

Estimates of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, 2021

Source: ABS, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, released 31 August 2023

Due to the inherent uncertainties in these data, including volatility in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census counts and the quality of births, deaths and migration data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) advises that these estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Key points

The ABS estimates of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population indicate that, at 30 June 2021:

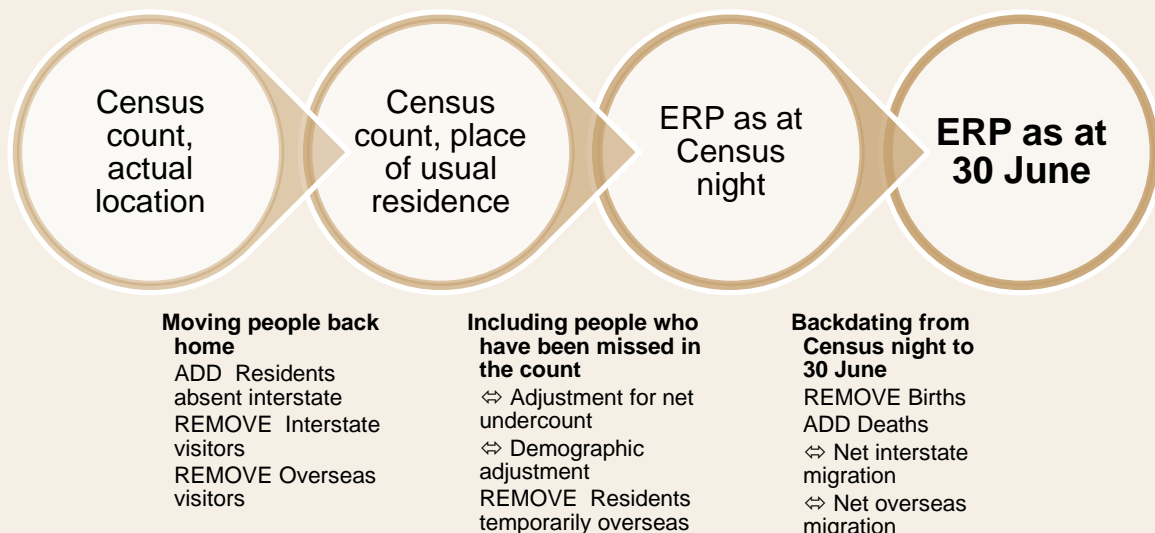
- Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was estimated to be 273,119 persons
 - 34.0% of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were children aged 0–14 years, compared with 18.1% of the non-Indigenous population
 - 5.2% were older persons aged 65 years and over, compared with 17.2% of the non-Indigenous population.
- Queensland was home to the 2nd largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia.
- An increasing proportion of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population lived in the major cities region of Queensland compared with previous census years.

More than **1 in 4**, or 273,119, of Australia's total resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in 2021 **lived in Queensland**

Impact of 2021 Census counts on ERP

The count of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Queensland in the 2021 Census was 27.3% higher than the 2016 Census count. This continues a trend of significant increases between censuses and has provided the foundation for the 23.4% increase in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander estimated resident population (ERP) of Queensland reported in this publication (Figure 2).

The 2021 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander estimated resident population (ERP) is based on the 2021 Census of Population and Housing, and is calculated using a similar process to that used for the total Queensland population:



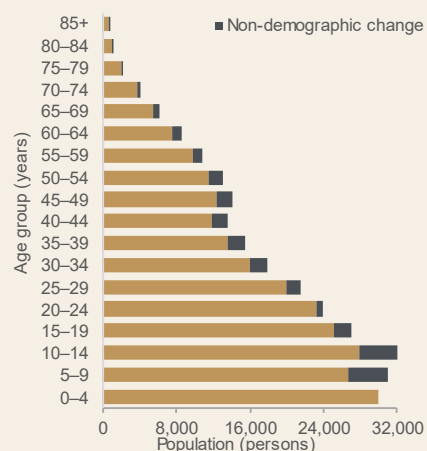
Non-demographic change

A large proportion (41.2%) of the growth in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census counts between 2016 and 2021 was driven by natural increase (births less deaths), consistent with the national pattern. Other demographic factors, such as net overseas and interstate migration, accounted for a further 9.6% of the change.

