

## Taking the Pulse of the Nation

Australians would prefer to work fewer hours per week. In NSW and Victoria, employees are keen to get back to the workplace, with most saying they would prefer to work less hours from home.

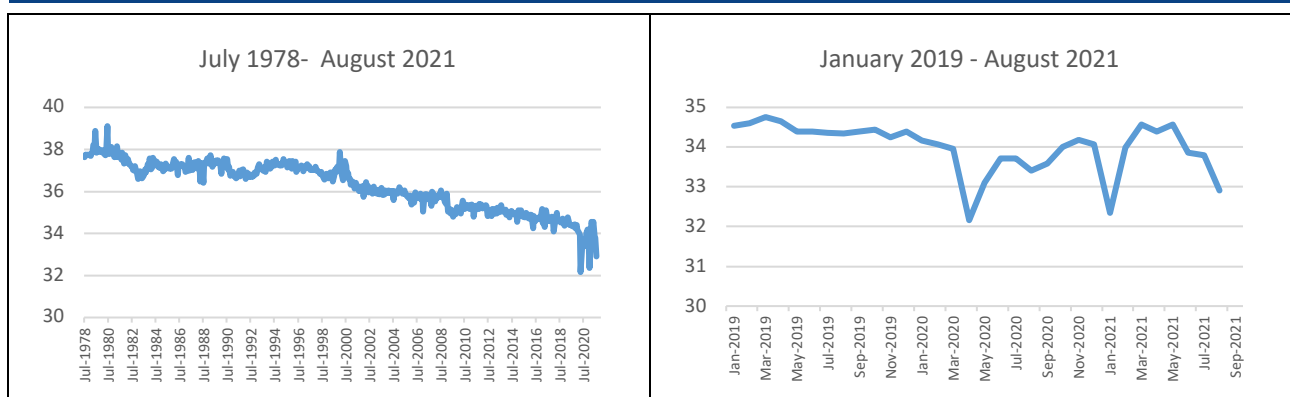
# Melbourne Institute's Taking the Pulse of the Nation Survey

## 2021 Survey Results\*: Wave 41 (20-24 September) and Wave 42 (4-8 October)

### Background - Downward trend in hours worked

Average hours worked in Australia has been trending down and is, on average, 33 hours per week in August 2021, compared to an average of 38 hours in 1978 (the start of Australian Bureau of Statistics data). Over the last 3 years, average hours per week worked dipped in April 2020 (around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic), again in January 2021 (reflecting more leave taken by employees during the holiday season) and more recently as NSW and Victoria grapple to contain the spread of the Delta-variant of COVID-19. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Estimated Weekly Hours Worked



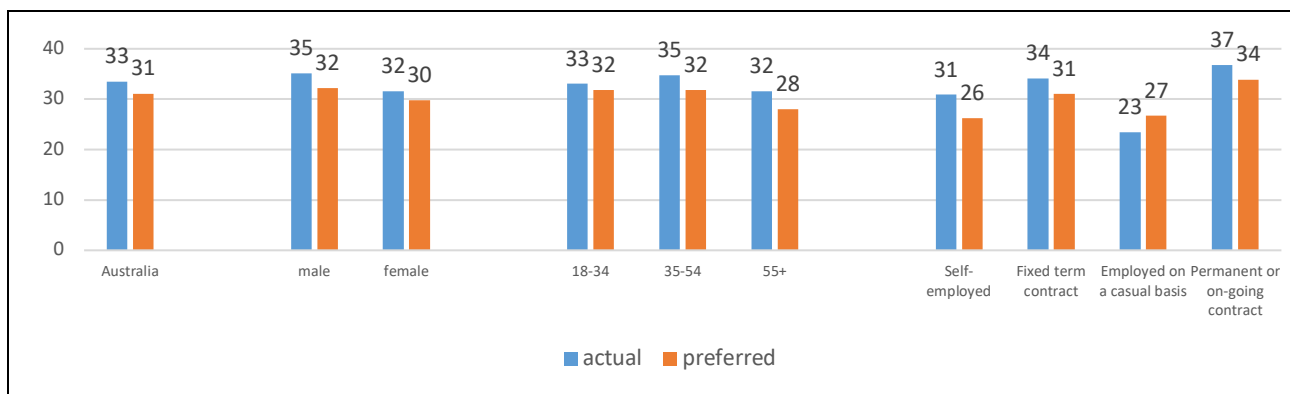
Source: ABS, Labour Force Tables 6202001 and 6202019

### Preferred average weekly hours worked are lower than actual hours worked

In the TTPN, **actual** hours worked are based on responses to the question "On average, how many hours per week, do you usually work?" while **preferred** hours are based on the question "If you could choose the number of working hours, and taking into account how that would affect your income, on average how many hours would you like to work?". Comparing data from these two questions (Figure 2) we see that:

- Australians work, on average, about 33 hours per week but would prefer to work 31 hours per week.
- The preference for less working hours holds across gender, age groups and employment types, except for people employed on casual contracts. For casuals, actual hours worked is 23 hours but they would prefer to work an additional 4 hours per week.
- The preferred drop in hours from actual working hours range from 1 hour (18-34 years) to 5 hours (self-employed).

