

# Indigenous Socioeconomic Outcomes: Assessing the Evidence

A CAEPR Conference to be held at The Shine Dome,  
The Australian National University, on 11th and 12th August 2005

## Conference Abstracts

*Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2005*

**9.00am: Jon Altman (CAEPR) and John Taylor (CAEPR)**

### **Statistical needs in Indigenous affairs: the role of NATSISS 2002**

This paper provides a conceptual and policy backdrop for the subsequent more detailed analyses of thematic components of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). It begins with an overview of recent developments in the collection and use of statistics on Indigenous Australians, and examines these against the background of sweeping changes in Indigenous affairs policy. With reference to findings from earlier CAEPR workshops both before and after the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS), the 2002 NATSISS is placed in historic context and questions are raised about its current role and efficacy. Particular attention is paid to survey methodology, content, and coverage, and these are considered against the requirements of Indigenous public policy and stakeholder interests.

**9.30am: Andrew Webster (ABS)**

### **Surveying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Strategies and methodologies of the Australian Bureau of Statistics**

Cultural considerations, the geographical location of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) peoples and policy requirements influence the statistical activity of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) with regards to Australia's Indigenous population. Drawing on material presented in the 2003-04 ABS *Annual Report*, this paper situates Indigenous surveys within the broad context of ABS Indigenous statistical activity that features an expanding program of engagement with Indigenous communities. The paper discusses survey design, operations and output activities with reference to the 2002 NATSISS and the 2004-05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATIHHS).

**10.00am: Nicholas Biddle (CAEPR) and Boyd Hunter (CAEPR)**

### **Selected methodological issues for analysis of 2002 NATSISS**

The 2002 NATSISS will help provide answers to a number of important questions that Indigenous policy makers and researchers have not previously been able to answer. However, analysts using the data must be familiar with the context in which the survey was collected. To help users become aware of some of the key issues, this paper provides a critical analysis of the NATSISS survey methodology and the way in which the data has been provided to the public. We talk about potential sources of non-sampling error and give an overview of how analysts can make sure the conclusions they draw from the data are robust to the way in which the sample was collected.

**11.00am: John Taylor (CAEPR) and Yohannes Kinfu (CAEPR)**

### **Mobility issues**

Understanding the scale and nature of population movement is fundamental to policy analysis, as it determines to a large degree the size, distribution and composition of populations in different places and regions. Previous research on census data has quantified the spatial pattern of Indigenous mobility and identified its contribution to population redistribution. Preliminary work on the proximate determinants of migration has also been conducted. For the first time, NATSISS now makes available direct information on the reasons for relocation. In this paper, we examine the descriptive output from NATSISS on reasons for movement, and examine movement propensities against a range of key various social and economic variables. NATSISS also allows for the exploration of relationships between variables, and we attempt to model the factors that most influence individual migration decisions. The findings highlight the importance of social and economic factors.

**11.30am: Yohannes Kinfu (CAEPR)**

### **The 2002 NATSISS: What can it tell us about recent Indigenous demographic outcomes?**

Although accurate knowledge on components of Indigenous population change is vital for planning and programming purposes, both the quantity and quality of population statistics on Indigenous Australians remain far from adequate. Not only are existing demographic estimates volatile, but there is also an inadequate analysis concerning the determinants of key demographic outcomes in the population. The primary goals of this paper are to evaluate the quality of fertility and mortality data obtained in the 2002 NATSISS, and to compare the results with available estimates and other relevant data. A related aim is to explore the potential of the survey data for examining inequalities in child survival and teenage fertility among Indigenous Australians—two demographic outcomes that are directly related to socio-economic status and that are of immediate policy interest. Finally, the paper seeks to propose ways of improving the collection of demographic data in future Indigenous household surveys in Australia.

**12.00 noon: Will Sanders (CAEPR)**

### **Understanding housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians: what can the NATSISS add?**

This paper will explore how NATSISS data can add to census data in understanding housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians. It will reiterate arguments about tenure profile differences of Indigenous people in remote and settled areas, but also look at these profiles by age, over time and in comparison with non-Indigenous people. It will also examine other indicators of housing differences between Indigenous people in remote and non-remote areas, such as whether a dwelling has major structural problems and access to various services.