The remaining growth (49.1%) in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census count between 2016 and 2021 was due to non-demographic factors, such as census coverage and response rates, delayed identification, and changing propensity to identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Of the total non-demographic change (24,967 persons) observed between 2016 and 2021, one-third (33.9% or 8,451 people) can be attributed to the 5–14 year age cohort (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Non-demographic change in Census counts, 2016 to 2021



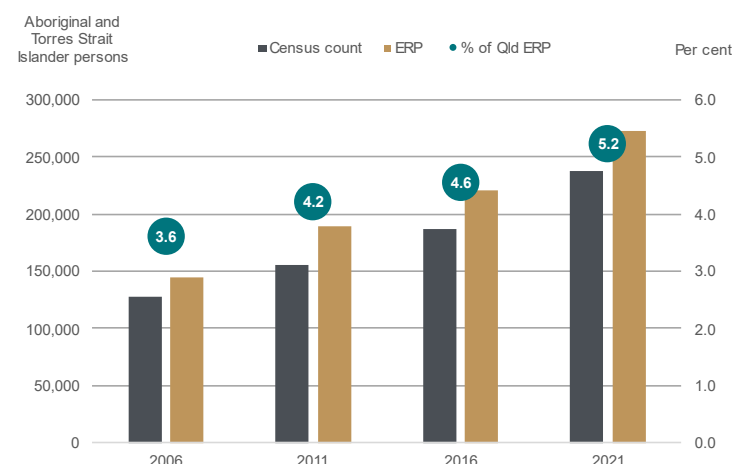
Population size – resident population

The estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population in Queensland at 30 June 2016 was 221,276 persons, increasing by 23.4% to an estimated 273,119 persons at 30 June 2021 (Table 1). This equates to an average annual growth rate of 4.3%, or 10,369 persons per year. Queensland's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples represent an increasing share of the total population over time, increasing from 4.6% at 30 June 2016 to 5.2% at 30 June 2021.

Table 1 Estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population¹: Queensland, at 30 June

	2006	2011	2016	2021
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (number)	144,885	188,954	221,276	273,119
% total Queensland population	3.6	4.2	4.6	5.2
% national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population	28.0	28.2	27.7	27.8
Average annual percentage growth rate for 5-year period	..	2.5	2.2	4.3

Figure 2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census counts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ERP and proportion of Queensland's total ERP, 2006 to 2021



1 in 20
 Queenslanders identified as
 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait
 Islander in 2021

Queensland's share of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population increased to 27.8% in 2021 (Figure 7 and Table 1). Queensland had the second-largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population behind New South Wales (339,710 persons or 34.5% share), and together these two states were home to more than 60% of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

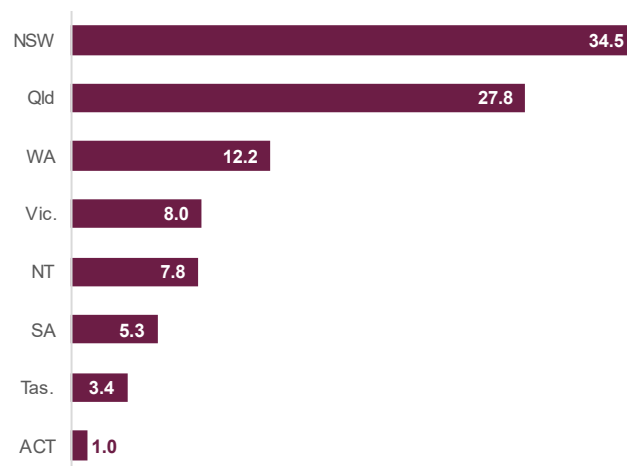
The proportion of the population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples varied markedly across the states and territories, with Queensland having the third-highest proportion (5.2%), behind the Northern Territory (30.8%) and Tasmania (6.0%) (Table 2). These patterns were also evident in 2011 and 2016.

¹ ERP as published in relation to the census count for the respective year in ABS *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, not the rebased timeseries following subsequent census-based estimates.

Table 2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, states and territories, 2021

State or territory	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population	Proportion of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population	Proportion of state or territory population
	— persons —	— per cent —	
NSW	339,710	34.5	4.2
Vic.	78,696	8.0	1.2
Qld	273,119	27.8	5.2
SA	52,069	5.3	2.9
WA	120,006	12.2	4.4
Tas.	33,857	3.4	6.0
NT	76,487	7.8	30.8
ACT	9,525	1.0	2.1
Australia	983,709	100.0	3.8

Figure 3 Proportion of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by state and territory, 2021



Indigenous status (individual categories)

Among Queensland's total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 273,119 persons in 2021:

- 222,309 (81.4%) identified as Aboriginal only (Figure 5)
- 25,169 (9.2%) identified as Torres Strait Islander only, and
- 25,641 identified (9.4%) as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

More than **two-thirds** of all Australians identifying as **Torres Strait Islander** lived in Queensland:

Figure 5 Proportion of Queensland's total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