Figure 2: Actual and Preferred Average Hours Worked per Week (by gender, age and employment type)



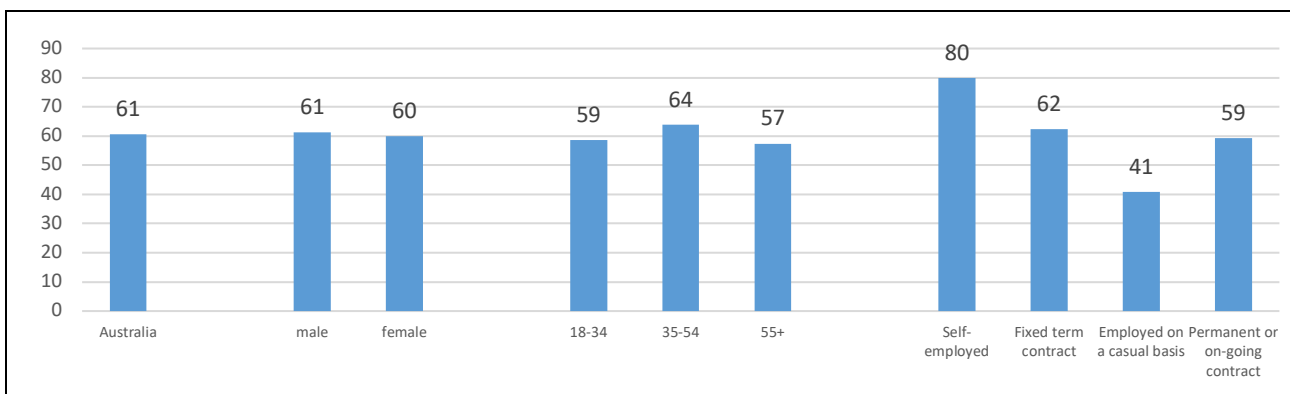
\* The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

### For almost 40% of workers, working from home is not an option

Working from home has become the norm for many, but not all work can be performed from home. In response to the question about whether any of the tasks done at work can be undertaken at home, 61 percent said that some aspects of their work can be home-based. This suggests that for 40 per cent of workers, working from home is not an option.

For the self-employed, most work tasks can be undertaken from home, but more than half of employees on casual contracts say that their work tasks have to be done at their place of work.

**Figure 3: Can any of the tasks you do at work be undertaken from home? (% of employed who said yes)**

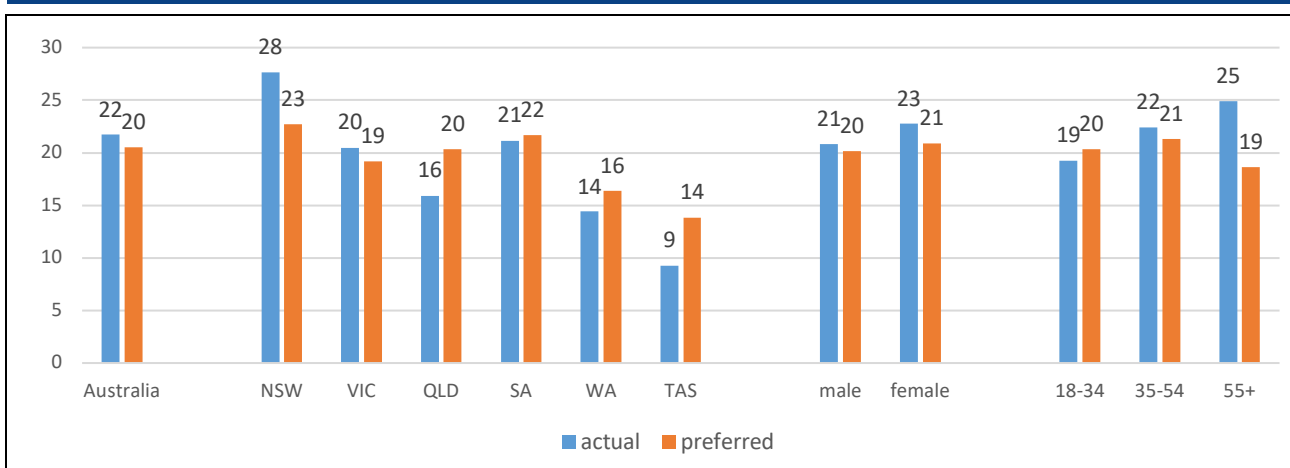


### Actual and preferred hours worked from home

Interviewees who can work from home were asked about how many hours per week (on average) they are currently working from home as well as the hours they would like to work from home (Figure 4).

