

19 November 2004

## Media release

For comment, please contact Dr Clive Hamilton (02) 6125 1270 0413 993 223  
Dr Richard Denniss (02) 6125 1270 0419 222 511

---

### *20<sup>th</sup> November*

#### *Take-the-Rest-of-the-Year-Off Day*

If Australians went on holidays from 20<sup>th</sup> November until the end of the year, and then took their annual leave, they would still have worked the same number of hours this year as the average worker in other industrialised countries, according to the Australia Institute.

In a paper called *Take-the-Rest-of-the-Year-Off Day*, the Institute analyses the serious topic of overwork in Australia.

“Whilst Australians often think of themselves as living in the land of the long weekend, they are now working the longest hours in the developed world and in fact are at risk of working themselves sick,” Institute Director Clive Hamilton said.

“Australian employees work an average of 1855 hours each year compared to the developed country average of only 1643. Employees in Norway work an average of only 1376 hours per year.”

Australians work on average longer than the super-efficient Germans, the Americans and even the Japanese who are known for the phenomenon of *karoshi* or ‘death by overwork’. Australia has the fourth highest proportion of people working more than 50 hours a week and the number of Australians working these hours has grown faster than in any other industrialised country.

While the number of public holidays Australians enjoy is on a par with the OECD average, their four weeks annual paid leave a year is less than those of European workers who average five weeks a year.

“Australians are paying a price for overwork,” Dr Hamilton said. “They are reporting higher degrees of stress and anxiety, and obesity, depression and heart disease are on the rise.

“While governments and business groups often decry attempts to achieve work family/balance as economically irresponsible, there is clear international evidence that this is not the case. On the contrary, working to the point where our personal and community bonds are weakened is not only economically inefficient, it is socially irresponsible.”

“If as individuals, and as a society, we choose to measure progress simply in terms of our personal and our national incomes then we are likely to work ourselves into early graves.”