



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER
AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the future of the working week](#))

Members:

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)
MR J DAVIS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

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Secretary to the committee:

Ms S Milne (Ph: 620 50435)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 11 am.

SHAW, MS ALYSSA, Co-Director, 4 Day Week Australia

McMAHON, MR ADRIAN, Co-Director, 4 Day Week Australia

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the fifth public hearing of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for its inquiry into the future of the working week. The committee will today hear from 4 Day Work Week Australia, the ACT government, and ACT Labor.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution that they make to life in this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, please say the words, "I will take that question on notice." This helps the committee and witnesses confirm the questions taken on notice in the transcript.

For our first session, we welcome two witnesses from 4 Day Week Australia. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement. Ms Shaw, would you like to go first?

Ms Shaw: I understand what you have just outlined, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr McMahon.

Mr McMahon: I also understand what you outlined.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you. In previous hearings, we have invited opening statements only if they are short two-minute statements, otherwise we will go to questions. Are you happy to give us just a quick rundown?

Mr McMahon: Yes. Thank you for inviting us today to provide evidence to the inquiry. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the four-day week in Australia. Our organisation, 4 Day Week Australia, exists to fearlessly and proudly lead Australians toward more productive, considered and inclusive modern workplaces that champion a culture of wellbeing. We work closely with various entities and campaigns around the world that conduct trials with hundreds of businesses and organisations, including a number here in Australia.

Global trials of a four-day week, with no loss in pay, of around 32 hours a week demonstrate that it is a win-win for workers and employers. We believe it is an overdue update to a five-day week that is no longer fit for purpose, and it is a fair solution for

workers who are burnt out and seeking better ways to work. A four-day week increases worker wellbeing and job satisfaction by providing employees with a better work-life balance. It also helps employers to attract and retain high-quality employees who are then more motivated and focused and take fewer sick days. We have seen that with real-world examples that show that employers who move to a four-day week either maintain or increase productivity and reduce costs related to absentees, recruitment and power bills.

I will hand over to Alyssa for some more benefits.

Ms Shaw: In addition to the benefits Adrian has just outlined, there are a lot of benefits for the economy, society and the environment. Supporting a four-day work week supports individuals to lead a more balanced life that promotes wellbeing. We see this particularly in having a greater distribution of paid and unpaid caring between partners, as well as a better contribution to household duties. This, in turn, supports women's workforce participation and creates more equity in family life. In addition to that, interestingly, trials of the four-day week have reported a decrease in work-family conflict, meaning that family environments themselves are more harmonious.

Outside of these things, Australians would be able to benefit from a four-day work week by providing care to the more vulnerable members of our society, such as the elderly and people with disability. In terms of the environment, there are a lot of benefits, such as less commuting and dealing with congestion, reduced carbon emissions, and allowing people to make individual choices that benefit the environment—for instance, creating meals with fresh foods rather than buying takeaway.

I will hand back to Adrian.

Mr McMahon: Just to finish our opening statement, the concept of the four-day week in Australia is established, but it is still very much in its early days. Our recommendation to the ACT government would be to trial a four-day week. In particular, we recommend a trial with professions such as nursing or teaching. We understand that recruiting and retaining employees in these professions in the ACT has been identified as an area for consideration.

We are happy to take questions on any matter.

THE CHAIR: We will get to nurses and teachers. It is a good point. It is hard to get them to fill gaps. My first question is something that came up through the Assembly process and it touches on casual workers. I would like your thoughts on that and also your thoughts on sick leave for casual workers.

Ms Shaw: Chair, could we have more elaboration on the question? Is the question about how a four-day work week would work for casual workers?

THE CHAIR: Yes, from your perspective. That is right—in general, your thoughts on how casual workers fit into a four-day work week?

Ms Shaw: Adrian, do you want to answer that one?

Mr McMahon: Sure. We have identified that, for this to work in a fair and equal way across society, all workers need to move to a four-day week and have that reduction in hours. For those who are in casual employment, the fair thing to do would be to increase their hourly wage if they are being paid by the hour. That is a large and complex element of this. A society-wide four-day week requires governments, unions and business sectors all coming together to work out how it would be done in a fair and equitable way. But what we are campaigning on at the moment is for everyone to recognise the benefits. Then, if that is agreed to, we can work on how we would implement it for those trickier parts of the economy and workforce.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Ms Orr, do you have a question?

MS ORR: I sure do. Your submission notes that there was an Australian trial that finished in February this year. Can you run us through the trial: the number of participants, the sorts of businesses that were participating and what the outcomes of the trial were, please?

Mr McMahon: I can start with that. It was a trial with companies in countries across the world. This one had about 10 Australian companies. They were from around the country—none in the ACT, unfortunately. There were property managers, an accounting firm and a marketing agency. They were very much office based, nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday jobs—white-collar jobs. Outside of the trial, a logistics company over in Perth did it, and there are examples across the world of non-office jobs, if you like, doing it as well. In Australia, the companies were largely small to medium businesses and they were largely private as well. There were no not-for-profits that I can think of, unless I am missing one. Does that give you an indication?

MS ORR: Yes. That gives a good idea of who participated in the trial. Regarding the groups that participated in the trial, what was the process they went through for the trial? What sort of preparation did they do, what sorts of supports did they have, and how did they approach the task?

Mr McMahon: There is an organisation called 4 Day Week Global. A couple from New Zealand started that company and they have been moving around the world and running different trials with companies like this. Largely, it involves the company to volunteer, to put their hand up and want to be involved. An element of leadership internally in those organisations has to exist for them to put their hand up. They underwent two or three months of preparation and planning. That involved webinars, chatting with experts in relation to productivity, how to work smarter rather than working longer, and introducing them to the concept of the four-day week. Then there was a six-month trial.

For a lot of companies, the first month is crucial for them to try things, for things to fail, for things to work, for them to figure out how to do it in an ongoing way. Usually, by the second, third or fourth month they start to get into the swing of it. As we found with the results coming out few weeks ago, by the end of the six-month trial, all of the Australian companies—and I think the global total was 95 per cent—decided to continue or make it permanent.

MS ORR: To confirm, regarding the Australian companies in the trial, post the trial

they were all continuing with the four-day work week.

Mr McMahon: Yes; that is correct.

MS ORR: Alyssa, you might have something to add to this. What were the experiences from the trial and what was the feedback you got from all of the companies? Obviously they continued, so they found it positive, but what were the things that they noted as part of the experience?

Ms Shaw: Thanks for the question, Minister. There are a lot of benefits. As Adrian said, a lot has come out of it where companies were broadly supportive. We are still waiting for the disaggregated data just for the Australian companies. This research was done mainly by international scholars that worked with South Australian academics, and it was largely out of Boston College. There is more information we can bring, and of course we are happy to provide the report to the committee and have it tabled if you do not have access to it.

One of the key things that came out about why people kept going with the four-day work week is that almost two-thirds of employees experienced a reduction in burnout and a significant reduction in stress as well. There were a lot of benefits for work-life balance. There was an increase in the frequency and the duration of exercise. There was better sleep. As I said before in the introduction, we saw the same results here as they saw in the UK where partners, in particular men in heterosexual relationships, increased their share of the housework as well as caring responsibilities. That is consistent across two major trials. There is a range of other benefits. Like I said, work-family conflict was reduced. There were better environmental outcomes. There is a range of things that companies found, including that productivity stayed the same or increased and there was a reduction in the number of absentees. All the things we are seeing internationally are coming to bear in Australia as well. There is a real consistency in the data. It is evidence based.

MS ORR: I was going to ask about whether productivity or income has gone down for participants. You touched on that quite a bit. Is it fair to say the trials have found that there has been no disruption to the regular routine of business by moving to a four-day work week?

Ms Shaw: Not at all. In fact, it has been the opposite. All the trials have reported that productivity has remained the same, if not increased. Whilst it was not reported very widely in the UK, some of the businesses there actually saw an increase in profitability of around five per cent. Every business is different and, of course, we look at different metrics to determine success. Some businesses are going to be profit driven. If we are talking about a service industry or something like nursing or teaching, for instance, one of the case studies out of Sweden showed that, when they moved to a reduced number of hours, with the additional money they hired more nurses and they saw not only more people coming off things like the Swedish equivalent of JobSeeker—and therefore they were paying tax to the government—but also a huge increase in the quality of care. That is really important in the nursing sector because one of the key reasons for deaths, particularly in aged care, is falls. The rate of falls dropped dramatically, as well as cuts and abrasions that can lead to infection and can also be life threatening. It really depends on what the metrics for success are. The metrics show that, for industries that have

trialled this so far, there has been a huge range of benefits.

MS ORR: That was the trial in Sweden that you were referring to?

Ms Shaw: Yes; that is correct.

MS ORR: Going back to the point you made during the conversation about being able to provide the committee with the report, if you would not mind sending us a copy, I think that would be good.

THE CHAIR: Can I ask a supplementary? Can you hear me, Ms Orr? Can I jump in with a supplementary?

MS ORR: Sorry—I am finished.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the white-collar private businesses. Did they have to employ additional people to cover any gaps? Do you know if any of those businesses reported that?

Mr McMahon: Not that we are aware of. They are customer focused, and, in working Monday to Friday, they have half the staff on Monday and half on Friday, and maintain their customer relations without having to employ anyone else.

THE CHAIR: Do you know of any small businesses like cafes and restaurants that have hopped on a trial yet? How did they go? They would need to employ more people, I assume. I do not know. Can you explain that for me?

Mr McMahon: In the United Kingdom, there is a fish and chip shop which is fantastically iconic and good for the media as well. They really looked at it and, as far as I am aware, they did not employ anyone additional, but they looked at their shift work. There were the morning and the afternoon crews, with a slight crossover. That was how they stayed open for the same number of hours as before and maintained their seven-day-a-week output as well as a fish and chip shop.

Ms Shaw: I believe there is also a beauty business in Australia that is trialling the four-day week. One of the things that industry looks at is occupancy rates—that is, how much of their time is actually being used when they are open from 9 am to 5 pm. There are additional benefits that they are finding. Often, when you start training in a beauty business, you learn a specific way of doing beauty. They are finding that, if they can do that and retain people, it brings down their long-term costs because that training is absorbed.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Davis, do you have questions?

MR DAVIS: I do indeed. Thank you so much for your time and your submission, Ms Shaw and Mr McMahon. I am interested in point 5 of your submission, under key findings, where you talk about gender equality and boosting women's workforce participation, and you also talk about the opportunities to care for others and particularly volunteering. I ask you this question in the context of recent data released by Volunteering Australia that says that the rate of volunteering in Australia is rapidly

declining, from 36.2 per cent of our population in 2010 to 28.8 per cent in 2019. They also say the decline is most evident among women, whose rate decreased from 38.1 per cent in 2010 to 28.1 per cent in 2019. In that context, would you mind expanding a bit more on the benefits for volunteering and the not-for-profit community organisations that rely on volunteering—providing workers with more free time to be able to participate in these sorts of activities?

Ms Shaw: Thank you for the good question. Australia has a reputation of being a country of volunteerism. One of the things we have noted is that, as you have said, those rates are declining. Of course, the pandemic has a part to play in that too, so we do not to dismiss the impact of that. They are very interesting statistics, particularly on women. We have seen that borne out with women in the workforce and in their home life. We know that they are overrepresented in part-time work. They have a disproportionate amount of work in terms of caring and domestic labour. There are household duties. Often, when returning to work, women experience what is called the motherhood penalty for these things. There are significant disadvantages they face in the workplace.

I do not want to make assumptions about why it is that women are volunteering less. I think that, when we consider all these things together, it makes a lot of sense that, in terms of time being the really important construct here, women just do not have enough time to do everything. Their time is already very much stretched. We know that from lots of other statistics. Our assertion is that we do not look at volunteering jobs through a gendered lens, but we do think there is a broader societal benefit when you have a reduction in work time, which means that you have more time to give to the other parts of your life.

Traditionally, Australians do love to volunteer. Certainly one of the things we have seen out of the trials, from speaking to companies and speaking to employees, is that people volunteer more of their time. They might have a business as well, they might learn a language, they might spend all day on the golf course, they might do light admin, or they might go to the parent-teacher association. There is a range of things people can do, volunteering being one of them. We would certainly assert that, if work time reduction and a four-day work week were to come into effect, we would quickly see an increase in volunteering.

MR DAVIS: Tremendous. You will have to forgive me as your submission cites a range of other submissions and bodies of evidence, particularly internationally, where they have trialled the four-day work week, so I would be happy if you took this on notice. Would you have any more information that you might be able to provide the committee on evidence to support a reduction in working hours or a move to a four-day work week seeing an increase in volunteerism?

Ms Shaw: I am not aware of a specific report on volunteerism, but we can certainly talk to our counterparts internationally to see if they can disaggregate that data. I am aware there is another report coming out of Swinburne University that is looking more specifically at the companies in Australia who have run a four-day week trial and their experiences. It is possible we could get some additional data coming out of that. That should be released in the next couple of weeks. I am happy to take both of those questions on notice, to look into volunteerism rates internationally and if there is anything we can acquire from the new report coming out.

MR DAVIS: Great. This is my last follow-up question. I suspect I know the answer to this question, but I would not be doing my job if I did not ask you. I, in preparing for today's hearing, did a bit of Googling on the four-day work week in other places and observed a company in America that moved their workforce to a four-day work week with no loss of pay, on the condition that the fifth day was spent volunteering. The corporation provided access to all of the different organisations with which to volunteer. I wonder if you have any observations on that kind of model, if that is a good model, and what some of the risks might be associated with that model.

Ms Shaw: We do not have a specific position on that. Our general position is that individuals should be able to choose what they do with the additional time they have if we go to a four-day work week. Volunteering would be a natural part of that for a lot of people, but it really is very individual and very contextual to people and their lives. For instance, we do not see it as volunteering, but of course, if you have more time and you go and help an elderly relative or a relative or community member who is disabled, for instance, that would be seen as just as valuable, but is only made possible through that reduction in work time.

MR DAVIS: It is slight tangential, but, based on your answer to that question, I have just one more. You cite the example of helping an elderly relative using this free time or helping out a community member or a family member with a disability. That instinctively makes me think there are some benefits for the workforce sectors that already support those communities—disability support workers and workers in the aged-care sector. Can you see some benefits to those industries and those workforces if there is an increasing number of Australians that are able to, through a four-day work week, take on some of those responsibilities for their family members and friends who are aging or have a disability?

