

# Identifying & profiling potential FIFO workers

*Perspectives from Far North Queensland*



## Summary Report

January 2013

An Initiative of the Cairns FIFO Coordinator Project

*Funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education*



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## **Identifying & profiling potential FIFO workers**

Perspectives from Far North Queensland

Summary Report

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SkillsDMC, with its project partner Advance Cairns, commissioned The Cairns Institute at James Cook University to undertake two components of research to better understand the strengths and capability of the existing and the potential FIFO workforce based in the Cairns region. JCU would like to acknowledge the support of these organisations, and a group of devoted JCU students who assisted in data collection. Without their support and expertise this project would not have eventuated.

## **Disclaimer**

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## Executive summary

This report presents the findings from an online survey which sought to determine the demographic characteristics, qualifications, experience and current employment status of workers in the Far North Queensland region who are interested in Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO) work. In addition, it aimed to ascertain the level of interest these potential workers had in FIFO work and possible barriers faced in becoming part of the FIFO community. It was anticipated that this information would be able to provide a good indication of the capacity of the potential FIFO workforce and to determine how to facilitate entry for these workers into FIFO work.

Information sessions were held by SkillsDMC so as to create awareness among people in the Cairns region who may be interested in FIFO work about this research and the online survey. These sessions were held in November 2012 in Innisfail (12<sup>th</sup>, 53 attendees), Malanda (13<sup>th</sup>, 30 attendees), Mareeba (15<sup>th</sup>, 45 attendees), and Cairns (20<sup>th</sup>, 208 attendees). Following the awareness campaigns, the online survey was made available for the months of November and December 2012, during which time 213 respondents participated. The online survey was designed and administered by JCU researchers in consultation with SkillsDMC.

The demographic profile showed that respondents were predominantly employed (76.5%) with almost one third (31.48%) having worked in their current job for between three and ten years in key industries such as mining (16%), construction (16%) and government (16%). The largest proportion of the potential FIFO workers (32.4%) noted their occupations as technicians and trade workers with 18.9% indicating they are professionals, 15.5% managers and 14.2% machinery operators and drivers.

The interest in FIFO work was overwhelming with 95.4% indicating that they were 'Interested' or 'Very interested' with the majority showing a ranked preference to work in Far North Queensland (91.2%), Northwest Queensland (79.6%), Central Queensland (70.7%), and Northern Territory (70.7%). The main reason advanced for the interest in FIFO work is primarily related to the pay and conditions, followed by rosters and time off, then by opportunities to up skill and retrain.

To date, approaches utilised by potential FIFO workers in seeking FIFO work have mainly included checking of online career pages (26.5%) and subscription to automatic notification of jobs from online career or company sites (21.5%). Job opportunities for potential FIFO workers seem favourable with one third of respondents (32.5%) having previously worked in a FIFO role with 24 respondents reporting having spent more than three years in a FIFO role; and, with 65.7% of respondents having previously worked in remote communities. Factors impacting on willingness to be deployed were majorly related to 'travel time' (64.7%) and 'conditions' (64.7%), with other factors being 'site' (50.0%), 'period of employment' (50.0%) and 'roster' (47.1%).

Demographically, respondents principally lived in Cairns (62.9%) with 98.2% of respondents living within two hours driving distance from the Cairns Airport. The potential FIFO workers included 24.8% females and 75.2% males, with the majority (81.7%) of respondents aged between 30 and 59 years. Further to this, 64.8% were in a relationship and 63.6% did not have children.

All-in-all, the results indicate that there is capacity within the Cairns region to build a strong and capable workforce to accommodate the needs of the mining and oil and gas sectors. Potentially, the findings suggest that there is good prospect for Cairns to increase its status as a FIFO hub. However, further research is required to ascertain the full implications of such a venture with consideration to families, communities, local business, governments and others impacted by FIFO work.

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## 1. Introduction

In September 2009, the Australian Government announced the establishment of the National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce (NRSET) to develop a comprehensive plan to meet the skills needs (at that time) of more than 75 major resources projects expected to commence in Australia over the following five years. The Cairns Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) Coordinator initiative arose from Recommendation 5.4 from the NRSET report and forms part of the National Resource Sector Workforce Strategy launched in March 2011 by the Commonwealth Government. The Cairns FIFO Coordinator Project is being funded by the Commonwealth Government over two years as a pilot project, to develop links between resources projects in remote locations and skilled workers, including local unemployed job-seekers. SkillsDMC launched the Cairns FIFO Coordinator Project in November 2011.

A core objective of the project is to identify the potential FIFO workforce in the Cairns region and to establish a pathway to link this workforce to mining, construction and infrastructure jobs required by existing and emerging resources projects in northern and western Australia. SkillsDMC commissioned The Cairns Institute at James Cook University to undertake research which would help the Project partners, the Commonwealth Government and the region better understand the existing FIFO workforce in the Cairns region, and to identify the skills and experience of job-seekers who have potential to join the FIFO workforce.

To date, there is scant research examining the level of interest amongst workers in local regional communities (such as Cairns) in becoming FIFO workers; there has been little that identifies profiles of potential FIFO workers and their capacity to become FIFO workers; and, limited data that reveals barriers to entry for workers interested in FIFO. Insights into each of these aspects of FIFO work are useful in the development of regional hubs to service the mines with competent, capable and experienced workers. Much of the research focuses on areas outside of Far North Queensland. Hence, gaining data particular to the region and which identifies the specific needs of the region is critical if servicing of the mines by a local workforce is to be achieved.

This report presents key findings from a study of potential FIFO workers in a sample of individuals from Far North Queensland. This report seeks to provide insights into how best to manage the emerging working life of a FIFO worker. It aims to inform individuals, organisations, communities, and governments in the development of policies and practices which will provide sustainable partnerships for all stakeholders.

The objectives of this study were to: (1) identify and profile potential FIFO workers by determining their demographic characteristics, qualifications, experience and current employment status; (2) ascertain the level of interest these workers have in FIFO work; and, (3) determine possible barriers faced by individuals in becoming part of the FIFO community. The structure of this report is consistent with addressing each of these objectives progressively.

