An aerial photograph of a vast, arid Australian landscape. The foreground shows a brown, textured ground with sparse green shrubs. In the upper left, a portion of a white aircraft wing is visible, extending towards the center. The horizon is flat and distant under a clear blue sky.

Giving them purpose: Working for the Dole in remote Australia

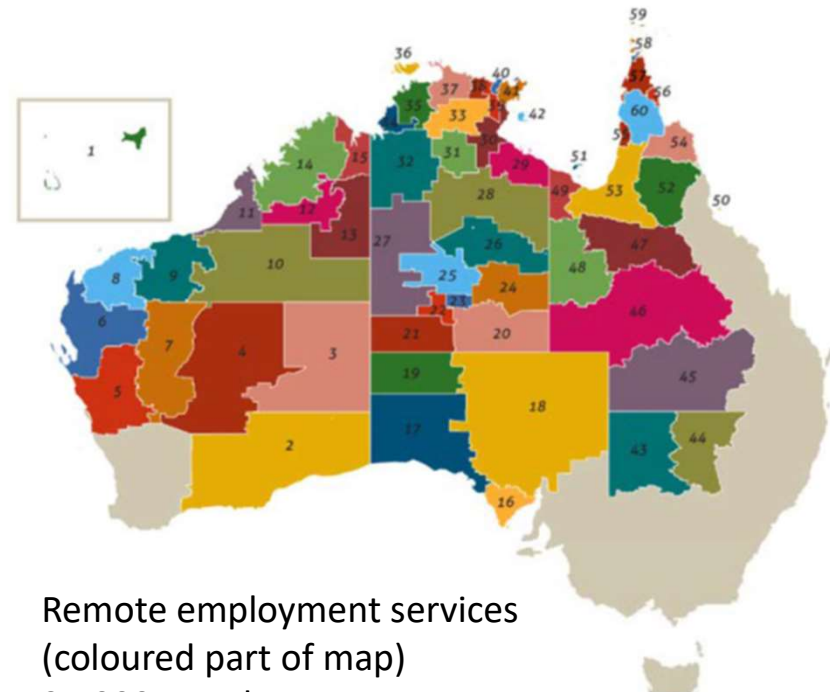
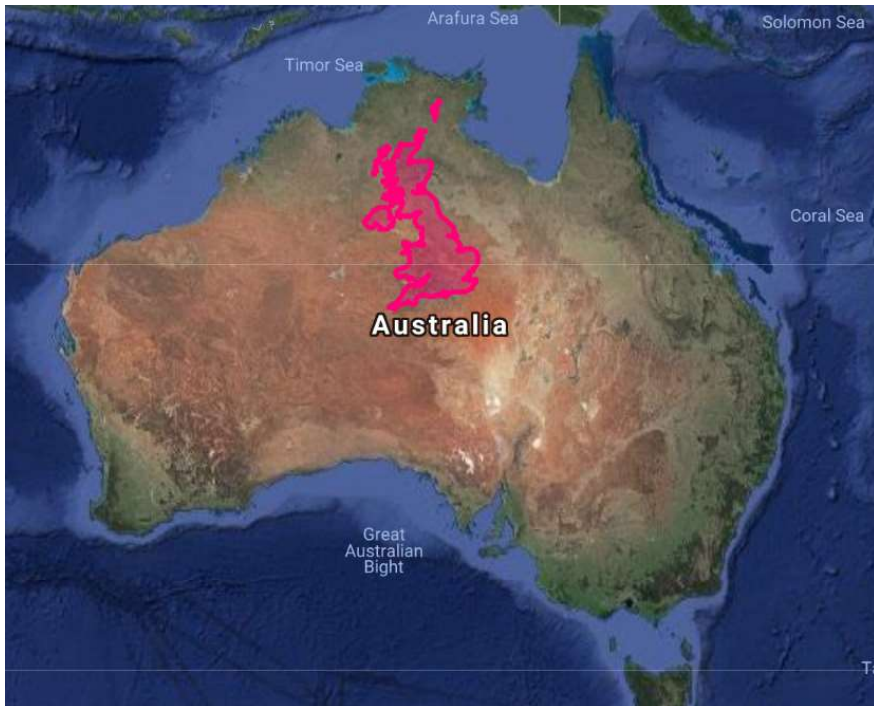
Lisa Fowkes, Australian National University
(ARC Linkage Project supported by Jobs Australia)

‘Work for the Dole’ = obligation to participate in supervised, ‘work-like’ activities, often in groups, for prescribed hours as a condition of receiving unemployment benefits.

