



AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL  
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

# Gender and generation in native title

## Director demographics and the future of prescribed bodies corporate

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# Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

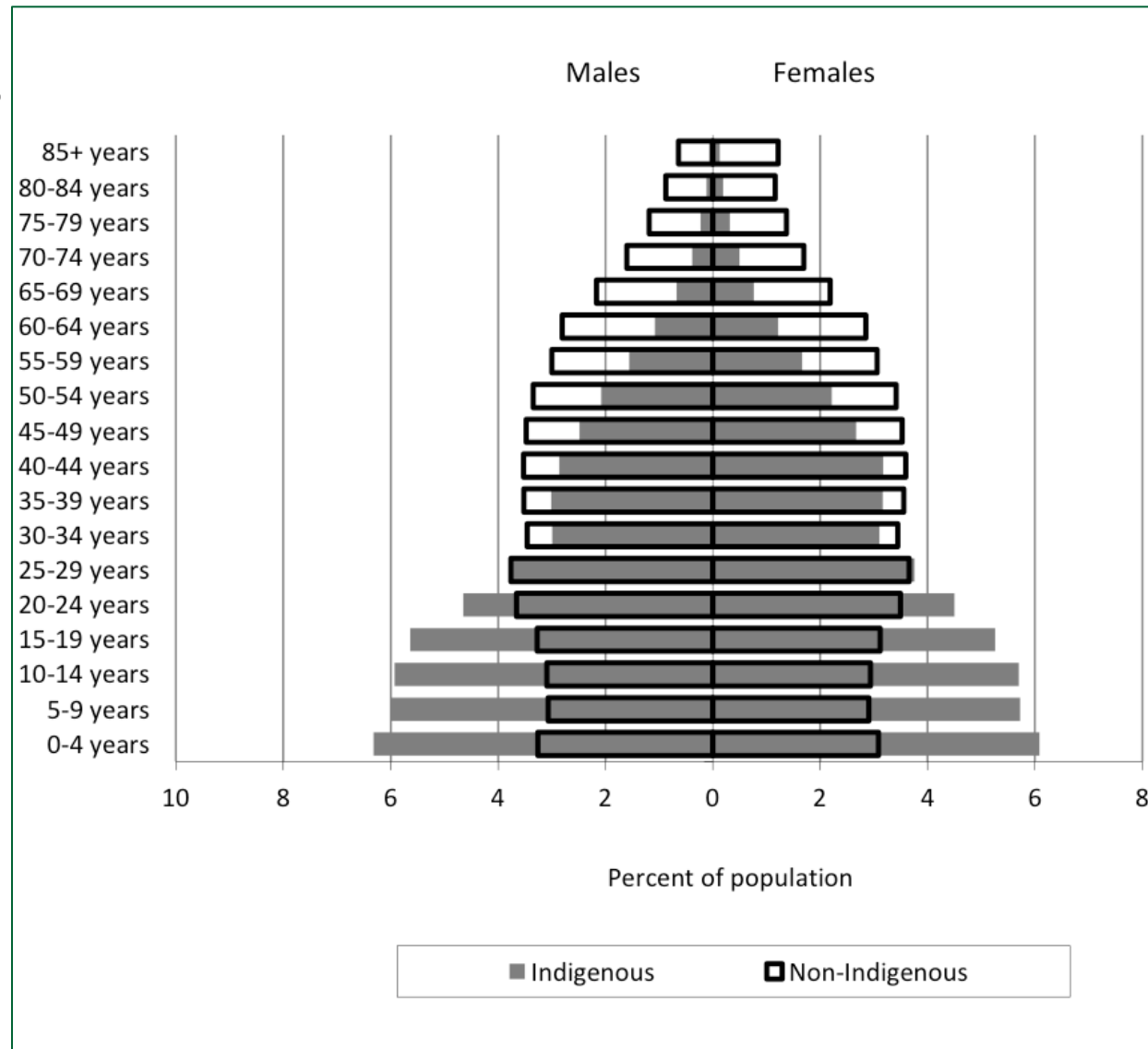
- I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country, the Kuku Yalanji people, and pay my respect to their elders past and present.
- This presentation acknowledges the importance of the relationships among Traditional Owners – male and female, young and old – in maintaining connections to country, culture, kin and community.

