



Shifting tides

The NZ Surf Festival 2014



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Introduction

This report provides a summary of data collected at the New Zealand Home Loans Surf Festival that took place from 18 April to 4 May 2014 in Taranaki, Aotearoa/New Zealand. New events were injected into previous program line-ups (eg Women's and Men's Pro Juniors) and the previous Association of Surfing Professional's (ASP) event, the World Championship Tour (WCT), was replaced with the World Qualifying Series (WQS).

Making the most of public (Easter) and national school holidays the associated events ranged from participatory leisure to competitive, entry to expert level, and for ages across the lifespan. These events were held as 'in surf' or 'off surf' events at a range of sites, primarily at Fitzroy Beach, New Plymouth but also with Oakura Beach, East Beach and Puke Ariki Museum as alternative sites. 'In surf' events included Fisher and Paykel Easter Masters (Women and Men 30-75 yrs), Powerco Surf Coaching Sessions Have a Go Day (one for beginning and intermediate surfers, another for advanced surfers), Art of Surfing Expression Session, Surfing Taranaki Groms Interclub Competition, Rip Curl Gromsearch (U12, U14, 16 and under girls and boys), Wahine On Waves Women's and Girl's Surf Day, Chain Resources Pro Juniors (ASP Women's and Men's U21), and the Port Taranki Pro (ASP 6QS Women's). 'Off surf' events included stalls, food and beverage and Sustainable Coastlines education at the main site's 'Festival Village' and a significant museum exhibition 'Surf: Shaping Taranaki' launched as part of the opening of the festival. This site also hosted the showing of the surf film 'Soul Surfer' during the festival. The festival was supported by 63 sponsors, many local, attracting competitors and spectators locally, nationally and internationally. What follows is a summary of two surveys carried out during the festival (spectators) and after the festival (competitors).

SURVEY FINDINGS

Two surveys were carried out in relation to the festival, the first during the festival (spectators) and the second after the festival (competitors). Using random sampling the spectator survey was completed by spectators via an onsite electronic survey tablet. The competitors survey was sent to all competitors by a third party and completed via an online LimeSurvey after the close of the event. Results from each cohort will be reported separately below.

Competitors

Results were collated from 35 surveys completed by competitors through an anonymous online survey managed by the university. A week after the competition competitors were contacted via email by organisers, provided with the survey address, and asked to complete the survey within the week. More than a half of the respondents competed in the Pro Junior’s Women’s and Men’s competition and a third of the respondents were participants in the Pro-ASP Women’s 6 QS (Figure 1). Respondents were mostly from Australia and AotearoaNew Zealand (Figure 2), between 16 and 24 (2 younger and two older), and nearly equally female and male (Figure 3).

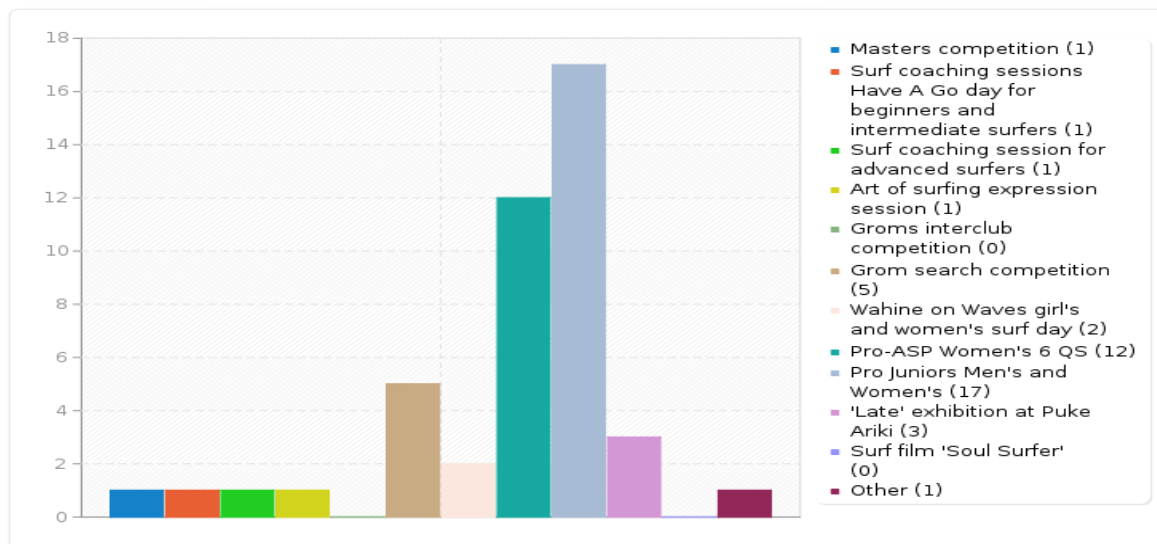


Figure 1: Event participation by respondent

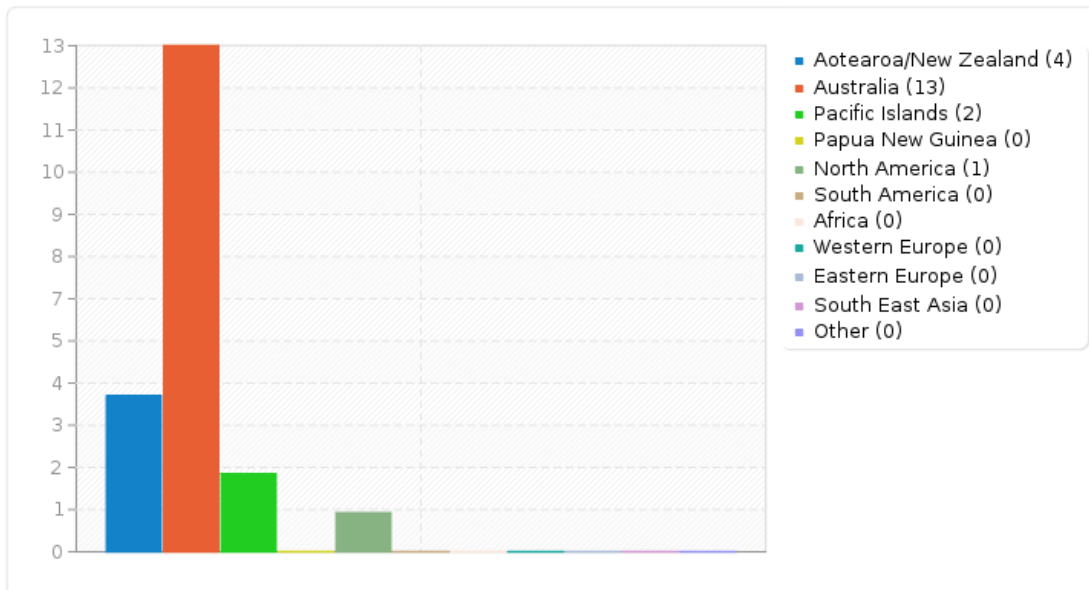


Figure 2: Competitor homes

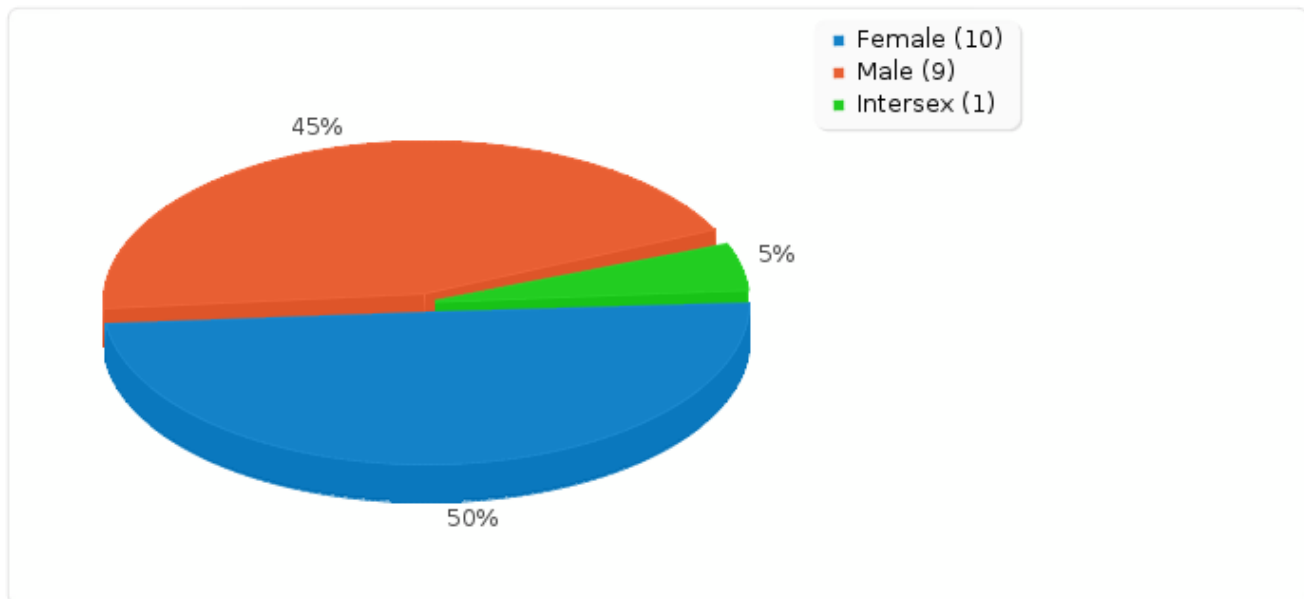


Figure 3: Sex of competitors

All competitors felt it was a very (or reasonably) important event for them. Their reasons for competing ranged from those who had been before *‘[I] love Taranaki and this event’*, to newcomers *‘My father is from NZ and we heard it was a great event’*. Many who were focused on competition noted the value of the event in terms of it being *‘For points from my pro junior campaign and nz is close*

to Australia'. The importance of points and geography was noted in responses such as *'part of the Australasia Pro Junior Series'* *'To collect valuable ranking points'*, *'Points towards ranking in QS and Junior Pro'*, *'to get points to qualify for the Women's Tour'* and *'seeding'*. Australian and local competitors noted the importance of close geography where there were *'not enough pro junior comps'* and *'close to Aussie'*. Some also responded to the progression that the event offered saying *'It's a great stepping stone to bigger things'*. Those perhaps less focused on points referred to both proximity *'It's part of my region'*, habit *'Have competed for the last 20 years. What I do'*, and a wish to travel to NZ *'Desire to visit (sic) NZ'* and *'We love NZ & surfed there last year. Plus, it's easy 4 us 2 get there from Hawaii on Hawaiian Airlines'*. Having a number of events in the one program also acted in the decision to participate, one respondent noting *'It was very worth the money spent as there were 3 events so close together that i could come over and surf in rather than spending all of your money for just one event.'*

When asked about their overall experience and the importance of this year's event for them all were very positive. Forty five percent rated it as excellent and 37% felt it was good/ok. Fifty eight percent said it was very important for them and just over 30% felt it was reasonably important or of some importance. Several did not respond. Some explained their selection around the running of the event/s and the quality of the waves and venue (see Tables 1&2).

Table 1: Explanations for overall experience rating

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Challenge with number of events. Communication from aspre entry confirmation for juniors- 3 emails to organisers before reply-entry received in comp, then told not in comp then yes. Concerned how in juniors competitors got to surf again if people did not turn up....</i> • <i>Competition venue could have been more accommodating overall. The France SWATCH event is a great example if a good event! Opening event could have been a little more authentic.</i> • <i>First time to this event and thought that is was fantastic. Well done to the organisers</i> • <i>Great place! fun waves</i> • <i>I think the contest was run efficiently put the set up could be improved and also allowing there to be back up beaches as fitzroy beach does not cope too well with a low tide.</i> • <i>involved for the two weeks. love it</i> • <i>It would have been better if the competition was mobile as</i> |
|--|

some of the heats were unfair due to the lack of waves. I travelled around and found fantastic waves within the area.

- *Not letting competitors into the surf club on the first day wasn't good*
- *really enjoyed it ,except the surf was a lot smaller than I thought it would be .*
- *Really well run*
- *Taranaki was a beautiful place with great accommodation close. Could the event be more mobile?*
- *They had an awesome comp setup where the competitors felt safe leaving there bags in the comp area and going surfing. The free wifi was a big help because many of us had no internet where we were staying and Travel sim calls are expensive. So many food options at the beach were available with the cafe and the Mexican trailer and there was always water available in the comp area.*
- *Waves weren't so good some days and some of the judging decisions and asp decisions were controversial*

Table 2: How important was this event for you? Please explain why.

- *All comps are! In it to win it!*
- *As I need to accrue points.*
- *Be good to get a result in my hometown and help me re-qualify for the world tour*
- *For rating points*
- *i have a part role in organisation - co-ordination since festival conception. enjoy putting something back into the community via my passion for surfing.*
- *It allowed me to qualify for the World pro juniors*
- *It is very hard to get into a women's QS in Australia if you do not have a ranking so it was good that there were so many spots available for everyone to enter. It is also important to come to the pro junior events to keep improving on our ranking total for the year so it is great to have more events on the series this year.*
- *necessary points*
- *To gain points to try to qualify for WCT*
- *To get points to qualify for the Women's Tour*
- *To get Pro Junior Rankings up*
- *To keep a competitive career going.*
- *trying to get a rating in pro juniors & QS ,and surf more lefts*
- *very important for ratings and to assess where we are competitively against top surfers from around the world*
- *We live in New Plymouth so having a Grom Comp and International Pro Junior in our local town and local beach is a huge \$\$\$ saving and advantage.*

More than 80% felt it was a very important event for the Women's tour:

I and many other girls who haven't been in a QS event before were finding it hard to get into the QS comps in Australia because there were not enough spots and too many girls so it was really important for surfing internationally to get some more girl surfers on the rankings which will encourage us to travel to more events.

They also felt it was very important for women's surfing in AotearoaNew Zealand noting there were not enough women's events in the region and that it was:

Good for sport to profile different locations, makes for a truly world event giving growth and participation. Comp surfing local lacks mainstream following- great opportunity to engage with public.

One had a word of caution emphasizing the commitment of some and therefore an expectation of quality surf:

There are girls and boys travelling from all over the world paying lots of money to get to this event and when there friends and family see how bad the conditions were online on some of the days the might think twice about supporting there child/friend for next years event.

Interestingly only 35% felt it was an important event for surfing internationally but that it 'boosted NZ surfing' given it was AotearoaNew Zealand's 'biggest event'.

The overall feeling about the venue of Fitzroy Beach was summed up by one competitor as 'The waves were not epic but the overall arena / venue could not be better and is world class.' It was rated highly for accessibility and vibe on the beach with comments such as:

The beach was nice and there were lots of banks to free surf on. There was a big car park so it was easy to get a parking spot throughout the day and they had toilets and showers at the venue. It was awesome to see kids riding around on there

skateboards and all the locals hanging around to watch the heats. Such a good vibe!

and *'Understand importance of being accessible with resources-reality if out of town people wont travel to it. Good veiwing and facilities.'* However, there was marked disappointment about the quality of the wave, particularly for the high stakes ASP events. These could be summarized by responses such as *'need bigger waves ,would like to see it at amore powerful break'*, *'Bad wave. We should have only 6 star waves for a 6 star event'*, and *'I went and surfed a few spots down the coast that are open to much more swell and variable winds. I think its such a shame to only have one venue and no back-up locations'*. Venues mentioned were Stent Road, Ahu Ahu, Piha, Raglan and Mt. Maunganui. Those who responded that they had competed at other venues for the event noted their waves to be mostly excellent (36%) and very good (50%) while some did not respond.

All said they would return next year, this return being very highly possible (75%) or possible (20%). They noted highlights of travel to and around the event, the scenic location, the opportunity to interact with high level athletes and participate in a high standard of competition, and the multi-event nature of the festival including the Māori influence and Pōwhiri ceremony. A few mentioned winning! Locals appreciated *'Having a Pro Junior at our local beach and not having to travel for hours and pay huge money'* while visitors noted:

Exploring all the different spots along the way back up to Auckland airport was fun because we got to surf different spots and see the amazing coastline. It was great to have New Plymouth airport so close and was very good and easy (Especially because I was by myself and cant drive over here) to be able to fly in and then get picked up 10 minutes away from where i was staying.

Great location, good waves with plenty of wave options to explore near by. It was located close to a major city where one could obtain goods etc as required as well an array of accommodation options avail to you.

Competitors had a range of suggestions for the organisers to improve the event, mostly summed up as providing opportunities to show the best results in the best conditions *'Just be good to surf other breaks and waves .MY heats it was only 1ft and hard to judge especially when you are trying to compete at a higher level.'* Some comments were about the wave quality and location *'If waves are bigger at another beach would be a good to move the event. The Pro Junior Girls were lacking waves very dissappointing considering there were great waves at Back Beach the same day'*, while some were about the venue *'The glare in the afternoon is a major issue on Sunny days, not sure how to overcome this unless you can set up two judging sites to accommodate?' and 'contestants area needs to be alot better with lounging area and raised viewing'*. There was a strong feeling about wave quality and timetables amongst a significant number of responses including:

Getting the surfers points of view when a decision is being made about running another round or not when the conditions have been deteriorating throughout the day

Sort out the Under 21 entries, notification process is a concern and murky oppurtunities where competitors surfed again after getting knocked out= not a good look for asp and nz surfing.

too many lay days due to both events

Choose better tides. - Pro Junior alternatives entering at round 3 after being knocked in the trials (round #1 & #2) is ridiculous.

Maybe a more mobile comp to get better waves and the 6 star women should get more precedence than the junior men.

A more professional web coverage with commentators that have their facts right. Rebecca was good but the men where ordinary at times

There were also comments alluding to tensions between categories of competitors competing for resources:

I think it was a well run event and I am not really sure but definitely when the surf is bad next instead of putting the girls out I think you should put the boys out just because guys can also surf bad conditions and it is about time for a comp to do change what they usually do.

Non kiwis in the kiwis trials round is dumb.

Two distant international competitors suggested ‘*Check out swatch event and please take note*’ and ‘*Starting the event on Monday would work well 4 people flying from Hawaii & North America*’

Spectators

Results were collated from the spectator survey that was a random sampling at the Fitzroy Beach site during the festival. An electronic tablet was used for spectators to either complete themselves or through interaction with a volunteer assistant. What follows is a descriptive summary of the survey completed by 45 participants.

The participant demographics ranged across age (Figure 4), included 95% from AotearoaNew Zealand, 75% from Taranaki. More participants were female (60%) than male (38%) with 2% preferring to not identify. Most identified as Pakeha (79%) and were from low to mid-income brackets (Figure 5), a quarter preferring not to disclose income.

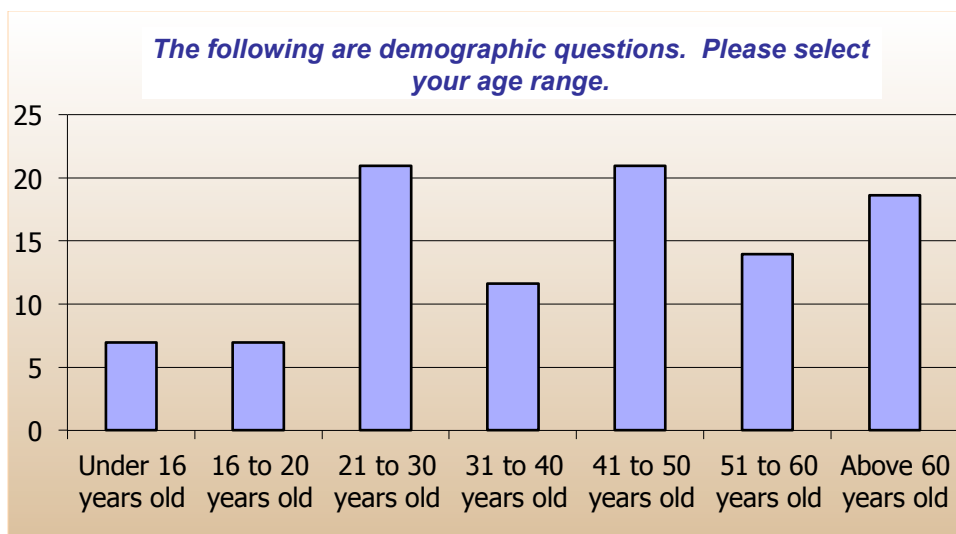


Figure 4: Age demographics

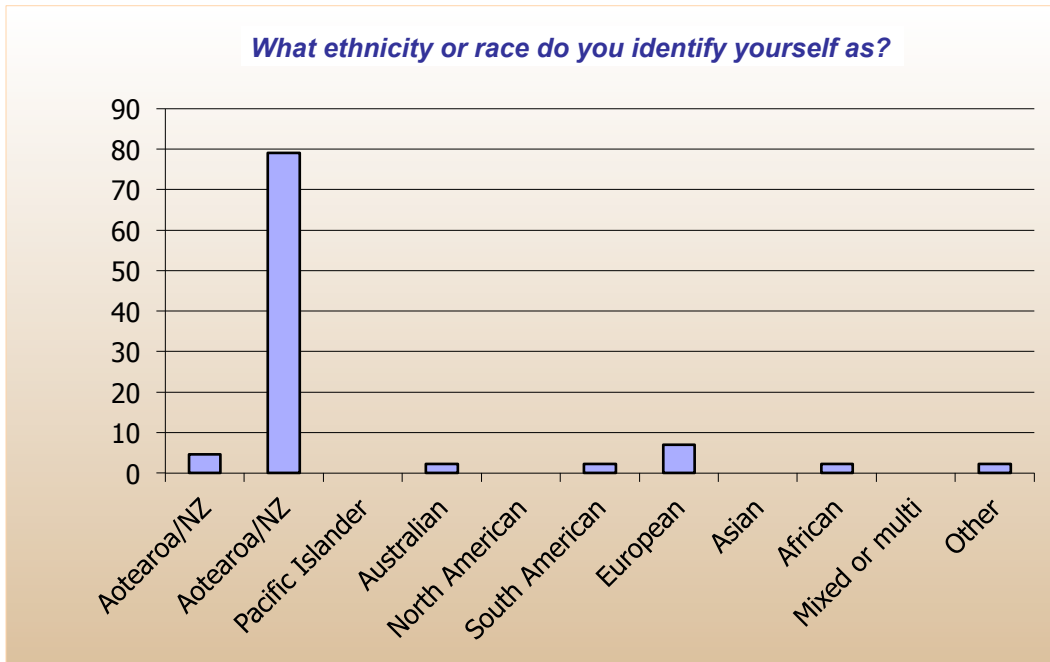


Figure 5: Ethnicity of respondents

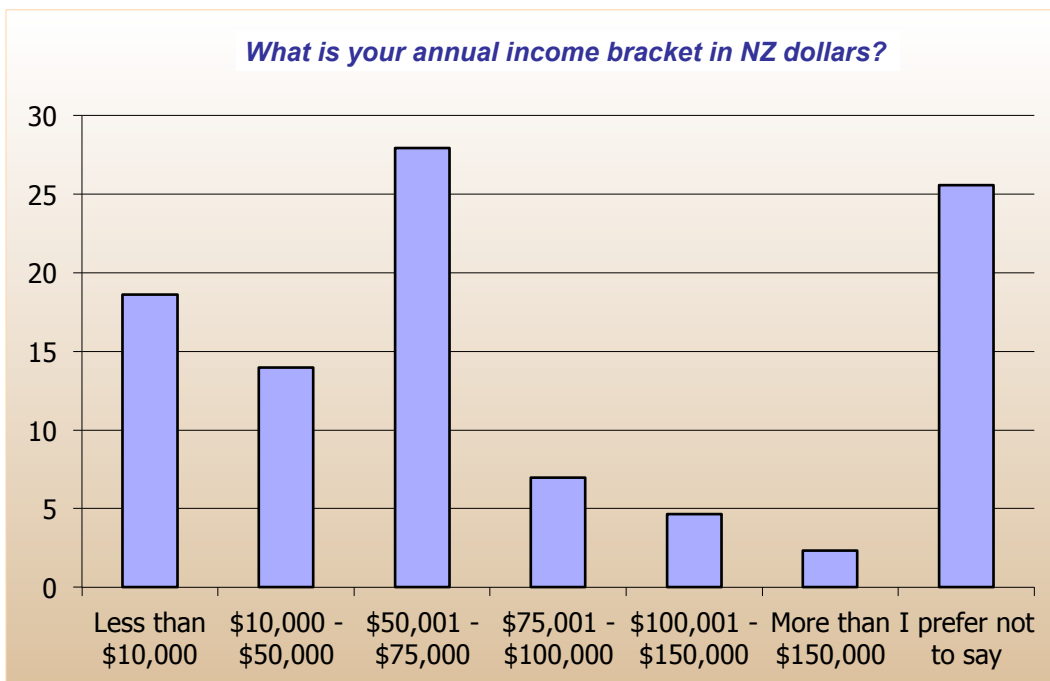


Figure 6: Annual income

The majority were on site specifically for the event (Figure 7) and had been to the event before (Figure 8).

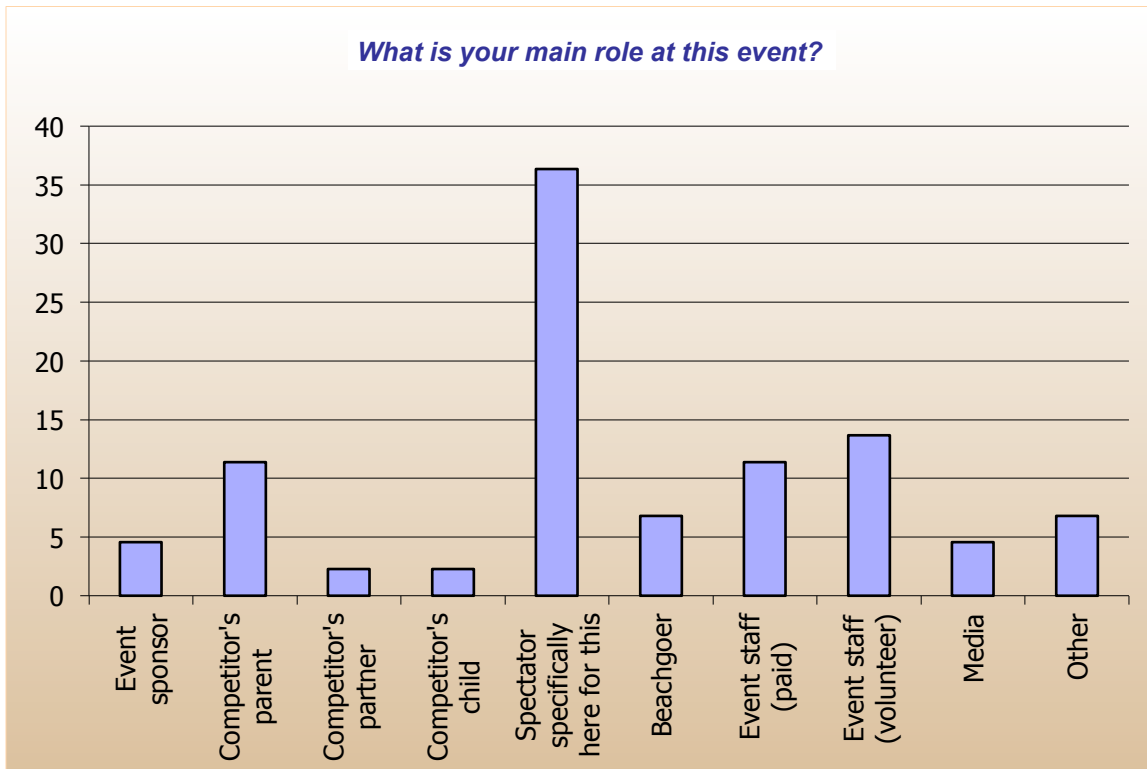


Figure 7: Role at event

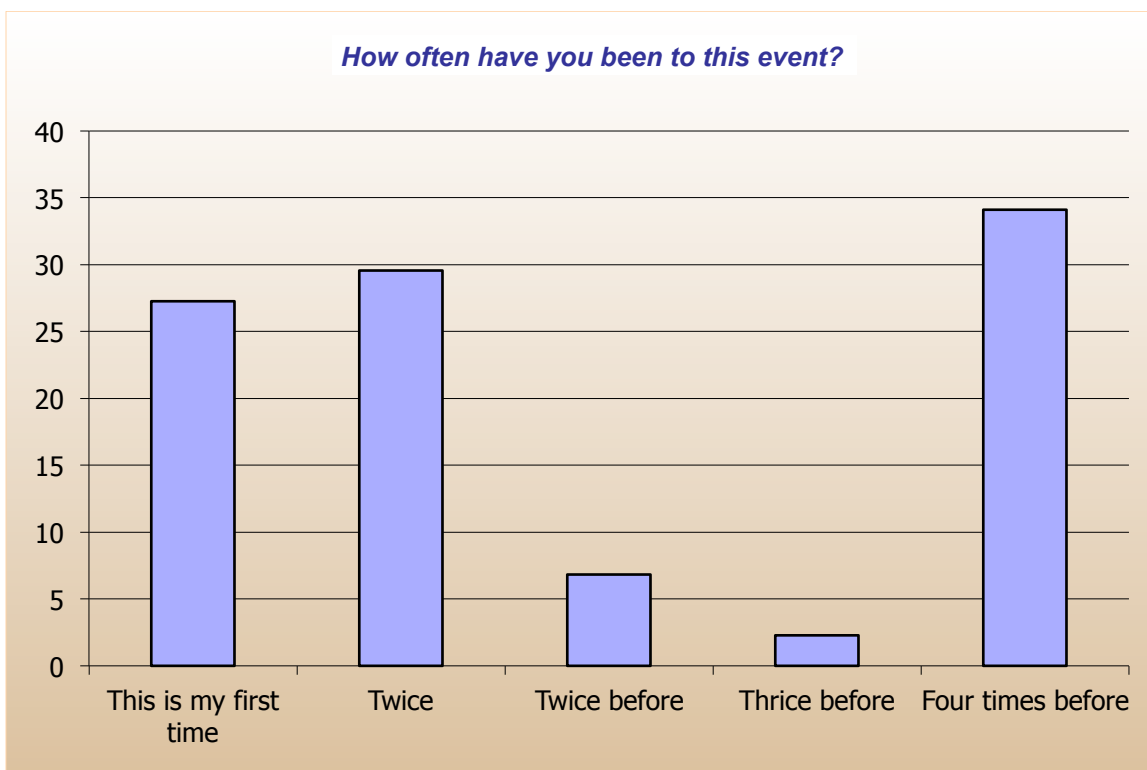


Figure 8: Regularity at event

A third of respondents were not surfers, nearly another third were regular social surfers, and 20% had tried surfing (Figure 9). They were mostly at the festival in relation to the Pro Women and Pro Juniors (Figure 10). Their reasons for coming varied between ‘meet pro surfers’ and ‘support Paige’, facilitating and supporting their partner or family, to being entertained, or to work at the festival in a voluntary or business capacity. Some reported learning more about surfing and competitions, about the running of festivals and competitions, about the location and the region, and about women’s surfing.

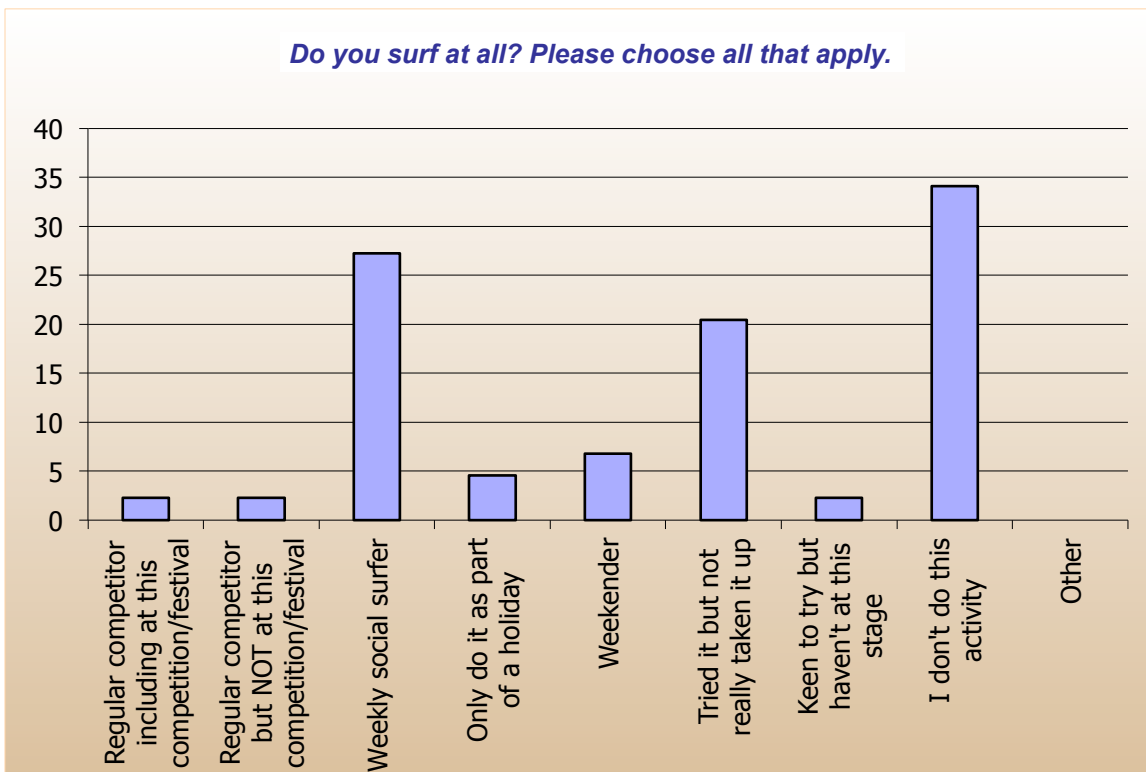


Figure 9: Surfing background

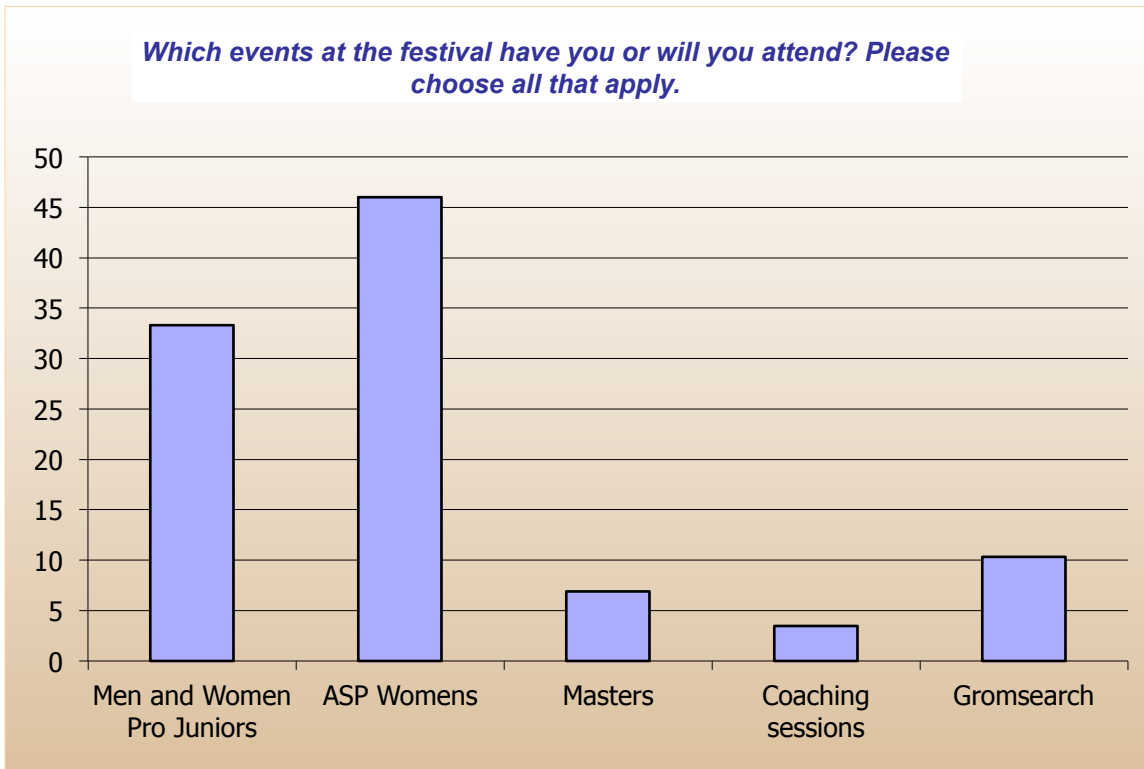


Figure 10: Festival event participation

The highlights for participants were highly variable from being able to see the professional women, enjoying the good weather and surf, and socializing. More specifically the responses included:

<p><i>Pro women</i> <i>Good rides</i> <i>Good surf</i> <i>Weather</i> <i>Grand kid falling into water</i> <i>Waves</i> <i>Snow / powhiri welcome</i> <i>Still to come</i> <i>Weather and location</i> <i>Weather</i> <i>Good surf and weather</i> <i>People</i> <i>Enjoyed men under 21</i> <i>Being with my friends</i> <i>The food is mean, got me interested in surfing, aps guys are hot</i> <i>Whole event</i> <i>Everything</i></p>	<p><i>Awesome surfing</i> <i>Seeing friends that surf</i> <i>Weather</i> <i>Watching</i> <i>Hanging with friend</i> <i>Meeting new people</i> <i>Sausage sizzle /weather</i> <i>Nice seeing pros close up</i> <i>Bethany speech</i> <i>Watching Paige make it through / powhiri / My competitors</i> <i>Top surfing</i> <i>Weather and great event organisers</i> <i>Watching all surfing</i> <i>Good surfing</i> <i>Watching the pro surfers beth hamilton</i></p>
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Table 3: Reasons for participation

Very few commented when asked what they liked least about the festival. Responses included *'taking over the beach for the event'*, *'no wifi'*, *'weather'*, and *'toilets'*. The ability to be able to hear clearly or see the surfing from a stand were mentioned as was beach access in the wheelchair. One respondent mentioned there was a problem with the parking for the icecream van while another commented on the poor state of the waves.

When asked whether they would return to the event 98% said yes, in order to *'compete'*, *'to have fun and meet the competitors'*, to enjoy the *'fresh air'* *'food, attractive people, good atmosphere'* and to continue to participate as a worker or sponsor.

Seventy five percent of the respondents lived locally and attended the festival for a week (41%) (Figure 11), 86% by car and 11% by walking or bicycle.

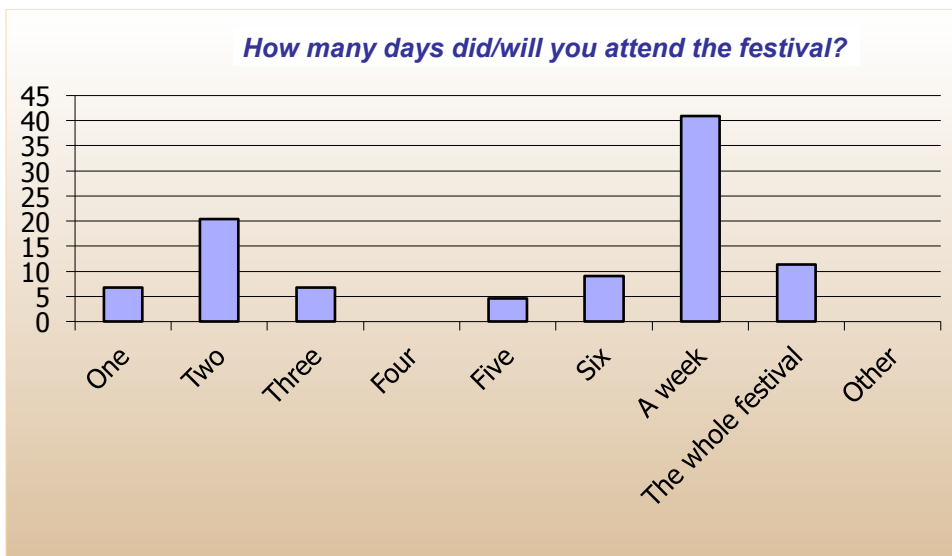


Figure 11: Time at the festival

Most preferred not to disclose accommodation, travel, food or entertainment spending (eg Figure 12). Of those who did respond, more indicated it would be below \$100 than above \$100 (Tables 4-8).

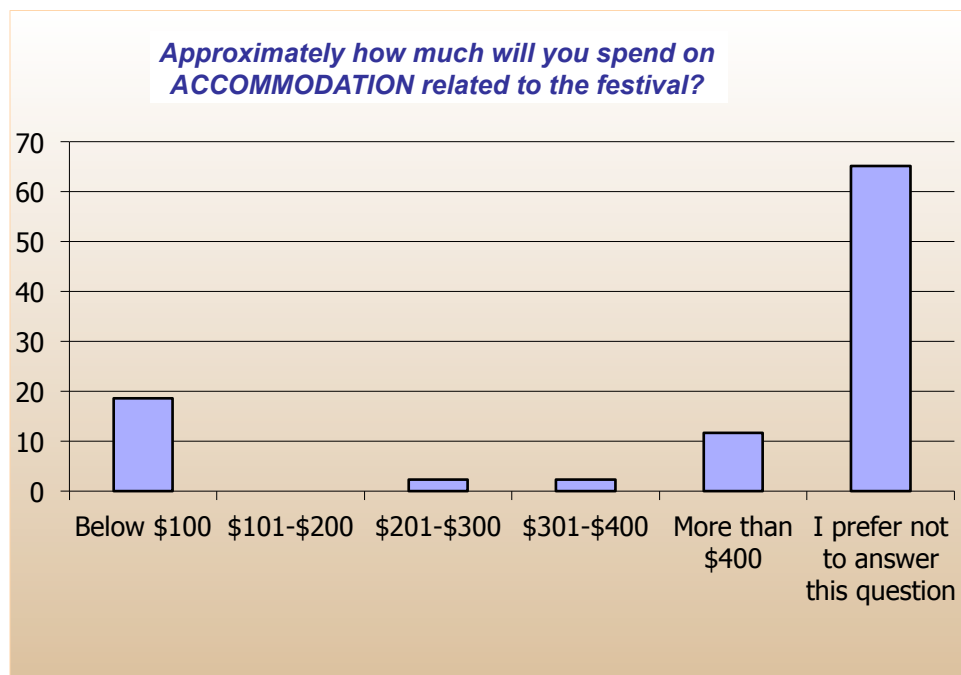


Figure 12: Accommodation spending

Responses	Approximately how much will you spend on TRAVEL related to the festival?
Below \$100	23.26
\$101-\$200	0
\$201-\$300	2.33
\$301-\$400	4.65
More than \$400	11.63
I prefer not to answer this question	58.14

Table 5: Travel spending

Responses	Approximately how much will you spend on FOOD related to the festival?
Below \$100	23.26
\$101-\$200	6.98
\$201-\$300	0
\$301-\$400	4.65
More than \$400	11.63
I prefer not to answer this question	53.49

Table 6: Food spending

Responses	Approximately how much will you spend on ENTERTAINMENT related to the festival?
Below \$100	27.91
\$101-\$200	9.3
\$201-\$300	0
\$301-\$400	2.33
More than \$400	4.65
I prefer not to answer this question	55.81

Table 7: Entertainment spending

Responses	Approximately how much will you spend on SHOPPING related to the festival?
Below \$100	27.91
\$101-\$200	2.33
\$201-\$300	2.33
\$301-\$400	4.65
More than \$400	4.65
I prefer not to answer this question	58.14

Table 8: Shopping spending



Figure 13: Accompaniment

Word of mouth (18%), print advertisements (17%) and online advertisements (14%) were the most common means for finding out about the festival (Figure 14).



Figure 14: How they found out about the festival

Conclusions

Once again, as detailed in the competitor and spectator surveys, the festival seems to have met a wide variety of needs including a venue for surfing enhancement and a local/regional/national/international presence. Similar issues to previous years associated with weather and wave quality continue as tensions for organization but the variety of events in the one region at the one time seems to be very attractive. While welcomed by most, the shift to introducing the Junior ASP competition has been seen as another tension both in the organization and in its competition for high quality waves with the WQS event. What makes this event different to many others is the intent to treat women's surfing as seriously as the men's and to invest in the

future of women's surfing in AotearoaNew Zealand where such an investment has been left wanting in other competitions and countries.

Survey dissemination and completion with spectators seemed to work well using the electronic tablet, making analysis more efficient. However, response was relatively low (50% to previous year) and required similar interactions to the pen and paper form of the survey. Competitor survey response online was better this year than the pen and paper survey in the previous year and is worth pursuing for the quality and quantity of responses. Ensuring it is sent to all participants immediately after the event may increase the response rate. Providing a prize for completed responses in future festivals, perhaps also for spectators, and an invitation for follow up interviews is one way some festivals have overcome some of these issues and provides for a broader response. A separate survey for volunteers and sponsors may also be worthwhile considering for future feedback.

Interviews and participant observations to support the surveys with nuance and depth were not carried out this year due to researcher commitments elsewhere. However, I look forward to future participation that could be more extensive, depending upon resources. Funding sources for a formal evaluation could perhaps be pursued through regional or national bodies. I hope this feedback will be valuable.

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Acknowledgment: The surveys were facilitated by generous cooperation from the volunteers and management, and the use of Council tablets. In particular I wish to thank Michelle Cowley, Christine Jochico, and David Bird from NPDC.