

Living with change: Human impacts of recent restructuring of the native hardwood timber industry in WA

Greg Miller

Forest Liaison Officer (Northern Region), Worker Assistance Program, WA Department of Education and Training, Australia

Peer reviewed contribution

Keywords: redundancy, timber industry, restructure, timber workers, assistance, human impact

ABSTRACT: European colonists arriving in the south west of Western Australia in the mid-1800s found what must have appeared to be an endless supply of timber in the forests. These remarkable timbers fuelled the economic development of the Colony, and were shipped out in vast quantities to feed the Empire. Whole communities were built around the early sawmills, paving the way for agriculture and other development throughout the southwest.

The timber industry in Western Australia has had a fascinating and turbulent history. The last 40 years have particularly seen many changes, driven by changing community demands and expectations, a growing scientific knowledge and environmental consciousness, shifting government policy, and economic factors.

Probably the most significant of those industry changes is currently unfolding in WA, as a result of the WA State Government implementing its “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” Policy, which began on 1 March 2001.

The resulting significant reduction in the log volumes available to the industry has seen the redundancy of over 600 timber workers and the closure of many timber mills and service providers to the industry. But who are these affected people? What is their story? What assistance was put in place to help support these people into new livelihoods and how well has it worked?

In this presentation we will explore the human impact aspect of the current restructure of the native hardwood timber industry in WA.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current restructure of the native hardwood timber industry in Western Australia has been brought about by the State Government’s “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” Policy, which came into effect on 1 March 2001, immediately stopping logging in 99% of all remaining old growth forests.

The resulting new sustainable yield for log volumes for 1st and 2nd grade jarrah and karri logs represents a reduction to approximately 25% of what the previous levels had been under the 1994 - 2003 Forest Management Plan. This level of reduction in sawlogs available to the industry would necessarily involve the closure of sawmilling operations and the redundancies of many timber workers from across the industry. This paper will explore aspects of the human impact of this industry restructure.

Any consideration of the human impact of the current re-structure of the WA native hardwood timber industry must be done in the context of the long history of change which has shaped and

buffeted this significant West Australian industry since European colonialists first commenced large scale exploitation and utilisation of the jarrah and karri forests of WA. Not an isolated event, the current restructure of the timber industry in WA is the culmination of a long historical process which has seen the interplay of the dynamic and changing forces of economic, social, political, and scientific values and understandings.

Caught up within these changes have been the timber workers, their families and communities.

2 LOCAL AUGUSTA HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is appropriate that Augusta was chosen to be the location for the Sixth National Conference of the Forest History Society during the 175th Anniversary year of the founding of the colony of Western Australia. Augusta is in fact the third oldest European colony established in WA. While a British military garrison had been sent to King George Sound in 1826, to discourage the French from claiming the western portion of the Great South Land for themselves, it was in June 1829 that the Swan River Settlement was founded. It was 12 months later, in May 1830 that the first European settlers arrived in Augusta aboard the Emily Taylor accompanied by a small military garrison for their protection. In that group of free settlers was James Woodward Turner, who quickly saw that there was great potential for the local timbers.

However, despite the high hopes that this new colony of Augusta might become the new Cape Town, this was not to be. By 1849 most of the settlers had left Augusta for the more agriculturally friendly Vasse region to the north. Augusta was off to a bumpy start.

The Swan River Colony was not originally established as a penal colony, but a desperate shortage of labour, growing numbers of Irish prisoners in British prisons, and several other colonies no longer taking convicts all helped to bring about the arrival of the first 75 convicts in Fremantle in 1850. A “ticket of leave” system was established to send out working parties of convicts where labour was required.

It was one year after the first convicts arrived in Fremantle, that a party of 10 convicts was sent to Augusta in 1851 to start the timber industry.

The timber was to be exported from Perth by Messrs, Shenton & Davey, Merchants of Perth. The whole scheme was fraught with difficulty as the timber had to be felled and pit sawn on the banks of the Blackwood River and rafted down to the mouth, as jarrah will not float. The ship the “John Panter” was engaged to carry the cargo and it arrived and anchored in Flinders bay in Augusta in 1851.

It finally sailed, full loaded, in February 1852 with 101 loads, nearly 170 tons, of sawn jarrah and 14,000 treenails, (rods or dowels up to 9 inches long and 2 inches thick, used for fastening ship’s planking to the framework).