This report on the FIFO workforce in Cairns should be read in conjunction with its companion report, *FIFO workforce in Cairns: Perspectives from Cairns based FIFO workers employed in North-West QLD and Groote Eylandt in NT* (January 2013).

## 2. Methodology

This study focused on potential workers in Far North Queensland living in the Cairns region, extending to Innisfail in the south, Mareeaba in the west, and Cairns itself as the most northern point (see Figure 1). In reviewing options on how to proceed with this study, it was decided that an online survey would work best to capture a more extensive area around the Cairns region of Far North Queensland, hosted on the website [www.fifocairns.com.au](http://www.fifocairns.com.au).

Awareness of the online survey was achieved by way of information sessions conducted by SkillsDMC and Advance Cairns during November of 2012. These sessions targeted people who may be interested in FIFO work and were held in Cairns, Mareeaba, Innisfail and Malanda (see Figure 1). The survey was open for November and December of 2012, allowing for maximum opportunity for interested FIFO workers to partake. A steady response rate to the online survey persisted throughout this period but peaks in responses corresponded with the information sessions. In all 213 surveys were attempted with participants responding to all questions as relevant to them. For example, some questions such as Q7 (How long have you been out of paid work?) referred only to respondents who answered 'No' to Q6.

The online survey was designed by JCU researchers in consultation with SkillsDMC and Advance Cairns; and administered by JCU researchers using Qualtrics Online Survey Software (see Appendix 1). Data was collated and analysed by JCU researchers and is presented in the following sections under the themes of: Demographics of Potential FIFO Workers; Current Employment Status of Potential FIFO Workers; Qualifications and Experience of Potential FIFO Workers; and, Interest in FIFO Work.



**Figure 1: Map of Cairns Region**

Source: <http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/region/tourist-information/maps>

## Part 1: Demographics of potential FIFO workers

### Gender

The sample of respondents was predominantly male (75.3%), with only one quarter (24.8%) being female (see Table 1). These statistics are consistent with studies which show women working in the mining industry are a minority. Pirota (2009) explored the experiences of women working in a FIFO capacity and reported that there were positive attractions for women (e.g. financial security, career advancement, sense of adventure, work satisfaction, sense of belonging, and enduring friendships). Conversely, she found that amongst the challenges there were aspects which related to working in an environment which was male-dominated including: coping with male mine site behaviour, being the focus of attention, coping with discrimination and harassment, lack of female contact, lack of privacy, and having to prove themselves. These findings inform recommendations for companies recruiting FIFO workers in ensuring the well-being of all workers, with particular attention to attitudes towards females.

**Table 1: Gender of potential FIFO workers**

Gender		Response	%
Female		41	24.8%
Male		124	75.2%
	Total	165	100.0%

### Age

In relation to age, Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents (81.7%) were between 30 and 59 years old with a marginal 10.3% aged between 20 and 29, and minority aged under 20 (2.4%) and '60 to 65' (5.5%). With a government focus on 'Earn and Learn' the underrepresentation of respondents aged under 20 years of age is not surprising. Equally, despite the ageing workforce, it is reasonable that there is also an underrepresentation of the over 60s because of the demands of FIFO work.

Carter and Kaczmarek (2009) examined the impacts of FIFO lifestyle on males aged between 18 and 28 years old and found that while they were enjoyed the lifestyle and associated benefits, there were considerable challenges relating to their self-identity, relationships and the FIFO lifestyle, all of which were characteristic of other FIFO workers. Hence, within the lure of FIFO work there are considerations for the psychosocial impacts of the FIFO lifestyle across all age groups. The unique challenges presented by FIFO work can affect individuals' performance and psychological well-being. Importantly, Carter and Kaczmarek (2009) found that the right attitude was important for FIFO workers in effectively coping with the lifestyle and its challenges and being able to engage with this work over a long period of time. These are worthy considerations for recruitment of future FIFO workers.

**Table 2: Ages of potential FIFO workers**

Age Groups		Response	%
Under 20		4	2.4%
20 to 29		17	10.3%
30 to 39		38	23.0%
40 to 49		56	33.9%
50 to 59		41	24.8%
60 to 65		9	5.5%
Older than 65		0	0.0%
Total		165	100.0%

### Citizenship & Indigenous representation

Further results, showed that respondents were overwhelmingly Australian citizens (98.8%) with 10.9% representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Tables 3 & 4). In general, the Indigenous labour force is considerably smaller than the non-Indigenous workforce. Hence, the results appear to be indicative of the survey participation. In recent times, Australian mining companies have made a concerted effort to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Brereton & Parmenter, 2008; Taylor & Scambary). The provision of employment opportunities for indigenous people has been variable but research indicates that the potential for positive outcomes is high. Hence, it is positive to see participation in this survey by indigenous people and their interest should be pursued.

**Table 3: Citizenship of potential FIFO workers**

Australian Citizen		Response	%
Yes		163	98.8%
No		2	1.2%
Total		165	100.0%

**Table 4: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander potential FIFO workers**

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Response	%
Yes		18	10.9%
No		147	89.1%
Total		165	100.0%

### Marital status & children

Relationship issues are often targeted as areas of major concern for FIFO workers, with information indicating that FIFO has a negative effect on relationships (Gent, 2004; Voysey, 2012). The literature identifies various factors which impact on relationships: rosters, stress and support received (Beach, Brereton, & Cliff, 2003). More recently, research is revealing that relationship satisfaction is similar between FIFO workers and/or partners and the general population (Voysey, 2012). However, studies are showing that “the presence of children in the home of FIFO workers and partners increases the risk of relationship stress” (Voysey, 2012, p. 13). It seems that FIFO couples with children under five years of age experience the greatest stress (Gent, 2004; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Voysey, 2012).

