

Friday, May 1, 2026

## Reduced working hours critical for workers and their families

Australian Unions are amping up their calls to win back more time for working Australians.

Unions will tell a parliamentary inquiry reviewing the National Employment Standards in Melbourne today, that reduced work hours is the next big payoff to improve workers' lives and lift living standards.

Unions will argue that Australians deserve to benefit from a shorter working week, with models including a four-day week where possible and sector specific alternatives where it is not.

Unions will argue that weekly hours should initially be reduced from 38 to 35 hours per week or sector appropriate alternatives.

Pay and conditions, including penalty rates, overtime and minimum staffing levels, would be protected so that a shorter working week does not result in a loss of pay.

Unions will argue at the inquiry that workers deserve a greater share of the benefits from productivity gains and technological advances through reduced working hours.

A four-day work week would counter some of the record-long hours Australians have been working and allow people to work more efficiently.

As part of the review of national employment standards, unions will also press for workers to secure an extra week of annual leave, to counter both rising work pressures and the high rates of unpaid overtime Australians regularly perform.

In what would be the first significant change since the mid-1970s, unions will press for an extra week of annual leave – up from 4 to 5 weeks per year – and from 5 to 6 weeks for regular shift workers.

The extra annual leave would help to make up for the 4.5 weeks of extra free unpaid leave Australian workers perform on average, according to the Centre for Future Work.

An extra week of annual leave would allow Australian workers to live happier, healthier and more balanced lives.

The union for retail workers - the SDA, the Australian Services Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the United Workers Union, the Victorian Trades Hall Council and the ACTU will represent workers at today's inquiry.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O'Neil:

“Australians have been working record long hours for some time now – currently around an average of four and a half weeks’ of unpaid overtime each year.

“Working people work to live not live to work, and the results of trials tell us more time for workers boosts productivity, reduces burnout, improves their health and retention.

“While Australians work longer hours, the gap between productivity and real wages is getting wider. Real wages would need to increase by 10 percent to catch up to increases in productivity since 2000.

“Another way to make things fairer is to allow workers to take an extra week of annual leave to reclaim some of that unpaid overtime. We've had annual leave stuck at 4 weeks for the last 50 years while much of Europe has already moved to leave beyond 4 weeks.

“Working Australians need to benefit from higher productivity and technological advancements, instead of watching all of the proceeds flowing through into corporate profits and executive bonuses.”

**ENDS**

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