

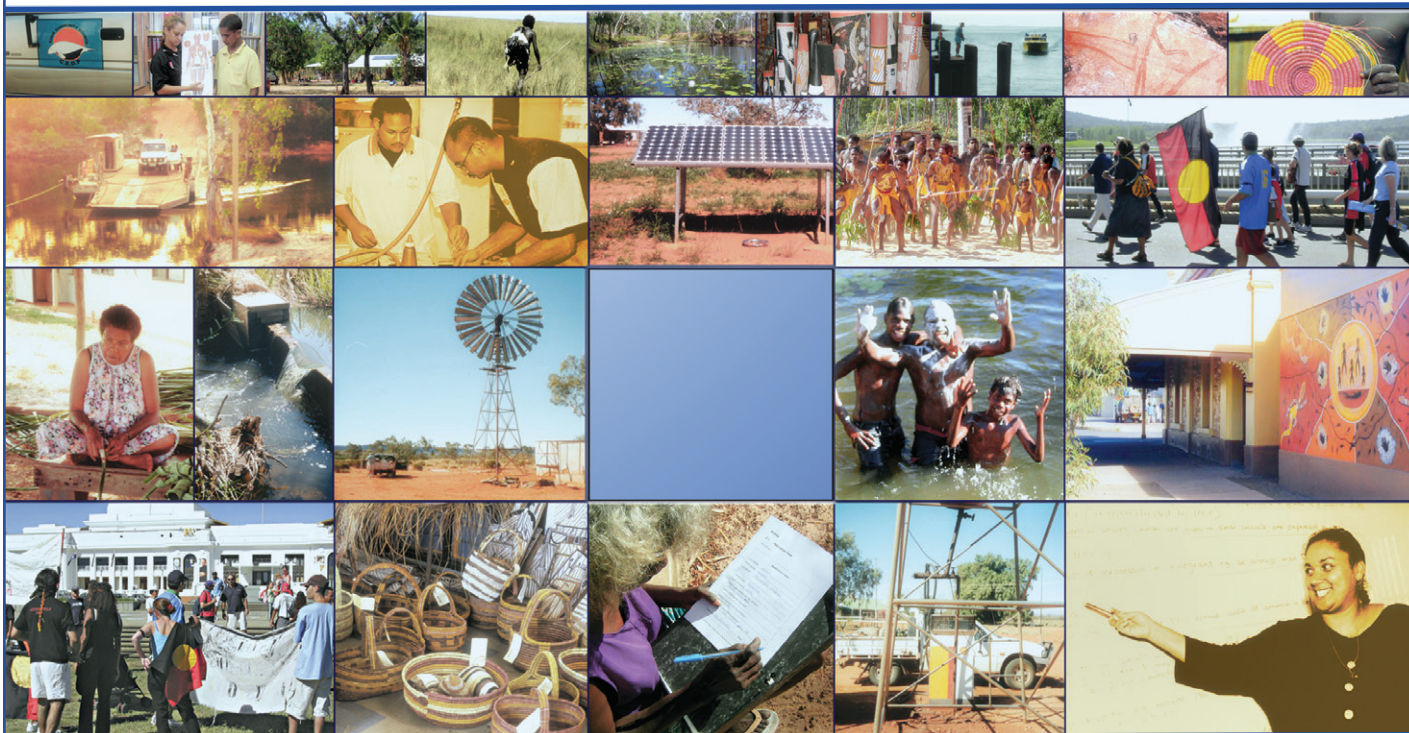
CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC
POLICY RESEARCH



Indigenous Australians and Home Ownership

Will Sanders

CAEPR Topical Issue No. 01/2011



ANU COLLEGE OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Indigenous Australians and Home Ownership

This paper is based upon a submission to the Australian Government's *Indigenous Home Ownership Issues Paper*, released in May 2010, which is available from <http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/housing/indig_home_ownership/Pages/default.aspx>.

Will Sanders

Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra; e-mail: william.sanders@anu.edu.au

1. **T**he *Indigenous Home Ownership Issues Paper* contains some useful discussion of the current housing circumstances of Indigenous Australians, including the factors that contribute to home ownership being lower among Indigenous Australians compared to others. The brief discussion of those factors under six headings, covering demographics, income, education, labour force participation, financial literacy and geographic location, on pages 6 and 7 of the paper, gives some indication of the connections involved between housing tenure and a range of other social and economic phenomena.
2. I was, however, a little concerned by some of the statistics quoted and the use made of them. On page 3, in a position of great prominence in the Issues Paper, it was stated that Indigenous home ownership had increased from 'around 19% in 1991 to 36% in 2006'. This presumably refers to census information about Indigenous households. However it does not square either with the 2006 Census data given on the following page of the Issues Paper or with my own rough compilation of census figures on this matter over a number of years. Table 1 below contains Australia-wide figures which I have compiled from the Indigenous Community Profiles on the ABS website in recent years and from ABS hard copy publications in earlier years. It shows home ownership, including purchasing, increasing from 28% of Indigenous households in 1991 to 34% in 2006. (The latter figure is consistent with those quoted on page 4 of the Issues Paper). This discrepancy in statistics is significant and should be investigated further and clarified with the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
3. Another rather questionable use of statistics seems to occur after page 8 of the Issues Paper when housing tenure is being compared for 2001 and 2006 by remoteness geography. This comparison is used to suggest that Indigenous home ownership in urban and regional areas has increased from 35% in 2001 to 39% in 2006 and in remote areas from 15% to 18 %. The figures used seem internally inconsistent – with the ownership plus rental figures for 2006 adding to close to 100%, while those for 2001 sometimes fall considerably short. Also these figures are not consistent with data I have compiled from ABS sources in recent years for the housing tenure of Indigenous households by remoteness geography. Table 2 below draws on the ABS's new

Table 1. Census estimates of private dwellings occupied by Indigenous households Australia-wide, by tenure/ nature of occupancy, 1991–2006

	1991	1996	2001	2006
Owned				
Number (000s)	7.4	12.4	14.7	18.4
Per cent	12	13	13	11
Being purchased				
Number (000s)	10.3	16.9	22.4	38.6
Per cent	16	18	19	23
Public/government rental				
Number (000s)	19.7	22.2	24.0	33.4
Per cent	30	23	21	20
Private rental				
Number (000s)	22.5	27.5	45.0	22.4
Per cent	24	24	27	34
Community rental				
Number (000s)		10.1	14.6	14.9
Per cent		11	13	9
Employer/other rental				
Number (000s)		2.4	3.5	5.0
Per cent		3	3	3
Other/not stated tenure				
Number (000s)	5.2	8.5	8.6	11.4
Per cent	8	9	8	7
Total				
Number (000s)	64.7	94.9	115.4	166.7
Per cent	100	100	100	100

Source: ABS census publications and website.