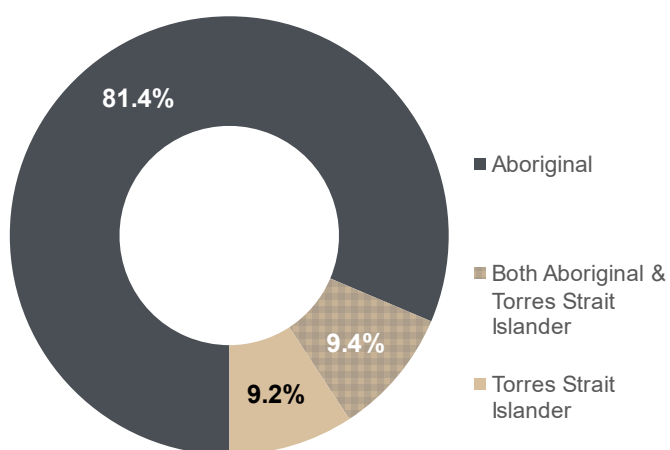
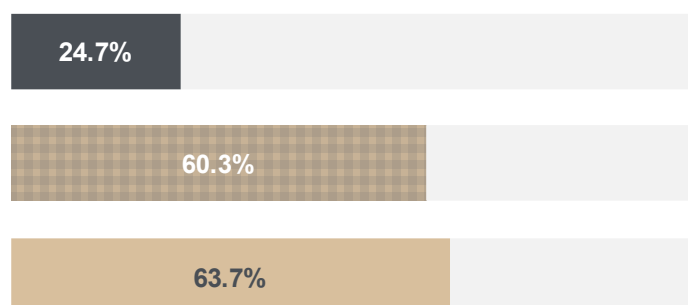


Figure 4 Proportion of national population for each group in Queensland



Queensland's total population of Torres Strait Islander peoples (comprised of people identifying as Torres Strait Islander only and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) was 50,810 persons. Torres Strait Islander peoples (including those identifying as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) living in Queensland accounted for 61.9% of Australia's total Torres Strait Islander population of 82,054 persons.

Population structure

Median age

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a relatively young age structure. In 2021, the median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland was estimated to be 22.8 years for males and 24.1 years for females, compared with 38.5 years and 40.0 years for the non-Indigenous Queensland population. Since 30 June 2016, the median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders had increased by 1.4 years for both males and females.

Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a relatively young age structure

Age and sex structure

The sex ratio (the number of males per 100 females) of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in 2021 (99.5) was slightly higher than the estimated sex ratio in 2016 (98.8). Similar to the non-Indigenous population of Queensland, women outnumbered men in the older age groups, with 1.2 times as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women aged 65 years and over as men.

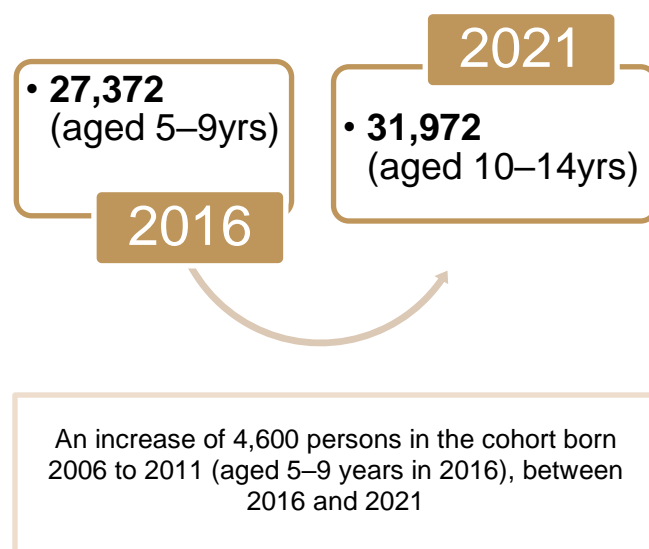
Figure 7 shows the differences in the age structures of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and non-Indigenous population at 30 June 2021 for males and females.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland has increased across all age groups between 2016 and 2021. The largest increase was recorded for the 10–14 year old age group, with an additional 6,895 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children recorded in this age group in 2021 compared with 2016 (Table 3 and Figure 6).

This cohort aged 10–14 years old in 2021 was aged 5–9 years at 30 June 2016 and, as a group, the cohort recorded an additional 4,600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in 2021, an increase of 16.8%. A similarly large increase was experienced for the cohort aged 5–9 years in 2021, up 4,100 persons or 15.2% from the number aged 0–4 years in 2016.