**1.30pm: Boyd Hunter (CAEPR)**

### **Income and social exclusion**

Previous research into Indigenous poverty has suggested that it is qualitatively and quantitatively different to other forms of Australian poverty. The advent of the NATSISS allows us to extend this analysis by examining financial stress and social capital broadly defined. The ABS Remote Access Data Laboratory (RADL) now includes continuous income data, offering an exciting opportunity for research that extends our understanding of the social and economic processes underlying Indigenous disadvantage. The extent of Indigenous poverty is highlighted by the fact that Indigenous adults are four times more likely to experience financial stress than other Australians, at least in terms of their ability to raise \$2000 cash in an emergency situation.

**2.00pm: Matthew Gray (AIFS), Ruth Weston (AIFS), and David Stanton**

### **Family and community life**

This paper examines information collected in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) on family and community life. These are areas in which there have been relatively little nationally representative data for Indigenous Australians.

The paper includes a critical examination of the nature of data collected on family and community life and a discussion of the types of research questions that the data can address. Allied to both these issues, the paper also provides an illustration of some of the ways in which the data can be used. In particular, comparisons are made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians concerning their experience of family-related and other social stressors and their use of child care.

**2.30pm: Bruce Chapman (RSSS, ANU) and Matthew Gray (AIFS)**

### **Labour force issues**

The 1994 NATSIS and the 2002 NATSISS are the only population samples with detailed information on labour market issues beyond labour force status for Indigenous Australians. This paper discusses the labour force data in the 2002 NATSISS and considers some of the policy relevant questions that this data set can be used to address.

One of the most valuable features of the NATSISS is that it identifies CDEP employment across all areas of Australia (which is not the case with census data). This allows analysis of the effects of CDEP employment on a range of outcomes, such as income. It also allows for analysis of trends in labour force status (including non-CDEP employment) to be identified with more confidence than has been previously possible using combined census data. A second valuable feature is that it allows, for the first time, examination of labour market relationships and outcomes in very remote areas of Australia.

Our presentation will also explore some omissions and weaknesses in the survey. We use an alternative data set to illustrate the extent to which these shortcomings matter in an empirical sense. For some variables not included in NATSIS the omissions are shown to be of importance in an interpretation of labour market relationships.

**3.30pm: Jon Altman (CAEPR), Geoff Buchanan (CAEPR), and Nicholas Biddle (CAEPR)**

### **The real 'real' economy in remote and very remote Australia**

This paper utilizes a model of the economy that includes the non-market or Indigenous customary sector. It seeks to 'Indigenise the economy' by using available NATSISS 2002 data on hunting and fishing activities, as well as on cultural activities that are undertaken for payment. NATSISS 2002 lends statistical support to the view that the real economy in remote and very remote Indigenous Australia is made up of three, rather than two, sectors; and shows that other ABS statistics ignore the non-market sector and hence understate the extent of Indigenous economic participation and well-being. The policy ramifications of this finding are that the customary sector might provide economic opportunity; major programs like the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme might be useful instruments to facilitate enhanced customary participation with positive livelihood outcomes. The NATSISS 2002 methodology has shortcomings both in geographic coverage and in conceptualizing the customary as primarily cultural, rather than economic. Measures are proposed that will allow the ABS to better capture customary economic activity throughout Australia in NATSISS 2008, and thus to represent the Indigenous economy more accurately.

**4.00pm–5.00pm: Larissa Behrendt (Jumbunna, UTS), Tom Calma (HREOC), and Jon Altman (CAEPR, chair)**

### **Panel discussion—Diverse perspectives on the evidence**

Panel members will evaluate the recent evidence on socioeconomic outcomes for Indigenous Australians, drawing on their diverse professional experience. In addition to reflecting on the presentations made in day one of the conference, the discussion will tease out how (and indeed if) statistical collections can add substantially to the public debate on Indigenous policy. One of the main questions to be addressed is how large-scale statistical collections can be improved to collect more accurate information about Indigenous circumstances so that policy can be better informed to address Indigenous needs.