# Overview

- Background to the research
- Gender and native title
- Generational issues in native title
- Leadership, Legacy, Opportunity: the future of PBCs

# Why we did this research

Original concern: the loss of elders as corporate and cultural leaders in native title due to the lower life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



# Why we did this research

- Additional opportunity: to address a gap in our knowledge by exploring the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women on PBC boards as well as broader gender issues in native title
- Predominant view: women have been marginalised, excluded, and inadequately represented in native title.

# What the research involved

- Two elements:
  - Demographic analysis to find out about the age and sex of PBC directors using publicly available information from General Reports provided to ORIC for 2011-12
  - A review of the literature to better understand the role that age and gender play in native title and to help explain the findings of the demographic analysis.

# Gender and Native Title

- Key findings:
  - Representation of women on PBC boards:
    - varied between state/territory/region
    - lowest in the Torres Strait region; lower than men in NT, QLD and WA; near equal in NSW, SA and VIC
    - lower than that found across the Indigenous sector
    - higher than that found in the state and market sectors of settler society.
  - Influenced by a complex mix of cultural, historical, demographic, institutional and intercultural factors.

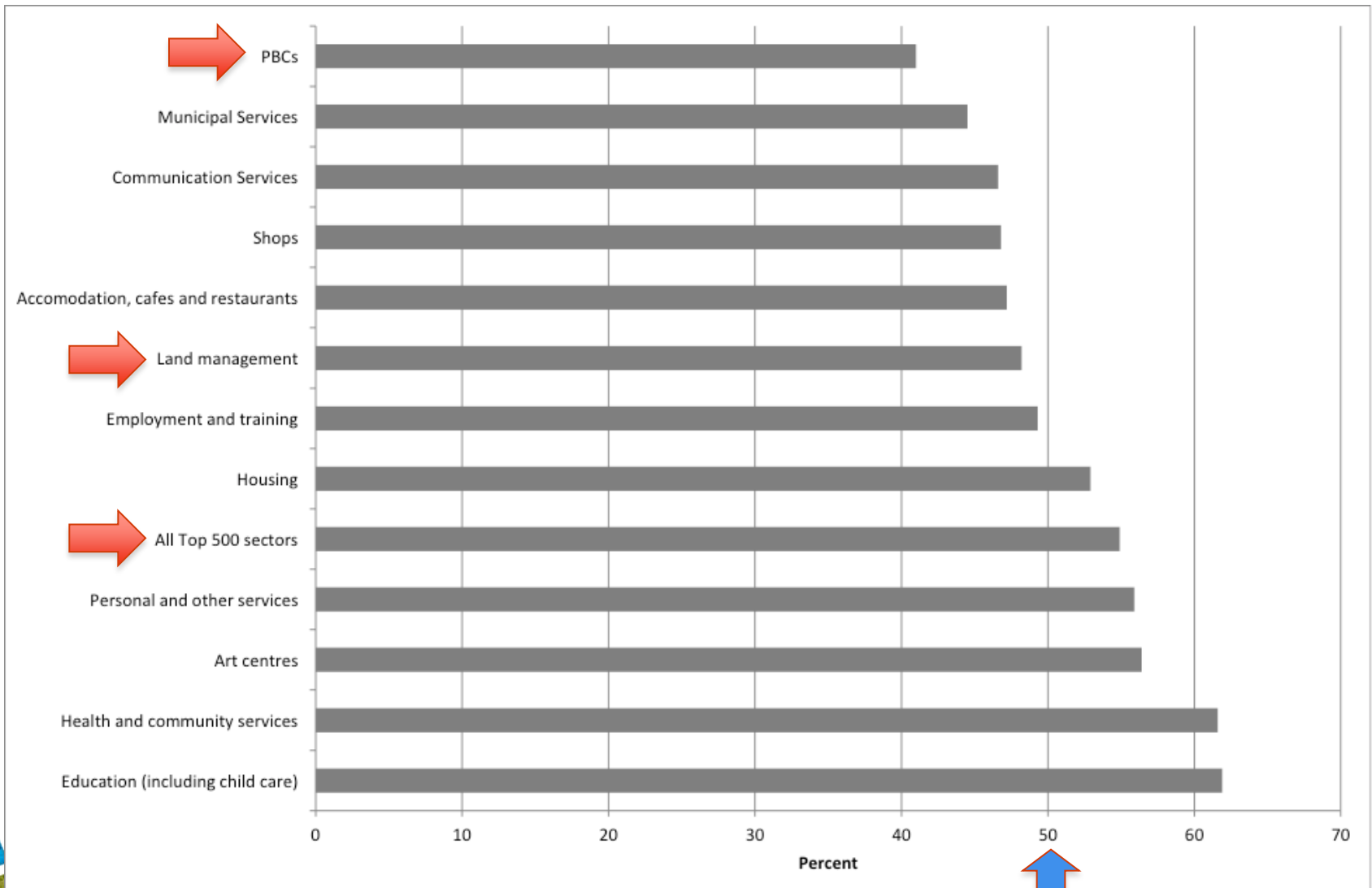
# PBC directors by state/territory, 2011-12

