POPULATION STUDIES GROUP RESEARCH BRIEF
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Population Studies Group
School for Social and Policy Research
Charles Darwin University
Northern Territory 0909
kate.golebiowska@cdu.edu.au

NET OVERSEAS MIGRATION (NOM) AND POPULATION GROWTH IN THE NT

KEY FINDINGS

- Between 1996-2006 NOM accounted for 33 per cent of NT population growth compared with 47.4 per cent of Australia's population growth
- In the NT and Australia NOM has been dominated by temporary (although termed long-term) movements (particularly visitor movements) rather than permanent movements
- As a result, NOM has contributed to the transient nature of settlement in the NT rather than mitigated it
- Increasing the proportion of permanent movers under NOM in the NT may be difficult as long-term temporary visas with minimum residency restrictions have been favoured by the federal government in the last decade
- The solution is to develop better links between the NT immigration strategy and regional planning
- If long-term visas are found not to have well served population growth goals of other regions in Australia, this may present a case for a national review of regional migration visas.

RESEARCH AIM

- To analyse the role of NOM in population growth in the NT and in Australia
- To establish which type of movement (temporary or permanent) contributes most to NOM and hence plays the greatest role in population growth

This Research Brief draws on published and unpublished data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It was prepared by Dr Kate Golebiowska.

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Background

Since 2000, Net Overseas Migration (NOM) has been responsible for approximately 50 per cent of Australia's annual population growth (DIAC 2008:146). In the NT NOM is a particularly important component of the annual population growth because often the Territory suffers a net loss of residents through interstate migration. The NT population is small and its annual growth is highly volatile. The NT population represents approximately 1 per cent of the total Australian population but less than half a per cent of Australia's annual intake of skilled and business migrants settles in the NT. The current NTG *Business and Skilled Migration Strategy* aims to increase that proportion to 1 per cent of the national intake (NTG, not dated:11).

This research brief analyses the role of NOM in the NT population growth in the period 1996-2006/7. It looks at the components of NOM, particularly the permanent and long-term movements, and discusses whether NOM can have a stabilising effect on the NT annual population growth, and in turn, mitigate the temporary nature of settlement in the NT.

Data and methods

This research brief uses published and unpublished ABS data covering the period of 1996 to 2006/7 to analyse the composition of, and the impact of NOM on NT population growth. It also investigates whether the situation in the NT differs from the national picture.

- NOM – net addition to the Australian population arising from the difference between those leaving permanently or on a long-term basis (12 months or more), and those arriving permanently or on a long-term basis. Permanent and long-term arrivals contribute to NOM and are therefore added to the population. Permanent and long-term departures contribute to NOM in a sense that they need to be subtracted from the population. In order for a person to contribute to NOM they must stay in or be absent from Australia for a continuous period of 12 out of 12 months. This is the so-called 12/12 rule (ABS 2008a, Glossary);

- 'category jumping' – adjustment made to NOM to reflect changes between intended and actual duration of stay of travellers in an out of Australia, such that their classification as short-term or as long-term/permanent movers is different at arrival/departure from that after 12 months. In the mid 1990s, the estimates of category jumping became highly volatile, which led the ABS to develop a better estimation technique. In the meantime, as it was being developed, category jumping was set to zero from 1997-98 to 2000-01 inclusive. The new technique has been used since September Quarter 2006 onwards. The term 'category jumping' has been also replaced with 'migration adjustments', which have been made separately to the data series for permanent and long-term arrivals and departures since 2001-02. NOM estimates where 'category jumping' was included and those where migration adjustments have been applied are not comparable (DIAC 2008:3). One of the principal differences between the two methods is that the new one uses the so-called 12/16 rule. Under that rule, measurement of an overseas traveller's duration of stay or absence is not based on a continuous presence in Australia, as opposed to the continuous approach under the 12/12 rule. Under the 12/16 rule, overseas travellers must have been

resident in Australia for a total period of 12 months or more during the 16 month follow up period to be included in the population. This rule therefore takes into consideration persons who may have left Australia for a short period of time and returned, while still being resident for 12 months out of 16. It also takes into account Australians who live overseas for most of the time but who return to Australia for short periods (ABS 2008b:96).This research brief is based on the 12/12 methodology and uses the term category jumping.

