

## FOUR-DAY WORKING WEEK

### *Motion*

**HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.23 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house recognises that —

- (a) labour markets in Australia and across the world are embracing flexible working arrangements including job-sharing, remote and hybrid work, compressed hours and shorter working weeks;
- (b) employers in Western Australia are starting to embrace a four-day working week, joining many others across the world who have seized upon the opportunity;
- (c) Western Australia stands to benefit by joining the movement before other states and territories, and being a first mover;
- (d) not only would a four-day working week help employers to retain and attract staff, it would be in line with our state's character as a laid-back place to live and work; and
- (e) as one of the largest employers in the state, the Western Australian government should be encouraged to set an example for businesses and to trial a four-day working week within the public sector.

During the pandemic I spent around 12 months, give or take, working remotely, locked away in an apartment. This experience of working remotely full-time was certainly not an isolated one. Indeed, it was shared by a lot of people in a lot of places around the world at the time. Before the pandemic, remote working was a well-known concept in a lot of businesses in a lot of different sectors; however, there was a level of hesitancy around remote work. In a lot of cases, workers had to justify why they were not in the office. There was also a level of mistrust by employers and managers of remote work and how productive employees could be if they were at home fighting the lure of their Xbox, their TV or their fridge. The pandemic really helped to change all that. It acted as a forcing function to really shift the conversation about where we work and has made remote working, really, the new normal. Now that the dust is settling on the pandemic, the conversation is shifting away from where we work to how much time we spend at work. Of course, I am referring to the concept of the four-day working week.

Members will likely recall an excellent op-ed in *The West Australian* penned by yours truly on 18 May this year on the topic of the four-day working week. I am sure every member has read that op-ed keenly, and I will quote a passage from it —

Not only would a four-day work week be good for our economy, but it would be in keeping with our character as a laid-back place to live and work.

I felt those comments were very applicable in May, and I think they are extremely applicable now, even more so, as the four-day working week movement continues to gather momentum around the world.

What is the four-day working week? It is fairly self-explanatory, but it warrants a little bit of unpacking. Basically, most people work a 5:2 roster—five days on, two days off. Really, the driver behind the four-day working week is to truncate that to a four-day week. Workers get the same pay and the same benefits with a reduced work week, with the expectation that productivity remains the same. This model is called the 100:80:100 model—with 100 per cent of the pay and 80 per cent of the time—so there is 20 per cent reduction in hours, typically from a 40-hour week to a 32-hour week, and the expectation that productivity will remain the same. There is another model under the four-day-working-week umbrella, and that is essentially a truncated week with the same hours, so going from eight hours a day, five days a week to 10 hours a day, four days a week. Bunnings is an employer trialling that. By far, the more popular model is the 100:80:100 model. That model has been shown to provide the greatest benefit to employers and employees. It is really the model that requires a more in-depth conversation within the four walls of an organisation to identify efficiency gains in order to give employees that additional day off.

Some members may be questioning the four-day model and saying that it all sounds too good to be true. How can a week be truncated yet the same productivity levels achieved? The data and evidence show that it is very possible, and in some cases the four-day week produces productivity beyond the standard five-day week. The overwhelming evidence backed by universities and reports commissioned as part of trials in the private sector around the world shows that beyond keeping productivity at the same level or having it increased, other employee benefits are realised, including wellness, fewer sick days, higher retention rates, higher employee satisfaction, less stress and all those other wellness benefits that come from a healthier work-life balance.

To date, the biggest trial conducted was in the United Kingdom in 2022. That six-month trial, which involved 3 000 employees and 61 firms, found that sick days fell by 65 per cent, resignations dropped by 57 per cent and revenue went up by 1.4 per cent. The trial showed that we can eat our cake and have it, too. All those employee benefits come with a four-day working week, which translates to benefits to the employer and the organisation as

a whole without the need to compromise on productivity, which is exactly what happened in Japan in 2019. In that instance, Microsoft trialled a four-day working week and found that productivity went up by 40 per cent.

Closer to home in Australia, Western Australia conducted a trial involving WA businesses. The employers who participated in the trial said that the biggest benefit was the increased ability to retain and attract staff. One of the organisations that took part reported a 600 per cent increase in applications compared with applications for a similar role that was advertised prior to moving to the four-day working week model. The findings also revealed that 70 per cent of the respondents who took part in the trial reported that productivity was higher, while 30 per cent said that productivity remained the same. Unsurprisingly, employees came out strongly in support of the trial, with 96 per cent saying that they wanted the trial to continue beyond six months and be put in place in perpetuity.