	NSW	NT	QLD (excluding TSI)	Torres Strait	SA	VIC	WA	Total
<b>Female</b>	50%	40%	43%	17%	51%	48%	45%	41%
<b>Male</b>	50%	60%	57%	83%	49%	52%	55%	59%

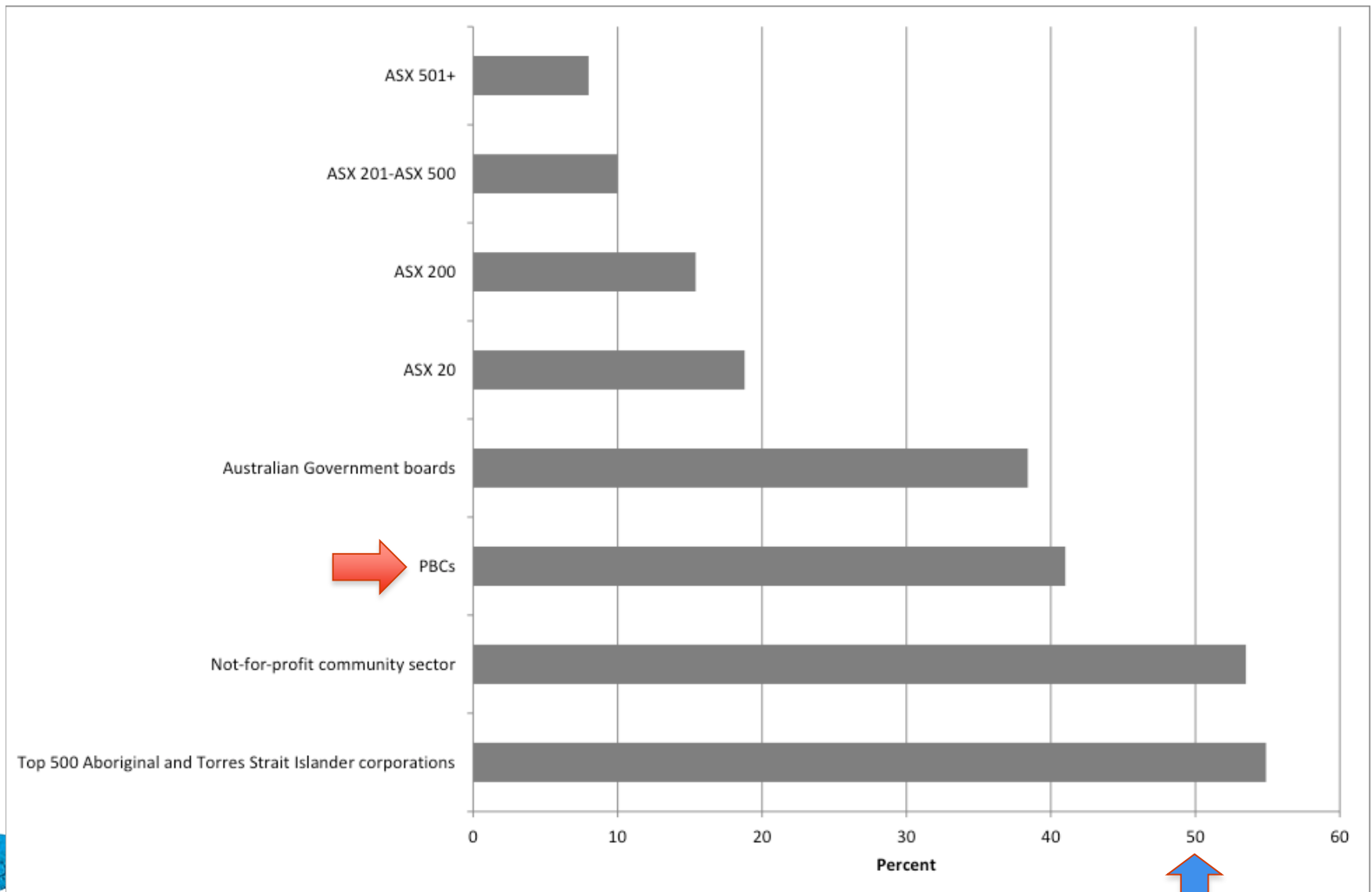




# Proportion of Women on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Boards, 2011-12



# Proportion of Women on ATSI and non-ATSI Boards, 2011-12



# Explanations for lower representation of women

- Gendered domains of authority in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies
- The invisible actions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women behind the scenes
- Legacy of historical misrepresentations of the roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and gender bias in settler society and its institutions.

# The Intercultural Factor

‘Gender relations in contemporary Australian Aboriginal communities reflect (and shape) both the conditions of their incorporation into “Australian” society, particularly their relations with the state, and social dynamics based on