- On average, employed respondents (who can work from home) are working 22 hours at home but this varies a lot across the States in line with recent stay-at-home restrictions.
- Employees in states with restrictions (NSW and VIC) would like to work less hours from home (5 less hours for NSW and 1 less hour for VIC). In contrast, employees in SA, WA would like to work 1-2 more hours from home while workers in QLD would like 4 more hours and those in TAS would like 5 more hours working from home.
- Overall, respondents would like to work an average of 2 hours less from home. This is similar for women and for employees aged 35-54 years old.
- The largest difference between actual and preferred hours working from home is from employees aged 55+ years – they would like to work 6 hours less from home.

**Figure 4: Actual and Preferred Average Hours worked, per week, from home**



## Distribution of hours worked – actual and preferred.

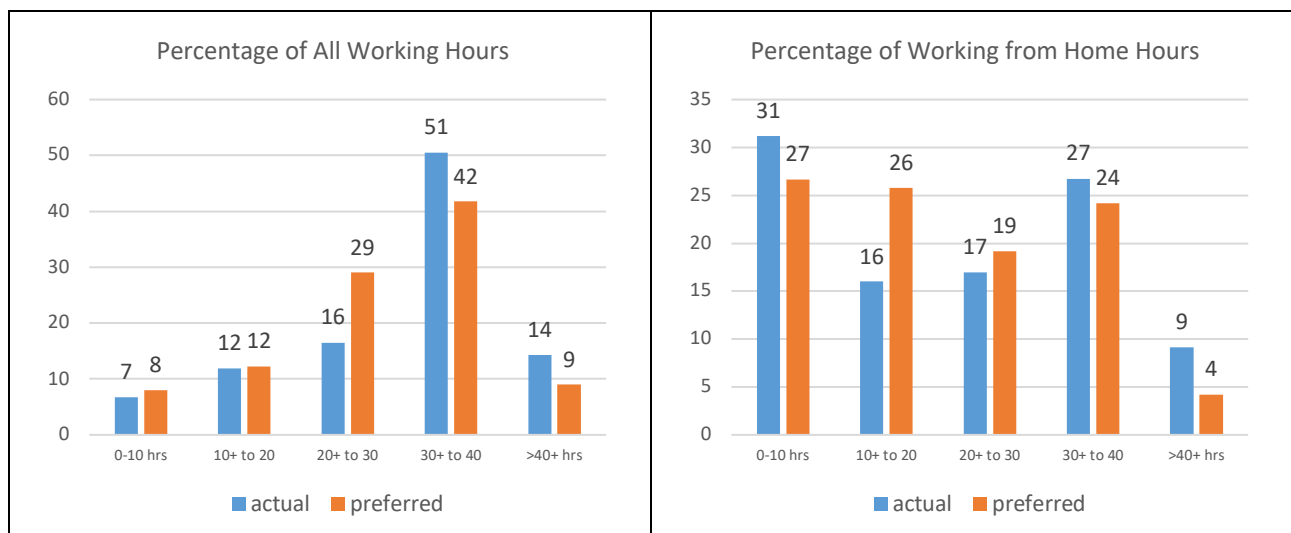
### All working hours

A closer look at the data showed that 1 in 2 employees worked between 30+ to 40 hours per week (51 per cent). Comparing the distributions of actual and preferred hours, 42 per cent of respondents would prefer to work between 30+ to 40 hours and 1 in 3 employees would prefer to work between 20+ to 30 hours (29 percent). There is also a significant shift down in the percentage of workers preferring to work more than 40+ hours (from 14 to 9 per cent).

### Working from home hours

About 1 in 3 of the employed working from home, worked less than 10 hours (31 per cent) or work between 30+ to 40 hours (27 per cent). About 16-17 per cent work between 10+ to 30 hours from home. The shift in the distribution of preferred hours is towards working 10+ to 30 hours from home. This is a movement away from working less than 10 hours (down to 27 percent) and also from working more than 30+ hours (from 36 to 28 percent).

Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Working Hours, actual and preferred



In summary, the survey suggests a preferential shift in working hours to the average - those working above the average number of hours would prefer to work less hours while those working below the average would like to work more hours. And the preferential shift holds for hours worked in the workplace as well as hours worked from home.

There also appears to be differences in labour practices across the states according to responses to the question: *On average, how many hours, per week, would your employer(s) permit you to work from home?* The states where employers are likely to permit less work from home are: QLD and TAS (4 less than preferred) compared to VIC (3 more than preferred). There is a 1 hour difference between preferred working hours and perception of what employer(s) will allow in NSW, SA and WA.

# Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research

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## About the survey

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These results have been drawn from Taking the Pulse of the Nation - Melbourne Institute's survey of the impact of COVID-19. The aim of the weekly survey is to track changes in the economic and social wellbeing of Australians living through the effects of the coronavirus pandemic whilst adapting to various changes in Federal and State government policies.

The survey contains responses from 1200 persons, aged 18 years and over each week. The sample is stratified by gender, age and location to be representative of the Australian population.

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