## **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005**

**9.00am: Bob Gregory (RSSS, ANU)**

### **Asking the right questions in Indigenous policy**

This paper takes a longer run look at the changing economic circumstances of indigenous peoples over the last three decades and conjectures about the economic success of policy and the relevance of economic research in this area. It places indigenous economic progress in the context of anticipated 'reforms' in the Australian economy.

**9.30am: Jerry Schwab (CAEPR)**

### **Education and training**

The first NATSIS (1994) provided an important contribution to the developing statistical profile of Indigenous Australians in the areas of education and training. The survey was ambitious and provocative, yielding important new insights into questions that had never been addressed at the national level. The survey also stumbled in places, illustrating why some important questions have proven so difficult to answer. In relation to education and training, the 2002 NATSISS is different to its predecessor in many ways. This paper compares the two surveys and reflects on what has been lost and what has been gained in the most recent exercise. In particular, the paper considers the current and future relevance of the NATSISS in light of the increasing availability of Indigenous education and training data gathered by other government, statutory and research organisations.

**10.00am: Sarah Holcombe (CAEPR) and Peter Radoll (School of Business and Information Management, ANU)**

### **Transport and information technology**

#### **Transport—Sarah Holcombe**

NATSISS 2002 is the first national survey of Indigenous Australians that includes a transport module. Thus, an analysis of change over time is not possible. Because of the unprecedented nature of the methodology and the data produced, it is useful to consider this module as an experimental data set, where there are necessarily lessons to be learnt from an analysis of the results. Because of the multi-dimensional nature of transport, this paper will focus on the remote area survey results by examining how transport in such areas differs from non-remote areas in the NATSISS and non-Indigenous adults in the General Social Survey (GSS). Remote areas cover approximately 80 per cent of the Australian land mass and consequently it is essential to understand whether publicly available data adequately addresses the scale of the issue of transport availability. Do we get an adequate picture of vehicles per capita in remote areas, and can any distinction be drawn between types of vehicles, such as those purchased by government or privately? These questions are raised and interrogated in light of

ethnographic evidence which suggests that the availability of vehicles in remote areas is significantly more severe than the NATSISS data indicates.

### **Information technology— Peter Radoll**

The paper presents data from the 2002 NATSISS as it relates to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use, namely computers and the internet. While a number of determinants of ICT use—education and income— have been well established, there are other factors that have a similar impact on ICT use in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that are presented here for the first time. These are health status, the impact of participation in the Commonwealth Development and Employment Program (CDEP), the impact of the justice system, access to online services, and the overall 'digital divide' between remote and non-remote Indigenous communities.

### **11.00am: Russell Ross (University of Sydney)**

#### **Health**

This paper compares the self-assessed health statistics available in the NATSISS and, where possible benchmarks these with General Social Survey (GSS). Factors examined include general health level, rates of disabilities, and life expectancy. A range of comparisons are made including Indigenous vs non-Indigenous, age, gender, regional (remote versus non-remote, States and Territories), and improvements between 1994 and 2002. The data clearly demonstrate the on-going levels of substantial health disadvantage among the Indigenous population, and the lack of any real progress in reducing disadvantage since 1994. They do highlight some areas of improvement and the unevenness of the disadvantage. A common theme linking the positive health results is the importance of factors such as education and labour force success.

### **11.30am: Maggie Brady (CAEPR) and Tanya Chikritzhs (Curtin University):**

#### **Substance Use in the 2002 NATSISS**

This presentation will address the methods and findings of the 2002 NATSISS in relation to estimates of substance use (tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs) among Indigenous Australians. Accurate and reliable surveys of drug use among vulnerable populations are fundamental to the development of evidence based policy and the effective allocation of funding for prevention and treatment. Yet there have been only a handful of large national surveys which have adequately addressed Indigenous substance use in this country. As one of the most recent, the methodological approach and results of the 2002 NATSISS are of particular interest. NATSISS substance use estimates will be compared to those made from other national surveys and issues relating, in particular, to non-sampling errors will be discussed.