All other cohorts up to 65–69 years in 2021 saw cohort growth between 2016 and 2021, which is likely to be due to increasing numbers of people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the Census and, to a lesser extent, to internal migration from other states/territories in Australia.

Figure 6 Cohort (born 2006 to 2011) population change 2016 to 2021



1 in 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland were **children aged 0–14 years** in 2021

There was a **63.3% increase** in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **older persons** (65 years and over)



34% children
(0–14 years),
down from 35.9% in 2016



60.7% working age
(15–64 years),
up from 60.2% in 2016



5.2% older persons
(65 years and over),
up from 4.0% in 2016

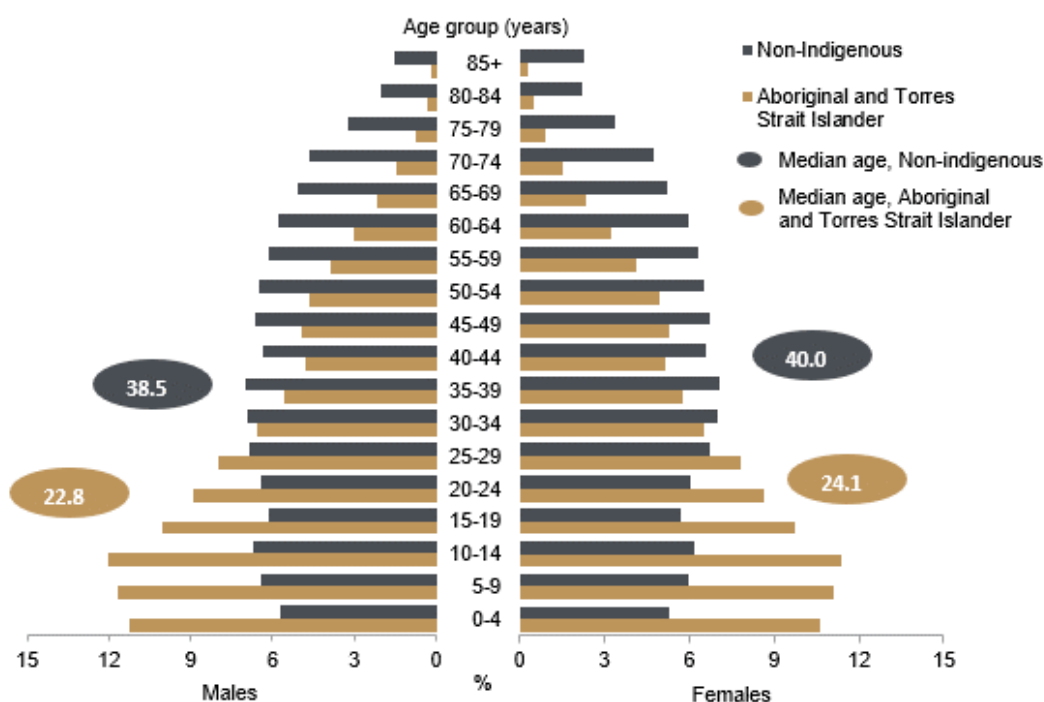
Table 3 Estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population, Queensland, at 30 June

Age group (years)	2016	2021	Change 2016–2021		Proportion of population	Cohort change
	— persons —		persons	%	%	persons
0–4	26,961	29,915	2,954	11.0	11.0	..
5–9	27,372	31,055	3,683	13.5	11.4	4,094
10–14	25,077	31,972	6,895	27.5	11.7	4,600
15–19	23,000	27,061	4,061	17.7	9.9	1,984
20–24	20,521	23,958	3,437	16.7	8.8	958
25–29	16,593	21,498	4,905	29.6	7.9	977
20–34	13,571	17,851	4,280	31.5	6.5	1,258
35–39	11,818	15,480	3,662	31.0	5.7	1,909
40–44	12,367	13,493	1,126	9.1	4.9	1,675
45–49	11,555	14,011	2,456	21.3	5.1	1,644
50–54	9,947	13,073	3,126	31.4	4.8	1,518
55–59	7,946	10,851	2,905	36.6	4.0	904
60–64	5,806	8,626	2,820	48.6	3.2	680
65–69	4,074	6,134	2,060	50.6	2.2	328
70–74	2,297	4,070	1,773	77.2	1.5	–4
75–79	1,243	2,241	998	80.3	0.8	–56
80–84	660	1,105	445	67.4	0.4	–138
85 and over	468	725	257	54.9	0.3	
Total	221,276	273,119	51,843	23.4	100.0	

Largest cohort increases in younger age groups

.. Not applicable (persons aged 0–4 years in 2021 were not yet born at the time of the 2016 Census)

Figure 7: Estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population, Queensland, at 30 June 2021



Indigenous regions⁴

The majority of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 273,119 persons (41.9% or 114,561 persons) lived in the Brisbane Indigenous Region (IREG) (Table 2).

