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Paul Hamer. Rumour has it wrong about lure of the mines

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By Paul Hamer

There has been much made in the media of the movement of vast numbers of New Zealanders across the Tasman, in particular to work in the mines of Western Australia.

Last year the Western Australian Government took an employment roadshow to Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch that aimed to recruit workers for mining and other industries.

Undoubtedly many New Zealanders have found employment in the mines and, despite the hardships of heat, hard work and isolation, are doing very well for themselves.

But are there really as many as people say there are? Several media sources have referred to New Zealanders "flocking to Western Australian for big money" in the mines, including claims that there are an estimated 10,000 Kiwis in Kalgoorlie, roughly a third of the population.

The notion of a third of the Kalgoorlie population being New Zealanders would be an astonishing statistic. For some reason though the myth persists. When I was researching the Maori population in Australia for *Te Puni Kokiri* in 2006, a woman in Kalgoorlie told me there were no fewer than 20,000 New Zealanders living there.

The truth is that, at the 2006 Australian Census, only 1512 people out of Kalgoorlie-Boulder's population of 28,241 reported that they were born in New Zealand. The number of New Zealanders isn't within cooe of the figures being cited. Aside from country of birth statistics, 602 people in Kalgoorlie-Boulder in 2006 identified as Maori in response to the Census ancestry question, and 434 as New Zealander.

There actually will be more New Zealanders in Kalgoorlie than the figures indicate. New Zealanders have a relatively high rate of Census undercounting in Australia and the Kalgoorlie-Boulder population doubled the 2006 national average for those who didn't state a country of birth or respond to the ancestry question. But these factors still don't justify the suggestion of 10,000 New Zealanders living there.

The key point is that the overall Census trends show that New Zealanders haven't been flocking to Western Australia to the extent popularly imagined. While the number of the New Zealand-born in Australia rose nearly 10 per cent between the country's 2001 and 2006 Censuses, the rate of growth was only just over 5 per cent in Western Australia.

Moreover, the numbers of New Zealand-born in fact declined in key mining towns such as Port Hedland, Leinster and Kambalda West, and the increase in Kalgoorlie was negligible.



A complicating factor in all this is the number of "fly in, fly out" mine workers in the more remote mining towns. People who fly in for a two-week working "swing", living in basic accommodation, before flying back to, say, the family home in Perth for a week.

Some of the New Zealand mine workers will thus pop up in the census figures for other towns. You can get a sense of this from the steep rise in the numbers of New Zealanders in the temperate coastal towns within striking distance of Perth, such as Bunbury, Rockingham and Mandurah.

This idea that you don't actually "live" in the town you spend two-thirds of your time in is a planner's nightmare. As the Weekend Australian Magazine put it in June last year with respect to Port Hedland: "No one can tell you how many people really live there. The last census said 15,000 residents, but the figure is meaningless."

None of this changes the fact that there aren't the tens of thousands of New Zealanders in the Western Australian mines – at least not yet.

Where are all these emigrants we hear about going then? Well, look no further than southeast Queensland, where so many Australians are moving as well, and in particular the Gold Coast.

The number of New Zealand-born there rose by 30 per cent from 2001 to 2006, and the number identifying as Maori by a staggering 86 per cent.

And Bondi? It stopped being affordable for New Zealand migrants in the 1980s.

* **Paul Hamer is a contracted writer for the Waitangi Tribunal.**

This story was found at: