Queensland has seen great change over the past century. This bulletin contains demographic statistics comparing Queensland in 1901 and 2001. Sources are the coordinated state censuses of 1901 including the Census of Queensland, and the 2001 Census of Population and Housing by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Some non-census data relating to the early 1900s came from the *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia 1908*. Please note that data from the 1901 and 2001 censuses are not always directly comparable, due to different methodologies and question content.

**Key points**

The typical Queenslander in 1901 was a 22 year old unmarried male with school education, living in a rural area, and employed in a primary industry occupation.

In contrast, the typical Queenslander in 2001 was a 35 year old married female with tertiary education, living in the south-east corner or major coastal centre, and employed in a clerical, sales or service occupation.

**Population count**

The population of Queensland grew from 503,000 in 1901 to more than 3.6 million in 2001, an increase of over sevenfold. The State’s share of Australia’s population rose from 13.2% to 19.3% over this period (see Figure 1). The only other state to experience an increase in population share was Western Australia.

**Figure 1: Population shares by state and territory**

![Population shares by state and territory](image)

Notes: Excludes overseas visitors. In 1901, New South Wales included the area now known as the Australian Capital Territory; the figure for South Australia included the Northern Territory.

Females made up only 44.4% of Queensland’s population in 1901. The low proportion of females was due to the greater tendency of males to travel in the 19th century and to be attracted by pastoral, gold mining and other opportunities. By 2001, females made up 50.7% of the State’s population.

A total of 6,670 Aboriginal persons were counted in Queensland in 1901, comprising 3,862 males and 2,808 females. In 2001, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the State was 113,000. This increase has been due to better counting, natural increase and more people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

As an indication of declining family size over the century, persons per dwelling almost halved between 1901 and 2001, from 5.0 to 2.6.

Queensland has become more centralised over the century, although it is still the most decentralised of Australia’s mainland states. Only 24.8% of the State’s population lived in Brisbane’s metropolitan area in 1901. This rose to 44.9% in 2001.

In 1901, Queensland’s largest regional centres mainly serviced agricultural and mining areas. They were Rockhampton (15,500 persons), Gympie (13,100), Maryborough (12,000), Townsville (11,000), Toowoomba (10,700), Mount Morgan (9,000) and Ipswich (8,600). In 2001, the main regional centres tended to be tourism oriented and supported a range of industries. They were Gold Coast (427,000), Sunshine Coast (187,000), Townsville/Thuringowa (133,000), Cairns (115,000) and Toowoomba (105,000).

**Age**

The median age of Queensland’s population rose from 22 years in 1901 to 35 years in 2001. Figure 2 highlights the older structure of the State’s population in 2001 compared with 1901. Children aged 0-14 years made up 37.0% of the population in 1901. This had fallen to 21.3% by 2001. The proportion of the population aged 60 years and over rose from 4.8% to 16.7% over this period. This increase has a range of implications for government services.

**Figure 2: Age distribution of the population, Queensland**

![Age distribution of the population, Queensland](image)

Note: Excludes not stated and overseas visitors.

**Birthplace**

Queensland had a greater proportion of people born overseas in 1901 than in 2001 (see Figure 3). Persons born in Australia rose from 65.1% to 81.9% of the population over this period. The fall in proportion of persons born in the United Kingdom and Ireland (from 25.4% to 5.6%) reflects the early migration of many of these people. Perhaps surprising is the lack of increase in the proportion from Europe and Asia, but early migration from Germany and China was relatively high.

Figure 3: Birthplace of the population, Queensland

In 1901, Queensland had no university or teacher training college. However, the State had 17 technical colleges with total enrolments of about 2,500 (in 1906). In 2001, the State had 137,000 people attending university, while 306,000 persons (10.8% of persons aged 15 years and over) had university level qualifications. TAFE colleges had 74,000 persons attending.

Occupations

Major changes have occurred in the occupational structure of the population over the century. Figures 5 and 6 show the occupations of people in 1901 and 2001 respectively. Primary industry occupations dominated in 1901, with 38.1% of employed persons in these jobs. There were more males than females in all occupation categories except domestic. Females accounted for only 16.3% of employed persons in 1901.

By 2001, females accounted for 45.4% of employed persons and dominated clerical, sales and service jobs. Other trends include an increase in the proportion of manager and professional positions, and a decline in primary and domestic jobs (although this is not shown directly in Figure 6).

Figure 5: Occupations, Queensland, 1901

Notes: Persons aged 15 years and over. Excludes unspecified.

Figure 6: Occupations, Queensland, 2001

Notes: Persons aged 15 years and over. Excludes inadequately described, not stated and overseas visitors.

Marital status

Significant changes in marital status occurred in Queensland over the period 1901 to 2001 (see Figure 4). The proportion of married persons aged 15 years and over rose from 45.8% to 51.3%. Not surprisingly, the proportion of persons separated or divorced increased from 0.05% to 11.8% with the relaxation of divorce laws. Harder to explain is the fall in the proportion never married, from 48.7% to 31.2%, especially as the latter figure would include a large number in de facto relationships. Possible reasons for the high proportion in 1901 were the large number of men in pastoral and other remote jobs, the large number of women in domestic positions and the imbalance in the number of men to women.

Education

School enrolments in Queensland in 1906 (1901 not available) were 104,600, with average attendance being 82,600. Persons aged 5-15 years totalled about 127,000 at this time. Thus, a fairly large proportion of school-aged children did not go to school, with 15.6% of those aged 5-15 years in 1901 unable to read and a further 5.0% unable to write but able to read. By 2001, some 573,000 persons attended school in Queensland.

Queensland Treasury

Office of Economic and Statistical Research
Website: www.oesr.qld.gov.au (see the web site for other bulletins in this series)

Brisbane Office: Level 16, Queensland Minerals and Energy Centre, 61 Mary Street, Brisbane Qld 4000 • PO Box 37, Brisbane Albert Street Qld 4002 • Telephone: (07) 3224 5326 • Facsimile: (07) 3227 7437 • Email: oesr@treasury.qld.gov.au

For further information about this bulletin, please email chris.pearce@treasury.qld.com.au

Townsville Office: First Floor, State Government Building, Cnr Walker & Stanley Streets, Townsville Qld 4810 • PO Box 2077, Townsville Qld 4810 • Telephone: (07) 4760 7650 • Facsimile: (07) 4760 7651

Rockhampton Office: Level 3, State Government Building, 209 Bolsover Street, Rockhampton Qld 4700 • PO Box 40, Rockhampton Qld 4700 • Telephone: (07) 4938 4486 • Facsimile: (07) 4938 4488

Cairns Office: Level 9, 15 Lake Street, Cairns Qld 4870 • PO Box 2378, Cairns Qld 4870 • Telephone: (07) 4039 8804 • Facsimile: (07) 4031 2170

Page 2 of 2