

# Population estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, 2006 to 2031

Source: ABS 3238.0, released 22 July 2021, 11:30 a.m. AEST (Incorporates revisions by the ABS to the original data release for the projection years 2017 to 2031).

## Key points

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates and projections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders indicate that, at 30 June 2031:

- Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to number between 302,093 and 315,585 persons.
- The number of children (0–14 years) is projected to increase from 79,410 persons in 2016 to between 92,361 and 104,483 persons.
- The number of persons aged 55 years and over is projected to increase from 22,494 persons in 2016 to between 46,424 and 47,631 persons.
- The Brisbane Indigenous region is projected to remain the most populous Indigenous region in Queensland, and supersede NSW Central and North Coast Indigenous region as the most populous in Australia from 2018.

## Introduction

This brief presents estimates and projections of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland for the period 30 June 2006 to 30 June 2031. Estimates for 30 June 2001 to 30 June 2005 are also included as an illustrative series and should be used with caution.

*The size, structure and components of the projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population presented in this brief for the years 2017 to 2031 supersede those previously published by the Queensland Government Statisticians Office in August 2019.*

## Data notes

Three projection series are presented in this paper representing high, medium and low growth rate scenarios for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland. The underlying assumptions used to produce these series are summarised on page 4. For more detailed information about the assumptions, methodology and data quality issues, please refer to the full publication of *Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006 to 2031* (ABS 3238.0).

The projection series presented here are not intended as predictions or forecasts, but are illustrations of growth and change in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population that would occur if assumptions about future demographic trends were to prevail over the projection period. There can be no certainty that any particular

outcome will be realised, or that future outcomes will necessarily fall within the projected ranges.

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 ABS advises that estimates and projections should be interpreted with caution.

## Population size

The estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population in Queensland at 30 June 2001 was 154,166 persons, increasing to an estimated 221,276 persons at 30 June 2016 (Table 1). This equates to an average annual growth rate of 2.4%, or 4,474 persons per year, the highest average annual increase of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in any Australian state or territory over the 15-year period.

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

	2001	2006	2011	2016
Estimated resident population (no.)	154,166	175,267	198,776	221,276
% total Queensland population	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.6
% national Indigenous population	27.3	27.4	27.6	27.7
Average annual percentage growth rate for five-year period	n.a.	2.6	2.5	2.2

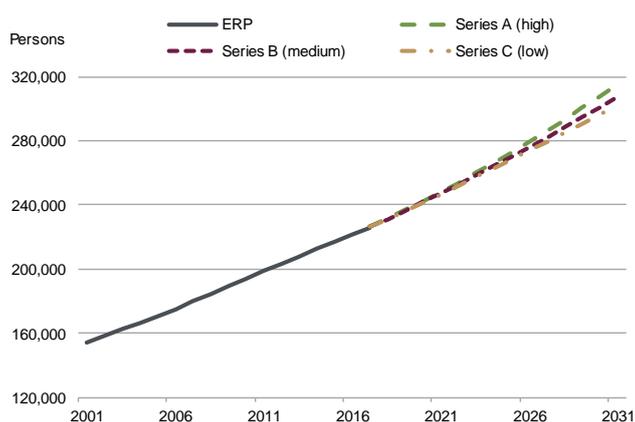
There was minimal change to the proportion of Queenslanders identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander over the reference period, accounting for 4.4% and 4.6% at 30 June 2011 and 2016 respectively.

Looking ahead to 2031, Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to increase with an average annual growth rate of between 2.1% and 2.4% over the 15-year projection period — the third-fastest growth rate behind the ACT and Victoria. At 30 June 2031, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland is projected to number between 302,093 and 315,585 persons (Table 2 and Figure 1).

**Table 2: Projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population, Queensland, at 30 June**

	2016	2021	2026	2031
<b>Projected resident population</b>	— persons —			
Series A (high)		247,856	279,313	315,585
Series B (medium)	221,276	247,178	276,099	307,547
Series C (low)		246,685	273,867	302,093
<b>Average annual five-year growth rate</b>	— % —			
Series A		2.3	2.4	2.5
Series B		2.2	2.2	2.2
Series C		2.2	2.1	2.0

**Figure 1: Estimated and projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population by main projection series, Queensland, at 30 June**



Queensland's share of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to increase to 28.9% at 30 June 2031 (Figure 2). In 2031 across the main projection series (Series B), Queensland is projected to retain its position as the state or territory with the second-largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (307,547 persons) behind New South Wales (353,667 persons or 33.2% share).

**Figure 2: States and territories, proportion of national estimated and projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population (Series B), at 30 June**



By 30 June 2031, the proportion of the Queensland population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is projected to be between 4.6% and 5.4% of the state's population.

## Population structure

### Median age

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a relatively young age structure. In 2016, the median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland was estimated to be 21.9 years, compared with 37.0 years for the total Queensland population. By 30 June 2031, the median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is projected to increase to between 24.6 and 25.6 years (Table 3).

The median age for female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is projected to be between 25.4 and 26.4 years by 2031, compared with between 23.9 and 24.9 years for males.

**Table 3: Median age (years) of projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, Queensland, at 30 June**

	2016 <sup>(a)</sup>	2021	2026	2031
— males —				
Series A		22.4	23.3	23.9
Series B	21.3	22.4	23.6	24.6
Series C		22.5	23.7	24.9
— females —				
Series A		23.8	24.8	25.4
Series B	22.6	23.8	25.0	26.0
Series C		23.9	25.2	26.4
— persons —				
Series A		23.1	24.0	24.6
Series B	21.9	23.1	24.3	25.3
Series C		23.2	24.4	25.6

(a) Median age of base population.

### Age and sex structure

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland is projected to increase across all age groups between 2016 and 2031. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–14 years is projected to increase from 79,410 persons in 2016 to between 92,361 and 104,483 in 2031 (Table 4), equating to an average annual growth of 1.0% to 1.8% over the projection period. The number of young people (15–24 years) is projected to increase from 43,521 in 2016 to between 55,343 and 55,368 in 2031, at an average annual growth rate of 1.6% for each projection series.

As a proportion of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, children (0–14 years) are projected to decrease from 35.9% in 2016 to between 30.6% and 33.1% in 2031, continuing the downward trend observed over the 15 years to 2016. In contrast, the proportion of older persons (65 years and over) is projected to increase over the projection period, from 4.0% in 2016 to 7.9% for all three series in 2031.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons aged 55 years and over are projected to double in number over the projection period, from 22,494 persons in 2016 to between 46,424 and 47,631 persons in 2031. This equates to an average annual growth of between 4.9% and 5.1%. The estimated share of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of persons aged 55 years and over is projected to increase from 10.2% in 2016 to between 15.1% and 15.4% in 2031.

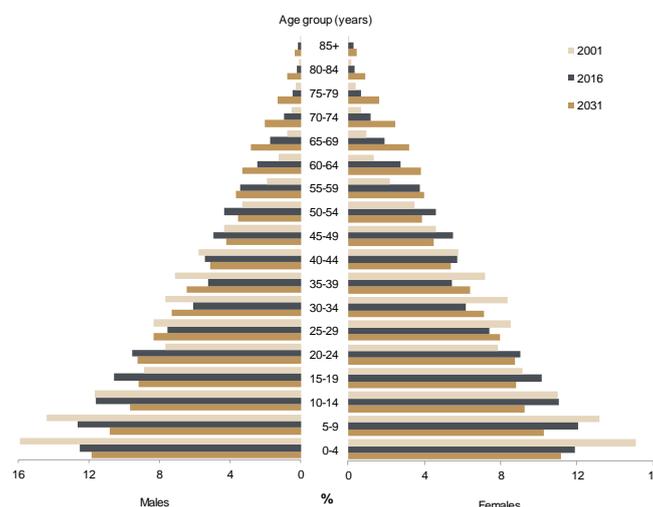
**Table 4: Estimated and projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population, Queensland, at 30 June**

Age group (years)	2016		Series A	Series B	Series C
	2001	2016	2031		
— persons —					
0–14	62,621	79,410	104,483	96,965	92,361
15–24	25,918	43,521	55,343	55,361	55,368
25–34	25,369	30,164	47,284	47,308	47,276
35–44	19,922	24,185	35,966	35,947	35,904
45–54	12,120	21,502	24,878	24,849	24,760
55–64	5,167	13,752	22,806	22,716	22,571
65–74	2,243	6,371	16,279	16,129	15,907
75 and over	806	2,371	8,546	8,272	7,946
<b>Total</b>	<b>154,166</b>	<b>221,276</b>	<b>315,585</b>	<b>307,547</b>	<b>302,093</b>

Figure 3 shows the estimated and projected proportional change (series B) in the age structure of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population over the 30-year period between 30 June 2001 and 30 June 2031 for males and females.

The sex ratio (the number of males per 100 females) of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in 2031 (between 98.2 and 98.6) is projected to be similar to the estimated sex ratio in 2016 (98.8).