Is part of a wider system of obligations and assistance: job search, case management, ‘agreed’ interventions (eg training).

Note that Australia’s employment services have been fully privatised.

Remote employment services cover a huge area...



Remote employment services
(coloured part of map)
35,000 people
Less than 5% of all unemployed
people who are in employment
services
82% are Indigenous Australians

Remote Australia is very different from where most Australians live



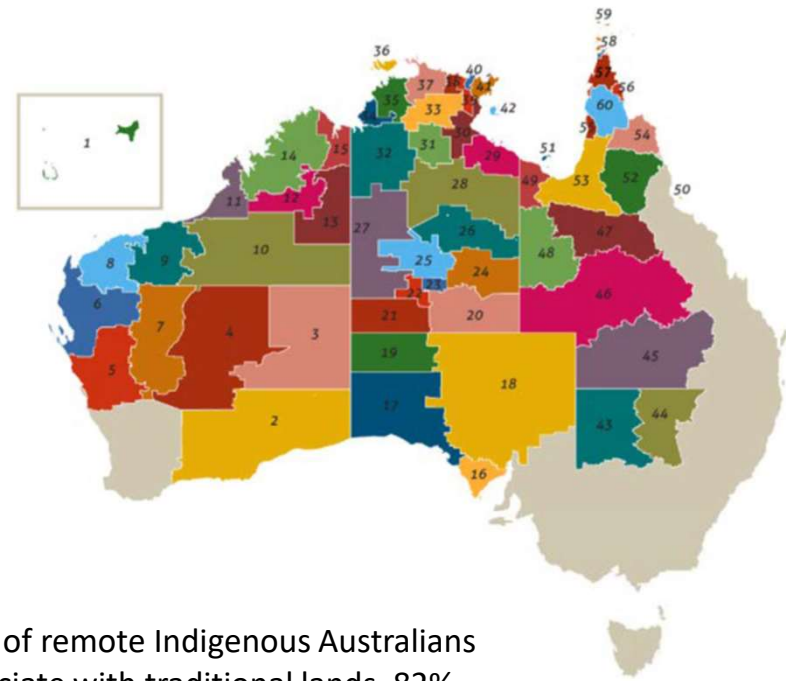
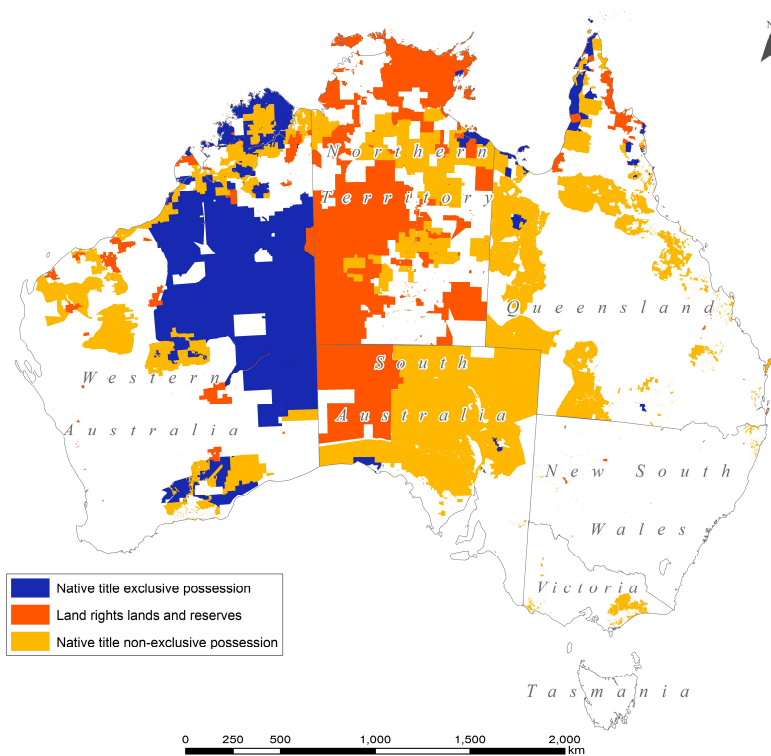
90% population in cities or 'inner regional' areas
2% of all Australians live in remote areas

Indigenous Australians are around 3% of a multi-ethnic population nationally, but 30% of those living in remote areas. In discussion of remote Australia, 'race' and racial constructions are always salient.



Remote Indigenous employment rate = 35.2%
Non-Indigenous employment rate = 71.5% (higher in remote areas)
Remote Indigenous median income about 50% of national. Shorter life expectancy, high rates of disability, poor access to services.

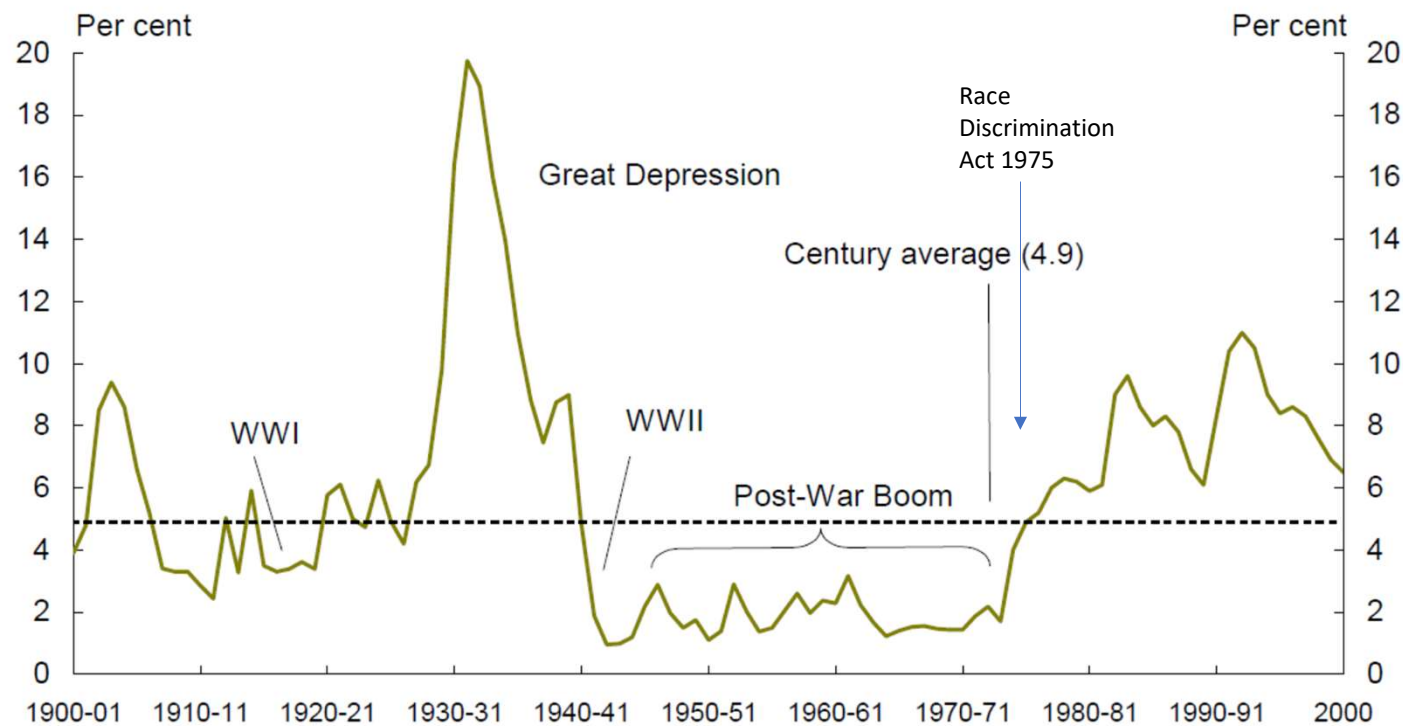
Remote employment services operate largely on Indigenous owned land



