

Population estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, 2011 to 2031

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, released 24 July 2024

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 increase to between 339,574 and 346,087 persons.
- The number of children (0–14 years) is projected to number between 107,382 and 112,450 persons, compared with 92,942 persons in 2021.
- The number of persons aged 65 years and over is projected to increase from 14,275 persons in 2021 to between 24,407 and 25,298 persons.
- The Brisbane Indigenous region is projected to remain the most populous Indigenous region in Queensland, and to overtake NSW Central and North Coast Indigenous region as the most populous in Australia from 2024.

This brief presents estimates of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population for the period 30 June 2011 to 30 June 2021. The brief also outlines projected population scenarios (low, medium and high) from 30 June 2022 to 2031.

The size, structure and components of the projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population presented in this brief supersede those previously published by the ABS for the period 2011 to 2031.

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 projections series and the backcast estimates are summarised on page 4.

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 the estimates and projections should be interpreted with caution.

Population size

Queensland's estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population at 30 June 2011 was 218,047 persons. By 30 June 2021, this had increased to an estimated 273,119 persons (Table 1). The growth over the 10-year period to 2021 equates to an average

annual growth rate of 2.3%, or 5,507 persons per year, the second-highest average annual increase, behind New South Wales (5,946 persons or 1.9%).

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

	2011	2016	2021
Estimated resident population (persons)	218,047	245,895	273,119
As a % of the total Queensland population	4.9%	5.1%	5.2%
As a % of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population	27.0%	27.4%	27.8%
Average annual percentage growth rate for five-year period	n.a.	2.4%	2.1%

There was a small increase in the proportion of Queenslanders identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander over the reference period, from 4.9% at 30 June 2011 to 5.2% at 30 June 2021.

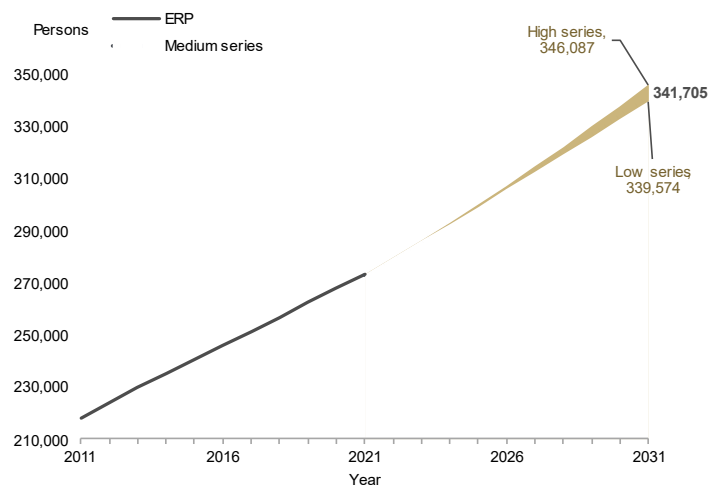
Under the medium series, over the five years to 2026, Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to increase at an average rate of 2.3% per annum. In the following five-year period to 2031 under the medium series, Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to increase by 2.2% per annum (Table 2).

Over the entire 10-year period to 2031, compared with other states and territories, Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population growth rate is projected to be the equal fastest with the Australian Capital Territory. Looking at the low and high growth scenarios at 30 June 2031, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland is projected to reach between 339,574 and 346,087 persons (Figure 1).

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

Series	2021	2026	2031
Projected resident population			
— persons —			
High		307,217	346,087
Medium	273,119	306,260	341,705
Low		305,771	339,574
Average annual five-year growth rate			
— % —			
High		2.4	2.4
Medium		2.3	2.2
Low		2.3	2.1

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



Queensland’s share of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is projected to increase to 29.0% by 30 June 2031 (Figure 2), up from 27.8% in 2021. In 2031, according to the medium series, Queensland is projected to retain its position as the state or territory with the second-largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (341,705 persons). New South Wales (404,365 persons or 34.3% share) is projected to continue to have the largest population.

Figure 2 States and territories, proportion of national estimated and projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population (medium series), at 30 June



Population structure

Median age

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a relatively young age structure, which is expected to continue over the projection period. In 2021, the median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland was estimated to be 23.4 years, compared with 38.4 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 24.5 and 24.8 years (Table 3).

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

Series	2021 ^(a)	2026	2031
— males —			
High		23.3	23.9
Medium	22.8	23.3	24.1
Low		23.3	24.1
— females —			
High		24.7	25.1
Medium	24.1	24.7	25.4
Low		24.7	25.5
— persons —			
High		23.9	24.5
Medium	23.4	24.0	24.7
Low		24.0	24.8

(a) Median age of base population.

Under the medium series, the median age for both males and females is projected to increase by around 1.3 years over the 10-year projection period.

Age and sex

All age groups are projected to experience population increase between 2021 and 2031. In terms of magnitude, the largest increase is projected among children (0–14 years) — 15,806 persons under the medium series — equating to an average annual growth rate of 1.6% over the decade (Table 4).

While experiencing the largest growth, as a proportion of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, children (0–14 years) are projected to decrease from 34.0% in 2021 to between 31.6% and 32.5% in 2031, continuing the downward trend observed over the 10 years to 2021. In contrast, the proportion of older persons (65 years and over) is projected to increase over the projection period, from 5.2% in 2021 to between 7.2% and 7.3% in 2031.

The estimated population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons aged 65 years and over is projected to significantly increase over the projection period, from 14,275 persons in 2021 to between 24,407 and 25,298

persons in 2031. This growth equates to an average of between 5.5% and 5.9% per year.

The age cohort of 35–44 year olds is also projected to grow at a relatively faster rate than most other age groups — at 3.1% per year, on average. Between 2021 and 2031, this cohort is projected to grow by over 10,000 persons in each series to reach around 39,000 persons by 2031. This is a result of the relatively large cohort of 25–34 year olds in 2021 ageing over the 10-year period into 35–44 year olds.

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

Age group (years)	Estimate		High series	Medium series	Low series
	2011	2021	2031		
— persons —					
0–14	81,445	92,942	112,450	108,748	107,382
15–24	39,434	51,019	63,874	63,858	63,850
25–34	29,903	39,349	50,775	50,754	50,739
35–44	27,807	28,973	39,262	39,220	39,163
45–54	20,642	27,084	28,633	28,576	28,491
55–64	11,814	19,477	25,795	25,687	25,542
65–74	5,025	10,204	16,883	16,710	16,516
75 and over	1,977	4,071	8,415	8,152	7,891
Total	218,047	273,119	346,087	341,705	339,574

Figure 3 shows the estimated and projected proportional change (medium series) in the age structure of Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population over the 20-year period between 20 June 2011 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 99.3 and 99.6) is projected to be similar to the estimated sex ratio in 2021 (99.5).

Components of population change

State population change comprises three components:

- natural increase (births minus deaths)
- net interstate migration (interstate arrivals minus interstate departures) and
- net overseas migration (overseas migrant arrivals minus departures)

Table 5 summarises the projected components of population change and total growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population for the medium series by five-year periods.

In each of the projection series (low, medium and high), natural increase is projected to make the greatest contribution to Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, adding 60,900, 63,036 and 67,400 persons respectively over the 10 years to 2031. This is

followed by net interstate migration, which is projected to add 5,550 persons across all three projection series, while net overseas migration has been set to zero in each projection series.

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

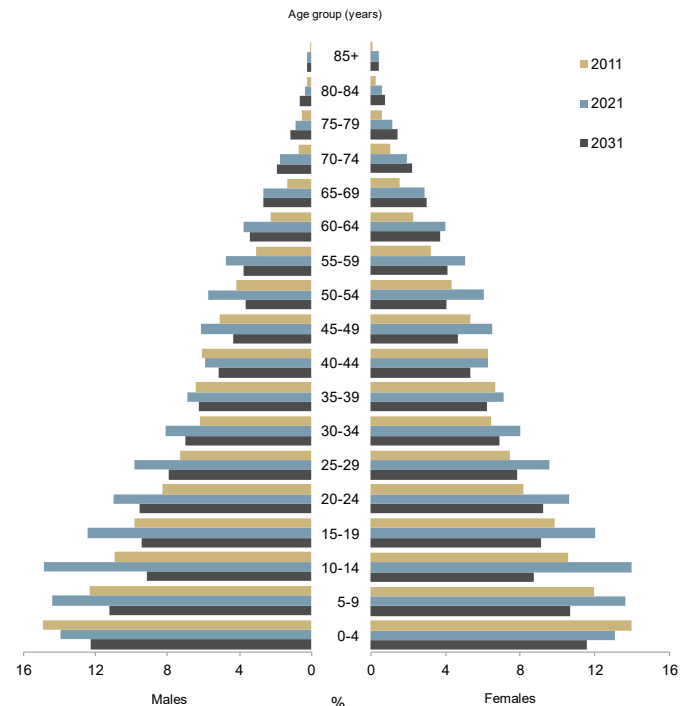


Table 5 Projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population (medium series) and components of change, Queensland, five years to 30 June

Medium series	2021–2026	2026–2031
— persons —		
Start population	273,119	306,260
Births	37,150	40,640
minus – Deaths	6,784	7,970
<i>equals – Natural increase</i>	<i>30,366</i>	<i>32,670</i>
<i>plus – Net interstate migration</i>	<i>2,775</i>	<i>2,775</i>
<i>equals – Total growth</i>	<i>33,141</i>	<i>35,445</i>
End population	306,260	341,705

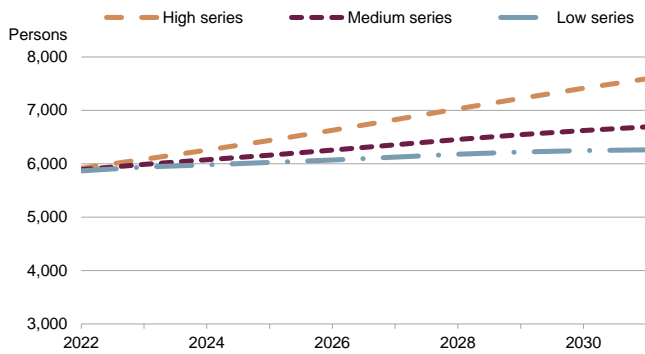
The number of births of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies in Queensland is projected to increase from between 7,151 to 7,176 births in 2022 to between 8,111 and 9,161 births in 2031. Projected births include babies with either an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mother, father or both, by incorporating assumptions for both fertility and paternity rates in each projection series (Table 7).

The number of deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons is projected to increase from between 1,258 to 1,285 deaths in 2022, to between 1,568 to 1,851 deaths in 2031. The increase in deaths in all series reflects the larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by 2031, with fewer deaths projected in the medium and

high series which both incorporate improvements in life expectancy, compared with the low series, which assumes constant life expectancy at birth.

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 6,260 and 7,593 persons in 2031 (Figure 4).

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



Indigenous regions

The Brisbane Indigenous Region (IREG) is projected in all series to become the largest Indigenous region in Australia by 2031, with an average annual growth rate of 2.7%. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the Brisbane IREG is projected in the medium series to increase, overall, by 30.0% (34,341 persons), the largest projected growth of all IREGs in Australia (Table 6).

Among Indigenous regions in Australia, the NSW Central and North Coast IREG has the second-largest projected growth between 2021 and 2031, with a projected increase of 26,723 persons (medium series) over the 10-year period.

Table 6 Indigenous regions, projected increase and rate of growth (medium), 2021 to 2031, at 30 June

Indigenous region	2021	2031	Projected growth 2021 to 2031	
	— persons —		persons	%
Brisbane	114,561	148,902	34,341	30.0
Cairns–Atherton	34,122	41,872	7,750	22.7
Cape York	10,308	11,128	820	8.0
Mount Isa	9,804	10,941	1,137	11.6
Rockhampton	34,458	43,330	8,872	25.7
Toowoomba–Roma	26,510	31,769	5,259	19.8
Torres Strait	6,776	6,800	24	0.4
Townsville–Mackay	36,580	46,963	10,383	28.4
Queensland	273,119	341,705	68,586	25.1
Australia	983,709	1,179,088	195,379	19.9

In Queensland, Townsville–Mackay IREG is projected to have the second-highest average annual rate of growth (2.5%), leading to a projected population increase over the 10-year period of 10,383 persons or 28.4%. Torres Strait IREG was projected to have the smallest growth in Queensland over the 10-year period with an increase of only 24 persons projected to 2031.

The spatial variability of projected increases in IREGs reflect an increased concentration of the future Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the coastal IREGs near the major population centres of Brisbane, Townsville/Mackay, Rockhampton and Cairns.

Assumptions and cautions

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, 2011 to 2031*.

Base population

The base population used to produce both the estimates (backcast) and projections is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June 2021. This ERP was derived from the 2021 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 by the ABS to produce estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population for the period 30 June 2011 to 30 June 2021 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 set to the actual levels observed in each respective intercensal period.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy at birth was assumed to be:
 - constant between 2016 to 2021 at the 2020–2022 level
 - constant between 2011 to 2016 at the revised 2015–17 level.

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.

The projections presented in this brief, are used to represent the ABS' high, medium and low growth rate scenarios for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland. The underlying assumptions used to produce the three projection series are

summarised in Table 7 and Table 8 and apply for the duration of the projection period.

These projections represent three of a range of possible nine 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 7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fertility and paternity projection assumptions, Queensland¹

Series	2021	High 2031	Medium 2031	Low 2031
Total fertility rate (TFR)(babies per woman)	2.34	2.34	2.08	2.02
Total paternity rate (TPR)(babies per man)	1.15	1.20	1.15	1.09
Annual change in TFR		Constant	↓ 1.2%	↓ 1.5%
Annual change in TPR		↑ 0.5%	Constant	↓ 0.5%

Table 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy at birth (years) projection assumptions, Queensland

Series	2021	High 2031	Medium 2031	Low 2031
Male	72.9	75.8	74.4	72.9
Female	76.6	78.6	77.6	76.6
Annual change in male life expectancy		↑ 0.29 years	↑ 0.15 years	Constant
Annual change in female life expectancy		↑ 0.20 years	↑ 0.10 years	Constant

Assumptions for the remaining demographic factors were held constant for each of the high, medium and low series:

- sex ratio of 105 male births per 100 female births
- interstate migration using the average of the 2016 and 2021 Census years (assumed positive net interstate migration of 555 persons each year for Queensland)
- zero net overseas migration

no allowance for growth due to non-demographic factors (e.g. identification mobility was not explicitly modelled). Table 9 presents a summary of the projected number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders at 30 June 2031 for the three projection series for the year ended 30 June 2031.

Table 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident population projections, by sex, Queensland, at 30 June 2031

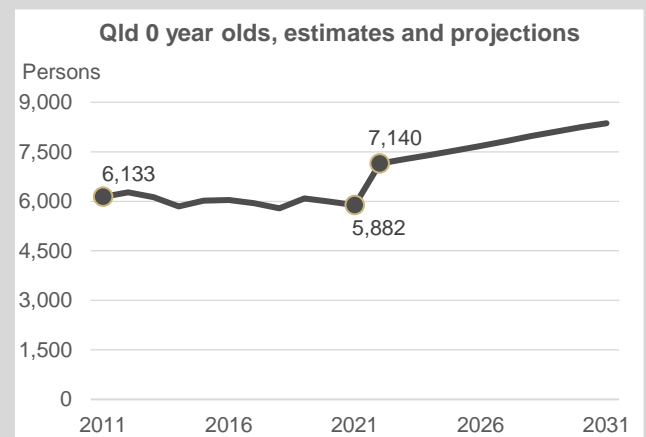
Series	High	Medium	Low
— persons —			
Males	172,705	170,390	169,225
Females	173,382	171,315	170,349
Persons	346,087	341,705	339,574

Over the 10-year projection period, life expectancy at birth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is projected to remain constant for both males and females in the low series, and experience increases of 2.9 years for males and 2.0 years for females in the high series.

Note regarding the use of backcast estimates 2017 to 2021

The backcast estimates of Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 0–4 year old population for the years 2017 to 2021 are lower than expected when compared with non-ABS datasets. This is driven by an **assumed** gradual reduction in the estimated number of 0-year-olds over this period. However, the assumed reduction is not reflected in other observed data. Both perinatal live births data and ABS birth registration data for Queensland show an increase in numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies over the 5-year period 2016 to 2021.

There is also a feature in the ABS timeseries between 2021 and the first year of the projections series (2022) for 0-year-olds, which is carried forward in the projection series to 2031 as the 0-year-olds age. The feature shows an increase of 21.4% in the number of 0-year-olds between 2021 and 2022.



Users should use the estimates and projections for babies and children with caution and consider the implications of these issues when reporting for this cohort.

¹ 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 2021.

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 one census year and 30 June of the next census year.

Life expectancy at birth — refers to the average number of additional years a person of a given 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).

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