



AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION TO THE

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

INQUIRY INTO REPRESENTATION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
AND THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Australian Bureau of Statistics
3 September 2003

**Australian Bureau of Statistics Supplementary Submission to the
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Inquiry into Representation of the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital
Territory in the House of Representatives**

This supplementary submission is ABS' response to certain issues raised in Appendix B of the NT Government's submission and some statements in the submission of Senator Crossin. Some of the statements in the submissions seriously misstate the actual situation. Also included is a graph of the latest series of population projections released on 2 September 2003, as requested by the Committee.

2 This submission focuses on factors that may affect the total population of the Northern Territory rather than on the distribution or the characteristics (such as Indigenous origin) of the population, except where these impact on the determination of the Estimated Resident Population.

3 *There has been some independent assessment of the accuracy of the Census....the manner of ABS enumeration in remote Aboriginal communities can serve to undercount the population and that the adjustment factor applied to compensate for this may be inadequate...There has been only one rigorous check of the Census enumeration of remote Indigenous population. This estimated a census undercount of 17 percent in Aurukun...* (NT Submission Appendix B, point 1, paragraphs 3 and 4)

4 The study referred to which provided evidence of a 17% undercount was published as *Ethnographic perspectives on enumeration of Aboriginal people in remote Aboriginal Australia*, by Martin and Taylor and was conducted at the time of the 1986 Census. The paper was not published until May 1996. The census Indigenous Enumeration Strategy (IES) was first used in Queensland for the 1991 Census, and has fundamentally changed the way the census is conducted in Aboriginal communities. The census IES involves working closely with the local communities and using local people who know their communities to conduct the census. There is one collector for every ten households (compared with one for every 400 households for mainstream enumeration). The methodology used in the now dated research, was based around constructing kinship and family groups over an extended period of time and geography. This means that the population count obtained could not be compared directly with either "usual residence" or "as enumerated" census counts or Estimated Resident Population figures. Both these points were noted by the researchers.

5 ABS has researched the quality of enumeration for Indigenous people using demographic analysis techniques. The results have been published in *Population Issues, Indigenous Australians*, ABS Cat No 4708.0. These indicate that, for the NT, the census misses the very young, young adult males and the very old but to nowhere near the extent suggested by the earlier study. However, the adjustments made to census counts to arrive at the Estimated Resident Population account for these missed people.

6 Observational studies were conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal and Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) with the support of the ABS in conjunction with the 2001 Census. These studies involved three researchers observing 2001 Census operations in three different communities. The results of their studies were published in CAEPR monograph 22 *Making Sense of the Census: Observations of 2001 Enumeration in Remote Aboriginal Australia*, Martin, Morphy, Sanders and Taylor. In two of the communities, the conclusions were that the count was "exemplary" (page 28) and as "good as it could be." (page 50). One of these researchers noted that with the current methodologies, there was "a significant risk of double counting some people". This was also the overall conclusion based on the three studies, "As we have suggested, this methodology will, if anything, err towards double counting" (page 96) .

7 *The ABS has acknowledged that in Wadeye (Port Keats) there were community problems which disrupted the Census...The Census appears to have missed a significant number of people in Wadeye...The Wadeye example illuminates the challenges of the Census and (sic) well as the limitations of the ABS effort: "The census was disgusting - people were coming back with their forms weeks later, and the census people would not collect them...I myself saw about 15 forms lying around people's houses when I did home visits...the white fellas were given a stack at their work...The Aboriginal people had them dropped off at home..."* (NT Submission Appendix B, point 1, paragraph 5, sub paragraph 2)

8 Because of difficulties encountered in the lead up to the 2001 Census, Wadeye was enumerated by interview by ABS Northern Territory staff in association with people from the Wadeye community. The enumeration of Wadeye included a comprehensive cross-check of people counted within the community itself and all of its associated outstations against expected numbers of residents as indicated by intelligence gathered prior to enumeration. The anecdotal evidence from an unnamed source does not correspond with census enumeration methods in remote Indigenous communities. The census in these communities is conducted by interview and consequently census forms are not left with the Indigenous households. Census forms are not distributed at work places for any segment of the population. Field procedures include quality control processes that would alert census management staff to any missing completed forms.