**Table 2. Tenure of dwellings containing Indigenous households, by remoteness
2001/2006 Censuses**

Indigenous households	Major cities		Inner Regional		Outer Regional		Remote		Very Remote		Total Australia	
	2001	2006	2001	2006	2001	2006	2001	2006	2001	2006	2001	2006
OWNED												
Number (000s)	5.4	7.1	3.9	4.9	3.8	4.5	1.0	1.2	0.60	0.65	14.7	18.4
Per cent	13.3	10.7	15.2	12.0	14.1	12.5	11.2	10.1	4.6	4.7	12.8	10.9
BEING PURCHASED												
Number (000s)	10.0	17.2	6.0	10.7	5.0	8.5	1.1	1.8	0.35	0.48	22.4	38.6
Per cent	24.8	25.8	23.2	26.2	18.3	23.4	12.0	15.3	2.7	3.4	19.4	22.9
PRIVATE RENTAL												
Number (000s)	11.6	21.6	7.6	12.4	6.8	9.0	1.2	1.6	0.39	0.40	27.6	45.0
Per cent	28.8	32.3	29.4	30.4	24.8	24.9	13.3	14.0	3.0	2.9	23.8	26.6
PUBLIC RENTAL												
Number (000s)	9.5	14.1	4.9	7.6	5.9	7.2	2.4	2.5	1.2	1.9	23.9	33.4
Per cent	23.6	21.1	18.9	18.5	21.6	20.1	26.4	21.9	9.7	14.0	20.8	19.8
COMMUNITY RENTAL												
Number (000s)	0.94	1.3	1.4	1.7	2.7	2.2	1.7	2.2	7.9	7.6	14.6	14.9
Per cent	2.3	1.9	5.4	4.1	9.8	6.0	19.1	19.1	61.0	54.7	12.7	8.8
EMPLOYER RENTAL												
Number (000s)	0.25	0.88	0.19	0.71	0.49	1.2	0.46	0.68	0.51	0.82	1.9	4.2
Per cent	0.6	1.3	0.7	1.7	1.8	3.2	5.1	6.0	4.0	5.9	1.7	2.5
OTHER/NOT STATED RENTAL												
Number (000s)	0.81	0.89	0.62	0.73	0.70	0.72	0.22	0.28	0.23	0.31	2.6	2.9
Per cent	2.0	1.3	2.4	1.8	2.6	2.0	2.5	2.5	1.8	2.2	2.3	1.7
OTHER/NOT STATED TENURE												
Number (000s)	1.9	3.7	1.2	2.1	1.9	2.8	0.94	1.3	1.7	1.7	7.6	11.6
Per cent	4.6	5.5	4.5	5.2	7.0	7.8	10.3	11.2	13.1	12.1	6.5	6.8
ALL TENURES												
Number (000s)	40.3	66.7	25.7	40.8	27.2	36.1	9.1	11.5	12.9	13.8	115.3	169.0
Per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Growth in number 2001/2006 per cent		65.5		58.8		32.7		26.4		7.0		46.4

Table Builder tool for the 2006 Census figures and on calculations from aggregated Indigenous Community Profiles for 2001. Again it would be useful for ABS to check and clarify these statistics. But they are, at this stage, the best I can produce, and do not seem to square with those in the Issues Paper.

4. My Table 2 suggests that ownership among Indigenous households in major cities and regional areas has fallen 2 or 3% from 2001 to 2006, but that this has been partially, or in regional areas wholly, offset by an increase in purchasing. In remote areas too there has been a slight increase in purchase and a slight decrease in ownership, while in very remote areas these two tenures are notable for both being very low and apparently changing very little. It is a little hard to see how these figures in Table 2 could be consistent with the increases in home ownership quoted in the Issues Paper and repeated in paragraph 3 above.
5. A general point of note in my Table 2 is the relative stability of percentages of Indigenous households in particular tenures, even as the number of Indigenous households has increased markedly from 2001 to 2006 (nationally by 46.6% and most notably in major cities by 65.5%). The biggest increases in tenure proportions among Indigenous households have been in private rental in major cities (up from 28.8% to 32.3%) and in public rental in very remote areas (up from 9.7% to 14.0%). The biggest decreases have been in community rental in very remote areas (down from 61.0% to 54.7%) and in outer regional areas (down from 9.8% to 6.0%). Beyond these changes, proportions of Indigenous households in different housing tenures have been very stable from 2001 to 2006, reflecting life-course housing careers which change only slowly over generations.
6. I wonder why a government Issues Paper would seem to be producing statistics which overstate the degree of housing tenure change in recent years. I would be interested to learn of ABS advice on the veracity of the census statistics I have identified compared to those used in the Issues Paper. Having an accurate view of past tenure changes would seem an important prelude to a realistic view of what might be able to be achieved in the future, through policy developments relating to home ownership and other tenures.

I hope that the foregoing tables and commentary are of some use in advancing the important issue of Indigenous Home Ownership. I look forward to further exchanges, not only restricted to the clarification of statistics.