



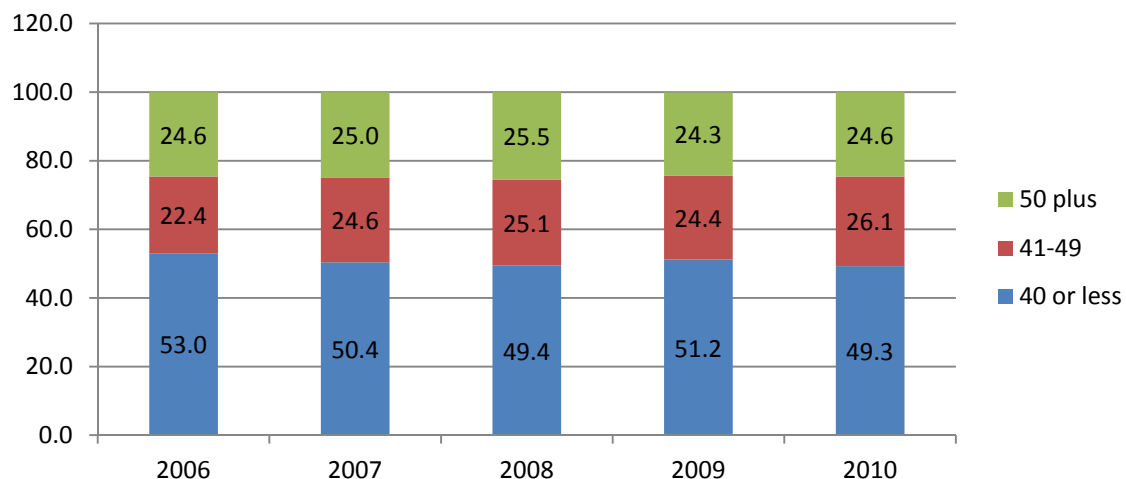
## Hours of work for full-time employees- usual and unpaid

Employees in the *Australia at Work* study<sup>1</sup> are asked a series of questions about their current working arrangements. This includes questions about their usual weekly hours of work, paid weekly hours and working time preferences. Key findings around usual versus paid hours for full-time employees are reported below<sup>2</sup>.

### Long working long hours prevalent

- Despite the National Employment Standard (NES) setting maximum weekly hours of work at 38 hours per week, half of all full-time employees in the study reported working more than the 'standard hours' of between 35 and 40 usual hours per week.
- Despite the economic downturn associated with the GFC, the culture of long working hours amongst full-time workers remained resilient during the five-year period from 2006 to 2010.
- In 2010, just over one quarter (26.1%) of full-time employees report usually working between 41 and 49 hours per week. While a further quarter (24.6%) report working a total of 50 or more usual hours per week.

Figure 1, Usual weekly hours of work, full-time employees, Australia, main job, per cent



<sup>1</sup> The *Australia at Work* study is being conducted by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney Business School. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grant scheme and the industry partner is Unions NSW. Further financial support is provided by CFMEU Energy & Mining Division, CFMEU ACT Branch, NSW Nurses' Association, the PFA, the SDA, the CEPU, the QLD Nurses Federation and the Nurses Federation (Victorian Branch). *The study* is a five-year longitudinal telephone survey of people who were aged 16 to 58 years and in the Australian labour force in March 2006 (i.e. prior to the implementation of the *Work Choices* legislation on 27 March 2006). New entrants and re-entrants to the labour force after March 2006 were not 'in-scope' for the study.

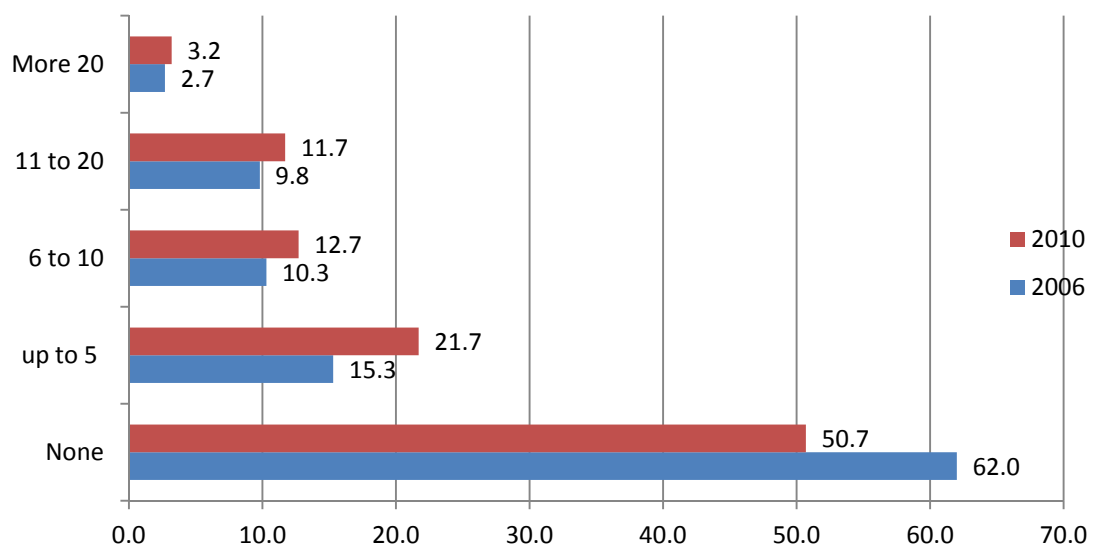
<sup>2</sup> Care should be exercised when comparing or combining the data from this study with that from other sources, especially the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The differences primarily arise because the *Australia at Work* study has gone back to survey the same people each year whereas the ABS generally gets a new cross-section each time a survey is conducted. Further technical details as well as substantive findings arising from the *Australia at Work* study can be found at: <http://www.australiaatwork.org.au>

## Many not compensated for extra hours they work

From 2006 to 2010, there has been an increase in the level of full-time employees who work extra hours each week without payment. During the 5 year period those full-time employees working:

- no unpaid hours decreased from three-fifths (62.0 per cent) to one-half (50.7 per cent).
- between 1 and 5 unpaid hours a week increased from 15.3 to 21.7 per cent.
- between 6 and 10 unpaid hours a week increased from 10.3 to 12.7 per cent.
- in excess of 10 unpaid hours a week increased from 12.5 to 14.9 per cent.

Figure 2, Unpaid hours per week, full-time employees, Australia, 2006 and 2010, per cent



In 2010 around three-in-ten (30.7%) of full-time employees said they would prefer to work fewer hours. This contrasts sharply with the working time preferences of part-timers, where one-in-five (20.6%) would prefer to work more hours.

## What do our findings suggest?

During the 1980s a trend started whereby Australians work amongst the longest hours for full-timers in OECD countries. This trend appears to be well entrenched. Many of these hours are not separately compensated. This problem is more pronounced in the upper reaches of the workforce, where it appears that 'success' at work today comes at a high price in terms of hours. It also contrasts sharply with a growing problem with 'under-utilisation' among part-time employees.

This being so, perhaps it is time for a re-think of how we define working time standards. The problem is most acute amongst those who 'work until the job is done' (i.e. 'task based employment'). Most working time standards, however, have been framed on the assumption that people are paid 'by the hour' (i.e. 'time served employment'). Working to task has traditionally not attracted payment for 'overtime'.

The key challenge appears to be devising labour standards that link the right to adequate resources to getting 'the job done' to overcome the problem of chronic understaffing - the root cause of many excessive hours of work. Considerably more work is required, however, to identify how the problem of excessive hours of work amongst Australian full timers can be overcome.