanding, harder to do when one is older, and so does not represent a good long-term career prospect. And yet another was that it did not represent a full-time job. This last point is uncontested as the fisheries are largely

Fig. 14. Negative aspects of commercial fishing, 2003



seasonal and depend on tides and weather. On the other hand, fishers have indicated in the past that these factors do not necessarily prevent them from earning a good income. Most of the above factors can be gathered together and classified as 'job or income uncertainty'. That is to say, it appears to be the general uncertainty of the industry that makes it unattractive. It is notable that the 1999 interviews revealed that people aspired to having secure and full-time jobs.

A small number of people felt that taxation made commercial fishing unattractive. It is possible that in the past some people fished without paying tax. In recent years regulations have been tightened so that this is more difficult and the negative comments about tax may relate to this change. Another and more recent change has been to charge Islanders for fishing licences. No one cited this as a negative aspect of commercial fishing.

CONCLUSION

In the initial interviews in 1999 no one expressed the desire to make a career out of commercial fishing. The interviews in 2003 attempted to obtain information about young people's perceptions of commercial fishing as a career, though it is probably true to say that the data obtained are more applicable to lobster fishing than to fishing in general. Just over half of all the people interviewed thought that fishing could

provide a good career path. The main reasons they gave for this were that it gave good returns, was part of the (Islander) way of life, and it was accessible.

Earlier work explained that the majority of the Strait's formal job opportunities are in the Inner Islands (including Thursday Island) (Arthur & David-Petero 2000a, 2000b). On the Outer islands (including Badu Island) employment opportunities are limited to CDEP, Community Council projects, and commercial fishing. People may do more than one of these things, for example, work on CDEP as well as fish commercially and for subsistence. Most of those interviewed in 2003 who had fished commercially were on Badu Island, but no one there thought that fishing was a good career, mostly because of its uncertain nature—catches and prices vary and therefore so does the income. Since many people do not rely solely on fishing for their income but mix it with CDEP work, they do have a regular base income, from CDEP, and both commercial and subsistence fishing are a supplement to this. Nonetheless, their aggregate income will still vary with the catches and prices. What people seemed to prefer were full-time jobs, and from other statements they made, this seems to mean full-time, steady jobs with regular and predictable incomes. One possible reason for preferring a secure job is that it may make it easier for people to manage their finances than does fishing, with its uncertain income.¹⁶

In many respects, there is little that can be done about the uncertainty of fishing; variable seasons, catches and prices are its characteristics. As we pointed out above, the period 1999 to 2003 was one of low catches and prices. If it had been one of good catches and prices, then possibly more people would have seen commercial fishing as a good career. At another level, it is possible that young people do not see commercial fishing as a 'real' job. This may be because in the past they have been able to fish commercially without licences and this activity has been officially classified as community fishing rather than as commercial fishing.

In any event, it is unclear that the interests of Torres Strait are best served by young people aspiring to be commercial fishers. The resource is renewable but finite and is currently under some pressure. I noted above that young people (and others) probably gain their income from a mix of sources: CDEP, commercial fishing and subsistence fishing (the so-called 'hybrid economy'; see Altman & Cochrane 2003). It may be that such a mix presents a more sustainable future for Torres Strait than a wholesale shift to full-time commercial fishing (see Arthur 1991a, 1991b).

Around half of the people interviewed had been able to achieve the vocational goal that they had in 1999. Several others had not achieved that specific goal but had instead done something else. In part, this was due to the limited employment and training options in Torres Strait. It suggests however that people are flexible and are likely to take up alternative options if they are presented. It also means that people may change stream if an opportunity more in line with their previous goal presents itself. Participation in training may also be seen in this light. All the evidence from the 1999 and 2003 interviews suggests that young people enjoy training. It may be that they will take a course that is not exactly what they want simply because it

is available. They might change to another more attractive option if that becomes available. Government programs should be flexible enough to deal with such changes of direction.