Moreover, across the 37 IREGs in Australia, the Brisbane IREG had the second-largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population after NSW Central and North Coast IREG (116,051 persons).

A further 38.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders lived in the IREGs of Townsville-Mackay (36,580 persons), Rockhampton (34,458 persons) and Cairns-Atherton (34,122 persons).

The Torres Strait IREG had the highest proportion of people who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, accounting for almost 9 in 10 (86.8%) persons (Table 4), followed by Cape York (58.3%). While the Brisbane IREG had the greatest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, they made up only 3.1% of the region's total population. Cape York and Torres Strait IREGs both had smaller estimated resident populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in 2021 compared with 2016, down from 10,579 and 7,403 persons respectively.

Table 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, by Indigenous region, 2021

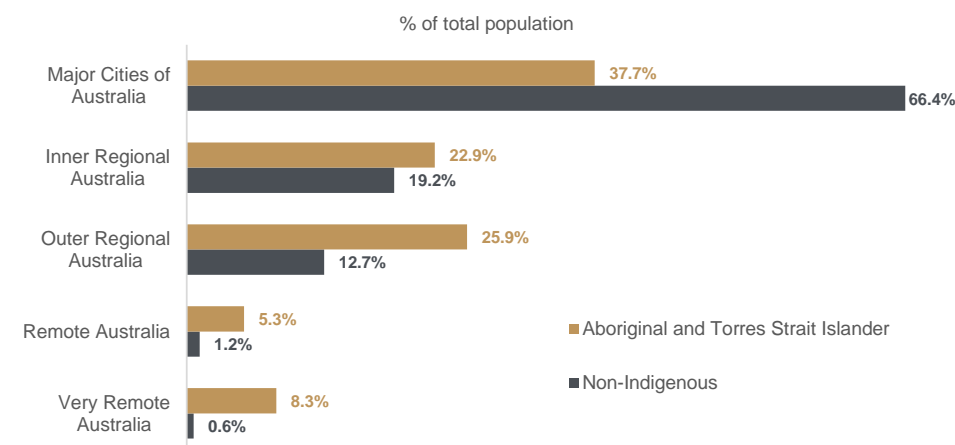
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons	Proportion of Qld Indigenous population	Proportion of total population in region
	persons	— per cent —	
Queensland	273,119	100.0	5.2
IREG			
Brisbane	114,561	41.9	3.1
Cairns-Atherton	34,122	12.5	12.9
Cape York	10,308	3.8	58.3
Mount Isa	9,804	3.6	31.9
Rockhampton	34,458	12.6	7.1
Toowoomba-Roma	26,510	9.7	7.2
Torres Strait	6,776	2.5	86.8
Townsville-Mackay	36,580	13.4	9.1

Brisbane IREG includes the LGAs of Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Moreton Bay, Noosa, Redlands, Sunshine Coast, Scenic Rim, and Somerset.

Remoteness⁵

Looked at from a remoteness perspective, 37.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders lived in major cities (102,880 persons) in 2021. A further 22.9% (62,547) lived in inner regional Queensland, while 25.9% (70,686) lived in outer regional Queensland. The remainder lived in remote or very remote Queensland (5.3% or 14,430 persons and 8.3% or 22,576 persons respectively). For the non-Indigenous population, the highest proportion also lived in major cities (66.4%), however, only 1.8% lived in remote and very remote areas (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Population by remoteness area, Queensland, 2021



Local government areas

While the distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the state's local government areas (LGAs) was variable, a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders lived in coastal LGAs (Figure 9), including:

- Brisbane (9.3% or 25,528 persons)
- Moreton Bay (7.8% or 21,195 persons)
- Cairns (7.2% or 19,667 persons)
- Townsville (7.0% or 19,125 persons) (Table 5).

While LGAs in the more remote regions of the state contained fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, those people accounted for notably higher proportions of the respective LGA populations (Figure 5). There were 13 LGAs where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population comprised more than 90% of the LGA's total population, with the highest proportion recorded in Cherbourg (99.0%) (Figure 10). Cherbourg also had the second highest proportion of all LGAs in Australia in 2021.

Of the larger city LGAs² in Queensland, Cairns had the highest proportion of its total population that identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (11.6%), followed by Townsville (9.8%).