Various trials are happening in different countries around the globe at the moment, including Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Iceland, the United States, Germany, New Zealand, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and South Africa. The list goes on. Excitingly—this is at the heart of what this motion is calling for—trials are currently happening in the public sector in three other jurisdictions around the world. Scotland, the United Arab Emirates and Spain are currently in the process of adopting a four-day working week trial within the public sector. Scotland will soon release the methodology for the four-day working week trial that it intends to implement. That will be publicly available. There is a precedent, a road map and a blueprint for the WA government to follow.

I have some examples of WA businesses that have successfully implemented a four-day working week program. It is not a trial; this arrangement has been put in place permanently. In May 2023, a Cockburn Central company, EES Shipping, officially adopted a four-day working week after its organisation trialled it.

Managing director Brian Hack said —

“Staff morale is up, productivity is up ...

“I believe this is the way forward and we’re just jumping the gun.”

Another Perth company that is trialling the four-day working week is arts charity ArtRage. It surveyed its managers and employees. The managers said that there were no performance issues, with productivity maintaining pre-pilot performance levels. A survey of its employees showed that 79 per cent felt positive about their workload overall. Mining and engineering company Austin Engineering launched a bid to entice more workers into the organisation. It runs a FIFO roster. It moved to a four-day working week within that FIFO regime. The CEO, David Singleton, said that the move would make the company more effective and competitive, and the number of applications for positions went up multiple times, whereas it was reasonably thin beforehand. That statement alone should give every employer pause for thought, given how tight labour markets are at the moment. We know that we have a labour crunch in WA. We need skilled people in this state. I can think of several industries that are screaming for employees. I am sure members can probably think of several more.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** All of them.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Yes, probably all of them. The overwhelming evidence of this Australian trial is that employers were able to compete on benefits not just on salary. This really applies to every sector in WA right now, including the public sector. We know that the government is actively carrying out recruiting drives for nurses, doctors and police. In the case of nurses, we are being outbid by the eastern states. They are offering nurses more incentives and higher salaries. They are taking this proactive approach to find nurses. The idea is that if businesses implement a four-day working week, they will offer more competitive benefits and attract people to WA in a more organic fashion, as opposed to being more reactive, and find these people.

**Hon Kate Doust:** Member, can I just interject and ask a question of your model? In your proposal for a four-day working week, will workers be paid a full-time five-day wage or will they be paid a pro-rata wage?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, member! I will provide the opportunity for the honourable member to respond, but as he is making his substantive contribution on the motion, I encourage you to allow him to continue to do that.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Member, we can certainly get into the mechanics of this in the debate. The idea is that, yes, workers will maintain the same pay and the same benefits. Employees will effectively get paid for five days while they work four days. If it is a public-facing organisation, there would need to be a sleight of hand rostering change to fill that gap and make sure that that organisation is still accessible five days a week. In reality, the employee would be working four days a week. We can get into that in more detail during the debate.

Other jurisdictions in Australia are certainly looking at a four-day working week. The ACT recently launched an inquiry, at the end of which it recommended that the ACT government convene a working group to develop a road map for a future trial of a four-day working week. This is in the public sector. It comprises administrative and frontline workers using the 100:80:100 model. The ACT obviously feels that it can put this in place without affecting continuity

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of service within the public sector. Coming into the last election, the Victorian Labor government made a commitment to trial the four-day working week. Since it was elected, it has been a little silent on the issue. Obviously, the Victorian government, led by Dan Andrews, saw some merit in the four-day working week trial. Potentially, we will hear some more updates on Victoria's thinking very soon. Also, the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care recommended that the federal government adopt a four-day working week trial within the public sector at a federal level.

Despite these commitments, the competitive advantage still exists for the WA government to move and embrace the concept of the four-day working week and to act as an example for the private sector, which is really what this motion is calling for. I think it is worth spending some time talking about what I am not proposing. I am foreshadowing some debate from this side of the chamber. The motion is not calling for the government to mandate any industrial relations changes to the private sector or intervene in markets. I am not asking the government to dictate terms to the private sector or mandate how businesses should be run or operate. The motion is calling for the WA government, one of the largest and most influential employers in the state, to set an example by embracing the concept of a four-day working week, which will be good for the economy, by trialling it within the four walls of its own sector. It is a trial. The beauty of a trial is that we trial it. We can put some parameters in place and measure whether it is effective. If it is not effective, it is a two-way door decision—we just reverse it. There are no downsides here; there are just benefits. Other jurisdictions are seeing the benefits. The private sector is trialling it and implementing it and seeing the benefits. One state, one territory and the federal government are considering it. If WA wants to stay competitive, stay ahead of the eastern states by attracting labour to the state of Western Australia and embrace the change, remote working will eventually become the new normal, so the WA government should consider trialling the four-day working week within the public sector.

