



information PAPER

1976
POPULATION CENSUS



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RACIAL ORIGIN

No 19

This paper is one of a series of Information Papers published by the Population Census Branch of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to explain aspects of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing. It briefly discusses the racial origin question, and considers the quality of the data collected.

BACKGROUND

Information on the racial composition of the Australian population has been collected in some form by all Commonwealth censuses beginning with the first in 1911. For a detailed discussion of the historical development of census racial origin questions, see *Australian Year Book No. 61, 1975-1976*, p.152 (1301.0).

DEFINITION

The question on racial origin is directed specifically at the identification of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in the population. The Government's 3 point working definition of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander states that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person (a) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent, (b) who identifies himself or herself as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and (c) who is accepted as such by the community with which he or she is associated. The census concept is in line with the first two points but a measure of community acceptance is not possible in the census.

THE QUESTION (1971, 1976)

18. What is each person's racial origin? • If of mixed origin, indicate the one to which the person considers himself/herself to belong. • Tick one box only for each person.	European origin ☐ 1
	Aboriginal origin ☐ 2
	Torres Strait Islander origin ☐ 3
	Other origin ☐ 4
↓ State one only	

A category for European was included because testing of question design prior to these censuses had shown that the exclusion of the category European created a great deal of confusion amongst a large proportion of householders, many of whom omitted to answer the question at all.

The word origin is used throughout the text of the question to emphasise to respondents the requirement of origin before self-perception.

COMPARABILITY WITH PREVIOUS CENSUSES

The race questions as asked in both the 1971 and 1976 Censuses differed significantly from those asked in previous censuses, due mainly to the decision to adopt self-perception as part of the method of identifying racial origin. Consequently, statistics collected prior to 1971 are not strictly comparable with those collected in 1971 and 1976.

In addition, 1971 and 1976 Census race data should not be treated as strictly comparable. The adoption of self-perception, by introducing a greater degree of subjectivity into the data, allows changes in attitude on the part of respondents to significantly alter the data over a relatively short period of time. Changes in attitude in fact occurred within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations between the 1971 and 1976 Censuses, as the following table clearly shows:

**THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER POPULATION OF AUSTRALIA,
BY STATES, 1971 AND 1976**

State	1971		1976	
	Number	% of State Population	Number	% of State Population
N.S.W.	23,873	0.5	40,450	0.8
Vic.	6,371	0.2	14,760	0.4
Qld	31,922	1.7	41,345	2.0
S.A.	7,299	0.6	10,714	0.9
W.A.	22,181	2.2	26,126	2.3
Tas.	671	0.2	2,942	0.7
N.T.	23,381	27.0	23,751	24.5
A.C.T.	255	0.2	827	0.4
Australia	115,953	0.9	160,915	1.2

* Includes NOT STATED - see below.

The 1976 Census racial origin question attracted a high non-response rate. For example, Not Stated's accounted for 9.2% of responses to the racial origin question in the Northern Territory and 8.4% for Australia as a whole. Evaluation studies indicate that the majority of respondents who did not report their racial origin were neither Aboriginals nor Torres Strait Islanders and that the response rate to the question by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations was significantly higher than that of the remainder of the Australian population. Nevertheless no attempt has been made to distribute Not Stated's among the various race categories.

However, in the 1971 Census, all Not Stated's were assigned a racial origin in accordance with other information supplied on the census schedule. This will make comparisons between 1971 and 1976 difficult and this problem is most severe in the Northern Territory where the method of allocating Not Stated will be the most significant parameter for determining the intercensal growth rate for Aboriginals. The data should be used with care.

It is doubtful whether any general statement can be made to advise users on the treatment of Not Stated's as the best method will depend on the type of statistical analysis that is being applied to the information. Preliminary evaluation indicates that an absence of any answer to the racial origin question was frequently accompanied by an absence of answers for all other

questions related to racial origin making it extremely difficult to make reliable assumptions about the distribution of the Not Stated's.

In practice, problems of comparability of census race data will be of limited importance to those Government agencies and other users who are more concerned with the picture that the data provides of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait populations at one point in time rather than with changes in census race data over time. The quality of the 1976 Census data on the housing, education, income, employment and other main characteristics of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders should prove adequate for such users.

RELEASE OF THE DATA

At the smallest geographical level (the Collection District) racial origin data is available with the following classifications:

Males	Females	Persons	Prop %
European			
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander			
Other			
Not Stated			
Total Population			

Collection District (CD) data can be aggregated to form larger geographical areas including:

- Sections of Local Government Areas (LGS)
- Whole LGA's
- Statistical Subdivisions
- Statistical Divisions
- Section of States
- States

A summary file aggregating the CD data to LGA level is already available and is called LGA0.

The aim of the racial origin question was to collect information on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia; data on these people are available in more detail than for other racial origins. The 1976 Census Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data have been aggregated to form the Aboriginal Collection District Summary File (ACDSF) which is expected to be available to users on magnetic tape and microfiche in April 1979. The contents of this file are basically the same as the CDSF except that Tables 7-11 and 49 of the CDSF have been excluded and Tables 50-54 of the ACDSF are included to provide additional household and dwellings information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Information Paper No. 8 (2111.0) describes the contents of this file in more detail. A summary of this data for each LGA will also be available.

As the numbers of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in a geographic area are often very small, data on the ACDSF have been arranged in such a way as to

preserve confidentiality. This has been achieved on magnetic tape by deleting all those areas in which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population numbers less than ten persons and where there are fewer than four dwellings with one or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents. These geographic areas are designated as confidential on other output. In all cases, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of confidential areas is included in higher level (LGA, Statistical Division etc.) totals.