Ms Shaw: Yes; absolutely. We think there is the potential for a lot of benefits. We presented to the Senate inquiry on work and care about this—a bit more specifically in that context. The key thing we are thinking about is that, in the Australian context, we have an aging population. One of the reasons the Japanese government has been more radically promoting the four-day work week is that they know they do not have enough people in Japan to actually take care of their aging population. What they are seeing is a lot of people dropping out of their jobs to take care of their elderly relatives. That is partly cultural, in terms of both family responsibilities and responsibilities in the workplace.

Australia is not going to approach the level of Japan in terms of an aging population, but we are increasingly getting there. I am happy to provide the very specific statistics from our projections on that. We see it as an increasing issue that is going to compound over time and, for that reason, if we do have this bit of a rejig to how our work-life balance looks, it will enable people to support aging relatives.

We also know that, in the caring industry, the majority of carers that take care of people who have disability or are elderly are women. Often these women are under-represented in the workforce and they are more likely to be in poverty. There is a huge issue here. If you can provide family members more time to support their relative who is being supported by the primary carer—a woman who is often impoverished—it might

actually enable them to have more time to look for work and get out of the poverty cycle. There is a huge implication. I guess it is a huge ecosystem, is it not? How we move one lever results in a lot of positive conclusions for a lot of other people.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have one question. We have just a few minutes left. Noting the massive shortage of nurses and teachers, how have the trials negotiated that? I imagine that is not for the sort of industry where you need all of the 24/7 shifts covered. Can you talk to me about how that is worked out?

Mr McMahon: We have not seen trials in that space yet, and that is why we would recommend it to a government. It needs longer term planning and it needs the backing of the government to potentially fund the research and look into different ways of doing it. Most of the trials so far have included businesses that have volunteered themselves, whether they are private or NGOs, but those larger sectors are where we want to get into next to see how it would work. It is very much about retaining the staff that are already there. We know that, in this country, 40 per cent of teachers are leaving within five years, and the turnover rate in nursing is ridiculously high—

THE CHAIR: The average is 6.7 years in Canberra.

Mr McMahon: Teachers?

THE CHAIR: Nurses.

Mr McMahon: Right. We often hear about providing cheaper fees to go into university to study these courses, but, as well as attracting new people into these industries, we need to retain the ones that are there now. We need to find a more sustainable long-term solution and a better balance between work time and time outside of work. What we are advocating would be one piece of the larger puzzle.

MS ORR: Chair, could I jump in with a supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS ORR: Picking up on your comment on trialling with professions such as nurses and teachers and some of the non-office based ones, would you advocate for the ACT public service or government entities to get involved? How would a trial with those groups help with the broader movement to a four-day work week and understanding how a four-day work week would work?

Ms Shaw: We would certainly advocate that the ACT government undertakes this with the workforce that it has. In preparing our submission, we talked to representatives that are part of ACTCOSS who provide different sorts of services that would intercept with nursing in particular and certain disability support teams. We think there are potentially also opportunities to support not-for-profits who do something like this. Regarding the benefit and making the case for the four-day work week, even though we know that it is effective in non-white-collar sectors, we are still growing our evidence base. Adrian has rightly said that there have not been huge trials on this, but we do know about the

example in Sweden, which I gave you earlier. There are also places like Utah, where there is a council that has moved two primary schools and a high school to a four-day week. These concepts are being actively considered in order to meet the needs of people—not just the professions but the community as well.

We would love to see the ACT government do a trial and test this. Again, we would encourage the committee to think about the metrics for success. It is not necessarily just about productivity, as it would be in a private business; it is about how we are ensuring fewer falls and a better quality of care and how we are keeping teachers so that they can teach students over a long time and ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to pass on. There are different outcomes we can look at as to why it would be successful.

MS ORR: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to add that you think we have missed?

Ms Shaw: I do not think so.

THE CHAIR: Thank you so much for attending today and for your comprehensive submission. We really appreciate that. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide you with the opportunity to check it and identify if there are any errors. We had the tabling of a report. If you could make sure you get that to the committee secretary within a week, that would be awesome. If that is practical, we would appreciate that. Thank you so much. We will close this session. Thank you for your time.

Mr McMahan: Thank you.

Ms Shaw: Thank you very much.

Short suspension.

BARR, MR ANDREW, Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action,
Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism
WILSON, MS JANET, Executive Branch Manager, ACTPS Centre for Leadership
and Innovation, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
CAMPBELL, MR RUSS, Deputy Under Treasurer, Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development Directorate
MINERS, MR STEPHEN, Deputy Under Treasurer, Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development Directorate

THE CHAIR: We now welcome the Chief Minister and officials from the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate as witnesses on behalf of the ACT government.

I would like to remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could you please state whether you understand the privilege statement?

Mr Barr: I understand the privilege statement.

Ms Wilson: I have read and understand and agree with the privilege statement.

Mr Miners: I acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I will kick off with a question that is a bit out of left field, but it is something that cropped up in the Assembly as something that we should cover, and that is casual workers. Have you had any thoughts on casual work and sick leave for casual workers and how that might fit into a four-day or flexible work week?

Ms Wilson: I would start by saying that our casual workers in the ACT public service are already subject to the secure work provisions. We have an arrangement where people who have been employed with us consistently over 12 months are offered the option to convert to permanent work with us. We actually find that a lot of people choose to stay casual. So there are some options there for people.

We also offer, in particular circumstances, some leave—paid leave and unpaid leave—for casual workers. There are a few rules around that. I will not go into the detail of that, but there are some provisions there for casual workers in terms of this broad subject.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Orr, would you like to ask your question?

MS ORR: Yes, I would. I do not know if you have been following all the other hearings, but there has been a real theme coming out from a lot of the other witnesses that a trial within the ACT public service would be quite beneficial to understanding how a four-day work week can work across a range of professions, and there was a lot of enthusiasm from workers representatives to be involved in that trial.

I was wondering if there had been any thought given to the feasibility of a trial within the ACT public service.

Mr Barr: Thank you. Certainly we are open to progressing a project of that kind. Right at the moment there are a number of emerging issues around resolving enterprise bargaining agreements and the like. So it is not something that we are looking at this week. But we certainly will consider it, and of course we will await the committee's report before making any further decisions.

MS ORR: In the context of being open at some point to progressing the four-day work week, you note in your submission that you anticipate there being a cost. But we have heard a lot of evidence from various trials around the world and groups that have undertaken a four-day work week that there have not actually been significant additional costs in their experience, although some workforces may incur one.

What work have you done to date to actually examine in detail what costs might be associated with putting a trial on?

Mr Barr: I missed the second part of the question. A couple of words cut out; sorry.

MS ORR: You have said that there are costs anticipated.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS ORR: What work has been done to look at the cost, given that a lot of the trials that we have seen so far have indicated that there is not actually a lot of additional cost?

Mr Barr: I think the short answer there is that it depends on the nature of the employment arrangements. Where additional costs could potentially be incurred would be in relation to, for example, shift work and areas where the government requires a minimum staffing level to provide a service 24/7.

I think the examples that have been touched upon in trials elsewhere have largely involved salary workers who have a reasonably flexible level of working arrangements across a week. It would vary across the ACT public sector, depending on the employment type.

MS ORR: Do you think it is fair to say, given the evidence from trials to date, that there would not be a cost across the whole public service; that it would perhaps be parts of the public service, whereas others potentially would be cost neutral?

Mr Barr: Conceivably, yes, depending on exactly the implementation and what degree of flexibility and requirements for particular business units within the government. Yes, I think you are right: there could, in some instances, be no costs and in others, obviously, they would be potentially considerable. So we would need to assess that across the diversity of our employment base.

I think it would be fair to observe that there is not another employer in Australia that has as many different occupations as the ACT government, because of the combination of local and state government responsibility. So we are a unique employer in the nation.

As we are of course in the middle of enterprise bargaining, we have a very wide range of enterprise bargaining arrangements. A change process is not going to be straight forward. But, as I said, we are certainly open to considering those matters.

MS ORR: I think the diversity of your workforce has been one of the reasons people have said it would be such a good place to do it.

Mr Barr: Indeed; and I agree. I think there certainly is that capacity. I would argue that, in the context of some of our flexible work arrangements over the last few years, we have sort of demonstrated a willingness to go down this path.

MS ORR: On the workplace arrangements, you note in paragraph 10 that the ACT public service does not have a work reduction provision. Can you elaborate on what this means? Also, with that framework that is there and noting all the various instruments under the Fair Work Act, what would need to be addressed to do a trial as opposed to implementing a permanent arrangement?

Ms Wilson: In terms of not being able to reduce hours, it is not being able to reduce hours without a commensurate in reduction in pay. That is the current arrangement. People can go part-time, they can condense their hours and they can take all sorts of flexible working options. If they reduce their overall hours, though, there is a commensurate reduction in pay.

Being able to work at 80 per cent for 100 per cent pay requires some changes to our industrial instruments. On the complete requirements that would need to be changed, I would have to take that on notice if you wanted to know specifically.

MS ORR: Yes, that would be good. I appreciate that the instruments would need to be changed for any permanent arrangement or change in policy, but what I really wanted to know within this is what scope there is and what would need to be changed to enable a trial, as opposed what would have to be changed for a permanent arrangement.

Ms Wilson: I see. I would have to take that on notice, even for a trial.

MS ORR: If you would not mind, that would be good. You have also noted in the submission that there are challenges in the implementation. Can you just run us through what you would consider some of these to be?

Ms Wilson: Certainly. The Chief Minister has touched on this briefly but, if we look at the diverse workforce that we have, we have office workers, frontline workers in hospitals and teachers and nurses, and I know that in the other sessions you have had you have a number of people who have touched on that. So, in wrapping in all of those, there are various areas to consider.

We would be looking at the fact that, particularly with frontline workers, we still run services 24/7. So the hospitals and our emergency services would still be continuing to deliver services 24/7, and our front desks, our help desks and Access Canberra would still be delivering services.

So, for that component, if we have people who are working fewer hours, we would need to be thinking about whether we have an increased workforce to be able to take up those extra hours. So that obviously has implications for the recruitment of skilled staff in that space.

In that, though, there is an assumption that all services would continue five days a week and maybe some would be four days a week. I think if we were going down the path of a trial, there would be a lot of consultation around community expectations and whether everything still be offered five days a week.

MS ORR: Would there also be consideration given to whether services could be expanded? Some witnesses from the healthcare sector said that there are things within the healthcare sector that are only offered five days a week and that, if we moved away from this idea of five days a week and we moved to more of a seven day, we would actually have an increase in service provision. Has any thought been given to how that could be realised?

Ms Wilson: So far no real thought has been given to it in any depth, because we have not been pursuing that at this point. But, I guess, bringing into question a four-day working week starts to open up the question of what a working week looks like in any case.

Potentially, we could expand the delivery of services, but it comes with the costs of extra workforce. So there would be implications for all of these things.

MS ORR: I want to go to the benefits of attracting and retaining staff, We heard a little bit of evidence in the last hearing about staff turnover, particularly in areas where there is high burnout, such as teaching and nursing. Has there been any consideration given to the burnout and the staff turnover that the ACT government has and how a trial of a four-day work week, or a move to a four-day work week, could help in bringing those numbers down?

Ms Wilson: I believe that a four-day working week would make us an extremely attractive employer. So there are certainly opportunities there to attract terrific talent. In designing a four-day working week, it requires a completely different way of thinking about the way that we would work. It is fostering staff and it is managing workload and priorities really carefully.

Post the pandemic and particularly since a number of workforces have been working in a more hybrid and flexible fashion, one of the things we are grappling with is making sure that we are building a culture where people can disconnect. Flexibility is something that our staff tell us that they really want and they want to continue with. So we keep on looking for new ways and additional ways to expand that. But it has to come with the ability to disconnect from work and to make sure that people can do the things they want to do in their own time and not feel like they have to stay connected.

In a future environment of a four-day working week, that would become even more critical, and managing and prioritising work would be an area that we would have to invest in more, I think.

Mr Barr: I will just quickly add that obviously a number of these issues are pertinent in our current enterprise bargaining round. The government has responded to a number of those issues through agreements that have been made or will soon be made with our workforce in a number of those areas where attraction and retention of staff is very key to service delivery.

MS ORR: Great. I have more questions, but I will let Mr Davis—

MR DAVIS: No, by all means, Ms Orr, if you ask enough supplementary questions, I will not have any left, which appears to be the case—because that was my very next question. So I will go with something completely different.

We were just speaking with the 4 Day Work Week Australia group about volunteering. I would like a bit of a read on how much the ACT government records the rate of volunteerism in the ACT. If we acknowledge the position put by Volunteering Australia that volunteerism is on the decline by more than 10 percentile, and that is particularly amongst women—and the evidence would suggest particularly in the ACT—does the ACT government have any opinion on that and the effect that that is having on a number of not-for-profit community organisations that rely on volunteers to stay afloat? Have you identified any benefits from moving to these more flexible work conditions for those organisations that rely on a volunteer workforce?

Mr Barr: On the first question, I think the data would be sourced nationally. I do not think we have a separate data collection on that. In your subsequent questions, you then referenced a data source, which I presume to be the national one that would have been referenced by that particular organisation. I am not aware of anything I have seen about detailed research on implications of this for volunteering. Ms Wilson might be able to assist if there is something that I have not seen—

MR DAVIS: Before we go into the details—because I was externally processing, as I am wont to do—the point of my question is: has the ACT government heard from stakeholders that there has been a reduction in their capacity to deliver services because they have seen a reduction in their volunteer workforce? If so, do you see benefits to more flexible work conditions and the four-day work week to support that challenge?

Mr Barr: I am aware that, in some areas where there is a volunteering component associated with an ACT government service delivery—for example, in emergency services where we have volunteer supplementation around fire services and community fire units and those sorts of things—agencies have been needing to be active in maintaining their volunteer base. I cannot point to any specific research that I have seen that would demonstrate a link between increased volunteerism and a four-day working week.

MR DAVIS: Maybe that is an on-notice question. I would be interested to see if there has actually been a decline in volunteerism in the emergency services, like you suggest.