89% of remote Indigenous Australians associate with traditional lands, 82% report involvement in cultural activity, 76% speak an Indigenous language.

Indigenous people were excluded from labour market and welfare rights when social mobility was strongest

Chart 5: Australia's unemployment rate, 1901-2001



CDEP scheme 1977-2013

- Allowed communities to receive a community grant instead of individual UB entitlements. Grant used to employ own people.
 - Designed to avoid large scale distribution of unemployment benefits in places with little or no paid work
 - Communities opt-in. Control what is done and definitions of 'work'.
- “... not simply a means of providing employment as a source of a minimum cash income, but a training exercise in self-management and increasing independence for the Aboriginal communities involved”
(Coombs, 1977)

CDEP, at its best, communitarian. But mediated market effects:

“CDEP is an infringement on the privilege of private investors to define the conditions of material wellbeing through the market place. CDEP does more than compensate for the market’s failure to provide jobs where Indigenous people live, it also throws into question the power of the market to define the nature and intensity of work.” (Rowse 2001)

CDEP finally abolished in 2013. Argued that it was preventing people moving into work (even though not enough work available in remote areas)

National Work for the Dole programs implemented from 1997

Contractual and paternalist justifications:

“Look there are two elements. Firstly we want to get young people on a pathway to a job and the second is that the taxpayer who gets up at 4.30am has a long commute on the train, works all day and then comes home again, is paying the taxes that are providing benefits, and that taxpayer can reasonably expect that if they have to get up and spend a long day in the field that others who are receiving benefits have a mutual obligation to do that as well.”

Minister for Employment 2014

Current arrangements:

More onerous Work for Dole requirements in remote areas

Category	non-remote program (jobactive)	Remote program (CDP)
When the obligation starts	After 12 months	Immediate
Hours can be required to work in a year (full time)	Aged 30 to 59: <u>390 hours</u> Aged under 30: <u>650 hours</u>	Aged 18 to 49: <u>1150 hours</u>
People with part-time work capacity and principal carers	Aged 30 to 59: <u>200 hours</u> Aged under 30: <u>390 hours</u>	Approx <u>600 hours</u>
Scheduling	Flexible over 26 weeks in each year	Monday to Friday, min 46 weeks per annum
Type of work	Non-profit community projects only	Placements allowed in 'real workplaces'

Explicitly moral, paternalist justification for remote Work for the Dole.

Idle hands and a lack of the dignity that work brings have contributed to the dysfunction of many remote communities. Compounding the pernicious effects of welfare, remote Australia is now an easy target for those peddling drugs, illegally sold alcohol and gambling. Full-time Work for the Dole activities from day one of unemployment will keep people active. Andrew Forrest (Forrest 2014, p.197)

Making your community a better place.

We need to set expectations in remote communities that build the **same behaviours and norms of workers in ordinary Australian workplaces.** (Department's Questions and Answers on Work for the Dole reform December 2014)

Now a breach isn't there to be mean, a breach is there to create an incentive to actually turn up to an activity and **we can put purpose in your life.** (Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs)



Government promotional material for remote Work for Dole

WfD as 'teaching people to work'

We can't paint at the moment - there is no canvas for painting...There is nothing to do, so we sit around, tell stories.

Do people get bored?

Yes (Indigenous female supervisor)

* * *

Why do we have to do this bullshit? Why should we be working 5 days per week for \$400 a month? We are not doing anything around here anyway. Can't even do [training].

What would you be doing if you were at home?

Sitting around – but we do a lot of sitting around here (Indigenous male participant).

