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## A history of attempts to enumerate the Victorian Aboriginal population: Implications for current policy

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### **Abstract**

There is a taken for granted assumption in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy that the constitutional barriers to the enumeration of the Aboriginal population within the Commonwealth census in effect mean that there had been no attempts to enumerate the Australian Indigenous population until after the 1967 referendum. It was of course the 1967 referendum that resulted in the removal of the race specific clauses in the Australian constitution. This is in fact not the case. The counting of Aboriginal people as part of the national census continued, uninterrupted from the moment of federation until the 1967 referendum.

In the paper I intend to provide an overview of the history of attempts to enumerate the Victorian Aboriginal population drawing on archival sources and published histories. In particular I would argue that the approach taken to enumeration has shifted in parallel with the cultural shifts within Australian colonialism. I will use as an illustration of this the changing approaches to the enumeration of the Victorian Aboriginal population before and after the 1967 referendum. More importantly, census taking was embedded in a range of welfare and colonial experiences for Victorian Aboriginal people. The response of Indigenous peoples to attempts to enumerate their population has been critical in shaping the outcomes of such interventions.

Finally, I would describe the current policy context, in which such issues are to be considered. The implications of the history described above will be considered in light of some of these policy priorities.