

# THE LOGGING WORKFORCE IN NORTHLAND

(A Comparison with the Bay of Plenty)

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## INTRODUCTION

Using the same questionnaire employed by the authors in the Bay of Plenty (Gaskin, Smith and Wilson, 1987), a survey of the Northland logging workforce was conducted between April, 1986 and May, 1987. Because of the low level of logging activity in Northland, it was decided to survey the entire logging workforce. In all, 22 gangs were surveyed and 97 interviews were carried out. For the purposes of this survey, Northland was defined as that area to the North of Auckland city.

Northland was selected as the second region to be surveyed because of the major expansion expected in logging activity over the next 15 to 20 years. It is anticipated that the annual harvest will increase from the present 0.5 million m<sup>3</sup> to 1.8 million m<sup>3</sup> by 2004-2008 (Stewart et al, 1985).



Figure 1 - A father and son operation logging farm blocks in Northland

The purpose of this Report is to provide some preliminary results from the Northland survey and to compare these with equivalent data from the Bay of Plenty. *Where comparisons are made between the Northland and Bay of Plenty surveys, material from the Bay of Plenty will be presented in brackets immediately following those of Northland.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Of the 22 gangs surveyed, only one was a Company gang. (The predominance of contract logging was also noted in the Bay of Plenty, where 33 out of the 37 gangs surveyed were retained in this way.) The ratio of clearfell to thinning operations was 16 : 6 (20 : 17) and this reflects the relatively limited market for smallwood at the time of the survey. The average gang size of 4.7 men was about one fewer than gangs operating in the Bay of Plenty (5.6). Gang sizes ranged from 1 to 8 in Northland, compared with 3 to 12 men in the Bay of Plenty.

## Age

The average age of Northland loggers was slightly higher than that of their Bay of Plenty counterparts, 31.7(29.5), with ages ranging from 17 to 59 years (15 to 62 years). A comparison of the age distribution of the two surveys is given in Figure 2.