The last point I will make before I hand across to members is that Western Australia is considered a very laid-back place to live and work. It is one of our strengths and something we certainly should not shy away from. Besides all the benefits members have heard around the four-day working week, it is a change I believe is fundamentally aligned to Western Australian culture and who we are as a state. Just like daylight saving, a four-day working week will mean more time with your mates, more time to catch-up on sleep and get your chores done, and will ultimately mean that Western Australia will become an even better and more prosperous place to live and work.

I am going to leave members with a quote from Mr Brian Hack from EES Shipping, whom I mentioned previously has implemented the four-day working week with within his organisation. He said, according to my notes —

Going to be honest, I had my FDO (Free Day Off!) on Monday & it was one of my busiest days in quite a while—I can't remember how I had time to do all of my own personal "life admin" without it any more—or maybe I simply just didn't do some of the things that I now find super important like going to the GP & Dentists for regular check ups, PT/Gym sessions, Donating Blood more regularly, helping out at the kids school, etc.

Brian has realised the benefits of a four-day working week for himself and for his organisation, and I urge the government to think boldly and embrace the four-day working week model so more Western Australians like Brian can enjoy the health and lifestyle benefits.

**The PRESIDENT:** Members, the question is that the motion be agreed. Hon Matthew Swinbourn, I am checking whether you are the lead speaker.

**HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary)** [10.41 am]: Yes, I am the lead speaker for the government as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industrial Relations. I take the opportunity to commend the member for bringing the motion in its form to the house. It is a good debating motion with a little bit in there for everyone. However, the first thing I will point out is that one size does not fit all and the member would have been better to recognise in his speech that a four-day working week, while really quite attractive to some areas, it is completely impractical in others. It is not a cure-all for labour shortages, work-life balance or a range of other things. It is really important to understand that and to understand as well that the government, as an employer, employs a variety of people across a number of different sectors. What we need from the workers in those sectors varies greatly. From the government's point of view, a four-day working week is not something that could work in all parts of government.

The government is not opposed to the idea, but normally the way this government, and to some extent other governments, is driven to undertake these kinds of innovation is often if workers' representatives ask for this kind of thing through their enterprise bargaining. Again, the member did not mention enterprise bargaining in his contribution but it is an important element of our industrial relations system here in Western Australia and across Australia. It entitles employers and employees, with their representatives—trade unions—to negotiate over this kind of thing if it works for that particular enterprise. They can sit down and employers might propose it to their workers or workers, through their unions, might propose it to their employers. It is certainly something that, in certain sectors, might very well work.

First of all when we are talking about a four-day working week, we need to understand what it is we are talking about. What is the model that has been proposed? As I understand it, it is essentially a proposition to compress the working week. Some of the trials focus on compressing the working week so that employees work the same number of hours over four days instead of five. However, the four-day work week concept usually encompasses an arrangement in which an employee retains 100 per cent of their salary while reducing to around 80 per cent of the hours on the basis of maintaining 100 per cent productivity. That is the concept of 100–80–100. If we think about it for a full-time person who normally works five days a week, they are going to work four days a week and get paid the same amount of money and have the same productive output. Again, the problem with talking about this in the most general sense is that it fails to recognise some of the concepts like workplace productivity, including how it is measured and how we get it.

One of the issues in the member's speech was that he mentioned nurses, doctors and police as a potential model to introduce a four-day working week. The member was saying that in service delivery-type occupations like nurses, doctors and police, they can be as productive in four days as they could be in five days. That is not how those occupations work. They have to be present in their occupations to meet the demands that come to them and they do not know what those demands will be. In a five-day working week, if we are talking about frontline police officers rather than the administrative staff who might support them, they have to be on the beat for five days. They do not know what their work will require them to do. If, for example, we say their five-day working week will be compressed into four days, I can guarantee members all the crims will work out what day the cops do not work and that is the day they will be doing all their activities, because they are not on the job.

**Hon Wilson Tucker:** By way of interjection, we are not closing down the police force for one day; we are rostering people in and out.

**Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN:** Then we need more police officers and that is the problem. I think the member misunderstands the concept he is promoting. We are saying that we maintain 100 per cent productivity by compressing workers' time. If we are maintaining 100 per cent productivity, that means no new police to deal with their work, but they are not available for that day.

I am not saying what the member is proposing with a four-day work week is bad and I am not saying it is not applicable in some industries wherein it might very well work with the benefits he has talked about, but I think the important thing is to understand its limitations. Some of those limitations are in the industries and occupations that require people to be present to do their work. We cannot essentially take them out of their workplace for an additional day without there being some impact on productivity. Teachers are another example. The government employs most teachers in this state. It would mean we would have to employ more teachers. Then there is no productive benefit for us in adopting a model like the member talked about, which subsequently results in us getting no more productivity for essentially the cost of reducing the time off. There is a whole range of other —

**Hon Wilson Tucker:** Member, the majority of the benefits realised are for the employees, not for the government itself. Productivity should remain the same but Western Australian residents will get all the other benefits.

**Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN:** Member, I am not going to take too many interjections because I am trying to make a particular point and I am not sure I am getting my point across. I am saying that one size does not fit all and this approach does not fit across all industries. It may very well work in office-based environments. It may work in other areas, but I do not think for the public sector workers whom we employ—for example, firefighters—can do it in a way that is win-win. That is how the four-day working week model is sold. It is as a win-win for employers and employees. That is where it has to be of benefit because it is a zero-sum game in which it neither costs the employer more because they still get 100 per cent productivity nor costs the employee any loss of wages because they are doing their work at 100 per cent productivity but over four days. It is not something that would work across all industries.

I think it is also implicit in the member's motion that the state government is not flexible in its working arrangements with its employees. I want to make it clear that that is not true at all. I will give members some examples of where public servants and government officers can access flexible working arrangements. For a full-time employee, their standard working week is 37.5 hours, but the government will enter into arrangements with workers to move from full-time work, if their operation can accommodate it, to part-time work, on either a temporary or ongoing basis. This can relate to fewer working days or shorter working hours a day. Of course, this flexibility is particularly helpful to those workers who have caring responsibilities or might be phasing into retirement by trying to reduce their numbers of hours. We have employee-initiated variations of working hours; for example, they work outside of ordinary hours to meet personal circumstances. The government offers many of its employees flexitime and time off in lieu so that workers can accumulate time. Time of in lieu works by if a worker accumulates additional hours, they can take that time off. Flexitime relates to when workers start and finish. Again, they are flexible arrangements.

There are nine-day fortnights for some groups. There are numerous flexibilities relating to parenting and adoption. For example, for parenting, there is: keep-in-touch day, shared concurrently between partners; extension of leave beyond 12 months; modified hours and duties prior to parental leave and return to work; and leave for partners and grandparents. There is the capacity for working from home arrangements, subject to business and operational needs. There are limitations on out-of-work contact. Many public sector workers can purchase leave. They can purchase up to 10 weeks every year of additional leave, which is a flexibility arrangement that can increase work-life balance. Workers can take leave with half pay; they can take leave without pay; there is early access to long service leave for employees within seven years of the preservation age. There is study leave and study assistance. There are three additional public service holidays that can be taken at any point in the calendar year. There is additional paid leave related to cultural obligations, foster caring, emergency service volunteering, donating blood, Defence Force Reserves, representing Australia in international sport and witness and jury duty.

The Western Australian public sector and the Western Australian public service, which is included in that, is a flexible and dynamic workplace and it is an attractive place for people to work. People often say that employees can earn more money in the private sector, but they do not get the working conditions of the public sector. It is a place that people choose to work and it is a good place to work. I would encourage people who are considering a job in the public sector to pursue that. The government offers a significant range of flexibility to its workers. It is hard to see why it would be necessary to proceed on a four-day working week, given the breadth of flexible working arrangements that are already available for public servants and government officers; however, from this government's perspective, if the unions representing those workers are advocating for that kind of thing and it forms part of their log of claims when bargaining with the government, the government will give due consideration at each of the appropriate enterprise levels and make a decision as to whether it is possible for that group of workers. This government at this time is not intending to lead a study. The information is already out there. I do not think a trial in Western Australia will give results different from what has happened in other places. What can be learnt from a trial has probably already been learnt.