**Figure 3: Estimated and projected (series B) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population, Queensland, at 30 June**

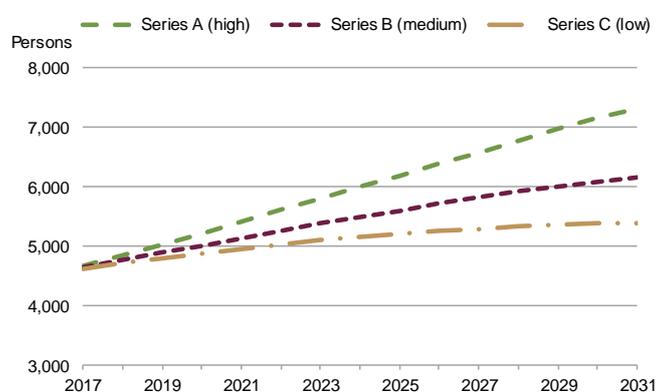


### Components of population change

The number of births of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies in Queensland is projected to increase from between 5,430 and 5,453 births in 2017 to between 6,574 and 8,303 in 2031. Projected births includes babies with either an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mother, father or both, by incorporating assumptions for both fertility and paternity rates in each projection series (Table 10).

In series C, which assumes constant life expectancy at birth, the number of deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons is projected to increase from 805 deaths in 2017 to 1,188 in 2031. In comparison, in series A and B, which incorporate increasing life expectancy at birth assumptions, the number of deaths is projected to increase to 981 and 1,067 deaths respectively in 2031.

As the number of births is considerably larger than the number of deaths in each projection series, natural increase remains consistently high across the main projection series, reaching between 5,386 and 7,322 persons in 2031 (Figure 4). Table 5 summarises the projected components of population change and total growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population for series B by five-year periods.

**Figure 4: Projected natural increase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, Queensland, at 30 June**

**Table 5: Projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population (series B) and components of change, Queensland, five years to 30 June**

Series B (medium)	2016–2021	2021–2026	2026–2031
<b>Start population</b>	<b>221,276</b>	<b>247,178</b>	<b>276,099</b>
Births	28,514	31,942	35,056
less – Deaths	4,067	4,476	5,063
<i>equals – Natural increase</i>	<i>24,447</i>	<i>27,466</i>	<i>29,993</i>
<i>plus – Net interstate migration</i>	<i>1,455</i>	<i>1,455</i>	<i>1,455</i>
<i>equals – Total growth</i>	<i>25,902</i>	<i>28,921</i>	<i>31,448</i>
<b>End population</b>	<b>247,178</b>	<b>276,099</b>	<b>307,547</b>

## Indigenous regions

With an average annual growth rate of 2.8%, the Brisbane Indigenous Region (IREG) is projected in all series to become the largest Indigenous region in Australia over the period to 2031. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the Brisbane IREG is projected to increase by 51.4% (43,392 persons) (Table 6). Among Indigenous regions in the rest of Australia, the NSW Central and North Coast IREG and Sydney–Wollongong IREG have the largest projected growth, with projected increases of 34,827 and 23,960 persons respectively over the 15-year period.

In Queensland, Townsville–Mackay IREG was also projected to have a very high average annual rate of growth (2.5%), leading to a projected population increase over the 15-year period of 13,794 persons or 43.8%. Mount Isa IREG was projected to have the smallest average annual rate of growth in Queensland (0.2%) over the 15-year period (an increase of 3.6% or 325 persons) to 2031.

**Table 6: Indigenous regions, projected increase and rate of growth (series B), 2016 to 2031, at 30 June**

Indigenous region	2016	2031	Projected growth 2016 to 2031	
	— persons —		no.	%
Brisbane	84,454	127,846	43,392	51.4
Cairns–Atherton	30,050	39,466	9,416	31.3
Cape York	10,579	13,613	3,034	28.7
Mount Isa	9,003	9,328	325	3.6
Rockhampton	26,941	35,870	8,929	33.1
Toowoomba–Roma	21,350	27,886	6,536	30.6
Torres Strait	7,403	8,248	845	11.4
Townsville–Mackay	31,496	45,290	13,794	43.8
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>221,276</b>	<b>307,547</b>	<b>86,271</b>	<b>39.0</b>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>798,365</b>	<b>1,065,236</b>	<b>266,871</b>	<b>33.4</b>

## Assumptions and cautions

### Estimates 2001 to 2005

The ABS recast estimates for the period 2001 to 2005 as part of the July 2019 release of the 3238.0 [publication](#).

These estimates should be used with caution, with uncertainty in the reliability of these estimates increasing as the time from the base year (2016 ERP) increases.

Further information on the quality of estimates for 2001 to 2005 is detailed in the *Backcast estimates for the period 2001 to 2005* section of the [publication](#).

### Base population

The base population used to produce the estimates and projections is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June 2016. This ERP was derived from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, adjusted for net undercount and demographic components of change.

### Estimates

The underlying migration assumptions used to produce estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population for the period 30 June 2006 to 30 June 2016 were as follows:

- Net overseas migration for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was set at zero.
- Net interstate migration for each intercensal period was based on the levels observed in each respective intercensal period.