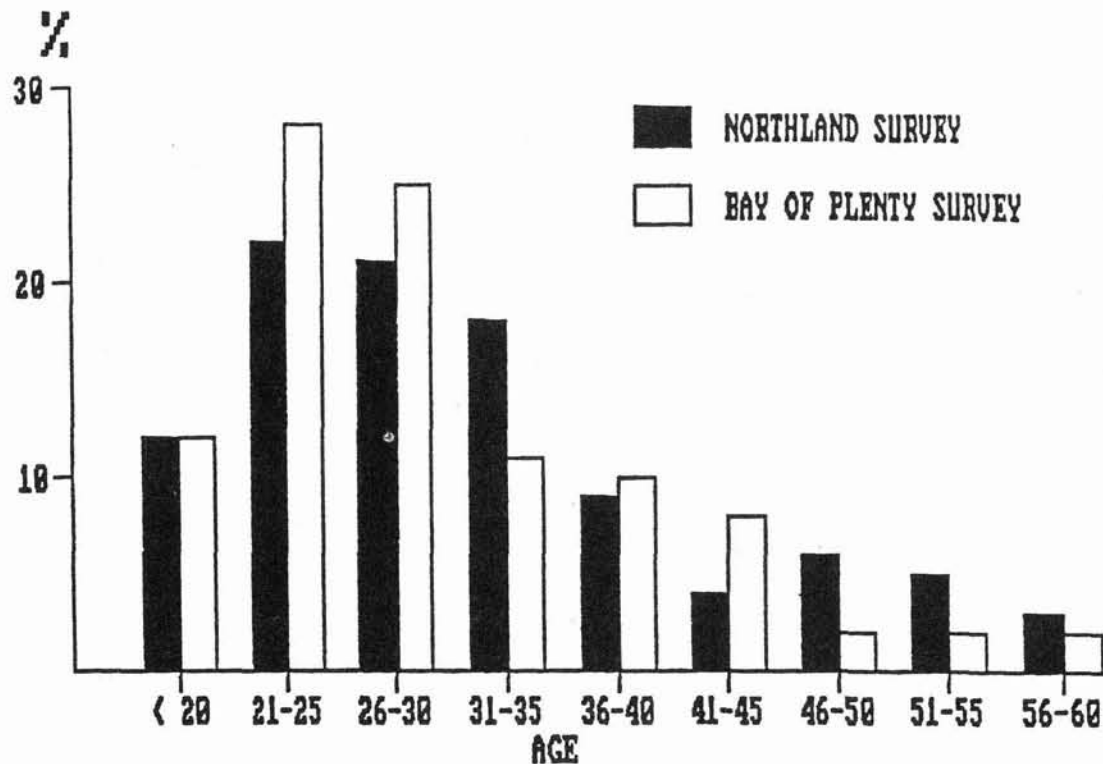


Figure 2 - Age Distribution of Loggers Interviewed

### Time in Logging

Table 1 shows the length of time spent in logging and the length of time spent with the current gang. The average time in logging was 4.9 years (8.1) with the average time spent in the current gang being 1.8 years (2.0). On average, loggers had worked in 2

gangs (3.1), with only 14% (35%) of Northland loggers having worked in more than three gangs.

It might be expected that given the smaller size of the Northland logging industry, a more stable workforce would be evident and indeed the data supports this view.

Table 1 - Length of Time in Logging and Current Gang

Period	Length of Time in Logging			Length of Time in Current Gang		
	No.	%	(B.O.P.%)	No.	%	(B.O.P.%)
< 3 months	4	4.2	( 4.5)	15	15.5	(16.4)
4 to 6 months	3	3.1	( 2.5)	7	7.2	( 8.5)
7 to 12 months	6	6.2	( 2.5)	12	12.4	( 4.0)
1 and < 2 years	11	11.5	( 5.9)	17	17.5	(21.3)
2 and < 3 years	10	10.4	( 6.9)	9	9.3	(11.9)
3 and < 4 years	6	6.3	( 3.0)	4	4.1	( 8.5)
4 and < 5 years	8	8.3	( 6.9)	6	6.2	( 9.5)
5 and < 9 years	20	20.8	(30.7)	14	14.4	(12.4)
> 9 years	28	29.2	(37.1)	13	13.4	( 7.5)

## CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

### Pay

A major difference between Northland and the Bay of Plenty was observed in the method and frequency of payment. Wages were still the most common, 61% (86%) but there was a much higher percentage of loggers paid by piece rate, 39% (13%). Fortnightly payment was again most common, 47% (82%), with only 29% (18%) paid weekly. About one-quarter were paid a bonus, 24% (25%).

Before a comparison could be made between the "take-home" pays of Northland and the Bay of Plenty loggers, it was necessary to take account of the changes made to personal taxation during the course of the surveys. Accordingly, all pay statements given prior to 1 October, 1986 were adjusted (upwards) to reflect the "new" tax rates. As a result of these adjustments, the average take-home pay per fortnight in Northland was found to be \$750, with a range of \$400 to \$1100. This was similar to the Bay of Plenty where the average take-home pay was

\$730, and ranged from \$440 to \$1007. The distributions of fortnightly take-home pay for both regions are shown in Figure 3.

It is evident from these distributions that the higher average pay of Northland loggers is strongly influenced by a relatively small group of highly paid workers. Also, Northland loggers figured disproportionately high in the lower pay range. Any differences in pay, however, were found not to be related to the method of payment as no significant differences were found between the earnings of wage and piece rate workers.

### Hours of Work and Travel Time

The average time "on the job" was 8.9 hours (8.1 hours), with a range of 6 to 10 hours (6.5 hours to 10 hours). The average time spent travelling to and from the work place each day was 1 hour (1.4), although this ranged from 20 minutes to 3 hours. This implies an average working day of 9.9 hours (9.5). Fewer than half the loggers, 46% (90%), had their travel time paid separately.

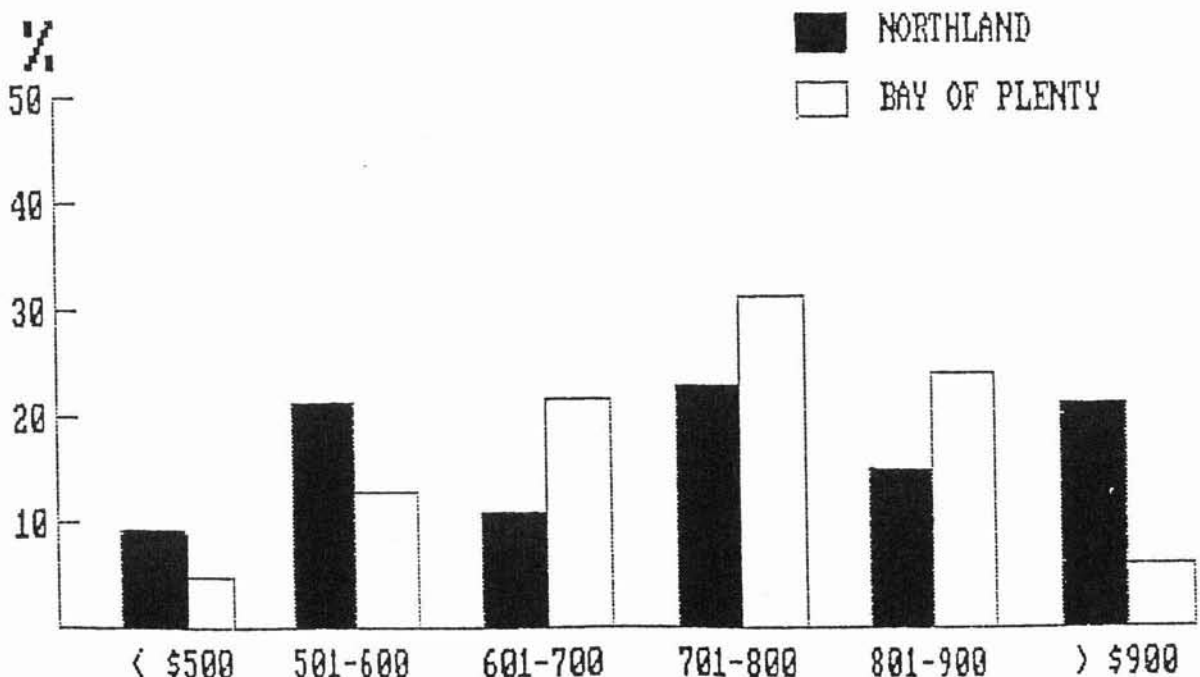
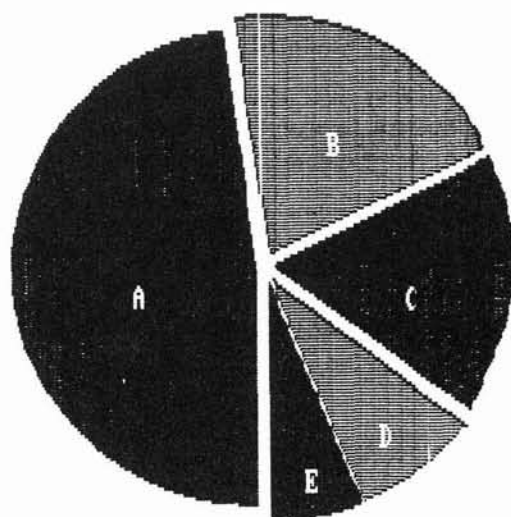


Figure 3 - Distribution of Fortnightly Take-Home Pay

## RECRUITMENT — OPPORTUNITIES AND RETENTION

### Recruitment

The most popular reason given for working in logging (Figure 4) was the attraction of working outdoors. The second most stated



<u>Group</u>	<u>Share</u>	
	<u>%</u>	<u>(B.O.P.%)</u>
A Outdoors	47.9 %	(42 %)
B Only Job	19.8 %	(20 %)
C Change	17.7 %	(18 %)
D Pay	8.3 %	(9 %)
E Pay and Outdoors	6.3 %	(8 %)
Other	-	(3 %)

Figure 4 - Main Reasons for Working in Logging

reason was that logging was the only job available. Pay as a factor in attracting workers was the least mentioned.

As with the Bay of Plenty, three-quarters of the loggers interviewed had got their first job in logging through personal contacts, such as a friend or relative. Only 7% (10%) had answered an advertisement.

That "a job was available" was the most common reason given for loggers to be working in their present gang, with nearly a quarter of those spoken to falling into this category (36%). The other two prime reasons were "change" (11.5%) and "better working conditions" (9.2%).

Agricultural work was the most common first job loggers had on leaving school (Table 2). Logging as a first job was the only other occupation to have more than 10% representation. Considerably fewer loggers had started their working career in forestry or logging than was observed in the Bay of Plenty survey.

### Opportunity in Logging for School Leavers

The majority, 71% (62%), of loggers felt there was ample opportunity for school leavers in the logging industry. Again, there was support for some form of formal training school to be set up to provide new people with the necessary basic skills.

### Retention

Only just over half the Northland loggers interviewed indicated that they would still be working in logging in five years time - a figure which is very similar to that observed for the Bay of Plenty.

Table 2 - Father's Occupation and Respondent's First Job after Leaving School

	<u>Father's Occupation</u>			<u>Respondent's First Job</u>		
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>(B.O.P.%)</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>(B.O.P.%)</u>
Forestry	8	8.3	(5.4)	1	1	(9.0)
Logging	24	25.0	(34.3)	11	11.5	(20.8)
Agriculture	32	33.3	(23.4)	33	34.4	(30.1)
Other	32	33.3	(36.8)	51	53.1	(40.1)

*Table 3 - Work Skills, Learning Time and Job Preferred*

Job	Done in Present Gang	Done in Previous Gang	Normal Job	Most Preferred	Time to Learn
	% (BOP%)	% (BOP%)	% (BOP%)	% (BOP%)	<u>Months</u> (B.O.P.)
Fell and Trim	83 (85)	91 (93)	33 (43)	39 (44)	4.8 ( 8)
Breaking Out	77 (75)	84 (86)	2 ( 3)	1 ( 5)	3.0 ( 4)
Skid Work	81 (78)	86 (86)	14 (12)	5 ( 9)	3.7 ( 3)
Skidder Op.	51 (53)	58 (68)	18 (15)	14 (16)	8.5 ( 8)
Tractor Op.	37 (19)	49 (39)	5 ( 3)	4 ( 3)	8.2 ( 9)
Loader Op.	55 (38)	63 (50)	13 (10)	14 ( 7)	4.0 ( 8)
Hauler Op.	7 ( 4)	8 (13)	2 ( 1)	2 ( 1)	3.1 ( 9)

## WORK SKILLS AND JOB PREFERENCES

The replies to questions addressing the loggers; work skills, normal job, most preferred job and an estimate of the amount of time to learn each job, are shown in Table 3. The Northland responses are similar to those recorded from the Bay of Plenty survey, though for a number of jobs the perceived learning times were considerably lower in Northland.

The two main reasons given for preferring a particular job were; that the job is challenging (28%) and that the job keeps the logger busy or is interesting (13%).

## ACCIDENTS AND SAFETY

Of the 97 loggers interviewed, 32 had suffered at least one accident during the last five years. This would suggest an accident rate slightly higher than the Bay of Plenty (33% as opposed to 28%). In accordance with the Bay of Plenty data, very few accident victims had had the accident discussed with them, and no evidence was found that any recommendation was made to avoid the accident happening again.

In comparison with the Bay of Plenty, fewer Northland loggers wore safety trousers or chaps (45% as opposed to 78%). However, more Northland loggers had to supply their own safety equipment (53% compared with 28%).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A brief look at the information collected suggests that the "typical Northland logger", when seen alongside his (there were no females interviewed in either survey) Bay of Plenty counterpart, would

- be slightly older
- have spent much less time in logging
- have worked in fewer gangs
- be more likely to have worked in jobs other than those in forestry or logging immediately upon leaving school
- be a bit more likely to have had an accident.

Of course many of these differences are a reflection of the fact that the exotic-based industry in Northland is both smaller and more recently developed than that in the Bay of Plenty. However, from the point of view of future planning for the forest sector, the broad regional similarities will be of greater importance. Two examples can be given :

First, the Northland survey, like the Bay of Plenty study, indicates a clear need for an organised programme of recruitment in anticipation of future growth, since nearly half of those spoken to in the area were





*Figure 5 - One of the larger Northland logging gangs. As well as the machines shown they also operate a Clark 666 and Dispatch hauler. This operation was clearfelling radiata pine in Glenbervie Forest, Whangarei.*

uncertain about their future within the industry. In the Northland case, the recruitment issue has added urgency, given that the loggers here tended to be somewhat older. Furthermore, the reliance upon the "word of mouth" methods of recruitment, that was as much in evidence in Northland as the Bay of Plenty, may work to restrict the employment base of the industry.

Secondly, accident rates in Northland were seen to be a little higher than in the Bay of Plenty. In the latter instance, the observation was made that approaches to accident prevention were "painfully inadequate" (Gaskin et al, 1987). Sadly, assessment of the Northland region only reinforces this view.

## REFERENCES

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