

## 12. The real 'real' economy in remote Australia<sup>1</sup>

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The Productivity Commission's recent report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, notes that the vision behind the report is that Indigenous people will one day enjoy the same overall standard of living as other Australians (SCRGSP 2005: 1.2). This admirable goal is a reflection of the Howard Government's commitment to practical reconciliation; that is, to equality in health, housing, employment and education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The futuristic reference to 'one day' suggests that the goal may indeed be more visionary than policy realistic.

Such a commitment by government is not new and was first articulated by the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy of 1987 (Australian Government 1987). Altman and Allen (1992: 147–8) noted before the 1994 NATSIS that while government policy aims to provide employment and income equality for all Indigenous Australians, it ignores the contributions made by 'the informal economy', or what we refer to here as the customary sector.

This chapter focuses on a different livelihood vision—one that seeks a sustainable future for Indigenous people residing in remote and very remote Australia, and one that accords with the culturally-informed aspirations of many. Our view is that measured equality, based on mainstream notions of development, will be impossible to deliver in many remote and very remote parts of Australia where Indigenous Australians reside, often on Indigenous-owned and managed lands. Rather than envisioning Indigenous futures that are limited to mainstream notions of development in either of the private (market) or public (state employment and welfare) sectors, we focus here on an economy that includes a third—customary or non-market or Indigenous—sector.

This framework has been termed the hybrid (three-sector) economy (Altman 2005b), but it has other nomenclatures. For example, Gibson-Graham (2005) refers to the diverse or community economy. And the feminist literature identifies a somewhat different three-sector economy that has crucial resonance with the model used here (Cameron & Gibson-Graham 2003; Ironmonger 1996). The

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the results presented in this chapter differ from those presented at the Indigenous Socioeconomic Outcomes conference held on 11–12 August 2005. There was an error on the 2002 NATSISS CURF regarding the fishing or hunting in a group results that did not enable us to accurately calculate the denominator for our proportion estimates. Our conclusions, however, remain unchanged.

Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) used the term 'traditional-mixed economy'.

Altman (2003b) contends that the real economy in many remote Indigenous contexts is the hybrid economy. The term 'real' economy has come to some prominence in the influential writings of Noel Pearson (2000, 2005), although he uses the term to mainly refer to the market economy. Thus, the term can have very different meanings and has been the subject of considerable debate within feminist discourse (e.g. Gibson-Graham 1996), as well as in policy debates on achievable Indigenous economic development (Altman 2003b, 2005b; Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). Both approaches seek to embed economic representation within a broader and more inclusive frame. For example, within feminist discourse it has been argued that the real economy has to include the contributions made by unpaid productive activities, predominantly performed by females. From this feminist perspective, economist Duncan Ironmonger (1996) looks to quantify the market and household sectors of the economy and thereby 'feminise the economy'. In a similar way, we seek to include and quantify a predominantly unpaid and unrecognised Indigenous component in the economy—we 'Indigenise' the economy, at least in remote and very remote Australia, regions for which some data are available.

One important reason for conducting the 2002 NATSISS was to gather information that is distinctly Indigenous. In the search for the real Indigenous economy in remote and very remote Australia, we are highly reliant on official statistics to move beyond community or small group case studies. In this chapter we explore what can be documented about customary activity in Australia using the 2002 NATSISS. Given that Indigenous Australians now own over 20 per cent of the Australian continent (Pollack 2001), we explore what can be ascertained about their non-market activities on this land in order to inform debates over whether there is development benefit from land rights and native title. This debate, which has some currency, tends to ignore the reality that the market economy is very limited in remote regions and fails to quantify the non-market (see Hughes 2005b; Hughes & Warin 2005).

The paucity of data available on the customary sector marginalises Indigenous productive participation (Altman 2003b, 2004, 2005b), positioning it as 'other' to 'real' economic activity (see ABS 2005a, where it is reported as 'social and sporting activity'). Such marginalisation facilitates poorly informed criticism of remote Indigenous communities by those who are opposed to the contemporary reality of a customary sector that is often underwritten by some state income support (e.g. see Hughes 2005b; Sandall 2000).<sup>2</sup> At the most fundamental level,

<sup>2</sup> The ideological opposition to the legitimacy of the customary sector referred to here, which is described by Gibson-Graham (n.d.) as 'capitalocentric', is outlined well by Gibson (1999: 3) with reference to what she terms 'community economies'.

we interrogate the 2002 NATSISS to see if it provides information about the magnitude and significance of the customary sector that can inform academic and policy debate. Gibson-Graham (n.d.: 2) note that what is at stake in conversations about rethinking 'economy' is 'who and what is seen to:

- 1) constitute the economy, and
- 2) contribute to economic development'.

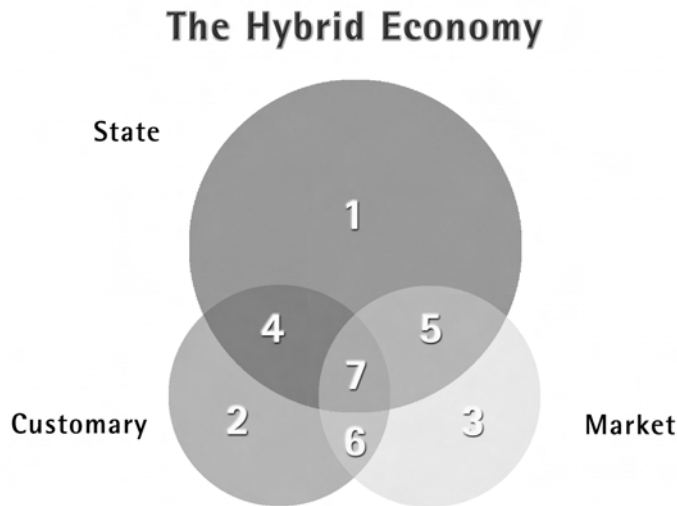
How can 2002 NATSISS data help answer such questions?

## **A brief overview of the customary sector and the hybrid economy model**

The term 'customary sector' is similar to other widely used terms such as subsistence, non-market, non-monetary, informal, non-mainstream, cultural, and traditional-economy (see, inter alia, Altman & Allen 1992; Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Fairbairn 1985; Fisk 1985; Morgan, Strelein & Weir 2004; Smith & Roach 1996). As outlined by Altman (2005b), the customary sector is made up of a range of productive activities that occur outside the market that are based on cultural continuities and specialities. These include activities such as hunting, fishing and gathering, production of art and crafts, and land, habitat and species management.<sup>3</sup> Although the customary economy is not monetised (or marketed) by definition, a proportion can attract a dollar value, as with the sale of Indigenous art (Altman 2005b). At the core of the hybrid economy model is recognition of the linkages and interdependencies between the market, state and customary sectors, as shown in diagram 12.1 below. Our focus here is on segment 2, but also on segments 4, 6 and 7.

<sup>3</sup> Fairbairn (1985: 327–29) provides an inventory of subsistence output in a Samoan context, including foodstuffs, buildings, capital works (canoes, road building, land development), craft industries and miscellaneous products, law and order functions of village councils and chiefs, certain kinds of intra-household works (water carrying, house cleaning, religious services), social security aspects of village life, the home processing of foods, Indigenous medicine and funerals). Fairbairn defines subsistence as embracing all non-monetary economic activities like the definition of the customary economy used here.

Figure 12.1. Conceptual representation of the hybrid economy



These linkages and interdependencies are often overlooked in Indigenous policy. A recent example of such an oversight can be found in the Productivity Commission's *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report mentioned above. The chapter 'Economic participation and development' recognises fishing, hunting and gathering as 'important economic activities for some Indigenous people living on Indigenous-owned land' and that the 'customary economy could have significant value for Indigenous people' (SCRGSP 2005: 11.20). However, by limiting its perception of such activity to being 'an affordable source of fresh and healthy food' the Productivity Commission focuses only on the direct subsistence benefits of such activity—it ignores culturally-informed interpretations of its significance and wider spin-off benefits that might be generated. Opportunities to recognise and promote economic development on the Indigenous estate through commercialisation of the customary are also overlooked (Altman 2005b).

In much of its report, the Productivity Commission relies heavily on data from the 2002 NATSISS. However, in its discussion of the customary sector, no reference is made to survey results. Similarly, in its main publication about the 2002 NATSISS, the ABS (2004c) similarly fails to report data it collected on hunting and fishing activities. More recently, in *Australian Social Trends 2005*, the ABS (2005a: 52–57) reports on fishing or hunting, but as a selected social activity rather than economic activity. It is worth asking whether this was because the 2002 NATSISS did not go far enough in assessing customary activity as economic activity. As a first step in exploring this issue, we examine the questions that the 2002 NATSISS asked in relation to the customary sector.

## 2002 NATSISS questions and results

We focus here on three key issues in the 2002 NATSISS that relate to the customary sector and its interactions with the market and state. These are included in the 2002 NATSISS through variables on:

- fishing or hunting as a group activity
- participation in and payment for cultural activities, and
- the ability to meet cultural responsibilities while in employment.

### Fishing or hunting in a group

Under 'Culture', the 2002 NATSISS asked those in the CA sample, 'in the last three months, have you done anything else with other people?' There were eleven possible responses, of which one was 'going fishing or hunting in a group'. While a similar question was asked in the NCA sample in terms of involvement in social activities, 'going fishing or hunting in a group' was not a listed response.

The two components of the 2002 NATSISS sample selection and survey design—CAs and NCAs—have been described and discussed in detail by Biddle and Hunter (in this volume). In terms of sample size and geographic coverage, the 2002 NATSISS survey methodology has meant that information on fishing or hunting in a group was only gathered from the 2120 CA respondents (i.e. individuals residing in discrete communities and outstations in parts of Queensland, SA, WA, and the NT). No information was gathered on such activities from the vast majority of respondents to the 2002 NATSISS—a total of 7362 individuals in non-community remote areas (1997) and in regional areas and cities (5242). As a result, any discussion of Indigenous involvement in fishing or hunting activities based on 2002 NATSISS data is limited to the CA sample, the majority of whom were from very remote, as opposed to remote, Australia (see Biddle & Hunter in this volume).

According to the 2002 NATSISS, 82.4 per cent of the CA sample aged 15 years and over answered that they fished or hunted in a group in the past three months. This represented 39 400 Indigenous Australians. A slightly higher, though not significantly different, proportion of males reported that they fished or hunted in a group than females (84.0% compared to 80.8% respectively). There was no difference between those aged 15 and 34 years (84.2%) and those aged 35 to 54 (84.9%). There was, however, a significant difference between the proportion of those aged 55 years and older who said they participated (66.7%) compared to the rest of the population.

**Table 12.1. Percentage of Indigenous population in CAs who did and did not fish or hunt in a group in the last three months, by recognising and living on homeland, 2002<sup>a</sup>**

	Does not recognise homeland	Lives on homeland	Does not live on homeland	Total
Did not fish or hunt in a group	25.8% (800)	15.3% (3400)	18.9% (4200)	17.6% (8400)
Fished or hunted in a group	74.2% (2300)	84.7% (18 900)	81.1% (18 100)	82.4% (39 400)
Total	6.7% (3200)	46.7% (22 300)	46.7% (22 300)	100.0% (47 800)

a. The relevant population numbers are provided in parentheses.

Source: Customised cross-tabulations from the 2002 NATSISS CURF

The data from 2002 NATSISS suggests that recognising and living on one's homeland may influence a person's participation in the customary sector. However, the sample sizes are too small to make any definitive statements (see Table 12.1). Of the 3 200 individuals who did not recognise their homelands, 74.2 per cent said that they fished or hunted in a group. Of those who did recognise their homeland, those who lived there (22 300 individuals) participated most in fishing or hunting in a group (84.7%). Those who recognised, but did not live on, their homeland (22 300 individuals) had a lower participation rate (81.1%). None of these differences were significant at the 5 per cent level of significance. Given the small sample sizes, this is not surprising. So, although the figures suggest a positive economic benefit from land rights and native title (and customary harvesting rights under s.211 of the *Native Title Act 1993*), that is ignored in current public discourse on land rights and development, the survey methodology makes it difficult to properly examine such an important issue.

A person's participation in paid work may be associated with their participation in fishing or hunting. On the one hand, employment that is not directly related to fishing or hunting may take time away from such activities. On the other hand, employment may give people economic resources that facilitate such activities, or alternatively some people's employment may be directly related to fishing and/or hunting. Of those who were employed (24 800), 86.8 per cent reported that they participated in fishing or hunting in a group. Of those who were not employed (1600 unemployed, 21 400 not in the labour force), 77.8 per cent said that they did so. This difference was statistically significant.

**Table 12.2. Percentage of Indigenous population in CAs who fished or hunted in a group in the last three months, by industry and hours worked, 2002**

	Public sector	Private sector	CDEP	Total
	%	%	%	%
Full-time	90.0	71.4	85.7	83.9
Part-time (< 35 hours)	91.7	80.0	87.3	88.0
Total	90.6	75.0	87.1	86.7

Source: Customised cross-tabulations from the 2002 NATSISS CURF

Of those who were employed, there were inconclusive differences by sector of employment and the hours worked. Table 12.2 shows that those employed full-time are slightly less likely to participate in fishing or hunting than those who were employed part-time. However, this difference was not significant. The type of work also made a difference. Of those in non-CDEP employment, those employed in the public sector were more likely to participate than those who were employed in the private sector, with those employed in CDEP somewhere in between. None of these differences were significant

The role that CDEP employment plays in facilitating such activities as compared to not being employed is a consistent finding between the 1994 NATSIS and the 2002 NATSISS (despite different survey questions). Hunter (1996: 60–61) showed that those on CDEP were most likely to engage in hunting, fishing and gathering bush food in 1994. However, given the smaller sample size and change in survey methodology in the 2002 NATSISS, much less can be said about differences between employment sectors and geographical categories than was possible from the 1994 NATSIS.

## Participation in, and payment for, cultural activities

Another aspect of the hybrid economy, which the 2002 NATSISS gives us some information on, is participation in, and payment for, cultural activities. Unlike fishing or hunting in a group, this question was asked in CAs and NCAs, making it possible to differentiate between remote Australia (incorporating remote and very remote Australia) and non-remote Australia (incorporating outer and inner regional Australia and major cities). However, it is not possible to differentiate between remote and very remote areas using the standard output from 2002 NATSISS.

Under ‘Culture’, the 2002 NATSISS asked respondents—with only a minor difference in wording between the CA and NCA questionnaires—whether, ‘including activities done as part of your job, in the last 12 months did you: make any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander arts or crafts; perform any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander music, dance or theatre; and/or write or tell any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander stories?’ Those who answered ‘yes’ to one or more of the above were then asked, ‘Were you paid, or will you be paid,

for your involvement in this activity/any of these activities?’ and if so, for ‘Which activities?’, with more than one response being allowed.

Table 12.3 shows the three types of cultural activities that are grouped in the 2002 NATSISS and the participation rates for remote and non-remote populations. Of those who did participate, the proportion paid for doing so is also presented.

**Table 12.3. Percentage of Indigenous population who participated in, and were paid for, various cultural activities, by remoteness, 2002**

	Arts or crafts %	Music, dance or theatre %	Writing or telling stories %
<b>Non-remote</b>			
Participated	15.1	7.5	12.4
Paid (of those who participated)	20.5	34.9	20.8
<b>Remote/very remote</b>			
Participated	19.1 <sup>a</sup>	10.4 <sup>a</sup>	12.9
Paid (of those who participated)	51.9 <sup>a</sup>	26.3	23.7

a. The remote/very remote estimates that are significantly different from the non-remote estimates at the 5% level of significance.

Source: Customised cross-tabulations from the 2002 NATSISS CURF

Table 12.3 shows that the type of cultural activity that people participated in is somewhat different by region. Those in remote or very remote regions were more likely to participate in ‘arts and crafts’ as well as ‘music, dance or theatre’ compared to those in the non-remote population. The proportion that participated in writing or telling stories was not significantly different. Within those who participated, over half of the population in remote or very remote areas were paid for the activity. This was much higher than the proportion for the non-remote population and significantly higher than the proportion that was paid for the other two activities.

## Ability to meet cultural responsibilities while in employment

The final variable examined is the ability to meet cultural responsibilities while in employment. Under ‘Employment’, 2002 NATSISS asked all employed respondents (including those employed in CDEP), ‘Because you work, is it possible to meet all your cultural responsibilities?’. As with participation in, and payment for, cultural activities, this question was asked in both CAs and NCAs, thus allowing for differentiation between remote and non-remote Australia. In NCAs, at least, cultural responsibilities were described to respondents as including ‘such things as telling traditional stories, being involved in ceremonies and attending events such as funerals or festivals’.

Table 12.4 gives the number of people (who were employed) who: did not have cultural responsibilities; had cultural responsibilities and were able to meet them; and had cultural responsibilities but were unable to meet them.



**Table 12.4. Presence of, and ability to meet, cultural responsibilities while in employment, by remoteness (number of persons), 2002**

	No cultural responsibilities %	Able to meet responsibilities %	Unable to meet responsibilities %
Remote/very remote	7732	27 600	4402
Non-remote	31 578	35 360	23 592

Source: Customised cross-tabulations from the 2002 NATSISS CURF

Table 12.4 shows that, for the total surveyed population who had cultural responsibilities while in employment, 69.2 per cent were able to meet them. There were significant differences by remoteness with 60.0 per cent of the non-remote population able to meet their responsibilities, compared to 86.2 per cent in the remote population.

**Table 12.5. Percentage of population who were able to meet cultural responsibilities, by industry and remoteness, 2002**

	Public sector	Private sector %	CDEP %	Total %
Remote/very remote	79.2	62.4	93.7	86.3
Non-remote	61.2	54.3	78.5	60.0
Total	65.9	55.3	89.6	69.2

Source: Customised cross-tabulations from the 2002 NATSISS CURF

As Table 12.5 shows, industry sector can influence these differences.

CDEP employment appears to be the most conducive form of employment to allow Indigenous people to meet their cultural responsibilities, followed by employment in the public sector. Apart from the difference between public sector and private sector employees in non-remote Australia, all these differences were significant at the 5 per cent level of significance.

**Table 12.6. Percentage of each State/Territory engaged: in fishing or hunting in a group; paid; and unpaid arts and crafts activity, 2002**

State	Remote and very remote area who fished or hunted in a group %	Total State who participated in arts/crafts %	Those who participated in arts/crafts who were paid for doing so <sup>a</sup> %
NSW	N/A	16.4	15.4
VIC	N/A	14.4	17.0
QLD	82.4	14.4	25.9
SA	76.0	20.9	43.0
WA	80.1	16.4	33.3
NT	83.5	19.5	67.6
ACT/TAS	N/A	11.4	15.6
Australia	51.0	16.2	30.6

a. The percentages in this column represent those who reported that they participated in arts/crafts.

N/A Refers to those States or Territories without a remote or very remote population in the sample.

Source: Customised cross-tabulations from the 2002 NATSISS CURF

In Table 12.6 we provide some slightly different summary data by State/Territory on fishing or hunting, participation in arts and craft, and in being paid for arts and crafts. Bearing in mind that the question on fishing or hunting was limited to CAs, it is instructive that such activities are prominent in jurisdictions with land rights and sea access. It is also interesting that those States that have most land rights and that have benefited most from arts marketing support also have the greatest proportion paid for arts and crafts participation. The Northern Territory stands out in both.

It is most disappointing, in terms of the data on fishing or hunting, that a more comprehensive and detailed geographical analysis of such activity is not possible under the 2002 NATSISS, especially when compared to what is possible using data from the 1994 NATSIS (Smith & Roach 1996: Fig. 6.1).

## **Shortcomings in the 2002 NATSISS**

There are shortcomings in the 2002 NATSISS's capacity to generate useful data on the customary sector. These are explored here with a focus on the data pertaining to fishing and hunting.

### **Coverage of Indigenous population and key customary sector activities**

We identify three key shortcomings in the 2002 NATSISS's coverage of economic activities with customary links. Firstly, and most importantly, it is unclear why 'fishing or hunting in a group' was not included as an option under the involvement in social activities question in NCAs, especially when a similar question on 'hunting, fishing and gathering bush foods' was included in all areas in the 1994 NATSIS (Hunter 1996; Smith & Roach 1996). Subsequent research shows that the customary sector is of economic importance to non-remote Indigenous people, especially in inner and outer regional areas. For example, Gray, Altman and Halasz (2005) estimated that the value of wild resources harvested by members of the Indigenous community of the Wallis Lake catchment in coastal NSW was between \$468 and \$1200 per annum, accounting for between 3 and 8 per cent of the gross incomes of Indigenous adults. The 2002 NATSISS clearly ignores customary activity known to occur in these areas by not allowing respondents in NCAs to indicate their participation in fishing or hunting activities.

Secondly, it is unclear why 'gathering bush food' was not either included in the above question as it was in the 1994 NATSIS, or asked as a separate option. As women are the predominant gatherers, there is a clear possibility of gender bias here. Third, a very significant aspect of the customary sector—the role of Indigenous people in land and sea management and biodiversity conservation—is ignored in both the 1994 NATSIS and the 2002 NATSISS (Altman 2005b; Smith & Roach 1996).

## Economic versus cultural activity

The inclusion of hunting, fishing and gathering activities in the category 'Employment and income' in the 1994 NATSIS was positive. However, its inclusion under the sub-category of 'voluntary work' was not (Smith & Roach 1996), especially as it was included in a list of other voluntary work activities that could not be considered economic activities with customary links.<sup>4</sup> The 2002 NATSISS potentially ignores the economic significance of such activities by addressing them only as cultural activities. Similarly, while recognising that monetary benefit may be gained from activities such as the production of art and crafts, the 2002 NATSISS categorises such activities exclusively as cultural rather than economic.

As shown in the recommendations section below, with reference to the Canadian Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001, such activity can be recorded under more than one category.

## Group versus individual activity

It is unclear why 2002 NATSISS focused on fishing and hunting as a group activity to the exclusion of individual activity, especially as the question was not asked in this way in the 1994 NATSIS. Indicative fieldwork undertaken by Altman (2003a) in January 2003 indicates that 20 of 40 harvesting events recorded at Mumeka outstation were by individual hunters or fishers who were also, coincidentally, the most productive. While we are not suggesting that these individuals would not have participated in a group harvesting activity within a three-month period, it is unclear why this distinction is made in circumstances where people clearly hunt and fish alone. The question appears to be primarily concerned with Indigenous people's involvement in group activities at the possible risk of excluding accurate information on the labour individuals had invested in these activities.<sup>5</sup>

## Seasonality

It was an improvement in the 2002 NATSISS CAs interview to specify a set time period of three months in terms of fishing or hunting activities, compared to the unspecified time period in the 1994 NATSIS question. However, it is still

<sup>4</sup> Smith & Roach (1996: 74) noted that a number of definitional issues needed to be reconsidered with regard to the voluntary work question in the 1994 NATSIS arguing, for example, that 'subsistence activities are clearly significant but should be treated separately to voluntary work in a questionnaire schedule, being more appropriately classified as unpaid own account production in the informal economy'.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting with regard to the issue of labour effort expended, that the question on hunting, fishing and gathering bush food as voluntary work in the 1994 NATSIS also delivered information on the amount of time spent on these activities. This information would prove extremely useful in determining labour input into such activities. Again, it is unclear why the 2002 NATSISS did not ask for this information.

inadequate. The primary reason for this is the influence seasonal variability may have on hunting, fishing and gathering activities and the consequent potential for seasonal bias in recording for a period under 12 months or a full seasonal cycle (Altman & Allen 1992: 145; Altman, Gray & Halasz 2005: 15).<sup>6</sup>

## **Lack of comparability between the 1994 NATSIS and the 2002 NATSISS**

A significant shortcoming of the 2002 NATSISS is the inability to confidently compare data about customary activity with the earlier 1994 NATSIS data. Biddle and Hunter (in this volume) have alluded to this shortcoming.

## **Restrictions on geographic analysis**

A major problem with the standard output from the 2002 NATSISS is the inability to differentiate remote areas from very remote areas. Furthermore, the publicly available unit record data confuses the concept of remote and non-remote with CAs and NCAs. Especially with regard to the social activities question, the ABS must allow users to identify those who were and those who were not given 'fishing or hunting in a group' as a response option.

## **Recommendations for NATSISS 2008**

We limit our recommendations here to the improvement of data on hunting, fishing and gathering activities in the next NATSISS. Biddle and Hunter (in this volume) point out that the change in the way information was gathered on these activities makes comparison between the 1994 and 2002 surveys 'uninformative, if not meaningless'. While we recommend some significant changes to survey questions on customary activities, we believe it is important that some comparability is maintained between the 2002 NATSISS and the NATSISS scheduled for 2008. This can be done by repeating the 2002 NATSISS questions under cultural activities, but by adding one or two more specific questions under Employment and/or Income. This of course needs to be done while taking into consideration the time burden on respondents of such surveys. However, the importance of such activities to the access to resources of many Indigenous Australians necessitates asking the right questions.

There are some straightforward recommendations on how information on this range of activities should be collected in NATSISS 2008 which will not substantially increase respondent burden:

- Information needs to be collected for all Indigenous Australians and not be limited to just those in CAs.
- Information needs to be gathered as economic activity, not just as cultural activity. One aspect of the question used in the 1994 NATSIS but not in the

<sup>6</sup> This is not to deny the fact that the longer the time period, the greater the potential for recall error.

2002 NATSISS that is worthy of re-inclusion is information on labour effort expended on customary sector tasks in hours per week.

- In an economic context, the question should not be confined to conducting these activities in a group.
- The question needs to include gathering of bush food as an activity, as was done in the 1994 NATSIS.
- Information needs to be gathered on the basis of activity over the last 12 months in order to overcome problems of seasonal bias.

The Canadian Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 provides guidance on how questions on hunting, fishing and gathering could be collected in order to better capture their significance as economic, as well as cultural, activities. The 2001 survey comprised a core questionnaire as well as distinct supplementary questionnaires for the Metis and Arctic communities (Statistics Canada 2003). Under 'Section C – labour activity' the core questionnaire asks whether respondents have hunted, fished, gathered wild plants and/or trapped for either food, pleasure, commercial use or other use (medicinal, ceremonial) over the past 12 months. Unlike the 1994 NATSIS and the 2002 NATSISS questions, hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping are each listed separately. Collecting information on the purpose of activity seems advisable, given uncertainty as to whether such activity is being undertaken for subsistence, commercial or recreational purposes.<sup>7</sup>

The Arctic supplement to the Canadian survey devoted an entire section to 'Household and harvesting activities' in which much more detailed information was gathered on commercial and unpaid household activities related to the harvest, preparation and consumption of 'country food'. Information was gathered on inputs, including food preparation and hunting equipment repairs carried out in the home and household investments in harvesting equipment. Data collected on outputs included whether 'country food' was eaten in the household, shared outside the household, exchanged or sold; the proportion of household food that was made up of 'country food'; and household income from the sale of 'country food' and other harvested products.

The Arctic supplement also asked for more information than may be feasible in NATSISS. And asking respondents to estimate actual amounts of income derived from harvesting activities may not produce reliable data. The Metis supplement

<sup>7</sup> Altman & Allen (1992: 138) note that while participation in the informal economy is not limited to Indigenous Australians, the major distinction is 'that for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to live off the land, subsistence is their 'primary' work and income-generating activity'. Hunter (1996) suggests that caution should be exercised in interpreting hunting, fishing and gathering activity automatically as customary activity. Hunter (1996: 60) warns that hunting, fishing and gathering in urban areas requires a certain level of income to allow engagement and may be more accurately interpreted as a consumption activity as opposed to a productive economic activity providing an alternative to market sector employment..

provides an alternative approach by asking respondents about the importance of income from hunting, fishing, gathering, guiding, trapping and/or art and craftwork production in making ends meet in the household, using a four-point scale from 'not important at all' to 'very important'. In the Australian context, land, habitat and species management activities could be included in such a question.

We would gain a much more comprehensive picture of the economic importance of customary activity within Indigenous households in Australia if we collected information on participation in, and the purpose of, such activities (as in the Canadian core questionnaire); labour effort expended on them (as in the 1994 NATSIS); and the contribution of such activities to household income (as in the Metis supplement).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have examined the 'real' economy in remote and very remote Australia, where 27 per cent of the Indigenous population resides. Of this population, 17 per cent resides in discrete Indigenous communities, frequently on Indigenous-owned land and very remote from markets and mainstream employment and business opportunity. The customary, Indigenous or non-market sector of the economy makes contributions to Indigenous people's livelihoods that are not reflected in standard statistical collections like the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing.

The 2002 NATSISS provides strong statistical support for the view that the real economy in remote Indigenous Australia is made up of three, rather than two, sectors. The 2002 NATSISS information reinforces a view that other ABS statistics that ignore the non-market sector understate the extent of Indigenous economic participation and wellbeing. The policy ramifications of this finding is that the customary sector might provide economic opportunity, and that major programs like the CDEP scheme, as well as land rights and native title rights, might be useful instruments to facilitate enhanced customary participation with positive livelihood outcomes.

The 2002 NATSISS has generated some important information on hunting and fishing in some contexts; on paid and unpaid cultural work; and on the impact of employment on the ability to meet cultural obligations. As social scientists, we welcome new data sets that allow testing of new ways of looking at the Indigenous economy. We are naturally very disappointed that these data do not go far enough, and strongly encourage the ABS to enhance efforts to better capture customary activity throughout Australia in 2008.