

# Making Sense of the Census: Observations of the 2001 Enumeration in Remote Aboriginal Australia

D.F.Martin, F.Morphy, W.G.Sanders and J.Taylor



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research  
The Australian National University, Canberra

Research Monograph No.22  
2002

Published by the ANU E Press  
The Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 0200, Australia  
Email: [anuepress@anu.edu.au](mailto:anuepress@anu.edu.au)  
Web: <http://epress.anu.edu.au>

Previously published by the  
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research,  
The Australian National University

---

National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-publication entry.

Making Sense of the Census: Observations of the 2001  
Enumeration in Remote Aboriginal Australia

ISBN 1 9209420 2 5

1. Indigenous Enumeration Strategy. 2. Aboriginal Australians - Census. 3. Aboriginal  
Australians - Population - Statistics. 4. Census - Methodology. 5. Australia - Census,  
2001. I. Martin, D. F. (David F.).

304.60899915

---

All rights reserved. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in  
unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use  
within your organization.

The four forms in the Appendices are reproduced courtesy of the Australian Bureau of  
Statistics.

Designed by Green Words & Images (GWi)  
Cover design by Brendon McKinley  
All electronic versions prepared inhouse

First edition © 2002 Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research  
This edition © 2004 ANU E Press

# Foreword

This monograph had its genesis in discussions held over many years between CAEPR researchers and the ABS regarding the capacity of census data to adequately and accurately represent the distinctiveness of Indigenous social, cultural and economic life in its many varied forms. Initial discussions surrounded the correct interpretation of census characteristics in situations where these fail to capture the on-the-ground reality of Indigenous circumstances. Other discussions concerned the adequacy of census counts in remote areas following the publication of a CAEPR Discussion Paper by David Martin and John Taylor illustrating discrepancies in enumeration at Aurukun community on remote Cape York Peninsula. More recently, and following on from that paper, the idea of using CAEPR researchers (who were to be in the field at the time of the 2001 enumeration) as official observers of the census in select communities was raised with the ABS. As the case studies in this monograph testify, this plan was supported and subsequently brought to fruition.

This is not the first time that CAEPR and the ABS have collaborated to produce research of importance to national Indigenous policy development. In 1992, current CAEPR Associate and former CAEPR colleague, Anne Daly, was the recipient of an ABS fellowship which resulted in a landmark study of the labour market status of Indigenous people. In 1996, Boyd Hunter and John Taylor collaborated with the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics to produce a joint ABS/CAEPR publication on employment outcomes for Indigenous people using data from the 1994 NATSIS. Boyd Hunter is also the recent recipient of an ABS fellowship under the Australian Census Analytic Program. In addition, several CAEPR staff assisted in the development of the NATSIS as members of Technical Reference Groups, and John Taylor is currently a member of the committee overseeing development of the Indigenous Social Survey. Over the years, ABS staff have participated in CAEPR workshops on employment equity, housing need, and the development (1992) and then analysis (1996) of NATSIS data.

In all of these activities, the ABS has displayed an interest in, and a commitment to, productive collaborations with CAEPR researchers. From CAEPR's perspective, the ABS provides statistical expertise, ready access to published and unpublished data, and, most importantly, insight into the methodological and bureaucratic processes that lead to official data collection. From the ABS perspective, CAEPR provides an interpretive and analytical capacity which is informed by ethnographic understanding, social sciences theory and methods, and familiarity with the social and economic realities of daily life in Indigenous communities. Together, these provide a powerful (and essential) means towards improving the quality of statistical information that is of fundamental importance to the development of effective and appropriate Indigenous social policy.

Professor Jon Altman  
CAEPR  
August 2002



# Contents

Foreword	iii
Lists of figures and tables	vii
Abbreviations and acronyms	ix
Abbreviations for kin terms (chapter 3)	x
Acknowledgments	xi

## **1. The context for observation** **1**

John Taylor

Out of sight, out of mind: remote census counts before 1971	3
The referendum of 1967 and beyond	4
The development of special enumeration procedures	5
Current practice	7
Data quality	9
Departures from standard procedures	10

## **2. Counting the Wik: the 2001 Census in Aurukun, western Cape York Peninsula** **13**

David Martin

Introduction	13
Pre-census preparation	14
Proposed collection methodology	16
Conduct of the census	17
Responses to the census questions	20
Completion of the count	27
Conclusion	28

## **3. When systems collide: the 2001 Census at a Northern Territory outstation** **29**

Frances Morphy

Introduction	29
Putting the census team in place	32
From training to doing	34
The enumeration proceeds	37
The interviews	40