Categories of movement under NOM

- permanent movements – travellers who move to or from Australia on a permanent basis. Permanent arrivals (settlers) include: travellers who hold migrant visas (regardless of stated intended period of stay); New Zealand citizens who indicate an intention to settle; and those who are otherwise eligible to settle (e.g. overseas born children of Australian citizens). Permanent departures refer to Australian residents (including former settlers) who on departure state that they are leaving permanently;

- long-term movements – travellers who move in and out of Australia for a period of 12 or more months but not permanently. Long-term arrivals include overseas migrants (visitors and temporary entrants) who intend to stay in Australia for 12 months or more and Australian residents returning after an absence of 12 months or more overseas. Long-term departures refer to Australian residents who intend to stay abroad for 12 months or more and overseas visitors departing who stayed 12 months or more in Australia.

Short-term movements (for less than 12 months) are considered only under the category jumping component of NOM, that is when the declared short-term stayers change their intention and remain in Australia long-term, or when those departing stay overseas long-term instead of short-term. This permits adding or subtracting them from the population estimates as appropriate. Short-term arrivals comprise overseas visitors who intend to stay in Australia for less than 12 months and Australian residents returning from overseas after an absence of less than 12 months. Short-term departures comprise Australian residents who intend to stay abroad for less than 12 months; and overseas visitors departing after a stay of less than 12 months in Australia (ABS 2008a, Glossary).

For more information about the new and old methods of calculating NOM see ABS 2003, 2006 and 2007.

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Results

NOM as a component of NT population growth

Table 1 shows components of the NT population growth.

Table 1. Components of population growth in the NT, 1996-2007.

Year [a]	Natural increase NI	NOM [b]	Net interstate migration NIM	Total population growth [c]	% NOM in Total population growth
1996-1997	2,733	541	1,754	5,028	10.8
1997-1998	2,825	560	-472	2,913	19.2
1998-1999	2,749	1,006	-953	2,802	35.9
1999-2000	2,722	942	-907	2,757	34.2
2000-2001	2,851	878	-1,592	2,137	41.1
2001-2002	2,839	655	-1,998	1,496	43.8
2002-2003	2,946	325	-2,768	635	51.2
2003-2004	2,755	648	-1,487	2,017	32.1
2004-2005	2,558	1,004	610	4,310	23.3
2005-2006	2,764	1891	-553	4,254	44.5
2006-2007	2,808	1,116	253	4,177	26.7
1996-2007	**30,550**	**9,566**	**-8,113**	**32,526**	**33.0**

Notes: a) From 1997-98 to 2000-01 inclusive, category jumping was set to zero.
b) NOM 2006-07 contains data obtained using improved NOM methodology from September Quarter 2006 onwards.
c) Differences between total population growth and the sum of the components from 2002-03 to 2005-06 are due to intercensal discrepancy. Population growth for earlier periods and for 2006-07 are exact sums of all three components.
Sources: ABS 2008a and ABS unpublished statistics.

Table 1 shows that the annual population growth in the NT ranged from a high of 5,000 to just above 600 people. Overall, NOM has represented annually between 10 per cent and 51 per cent of the total population growth in the NT with an average for the period studied of 33 per cent. Variations in total growth reflect not so much annual differences in absolute NOM numbers but rather the fluctuating levels of net interstate migration (NIM). Figure 1 below plots components of the annual population growth in the NT shown in Table 1 above.