Mr Barr: Sure. I did not say that there was a decline; I said that I am aware that it has been raised with us that they are actively seeking to maintain. As the population ages, sometimes that can have differing impacts on volunteering in different sectors. As people retire, they may have more time—which was sort of implicit, I think, in part of

your question—not necessarily for very physically strenuous activities, for example, but perhaps in other areas.

But we are at such an early stage of any consideration of a four-day working week, that, no, we have not gone out and commissioned research on its implications for any number of other things. It is just too early in the process. But I guess that is why we are having a committee inquiry. This issue will be considered over an extended period of time, and not just in this jurisdiction.

Nothing is going to change overnight. I suspect that, as we have seen an evolution in the number of hours that people work over the history of our nation, such a further evolution is indeed possible, but it generally tends not to happen overnight.

MR DAVIS: Do you have further on that, Ms Wilson?

Ms Wilson: To the first part of your question, I would add that I have not seen any data. On the second, I believe I have read research from a gender point of view that, as women's participation in the workforce has grown and increased hours for women, that engagement in community—I would not say volunteering but broader engagement—such as helping out at the school, helping out at the tuckshop and things like that and helping out with parents, is impacted. I could not tell you the numbers, but I have seen research that suggests that lower community engagement.

MR DAVIS: I have a few more questions on a slightly different tangent. The Chief Minister raised the enterprise bargaining negotiations that are ongoing with a number of different workforces. Would you be able to proffer some wisdom for the committee on how much workload pressures and work hours were raised with different workforces throughout the course of their EBA negotiations? And, Chief Minister, given your relative experience in this place, how that compares in contrast to the last time we negotiated on EBAs?

I suppose what I am trying to get to is: are you hearing from your workforce greater stresses on both workload and working hours than you have in past EBA negotiations?

Mr Barr: There is across the public sector. I guess there is a question as to whether you can disentangle that from pandemic related impacts but, certainly in some areas, extreme pressure that is a once-in-a-century event would clearly deliver that pressure in certain workforces. In others, that once-in-a-century event meant that a lot of their work disappeared because the sorts of community activities or things that were a key feature of their work were not possible for reasons of lockdowns and other things.

So, stepping beyond the sort of COVID impact period, I can make some general observations about people certainly feeling busier and that there is more going on and less time to do all the things that they would like to do. Equally, there are more things to do in 2023 than there were in 1953. Technology, wealth and all of those things have contributed to a much more interesting life for citizens in 2023 than in 1953, 1973 or even 1993.

There is a lot happening in the world—that is true. I think perhaps some of the best people to ask questions on how much this has changed might be people who were alive

through each of those periods. I am old now, but there are a lot of people older than me who would have more reference to what might have been described as a quieter period of living than—

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, you raised the pandemic pressures. The committee has heard, particularly from the nursing workforce and from the teaching workforce, through their industrial partners, particular pressures on those workforces. At the risk of verballing them, my interpretation of their evidence is that their workforces were under considerable strain prior to the pandemic, and they were workforces that were exacerbated by the pandemic.

They have been quite forthright with the committee about their desire to see their workforces included in any prospective four-day work week trial. Would that be a position shared by the ACT government? Does the ACT government understand those concerns and those pressures and can understand the position of those industrial partners to want to see their workforces included?

Mr Barr: Yes. There are there are the range of issues that Ms Wilson touched on. If you reduced the school week to four days as well, there is an alignment at the moment with what is considered the working week with what is considered the schooling week. So it would be quite a significant societal change.

So we would need to think those questions around whether a move to a four-day work week would then mean, as has been touched on, four days being the number of days that—

MS ORR: They are not—

MR DAVIS: Before Ms Orr jumps in, because Ms Orr has had a pretty crack, I would say that, when we spoke to the AEU, my recollection of their evidence to us was that their position—and it would appear most people's position—is not moving to a four-day school wee, but rather that there would be implications on government and budgetary implications to increase the size of the workforce to support four-day teachers and five-day schooling. Is that something that the government understands to be the position of these industrial partners, and how would you imagine accommodating that?

Mr Barr: It is very early in the discussion. I guess you could see some education settings where that would be feasible. There are others, though, particularly in primary school and preschool, where normally it is the same teacher. There would presumably be a different teacher on one or more days of the week, which, again, would be a pretty fundamental change to the nature of, for example, primary school teaching.

I think we have to be fair dinkum about a discussion that, if it is four-days, it is four-days across the system—not that taxpayers will then find the resources to offer five days. If it is genuinely a four-day working week, then our system moves from two days to three for days that we do not work. I think that is pretty strong reality in this discussion, and it needs to be front and centre. We cannot have our cake and eat it too; I think would be the reality.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: My question harks back to what you were saying about, at the moment, people can go part-time—four days a week, obviously—but with reduced pay. Some of the people who have attended our hearings have said, “No; it should be full pay and four days.” I note here in your worker productivity and timekeeping that there is flexibility. So what are your thoughts on that? Is it back to: if it is four days, it is four days and, based on activity only, if someone can do their five-day-a-week job tasks—the tasks that they have to get done—in two days the, great, “We’ll still pay you for five”? What are your thoughts around that? Can you explain to me what the public service feel?

Mr Barr: Again, it will vary across the diversity of the ACT public sector. In some circumstances, that could not work, because we could not have a vacant post for—

THE CHAIR: Nurses doing that. I completely understand. I am probably talking more about the office work—

Mr Barr: Again, we have a degree of flexibility in that regard. It would, of course, depend on the needs of the business unit, and some have a particular output requirement at certain times of the year. Mr Miners might wish to talk a little bit about Treasury’s workload during this budget cycle, as opposed to the one or two weeks when we are not in the budget cycle.

Mr Miners: Yes, I am happy to. Obviously putting a budget together requires considerable hours, and it would be more usual to be working six days rather than five days over that period. There is considerable overtime and considerable extra workload that come on to the team at that point.

If we were to try and do it using a four-day week, you would need to roster things differently. But there is still the same amount of work to be done. So, if you are just cutting everyone’s hours back, we would effectively have a 20 per cent reduction in output, unless we can pick it up through productivity.

We might pick up some of it through productivity, but I do not think we would get the whole lot. When I look at my staff, I do not see 20 per cent of their time spent sitting around—in fact, I see nothing like that. So, over those periods where people are working budgets, a four-day week is not something that is going to work in those areas.

We do try to have much more flexible arrangements. We make up for that with time after budget to allow our staff longer periods of leave. We try to do a little bit of rostering and working on the hours. So, if someone has had a particularly late night because they needed to get something through, they might come in later the next morning, and we try to pick it up through the hours they work, using that flex system.

THE CHAIR: That seems like a sensible approach. I am trying to think of everybody here. With nursing conditions, if the conditions are adjusted, if they have done a nightshift then it seems terrible to get them in for an evening the next day and that cannot be their day off. So I appreciate that. Chatting to people out in the community, especially from a business perspective, it seems, “If you can do your job in four days

then why would I be paying you for five?” So I think, yes, there is that cost. Anyway, that is really all I have to say about that. Thank you; I appreciate your response.

