

FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE  
ON  
ABORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

ANALYSIS DISPUTES CENSUS  
FIGURES ON NATIVES

NATIVE COUNCIL OF CANADA

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# Native Council of Canada

## Le Conseil National des Autochtones du Canada

### ANALYSIS DISPUTES CENSUS FIGURES ON NATIVES

Because of its concern over the low estimates of Metis people in Canada as affected in the 1981 Census, the Native Council of Canada has commissioned an analysis of its methodology and findings.

The report, which was prepared by J. Phillip Nicholson of Policy Management Consultants Inc., states that estimates for the total native population appearing between 1971 and 1980 have ranged from a low of 491,460 (Census) to a high of 3,000,000 (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation).

The report emphasized the importance of appreciating that significant discrepancies exist and that different methodologies employed at different times with different objectives in mind will produce different results.

Referring to the census the report said that it was relatively clear that the methodology had natural biases which may have affected the reliability of the native estimates and that the native component was but one part of a very large and comprehensive multi-purpose census.

#### BACKGROUND

The 1981 Census is the first census in Canadian history which attempted to estimate the population size of all "categories" of native peoples: Inuit, status Indian, non-status Indian, Metis. Although there is some basis for comparing the results of the 1981 census with previous census estimates, the 1981 census marks the first of what is intended to be a permanent enumeration of all categories of natives in Canada. In this sense, it is perhaps the most significant estimate from the point of view of planning for the delivery of government programs and services, and from the point of view of the rights, concerns and interests of the varying groups.

Although the authors have not undertaken a formal survey of the reactions of either native groups or of government departments to the results and findings of the 1981 census, it appears that the general consensus is as follows:

-the 1981 estimates tend to under-estimate the total size of native population in Canada

-the magnitude of the under-estimation may be very significant

-although Statistics Canada's methodologies and general reputation enjoy relatively high esteem, there may be a number of significant shortcomings in respect of the census of native peoples which result in both inaccuracies and in a general low level of confidence in the results.

-notwithstanding the above concerns with the methodologies and results of the 1981 census, native groups and government departments alike feel that the census results will be used as the basis for policy and program planning in respect of such issues as native claims, housing, economic development, social services and native rights.

The Native Council of Canada as well as several federal departmental officials actively involved in native affairs appear to be concerned that the 1981 results may be too rigidly adhered to for official government planning purposes.

In general, their concerns are that the government should maintain a healthy appreciation of the potential and likely limitations of the 1981 census estimates, and should put the results in the context of other population estimates which suggest a broader range and generally higher population level for native peoples in Canada.

The general hope and intent of those most concerned is that considerable attention should be focused on improving the methodologies for the 1986 and 1991 census estimates.

If appropriate improvements are made, then the future estimates might prove to be more accurate, reliable and credible.

For Further Information:

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Estimates for the total native population appearing between 1971 and 1982 have ranged from a low of 491,460 (Statistics Canada 1981) to a high of 3,500,000 (Employment and Immigration 1978). Estimates by other departments and agencies are shown in the table below.

	YEAR	INUIT	STATUS INDIANS	NON-STATUS INDIANS	METIS	TOTAL NATIVE
Secretary of State	1982	- 0 -	- 0 -	-	-	614,800 (1)
	1977	27,170	295,898	447,144		745,483
Employment and Immigration	1978	17,877	282,762	300,000		600,639
CMHC	1971/ 1972		257,609	271,700		529,319 3,000,000
DIAND	1971		263,499			
	1982		324,376			
DREE	1976		282,762	305,000		587,762
				426,060		708,822
Statistics Canada	1971	17,550	295,215	N/A	N/A	312,765
Census	1981	25,390	292,700	75,110	98,260	491,460

(1) Includes only Métis and non-status Indians