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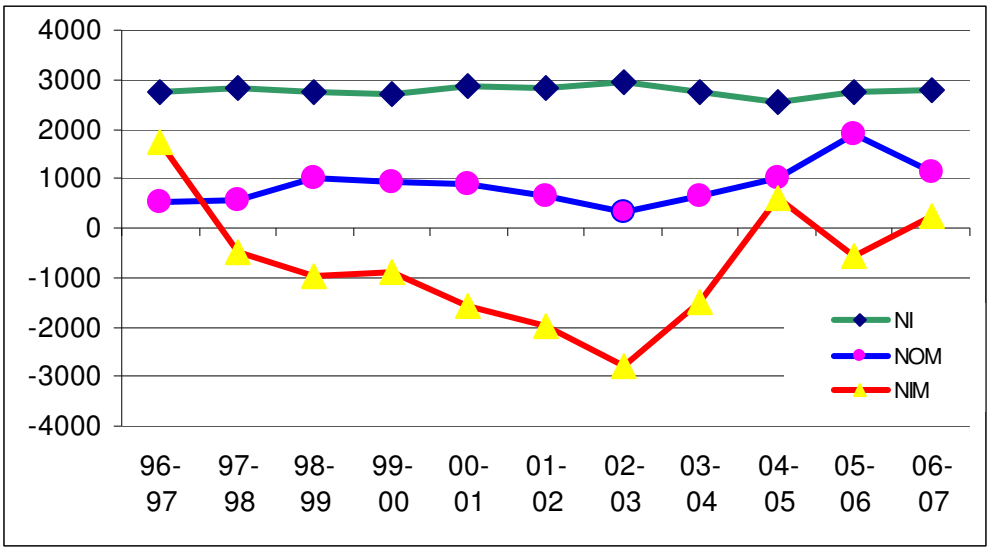
Figure 1. Components of population growth in the NT, 1996-2007.



Notes a, b and sources as in Table 1 above.

Figure 1 illustrates that between 1996-97 and 2006-07 NOM made a positive contribution to population growth, while NIM resulted in population decline (with exception of 1996-97, 2004-05 and 2006-07). Natural increase has followed a largely consistent pattern of growth of just below 3,000 per year. Net interstate migration (red line) was largely negative during that period and until 2002-03 it was decreasing every year. The sudden spike in its numbers that followed, only to fall below zero and to rise again, shows that net interstate migration levels are unpredictable. Positive NOM, although not exceeding 1,000 people until 2004-05, has offset the net population losses through interstate migration and helped the NT achieve the growth in the range it has. NOM can be then seen as a pivotal component of the NT population growth. In its absence, in 2000-01 this growth would be only 1259, in 2001-02 it would be 841, and in 2002-03 the NT would have grown merely by 178 (see Table 1).

Composition of NOM in NT

Table 2 shows the breakdown of NOM and enables to distinguish between permanent and long-term movements.

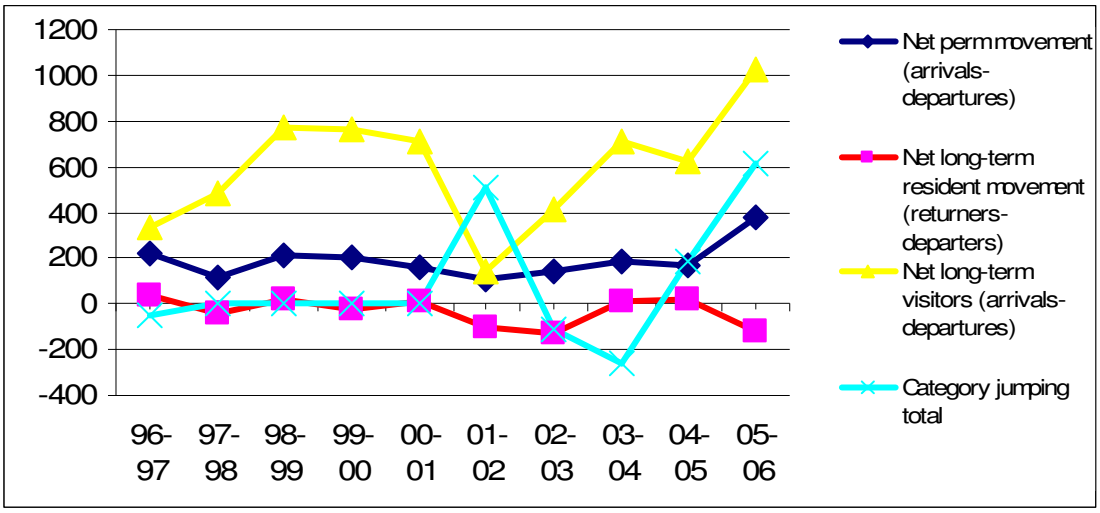
Table 2. Components of NOM in the NT, 1996-2006 [a)].