Information in the 2003 survey suggested that several apprentices had left their apprenticeships because they could not get on with their supervisor. It was not possible to confirm this with the trainers or supervisors involved. In Torres Strait, where training and employment options are limited, it seems unfortunate that opportunities can be lost in this way, especially as many males aspire to careers in trades (see Fig. 2). It has to be acknowledged that the social and cultural circumstances in small remote Indigenous communities are not the same as in towns in the south. Although it may be difficult, training styles and programs will have to take these circumstances into account. In any event, it is possible that people who break apprenticeships will try again later, and as noted above, programs should be flexible enough to accommodate this. Part of the training might include helping the would-be apprentices to understand more fully that an apprenticeship is a contract of sorts, and that they too have responsibilities. Designers of programs would do well to approach Torres Strait more as they might if they were working on development projects in the island states of the Pacific.

Some people indicated that their Community Council had helped them achieve their goal. However, the greatest assistance seemed to come from friends, family, and what we have called mentors. In sum, these all represent assistance from members of their social networks. This confirms findings from the 1999 interviews and, as noted in earlier work, these are similar to patterns found among the general population both in Australia and overseas (Arthur & David-Petero 2000a: 23; Gray & Hunter 2000; Jones 1989). Some of these same personal relationships, for example those entailing family responsibilities, can also hinder people from pursuing their career. In some respects this is part of the Islander way of life and is less amenable to policy intervention. However, we can surmise that if people have to break their career path to meet family obligations then they may wish to take it up again later (Arthur & David-Petero 2000a). In these cases, government programs should be flexible enough to cope.

Few people mentioned the official bodies, such as Centrelink and 'Jobcentre', as organisations that they felt would help them with their careers. This may relate to what young people seem to want from helpers. The impression gained from the interviews is that young people are short of information about different careers, rather than just about jobs or training options. It seemed the case that people got a lot of their career information from employed family members, their bosses and their schoolteachers. Government programs could explore ways of increasing and improving career information in remote areas and in mainland schools attended by people from remote areas.

NOTES

1. The Torres Strait area is made up of those islands and communities within the area of jurisdiction of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) plus two Island communities on Cape York, namely Seisia and Bamaga.
2. This is a distinction made within many of the archipelagoes of the Pacific. Inner Islands usually include a region's service centre while the Outer Islands are the remote and often smaller islands that are spread out over the archipelago. Outer Islands often have fewer services, less infrastructure and a less developed labour market than Inner Islands.
3. The CDEP scheme is one where people forgo their standard unemployment benefits to perform work on their community, usually under the direction of their Community Council.
4. The sample cannot be said to be truly representative, and its small size does not allow a full statistical analysis. Qualitative data have been used instead, to present a case study of two islands.
5. Thus, just 56% of the original sample was reinterviewed. This highlights one problem inherent with longitudinal surveys: finding and reinterviewing respondents (see also Hunter & Smith 2000).
6. In Torres Strait, young people call the Job Network the Jobcentre.
7. Anecdotal evidence indicates that a total of six apprentices broke their apprenticeships.
8. Gaining support from social networks has been characterized as a form of 'social capital'. However, investing in social capital leaves one open to the demands of other group members and may restrict one's individual freedom and options (including in the labour market) (Hunter 2000: 35).
9. Balancing occupational training and family obligations is also a problem for young people in some Aboriginal societies (see Austin-Broos 2003:121).
10. The mainland refers to all of Australia outside the area of the TSRA. Therefore visits to Bamaga or Seisia are not included.
11. In addition to the locations shown in Fig. 2, people had also visited Thailand and Samoa on holidays. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Islanders are increasingly visiting Pacific locations for holidays but also to visit kin there.
12. We were unable to get good data about people on the mainland during the 2003 interviews. Possibly more than five were working there.
13. The marine species that are exploited commercially are distributed unevenly across the region.
14. There are two forms of participation in fishing for lobster: diving, and driving the dinghy while the divers are under the water.
15. Several people on Thursday Island thought that there were both positive and negative aspects to fishing as a career.
16. Gray and Hunter also found that Indigenous people valued job security (2000: 34).

