

Wednesday, 7 September 2011

## Largest ever workers' survey shows the modern workplace is increasing job stress and insecurity

Australians in 2011 are under more pressure than ever before, working longer hours than they are paid for and increasingly having work invade their home life, totally shattering the myth that employees are to blame for the nation's productivity, a new national survey of 42,000 workers has found.

The largest ever survey of Australian workers found that while the modern workplace is for some less physically demanding than in the past, but instead of making jobs easier, working hours have increased and new forms of stress have emerged.

ACTU President Ged Kearney, who officially releases the survey results in an address to the National Press Club in Canberra today, said the Working Australia Census 2011 exposed the misleading blame game being played by employers.

"Work is bleeding into the rest of a worker's life, and we do not have the means of recognising or dealing with this in a way that suits workers," Ms Kearney says in her address to the National Press Club.

"Instead we have an increase in stress, and insecurity for workers. This is particularly the case for people in casual jobs, who fear they will lose shifts if they do not comply. Business is shifting more and more financial risk and responsibility onto the workforce.

"We have a "Productivity Squeeze" which means that we are achieving productivity through unpaid work and greater pressure on workers.

"This should be a wake up call at a time when we are saturated with urging from employer and business groups about the need to effectively take away more rights and reduce pay and conditions to improve productivity and flexibility.

"Rarely do we hear from the millions of Australian workers what productivity and flexibility mean to them and their lives. The Census shows they are not abstract terms. What workers told us was that the 38 hour week is often an aspiration, not a reality, while the idea of working overtime means longer hours for no extra pay.

"They've told us that when they want to spend time with their family on weekends, they have to juggle extra work commitments, that a night in is frequently a prelude to homework for the next day, and for many, the job for life has been replaced by a series of short and insecure contracts."

Ms Kearney said the Census, which would help inform the future direction of union campaigns in the interest of all Australian workers and workplaces, backed up recent Australia Institute findings that Australians worked the longest hours of any developed nation.

(continued...)

The Census, which surveyed more than 42,000 Australian workers, found:

- 73% are regularly contacted outside of work hours about their job;
- 61% work more hours than they are paid for;
- 47% receive no compensation for their extra hours; and
- 58% have paid for work-related expenses and not been compensated.

“The Census also found that a third of workers see senior management as having no real understanding of their business, and no plan for the future,” Ms Kearney said.

“This is a disturbing finding. It suggests also that company managements are often ignoring some of the most innovative and creative people in their organisation, people who could help create productivity solutions: the workers.”

The Census also found many workers were concerned about job security, with 22.3% of respondents the issue as among their greatest concerns and one in seven (14.3%) of employed Census respondents were in a form of non-permanent work arrangement. And one in six (16.5%) respondents said they were in non-permanent work part time arrangements because they couldn't find full time work.

It has confirmed the existence in the modern Australian workplace of three distinct groups: women aged 45-54 who are juggling caring responsibilities for children and parents while continuing to work full-time; men aged 45-64 who cannot find permanent work because they are told they are too old; and workers under 25 who are employed and living out of home, but facing labour market and financial stress because of insecure and unstructured work.

Ms Kearney said the Working Australia Census will prove invaluable in helping to determine the direction of future campaigns by the union movement, including tackling the crisis of insecure and casual work in Australia.

“Our movement and its network of over 100,000 representatives in workplaces across Australia are still defending the rights to a safe workplace and a fair day's pay,” she said.

“They believe that unions have a wider role to play in society. That we should be campaigning more broadly to preserve and advance equality in Australia and to maintain the social infrastructure which has been built up over this nation's history.

“Regardless of who forms the Government, our members want us to ensure that their concerns are at the center of national debate, and that policies are judged by how they match up with the interests of working people and their families.

“This means a society where “national prosperity” reflects the interests of working people, and where opportunity and reward for effort are supported by a strong safety net and a genuine compassion for the vulnerable.

“Where our economic growth can come from genuine improvements to productivity, not simply cutting wages or forcing people to work longer hours.”

*The Voices from Working Australia report and supporting materials are available at [www.actu.org.au](http://www.actu.org.au)*

**Media contact:**

**Rebecca Tucker** ph (03) 9664 7359 or 0408 031 269; [rtucker@actu.org.au](mailto:rtucker@actu.org.au)