



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY
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Submission Cover sheet

Inquiry into the future of the working week

Submission number: 10

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Submission to the Inquiry into the future of the working week

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Terms of Reference:

- a) defining and configuring the concept of a four-day work week;
- b) the advantages of a four-day work week;
- c) the disadvantages of a four-day work week;
- d) options, issues and challenges for transition to and implementation of a four-day work week across different sectors and industries;
- e) considerations of implementing the four-day work week in the context of enterprise bargaining and current industrial law considerations;
- f) how the four-day work week compares with flexible work arrangements or other alternative working arrangements;
- g) best practice four-day work week policy approaches and responses being undertaken in other jurisdictions; and
- h) any other related matters.

* * *

Thank you for accepting my submission into this inquiry. I address parts (a) to (c) and (f) of the Terms of Reference in this submission.

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This is what has compelled me to write a submission to this inquiry. Australians deserve a four-day work week because we *need* it. We *need* more days for leisure, for rest, for fun – all fundamental tenets of what it means to be human. I urge the Committee to implement a four-day work week.

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a) Defining and configuring the concept of a four-day work week

For the purpose of this submission, I define the four-day work week as 28 hours per week (i.e., 7 working hours per day, multiplied by 4 working days), with flexibility as to when these work hours are conducted, paid at the same rate as the existing a 5-day work week.

b) Advantages of a four-day work week

[The 4 Day Week Campaign](#), a UK-based organisation, noted the advantages for workers, employers, the economy, broader society and the environment of a four-day work week. I agree wholeheartedly with each of the 5 advantages that have been listed and briefly outlined below.

Advantage #1: For Workers

- Better work-life balance: More free time would allow for those non-work parts of life that are often neglected such as
- Rest: sleep and the various forms of rest we need while awake (physical, mental, social, emotional and sensory rest)
- Leisure: from spending time with family and friends, to pursuing hobbies and passion projects
- “Life Admin”: tasks like shopping, cleaning, managing the finances, and the many parenting duties.

- According to [mental health charity Mind](#), 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem in any given week in England, and 1 in 5 agreed that they have called in sick to avoid work.

Advantage #2: For Employers

- Higher performance and profits: trials show a reduced work week increases an organisation's productivity.
 - A Henley Business School study in 2019 found that 250 firms participating in a four-day week saved an estimated £92 billion a year because their employees were happier, less stressed, and took fewer sick days.
 - Put simply, a rested worker is a better worker.
- Greater talent: Reducing the work week enables organisations to attract and retain talented employees.

Advantage #3: For the Economy

- Lower unemployment – Incredibly, the UK suffers simultaneously from overwork, unemployment and underemployment. A four-day week is an intuitively simple way to rebalance the economy and address many problems.
- Increased productivity - numerous studies show that working fewer hours would boost the UK's productivity.
- Boost to tourism - with more free leisure time, the tourism sector would benefit from people taking more short breaks in the UK.

Advantage #4: For Broader Society

- Better mental & physical health – more time to recuperate, exercise, socialise and spend time with family.
- Gender equality – a more equal share of paid and unpaid work, including of caring roles traditionally ascribed to women.
- Strengthened communities – more time to build relationships, to care for children, the elderly and the disabled.

Advantage #5: For the Environment

- A more sustainable lifestyle – more free time allows us to make environmentally positive choices; cycling and walking instead of driving, cooking with fresh ingredients rather than buying energy-intensive ready meals.
- A reduced carbon footprint – Research has shown that a four-day week could reduce the UK's carbon footprint by 127 million tonnes per year, equivalent to taking 27 million cars off the road (effectively the entire UK private car fleet)

The UK is not alone in advocating for the benefits of the four-day work week. [In Iceland trials of a four-day week](#) were an 'overwhelming success' and led to many workers moving to shorter hours. Researchers noted that workers had reported feeling less stressed and at risk of burnout, in addition to citing improvements in their health and work-life balance. Workers reported having more time to spend with their families, engage in their hobbies, and complete household chores. Now, 86% of the country's workforce operates on a shorter work week for the same pay.

[Spain has also trialled the four-day work week](#) as a means to increase productivity, improve the mental health of workers and [fight climate change](#). Joe Ryle, [the campaign director for the 4 Day](#)

[Week Campaign](#), described Spain's reduction in working hours as long overdue: 'Clearly, the way that we work is making people stressed, burned out, overworked and causing massive mental health issues... The four-day week would be good for the economy, good for workers, and good for the environment.'

[In Japan, Microsoft trialled four-day weeks](#) and found the shortened work week led to more efficient meetings, happier workers and boosted productivity by a staggering 40%.

These case studies are just a few examples of the overwhelming benefits of the four-day work week.

c) The disadvantages of a four-day work week

The 2 primary disadvantages that I have managed to explore in the preparation of this submission are briefly outlined below. I believe, however, that the advantages of the four-day week vastly counteract the 'costs' of radically shifting how Australians work to a four-day work week.

Disadvantage #1: Cost

[According to the Big Issue \(UK\)](#), Ireland's minister for public expenditure, Michael McGrath, estimated the cost of changing work patterns at approximately €4.2 billion (AUD\$ 6.65 billion). A four-day week may result in underutilised labour – and therefore greater costs – in some industries. For instance, some professions have tasks or duties that take more time to complete than others, which may lead to more overtime costs or drafting further staff to make up for the shortfall ([evidenced in the Icelandic healthcare sector](#)).

Disadvantage #2: No 'guarantee' of increased productivity

The [Economics Observatory \(EO\)](#) noted that 'there is no guarantee that working less will in itself raise productivity.' For example, Ford Motor Company and Boots the Chemists were instrumental in introducing two-day weekends for their employees. However, EO elaborates, 'the fact that a manufacturing employer [in the 1920s-30s] reducing the working week from six days to five managed to raise productivity does not necessarily mean that a service sector employer reducing the week from five to four days will achieve a similar result.'

These concerns, while valid, do not commandeer the same level of scrutiny and criticism in light of the benefits of the four-day work week.

f) how the four-day work week compares with flexible work arrangements or other alternative working arrangements;

To keep this brief – I firmly believe that the APS is leading the future of work in terms of flexible work arrangements and alternative work arrangements (e.g., FLEX time). The four-day work week compares with the current arrangements in place *simply by shortening the "compulsory" working week with no reductions in pay*. This is what makes it so significant and so important. The "proper" number of hours expected from workers should be capped at 30 hours per week, not 37.5+ hours per week, with additional time spent beyond 30 hours per week compensated by FLEX and/or overtime pay.