In this study, the majority of respondents (64.8%) were in a relationship, with the largest proportion of these potential FIFO workers (40.0%) being married (Table 5). The number of respondents without children (63.6%) was much higher than those with children (36.4%) (Table 6). It can be argued that perhaps perceptions of prospective FIFO workers are influenced by stories emerging from trends noted in research such as that described above. In this case, the data here is not surprising and potential FIFO workers in relationships are willing to engage with FIFO work but those with children are more reluctant to do so. However, further research would be needed to explore this possibility more fully.

**Table 5: Marital status of potential FIFO workers**

Marital Status		Response	%
Single		58	35.2%
Married		66	40.0%
In a relationship		41	24.8%
Total		165	100.0%

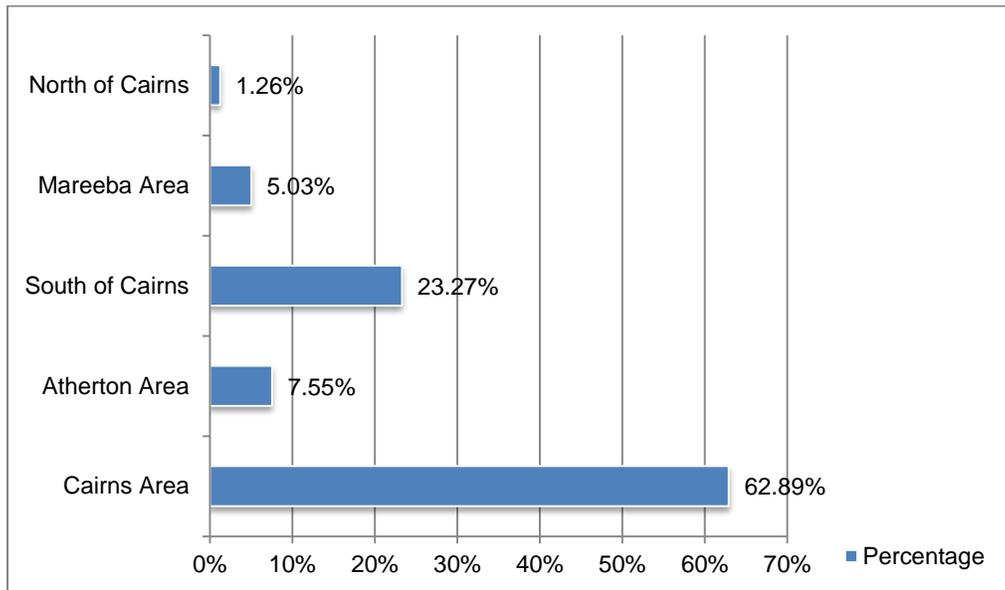
**Table 6: Dependent children of potential FIFO workers**

Dependent Children	Response	%
No	105	63.6%
Yes. How many?	60	36.4%
Total	165	100.0%

Yes. How many?	Frequency
1	22
2	24
3	14

### Location of potential FIFO workers

Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents were from the Cairns region (62.9%), with just under a quarter (23.3%) from the South of Cairns area. There was one respondent from the Gold Coast and another from Victoria but neither of these are included in the results below (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Location of potential FIFO workers**

These results are consistent with responses to the question: 'What is your driving distance to Cairns Airport? Most of the respondents (70.3%) indicated that they are within one hour's drive from the Cairns Airport, with 98.2% being within two hours' drive (Table 7).

**Table 7: Driving distance to Cairns Airport**

Driving distance to Cairns Airport		Response	%
Less than 1 hour		116	70.3%
1 to 2 hours		46	27.9%
2 to 3 hours		0	0.0%
More than 3 hours		3	1.8%
Total		165	100.0%

## Part 2: Current employment status of potential FIFO workers

Survey participants were asked whether they were currently employed. Out of 200 respondents, 76.5% (153) indicated that they were currently employed (Table 8).

**Table 8: Current employment status of respondents**

Answer		Response	%
Yes		153	76.5%
No		47	23.5%
Total		200	100.0%

Of the respondents who stated that they were currently unemployed, 84.8% said that they had been in paid work (Table 9) and 15.2% had never been in paid work. The majority of those respondents who had previously been in paid work (33 respondents, 86.8%) indicated that they had been out of work for six months or less, two other had been out of work for just under one year, and the rest had been out of paid work for two years, three years and six years, respectively.

**Table 9: Paid work previously**

Paid work previously		Response	%
Yes		39	84.8%
No		7	15.2%
Total		46	100.0%

Of the respondents who indicated that they are currently employed (Table 8), 143 (67.1%) provided an indication of how long they have been working in their current job (Table 10). Nearly half of the respondents (46.16%) had been working their current job for less than three years. About one third of respondents (31.48%) had worked in their current job for between three and ten years; and almost 12% had been in their current job for between 10 and 15 years.

**Table 10: Length of employment in current job**

Number of years	Percentage	Frequency	% of respondents
<1		30	20.98
1-<2		18	12.59
2-<3		18	12.59
3-<4		7	4.90
4-<5		5	3.50
5-<6		12	8.39
6-<7		9	6.29
7-<8		6	4.20
8-<10		6	4.20
10-<15		17	11.89
15-20		9	6.29
>20-<35		6	4.20
Total		143	100%

## Current industry of work

Respondents were asked: What industry are you working in? Results indicated that they work in all sorts of industries, providing potential to fill a wide range of positions in the mining industry (Table 11). Equal proportions (16% per each industry) worked in mining, construction and 'government, administration, defence'. The next largest industry representations were manufacturing (8.0%) and retail (6.7%).

**Table 11: Current industry of work**

Industry	Response	%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5	3.3%
Mining	24	16.0%
Manufacturing	12	8.0%
Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	2	1.3%
Construction	24	16.0%
Wholesale Trade	2	1.3%
Retail trade	10	6.7%
Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants	8	5.3%
Transport and Storage	7	4.7%
Communication Services	2	1.3%
Finance and Insurance	2	1.3%
Property and Business Services	3	2.0%
Government Administration & Defence	24	16.0%
Education	7	4.7%
Health and Community Services	8	5.3%
Cultural and Recreational Services	6	4.0%
Personal and other related services	4	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Current occupation

Further to the current industry of work, respondents indicated that the largest proportion of them (32.4%) were technicians and trades workers (Table 12). Following that occupation, 18.9% were professional, 15.5% managers, and 14.2% machinery operators and drivers.