I will end on one particular point. I reflect on experiences I had while working for my old union, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. In the construction industry there are arrangements for rostered days off. I have a warning for those who see a four-day working week as something that might necessarily be implemented and adhered to and beneficial. Rostered days off are part of the award. Workers work a 40-hour week and get paid 36 hours and the additional four hours accrue towards a rostered day off. Those rostered days off are generally agreed—certainly when I was in the union—with the Master Builders Association. A calendar is put out. I can tell the member that the calendar is overwhelmingly ignored and construction workers do not get the rostered days off. A lot of them do not get their RDOs because the employer wants them on the job, doing the construction work, and so they have them continue work. They continue to accrue and what usually happens is that at the end of the job they get paid out.

There is always a tension in workplaces between worker productivity, having workers on the job doing work, and getting that achieved. It is all well and good to have those conditions, but they are only good if they are observed. I suspect that although the four-day working week is the “emperor's new clothes” at the moment, in time employers will understand that they are not getting the same five-day-a-week productivity out of their workers, then they will suddenly find there will be a pushback on that kind of thing, or they will push workers into doing overtime. All the benefits that are initially seen as being new, and everyone is keen and into it, will suddenly start to disappear under pressure. If an employer works in a cost environment and needs to produce more widgets each hour, they are going to try to find ways to make that happen.

The government's position is that it is not opposed to a four-day working week. If unions are keen to pursue that through bargaining, the government will take that on board, but it is not the position of this government that it wishes to engage in a trial. We understand that it is not something that will work in every workplace. I think it would be worthwhile if the member recognises it is a matter that exists between individual employers. In terms of the private sector, there is enterprise bargaining and people can work to those arrangements. If it works for their business and it works for their employees, I would encourage workers and employers to sit down and come to a conclusion on that.

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition)** [10.55 am]: It is good to be back on a Thursday morning and to see a little differential between the left and right wings of the Parliament and go back into our normal routine. I am not sure where to put Hon Wilson Tucker in that spectrum. I suspect he is —

**Hon Wilson Tucker:** In the middle somewhere.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** — somewhere in the middle. The indication is that he is leaning to the government's side on some issues. We may have to come to a decision on that by the end of the parliamentary term. Both members who have contributed to the motion this morning have said things that were accurate and there is a bit of commonality here. I want to grab that, run with it, and then take it to what I think is its natural conclusion. I fully accept the intent

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of Hon Wilson Tucker that flexibility in the workplace can improve output. It does not always do that, but it has the possibility of doing so.

The parliamentary secretary for the Builders Labourers Federation—sorry, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industrial Relations—suggested that it is not always the case that those benefits accrue. He is absolutely right; it is not the case. Not every workplace lends itself to flexible hours or cutting down from five to four days. The parliamentary secretary talked about the 37.5-hour week. I think the maximum under fair work is 38 hours, but the standard is 37.5 hours in the public sector. Over five days, 7.5 hours a day is easy. Over four days it is 9.5 hours a day.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Tell the farmers that.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** There are lots of farmers who work far more, and so do a lot of parliamentarians. Every morning on a sitting day I am here by seven o'clock in the morning. On Tuesday I go home at 9.30 pm. I am not the only one in the room. Lots of other members are working far more than a 37.5 or 38-hour week. We do it; there are a lot of people who do beyond that. Some workplaces could allow more flexibility in the workplace. I have always been a believer in flexibility in the workplace, when it suits both ends of it. I note the parliamentary secretary talked about enterprise bargaining and union agreements when they talk about flexibility in the workplace. That is the problem. It is that encompassed thinking. If we want to deal with the issues raised by Hon Wilson Tucker, we have to extend that flexibility in the workplace beyond enterprise bargaining. The more choices we offer in the workplace, the better we might be. The more choices in work, when there are agreements between employers and employees, the better off the economy is and probably the better off society is. I suggest the parliamentary secretary move beyond enterprise bargaining components. Hon Wilson Tucker is talking about getting the best working relationship between employees and employers. I absolutely agree that the more flexibility we have, the better off we are going to be.

There are industries that can offer lots of flexibility —

**Hon Kate Doust:** Depends on which side of the flexibility argument you are on.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** We need flexibility on both sides, honourable member, and we cannot do that if we restrict our thinking to the union movement and running along the agenda of the Builders Labourers, Painters and Plasterers Union or whichever union; we have to extend ourselves beyond that. There are advantages for bosses and employees. In many cases, employees like flexibility as much as bosses do. Much of the workforce is not on a standard 7.5-hour day, nine to five operation. That is in the private and public sector. I think the parliamentary secretary mentioned nurses, who are obviously on shift work, so that is completely different. Police officers on shift work are covered by an entirely different component.