9 *"At the global level, NT Grants Commission service population for all remote communities were 4% above census counts (including overseas visitors)...Given the substantial number of visitors to these regions this suggests that the 2001 Census adjustment for undercounting was inadequate"* (NT Submission Appendix B point 1, paragraph 5, sub paragraph 1). The submission (NT Submission Appendix B, point 1, paragraph 5, subparagraph 2 and appendix) also presents evidence of alleged undercounts for three communities.

10 It is not entirely clear how the NT Grants Commission (NTGC) service population estimates are prepared. However, it is likely that these figures, along with figures for the three communities listed in the appendix of the NT Submission are based on comparing administrative data with census or Estimated Resident Population data.

11 ABS population estimates rarely match data from administrative records. This is also true for non-Indigenous communities. Some of the figures for the individual communities are for different time periods (one example is two years after the census). It is not clear that they are for comparable geographic areas. The business rules which determine whether a person is entitled to access a service and therefore is on an administrative list in a particular location can differ markedly from census or Estimated Resident Population concepts. As a consequence, it is possible for people to be included on a community's administrative records even though they may not be currently present in a particular community or meet the ABS usual residence criteria. For example, a resident who is temporarily residing in Darwin while undergoing long term medical treatment.

12 Furthermore, while it may be possible to control for duplication on administrative lists at the local level, it is not possible to ensure that individuals are not on other lists, including equivalent lists at other localities. This could lead to some people being counted twice if lists are summed to arrive at a Northern Territory population. It is not possible to comment on the particular examples cited without an understanding of how these lists are compiled and maintained.

13 *It is clear from a recently published paper that the enumeration of the Indigenous population in the Alice Springs Town camps in the 2001 Census "probably allowed a lot of visitors who might not have been counted elsewhere, to slip through the census net" (NT Submission Appendix B, point 3, paragraph 2)*

14 The paper referred to was the CAEPR monograph discussed above in paragraph 6. As noted previously, the overall conclusion of the research was that "...this methodology will, if anything err towards double counting" (page 96).

15 For the Alice Springs Town Camps, the researcher noted the difficulties of the situation, including high level of mobility between the camps, to outlying Aboriginal communities and into Alice Springs, and a good deal of drinking (page 88). Because of these difficulties, it is likely that some visitors to the community who arrived during the conduct of the census were missed in the Alice Springs Town Camps. However, it is the ABS view that given the extended enumeration period which was required in the Alice Springs Town Camps and the enumeration method adopted in other remote communities, some of these recently arrived visitors may have been counted elsewhere.

16 *...In 2001, the ABS applied a new method and according to written advice from Patrick Corr, the ABS Director for Demography, the method is so complex that it is difficult to say precisely how much the remote Indigenous population has been adjusted for undercount. Apparently, in 2001, the ABS did not apply the 6.1% national Indigenous undercount rate to the Territory's remote population. (NT Submission Appendix B, point 4 paragraph 3).*

17 The ABS uses a combination of techniques which interact with each other to adjust the census as enumerated counts to arrive at the Estimated Resident Population. The total NT population was adjusted by 7,500 which was the estimate of the net undercount as measured by the Post Enumeration Survey (PES) in the NT, including demographic validation adjustments. The NT net undercount was then distributed into Indigenous and non-Indigenous (using the 6.1% national Indigenous undercount rate), as well as age and sex in preparing Statistical Local Areas (SLA) level population estimates including Indigenous and non-Indigenous estimates which then sum to the Territory total. Other adjustments (such as for residents temporarily overseas on census night) are also distributed across the NT Statistical Local Areas. After distributing not stated responses for Indigenous status, the 2001 Census Indigenous usual resident counts in aggregate for the NT were further adjusted upwards by 8.5%, compared with 3.9% for non Indigenous. Most of the upward adjustment of 8.5% would be an adjustment for undercount as the other components such as residents temporarily overseas on census night would be relatively minor for Indigenous communities.