Table 5 Top 5 LGAs for largest and highest proportion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, 2021

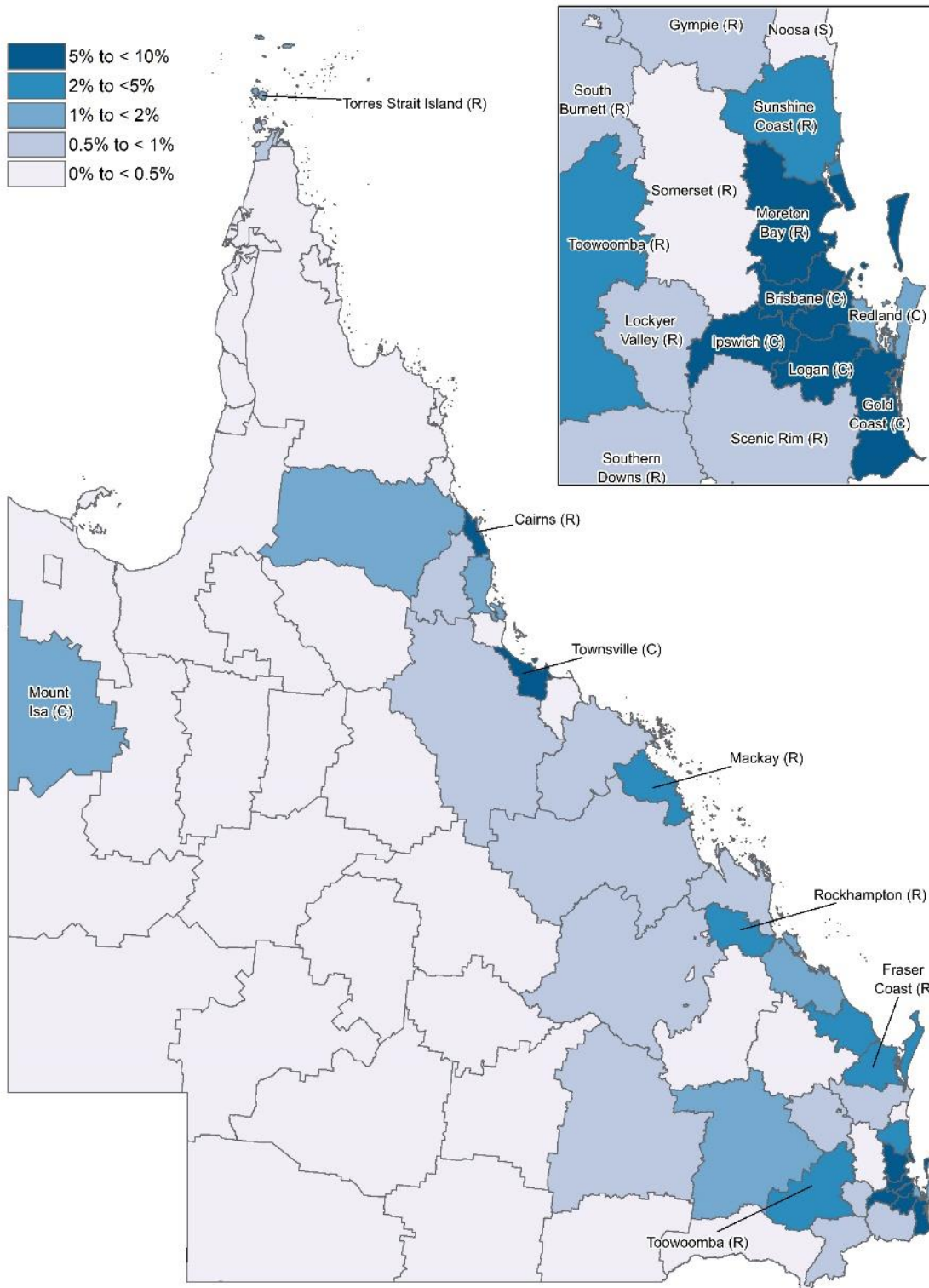
LGA	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons	Proportion of Queensland Indigenous population	Proportion of total LGA population
	persons	— per cent —	
Largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population			
Brisbane	25,528	9.3	2.0
Moreton Bay	21,195	7.8	4.4
Cairns	19,667	7.2	11.6
Townsville	19,125	7.0	9.8
Logan	17,139	6.3	4.9
Highest % of population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander			
Cherbourg	1,199	0.4	99.0
Yarrabah	2,544	0.9	98.0
Torres Strait Island	4,118	1.5	95.9
Woorabinda	996	0.4	95.8
Napranum	867	0.3	95.7

While Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population saw an overall increase of 23.4% between 2016 and 2021, growth was variable across the LGAs. Moreton Bay had the largest absolute increase in its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with an additional 6,199 living in the region (up 41.3%), followed by Logan with an additional 5,345 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents (up 45.3%). Also of note were the 70.4% increase in Isaac (up 685 persons) and the 51.9% increase in Gladstone (up 1,541).