**Table 12: Current occupation**

Occupation	Response	%
Manager	23	15.5%
Professional	28	18.9%
Technician and Trades Worker	48	32.4%
Community and Personal Service Worker	8	5.4%
Clerical and Administrative Worker	8	5.4%
Sales Worker	7	4.7%
Machinery Operator and Driver	21	14.2%
Labourer	5	3.4%
Total	151	100.0%

## Current tenure

Almost three quarters of respondents were employed in ongoing, full-time employment (Table 13). Less than one percent of the respondents were unemployed and seeking work. Almost twenty percent (19.1%) were employed as either casual or ongoing, part-time.

**Table 13: Current tenure**

Current tenure	Response	%
Employed on ongoing basis - working full-time	107	70.4%
Employed on ongoing basis - working part-time	10	6.6%
Employed on fixed term contract	15	9.9%
Employed on casual basis	19	12.5%
Unemployed but looking for work	1	0.7%
Total	152	100.0%

## Been looking for work

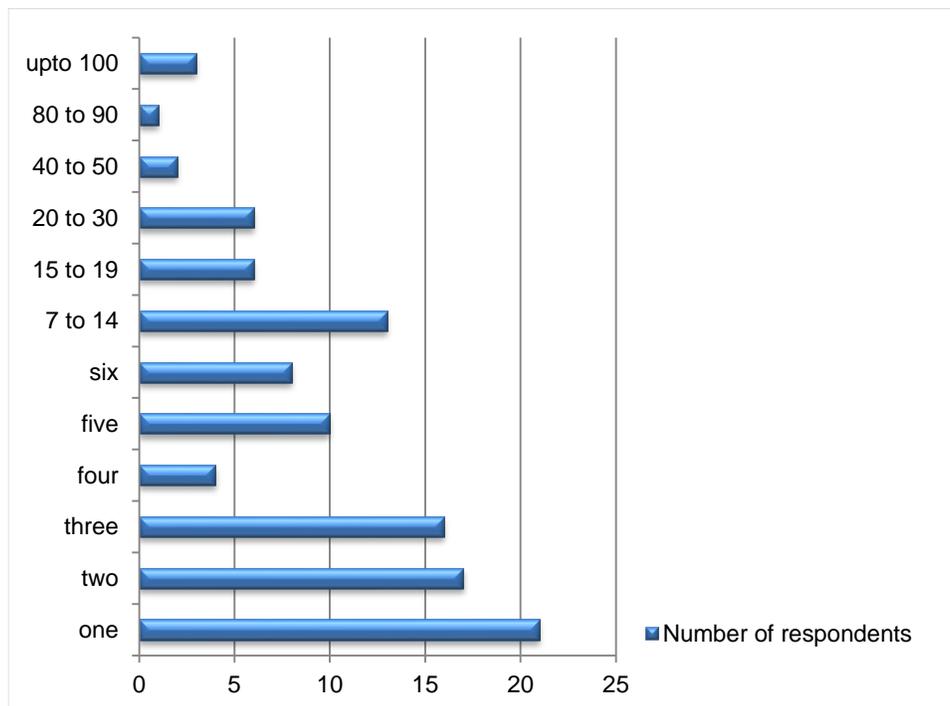
In order to gauge the pool of potential FIFO workers, respondents were asked to indicate if they had been seeking work in the previous four weeks. Interestingly, almost three quarters (70.8%) replied in the affirmative (Table 14).

**Table 14: Been looking for work**

Been looking for work in previous four weeks	Response	%
Yes	136	70.8%
No	56	29.2%
Total	192	100.0%

## Number of applications lodged

One way to gauge the seriousness of respondents in seeking FIFO employment was to determine the number of applications lodged by respondents in the past three months for FIFO positions. Figure 3 presents the results for 'Number of applications lodged' (vertical axis) against 'Number of respondents' (horizontal axis). The results show that 21 respondents had lodged at least one application in the past three months, with 76 respondents lodging up to six applications. Further to this, the results for interest in FIFO work were of interest and these are reported in the next section.



**Figure 3: Number of applications lodged**

## Part 3: Interest in FIFO work

### Interested in FIFO work

The majority of respondents (95.4%) indicated that they were 'Interested' or 'Very interested' in working in the mining or oil and gas sectors on a Fly-In, Fly-Out basis (Table 15).

**Table 15: Interest in FIFO work**

Interested in FIFO work		Response	%
Very interested		162	83.1%
Interested		24	12.3%
Vaguely interested		3	1.5%
Not interested		6	3.1%
Total		195	100.0%

### Willingness to be deployed anywhere in Australia

Further to this, three quarters of respondents (74.9%) indicated that if they were to be successful in applying for a FIFO job, they would be willing to be deployed anywhere in Australia (Table 16). Some respondents (19.9%) indicated that they may be interested and this depended on several reasons.

