



A DECADE OF THE LIFE COURSE  
29-30 September, 2008  
Innovations Lecture Theatre  
The Australian National University

**Negotiating work and the lifecourse: Working hours and preferences over a decade.**

Dr Brigid van Wanrooy (email: [B.VanWanrooy@econ.usyd.edu.au](mailto:B.VanWanrooy@econ.usyd.edu.au))  
The University of Sydney

It is undeniable that Australia has developed a chronic culture of long working hours. Australia has the longest full-time working hours among employees in 23 OECD countries, with full-time employees working an average of 44 hours per week. A major factor contributing to the problem is a lack of leadership from the Federal Government in combating long hours of work.

The industrial relations regulatory environment has undergone a substantial amount of change in the last decade. While the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* was tempered by Democratic Senators, the *Amendment (WorkChoices) 2005* unleashed the full scale of change aspired to by the Howard Government. The change is continuing with promises by the Rudd Government to overturn *WorkChoices* in their proposed industrial relations policy: *Forward with Fairness*. Yet, among all this change one factor has remained constant: working time regulation, and in particular, protection from long working hours has remained absent.

The Negotiating the Lifecourse (NLC) study presents a unique opportunity to examine the issue of working hours over the last decade from a holistic perspective – examining Australians' work, personal and household environments. This paper uses the NLC to examine trends in working hours including paid and unpaid hours of work, employees' preferences to change their hours of work, and the impact the life course has on working hours and preferences. The paper examines whether the regulatory environment has had any impact on the length of working hours and whether employees' appear to have accepted the long working hours culture in Australia.