There are probably a limited number of workers in total who could benefit from that greater degree of flexibility because it does not suit the business model they are in. But if a business is open nine to five, five days a week, having an employee work four days a week—a classic example is retail—will obviously mean having to find an extra worker for the extra day. The parliamentary secretary raised that. If we apply that across the board in the public sector, which is not what I think Hon Wilson Tucker is proposing, there would have to be a massive increase in workforce and it would blow out the budget. As rich as the government is, at some point that will correct and it will not be able to afford it. It does not work across the board and it will not function, but there may be some areas in which it does.

I am a bit on board with the parliamentary secretary in that we need to be careful about how we measure the increased productivities. A basketball coach named John Wooden came up with the great line: “Don’t mistake activity for achievement.” We can have lots of activity, but we must be able to measure the achievements when the system and the outputs are changed. I think we agree on that, parliamentary secretary. It is difficult to make sure that we get not just more activity, but also more achievement. I accept absolutely that there are businesses for whom that is the case; that a more flexible working model, which might in some circumstances be the longer shifts and more work, on the agreement of the worker might be beneficial to both sides of the argument, so we should be open to that. It is probably hardest to apply it to the public sector.

Hon Wilson Tucker mentioned recent discussions around federal public servants being offered more flexible working hours and a four-day working week. This comes back to the question of how we measure productivity. I rang the ABC morning show when this topic was under discussion and said that my problem was that it was often very hard to get outcomes out of the federal public service. It is sometimes pretty hard to get outcomes out of the state public service. It is not so much whether we need a police officer, nurse, doctor or teacher, but for government departments—what we loosely like to call “the bureaucrats and bureaucracy”—sometimes it is very difficult to get solutions. There are probably members in this chamber who have had to deal with government departments and have found it an incredibly frustrating exercise. A lot of the time the general public find it an incredibly frustrating exercise. It is very tough. For example, some complaints around the Australian Taxation Office take years to resolve. Immigration matters take years

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sometimes. One of the issues is that because those offices have pretty flexible hours already, if I ring up and say, “I’ve got a constituent who has an issue with the tax office”, and talk to person A, the next day they are on a rostered day off and the day after they are on flexi leave. The next person I get goes, “Oh, it is on the list for somebody else; we’ll get back to it.” Being able to hide and not be accountable for one’s actions is incredibly common in some sections of the public service. The problem is that having a four-day working week and putting more people into the system actually makes that worse, not better. For what is an incredibly important issue, it will be a short debate today.

I encourage Hon Wilson Tucker because I think there are opportunities, although not across the board and not for all public servants in particular. It is difficult to start with the public servants. I agree that the private sector should be doing this much more—some of them certainly are—and should be given much more freedom to negotiate between employer and employee the best outcome for both. That should absolutely be the case. There are benefits to be gained all round, including, generally, productivity. It is harder in the public service. That does not necessarily mean that the public service could not trial it. The parliamentary secretary might find it works with a small section within a department that is not answering the door nine to five. One of the issues with compressing work hours into four days and extending the hours people work is that if they have to get to 9.5 hours in a four-day week and the office is open for only seven hours, they are just putting in more time when they do not have to deal with the public. I am sure many bureaucrats would enjoy that, but ultimately it is not good for output. There might be places that could run like that, in which case it does not need to be a trial, in my view.

If the government can find places where alternative work models are more efficient, by all means jump into it. I would be the first person to say to the parliamentary secretary, “Go for your life. You don’t need a trial if you can install it and it’s more efficient.” However, we must be very careful because the key performance indicators we see in annual reports of government departments are a nonsense. The KPIs mean nothing. The government would have to put in place proper accountability. I think it might scare the public service. I can see Sir Humphrey turning in his grave. I suspect there would be predefined outcomes and time frames for public servants within bureaucracies. I have tried to introduce them in legislation—to absolute meltdowns. The government would have to monitor to that level, and I do not think that is a bad idea either. It could be implemented in a small way and potentially the government could look at it.

**HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan)** [11.05 am]: I was not going to stand, but I will make some brief comments on Hon Wilson Tucker’s motion. With regard to the contribution by Hon Dr Steve Thomas, I have been around a long time. It took me back to the days of Graham Kierath and Richard Court and individual workplace agreements and having that sort of flexibility. Of course, that does not work—just a passing comment—because there is not equality in the bargaining strength of the two parties. That is why unions are such a great thing and I am happy to say that I am a unionist.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** The individual agreements were identical in their terms as well.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** They were. That is another debate. I think we have had it a couple of times. It does not work and we do not need to go there.