The data on Aboriginal dwellings on the ACDSF are different from that on the CDSF and LGA0. The dwellings described as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dwellings on the CDSF and LGA0 were those which had an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander *head or spouse only*. On the ACDSF, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dwelling is one in which at least one inmate stated that his or her racial origin was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In the 1971 Census, an Aboriginal dwelling was one where the *head of the household* was an Aboriginal.

Additional cross-classified tables are being produced as part of the main tabulation program. Racial origin data will be cross-classified by age, sex, marital status, duration of marriage, issue of all marriages, educational qualifications, current attendance at educational institutions, occupational status, industry, occupation and handicaps. A catalogue of 1976 tabulations will soon be available from Bureau offices. (See Inquiries).

FURTHER INFORMATION

A number of other Information Papers will be released which discuss either technical aspects of the census or provide information about specific 1976 Census topics. A list of these papers follows.

INFORMATION PAPERS

A. Technical Papers

- (1) Availability of Census Results (a) (2102.0)
- (2) Release of Data on Microfiche (a) (2106.0)
- (3) Release of Data on Microfiche - Supplement (a) (2106.0)
- (4) Release of Census Publications (a) (2107.0)
- (6) Release of Data on Magnetic Tape (a) (2105.0)
- (8) Collection District and Local Government Area Summary Files on Magnetic Tape (a) (2111.0)

- (9) (i) Classification of Characteristics (a) (2112.0)
- (ii) Industry Classification Extract (a) (2113.0)
- (iii) Occupation Classification Extract (a) (2114.0)
- (iv) Classification of Educational Qualifications (a) (2115.0)
- (10) 1976 Census Glossary of Terms (2126.0)
- (11) Service Charges (a) (2116.0)

B. Topic Papers

- (12) Child Minding (a) (2117.0)
- (13) Dwelling Structure (2125.0)
- (14) Family (a) (2119.0)
- (15) Income (a) (2120.0)
- (18) Languages (2123.0)
- (19) Racial Origin (a) (2124.0)
- (20) LGA Code List (a) (2118.0)

C. Other

- Collection District Basic Summary File - Technical Details (a) (2127.0)
- Local Government Area Descriptor File - Technical Details (a) (2128.0)
- Making Sense of the Census (a) (2129.0)
- Sampling Errors Associated with Census Estimates (Revised) (a) (2129.0 Extract)
- Collection District Master File - Technical Details (a) (2130.0)
- Collection District Summary File, Final Data - Technical Details (a) (2131.0)
- Collection District Summary File, Final Data - Printout and Microfiche Summary Tables, Explanatory Notes (a) (2131.0 Extract)
- Local Government Area Summary File (LGA0), Final Data - Technical Details (2132.0)
- Local Government Area Summary File One (LGA 1) De Facto - Technical Details (2133.0)
- Local Government Area Summary File One (LGA 1) De Jure - Technical Details (2134.0)
- Local Government Area Summary Files One - Occupation, Industry, Qualifications (LGA 1 OIQ) De Facto and De Jure - Technical Details (2135.0)
- Aboriginal Collection District Summary File (ACDSF) - Technical Details (2136.0)

(a) Now available.

INQUIRIES

<i>State or Territory</i>	<i>For Personal Inquiries -</i>	<i>Telephone</i>	<i>For Written Inquiries -</i>
NEW SOUTH WALES	Census Liaison Officer Population Census Subsection Level 5 St Andrews House Sydney Square SYDNEY	(02) 236.6111	Deputy Commonwealth Statistician (Attention : Supervisor Demography Section) Box 796, G.P.O. SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2001
VICTORIA	Supervisor, Demography Section Commonwealth Bank Building Cnr Flinders and Elizabeth Streets MELBOURNE.	(03) 652.6211	Deputy Commonwealth Statistician (Attention : Supervisor Demography Section) Box 2796Y, G.P.O. MELBOURNE. VIC. 3001
QUEENSLAND	Supervisor, Social and Demography 345 Ann Street BRISBANE.	(07) 33.5606	Deputy Commonwealth Statistician (Attention : Supervisor, Social and Demography Section) 345 Ann Street BRISBANE. QLD. 4000
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	Information Officer Prudential Building 195 North Terrace ADELAIDE.	(08) 228.9439	Deputy Commonwealth Statistician (Attention : Information Officer) Box 2272, G.P.O. ADELAIDE. S.A. 5001
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	Census Liaison Officer 1-3 St George's Terrace PERTH.	(09) 323.5285	Deputy Commonwealth Statistician (Attention : Census Liaison Officer) 1-3 St George's Terrace PERTH. W.A. 6000
TASMANIA	Census Liaison Officer 188 Collins Street HOBART.	(002) 20.4437	Deputy Commonwealth Statistician (Attention : Census Liaison Officer) Box 66A, G.P.O. HOBART. TAS. 7001
NORTHERN TERRITORY	Census Liaison Officer 7th Floor, M.L.C. Building 81 Smith Street DARWIN.	(089) 80.2612	The Statistician, Northern Territory (Attention : Census Liaison Officer) Box 3796, P.O. DARWIN. N.T. 5794
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	Assistant Supervisor User Contact and Dissemination Population Census Branch Wing 4, Level Gb Cameron Offices BELCONNEN.	(062) 52.6006	Australian Statistician (Attention : Population Census Branch) Box 10, P.O. BELCONNEN. A.C.T. 2616