

Economic Participation

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to participate fully in Queensland's society and economy, and enjoy the opportunities and benefits other Queenslanders experience, they need to be able to participate fully in the mainstream economy. This will have major flow on benefits and help close other gaps in life outcomes.

Overview

Addressing the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples is a priority for the Queensland Government. Though economic policy and employment programs are primarily the responsibility of the Australian Government, the Queensland Government makes a major contribution through its investment in public services, public infrastructure, enterprise support, tourism promotion and facilities, trade and industry programs, as well as training and employment programs.

Below is an outline of Queensland's commitment under the COAG Indigenous reform agenda, as well as the measures which will be used to monitor progress, and the programs and services which have been delivered by the Queensland Government (in 2008/09) to address the economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Queensland's commitment under COAG

The following are the specific outcomes of the COAG target to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working age population has the depth and breadth of skills and capabilities required for the 21st century labour market
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of working age participate effectively in all sectors and at all levels of the labour market.

Under the **National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation** 2008–2013 the Queensland Government is strengthening government procurement processes and service delivery arrangements and aims to increase Indigenous employment opportunities in the public sector.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation** is also supported by COAG skills reforms and the existing commitment under the **Queensland Skills Plan** which involved the development of **Positive Dreaming, Solid Futures Indigenous Employment and Training Strategy 2008–2011**. This strategy outlines the Queensland Government's commitment to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders into work by promoting alliances with industry, building the skills of individuals and enhancing community capabilities. It also seeks to align employment support and training to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.

Key sectors targeted are the resources, agriculture and tourism industries. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Queensland Resources Council 2008 is an example of the mining industry working with the Queensland Government to increase employment of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people s.

The evidence

Employment rate⁷³

The employment to population ratio measures the proportion of the working age population (15 years and over)⁷⁴ that are employed. Employment status can be directly related to people's living standards and many aspects of their wellbeing. Outcomes commonly associated with employment include increased income levels, better health and improved education outcomes.

⁷³ Please note that rates for labour force participation, employment and unemployment are from the annual Labour Force Survey, whereas rates presented in the 2007/08 *Closing the Gap Report* are from the five yearly ABS Census of Population and Housing. Therefore, these rates are not comparable.

⁷⁴ The working age population is 15-64 years as indicated in the NIRA, however, this is not available in annual Labour Force Surveys.

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- In 2007, the employment to population ratio for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland was 57.8 per cent compared with 64.8 per cent for the total Queensland population.
- Both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the total Queensland employment to population ratio have consistently trended upwards over the five years to 2007.⁷⁵
- The gap between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and total Queensland employment to population ratio, appears to have been declining over the period 2002–2007.⁷⁶

Labour force participation rate⁷⁷

The participation rate measures the proportion of the civilian population aged 15 years and over participating in the labour force. The labour force participation rate is a measure of the labour available for the production of economic goods and services and is often called the ‘economically active population’ or the ‘formal supply of labour’. The labour force comprises persons aged 15 years and over who are either employed or unemployed and seeking work. The remainder of the population are not in the labour force.

- In 2007, 64.1 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working age population were participating in the Queensland labour force compared with 67.3 per cent of the total Queensland population aged 15 years and over (see Figure A15).
- Both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and total Queensland labour force participation rates have been relatively stable over the period 2002–2007.

75 The change over the five year period is not statistically significant for either the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population or the total Queensland population.

76 No statistically significant change in employment outcomes is detectable due to the small count of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the Labour Force Survey.

77 Please note that rates for labour force participation, employment and unemployment are from the annual Labour Force Survey, whereas rates presented in the 2007/08 *Closing the Gap Report* are from the five yearly ABS Census of Population and Housing. Therefore, these rates are not comparable.

Unemployment rate⁷⁸

The unemployment rate measures the proportion of the working age population (15 years and over) that are participating in the labour force, i.e. actively looking for work but currently unemployed. The unemployment rate offers an insight into the level of unutilised labour resources within the Queensland economy.

- In 2007, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders had a higher estimated rate of unemployment (9.8 per cent) than Queensland as a whole (3.7 per cent).⁷⁹
- From 2002–2007, the total Queensland unemployment rate experienced a decrease from 7.5 per cent in 2002 to 3.7 per cent in 2007 (see Figure 7).
- Given the large margins of error for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment rate no conclusions can be drawn regarding changes between 2002 and 2007.⁸⁰

Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) Scheme

The Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) scheme is an initiative of the Australian Government that was originally funded to provide employment to (primarily) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote, rural and urban areas.

- From 1 July 2009, CDEP has been removed from non-remote areas. In remote areas it has been restructured to focus on work readiness skills and community development activities.⁸¹

78 Please note that rates for labour force participation, employment and unemployment are from the annual Labour Force Survey, whereas rates presented in the 2007/08 *Closing the Gap Report* are from the five yearly ABS Census of Population and Housing. Therefore, these rates are not comparable.

79 No statistically significant change in employment outcomes is detectable due to the small count of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the Labour Force Survey.

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81 All Indigenous Council areas except for Yarrabah have been declared as remote and retain the restructured CDEP program. Negotiations around CDEP reform in the Torres Strait are currently underway.



- As at 30 June 2009, approximately three per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders (2,773 persons) were participating in the CDEP scheme.⁸²
- Of the 8,371 participation episodes⁸³ in the CDEP scheme over the 2008/09 period, 751 (nine per cent) have transitioned to either full time or part time employment (93.9 per cent to full time employment and 6.1 per cent to part time employment).⁸⁴

Short-term employment outcomes

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) contributes to the Australian Government's strategy of enhancing employability through the acquisition of labour market skills and knowledge for job seekers and participation in society and the economy. The strategy is supported by investment in employment and training services for the unemployed and the disadvantaged.

One measure of outcomes from DEEWR-administered programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is the rate of employment three months following participation in assistance.

In 2008:⁸⁵

- under the Indigenous Employment Programs – Wage Assistance, 63.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders⁸⁶ were employed three months following the end of the subsidy period
- under the Intensive Support customised assistance program, 36.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders⁸⁷ were employed after receiving assistance (compared with 53.3 per cent of non-Indigenous Queenslanders).

82 Source: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (unpublished) CDEP Programme Management Branch data collection.

83 CDEP episodes do not equate to outcomes for unique individuals.

84 Over a time interval, multiple off-CDEP employment and CDEP participation episodes can be recorded per participant. The off-CDEP employment measures capture both unique and multiple exits and participations of participants.

85 Source: The Post-Program Monitoring survey conducted by DEEWR three months after jobseekers ceased assistance, with outcomes measured in 2008.

86 Of those job seekers whose outcomes were measured.

87 Of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders whose outcome from participating in the program was collected.

Training

Proportion of Indigenous 20-64 year olds with or working towards a post-school qualification in Certificate III or above

The economic returns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young adults continuing into post-school education are significant. In 2000, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research reported that persons of working age with a post-school qualification (including university degree or higher degree, apprenticeship, skilled vocational qualification or basic vocational qualification) were more likely to be employed than people without a post-school qualification.⁸⁸

In Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20-64 year olds:⁸⁹

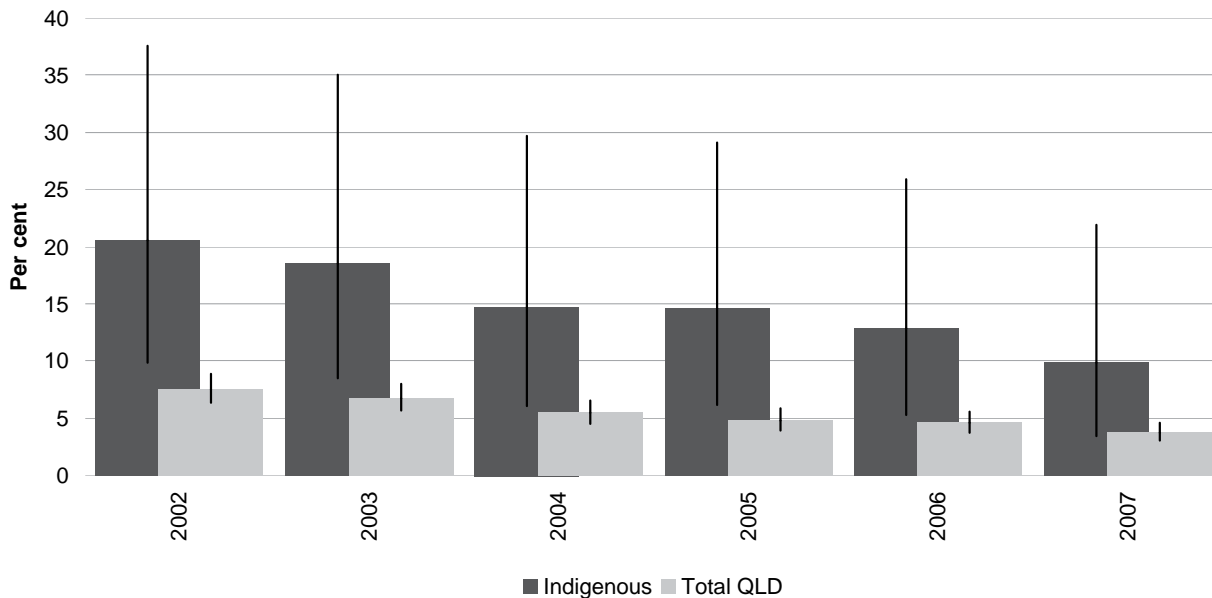
- were less likely than non-Indigenous 20-64 year olds to have completed a post-school qualification in 2006 (36.7 per cent compared with 54.1 per cent for non-Indigenous 20-64 year olds - see Table A10)
 - › were also less likely than non-Indigenous 20-64 year olds to be completing a tertiary qualification in 2007 (see Table A10)
- were less likely to hold a post-school qualification in 2006 with increasing remoteness, from 42 per cent in major cities, reducing to 28 per cent in remote/very remote areas (see Figure A16). This was also true for those working towards a tertiary post-school qualification in 2007
- were more likely than non-Indigenous 20-64 year olds to have completed a vocational post-school qualification in 2008 (1.2 per cent compared with 0.8 per cent for non-Indigenous 20-64 year olds - see Table A10)
 - › were also more likely than non-Indigenous 20-64 year olds to be completing a vocational post-school

88 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, and unpublished data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Income and Housing Costs 1997-98.

89 Sources: Analysis prepared by Queensland Office of Higher Education based on Higher Education Student. Data Collection, Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWR), September 2009. Shows enrolment for the full academic year 2007. ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006. These rates are not age standardised. 2008 National VET Provider Collection.

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Figure 7. Unemployment rate, Queensland, 2002 to 2007.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 2007 and unpublished Labour Force data, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007.

qualification in 2008 (see Table A10)

- were more likely to have completed a vocational post-school qualification in major cities and outer regional areas than their non-Indigenous peers. In remote/very remote areas of Queensland, the converse was true (see Figure A17).

Proportion of Indigenous 18-24 year olds engaged in full-time employment, education or training at or above Certificate III

Young adults aged 18-24 years make decisions that affect their future educational and employment outcomes. These decisions have consequences for their longer-term health and wellbeing.

In 2006, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons aged 18-24 years:⁹⁰

- were less likely to be fully engaged in the economy (41.1 per cent or 6,030 persons) than non-Indigenous persons aged 18-24 years (68.8 per cent - see Figure A18)
- were less likely to be fully engaged in the economy with increasing remoteness, whereas for non-Indigenous people, the proportion did not vary significantly by remoteness. This outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is likely to be influenced by both the educational and employment opportunities available in remote and very remote areas (see Figure A18).

⁹⁰ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006.



Key Queensland Government actions to close the gap

Enterprise development initiatives

In May 2007, the Queensland Government made a commitment under the **Aurukun Local Partnership Project** to provide approximately \$2.75 million over two years to improve the coordination and delivery of government services and programs in Aurukun. Since the commencement of the project in June 2007, the community has shown positive changes, such as the establishment of 122 sole traders/partnerships to harvest seed for commercial sale, community development projects and increased community sports participation. From the Aurukun Local Partnership Project work crew, three men have transitioned into full-time employment, four men have gained employment with the Aurukun Shire Council and others with Rio Tinto Alcan, Chalco (the Aluminium Corporation of China Ltd.) and the professional services company, GHD.