The motion before us is about introducing the concept within the public service and for it then to flow onto the private sector, and that is the ultimate gain. I would not have got up but the member mentioned Bunnings. Bunnings employees have the opportunity of a 9.5 or 10-hour day. I started my main working life as a shop assistant, so I know the old shop assistant award quite well. I know about enterprise bargaining because when I worked for the union I was involved in negotiating quite a number of them, and the modern awards. When I started way back as an 18-year-old boy at Coles, it had rostering provisions that provided for a five-day week, a nine-day fortnight and a four-day week. That is going back to the 1970s. Companies in retail have been able to access a four-day week for decades. It gets very complicated because extra breaks and those sorts of things must be considered. Managers like things to be fairly simple, and that is why they stay with a five-day week.

I wonder then how Hon Wilson Tucker’s concept flows on to part-timers and casuals. If we are talking about them receiving the same pay for a reduced working week, because they can provide the same productivity, I do not think that can happen in retail. As the parliamentary secretary pointed out, productivity is provided in different ways and in retail, even in Bunnings, it is having people on the floor to assist customers. By condensing the hours, it is unlikely that the same productivity will be achieved as measured by the employer, or meeting the desired outcomes that the employer wants to get. If we take the 100:80:100 model to which the member referred and say that they can provide more productivity—as I said, I do not think it works in retail—we would have to do the same for part-timers and say that in the reduced hours they work, they are still more productive. It does not flow. It would be the same with casuals, because theirs is based on an hourly rate plus loading. Are they more productive?

There may be certain areas in which the member’s view on a four-day week will work, whether it be by retaining the same wage and improving productivity, or by reducing just the hours of work and reducing the wage, which I do not think is worthwhile at the moment. That would not work in the current climate because we cannot get enough

workers. Either way there are some areas in which it might work and some areas in which it definitely will not work. Although I would never go in the same direction that Hon Dr Steve Thomas would go, enterprise bargaining allows for opportunities, or even negotiations about awards changes and flexibilities, to be achieved. Enterprise bargaining allows the employer and the employee, with their representative, to negotiate which flexibilities are appropriate for that workplace or that site, which is certainly the best way. Some improvements have been made on behalf of employers and employees going in that direction.

**HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West)** [11.10 am]: I will make a brief contribution. I rise to speak in favour of this motion by Hon Wilson Tucker. I would love to see WA shake off its “wait awhile” moniker and lead the country with progressive policies, including promoting a four-day work week, daylight saving would also be great, as well as the legalisation of cannabis. That would be awesome.

Multiple studies have shown the benefits of a four-day work week to both companies and employees. I acknowledge entirely that different industries would require very different approaches. As a healthcare practitioner, and also now in my current role, I would really love for everyone to be healthy and happy, but when we look at the general health of our population, we can see a lot of stress-related illnesses. We see a rise in cortisol levels for most people, which translates into an increase in cardiovascular disease, poorer immunity, weight gain, type 2 diabetes and mood disorders—in particular depression, and often insomnia is associated with that as well. All these diseases, illnesses and mood disorders add to the cost of Medicare and Centrelink, and I do not think that that costing has been taken into account when we discuss more flexible work arrangements for people.

It also often appears that we live in an economy versus a society. People work for a lifestyle. They do not necessarily work because they want to make their employer rich. I think that, overall, a better work–life balance would benefit everyone.

**HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral)** [11.12 am] — in reply: I thank members for their contributions. It is disappointing to hear that the government does not support this motion, but it is certainly not unexpected.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** I didn’t say that, member.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** So what is the government’s position?

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** I said to you that we weren’t opposed to the idea of a four-day working week. I didn’t make any position about whether we supported or opposed your motion; I just spoke to your motion.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Therefore, does the government support the concept of a four-day working week within WA?

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** I just told you that the government is not against the idea of the four-day working week, but it’s not something that the government is actively pursuing. So, there’s no vote on this motion, so it’s not a “support” or “not support” motion.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Okay. I think there is a Venn diagram here in which we have agreement with some aspects of this motion, but certainly when we talk about a trial in the public sector, it sounds like the government is not going to make any move on that. Is that a fair statement?

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** Your motion has—one, two, three, four—five aspects to it, so for that particular aspect, we do not propose to do a trial at this time.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Okay. It is good to clarify that.

