Summarising: Arthur (1998), Access to government program and services for mainland Torres Strait Islanders
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
Access to government program and services for mainland Torres Strait Islanders

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
W.S. Arthur

Time period:
1996

Geographic location:
Mainland Australia

Methodology:
Commonwealth and State/Territory government departments, local government and Islander organisations were surveyed and interviewed about: program and services provision to Torres Strait Islanders, statistical collections about Islanders, inclusion of Islanders on consultative committees and staffing strategies for Islanders. The research also analysed 1996 Census information collected about Torres Strait Islanders.

Aims:
The purpose of this research was to examine access for Torres Strait Islanders residing on the Australian mainland to the following government program and service areas: business development, employment, education and training (including vocational training and university education), health, housing, and arts and culture.

Selected findings and insights:
Of the 38,850 Torres Strait Islanders identified in the 1996 Census, some 32,800 or 85% resided on the mainland of Australia. Of those residing on the mainland, the large majority lived in Queensland (15,100), some 7,500 lived in NSW and 3,100 in Victoria; the remaining 7,000 were spread throughout the other States and Territories.

- Islanders predominantly lived in urban areas, with the only major exceptions being those who lived in Aboriginal communities in Cape York (Qld.) and the northern areas of WA.

Torres Strait Islanders comprised the majority of the population in Torres Strait which was their traditional country. Those on the mainland meanwhile, were a minority with respect to both non-Indigenous and Aboriginal people and were not living on their traditional lands. In 1996 they represented about 9 per cent of the mainland Indigenous population.

- Despite living in urban areas and many being born and raised on the mainland, other CAEPR research has shown they still strongly identify with the Torres Strait Islander culture.
The research provides comparative information between Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians in regard to a range of employment and educational indicators, indicating a lack of parity in self-employment, employment in the private sector, overall employment rate, post-school qualifications and home ownership. Employment in the State/Territory government sector was slightly higher than that for non-Indigenous Australians.

The research found that the overall approach of all levels of government to Torres Strait Islanders was that they made no distinction between Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people and encouraged them to participate in all of the programs and services that were available.

- Most State/Territory Governments perceived that there were either no, or very few, Torres Strait Islanders in their jurisdiction; and
- There was the perception that those that did exist, managed quite well without specific programs and services.

These government agency perceptions were possibly due to:

- There being very few Islanders outside Queensland and as these mostly lived in urban centres, they were relatively 'invisible';
- Islanders on the mainland, unlike those in the Strait and Aboriginal people, maintained a fairly low political profile and tended to find their way in mainland society through the labour market very much like other Australians; and
- Although their socioeconomic status was lower than that of non-Indigenous Australians, it was generally higher than that of Aboriginal peoples.

The research found that Islanders generally believed that they could access mainstream programs and services on the mainland, however they felt:

- Disadvantaged with respect to Aboriginal people in terms of accessing Indigenous programs and services as demonstrated by little Islander cultural content in State government training programs and not being treated as 'identified' for particular training and employment programs.

Educational implications:

This paper suggests the need to include in cultural awareness courses for teachers and trainers a consideration of the distinct cultural characteristics of Islanders that differentiate them from Aboriginal culture. This applies particularly in regard to those involved in educating and training mainland Islanders as they will tend to be a minority among the larger Aboriginal populations. It will also apply to those agencies responsible for employment programs, health and community support services. [inservice training] [teacher preparation] [program training].
Relevance:

*Introductory Topic: The changing demography of Indigenous Australia*

*Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and Family Life*

**Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education**

- Access to post-compulsory schooling, training, employment and higher education
- Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education.
- Culturally inclusive support strategies, culturally appropriate work readiness strategies, career counsellors and mentors

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