* * *

People worked for CDEP because they got paid money. This one, they come in because they don't want their pay to get stopped. (Indigenous engagement officer)

Lacking purpose?

Q: What would you be doing if you weren't doing Work for the Dole ?

- Helping out family, helping out the community. when I am not there I am like a taxi for the oldies, or disabled people. There are always things to do giving oldies a lift.
- Probably sitting at home. I love sitting at home, cleaning up, looking after grandkids. I have six grandkids. Some are at school - but when they are sick. Me and my wife, we find it hard to come to work every day.
- Painting, doing my art work, looking forward to market days, selling at the park.
- Hunting, fixing up my outstation.
- Working on my business.
- Family, funerals – cultural stuff. We don't have time to do all these things. We have to manage two different cultures.

What is seen as purposeful (or not) by participants:

Everything that works on the projects is all family. Keeping family together is the way to go. (local Indigenous supervisor)

When we went and cleaned up the old peoples' centre – I felt good about that. But in that other job – felt like just cheap labour for the government (participant)

There are no goals in these places for people. If you have got a goal then you want to come. But if it's the same old thing – cleaning up, then there's no incentive to go to work. Since European settlement white people have been telling us what to do. They are used to telling Aboriginal people what to do. (participant)

In the olden days we used to have more control and ownership of what we were doing. It gave them pride in what they were doing. (Former CDEP supervisor)

Q: What are the good things about Work for the Dole?

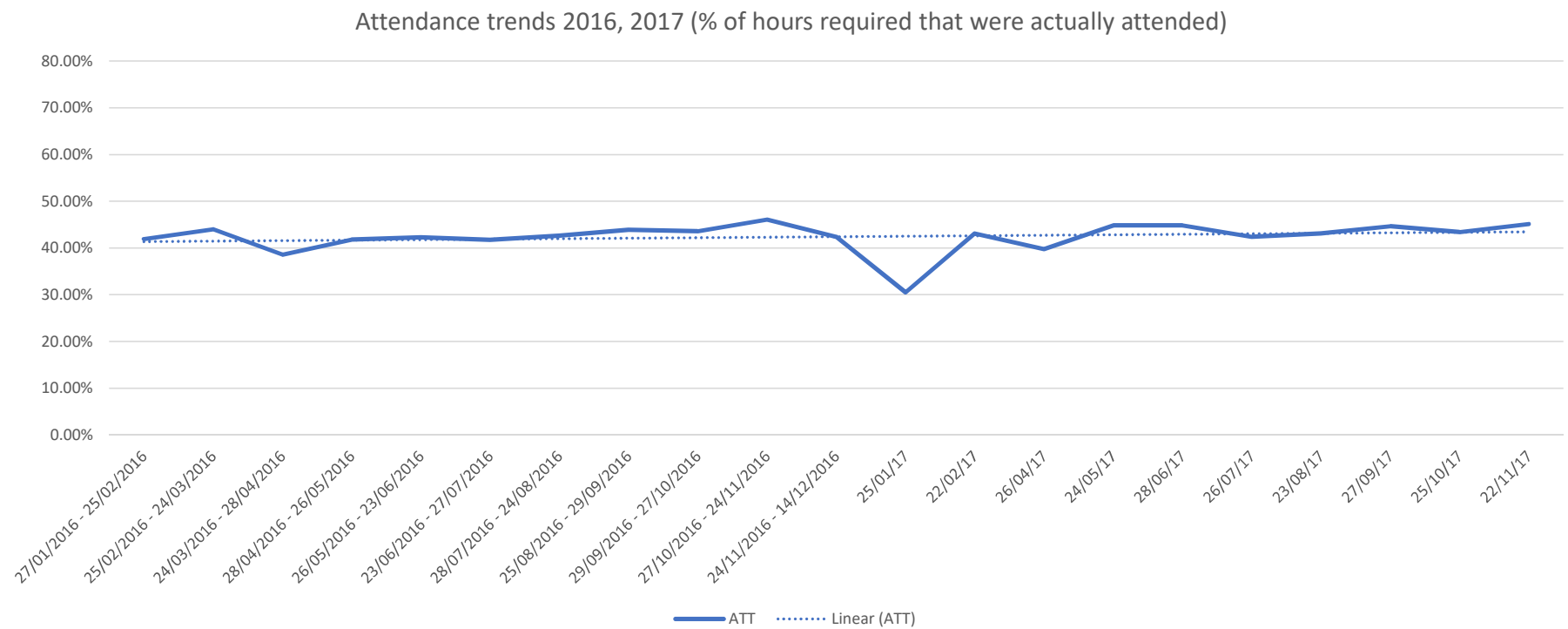
A: Nothing good, work for the dole. That's rubbish work. That hurts so much when people say you are on work for dole. This government's rules. Government laws. Got to do the job for him. (participant)

Remote job seekers are now standing up and participating, building daily routine and establishing social norms. Many remote job seekers have a renewed sense of pride as they are contributing to their communities.

(Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017)

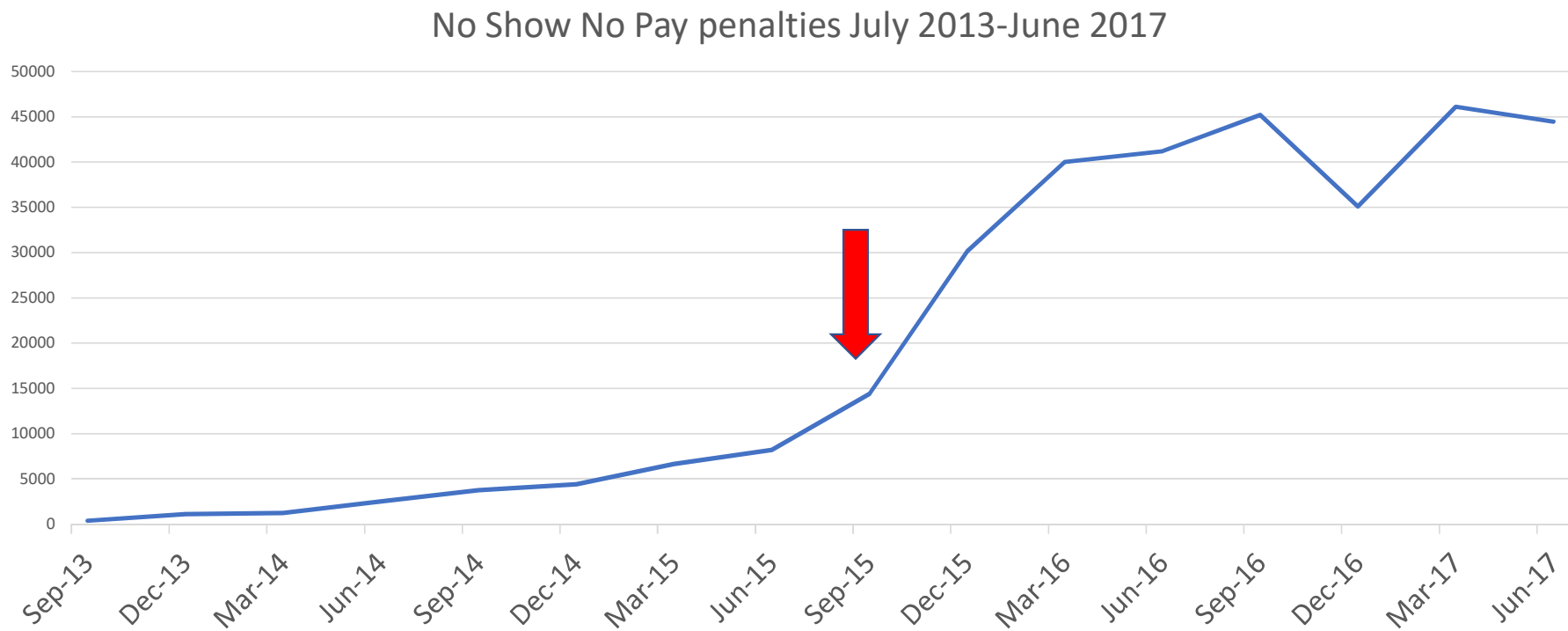


Change in actual attendance at remote Work for the Dole 2016-2017

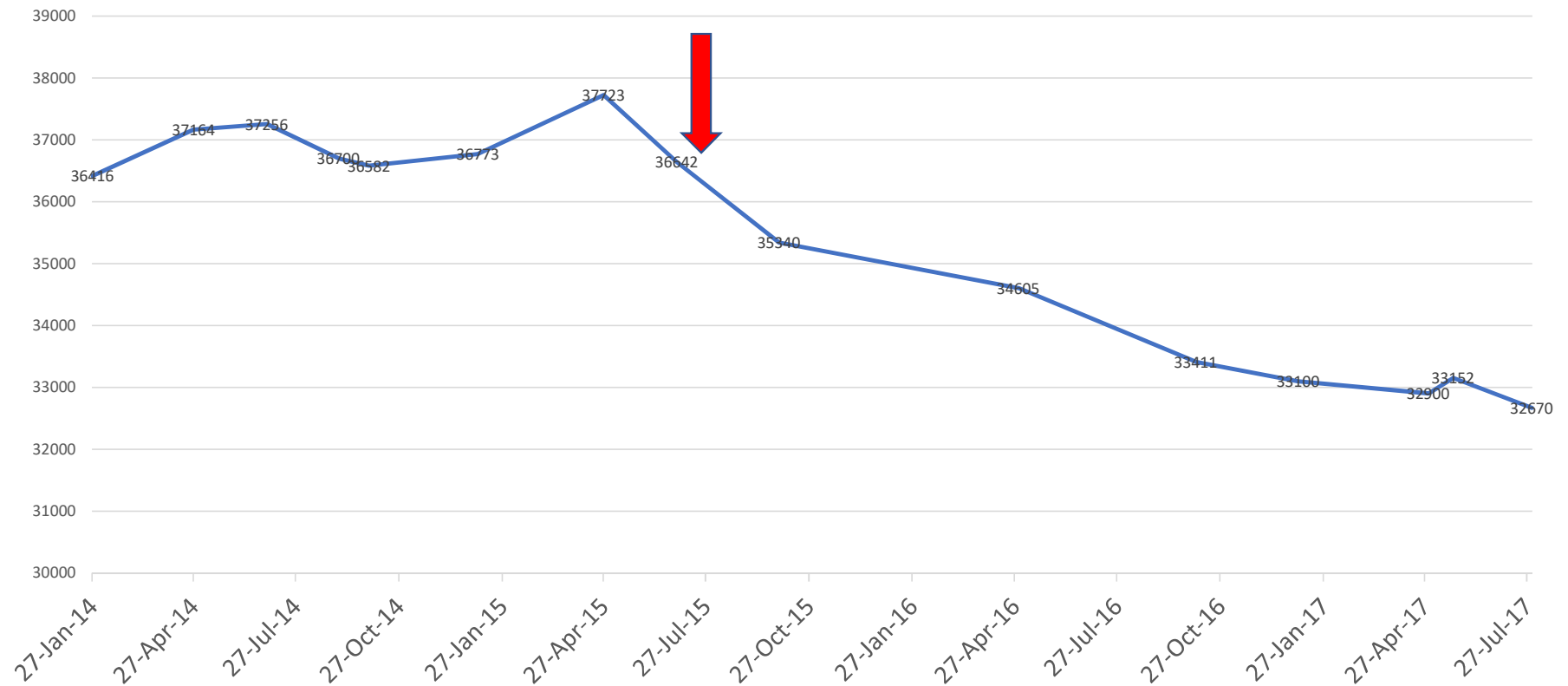


Penalties for non-attendance at remote WfD

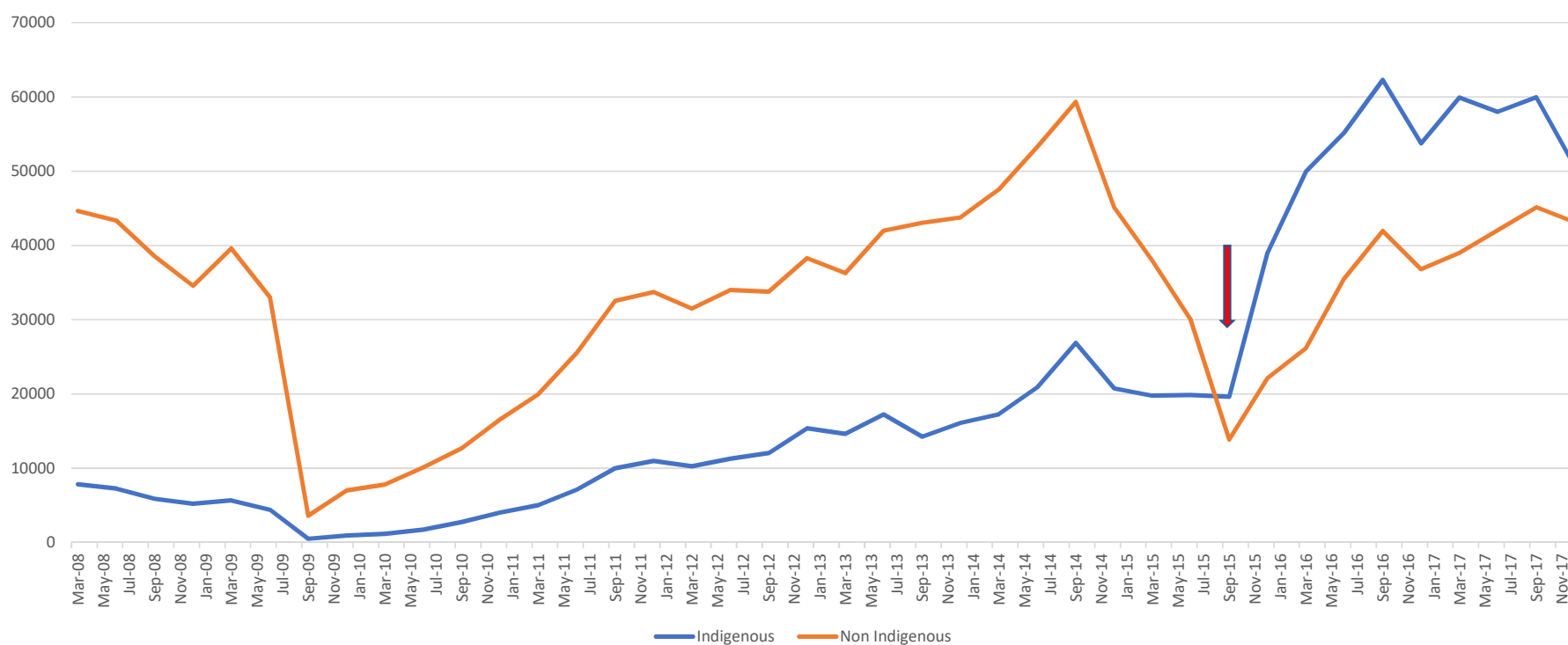
(red arrow marks start of remote WfD)



Declining remote caseload



Number of penalties by Indigenous status 2008-2017



You can say what you like – people will not leave their community. If that means that you want to put them into poverty, be that on your head and your government's head. This country, in my view, to move forward, has to accept Aboriginal people and their culture, and decide that it wants to support that and fund it. Otherwise we're forever going to be having this assimilation discussion: 'You need to be like us.' Clearly, we aren't. We all live in this country; we all understand that. However, we need to accept Aboriginal culture and what goes with that. Yes, we need to start to move forward and create economies, but on our terms with our cultural framework intact.

Marty Sibisado (Baard and Ngarluma) in evidence to Senate Inquiry into remote employment scheme. 23 August 2017.



Lisa Fowkes

lisalawsonfowkes@gmail.com