A complete enumeration?	50
The 'household' and its structure	55
Factors influencing the quality of the data	66
Conclusion	71
Notes	73
<b>4. Adapting to circumstance: the 2001 Census in the Alice Springs town camps</b>	<b>77</b>
Will Sanders	
Introduction	77
Background	77
Getting going	78
Twelve days in August: building the effort	83
The decision to focus on household forms	85
Analysis and policy implications for census collection	87
The Indigenous Enumeration Strategy: how special, how successful, how necessary?	91
<b>5. The Indigenous Enumeration Strategy: an overview assessment and ideas for improvement</b>	<b>95</b>
David Martin, Frances Morphy, Will Sanders and John Taylor	
Who to count	95
How to count	97
What to ask	98
Conclusion	101
Notes	102
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A. Dwelling Check List, 2001 Census	103
Appendix B. Special Indigenous Household Form, 2001 Census	105
Appendix C. Special Indigenous Personal Form, 2001 Census	109
Appendix D. Special Short Form, 2001 Census	115
References	117
Notes on the authors	120

# List of figures and tables

## Figures

Fig. 1.1 Procedural structure of the Indigenous Enumeration Strategy, 1991 Census	8
Fig. 2.1 Example of a 'cluster' of households, Aurukun	22
Fig. 3.1 Kin relationships between people designated as 'person 1' for each occupied dwelling, community A, 2001 Census	31
Fig. 3.2 The kin connections of the community A enumerators, 2001 Census	32
Fig. 3.3 Siblings and cousins in the Anglo-Celtic and local Indigenous systems	56
Fig. 3.4 Children in the Anglo-Celtic and local Indigenous systems	57
Fig. 3.5 The Anglo-Celtic term <i>mother</i> and the local Indigenous term M compared	58
Fig. 3.6 Dwelling J: actual relationships of usual residents	61
Fig. 3.7 Dwelling K: actual relationships of usual residents and visitor	62
Fig. 3.8 Anglo-Celtic kinship terminology and the nuclear family	64
Fig. 3.9 Local Indigenous kinship terminology and the intersection of lineages	64
Fig. 4.1 Alice Springs Community Living Areas, with hand annotations of town camp CD numbers`	79

## Tables

Table 2.1 'Family types' at Aurukun, 2001 Census	22
Table 2.2 Language spoken at home and English proficiency, Aurukun, 2001 Census	24
Table 2.3 Religious affiliation, Aurukun, 2001 Census	25
Table 3.1 Details of dwelling J in community A as recorded on the SIHF, 2001 Census	61



# Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANU	The Australian National University
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR	Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CC	Community Coordinator
CD	Collection District
CDEP	Community Development Employment Project
CFO	Census Field Officer
CGC	Commonwealth Grants Commission
CHINS	Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey
CYPLUS	Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
E	enumerator
HA	homelands association
IA	Indigenous Area
IES	Indigenous Enumeration Strategy
NACC	National Aboriginal Consultative Council
NARU	North Australia Research Unit
Q.	SIPF question
RNO	Census Record Number
s.	section
SIHF	Special Indigenous Household Form
SIPF	Special Indigenous Personal Form
SLA	Statistical Local Area

### Abbreviations for kin terms (chapter 3)

B	brother
C	child
D	daughter
F	father
M	mother
Z	sister

Compound terms should be interpreted as follows: MB 'mother's brother', MMB 'mother's mother's brother', etc. When a compound term appears with one of its terms in brackets, this indicates that the compound term has different referents for different categories of people. For example (Z)C is the term used by a woman for her own and her sisters' children, and by a man for his sisters' children, while (B)C is the term used by a man for his own and his brothers' children and by a woman for her brothers' children. Anglo-Celtic terms appear in two forms: in italic (e.g. *sister*) or between quotation marks (e.g. 'sister'). The former are to be understood as terms in the Anglo-Celtic system, whereas the latter are approximate 'translations' of local Indigenous terms.

# Acknowledgments

Paul Williams of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has shown a continuing interest over many years in engaging researchers in open debate and in the exchange of ideas and information about the interpretation of Indigenous census data. It was he and John Struik, in his capacity as head of the Population Statistics Group of the ABS, who bravely entertained the notion of independent observation of the 2001 Census, and who made it possible. Logistically, numerous individuals also assisted in this process. Those deserving of special mention include Martin Brady of the ABS in Canberra, and Roger Jones of CAEPR who was invaluable as a constant source of ideas and critical comment.

David Martin wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Roylene Wolski, and the census collectors at Aurukun, particularly Albert Peinkinna. Frances Morphy would like to thank the enumerators, residents and visitors at community A, who accepted her presence as an observer with equanimity and good humour. She owes a special debt to the CFO, who spent more time than he could probably afford in providing information that could not have been easily obtained otherwise, particularly about the training procedures and the regional context of the enumeration. Lorraine Oakshotte and Sue Ward of the Darwin ABS Office also provided valuable assistance. Frances also thanks Roger Jones, David Martin, Will Sanders, Di Smith, and John Taylor, all of CAEPR, and Rosa Gibbs and Paul Williams of the ABS for their comments and feedback on various drafts of her chapter. Will Sanders would like to acknowledge the Tangentyere Council and Peter White, ABS Central Australian Census manager, for their assistance in carrying out his study.

Those who deserve special mention for their help with the production of the book include Paul Williams and Emma Perkins of the ABS for the speed and efficiency with which they provided the extra materials we asked for. Hilary Bek and Sally Ward of CAEPR are thanked for their copy-editing and proofreading.