Category of movement	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	96-06	% 96-06
Net perm movement (arrivals-departures)	222	118	216	199	158	104	144	189	171	376	1897	22.4
Net long-term resident movement (returners-departers)	36	-44	19	-21	7	-99	-125	8	23	-122		
Net long-term visitors (arrivals-departures)	335	486	771	764	713	139	415	714	620	1022	5661 [d)]	67.0
Category jumping total [b)]	-52	0	0	0	0	511	-109	-263	190	615	892	10.6
NOM total [c)]	541	560	1006	942	878	655	325	648	1004	1891	8450	100.0

Notes: a) The data in this table is based on the 12/12 NOM methodology and was used in the official population estimates up to June quarter 2006.
b) From 1997-98 to 2000-01 inclusive, category jumping was set to zero.
c) Final NOM was calculated by adding any required category jumping to the net of permanent and long-term arrivals and departures data.
d) This figure is composed of -318 net long-term resident movements and 5979 net long-term visitor movements.
Source: ABS unpublished statistics and ABS 2008a.

Table 2 reveals that long-term visitors contribute the highest numbers to NOM each year, except in 2001-02, when there were 511 category jumpers and 139 long-term visitors. This is also visually illustrated by Figure 2 (yellow line). Net numbers of long-term residents were low and in 2002-03 and 2005-06 they dipped below zero with net losses exceeding a hundred people in each of these years. Although net permanent movements were higher in each year than the net long-term resident movements, with exception of 2001-02, they have remained considerably below the numbers of net long-term visitors. Over the whole decade, net permanent movement represented just one-fifth of NOM (22.4 per cent), whereas the net long-term movement (dominated by visitors) represented 67 per cent of NOM.

Figure 2. Components of NOM in the NT, 1996-2006.



Notes a, b and sources as in Table 2 above.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of categories of movement in the Category Jumping.

Table 3. Components of category jumping in the NT, 1996-2006.

Category jumping breakdown	**96-97**	**97-98**	**98-99**	**99-00**	**00-01**	**01-02**	**02-03**	**03-04**	**04-05**	**05-06**
Long-term visitors arriving	na	0	0	0	0	-976	-965	-1015	-860	-1040
Short-term visitors arriving	na	0	0	0	0	2504	2262	1679	1807	2081
Long-term residents departing	na	0	0	0	0	333	316	275	289	404
Short-term residents departing	na	0	0	0	0	-1336	-1721	-1185	-1054	-792
Permanent arrivals	na	0	0	0	0	-24	-12	-25	-8	-54

Category jumping breakdown	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06
Permanent departures	na	0	0	0	0	10	11	8	16	16
Total category jumping	**na**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**511**	**-109**	**-263**	**190**	**615**

Source: ABS unpublished data.

Table 3 shows that the lowest absolute numbers of category jumpers can be found among those who move permanently. It appears that this group is fairly confident in its choices of permanent relocation and rarely changes the initial plans. By contrast, visitors and residents who move on a temporary basis tend to change their intentions a lot more often as illustrated by their absolute numbers that are in the range of hundreds and thousands. The highest absolute numbers of category jumpers each year are in the intended short-term visitor arrivals category, who have stayed in the NT for longer than 12 months (thus 'long-term'). As a consequence, the final category jumping figures for each year are mostly affected by the changed intentions of those who come to the NT and who leave the NT temporarily both short and long-term.

NOM as a component of Australia population growth

Table 4. Components of population growth in Australia, 1996-2007.

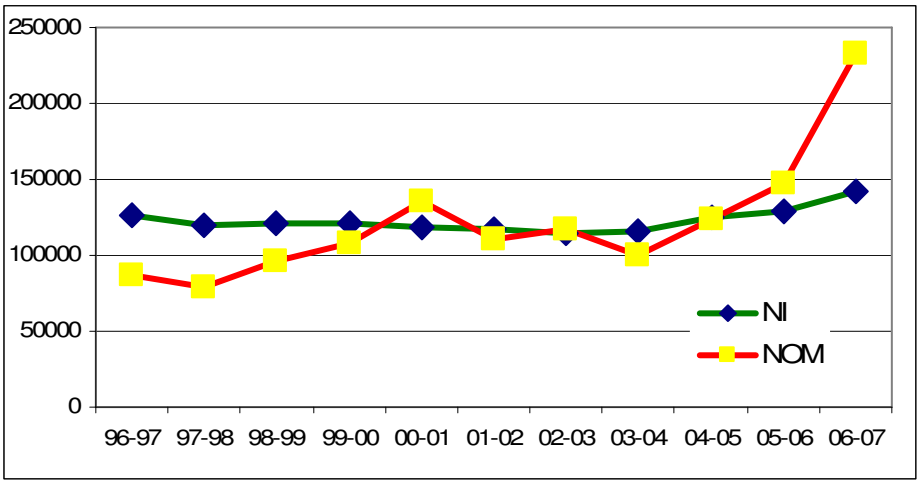
Year [a]	NI	NOM [b]	Total population growth [c]	% NOM in total population growth
96-97	126 362	87 079	213 441	40.8
97-98	119 850	79 162	199 012	39.8
98-99	121 687	96 483	218 170	44.2
99-00	120 918	107 275	228 193	47
00-01	118 587	135 673	254 260	53.4
01-02	117 035	110 556	227 591	48.6
02-03	114 424	116 498	243 997	47.7
03-04	115 851	99 966	231 928	43.1
04-05	124 580	123 763	267 428	46.3
05-06	129 499	146 753	303 089	48.4
06-07	141 748	232 824	374 572	62.1
96-07	**1 350 541**	**1 336 032**	**2 761 681**	**47.4**

Notes: a) From 1997-98 to 2000-01 inclusive, category jumping was set to zero.
b) NOM 2006-07 contains data obtained using improved NOM methodology from September Quarter 2006 onwards.
c) Differences between total population growth and the sum of the components from 2002-03 to 2005-06 are due to intercensal discrepancy. Population growth for earlier periods and for 2006-07 are exact sums of all three components.
Sources: ABS 2008a and ABS unpublished statistics.

Table 4 shows that NOM has been gradually increasing its numerical contribution to Australia's population although it took a couple of dips, as in 2001-04. In most of the years shown, NOM has contributed above 100,000 people to its population. NOM contribution was exceptionally high in 2006-07, which may be due to using the new NOM calculation method. On average, NOM has represented 47.4 per cent of the Australian population growth during the period shown, which is a higher proportional

contribution than its average contribution to the NT population growth, discussed earlier.

Figure 3. Components of population growth in Australia, 1996-2007.



Notes a, b and sources as in Table 4 above.

Figure 3 plots data from Table 4 above. It shows that NOM levels have fluctuated and that in most of the years shown they have remained below the levels of natural increase. Exceptions were years 2000-01, 2002-03, and the last two years shown. By contrast, in the NT NOM has never been numerically greater than natural increase in the same period (Figure 1).

Components of NOM in Australia

Table 5 below shows all components of NOM in Australia and enables to see the contribution from permanent and long-term movements separately.

Table 5. Components of NOM in Australia, 1996-2006 [a)].

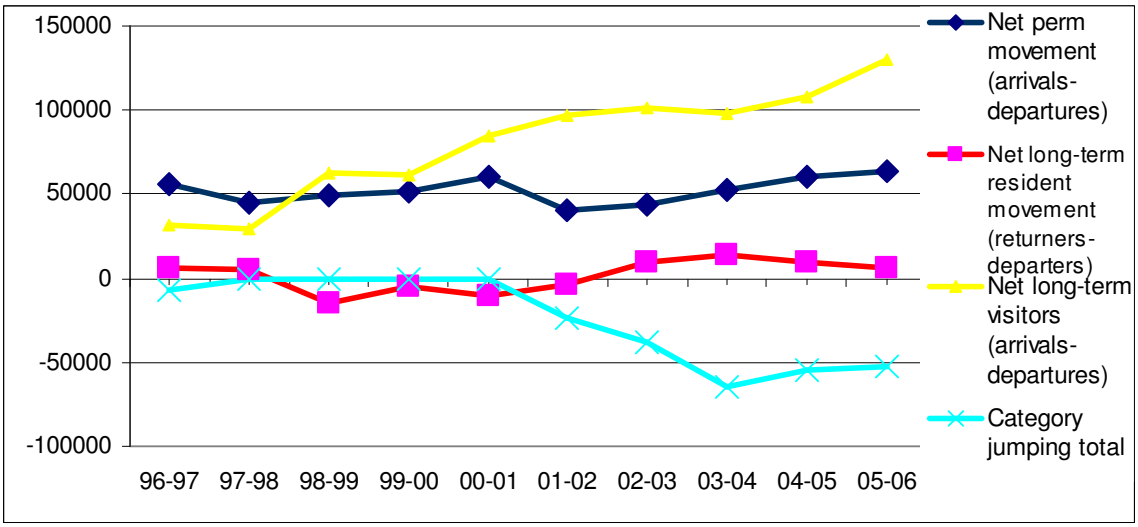
Category of movement	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	96-06	% 96-06
Net perm movement (arrivals-departures)	55895	45342	48962	51194	60845	40659	43451	52512	60818	63740	523418	47.4
Net long-term resident movement (returners-departers)	6393	4936	-14951	-5267	-10052	-3473	9573	14064	9666	5785		
Net long-term visitors (arrivals-departures)	32108	28884	62472	61348	84880	96498	101201	98045	107488	129748	819346 [d)]	74.3
Category jumping total [b)]	-7317	0	0	0	0	-23128	-37727	-64655	-54210	-52520	-239557	-21.7
NOM total [c)]	87079	79162	96483	107275	135673	110556	116498	99966	123762	146753	1103207	100.0

Notes: a) The data in this table is based on the previous NOM methodology and was used in the official population estimates up to June Quarter 2006.
b) From 1997-98 to 2000-01 inclusive, category jumping was set to zero.
c) Final NOM was calculated by adding any required category jumping to the net of permanent and long-term arrivals and departures.
d) This figure is composed of 16,674 net long-term resident movements and 802,672 net long-term visitor movements.
Sources: ABS unpublished statistics and ABS 2008a.

Table 5 reveals that net long-term visitor movement has numerically contributed most to NOM in the period shown. Its contribution has ranged from 32,000 in 1996-97 to nearly 130,000 in 2005-06. With only three exceptions (1997-98, 1999-2000 and 2003-04), net number of long-term visitors has been continuously rising and since the beginning of the period studied until its end it has quadrupled.

Net long-term resident movements fluctuated, including net losses in the period of 1998-2002. Their annual volumes have remained low in comparison to the net long-term visitor movements. Over the whole period studied here the total volume of net long-term resident movement was nearly 50 times lower than the total volume of net long-term visitor movement. This shows how much NOM has been reliant on the latter.

Figure 4. Components of NOM in Australia1996-2006.



Notes a, b and source as in Table 5 above.