APPENDIX A. TYPICAL QUESTIONNAIRE, 2003

Name: _____

In September 1999, Bill Arthur and Josephine David-Petero interviewed you about your career. At that time we asked you what you were doing and what you wanted to do in the future.

We asked you what you would like to do in the year 2000 and also when you were 30 years old.

We would like to interview you again.

This is to find out if you have

- managed to do what you wanted,
- what helped you to do this, or
- what stopped you from doing this, or
- if you have changed your mind about what you want to do.

If you are agreeable, I would like to ask you these questions.

When we first interviewed you in September 1999 you were working in _____.

You said that in the next year (2000) you wanted to become a _____.

1. Did you become a _____? YES or NO. If NO, go to question 3

2. If you did become a since 1999, tick ONE thing from this list that you think helped you to do this.

- Your family
- Your community council
- Training you did
- The Centrelink office
- The Jobcentre office

@ Is there any other thing or person that you think helped you become a _____?

3. If you did NOT become a _____, tick ONE thing from this list that you think stopped you.

- Looking after your family
- There were no jobs available
- You changed your mind
- You left Torres Strait

@ Is there any other thing or person that you think stopped you becoming a _____?

APPENDIX A CONT.

4. Do you have a job just now? YES or NO.

5. What work or job are you doing now _____?

6. Do you like doing this

6.1 A lot _____ Why _____

6.2 A little bit _____ Why _____

6.3 Not very much _____ Why not _____

In September 1999 you said that when you were 30 years old you wanted to be a

7. Do you still want to be a _____ when you are 30 years old? YES or NO

8. If you do NOT, then please tell us what you would now like to be doing when you are 30 years old _____

9. What has changed your mind? _____

10. What TWO things from this list do you think will help you MOST to get the job you want?

- School education
- Training after school
- University education
- An apprenticeship
- Help for your family
- The job centre office
- The Centrelink office

@ Can you say ONE other thing that you think might help you _____

11. What TWO things from this list do you think might stop you the MOST from getting the job you want?

- The type of job you want is not in Torres Strait
- You do not have the qualifications
- You may have to look after members of your family
- You may not have the self-confidence

@ Can you say ONE other thing that you think might stop you getting the job you would like?

APPENDIX A CONT.

12. Have you visited the MAINLAND since we interviewed you in September 1999?

If you have,

13. Where did you go? _____

14. From this list tick the TWO MAIN reasons that you went to the mainland

- To visit relatives or friends
- For education, study or training
- For a job
- For shopping
- For medical treatment
- For a holiday

@ Is there any other reason you went to the mainland? YES, NO.

If YES, what was it? _____

15. Have you done any COMMERCIAL FISHING since we interviewed you in 1999? YES or NO

16. If you have done some commercial fishing since we interviewed you in 1999, then make a tick against the things you usually fished for on this list.

- Cray (Lobster)
- Trochus shell
- Bêche de Mer
- Mackerel

@ Tell us any other thing you fished for? _____

17. If you went commercial fishing, between September 1999 and now tick which job you usually did

- I was the diver
- I drove the dinghy

@ Tell any other job you did in fishing _____

APPENDIX A CONT.

18. If you go commercial fishing, tick on this list ABOUT how often you do this

- About once each month
- Less than once each month
- About every week

19. Mark from this list if you like to go commercial fishing

- A lot
- A little
- Not much at all

20. Is there anything that stops you going commercial fishing when you want to?
YES or NO

21 If YES, what is it that stops you _____

22 If you DO like to go commercial fishing, what do you MOST like about it _____

23 If you do NOT like to go commercial fishing, why you do not like it _____

24 Do you think being a commercial fisherman in Torres Strait is a good CAREER to have,
YES or NO

25 If YES, then tell us what is good about it _____

26 If NO, then tell what is not good about it as a career _____

APPENDIX B. SAMPLE COMPOSITION

Table B1. Composition of the sample in 1999									
Age	Thursday Island			Badu Island			Total		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
15-16	4	4	8	2	6	8	6	10	16
17-19	12	14	26	7	6	8	6	10	39
20-24	9	11	20	15	15	30	24	26	50
Total	25	29	54	24	27	51	49	56	105

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