traditional structures, values and practices. Relations between Aboriginal and other Australians, and the attitudes generated by these relations, are central to the experience of Aboriginal people. They are also crucial to understanding the positions of Aboriginal women within their own and the wider society, insofar as these remain different’

(Mary Edmunds, 1996: p122).

# Explanations for the higher representation of women

- Gendered domains of authority in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies
- The demographic transformation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies in the wake of colonisation.

# Demographic Transformation in the Wake of Colonisation

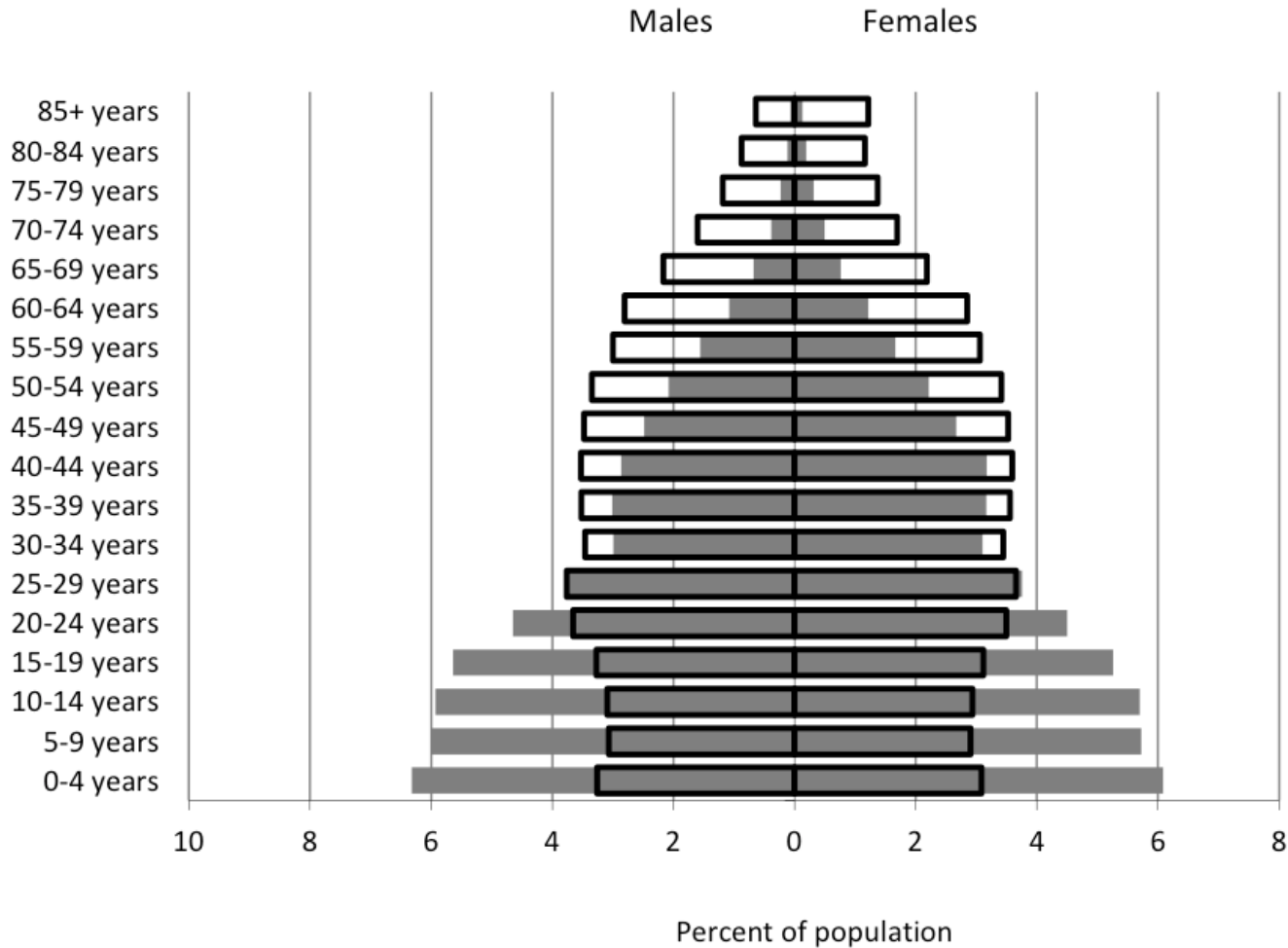
- Impacts such as:
  - massacres
  - epidemics
  - forced removals
  - movement into towns
  - alcohol and other addictions
  - imprisonment
  - access to education
  - employment in the pastoral industry
  - non-Indigenous parentage
  - non-adherence to previous marriage rules.