MS ORR: Just picking up on this line, I think it is an interesting one—this idea, as the Chair said, that “If you can do your job in four days why would I pay you for five?” A lot of the evidence that we have heard from the four-day work week trials and the groups that have been involved is that it is not actually about just trying to get people to do more with less without any adjustments, and that there has been quite a lot of work put into reducing, for example, the number of meetings we have, capping meetings at half an hour—which I think would be almost a dream for a public servant, being a former public servant myself—making sure that not more than five people come to a meeting and looking at other productivity offsets

So, in having this discussion, in your consideration of the four-day work week, are you looking at how productivity could be implemented, as opposed to just trying to make the workforce do more in less time?

Mr Barr: You have absolutely hit the nail on the head there. The only way in which it is viable is if there is a significant productivity benefit. As Mr Miners said, the amount of work to be done is not going to reduce. In fact, if anything, the expectations on the public sector are growing not reducing. Any cursory look at, for example, the workload of the Assembly, when it sits and then the outcomes of Assembly sittings place in addition on the public sector, would give you a very clear sense that workload is only growing and the range of issues that the parliament wishes the public sector to work on only grows.

Productivity is clearly an area that we would have to focus on. But I would observe in the context of the example you have given in terms of meeting efficiency that the use of technology during the pandemic, that I think has remained in place, has dramatically improved productivity. There are the concerns that people have about online meetings, for example, but, in many instances, they have been more efficient—simply by reducing travel time between meetings—but people do miss the degree of inter-personal engagement. So there are things you need to weigh up here about the nature of workplaces. We are not all just units of production producing certain output. I think that is pertinent in the consideration of both the hours of work but then what that work actually entails and what that working life experience is.

If you adjust all the productivity agenda outcome then, yes, you could seek to reduce almost all of human interaction down to the essential elements that deliver the key outputs for whatever area of the public sector you are talking about. But I am not sure that is a particularly nice world working life or society in which to live. I guess these are things that we do trade off in the current arrangements and that you certainly would need to consider in the future.

MS ORR: That is a really good point when talking about the wellbeing of the workforce. What obligations does the ACT public service administration have towards the wellbeing of the ACT public service? Where do you see the benefits in increasing the wellbeing of the public service employees?

Ms Wilson: We take the wellbeing of our employees incredibly seriously. It is one of the key considerations in reviewing the research and listening to stories coming from the trials and some of the conversations that have happened with this committee so far. There is a lot of research that indicates that limiting working hours—and I would note that it is not just the four-day week model; that it is actually other models, whether that is a kind of capped working week instead of a four-day working week—is something that has good outcomes both for the individual but also for their families.

I think that is an interesting consideration for the public service to think about there: that we have an obligation to our employees but there is a broader obligation to the Canberra community as well to make sure that people can disconnect from work in a reasonable way.

MS ORR: We have had evidence from other witnesses today around looking at the benefits beyond the costs and profits and also looking at reduction in our staff turnover and hiring costs.

The other point I wanted to explore a little bit with you was psychosocial hazards, and the obligations that the government has towards psychosocial hazards in the workforce. My understanding is that public service sectors are seeing this as a growing area within their insurance liabilities. Has any thought been given to how something such as a four-day work week or a reduction in work could actually start to help with the psychosocial hazards and the burnouts that we are seeing coming through in workers compensation claims?

Ms Wilson: What I would say there is that we have not done the work yet. We have not yet pursued starting to do the planning investment. It is a big “if” at the moment, as the Chief Minister has said. So we have not looked down that side of it.

If the ACT government ended up pursuing this or another model, things like the impact on wellbeing, psychosocial risk in the workplace, the industrial framework and the employment framework—all of these things—would need to be fleshed out. It would take a considerable investment in simply the planning for something like this.

MS ORR: Yes. That actually goes to my substantive question, which was about the planning. The proposition has been put forward by a number of people that a trial within the ACT public service would be great. If I have understood your evidence today you yourself have said that a well-considered trial would be something that you would be open to. What does a well-considered trial look like, and what kind of preparation would you need to do in order to have a well-considered trial?

Ms Wilson: With our workforce, we would need to take into account a great deal of stakeholder consultation. I know that you have had members from unions, academics, and people from the ACT Public service before the committee. For us, working with our various stakeholder groups is something that we would need to be doing so that we could co-design a trial, or a series of trials, in fact.

Thinking about whether it would be a four-day working week or some other model around this would be important. I do hear from my colleagues over the lake, that they are looking to the ACT Public service and what we are going to do. So far, we have

been monitoring the trials that have been done elsewhere with interest, but without any kind of commitment.

If we were going down this path, we would have to start with consultation, discussing the various options, and looking at the various work groups and workforces that we work with and how it would impact them and look at their ideas for how it would work in the local operations.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, as the head of the service, would you have any view that you would like to share on what a well-considered trial would look like?

Mr Barr: Sorry; could you repeat the question?

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr, this will be your last question.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, do you have any views on what a well-considered trial would look like? And I do have two very short combo-questions once you have answered that.

THE CHAIR: We will move onto Mr Davis after that.

Mr Barr: This is not an issue on my agenda at the moment, to be frank. I am very happy for a committee process. I am not going to be doing anything until I have seen the committee report. Just knowing what is in front of the ACT public sector at the moment, within the next 12 months, it is not something that is going to happen immediately.

We have essentially made nearly all of the budget decisions for this year. So there is going to be nothing in our budget next month. The next time we would potentially consider anything would be next year's budget. So this is not something that is going to be pursued in the short term, but I am open to a medium-term consideration. I have not given any thought to the issue around how we would shape a trial. I would seek advice from the public service on that. It is just too early at this point—

MS ORR: And that is essentially what I am getting at, Chief Minister.

THE CHAIR: Mr Davis needs to move on with—

MS ORR: Hang on, may I finish, please?

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr, you need to give Mr Davis—

MS ORR: This is a bit unreasonable, Chair. Come on; let me just finish my question and then we can move on. There is still quite a bit of time left in this hearing.

THE CHAIR: There is 10 minutes. You have got two.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, just to clarify: I was not saying moving straight to a trial. I was asking about what would be the lead time for considering a trial to look like?

Mr Barr: At least 12 months.

MS ORR: Thank you. That is the question I was leading to. Would you be happy to have a range of stakeholders at the table in considering all parts of the public service as part of that trial?

Mr Barr: I do not have a closed mind on those questions at this point. It is just too early. As I said, I will await the committee's report, findings and recommendations, and then the government will consider that and give a response within the required time frame. But, right at the moment, as I said, to be frank, this is not something that we have devoted considerable resources too, and we are not in a position to do so at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you for your response, Chief Minister.

MR DAVIS: Going to the committee's report and the evidence required to inform its recommendations, I would be interested to know how you track, if at all, requests from individual staff members across the public service, but also from industrial partners representing public service employees as a collective, for four-day work weeks and more flexible work conditions. My question, in part, is: do you track that? If so, what is that data telling you? And, if you do not track it, why not? And how can I ask that you do?

Mr Barr: There are a number of different answers. I can give some. Clearly, some of those issues are raised in the periodic enterprise bargaining negotiations. They will come up every few years in that context. Then, often within EBA arrangements, there is an agreement to work on a particular issue that would be pertinent to the question you have asked, and that work would occur during the period of an agreement.

On the question of individual requests, that certainly is dealt with. There is a proportion of the workforce, but not a significant proportion of the workforce, that seeks reduced hours. Ms Wilson may be able to give a little bit more data on that.

Ms Wilson: Yes. About 24 per cent of our workforce is part time. That is almost a quarter when you are talking about the entire ACT public service, across 30,000-odd people. People would be going through their local HR areas. Each of our directorates has a local HR area. For the most part, they would be talking to either their HR areas or their direct managers and supervisors for flexible work conditions.

In terms of other ways of tracking it, our staff survey is probably one of the other key ways we keep track of whether we are on the money with that, whether we are offering enough conditions and whether people are taking up those conditions. We know that people are pretty happy with our flexible work provisions. Our surveys come back—

Mr Barr: The *State of the service report* would also report on that annually.

MR DAVIS: I asked the question for a few reasons, Ms Wilson—in part because you have acknowledged that senior leaders in the public service, like yourself, have been observing the public hearings, and you have seen some of the submissions and some of the evidence that we have received. You will no doubt know that an ACT government employee appeared before the committee and told the story of having worked a five-day week and now working a four-day week. That is an arrangement made with their

superior. What I want to know is: how often does that happen across the ACT public service? Do we track that? A quarter of the service is part time, and I do not know if that is because they applied for a part-time contract and got it or they were full-time employees who were asked to come back. That dataset does not tell me much in terms of a four-day work week.

Mr Barr: It would obviously be a combination of those. There are some positions that are part time. That includes bus drivers, those who work in Access Canberra and policy roles. There are—

MR DAVIS: I am asking, for the purpose of this committee, to identify both the need for a four-day work week and how to do a four-day work week. I am less interested in the people who work for the service that applied for a part-time job and have a part-time job. I am more interested in how many people you have recruited for full-time jobs that are now working fewer than full-time hours due to an arrangement they have made with their boss.

Mr Barr: That would be a very small number, but we could see what information we can provide.

MR DAVIS: That would be great. That is on notice?

Mr Barr: Yes. We will take that on notice.

MR DAVIS: Great.

Mr Barr: I do not know what data we can get, but there will be some, I am sure.

MR DAVIS: Tremendous. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything else, Mr Davis? You have the floor.

MR DAVIS: I am good after all that.

THE CHAIR: Great. I have a question. I would like to hear your thoughts on the impact if the public service were to transition. I know you have not even done a review or consideration, but what would the impact to business be?

Mr Barr: Interesting. To the extent that businesses rely on a workday level of activity—that is, if you took this to its extreme application of a weekend being three days, not two, and fixed days and the same days for everyone, in the way that our current five-two arrangements work—for some businesses that would be a boost because they would get a lot of their business on days when most people are not working. For others, it would presumably mean less activity because people would not be undertaking their workday activities on the days that they are not working.

So, in aggregate, what would that mean? I do not know. It would depend on the industry sector. If you were in tourism, you would be very happy with people having more time to travel and undertake leisure activities. If you were in hospitality, it is probably the same—

THE CHAIR: If you have the staff.

Mr Barr: Yes—unless of course your business relied on people coming in and out of an office. It is going to vary. It is difficult to give a definitive economy-wide answer. You would need to run that through an economic model, and, even then, it would depend on the assumptions you made about people's behaviour. I am not sure how much modelling would have been done before the last significant change in the industrial revolution. Probably not that much. Mr Miners may be able to give some further economic perspective on this.

Mr Miners: It would be very difficult to measure because, as the Chief Minister said, those implications would depend on the industry. In terms of running the public service, as I said, if we were reducing hours by 20 per cent, we would need to find 20 per cent productivity. That may be found through changing the way we work and the way we operate, but it is a lot. That is a massive undertaking. I do worry about the impacts. It will be very different across different sectors. For example, there are people who come in and buy their lunch every day on their five-day work week, and the restaurants and cafes will undoubtedly have a reduction. We saw that through COVID, when they really struggled. There will be other industries that will be able to do that really well and find different ways to do things.

We need to be careful. It is a complicated set of modelling. In something like working from home through COVID, we found that we had some areas that actually had an increase in productivity, which was great. We had other processes that really needed to be face to face, and their productivity fell through the floor. Things you think might be quite simple can have different effects. Even in one organisation, it can have different impacts on different parts of that organisation.

Mr Barr: I will make one other point, which I perhaps should have clarified at the beginning. If the question is that the ACT public sector moves to a four-day working week and everything else in the economy remains the same, that is a slightly different question. My assumption is that this is a society-wide change. It is not that the ACT public sector operates in an entirely different world to the rest of the economy and the rest of society. That is something the committee may wish to grapple with. There is discussion about trials, and that is one thing. These sorts of changes over economic history have been society wide. Some groups started them first, obviously, but something for the committee to dwell upon is: is this something that is going to change for everyone?

My view is that, if you are going to do this, you are going to do it for everyone. We need to think about the implications. The ACT public sector cannot operate in a bubble that is completely isolated from everything else that happens in society. When going down this path, we have to contemplate what it means economy wide, society wide, and presumably nation wide as well.

THE CHAIR: Will you take that on as a part of the modelling for the public service? Will you consider business—

Mr Barr: We would have to consider that, which is why I need to be clear. I wish the committee well in its deliberations, and I am sure you will deliver an excellent and thought-provoking report, but implementing something like this is not a straightforward exercise. It is very complex and it does have broader implications. We have touched on some of them today.

THE CHAIR: Especially in New South Wales. We are so closely tied.

Mr Barr: Indeed, yes, but even in just our own service delivery. For me, it is pretty fundamental that, if we are moving to four days, it is across the board, so that would have implications for schooling and it would have implications for a range of other things. At this point, I am yet to see evidence to suggest that productivity would address all of it. I accept there will be productivity in many areas, but it is not going to cover the full implication of this. As Ms Wilson said, a flip side to this is the services that would have to be reduced to do this fairly across society.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Orr.

MS ORR: I have a question.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. It is 12.20.

MS ORR: I thought we were going to 12.25.

THE CHAIR: No. The next people are starting at 12.25. We need time to switch over. Is it a two-minute situation?

MS ORR: Yes. It will be quite quick. Chief Minister, just on the topic of the private sector, the non-public sector, has there been any thought given to how trials within the private sector could be supported by government, noting that some governments have provided grants to help businesses transition and also provided access to the supports and the information needed. Is that something you would be willing to take on board to get this wider systemic change—

Mr Barr: It would obviously be something that would need to be considered. Right at the moment, the territory budget does not have room to give grants for this. At some point in future, we might, but not at the moment.

MS ORR: I will leave it there, noting the chair is keen to wrap this up.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Fabulous. I really appreciate your submission and your time today. I have found it very helpful. When available, a transcript will be provided to you. Please check that for errors and make sure there are no changes you would like to make. There were a couple of questions taken on notice, so please get those to the secretary within five days. We will close our session. Thank you very much. Have a good afternoon.

Short suspension.

VAN DIJK, MR ASH, Secretary, ACT Labor

THE CHAIR: We now welcome Mr Ash van Dijk, from ACT Labor. Could you please state that you have read and understand the privilege statement before you?

Mr van Dijk: I acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic. As we have only 10 minutes, we are just going to fly straight in with questions. My first question to everybody has been about pay for casual workers. What are your thoughts on that—in two minutes flat?