Conversely there were 21 LGAs whose estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population decreased between 2016 and 2021, generally in remote and very remote parts of Queensland, with the majority of these LGAs also having experienced a decrease in their total estimated resident population over the same period.

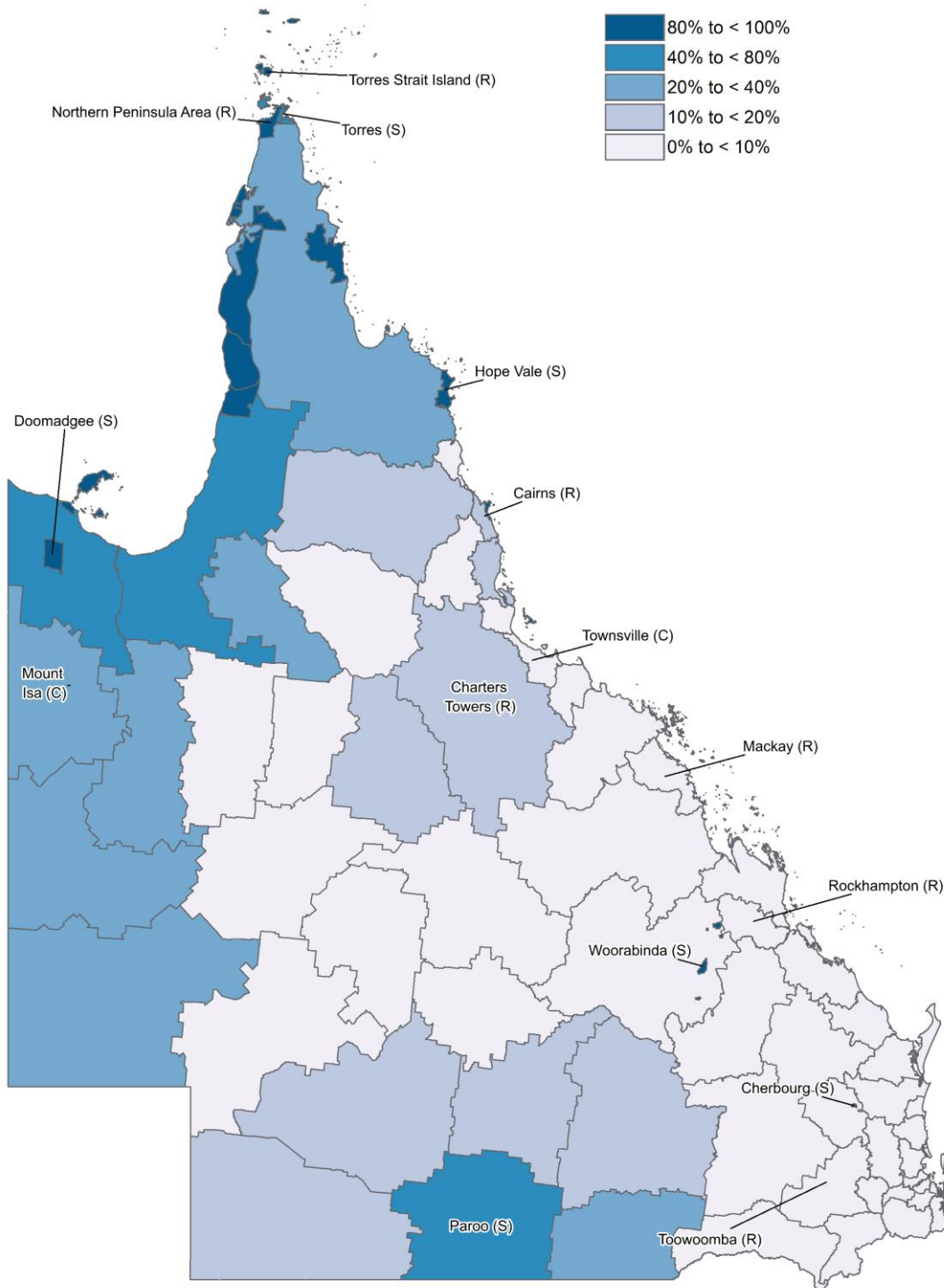
² Larger city LGAs are those with an estimated resident population greater than 100,000 persons.