In addition, the **Western Cape Regional Partnership Agreement** was endorsed by Rio Tinto Alcan, Western Cape Communities Trust P/L, the Coordinating Committee of the Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreements, Aurukun Shire, Napranum Shire, Mapoon Shire, the Western Cape Chamber of Commerce, and the Australian and Queensland Governments in 2008. This Agreement aims to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with the regional economy surrounding major mines in remote areas, and to maximise the opportunities, which come from mining, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In December 2008, a **Ministerial Roundtable on Indigenous Economic Participation and Development** established an Indigenous Jobs and Enterprise Taskforce to identify opportunities for economic development, enterprises and jobs in, around and beyond the discrete communities. The

Taskforce, in consultation with Australian and Queensland government agencies, is negotiating for a mentoring project with a major company in North Queensland to employ up to 20 local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To promote economic development, a number of business enterprise initiatives are being provided by the Queensland Government, including:

- the **Indigenous Business Development Grant Scheme**, \$1.83 million in 2008/09 for 14 projects: seven to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in the tourism, retail, aquaculture and mining sectors, and seven to support business capacity and industry development
- assistance to over 26 Indigenous businesses in 2008/09 by a network of four **Indigenous Enterprise Development Officers** (through a partnership agreement with the Australian Government)
- **Enhancing Indigenous Agribusiness** which helps Indigenous communities, families and individuals to realise the economic potential that comes with access to and ownership of traditional lands.

Under the **Indigenous Economic Development Strategy**, the Australian Government provided 196 business support activities in Queensland, totalling \$1.9 million in 2008/09.

Skills and workforce development opportunities

The Queensland Government is also supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders to participate in the workforce through the provision of **work readiness and skills based training**. For example, funding was provided for:

- the **Skilling Queenslanders for Work** initiative, which saw approximately \$80 million spent in 2008/09 to assist over 24,000 Queenslanders most disadvantaged in the labour market to achieve sustainable employment outcomes. Twenty-five per cent of all Skilling Queenslanders for Work participants are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- forty **Indigenous Employment and Training Support**

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Officers who, in 2008/09, assisted over 2,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices, trainees, vocational students and jobseekers

- the **Customised Employment Assistance** program, which assisted 1,283 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders in 2008/09
- the **Cape York Employment and Training Strategy** where \$2.384 million was provided in 2008/09 for training approximately 450 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons from the Cape York region (including trainees and apprentices) in areas such as conservation and land management, beef cattle production, business administration, hospitality and tourism
- **Training Initiatives for Indigenous Adults in Regional and Remote Communities** where a total of \$18.08 million will be invested over a four year period (2007–2011), equally funded by the Queensland and Australian governments. During 2008/09, over 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders received training and training support services
- the Palm Island Aboriginal Council to enable eight people from Palm Island to undertake **pre-employment training in Civil Construction** and a paid 20 week work placement in March 2009
- the Toowoomba Catholic Education Office to run the 2009 **Get Set for Work** program to assist 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early school leavers from Toowoomba
- the **Joint Indigenous Funding Pool** (funded by the Australian and Queensland governments) which between commencing in 2006 and its completion in 2008 has provided training to over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders in areas as diverse as Indigenous primary health, broadcasting, business, performing arts and tourism.

The Queensland Government also provides funding for traineeships and apprenticeships, including:

- six new traineeships in **Certificate II in Housing Repairs and Maintenance** in the communities of Pormpuraaw, Woorabinda, Palm Island, Napranum, Doomadgee and Kowanyama
- the **QBuild Apprenticeship Program** which, in the period to July 2009, saw 15 positions identified and filled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, including six school-based positions.

The Queensland Government's **Skills Development Scholarships** target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability services workers in the non-government sector. In 2008/09, 55 scholarships were awarded for accredited training against the disability work qualifications and relevant professional development.

Under this skilling plan, the Queensland Government also implemented the **Indigenous Mentoring Program** in Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane for Indigenous disability services workers from non-government services.

The Queensland Government is promoting employment in the public sector through funding for programs such as:

- the **Wal Meta Unit** which, in 2008/09, helped 111 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders obtain employment in the public sector
- initiatives to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to pursue **careers in child safety and for career and learning opportunities** (for pre-existing staff).

In 2008/09, 2,909 **drivers' licences** were issued across 16 Indigenous communities. In addition, more heavy-vehicle licences have been issued. These licences are necessary to secure many employment opportunities in the mining industry.