

Shipwright, Boat Builder and Repairer		Western Australia (WA)
ASCO Code: 4981-11, 13		September 2006
Labour market rating:	Shortage	
Comment		
<i>Research identified that vacancies are difficult to fill and attract low numbers of suitable applicants.</i>		

Occupational demand

Demand for marine construction tradespersons has been very strong over the last few years as a result of WA's buoyant economy, international demand for medium to large, high speed aluminium hulled vessels and the awarding of a number of very large defence contracts to local shipbuilders. The Australian Marine Complex at Henderson accounts for at least 55 per cent of national production with much of the output being for the export market.

The occupation is too small for quarterly Australian Bureau of Statistics' Labour Force Survey figures to be reliable, however, the shipwright/boat builder and repairer workforce recorded in WA increased by an annual average increase of five per cent to 736 over the five years to the 2001. Industry data and industry and employer contacts suggest that the labour force has since increased significantly. Other tradespersons are also employed in the building and repair of marine craft. In the construction of large ships, shipwrights tend to specialise in marine fit out.

Occupational supply

Supply from relevant apprenticeships fell by 19 per cent in 2005 to 42 persons, well below the decade high of 62 persons completing in 2000. However, increased numbers of commencements over the last few years (including a 145 per cent jump in 2005 to 120 persons) suggest that supply through training completions should increase in future years.

The annual training rate of 5.2 per cent is above the wastage rate of 3.5 per cent per annum, indicating that supply from local training should eventually be sufficient to replace those leaving the trade. Some employers employ experienced steel welders and retrain them to do marine aluminium welding. Whilst overseas migration has traditionally not been a major source of supply, there was a net migration of 50 marine construction tradespersons to WA in 2005-06.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Just under half (47 per cent) of the surveyed vacancies were filled, with less than one (0.8) suitable applicant per vacancy. As these figures are even lower than last year (52 per cent and 1.0 per cent respectively), this would suggest that shortages have become more pronounced this year. There was an average of just under two applicants per vacancy, however only 47 per cent were considered suitable. The main reasons that applicants were considered unsuitable for shipwright/boat builder and repairer vacancies were a lack of a broad range of relevant practical hand skills, the ability to measure and work from plans, and enough experience to work unsupervised in small boatyards.

Most of the vacancies (85 per cent) were in the metropolitan area, with nearly half in the Henderson site precinct. Only one-third of the non-metropolitan vacancies were filled compared with half of the metropolitan vacancies.

Smaller boatyards usually require shipwrights/boat builders with the full range of skills to construct and fit out a vessel from start to finish and to work on repairs. A number of employers at Henderson share a pool of tradespersons to even out the work between their major marine vessel projects.

Labour market outlook

Although supply from apprenticeship completions is projected to almost double over the next three years, strong demand for the construction of new vessels and repair work will ensure the shortage continues for at least the next six months.