Figure 4 plots the data shown in Table 5. It visualises how the gap between the net permanent movement (blue line) and net long-term movement (yellow line) has occurred. It can be observed that until 1997-98 there were more net permanent movements than net long-term visitor movements. The situation became reversed in 1998-99, when the former came to contribute more to NOM than the net permanent movement. Since 2000-01, numerically the gap between these two components has begun to considerably widen. Table 5 shows that over the whole decade, net permanent movement represented 47.4 per cent of NOM and net long-term movement (dominated by visitors) 74.3 per cent. The latter is then pivotal to NOM and Australia's population growth. Category jumping brought net population losses to Australia at -21.7 per cent. While the exact percentage shares of different types of movement are different from those in the NT, the broad trends are similar. In 1996-2006 NOM in Australia and in the NT has been fuelled by net long-term movement, particularly of visitors. Contribution from permanent movement was much lower both in Australia and in the NT. The difference consisted in the category jumping in the NT delivering an overall net population gain.

Table 6 shows the breakdown of categories of movement in the category jumping component of NOM.

Table 6. Components of category jumping in Australia, 1996-2006.

Category jumping breakdown	**96-97**	**97-98**	**98-99**	**99-00**	**00-01**	**01-02**	**02-03**	**03-04**	**04-05**	**05-06**
Long-term visitors arriving	na	0	0	0	0	-128,059	-130711	-132385	-137287	-145118
Short-term visitors arriving	na	0	0	0	0	182494	154312	136710	148771	153458
Long-term residents departing	na	0	0	0	0	46942	44749	42118	46850	50872
Short-term residents departing	na	0	0	0	0	-122400	-103915	-107085	-108630	-107859
Permanent arrivals	na	0	0	0	0	-4487	-4477	-7152	-7334	-7740
Permanent departures	na	0	0	0	0	2382	2315	3139	3420	3867
Total category jumping	**na**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**-23128**	**-37727**	**-64655**	**-54210**	**-52520**

Source: ABS unpublished statistics.

The lowest numbers of category jumpers can be found among those, who declare that they move permanently. Of all categories of movement shown in Table 6, permanent movers appear to be the most confident in their decisions. This resembles their behaviour in the NT. Although their numbers are low, it may be of concern that more and more individuals who intend to permanently settle in/return to Australia actually leave (see for example a loss of such 'permanent arrivals' in 2005-06). Visitors and residents are *much less* decided about their temporary long-term or short-term presence in, or absence from Australia. Their numbers, as opposed to permanent movers, start from just above 42,000 and exceed 182,000. The highest numbers of category jumpers can be found among the short-term visitor arrivals (they have remained in Australia long-term so at least for 12 months) and long-term visitor arrivals (they have left earlier). With exception of 2001-02, the net gap between these two categories ranged between around 4,000 and 24,000. That gap was wider in the resident movement categories, although the absolute numbers there were lower than in the case of the visitor movements. In each year there was a net loss of residents, which ranged from around 57,000 to 76,000. This resulted from 100,000+ of residents declaring a short-term absence but deciding to stay overseas long-term, and from between 42,000 and 50,000 residents declaring a long-term absence but returning earlier.

In sum, category jumping in Australia is most affected by changes in intentions of short and long-term movement. This has also been established to be the case in the NT (Table 3). Although the absolute volume of movers in Australia was higher in each of the visitor category than in each of the resident category, the overall negative category jumping outcomes in each year were primarily a result of net loss of residents. Net losses through permanent movement were the second contributor (losses ranged from

around 2,100 to 4,000). The final category jumping figure each year was moderated by net gains from the visitor movement, which ranged from around 4,000 to 54,000.

Discussion and Conclusions

In 1996-2007, NOM has on average contributed more to population growth in Australia than in the NT, 47.4 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively. Components of population growth in the NT and Australia differ in that the former includes net interstate migration, which in 1996-2007 was largely negative and the NT suffered net losses of residents. Low but positive contribution from NOM then became pivotal to NT population growth. In light of the unpredictable levels of net interstate migration shown in Figure 1, it is worth investigating whether NOM in the NT can have some stabilising effect on its annual population growth and in turn, mitigate the temporary nature of settlement in the NT. For this to happen, each year NOM should comprise a fair proportion of net permanent movements.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show all components of NOM. If patterns which they show continue into the future then it is difficult to reasonably expect that NOM could have a meaningful stabilising effect on the NT population by mitigating the transient nature of settlement in the NT. This is because over the whole period studied net permanent movement represented just one-fifth of NOM (22.4 per cent), whereas net long-term movement (numerically dominated by visitors, not residents) represented 67 per cent and category jumpers contributed 10.6 per cent. This makes long-term visitors the primary contributors to NOM in the NT. The permanent movement component of NOM was too weak to have a meaningful stabilising effect on the NT population. A closer look at category jumpers (Table 3) further supports that proposition by showing that this NOM component was mostly composed of temporary movements (dominated by intended short-term visitors who decided to remain in the NT long-term) and that permanent movements numerically contributed the least. In sum, despite the undeniably pivotal role of NOM in the NT annual population growth, it is evident that it has contributed to the transient nature of the NT population. Net long-term movement (numerically dominated by visitors) was also found to have been the principal contributor to NOM in Australia (Table 5 and Figure 4). But it is in the NT, which has a small and largely transient population, where the dominant role of net long-term movement in NOM can be particularly detrimental because it fosters this impermanent nature of the settlement.

Travellers can change their intentions. Since it cannot be immediately confirmed whether long-term and permanent movers remained in the NT (or Australia) after they were counted and have lastingly contributed to population growth, the percentage shares of permanent and long-term movements in NOM should be seen as indicative and not precise contributions from these two types of movement. Furthermore, technical aspects of calculating NOM such as setting the category jumping to zero and the 12/12 principle make the outcomes broadly indicative, including the final annual figure of NOM every year.

Domination of NOM by the long-term movement over the last decade makes reversing it, or at least improving the contribution of permanent movers difficult. In considering the potential solutions it may be helpful to keep in mind that the dominant role of the long-term movement in NOM, and as a consequence, its contribution to the NT and

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Australia's population growth has resulted from a combination of factors of which some were federal level policy decisions (although taken in consultation with the State/Territory Governments). For example, since late 1990s, Australia has been welcoming an ever increasing number of overseas workers, business people and overseas students on temporary visas. They were responsible for the growing numbers of net long-term movements of visitors. The increase in the number of temporary visas has not only resulted from the demand for foreign labour in times of economic prosperity or from a growing interest in studying in Australia, but also from deliberate policy changes, where granting temporary status to business and skilled migrants was preferred over granting them permanent status immediately. This was driven by the 'try before you buy' principle intended to probe one's performance and commitment to Australia. That has typically been accompanied by temporary residence restrictions to support regional population growth, whereby one could relocate from the initial place of settlement in Australia after having spent there between two to four years. While well-intended, largely serving the immediate needs of employers and providing an important source of income to educational institutions, ironically, long-term temporary migration with the in-built residency restrictions may not have best addressed concerns of less populous jurisdictions such as the NT, which has been concurrently dealing with high population mobility (recently, mostly suffering losses to interstate). In debating possible ways of improving the permanent settlement outcomes for the NT, solutions may initially be limited to what can be achieved under the current federal visa options, but can also include future new arrangements (or modifications permitted in the NT), which the NT could propose and which would be better suited to mitigate its unique population mobility patterns.

Importantly though, more permanent settlers even if attracted may not stay in the NT if they find the living conditions, quality of infrastructure, access to various services and recreation facilities to be below their expectations. Rather than concentrating exclusively on new and improved features of an immigration strategy, it may be worth considering how this strategy and regional planning can be better linked so that the NT becomes a more attractive place of permanent settlement for international migrants (and also for the local-born and the interstate movers).

New arrangements for immigrants (or modifications permitted in the NT) better able to mitigate unique population mobility patterns could be proposed by the NT. If it was found that the long-term temporary visas have not aided other regional areas in Australia to achieve their population goals, then this could present a case for reviewing the regional visa rules and accompanying arrangements (role of employers, etc.) altogether and could be championed by the NT.

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