# Western Cape York Case Study

- Demographic context as a key factor underlying women's significant involvement in the negotiation and implementation of mining agreements in western Cape York – due to:
  - Continuous presence in community
  - Higher education levels (literacy and numeracy)
  - Experience on local councils, committees and boards
  - Higher life expectancy.

(Source: Keenan and Ramsay 2013)

# Generational Issues in Native Title



■ Indigenous      □ Non-Indigenous

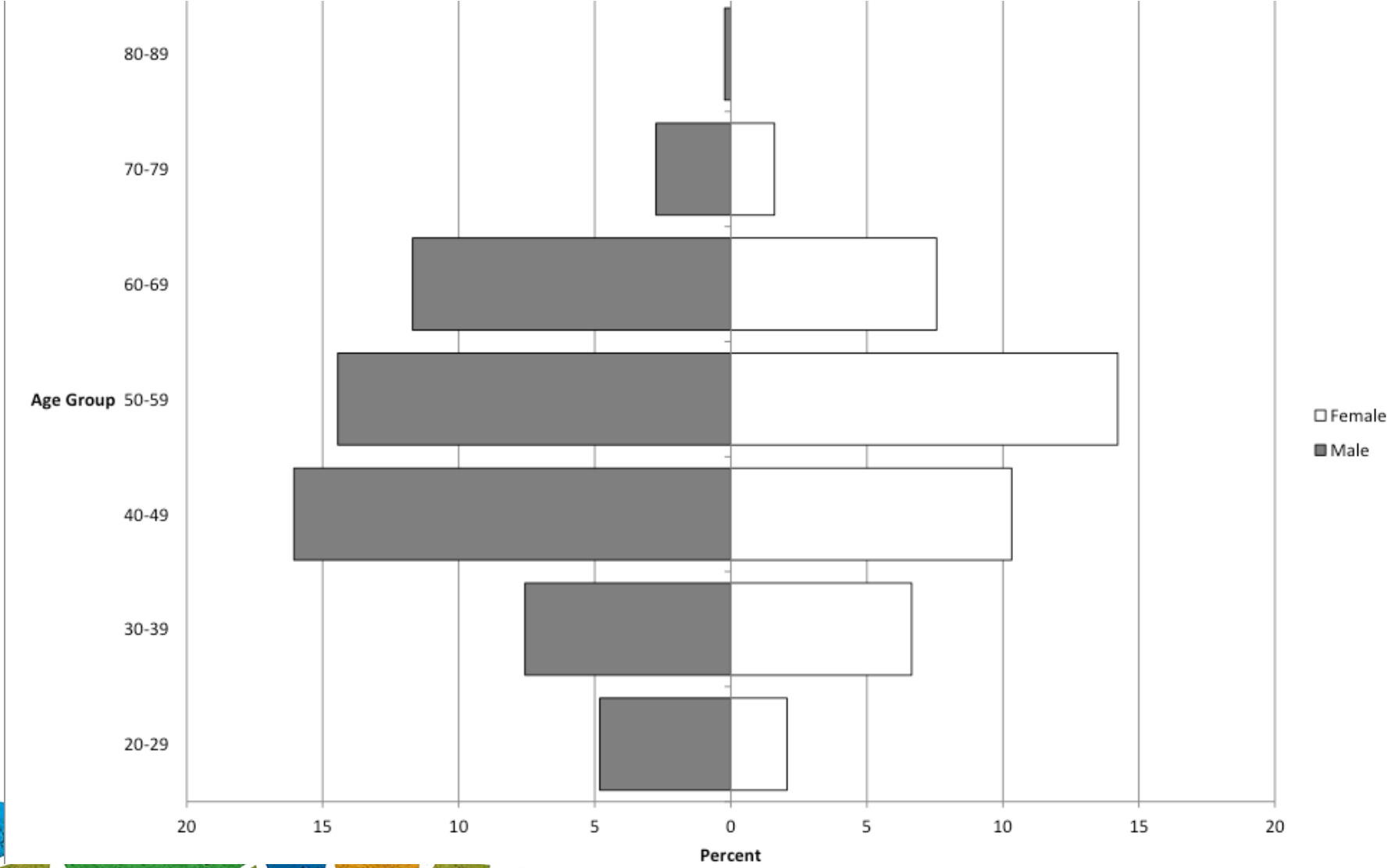


# Generational Issues in Native Title

- Key findings:

- Average age of PBC directors was 50
- Life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (67) and women (72)
- Population projections predict that the 'middle-age' group will grow significantly over the next decade creating a larger pool of potential corporate leaders
- Key challenge is to ensure the intergenerational transmission of critical native title knowledge from older to younger Traditional Owners.

# Age distribution of PBC directors, 2011-12



# Explaining Middle-Aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporate Leadership

‘It is usually the senior native title holders who are involved in setting up a PBC, and as time goes on their responsibilities are often assumed by middle aged native title holders who are more familiar and comfortable with taking on the roles and responsibilities as directors of the PBC’  
(Austin Sweeney, 2008 National Native Title Conference, Perth).

- Education, Energy, Experience
- Elders may delegate corporate leadership but maintain critical cultural knowledge and authority.

# Leadership, Legacy, Opportunity: the future of PBCs

- Key demographic challenge is the intergenerational transmission of native title knowledge and development of tomorrow's leaders today
- 142 PBCs hold and manage native title over more than 20% of Australia and this will continue to grow