**Table 16: Deployed anywhere in Australia**

Deployed anywhere in Australia		Response	%
Yes		143	74.9%
Maybe		38	19.9%
No		10	5.2%
Total		191	100.0%

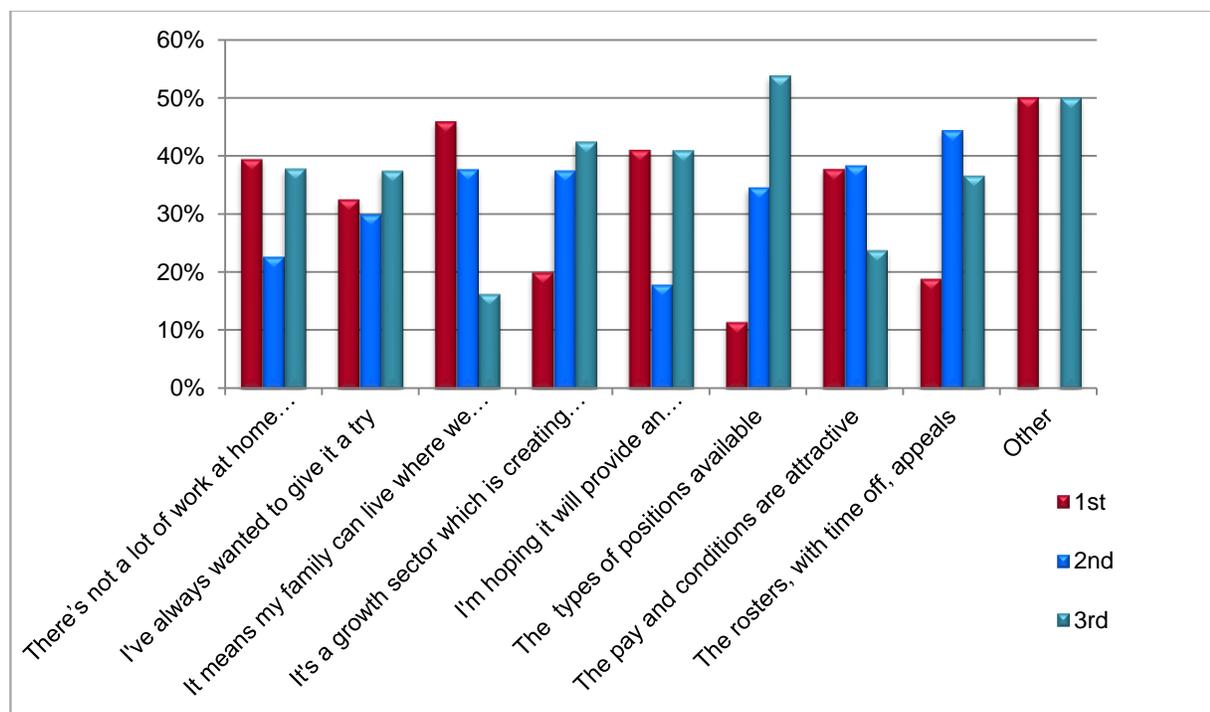
Table 17 shows that reasons for 'maybe' willing to be deployed anywhere in Australia were predominantly dependent on 'travel time' (64.7%) and 'conditions' (64.7%), with other factors being 'site' (50.0%), 'period of employment' (50.0%) and 'roster' (47.1%).

**Table 17: Factors impacting on willingness to be deployed**

Deployment depends on	Response	%
Travel time	22	64.7%
Roster	16	47.1%
Conditions	22	64.7%
Site	17	50.0%
Period of employment	17	50.0%
Other	1	2.9%

**Reasons for interest in FIFO work**

Figure 4 presents rankings for interest in FIFO work with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> preferences noted. From Figure 4 it can be seen that when asked to rank reasons for their interest in FIFO, most respondents indicated that their main reason was “The pay and conditions are attractive” (138 main rankings), followed by the appeal of “The rosters, with time off” (90 main rankings), then “I’m hoping it will provide an opportunity for me to up-skill or retrain” (78 main rankings), “There’s not a lot of work at home currently” (66 main ranking), and “It means my family can live where we want to live with access to things that suit our lifestyle” (61 rankings). Factors other than those listed in Figure 4 which potential FIFO workers listed included: “general interest in geological settings”, “have tertiary qualifications and 5+ years’ experience in mining”, “future investment towards my superannuation”, and “stable long term employment”.



**Figure 4: Rankings for reasons for interest in FIFO work**

## Ways of seeking FIFO work

In order to ascertain how potential FIFO workers were seeking employment in the mining industry, respondents were asked to tick an option from Table 18 which best described them. The largest proportion of respondents (26.5%) stated that they “Regularly check positions vacant in online career pages”; an almost similar portion of respondents (21.5%) indicated that they “subscribe to automatic notifications of jobs from online careers pages and/or company sites”. These findings provide a good indication of the best possible approaches for mining companies to use when advertising to recruit employees.

**Table 18: Ways of actively seeking FIFO work**

Actively seeking FIFO work		Response	%
Occasionally look at positions vacant in the newspaper		22	12.2%
Regularly check positions vacant in the newspaper		19	10.5%
Occasionally look at positions vacant in online careers pages (e.g. CareerOne, Seek)		28	15.5%
Regularly check positions vacant in online careers pages (e.g. CareerOne, Seek)		48	26.5%
Occasionally look at positions vacant on resource company websites		15	8.3%
Regularly check positions vacant on resource company websites		10	5.5%
I subscribe to automatic notifications of jobs from online careers pages and/or company sites		39	21.5%
Total		181	100.0%

## Preferred geographical regions for FIFO work

In a further effort to ascertain how best to attract FIFO workers, respondents were asked to indicate the geographical regions they would consider going to as a FIFO worker. Table 19 shows that by far the most preferred region for FIFO work was Far North Queensland (91.2%). Following this, preferred regions were Northwest Queensland (79.6%), Central Queensland (70.7%), Northern Territory (70.7%), and Northwest Western Australia (55.2%). Eight respondents stated that they would go ‘anywhere’, three noted ‘PNG’, and two said ‘Australia’.

**Table 19: Preferred region for work**

Preferred region for FIFO work		Response	%
Far North Queensland		165	91.2%
Northwest Queensland		144	79.6%
Central Queensland		128	70.7%
Northern Territory		128	70.7%
Northwest Western Australian (Pilbara/Kimberleys)		100	55.2%
Other		30	16.6%

Having gained an insight into the demographic profile of potential FIFO workers and an understanding of their current employment status, and having determined that there is a keen interest in FIFO work, it was important to ascertain the level of qualifications and experience of potential FIFO workers. With such information, it would then be possible to establish the capacity of potential FIFO workers to undertake FIFO work and what organisations can do to facilitate their entry into FIFO work. The next section presents findings on the qualifications and experience of potential FIFO workers.