18 *The final Census ERPs for the Territory incorporated substantial negative revisions were released on 18 February 2003. The revisions which reduce the Territory's measured population by 2,251 or 1.1% were completely unexpected and out of scale with those applied to other jurisdictions...The substantial reason for the revision was the ABS decision to impute "non contact" as smaller than those households that complete their census forms...The imputation adjustment is based on an assumption that where the ABS had informal estimates of the household size from neighbours that this was a reasonable basis for estimating the size of 78% of non-contact households...There is no evidence that this is a reasonable assumption and the ABS has refused to review the methodology...* (NT Submission Appendix B, point 6, paragraphs 1 and 2)

19 The ABS imputes numbers of males and females for households, which the census collector has assessed as occupied but from which no completed form has been obtained. The method used for preliminary 2001 Census based Estimated Resident Population simply assumed that the non-contact households had the same household size as the average household size within the same collection district.

20 There was a considerable increase in the intercensal discrepancy at the national level as measured for the preliminary 2001 Census based Estimated Resident Population. This was unexpected, as Australia has excellent data sources for births and deaths and overseas migration (despite DIMIA passenger card processing delays) which allows quite accurate tracking of the population between censuses.

21 Investigations were undertaken as to the cause of the large intercensal discrepancy. It was noted that the 2001 Census recorded a considerable increase in non-contact households. For the first time ever, there were data for a proportion of these households on the actual number of people in the household on census night ('credible source'). This credible source information was mostly obtained from the householders themselves (and not from neighbours), on delivery of the census form. For these non-contact households it was found that the number of persons present

was on average 1.80 compared with 2.37 persons which was the average imputed by the census processing system for the other dwellings using the average household size for the collection district.

22 A new imputation method was devised for the purposes of determining the final 2001 Census based Estimated Resident Population, using a combination of credible source data, geographic location and dwelling structure and applied Australia-wide. The results of the method were consistent with the findings of the Post Enumeration Survey and other demographic analysis.

23 The methodology was subject to independent review, reported in Demography Working Paper 2002/2 in November 2002 and discussed with State and Territory (including the Northern Territory) representatives at the Australian-New Zealand Population Workshop in December 2002, two months before the final results were released in February 2003.

24 Revising the population estimates is current ABS practice and is done as more reliable and up-to-date information becomes available. The current Estimated Resident Population figures are still subject to revision as better information on the components of population change (natural increase, internal migration and overseas migration) is received. It is expected that revised figures for all quarterly estimates from September 2001 will be issued in the December release of *Australian Demographic Statistics* (ABS cat. no. 3101.0). As discussed in the previous ABS submission, final Estimated Resident Populations will only be available after the 2006 Census.

25 "...the ABS have been evasive and misleading in explaining exactly which figures were supplied and the reasons as to why they were chosen." (Senator Crossin)

26 Section 47 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* places an obligation on the Australian Statistician to provide statistical information to the Electoral Commissioner **on request**:

*'47. The Australian Statistician shall, **on request** by the Electoral Commissioner, supply the Electoral Commissioner with all such statistical information as he or she requires for the purposes of this Division.'* (emphasis added)

Section 46 (1) specifies that the statistics are to be the **latest** available:

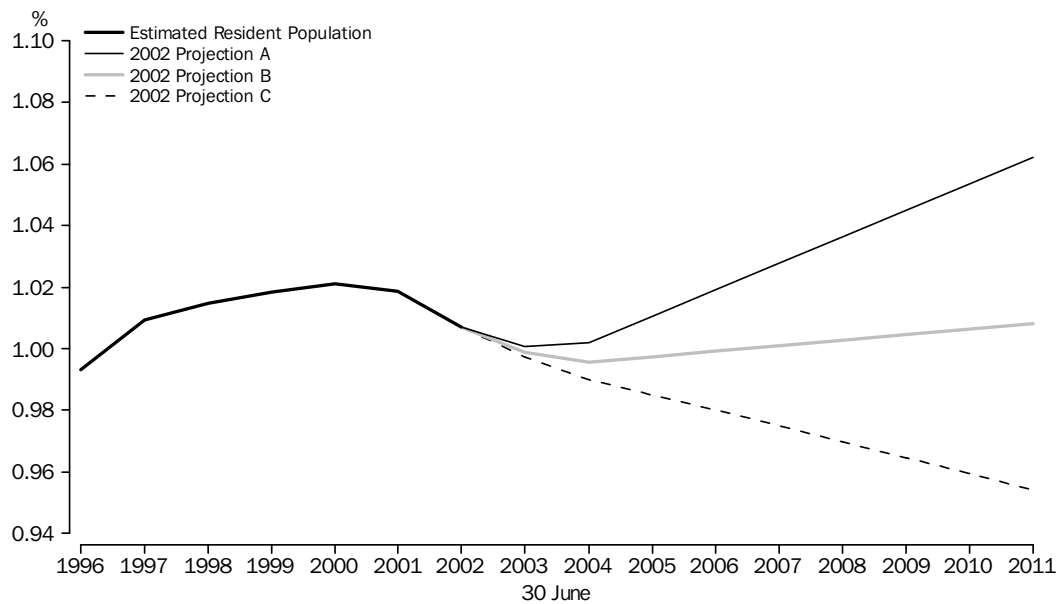
*'(1) Where a House of Representatives has continued for a period of 12 months after the day of the first meeting of that House, the Electoral Commissioner shall, within one month after the expiration of the period of 12 months, if that House is still continuing, ascertain the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth and of the several States and Territories in accordance with the **latest** statistics of the Commonwealth.'* (emphasis added)

27 The statistics provided to the Electoral Commissioner on 18 February were the latest statistics of the Commonwealth on the numbers of people of the Commonwealth and the several States and Territories as required under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

28 In order to maintain ABS policy of equal access to data, the Australian Statistician, in making the 2003 determination, took steps to ensure that the statistics provided to the Electoral Commissioner were also released to the public in the form of a special publication. This publication was special in that it contained a much reduced set of statistics compared to the quarterly publication (for example it did not include population breakdowns by age and sex) and it was released electronically. Both these aspects enabled it to be produced more quickly than the standard quarterly publication, even though the State and Territory population estimates in both publications were the same.

29 On those occasions where the AEC request for the latest statistics falls ahead of the publication of the quarterly estimates, but after a new set of estimates is internally available, it has been ABS practice to provide these to the AEC, and make them publicly available. For example in 1994, the Statistician released a press release on 4 March 1994 (the day the Electoral Commissioner was advised), several weeks in advance of the regular publication of the statistics in *Australian Demographic Statistics* (ABS cat. no 3101.0). In 1999, the Australian Statistician brought forward the release of the regular quarterly publication by several days so that it would coincide with the provision of the statistics to the Electoral Commissioner on 8 December 1999.

30 As requested by the Committee, the graph below updates the equivalent population projection graph presented in the ABS submission. It incorporates the latest series of ABS population projections published on 2 September 2003 in *Population Projections, Australia, 2002-2101* (ABS cat. no. 3222.0).

7**NT AS A PROPORTION OF AUSTRALIA'S POPULATION**

Note: Projections A, B and C commence at 30 June 2002

Source: *Population Projections, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 3222.0) and *Australian Demographic Statistics* (ABS cat. no. 3101.0)

31 The new projection series commences at 30 June 2002 with the Estimated Resident Population for that date. The projection series A, B and C (3 illustrative series selected from the 72 series compiled) have different assumptions for fertility, mortality, overseas migration and interstate migration. The assumptions are detailed in the publication cited above. They were developed through analysis of recent and longer term trends in components of population growth and through consultation with Commonwealth, State and Territory Government agency representatives, expert demographers and other key users.

32 With population growth lower in the Northern Territory than for the rest of Australia in recent years, the new series of projections indicate that the proportion of Australia's population in the NT under the high growth assumption projection series A is below the middle series of the previous series (projection series II used in the representation entitlement scenario in Table 2 of the Department of the Parliamentary Library Research Note "A Fair Deal for Territory Voters?" No 27, 18 March 2003).

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