Mr van Dijk: Well, casual workers should be paid. To kind of set the scene, ACT Labor does not currently have a formal policy position on the four-day working week. Our submission was put together early last year based on surveys from our members. So that is the basis of our submission.

In respect of casual employees, a lot of the comments that came through in that—and, admittedly, there were a lot of public service workers in there but there were a few casuals—were around the concern that, if you are on a salary, it is a very different picture to if you are being paid per hour. So, if you are working less hours, you paid less—and then how does that work?

So, to try and shorten the answer, based on the time that we have got, there is a concern amongst some respondents that reducing hours, if people are paid per hour, will have an adverse impact, and that that would have to be considered.

THE CHAIR: Noted. Thank you.

MS ORR: You note in the submission, that the ACT Labor Party does not have a formal position, and you mentioned that again in what you just said. Can you note how the branch can put forward a formal position on the four-day work week?

Mr van Dijk: The party is made up of thousands of members that, through a process, elects people to attend a branch conference once a year. At branch conference, motions are sent from different party units. We have a number of different branches in localities—a couple down south, a couple up north and a couple centrally. They all, as well as our union affiliates and policy committees, submit motions to conference to be considered.

The genesis of this submission actually was a motion to conference two years ago that called on me as the secretary to put together a submission for this hearing. So that was the genesis of this submission.

To create a formal position for the ACT Labor Party, that would require a motion that would change our policy platform. I understand there has been reporting on a motion that may be coming to this conference this year on this matter.

So, again, to summarise, once a year all of our Labor members get together as duly elected by our Labor members to decide our position on policy matters.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: My substantive is actually on that article, Mr van Dijk. You will have to forgive me; this question is going to sound spicy but I am genuinely confused. The motion, I understand, going to ACT Labor's conference is as follows: "Labor aims to move to a four-day work week, defined as a reduction in working hours with no loss of pay, with a corollary extension to penalty rates and overtime."

Mr van Dijk: Yes.

MR DAVIS: My understanding is that this motion is also for the ACT public service. The Chief Minister, who is also the parliamentary leader of ACT Labor, has just made it very clear that he does not believe that it would be effective amongst the public service unless it was across the wider economy.

I cannot help but feel like I have just borne witness to an ACT Labor branch meeting, as opposed to a committee hearing genuinely debating the issue. I wonder if you could proffer any wisdom on what appears to be the parliamentary leader of ACT Labor already putting water on a motion coming before your conference.

Mr van Dijk: I would have to check back in the office. I have not seen that motion yet, but I fully expect, given the processes that we have, that it will come through. The policy platform is the platform of the ACT Labor Party.

Through a preselection process that will be coming for the 2024 election, those members, when going through preselection and selecting their candidates, consider picking the right person for the right job. I assume all incumbents will put themselves forward for the next preselection process.

It is then incumbent on them to implement the policy platform, but it is not an immediate thing. It has to happen in the context of the budget. In reality, an entire policy platform could not be implemented in one year when we meet every conference. Getting something to the policy platform is the first step on a campaign to make a change in society, as the Chief Minister said. Does that make sense?

THE CHAIR: My question is: what considerations have you had with regard to private business on what the impact would be?

Mr van Dijk: Again reflecting on the survey responses, there were a few comments in relation to a few different challenges. If you are paying the same amount to someone to work fewer hours but you are in a service delivery business—something that works five or seven days a week—and you need to find someone to replace in that position and pay them, that is a challenge and something we are considering. The other side of that is that, if you are decreasing the number of hours or days that someone works, you need to hire someone to fill that space. That would decrease supply on jobs, which will then potentially—I am no economist—increase costs for staff because there are probably fewer people. As we see in the ACT labour market, there are fewer people to get into jobs that exist, given our unemployment rate. It is a challenge.

THE CHAIR: There are so many questions—

Mr van Dijk: It is a unique submission, given we do not have a formal position on the matter. It is reflecting what our members are saying.

THE CHAIR: Interesting. Ms Orr.

MS ORR: Thank you, Chair. The joys of not having supplementaries. This would help Mr Davis, knowing that he is in a completely different party to Labor and probably has as much idea about how the internals of Labor work as I have in understanding how the internals of the Greens work, or the Liberals for that matter. Can we clarify: regarding the platform changes, my understanding, as a member of the Labor Party at the parliamentary level, is that changes can go into the platform. They are not necessarily time bound, but they show the branch's position on a particular policy matter. The MLAs, when they stand for preselection, sign an agreement that they will work towards implementing that, but it is not necessarily time bound.

Mr van Dijk: The way that I explain it to our branch members is that getting it into our policy platform is a signal of what ACT Labor stands for and believes in. Then you can start the process of how to get there in reality. I think your summary is accurate.

MS ORR: Thank you.

MR DAVIS: Not that I am usually in the business of asking about the temperament of members of ACT Labor, but I am confused about the position—that you are invested enough in this committee's inquiry that your members asked you to write a submission. You presented a submission. You have appeared before the committee, clearly indicating broad support for the idea of a four-day work week. The head of the parliamentary Labor Party does not appear nearly as enthused as your rank-and-file membership. What position do you find yourself in as a party if the head of the government, the head of the public service, is not believed to be in a position to implement the platform if it is reformed?

Mr van Dijk: It is not unheard of that, when an ambitious policy change goes into our platform, there is a reality that has to overlay that. Obviously, the Chief Minister has just advised that he is open to consideration, but the reality is that the budget is not far away, and then there is the next budget, and then we have an election. There is the ambitious policy position that we put ourselves in, and then we entrust and empower our parliamentary representatives to go about working to implement that.

I do not think the Chief Minister was necessarily opposed to the idea. I think he was giving a very well measured lens on the reality of such a huge change. The eight-hour working day was fought and won over a century ago. This is a huge change. I think the Chief Minister is providing a clear reality of what that means and being really up-front with people about what a big change it is and how the reality applies to what our members may want to put in the policy platform.

THE CHAIR: The Chief Minister said it would be societal change. Can you comment on that?

Mr van Dijk: That is right. There were times when there were kids in coal mines. It was the norm at the time. Over time, things have changed. We have gone through COVID and never imagined it to happen. We have learnt that, if you watch social media, TikToks or whatever, people think that they can fit their productivity hours into a few hours a day and get back to playing video games or watching TikToks or whatever. Over time, everything changes and it is worth having the conversation. There is work and life. I think there is a conversation to have about how we can have more life in our lives—the work-life balance—but there is no question that fundamentally changing how much we work, the five days of work and two days of rest, is a huge change.

THE CHAIR: We have two minutes. Ms Orr.

MS ORR: On that note, Mr van Dijk, do you think it is fair to say that the Labor movement would always advocates for an improvement in working conditions and a return to a better work-life balance, particularly in the context of increased productivity over the last 100 years or so?

Mr van Dijk: Yes; absolutely. We are the Labor Party. It is in the name. We stand up for workers and we believe that there is more to life than work. I think that is an accurate summary, Ms Orr.

MS ORR: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything you would like to add? We have 30 seconds left.

Mr van Dijk: No. That is all right. I will let you get your 30 seconds back.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you. Please check that and make sure there are no changes required. I do not believe there were any questions taken on notice today. Thank you for your submission and for appearing in person today. We appreciate that. We will close this session.

Mr van Dijk: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 12.34 pm.