## Part 4: Qualifications & experience of potential FIFO workers

### Education & qualifications

In terms of education, the largest proportion of potential FIFO workers (36.2%) had a Trade Certificate IV, with 15.8% having completed at least Year 10, 7.3% Year 12 and 7.3% a Bachelor degree (Table 20).

**Table 20: Highest level of education**

#	Highest level of Education	Response	%
1	Year 10	28	15.8%
2	Year 12	13	7.3%
3	General Certificate II or III (non-trade), specify	25	14.1%
4	Trade Certificate IV, specify	64	36.2%
5	Advanced Diploma or Diploma, specify	21	11.9%
6	Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate, specify	6	3.4%
7	Bachelor Degree, specify	13	7.3%
8	Postgraduate degree, specify	7	4.0%
	Total	177	100.0%

Table 21 shows that nearly half of the respondents (43.7%) had substantial experience in a particular trade area but had never received formal or recognised qualifications. Of these 24 respondents had experience in “Heavy Fabrication or Boilermaker or Pipefitter or Welder”, 19 “mechanical fitter”, and 18 in “carpentry or formwork”. This indicates potential for approximately half of those surveyed to be employed through mature-age programs such as the National Apprenticeships Program, which facilitates employment of people using their substantive competencies, and by putting them through a process to recognise prior learning and gain formal qualifications in an expedited manner.

**Table 21: Area of substantial experience without formal recognised qualifications**

Area of experience (without qualification)	Completed 2+ years as apprentice but never finished trade	Worked as trades assistant for 4+ years	Completed trade qualifications overseas	Have trade aligned to one listed	Ex-Defence with aligned qualifications	
Electrical Fitter Mechanic	15.4%	15.4%	15.4%	46.2%	7.7%	13
Diesel Fitter	28.6%	7.1%	14.3%	28.6%	21.4%	14
Carpentry/Formwork	27.8%	22.2%	5.6%	33.3%	11.1%	18
Heavy Fabrication or Boilermaker or Pipefitter or Welder	8.3%	37.5%	4.2%	41.7%	8.3%	24
Dual Trade Electrical or Instrumentation	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	5
Mechanical Fitter	15.8%	31.6%	5.3%	36.8%	10.5%	19
TOTAL						93

## Tickets & licences

Also, some respondents indicated that they hold mobile plant operator tickets or licences (Table 22). Of these, the largest proportion (37.9%) had forklift licences, with an almost similar percentage holding heavy rigid licences (32.5%), and medium rigid licences (27.2%).

**Table 21: Tickets or Licences held by potential FIFO workers**

#	Ticket or Licence	Yes	No
1	Backhoe	6.5%	93.5%
2	Crane	5.9%	94.1%
3	Dozer	6.5%	93.5%
4	Forklift	37.9%	62.1%
5	Grader	5.3%	94.7%
6	Medium Rigid	27.2%	72.8%
7	Heavy Rigid	32.5%	67.5%
8	Other	34.9%	65.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	169 respondents		

In relation to other tickets, a 'confined space' qualification was common with 45 respondents indicating they had one such ticket (Table 23). Similarly, other common qualifications included 'elevated work platform' (37 respondents), 'general induction metalliferous surface' (39 respondents) and 'fire-fighting' (37 respondents).

**Table 22: Other tickets or licences**

#	Other tickets or licences	Have Ticket or Licence
1	General Induction Metalliferous Surface	39
2	General Induction Underground Coal	7
3	Confined Space	45
4	Elevated Work Platform	37
5	Fire-fighting	27
6	Rigging	8
7	Scaffolding	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		167

## Work experience of potential FIFO workers

The level of work experience is another useful characteristic to include in profiling the skills and capabilities of potential FIFO workers. Table 24 shows that there is a wealth of work experience amongst these workers with more than half of the respondents (53.0%) holding 21 years or more of work experience and 16.3% with 16 to 20 years. That means that nearly three quarters of the potential FIFO workers surveyed (69.3%) have substantial work experience.

**Table 23: Work experience of potential FIFO workers**

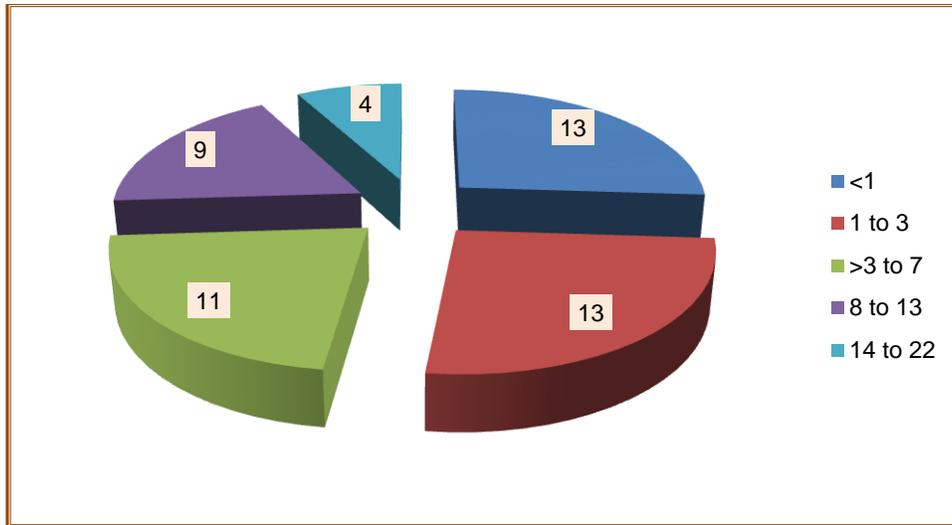
Work Experience		Response	%
Less than 1 year		11	6.6%
Between 1 and 5 years		15	9.0%
6 to 10 years		12	7.2%
11 to 15 years		13	7.8%
16 to 20 years		27	16.3%
21 years or more		88	53.0%
Total		166	100.0%

## Previous work in FIFO role

In addition, about one third of respondents (32.5%) have previously worked in a FIFO role (Table 25) and some of these indicating substantial years of working in a FIFO role (Figure 5). Twenty-four respondents reported more than three years spent working in a FIFO role, with thirteen of these spending more than eight years in a FIFO role.

**Table 24: Worked in FIFO role before**

#	Worked in FIFO role before		Response	%
1	No		112	67.5%
2	Yes, specify length of time in years and months		54	32.5%
	Total		166	100.0%



**Figure 5: Years worked in FIFO role**

### Previous work in remote communities

A further factor in the profiling of potential FIFO workers is consideration of whether they have previously worked in remote communities as it would be reasonable to contend that this would make such workers more amenable to FIFO work. Table 26 shows 65.7% of respondents had previously worked in remote communities; hence, providing a ready pool of workers who have experience and understanding of the challenges faced by FIFO work.

**Table 25: Worked in remote communities**

Worked in remote communities	Response	%
No	57	34.3%
Yes, specify length of time in years and months	109	65.7%
Total	166	100.0%

### **3. Conclusion**

This study sought to (1) identify and profile potential FIFO workers by determining their demographic characteristics, qualifications, experience and current employment status; (2) ascertain the level of interest these workers have in FIFO work; and, (3) determine possible barriers faced by individuals in becoming part of the FIFO community. In so doing, it found that there is good capacity within the Cairns region to build a strong and capable workforce to accommodate the needs of the mining and oil and gas sectors. The results show that relevant skills and experience are available in the region. Most interesting is the fact that nearly half of the respondents have substantial experience in a particular trade area but have never received formal or recognised qualifications. This finding is most informative as it means that by engagement with existing initiatives targeting mature-age individuals, such as The National Apprenticeships Program which assists in transition of individuals into the workforce, the current level of skills and expertise in the region can be readily enhanced and so, position individuals and the region formidably in the labour marketplace.

Equally, findings from this research show that there is overwhelming interest in FIFO work. Collectively, these factors suggest that there is excellent prospect for Cairns to be used as a point of hire for the resource sector and so, increase its status as a FIFO hub. With the current unemployment rate in Far North Queensland being nine percent (nearly twice the national average), it is timely that a collaborative approach be taken to capture and utilise the rich reserves of skills and experience within the Cairns region to meet the urgent workforce needs of the mining and oil and gas sectors.

## 4. References

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## 5. Appendix: Questionnaire Survey

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### FIFO Job-Seekers Online Survey Cairns

#### **Information about this research**

You are invited to take part in a research project about Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO) employment in the Tropical North. This research project seeks to determine the current status of FIFO in the Tropical North and so inform practices and policies to assist organisations, community agencies and government departments. The project is a collaboration between SkillsDMC (who have employed a Cairns FIFO Coordinator), Advance Cairns (as the peak regional economic development agency, and James Cook University (who are providing the professional research capabilities). It is important that this study captures the experiences and suggestions of a range of FIFO workers. Your opinion matters!

This survey is part of this project and it seeks to secure more FIFO jobs for people living in the region. We are interested in ascertaining who is out there looking for jobs in the resources sector, determining the decision-making process for taking on a FIFO role, and understanding the career implications of FIFO and/or resources sector work.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and your responses and details will be strictly confidential. Individuals will not be required to provide their personal information, and data will be non identifiable. The data from the study will be used in research publications and reports to Advance Cairns. You will not be identified in any way in these publications. A copy of the final report relating to this research will be available online through SkillsDMC at the completion of the project.

The survey should take approximately ten (10) minutes of your time. If you agree to be involved, completion of the survey will be recognised as informed consent. You may withdraw at anytime from completing the online survey.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact: Dr Riccardo Welters (Principal Investigator) or Dr Josephine Pryce (Co-Investigator).

**Principal- Investigator:** Dr Riccardo Welters, Head of Discipline (Economics), Senior Lecturer, School of Business, James Cook University, Phone: (07) 4781 4325, Email: riccardo.welters@jcu.edu.au

**Co- Investigator:** Dr Josephine Pryce, Senior Lecturer, School of Business, Fellow In-Residence, The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Phone: (07) 4042 1426, Email: josephine.pryce@jcu.edu.au

If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact: Human Ethics, Research Office, James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811, Phone: (07) 4781 5011 (ethics@jcu.edu.au)

## **Theme 1: Current employment status**

Q1. Are you currently employed (either full-time or part-time)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Q6. Have you ever been in paid work?

Q2. How long have you worked in your current job?

	Years (1)	Months (2)
Please indicate: (1)		

Q3. What industry are you working in?

- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (1)
- Mining (2)
- Manufacturing (3)
- Electricity, Gas and Water Supply (4)
- Construction (5)
- Wholesale Trade (6)
- Retail trade (7)
- Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants (8)
- Transport and Storage (9)
- Communication Services (10)
- Finance and Insurance (11)
- Property and Business Services (12)
- Government Administration and Defence (13)
- Education (14)
- Health and Community Services (15)
- Cultural and Recreational Services (16)
- Personal and other related services (17)
- Other, please specify (18) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4. What is your occupation?

- Manager (1)
  - Professional (2)
  - Technician and Trades Worker (3)
  - Community and Personal Service Worker (4)
  - Clerical and Administrative Worker (5)
  - Sales Worker (6)
  - Machinery Operator and Driver (7)
  - Labourer (8)
  - Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q5. Which of the following best describes your current job?

- Employed on ongoing basis - working full-time (1)
  - Employed on ongoing basis - working part-time (2)
  - Employed on fixed term contract (3)
  - Employed on casual basis (4)
  - Unemployed but looking for work (5)
-

Answer If Are you currently employed (either full-time or part-time)? No Is Selected

Q6. Have you ever been in paid work?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Q8. At any time during the last 4 wee...

Answer If Have you ever been in paid work? Yes Is Selected

Q7. How long have you been out of paid work?

	Years (1)	Months (2)
Please indicate: (1)		

Q8. At any time during the last 4 weeks, have you looked for paid work?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

## **Theme 2: Interest in FIFO work**

Q9. Are you interested in working in the mining or oil and gas sectors on a Fly In, Fly Out basis?

- Very interested (1)
- Interested (2)
- Vaguely interested (3)
- Not interested (4)

If Not interested Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q10a. If you were to apply for a FIFO job, are you willing to be deployed anywhere in Australia?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)

Answer If If you were to apply for a FIFO job, are you willing to b... Maybe Is Selected

Q10b. If 'Maybe', it depends on (more than one response possible):

- Travel time (1)
- Roster (2)
- Conditions (3)
- Site (4)
- Period of employment (5)
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q11. Why are you interested in working in a FIFO role in the resources sector? Rank top 3 preferences, 1 being the main reason:

- \_\_\_\_\_ There's not a lot of work at home currently
- \_\_\_\_\_ I've always wanted to give it a try
- \_\_\_\_\_ It means my family can live where we want to live with access to things that suit our lifestyle
- \_\_\_\_\_ It's a growth sector which is creating jobs
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm hoping it will provide an opportunity for me to up-skill or retrain
- \_\_\_\_\_ The pay and conditions are attractive
- \_\_\_\_\_ The rosters, with time off, appeals
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Q12. How active have you been in looking for a FIFO role in the resources sector? Tick the option which best describes you at present:

- Occasionally look at positions vacant in the newspaper (1)
  - Regularly check positions vacant in the newspaper (2)
  - Occasionally look at positions vacant in online careers pages (e.g. CareerOne, Seek) (3)
  - Regularly check positions vacant in online careers pages (e.g. CareerOne, Seek) (4)
  - Occasionally look at positions vacant on resource company websites (5)
  - Regularly check positions vacant on resource company websites (6)
  - I subscribe to automatic notifications of jobs from online careers pages and/or company sites (7)
- 

Q13. How many job applications for FIFO positions have you submitted in the past 3 months?

Number of applications: (1)

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Q14. What geographical regions would you consider going to as a FIFO worker (more than one response applicable)?

- Far North Queensland (1)
  - Northwest Queensland (2)
  - Central Queensland (3)
  - Northern Territory (4)
  - Northwest Western Australian (Pilbara/Kimberley) (5)
  - Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_
-

### Theme 3: Qualifications & experience

Q15. Please indicate your highest level of education, and specify where applicable your main qualification:

- Year 10 (1)
- Year 12 (2)
- General Certificate II or III (non-trade), specify (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Trade Certificate IV, specify (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- Advanced Diploma or Diploma, specify (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate, specify (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- Bachelor Degree, specify (7) \_\_\_\_\_
- Postgraduate degree, specify (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q16. You may have substantial experience in a particular trade area but never received formal or recognized qualifications. If this describes your situation, for the trade areas identified below, what type of experience is it that you have? Please click in the appropriate field(s).

	Completed 2+ years as apprentice but never finished trade (1)	Worked as trades assistant for 4+ years (2)	Completed trade qualifications overseas (3)	Have trade aligned to one listed (4)	Ex-Defence with aligned qualifications (5)	Not applicable (6)
Electrical Fitter Mechanic (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diesel Fitter (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carpentry/Formwork (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heavy Fabrication or Boilermaker or Pipefitter or Welder (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dual Trade Electrical or Instrumentation (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mechanical Fitter (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q17a. Which of the following mobile plant operator tickets or licences do you have?

	Have Ticket or Licence	
	Yes	No
Backhoe (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crane (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dozer (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Forklift (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grader (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Medium Rigid (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Heavy Rigid (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q17b. If you answered 'Yes' to any of the above, please specify your experience with size or type:

	Please specify your experience, indicating size or type of machinery you have experience with
Backhoe (1)	
Crane (2)	
Dozer (3)	
Forklift (4)	
Grader (5)	
Medium Rigid (6)	
Other (7)	

Q17c. What other tickets or licences do you have? Please indicate:

	Have Ticket or Licence (1)	Not applicable (2)
General Induction Metalliferous Surface (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General Induction Underground Coal (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confined Space (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elevated Work Platform (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire-fighting (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rigging (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scaffolding (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Q17d. Any other tickets or licences? Please specify:

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Q18. How many years of work experience do you have?

- Less than 1 year
  - Between 1 and 5 years
  - 6 to 10 years
  - 11 to 15 years
  - 16 to 20 years
  - 21 years or more
- 

Q19. Have you ever worked in a FIFO role before? If so, for how long?

- No
  - Yes, specify length of time in years and months \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q20. Have you ever worked in remote communities before? If so, for how long?

- No
  - Yes, specify length of time in years and months \_\_\_\_\_
-

## **Theme 4: Demographics**

Q21. Please indicate your gender:

- Female
  - Male
- 

Q22. Please indicate your age

- Under 20
  - 20 to 29
  - 30 to 39
  - 40 to 49
  - 50 to 59
  - 60 to 65
  - Older than 65
- 

Q23. Are you a citizen or permanent resident of Australia?

- Yes
  - No
- 

Q24. Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

- Yes
  - No
-

Q25. Are you:

- Single
  - Married
  - In a relationship
- 

Q26. Do you have dependent children?

- No
  - Yes. How many? \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q27. What is the postcode and suburb of your home address?

	Postcode (1)	Suburb (2)
Please indicate:		

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Q28. What is your driving distance to Cairns Airport?

- Less than 1 hour
  - 1 to 2 hours
  - 2 to 3 hours
  - More than 3 hours
- 

You have now completed the survey. Thank-you for taking the time to complete this survey. Just one more point, at the close of the survey, you will be redirected to the FIFO Cairns site. If you are interested in receiving results from the survey and future updates on the Cairns FIFO Project, please click on the option on the site at 'Future Updates' to enter your details.

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