

# The Aboriginal History Project

## Newspaper Archive

Argus 8th January 1931

### 61,000 ABORIGINES LEFT.

### FORMERLY QUARTER MILLION.

#### Tribe System and Languages.

Striking evidence of the decline in the aboriginal population of Australia is to be found in the "Commonwealth Year Book" for 1930. Comparisons may be made between the figures of the census of aborigines taken on June 30, 1929, and the figures suggested in an article in the year-book by Professor Radcliffe Brown, of the University of Sydney, on the estimated number and distribution of the native population at the time of the first settlement of the white race in Australia. On June 30, 1929, 61,801 full-blooded aborigines were enumerated, of whom 37,000 were described as nomadic, 11,298 were in regular employment, and 9,561 were living in supervised camps. At the same date there were 16,629 half-castes in Australia. The aborigines were scattered over the whole of the mainland, but the majority were concentrated chiefly in Western Australia, Queensland, and North Australia. The native population at the time of the first settlement of the white race in Australia is estimated by Professor Radcliffe Brown to have been, at a minimum, as follows:—

District.	Estimated Number of Aborigines.	Density (Number of Square Miles Per Aborigine).
Western Australia .. ..	52,000	18.8
South Australia .. ..	10,000	38.0
Victoria .. ..	11,500	7.6
Queensland .. ..	100,000	6.7
New South Wales .. ..	40,000	7.8
Northern Territory .. ..	35,000	15.0
Tasmania .. ..	2,500	10.5
Total .. ..	251,000	11.9

Professor Radcliffe Brown is careful to add that there is evidence that in some parts of Australia the density of the population was greater, and that in some areas it was at least as high as three persons to 10 square miles. "Omitting," he says, "about one-third of the continent as being desert and having a very sparse population, we ought to be able to reckon that the remaining 2,000,000 square miles would have had a density of population of one person to every 6.5 or 7.5 square miles. At the former figure we should have a population of a little more than 300,000, and with the latter more than 260,000." His conclusion is that the original population of Australia was probably more than 300,000.

Professor Radcliffe Brown observes that any systematic attempt to estimate the native population of Australia must proceed by dividing the continent into districts and considering each district separately, and by considering the territorial areas recognised by the natives themselves.