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Summarising: Taylor (2006), *Indigenous People in the West Kimberley Labour Market*
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:
Indigenous People in the West Kimberley Labour Market

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
J. Taylor

Time period:
2001 – 2021

Geographic location:
West Kimberley region (WA), covering the SLAs of Broome, Derby and West Kimberley

Methodology:
A statistical analysis of population, labour force, education and training characteristics and projected trends based upon 2001 Census of Population and Housing information and other Commonwealth and State and territory government agency administrative data.

Aims:
The paper aims to develop a social and economic profile of the West Kimberley region of Western Australia as a basis for considering regional development opportunities and factors likely to assist or impede those developments, including education and training implications.

Selected findings and insights:
In 2001, the estimated residential population of the West Kimberley region totalled 21,483, of whom 9,453 were Indigenous Australians and who therefore comprised about 44% of the total population for the region.

The Indigenous population is expected to continue to increase its share of the regional population and is projected to possibly double by 2029 (firm estimates point to a increase by about 40% by 2021). The major share in this projected growth is in the younger age groups – that is those commencing school, those of post-compulsory school age and those entering the workforce.

While the number of employed people in the West Kimberley expanded greatly over the past few decades, this resulted from either non-Indigenous migration into the West Kimberley from the south west of Western Australia or from growth in CDEP employment for Indigenous people.


There was a high degree of both industry and occupational segregation operating in the West Kimberley labour market:

- Indigenous workers were much more likely to be in jobs associated with government administration (that is, often CDEP classified jobs), health and community services and personal services;
• Indigenous workers were much more likely to be in labouring and other CDEP type jobs and less likely to be in managerial, professional and trade occupations.

Most notably Indigenous workers appeared under-represented in tourism and resources related industries, even though they were among the top employing industries.

Achieving job parity with the non-Indigenous population required a doubling of the number of people working over the next 15 year period (and that includes working in CDEP) - that would amount to an additional 5,755 jobs created and occupied over the period. Being solely dependent upon mainstream employment would be quite unachievable.

• To achieve any progress in the coming years, the major employment sectors would need to be encouraged to employ more Indigenous staff – tourism, agriculture, retailing, mining and State government services.

The polarisation of employment outcomes in the West Kimberley very much reflected the relative educational attainment levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Even if one ignored the overall educational levels of the working age population and considered only those of school age and young adults, the results were not encouraging.

This study found that current enrolment levels for compulsory school ages appeared close to parity, taking account of those that were enrolled outside the region. However:

• Many of those enrolled in West Kimberley schools did not attend regularly, with estimated attendance rates of 78% for Years 1–7 and 67% for Years 8–10.

• While retention rates from Year 8 to Year 10 were quite high (of the order of 80%+), retention through to Year 12 was low, ranging from 33% in the Broome region down to 7% in the Derby West Kimberley region.

The study estimates the output of students having completed Year 12 to be no more than 70 young people each year, based on current enrolment and completion trends. As it points out, this falls far short of the number required to compete for and fill the estimated 1300 jobs, if they became available, to maintain existing levels of employment.

For the VET sector, it appeared that at best the sector produced some 80 qualified individuals each year mostly at Certificate I to III levels, although this may well have included people currently employed, either in the mainstream labour market or in CDEP.

Overall the supply of Indigenous labour to meet future employment demand will be insufficient due to a general lack of skills, including basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Educational implications:

Despite the need for increased employment to alleviate economic disadvantage, regional mainstream options may not be available due to an overall lack of educational attainment of the Indigenous working age population. This suggests the need to consider alternative employment options based upon more customary activities and closer to the aspirations of the local Indigenous communities – sea and land resource management, art and tourism. In turn this will require the development of school-based education and training strategies, complementing training providers, directed towards the establishment of these Indigenous industries. This can only be successful if based upon effective local partnerships, including schools, training providers, community organisations and other business interests working together towards community and regional development.[land and sea management] [partnership]
Other CAEPR research has addressed the issues of developing suitable curricula and teaching strategies directed towards the training of Indigenous youth and adults to work in the customary sector and to establish commercially viable enterprises.

In brief the development of alternative pathways to employment appears critical to overcoming Indigenous socioeconomic disadvantage. At the same time low school attendance and Year 12 retention levels will need to be addressed by educational authorities so that those young adults joining the workforce over the coming decade will be able to participate in emergent mainstream employment opportunities as they arise, particularly in the trades and in community relevant areas of health, education and juvenile justice in a senior management and professional capacity. [policy]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

The challenge for 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

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