Reference No. 142

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 Murray-Darling Basin: A statistical profile

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 264/2004

Name of Researcher(s):
J. Taylor and N. Biddle

Time period:
2001

Geographic location:
The Murray-Darling Basin of NSW, Victoria and Queensland

Methodology:

Aims:
The purpose of this research was to develop a baseline regional profile of the Murray-Darling Basin, with particular reference to better understanding of Indigenous and non-Indigenous population numbers in the Basin, their characteristics, distribution and trajectory of change, as well as their relative socioeconomic status. Such demographic and socioeconomic information could therefore provide for assessment of the quantum of need in social and economic policy, and for assessment of the impact of that quantum in environmental policy.

Selected findings and insights:
In 2001, the estimated residential population for the Murray-Darling Basin was 2,028,755 of whom 68,656 or 3.4% were Indigenous Australians. The annual growth rate over the 1996–2001 period for the Indigenous population was 3.3% compared to 0.6% for the non-Indigenous populations.

The Indigenous population increased in all regions of the Basin, with growth rates over the 1996–2001 period varying considerably between different parts of the Basin with little discernable pattern.

- very high growth rates of over 28% were recorded in regions as varied as the Australian Capital Territory, the Darling Downs, Far West New South Wales and the Loddon Valley in northern Victoria, while relatively low growth of only 4% was recorded in the Murray statistical division which runs along the New South Wales bank of the river from Tumbarumba to Wentworth.

In contrast, the non-Indigenous population either declined or showed much smaller growth rates across the regions of the Basin.

- One of the reasons for this was a much higher net migration of 20–24 year olds from the Basin to the rest of Australia for the non-Indigenous population compared to the Indigenous population.
• There was also a general lack of reciprocal movement of non-Indigenous people back to the Basin in later years leading to the progressive decline in the non-Indigenous population.

The Indigenous population of the Basin had a much younger age profile than that of the non-Indigenous population, reflecting relatively high fertility and therefore potential for further expansion due to natural increase as well as relatively high adult mortality.

• In contrast, the non-Indigenous profile was much older and ageing and the depleting effects of out-migration among young adults is clearly evident in its profile.

• the Indigenous population, in comparison with the non-Indigenous population, was over-represented at all ages under 35 years, and especially below 20 years, and under-represented at older ages above 35 years, especially amongst those aged 45 years and over.

The paper conservatively estimates that the Indigenous population of working age in the Murray–Darling Basin will increase by 44% from 40,467 in 2001 to 58,260 in 2016. Such a projected increase in the size of the workforce, has significant employment implications for the region.

• To maintain parity with the 2001 Indigenous employment-to-population ratio of 37.6 per cent would require an increase in the numbers employed from 15,216 in 2001 to 21,381 by 2016 — an extra 6,165 jobs.

• To achieve parity with the 2001 non-Indigenous employment-to-population ratio in the region by 2016 then an extra 19,000 jobs would be required to be taken up by Indigenous people.

The levels of occupational segregation in the Basin for Indigenous workers were particularly high and higher than for industry segregation:

• As a statistical measure of industry segregation, 18% of Indigenous workers would have had to change their industry of employment in order to achieve a distribution equivalent to that of non-Indigenous workers. This indicates slightly less industry segregation in the Basin than the 23% recorded for Indigenous Australians as a whole;

• Indigenous people tended to be under-represented in the two major industries of the Basin — agriculture and retailing. In particular the only area of agriculture in which a significant number of Indigenous people were working was sheep farming, whereas non-Indigenous people were also frequently working in mixed farming, beef, dairy, grain and viticulture.

As a statistical measure of occupational segregation, 41% of Indigenous workers would have had to change their broad occupation group in order to achieve a distribution equivalent to that of non-Indigenous workers. This represents double the degree of occupational segregation in the Basin compared to the 20% recorded for Indigenous Australians as a whole;

• Indigenous people tended to be under-represented in professions, managerial positions and the trades.

A more detailed examination indicates the skills divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Though certain major occupations in the Basin (cleaners, farm hands, sales assistants, and truck drivers) were common to both populations, there were significant differences.

• Non-Indigenous workers were registered nurses and secondary school teachers, whereas Indigenous workers were nursing assistants and education aides; and

• Labouring occupations did not appear in the non-Indigenous top 20 occupations.
Educational implications:

The youthful profile of the Indigenous population in the Murray-Darling Basin, together with the increasing Indigenous share of the overall population, will change the profile of schools such that they will need to cater for an increased Indigenous student population. This in turn will have significant curriculum and staffing implications as schools respond to a greater proportion of students with low literacy skills, possibly less parental support at home than may be the case with non-Indigenous students, and potentially ‘at risk’ of not completing secondary school and becoming job ready. [curriculum] [professional development].

The high level of occupational segregation also presents a challenge for pathways development. There appears to be a strong need to provide skills training and career counselling and support as a means of encouraging young Indigenous people to enter those industries and occupations that represent the stronger part of the Basin’s economy. Yet, based upon other CAEPR research, there is also the issue of the extent to which the segregation is also a result of subtle forms of discrimination operating against Indigenous job seekers – again an issue that needs to be addressed by schools and the broader business and industry communities operating in the region. [training]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

The challenge for pathways to training, employment and higher education

Related papers:


