



Australian Council of Trade Unions

MEDIA RELEASE

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Job fears and higher workloads have led to an epidemic of unpaid overtime, say unions

An epidemic of unpaid overtime is costing hundreds of thousands of Australians time with their families and has worsened during the economic downturn, say unions.

Job security fears have put pressure on people to work extra hours for nothing, while others have felt they have no choice because of increased workloads as businesses have tightened belts during the GFC, says the ACTU.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said a new report by The Australia Institute, *Something for Nothing*, busted the myth that Australians were not hard-workers.

Australians already work among the longest hours in the western world, but the estimate of more than 2 billion hours of unpaid overtime each year was astonishing, Mr Lawrence said.

He said workers should receive payment for any overtime they do.

“Many workers will volunteer for overtime if they know they will be compensated for it, but this report reveals that employers are riding on the backs of workers who are doing extra hours for nothing,” Mr Lawrence said.

“The pressure on workers to do more for less worsened under the former Coalition Government and WorkChoices, and no doubt has increased again since the onset of the economic downturn, with many workers afraid or uncertain about their future putting in unpaid overtime to keep their job.

“Others have found their workloads increase unsustainably as their employer has cut staff during the downturn.

“Employees are legally entitled to refuse to work overtime for nothing, but the reality is that many workers believe they will either lose their job or be overlooked for promotion if they don’t.

“If the work demands are too much to complete in a normal working day, then employees should be paid for their extra hours, or their employer must hire more staff.”

The Australia Institute report found that each year, the average full-time Australian worker does 266.6 hours of unpaid overtime, or an extra six-and-a-half working weeks.

This is the equivalent of 1.2 million full-time jobs.

The think tank estimates that through unpaid overtime, workers are forgoing a total of \$72.2 billion in wages or 6% of GDP.

The ACTU is an official supporter of Go Home on Time Day on November 25. Workers can sign up for an electronic leave pass at <http://www.gohomeontimeday.org.au>

Copies of the *The Australia Institute's report, Something for Nothing*, are available for download at <https://www.tai.org.au/>

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