The convicts and guards were housed in tents along the bank of the river. However, the work had taken so long that a profit could not be made. Once more the sounds of axes ringing in the bush was to remain silent for the next two decades ... Cresswell (1989)

The colony in South Australia was desperately short of timber, and attempts were made by several entrepreneurial people including James Turner and Willie Eldridge to cut and ship timber to this market. However, it was the arrival of Maurice Coleman Davies and the establishment of his timber empire in the Augusta-Karridale area which really saw the timber industry thriving from 1880 until just before the First World War. In the 1880s, timber was second only to wool in total exports for Western Australia.

This Augusta-Karridale region was a significant contributor to the booming economy with two ports, Hamelin Bay and Flinders Bay, sending a steady stream of jarrah and karri timber all over the world to feed the Empire. The focus of the district moved to agriculture with the Group Settlement Schemes after the First World War, and only a few small sawmills continued.

3 CHANGES TO THE WA NATIVE HARDWOOD TIMBER INDUSTRY OVER TIME

The timber industry is one of the longest established industries in Western Australia, but it has not been an easy journey. The issues and forces of conservation and exploitation have always been at odds with one another – making the history a fascinating one. This saga has been further compounded by the effects of geographic isolation on its earlier administration and on marketing.

3.1 *The first hundred years – 1860 to 1960*

Governor Frederick Weld in the late 1860s was to stimulate the establishment and growth of an important timber industry in this state by granting long term leases or concessions. Governor Weld, who had previously initiated the timber industry in New Zealand, went on later to do the same in Tasmania after he had served his time in WA.

By 1874, the volume of timber produced for export began to exceed that for local usage. During the 1880s the Government assisted the exploitation of the resource by building railways to the ports, and the industry boomed particularly between 1893 and 1902.

John Ednie-Brown was appointed in 1895 as the State's first Conservator of Forests. However he died in 1899, and it was 17 years before he was replaced! The focus of Governments during this time was the expansion of agriculture. The forests seemed to be endless, so agriculture enjoyed a higher priority than the management of the forests.

Continued controversy about wastage and forest utilisation had brought about a Royal Commission into the timber industry in 1904, resulting in the introduction of royalties to replace the concession system, and the introduction of mill permits – but many of its other recommendations were never adopted. In 1913 timber production peaked in Western Australia. Lack of concern by the general public and government, with the help of vested timber interests, saw Ednie-Brown was not replaced after his death – until eventually a new Conservator of Forests was appointed 1916. Charles Edward Lane Poole was enthusiastic about his role and moved to make significant changes. In 1918 state parliament passed legislation which he had drafted, ushering in a new era of forest management under the Forests Act.

The period after the First World War saw the expansion of the industry again, with the number of sawmills increasing threefold to over 100. However, the great Depression and the Second World War slowed this growth further.

The finish of the War in 1945 saw the arrival of migrant labour, the expansion of the industry into the virgin southern forests, and better sawmilling and log handling technologies. The shortage of building materials after the war saw a huge demand for timber, and the industry flourished again.

3.2 *The more recent years – 1960 to the present*

The last 40 years have particularly seen many changes, driven by changing community demands and expectations, a growing scientific knowledge and environmental consciousness, shifting government policy, and economic factors.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, eloquently questioned humanity's faith in technological progress. This heralded the birth of the environmental movement and a growing environmental awareness in much of the western world which would also have an impact on the timber industry.

During the 1960s there were growing concerns in the community about forest management and timber utilisation. It was during this decade that changing Forest Policy oversaw the reintroduction of clear felling in the karri forest, the commencement of the wood chipping industry, the commencement of bauxite mining in the northern jarrah forest, and the introduction of prescribed burning – each practice of which would draw long term fire from the growing environmental movement. At the same time, the growing focus on conservation during the 1960s also brought with it a need for increased mill efficiencies, which resulted in the closure of many of the smaller sawmills, and even the closure of some of the smaller timber towns as the centralisation of sawmilling operations took place. (Coakes 2002)

During the 1970s, changing Forest Policy oversaw the introduction of forest conservation blocks and reserves, Dieback quarantining, the expansion of bauxite mining, a reduction in log volumes in response to a greater call for conservation, improved recovery of sawlogs, and an increase in the logging for charcoal and woodchip production. The structural timber market suffered through recessions in the building industry, and a number of the smaller mills amalgamated with larger timber companies in an effort to be more competitive. (Coakes 2002)

The 1980s saw Forest Policy overseeing the further development of forest conservation through the establishment of more Reserves and National Parks, and the introduction of Regional Management Plans. Meanwhile the establishment of both the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Environmental Protection Authority also reflected the growing awareness of environmental and conservation values. Economic recession and a boom-bust building industry saw fluctuating demand for timber bring about the closure of many more sawmills, and the takeover of many remaining operations by larger companies – to the point where one company controlled 75% of hardwood production. Employment options in the industry continued to decline as sawmilling operations continued to be centralised and more mechanised. (Coakes 2002)

The 1990s saw Forest Policy overseeing the increasing push for value adding, ecological sustainability, the National Forest Policy Statement, further reductions to timber harvesting through the adopting of the first Forest Management Plan 1994 – 2003, and the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process. Controversy in the wider Australian community and WA community saw conflict and much action on the political front as the forests debate reached fever pitch.

This debate in the community saw the famous “back flip” on the RFA by the Court Liberal Government, and the sweeping to power in 2001 of the Gallop Labor Government who promised to end logging in old growth forests and do a major restructure of the industry.

It is clear from this very brief overview of the changes that have taken place in Forest Policy and public awareness of forests over the last 40 years in Western Australia, that the native hardwood timber industry has been severely impacted on by the convergence of a number of factors simultaneously during a period of unprecedented global social and economic change.

This convergence has included:

- The growing awareness in the community of environmental issues and conservation values, and an increasing understanding of the linkage between the preservation of biodiversity and economic and social sustainability.
- The development of globalisation and the impact that this has on both state and local economies through market forces, competition, the changing labour market, and the effect of changing demands overseas for Australian products, and the arrival of cheaper imports.
- A growing political awareness and voice within the community with increased lobbying activity by stakeholders and pressure groups. The accompanying push towards accountability of Government, along with the changing role of the media in framing public opinion have been significant in this process.
- Significant change in rural communities, with increasing reduction and centralisation of Government services and other companies, combined with population shifts towards the larger communities. A lack of employment options in smaller communities and the changing landscape of agricultural types and practices has left traditional communities severely impacted, including those which were once seen primarily as “timber towns”.

The first few years of the new millennium has seen the “timber towns” in the state’s South West feeling under siege not just by the accelerated changes taking place in the timber industry, but also by the simultaneous impacts of the deregulation of the dairy industry, the impact on international tourism post-“September 11”, the demise of many small tourism operators as a consequence of the public liability insurance crisis post the collapse of HIH, the lack of stability in the live sheep trade, changing markets facing the marri woodchip industry, changing land use patterns with the spread of bluegum tree farms and viticulture into what was previously seen as prime grazing land, changes

facing the potato processing operation in Manjimup, and a growing sense of “them and us” as traditional values and rural cultures have been threatened by the constant buffeting of these waves of change.

It is in the context of this unprecedented rate of upheavals to south west rural communities, and after decades of changes to the timber industry, that the most significant of these changes to the WA native hardwood timber industry is currently unfolding in WA. Responding to growing concerns of the wider West Australian community, almost as soon as it came to power, the new WA State Government implemented its “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” Policy.

4 THE “PROTECTING OUR OLD GROWTH FORESTS” POLICY

The State Government’s “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” Policy came into effect on 1 March 2001, and brought with it an immediate end to logging in 99 percent of WA’s old growth Forest by placing in reserves approximately 340,500 of the 346,000 hectares of remaining old-growth forests. This action heralded the commencement of a process which would be the culmination of 40 years of growing concern in the community about the future of WA’s dwindling forest resources.

Of course, this would also have social and economic implications for hundreds of timber workers and their families, so a range of assistance and incentives was offered to businesses to exit the industry and to assist displaced workers and their families to move on into new livelihoods beyond the traditional timber industry.

The Worker Assistance Program is a major component of the assistance provided to displaced workers under the Policy.

4.1 *New Forest Management Plan and Timber Industry Strategy*

The Forest Management Plan 2004-2013 was released on 20 December 2003, and the sustainable yields outlined in this plan saw the levels determined at 131,000 cubic metres (m^3) of first and second grade jarrah sawlogs a year; and 54,000 m^3 of first and second grade karri sawlogs a year. These log levels compared with 490,000 m^3 of first and second grade jarrah and 214,000 m^3 of karri first grade and 203,000 m^3 of other karri logs under the previous forest management plan which expired on December 31, 2003. The annual cut was reduced to 324,000 m^3 of first and second grade jarrah sawlogs and 186,000 m^3 of first and second grade karri sawlogs under the Regional Forest Agreement signed in May, 1999.

The Timber Industry Strategy was released at the same time, which outlined the plan to develop a job-rich high value adding timber industry, with the primary end use of WA native timbers in furniture manufacture, flooring and moulded products.

5 PRIMARILY A MATURE AGED MALE WORKFORCE

A mood of significant impending change was already sweeping the industry in the second half of the 1990s as a result of the Regional Forest Agreement process, with many people choosing to leave the industry at the time. It was a difficult period of uncertainty for many timber workers, who were uncomfortable and feeling threatened about the level of change that was possibly going to take place around them. It was into this climate of uncertainty and change that the “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” policy was implemented on 1 March 2001.

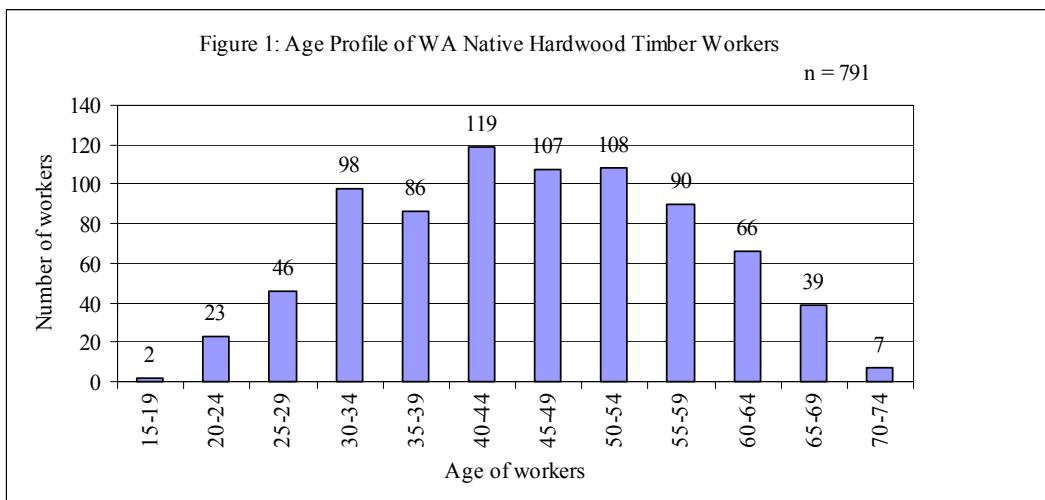
At the height of the forest debate, it was not clear how many people actually worked in the native hardwood timber industry in WA, or how many people would be directly affected by a significant reduction in the allocation of sawlogs available to the industry. People were already departing the industry when the policy was implemented. Despite some critics talking about thousands of people losing their jobs, this in fact did not eventuate. As of 30 June 2004, with the bulk of all redundancies and business closures having taken place, approximately 700 people had been made redundant. The resulting rate of unemployment is very low indeed, a testimony to the effectiveness of the

Worker Assistance Program and the staff administering the program on the ground, and to the resilience and resourcefulness of timber workers and their communities.

Although the resulting effect on workers and small businesses directly involved in the WA native hardwood timber industry would vary from one area to another, the impact was felt earlier in the south west than in the northern region, with the roll out of redundancies in the northern region approximately 12 months behind the similar processes in the south west.

The significant reduction in the log volumes available to the industry has seen the redundancy of many timber workers and the closure of many timber mills and service providers to the industry. But who are these affected people?

The native hardwood timber industry in WA is primarily made up of mature aged men. At 30 June 2004, the Forest Liaison Officers have had contact with a total of 862 workers from across the industry. The date of birth is known for 791 of these people, so it is known that two thirds of these workers have been found to be over the age of 40. (See Figure 1). There was no significant difference in age distribution between the Northern and Southwest regions.



The positions which have been made redundant have been many and varied, reflecting the breadth of the impact across the industry. From the forest floor have come fallers, plant operators, and haulage drivers. From the mills have come benchmen, dockermen, machinists and all types of workers involved in all aspects of breaking down logs through various processes creating saleable timber, plus forklift drivers and tallymen. From the mill offices have come company executives, administration staff and sales staff. While there were some women who were process workers, most of the women have come from the office/admin area.

6 ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE UNDER THE WORKER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Worker Assistance Program was put in place to assist workers who have been displaced directly as a result of the implementation of the "Protecting Our Old Growth Forests" policy. The values behind and aim of the program has been to assist workers to move on into new livelihoods, with as little disruption to their lives and communities as possible.

The package of assistance available has consisted of a range of components. For each eligible worker these include:

- The “flexible package” of up to \$10,000 worth of assistance made up of:
 - \$5000 for retraining,
 - \$3000 for employer incentives in the form of wage subsidies,
 - \$2000 for job search and relocation expense reimbursement.
- Workers could also apply to use this “flexible package” to assist in setting up small business ventures where it could be shown that their business idea was likely to be viable.
- A “participation allowance” of up to \$1000 specifically to attend the two week post-redundancy training course.
- Up to \$5000 for Mortgage and Rent relief in cases of financial hardship.
- Top-up redundancy payment recognising up to 27 years of continuous service to the WA native hardwood timber industry.
- Job search assistance and support via the Forest Liaison Officers and their support staff.
- Free counselling support to displaced workers and their families.
- Access to the above package of assistance for two years from date of redundancy.

Small business proprietors who had received Business Exit Assistance could also apply to access up to \$5000 retraining and \$2000 jobsearch/relocation assistance, prior to 30 June 2004.

Eligibility for the Worker Assistance Program was as follows:

- The worker must have worked in the WA native hardwood timber industry for 9 of the 18 months prior to 1 March 2001. (For most workers this would mean their entry to the industry would have to have been prior to 1 June 2000.)
- The worker must have been employed for at least 19 hours per week.
- The worker must have been made redundant by a business which had been adversely affected as a result of the implementation of the “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” Policy.
- Redundant workers had to apply within 12 months of redundancy and before 30 June 2004.

For workers made redundant who had entered the industry after 1 June 2000 and before 1 March 2001, a separate package of assistance was made available. Called “Career Restart”, this program provided eligible workers up to \$5000 retraining and \$2000 jobsearch/relocation assistance, accessible for 12 months from date of redundancy.

Workers made redundant who entered the industry after 1 March 2001 are not eligible for any funding assistance, but are provided with job search support and assistance by the Forest Liaison Officers.

6.1 Administration of the Worker Assistance Program

The Department of Training (now Department of Education and Training) was charged with the task of administering the Worker Assistance Program. Forest Liaison Officers were appointed to administer the program on the ground and to assist the displaced workers to access the assistance, and Forest Liaison Officer staffing levels have been responsive to the demand at the time.

For ease of administration, two regions were established, and Forest Liaison Officers located in each region. The Southwest Region generally included the lower south west and great southern regions, and the Northern Region included the greater Perth Metropolitan area, the Peel Region, and the Wheatbelt. The Southwest office was located primarily in the Timber Industry Restructure Assistance Centre in Manjimup, and the Northern Office was located in East Victoria Park, Perth. The financial administration of the program has been handled from the Department’s Royal Street Headquarters.

An essential aspect of the role of the Forest Liaison Officers was to make sure workers facing possible redundancy would be aware of the package of assistance which was in place to assist them, and how the eligibility worked. The Forest Liaison Officers had no control over when the redundancies would take place, but did a lot of work with workers and their families to explore their options prior to the impending redundancies. The Forest Liaison Officers would negotiate with employers for access to the workers prior to redundancy, in an effort to ensure that workers knew what

assistance would be in place for them, to help them to determine their eligibility, and to help to minimise the uncertainty of what lay ahead post-redundancy.

Despite concerns being voiced about possible massive dislocation of timber workers and large scale entrenched unemployment, this has not occurred. Just over 700 workers have been made redundant, with 60% of these in the Southwest region and the remaining 40% in the Northern region. These redundancies have rolled out over a 3.5 year period, and this time frame has assisted in the continual take-up of workers entering the labour market.

7 RESPONDING TO A CHANGING LABOUR MARKET

The fact that the majority of timber workers are mature aged (see Figure 1) would in itself have implications for those workers who have lost their jobs as a result of the implementation of the Policy. It would also shape the approach of the Worker Assistance Program staff on the ground, administering the program.

The industry is characterised by workers who have spent many years in the timber industry – an industry which has operated primarily with industrial practices which are no longer common in many other industries. Consequently, many of the displaced timber workers have never had to undertake a job interview, have never had a written resume and have up to this point maintained the expectation that “the only real job is a full-time job”.

These factors alone would see many of the displaced timber workers disadvantaged in the labour market unless they were better prepared for the competitive “New World of Work” - which most benefits those who have skills in self-marketing, who have an understanding of the transferability of their skills, who understand the impacts of globalisation, who know how to understand the labour market, and who have a flexible approach to employment opportunities.

7.1 Preparation through post redundancy training

It was built into the Worker Assistance Package that eligible workers would have access to a 2 week post-redundancy training course, which would help to build their understanding of the New World of Work and to open them up to the possibilities and work opportunities which are out there beyond the rapidly disappearing traditional employment patterns.

At June 30, 2004 more than 330 workers have participated in the post redundancy training course, and many of these have been enabled to move into new livelihoods to which they previously would not have thought possible for themselves.

7.2 Skills recognition

In recognition that the industry had a high proportion of skilled workers who often had no formal qualifications, a separate program was put in place and conducted industry-wide in parallel to the Worker Assistance Program, to address this matter. Through the Recognition of Current Competency process, timber workers had the opportunity to have their workplace skills and experience converted into tickets and qualifications - assisting in the transition into new workplaces.

7.3 Retraining for new industries or work opportunities

The variety of training accessed by the workers has been enormous, reflecting the diverse variety of directions in which these workers have moved beyond the timber industry. In the southwest, approximately 200 eligible workers have accessed retraining allocations from their assistance packages. In the northern region, approximately 150 have accessed retraining, also taking up the opportunity to undertake specific retraining. Many of these people have undertaken a number of training courses to gain a suite of tickets and qualifications to increase their employability. Others have undertaken training in order to gain specific employment opportunities.

The allocation of \$5000 per eligible worker, combined with a two year time frame of access provides a level of resourcing which is very functional and useful to displaced workers. Some workers have also successfully applied to use part of their retraining funds to purchase essential equipment and tools which they require to work in their new lines of employment.

No workers are forced to do training of any kind. Working from a Career Development model, the Forest Liaison Officers work with the eligible workers, assisting them to choose their own training and timeframes.

7.4 Job search support and the role of the Forest Liaison Officers

The role of the Forest Liaison Officer (FLO) is central to the success and effectiveness of the Worker Assistance Program. It is the task of the FLO to help prepare the workers for redundancy, to assist the worker to understand the assistance package available and to access that assistance, and it is up to the FLO to maintain contact with the worker for the duration of the program. Operating on a holistic case management model, the FLO provides basic counselling, referrals to other services, career guidance, advocacy, encouragement, and a good understanding of the labour market and job search techniques.

7.5 Moving into new livelihoods

The Worker Assistance Program has as its priority, assistance for displaced workers to move into new livelihoods with as little disruption to their lives as possible.

Between 1 March 2001 and 1 August 2004, over 700 native hardwood timber industry workers were made redundant. Of these, there were 685 displaced workers who were eligible for assistance, and their livelihood status has been tracked periodically.

Table 1: Eligible Displaced Worker New Livelihood Status, at 30 June 2004

Livelihood category	Southwest Region	Northern Region	Combined Total
Full-time	158	143	301
Part-time	23	16	39
Casual	38	7	45
Temporary work	0	1	1
Self-employed	85	46	131
Unemployed	13	44	57*
Disabilities Pension	9	10	19
Not fit for work	15	5	20
Retired	11	12	23
Semi-retired	2	7	9
Training/studies	6	8	14
Home Duties/Carer	4	12	16
Travelling/Holidays	0	3	3
Deceased	1	3	4
Voluntary Work	0	1	1
Work Experience	2	0	2
Totals:	367	318	685

* NOTE: The high number of unemployed workers at 30 June 2004 reflects the fact that there was a wave of redundancies (over 30 people) during April-June 2004. It is not unusual for workers to take 3 or 4 months to move into new livelihoods after being made redundant. In this time they are often doing training, exploring their options, taking a holiday, or just having a break while they prepare for serious job search or new employment – however they still appear in the statistics as unemployed, even if they are not actively looking for work.

It is interesting to note the number of workers who post-redundancy have moved into retirement, semi-retirement, disability pensions, or are not fit for work. This is primarily a reflection of the age of the workforce. As Figure 1 shows, two thirds of the workers in the industry are aged over 40.

The high number of workers moving into self-employment reflects the realities of the labour market, where the areas of strong employment growth are in business and domestic service industries. However, another aspect of the New World of Work is the reality of people having several income streams. A number of the workers have more than one income source (for example they may have a full-time job through the week but also do some casual work on the weekends). In Table 1, only the main livelihood for each worker is recorded, so unfortunately mixed income sources are not reflected in this table.

Living with being made redundant is never easy, and is often accompanied by grief and a sense of loss. For mature aged workers from traditional industries, this often includes a sense of loss of role definition and personal identity. After 40 years of accelerating change to the WA native hardwood timber industry, by March 2001 there were very few communities in WA which were solely dependent on native timbers for employment and a sense of collective identity. Throughout the forests debate there was a sense of a threat to identity for timber communities and timber workers brought about by further impending changes to the industry. However, as explained previously these rural communities have been affected by a convergence of a wide range of factors beyond the timber industry. This has served to soften the blow for many timber workers, as they have been aware that they are not the only ones facing change. Their families and communities have been engaged in other industries for some years, including agriculture, viticulture and tourism. This mix of reliance by communities and families on a range of industries has enabled these communities to survive as each industry has undergone difficult times. This has also enabled redundant timber workers to more readily move into other industries and occupations outside of the timber industry. While this transition has not been easy for everyone, this limited dependence of communities on timber alone has helped to reduce the sense of a loss of identity, and most timber workers have readily forged for themselves new identities and roles in a changing world.

A significant number of the workers have damaged their backs and knees through many years of very heavy lifting. For these it has often been a relief to be forced to have to reconsider the type of work which they are subjecting their bodies to. Many workers have resolved to do lighter duties, and have had to adjust their thinking and often undertake training to assist in this regard. Redundancy has been the catalyst which has enabled many to change their direction and look after their bodies better.

The success of the Assistance Program and the resilience of the workers is reflected in the fact that most people have moved readily into new livelihoods. Those who are struggling are provided intensive assistance by the Forest Liaison Officers and on-going support in an effort to help them deal with the barriers to employment.

8 CONCLUSION

The current restructure of the WA native hardwood timber industry, which has come about through the implementation of the “Protecting Our Old Growth Forests” Policy, is no isolated event. This historically significant WA industry has been characterised throughout its century and a half of existence as one continually grappling with change – often reluctantly and not without turmoil and pain. While being pivotal to the economic development of the south west of the state, it has also left with us a rich cultural and social heritage.

The timber industry is not dead – but it is changing. Significantly. In this rapidly changing world of globalisation, market forces, capital intensive industry, changing employment patterns, and ever deepening scientific understandings, nothing is for certain, and nothing is forever. There is one exception to this of course – the tenacity and strength of the human spirit.

The people of the native hardwood timber industry in Western Australia - the workers, their families and their communities - have demonstrated a resilience and resourcefulness which has enabled them to move on and accept the change, with most moving successfully into new livelihoods. The Worker Assistance Program has been a very valuable tool which has successfully enabled the vast majority of timber workers to move on into new and exciting futures.

As the anger of facing imposed change has subsided, there is many a timber worker who has stated that being made redundant was the best thing that ever happened to them ...

REFERENCES

- Cresswell, Gail J. 1889. *The Light of Leeuwin Augusta*. Western Australia: Augusta Margaret River Shire History Group
- Coakes Consulting 2002. *Socio-Economic Assessment of the Forest Management Plan* (August 2002). Perth, Western Australia: Prepared for Conservation Commission and Forest Products Commission.
- Government of Western Australia 2004. *Forest Industry Statement* (January 2004). Perth, Western Australia: Government of Western Australia.
- Government of Western Australia 2001. *Protecting Our Old Growth Forests Policy* (February 2001). Perth, Western Australia: Government of Western Australia.

