Profile of businesses in desert Australia

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Introduction

The desert offers numerous opportunities for desert residents. Notably, it is endowed with rich natural resources. It has a strikingly unique landscape, vast mineral deposits and natural resources, and is rich in heritage, culture and traditional knowledge. This natural wealth offers opportunities for business enterprises in a range of industries including tourism, bush food, arts, pastoral and other commercial enterprises that service large companies operating in the desert. But what are the types of businesses in the desert? How many of these businesses are Aboriginal-owned and not Aboriginal-owned, and in what industries are these enterprises engaged?

This paper presents a profile of businesses in desert Australia. The paper outlines the number of businesses\(^1\) located in Australian desert regions, the number of businesses by Aboriginal status, the types of industries and the access these enterprises have to internet facilities. The analysis is based on ABS 2006 census data.

Number of businesses in desert areas

There are 41,275 businesses in desert Australia. They comprise three per cent of business enterprises in Australia. The majority (66%) are located in semi-arid regions (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desert region</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Total(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arid</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>8,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi arid</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>26,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlap(^b)</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>4,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>40,383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Total includes those who did not state Aboriginal status

\(^b\) Overlap regions are those SLAs that have both semi-arid and savannah areas. This will be explained further in Rola-Rubzen et al. (forthcoming).

Of the total number of desert businesses, only about one per cent (513) are Aboriginal-owned. The rest (40,383) are non-Aboriginal owned. In general, Aboriginal enterprises are scattered across the desert regions, with almost similar percentages located in arid and semi-arid regions; whereas about two-thirds of non-Aboriginal-owned businesses are located in the semi-arid region (Figure 1).

\(^1\) In this paper, the number of businesses refers to the number of owner-managers of incorporated and unincorporated enterprises.
Contribution of desert businesses to employment

In general, owner-managers of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses across desert regions provide livelihood opportunities for other people, employing one or more people in the business (Figure 2).

What are the types of industries?

Desert businesses are engaged in various industries. More than a quarter (26%) of desert Aboriginal enterprises are in mining, manufacturing, electricity, gas, water and waste services as well as construction. About 15 per cent are in agriculture, forestry and fishing; 15 per cent are in accommodation, food services and transport industries; while around 21 per cent are in other industries, including arts and culture (Figure 3).
Other industries including culture and arts 21%
Accommodation and food services; transport, postal and warehousing 15%
Accommodation and food services; transport, postal and warehousing 11%
Wholesale; retail trade 11%
Mining; manufacturing; electricity, gas, water and waste services; construction 26%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing 15%

Figure 3: Industries of Aboriginal-owned businesses in desert regions

For non-Aboriginal businesses, more than a third are in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, while about 20 per cent are in mining, manufacturing, electricity, gas, water and waste services and construction (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Industries of non-Aboriginal–owned businesses in desert regions
Income of owner-managers

Owner-managers of desert businesses have varying levels of income. More than half (55%) of Aboriginal owner-managers of desert businesses earn a weekly income of $599 and below, 25 per cent earn between $600–$999, while 11 per cent earn $1 300 or more per week (Figure 5).

![Figure 5: Individual weekly income of owner-managers of Aboriginal-owned businesses in desert regions](image)

On the other hand, about 46 per cent of non-Aboriginal owner-managers of incorporated and unincorporated enterprises earn $599 and below per week, while about 28 per cent have a weekly individual income of $600–$999. About 15 per cent earn a weekly income of $1300 or more (Figure 6).

![Figure 6: Individual weekly income of owner-managers of non-Aboriginal–owned businesses in desert regions](image)
Access to internet by desert enterprises

Modern information and communications technology (ICT) and the era of globalisation offer new opportunities to overcome many of the spatial barriers that confront desert businesses. ICTs offer new ways of doing business and reaching markets. However, the degree by which businesses can harness new developments in ICT will depend to a large degree on their access to the technology.

Access to the internet by owner-managers of desert enterprises is shown in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, internet access is available to most desert businesses. However, access by Aboriginal entrepreneurs is lower at 49 per cent, compared with access by non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs at about 73 per cent.

Table 2: Internet access by owner-managers of desert businesses by Aboriginal status in desert regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet access</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Totalb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With internet access</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>29 367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without internet access</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>9 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1 782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>40 382</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Internet access is based on the owner-manager’s household connection
bTotal includes those who did not state Aboriginal status

A more in-depth analysis of the profiles of desert businesses will be available in Rola-Rubzen et al. (forthcoming).

References