Table 7 summarises the underlying assumptions about past levels of mortality that were applied to the base population to obtain a 'reverse-survived' population for the reference period. Over the 10-year period, it is

estimated there was an overall increase in life expectancy at birth of 3.50 years for males and 2.25 years for females.

**Table 7: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy at birth assumptions, Queensland<sup>1</sup>**

	2006	2006–2011	2011–2016	2015–17 (base)
<b>Females</b>	74.2 years	0.20 years per year	0.25 years per year	76.4 years
<b>Males</b>	68.5 years	0.30 years per year	0.40 years per year	72.0 years

## Projections

*These assumptions were formulated based on past demographic trends and do not attempt to allow for possible future changes in non-demographic factors (such as major government policy decisions, economic factors or significant health treatment improvements) which may affect future demographic behaviour or outcomes.*

Nine projection series of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population were produced for the period 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2031 by applying varying demographic assumptions to the base population. The projections presented in this brief, series A, B and C, represent the main projection series and are used to respectively imply high, medium and low growth rate scenarios for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland. The underlying assumptions used to produce the main projection series are summarised in Tables 8 and 9, and apply for the duration of the projection period.

These projections represent three of a range of possible outcomes for the future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland. Using a range of possible outcomes, rather than a single projection series, gives a more realistic view of the possible future size, distribution, and age structure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

**Table 8: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fertility and paternity projection assumptions, Queensland<sup>2</sup>**

	Fertility rates (babies per woman)	Paternity rates (babies per man)
<b>Series A</b>	Constant at 2.25	↑ 2.0% annually
<b>Series B</b>	↓ 1.0% annually	↑ 1.0% annually
<b>Series C</b>	↓ 1.5% annually	Constant at 0.98

**Table 9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy at birth projection assumptions, Queensland<sup>1</sup>**

	Females	Males
<b>Series A</b>	↑ 0.35 years per year	↑ 0.45 years per year
<b>Series B</b>	↑ 0.25 years per year	↑ 0.40 years per year
<b>Series C</b>	↑ 0.20 years per year	↑ 0.20 years per year

Assumptions for the remaining demographic factors were held constant:

- sex ratio of 105.6 male births per 100 female births
- interstate migration at levels observed in the 2016 Census (assumed positive net interstate migration of 291 persons each year for Queensland)
- zero net overseas migration
- zero unexplained growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (e.g. increased propensity to identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin was not explicitly modelled).

Table 10 presents a summary of the projected number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders at 30 June 2031 for the main projection series and the accompanying assumptions for the year ended 30 June 2031.

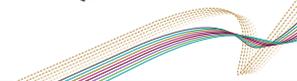
Over the 15-year projection period, life expectancy at birth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is projected to increase by between 3.0 years (series C) and 6.8 years (series A) for males and between 3.0 years (series C) and 5.3 years (series A) for females.

**Table 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, Queensland, at 30 June 2031**

	Series A	Series B	Series C
<b>Assumptions</b>			
Total fertility rate (babies per woman)	2.26	1.95	1.82
Total paternity rate (babies per man)	1.30	1.12	0.97
Male life expectancy at birth (years)	78.8	78.0	75.0
Female life expectancy at birth (years)	81.7	80.2	79.4
<b>Projected resident population</b>			
	— persons —		
Males	156,660	152,701	149,679
Females	158,925	154,846	152,414
Persons	315,585	307,547	302,093

<sup>1</sup> Mortality differentials between Queensland and Australia have been calculated and applied to the assumed Australian life expectancies at birth for the base population.

<sup>2</sup> The same rate of decline in fertility rate and rate of increase in paternity rate is assumed for each state and territory. Constant rates are as at 30 June 2017.



## Glossary

**Indigenous regions (IREG)** — are large geographical units loosely based on the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission boundaries. They are created by aggregating one or more Indigenous areas.

**Intercensal period** — the time between 30 June in the previous census year and 30 June of the latest census year.

**Life expectancy** — refers to the average number of additional years a person of a given age and sex might expect to live if the age-specific death rates of the given period continued throughout his or her lifetime.

**Median age** — the age at which half the population is older and half is younger.

**Natural increase** — the excess of births over deaths.

**Net interstate migration** — the difference between the number of persons who have changed their place of usual residence by moving into a given state or territory and the number who have changed their place of usual residence by moving out of that state or territory during a specified period.

**Net overseas migration** — the net permanent and long-term overseas migration, adjusted for change in traveller duration, intention and multiple movement error.

**Sex ratio** — the number of males per 100 females.

**Total fertility rate (TFR)** — the average number of children an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman could expect to bear during her lifetime if she experienced current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life.

**Total paternity rate (TPR)** — the average number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies born per Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father where the mother is non-Indigenous (calculated the same way as the TFR).