Figure 9 Distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by LGA, 2021



(C) City; (R) Regional Council; (S) Shire

Figure 10 Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a share of total LGA population, 2021



(C) City; (R) Regional Council; (S) Shire

Impact of new population estimates on reporting

Calculation of rates

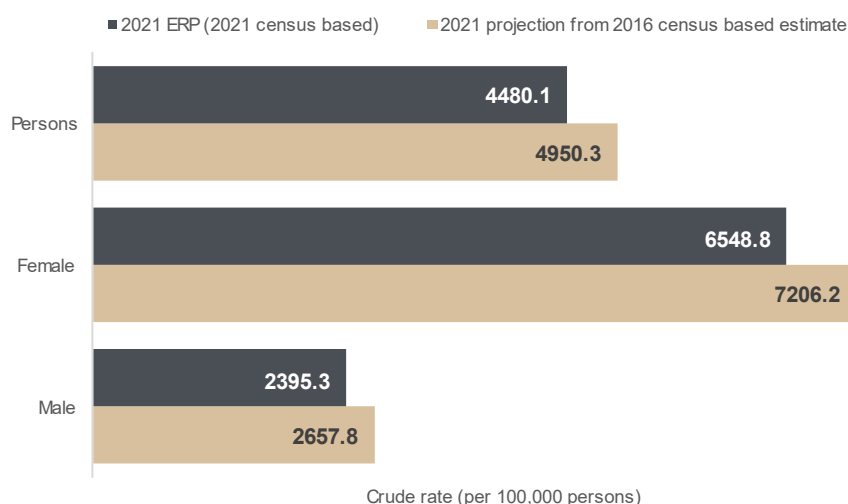
The 23.4% increase in the ERP for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population between 2016 and 2021 has a direct impact on the rates calculated for that population. The increase in the denominator (ERP) causes the rates (both crude rates and age-standardised) to be lower than the rates calculated using the 2016 Census-based projections for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

For example, when considering reported victim rates (age-standardised per 1,000 persons) for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, the new rates were lower for both males and females ().

Crude rates refer to the total number of events (count) divided by the population. Crude rates do not take account of the population age distribution in any way.

Age-standardised rate – a method of adjusting the crude rate to eliminate the effect of differences in population age structures when comparing different populations/sub-groups. This is particularly important if the characteristics observed vary by age.

Figure 11 Impact of new denominator population on crude rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of offences against the person by sex, Queensland, 2021



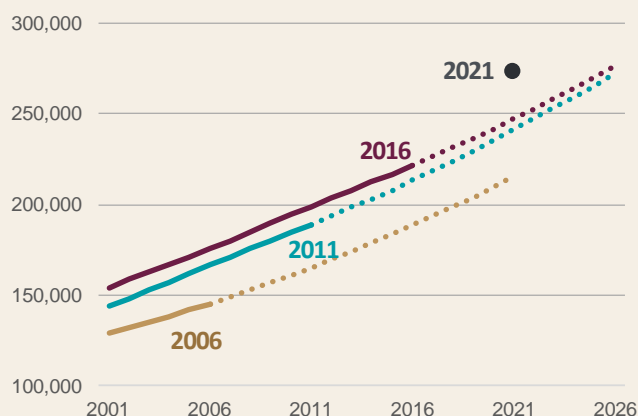
Timeseries data

When presenting timeseries data and/or rates for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, until the release of the 2021 Census-based estimates and projections, the ABS advises that the 2016-based projections should be used.

The difference between the previous and current timeseries (2016) and the new 2021 single-year population estimate are shown in Figure 12.

Note that all relevant timeseries data should be recalculated following the release of the 2021 Census-based estimates and projections.

Figure 12 Estimates and projections by Census year of base, Queensland





Notes

1 This brief presents final ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander estimated resident population figures for Australia and Queensland at 30 June 2021. These replace the preliminary estimates released in *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, September 2022.

Final population estimates are based on the 2021 Census and cannot be used with the 2016-based estimates or the 2001–2031 projection series. However, comparable historical and projected estimates for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population will be released in 2024.

2 Due to the methods used to derive the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimates, figures should be used with caution. For further information see the explanatory notes and technical notes in *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, June 2021.

3 Large increases in the counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons have historically been observed between Censuses. For additional information, see *Understanding change in counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Census, 2021*.

4 The Indigenous regions (IREGs) are geographical areas defined by the ABS. IREGs are based on former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission regions and are intended to represent something of the regional diversity among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. More information on IREGs can be found on the [ABS website](#).

5 Remoteness areas are geographical areas defined by the ABS. The five remoteness areas (major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote) are classified based on the accessibility of cities and towns, of a range of sizes, by road.