### **12.00 noon: Mick Dodson (National Centre for Indigenous Studies, ANU) and Boyd Hunter (CAEPR)**

#### **Crime and justice**

The dearth of statistical data which might have assisted the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody led to that Commission's recommendation for a special national survey of the Indigenous population. NATSISS continues and extends the capacity to research social interactions underlying the high rates of Indigenous interactions within the criminal justice system. The addition of age first charged and incarceration are crucial additions to the questionnaire since the 1994 NATSISS. While the General Social Survey (GSS) and NATSISS are broadly comparable in terms of victimisation statistics, the lack of arrest and incarceration data limits the ability to validly compare the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

**1.30pm: Nicolas Peterson (School of Archaeology and Anthropology, ANU), Inge Kral (CAEPR), and Frances Morphy (CAEPR)**

### **Language and culture**

#### **Language in the NATSISS— Inge Kral (CAEPR) and Frances Morphy (CAEPR)**

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the questions on language that were asked in the NATSISS. The second reviews the NATSISS evidence on the status and viability of the Indigenous languages of Australia. The final section focuses on whether Indigenous language speakers differ significantly from other Indigenous people in terms of their location, level of schooling and labour force status. We conclude with some thoughts on the value of the NATSISS enterprise given the size and diversity of Australia's Indigenous population.

#### **Culture—Nicolas Petersen**

It was unclear in the original NATSIS survey what the purpose and significance of the 'Culture' questions were: this remains true for the 2002 survey. However, it seems that the primary interest is to assist in formulating policies on cultural maintenance. A considerable number of changes have been made to the questions asked under the section 'Culture', and overall the changes are an improvement because they provide more information on the actual activities people undertake. The paper will review the changes to the questions, and compare the 1994 findings with those from 2002.

**2.00pm: Bill Arthur (CAEPR)**

### **Torres Strait**

Torres Strait Islanders are a separate cultural group from Aboriginal people, making up around 11 per cent of the total Australian Indigenous population. Their particular history has seen a migration from Torres Strait to other parts of the country, to the extent that only a small percentage of Islanders now reside in Torres Strait. This paper will discuss the implications of the above for projects like NATSISS, and will comment on the 2001 data.

**2.30pm: Tom Calma (HREOC)**

### **Social justice and human rights—Utilising Indigenous socio-economic data in policy development**

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner is required to report to the federal Parliament annually on the exercise and enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders (the *Social Justice Report*) and to the federal Attorney-General on the impact of the *Native Title Act* on Indigenous human rights (the *Native Title Report*). The Commissioner is also tasked to promote discussion and awareness of human rights in relation to Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders; and to undertake research and educational programs for the purpose of promoting respect for, and to promote the enjoyment of, the human rights of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders.

This paper will reflect on the importance and utility of available Indigenous socio-economic data in monitoring the exercise and enjoyment of Indigenous peoples' human rights. In particular, it will examine recent developments within the United Nations and in Indigenous policy making in Australia, and will consider the adequacy of existing benchmarking and targets, how existing collections of Indigenous socio-economic data contribute to these issues; and possible future directions for data collection.

3.00pm: Tim Rowse (RSSS, ANU)

### **From rags to riches? Steps in the formation of an Indigenous statistical archive in Australia**

This paper will try to periodise the long-standing practice of quantitative description of the Indigenous population. Until 1901, each colony followed its own course, and the determinants and uses of each colony's practices are questions for a comparative historical research program that has only just begun. From 1901 to 1966 the Commonwealth standardised Australian enumeration practices. I will draw on Smith (1980) in outlining the racial and historical perspectives built into that phase of enumeration. From 1970 to 1980, a number of authors involved in Rowley's Academy Project complained about the limitations of the extant statistical archive. Reform commenced with the 1971 Census. The reformed statistical archive has allowed systematic comparison of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, in certain policy-relevant dimensions; this has enabled new emphasis, in policy debate, on a notion of social justice that had previously been assumed rather than made explicit. The Productivity Commission (2003) has given consummate expression to this model of social justice. Meanwhile, new variables have been brought into play through NATSIS (1994) and NATSISS (2002), and through the addition of an Indigenous identifier to certain administrative data sets. From a technical point of view, the prospects for quantitative social science about Indigenous Australians have never been better. The political utility of this enriched archive, however, is another matter. Are interactions among variables complemented by interactions among agents? The paper concludes by arguing the relevance to our self-awareness as social scientists of Charles Taylor's idea that the modern social imaginary is 'bifocal'.