- PBC sector should play a critical role in addressing demographic and other challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Need to address persistent constraints on the capacity of PBCs so that they can maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of native title.

# Leadership, Legacy, Opportunity: the future of PBCs

- Gender is an important issue in native title, especially in relation to the distribution of the burdens and benefits of native title
- This research has challenged a predominant view of women's exclusion, marginalisation and inadequate representation in native title but our understanding remains very limited
- Marginalisation, exclusion and inadequate representation remain the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – male, female, younger and older – in relation to native title as a construct of settler society (and in relation to Australian governance systems more broadly)
- Native title has been limited in providing a decolonised space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (see Strelein and Tran 2013).

# Leadership, Legacy, Opportunity: the future of PBCs

- **Leadership:** supporting corporate and cultural, leadership among men and women, young, old and in between.
- **Legacy:** ensuring the intergenerational transmission of critical native title knowledge and acknowledging and addressing the legacy of colonisation
- **Opportunity:** providing meaningful education, employment, training and knowledge sharing opportunities today to develop the corporate and cultural leaders of tomorrow and to realise the potential of native title as a means to development and decolonisation.

# Thank You



**Full paper available at:**

<http://aiatsis.gov.au/publications/products/gender-and-generation-native-title-director-demographics-and-future-prescribed-bodies-corporate>