The member mentioned that a four-day working week is difficult and should not be applied across the board in the public sector. I absolutely agree, and I gave the example of nurses, doctors and police officers. I used those examples because the government is actively recruiting for those roles, which are roles that we desperately need. Will those roles fit into a four-day working week model? I am not sure. I imagine it would be quite hard to fit them in, but I would not say it would be impossible. I think the evidence will show over time that there will be benefit and merit for some of the public sector departments that we might think a four-day working week could not apply.

I was not prescriptive in this motion about which public sector departments the government should try to implement the four-day working week in. What this motion calls for is a trial. The government could identify within the public sector where the four-day working week could apply, whether it is in the administrative area or on the front line. The government could pick the low-hanging fruit, an easy department, to trial a four-day working week. It would set an example to the private sector that the government sees benefit and merit in the four-day working week. The private sector could, ultimately, adopt it more widely and quicker as a means of having a competitive advantage over the other states.

**Hon Kate Doust:** Member, I am just going to ask: are you sort of making some assumptions that government workers automatically want a four-day week? I mean, how do you assess the demand for this type of change? Have you consulted with the union representing the workers in the public sector about how this would actually function in



the real world? Those are the things that I think that the government would have to take on board before they took that leap—don't you think?—which you have not referenced at all. You've talked about the endgame, but you haven't talked about the mechanics of how you get there and how you engage the people who are actually going to be the recipients, or the participants.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Absolutely. I am not here mandating that this model is applied to people explicitly; it would be an option that is presented to people. In the example of a trial, people in the department could opt in or opt out. They could maintain a five-day working week or they could choose to have a four-day working week. That is how it has been applied during trials in the public sector in other jurisdictions globally and in the private sector. In the vast majority of cases, people actually want to move to a four-day trial because who does not want another day off? Therefore, this motion is not mandating anything. I am not here to throw out industrial relation agreements with anyone, but we can give an option to people to trial it.

Like I said before, the trial is a trial. We would tie performance to KPIs. We have had a debate on KPIs. I absolutely agree with Hon Dr Steve Thomas that to tie performance to public sector KPIs rather than private sector KPIs is a more hairy proposition, and a difficult conversation to have, but sometimes the harder part is the more rewarding one, and the fact that it is difficult and will require very difficult conversations within the public sector does not mean that it should not happen. The trial should not necessarily be across the entire public sector. I agree that it would be harder to implement it for certain roles, but I am calling for the government to set an example. Pick the low-hanging fruit and set an example for the private sector and for WA as a whole to try to attract people and provide more incentives for people to work in WA.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn also mentioned the book *The Emperor's New Clothes* and that this is potentially a flash-in-the-pan movement, and once it has been implemented more broadly, some of those benefits would not be completely realised on an ongoing basis. I think the member will find that scope-creep is already included in a five-day working week. The idea is that a private sector worker does 38 or 40 hours and a public sector worker does 37.5 hours, but in reality, in a lot of different organisations and sectors, people are already doing additional time anyway, whether they get overtime for it or not. This motion is really just drawing a line in the sand that people should be working fewer hours, whether that creeps up over the four days and the 32 hours, which is highly likely, but we would be setting an example that that should be reduced and people should be able to strike a better work-life balance than they currently have.

I think those were largely the points that were raised. Hon Dr Steve Thomas and I came to a general consensus around picking the low-hanging fruit within the public sector. We reached some level of agreement on that. I think there is some level of government endorsement on the option of a four-day working week within WA. If we look at this as a Venn diagram, we have had a level of consensus, which is refreshing for a Thursday. It is unfortunate that the government will not move forward with a trial because, as I mentioned, other jurisdictions are looking closely at this, and they feel that they can put this in place in the public sector without affecting continuity of service for the general public. The Australian Capital Territory is looking at this very closely. The federal Senate recommended that the federal government looks at this. Scotland, the United Arab Emirates and Spain are also looking at implementing trials in the public sector. Are they thinking about putting this broadly across the entire public sector? Probably not. They will pick some low-hanging fruit, implement it and set an example for the rest of the economy.

Hon Martin Pritchard mentioned that this example has been around since the 1970s. Absolutely, it has. After the pandemic, I think we will find that the pandemic has really changed people's relationship with work. The conversation has shifted from where we are working, which has now proven to be a successful model. Prior to the pandemic, people had a lot of reservations that the sky would fall in, no-one would show up to work or log in to their Zoom calls, and company productivity would fall into the doldrums, but we found that people can function remotely. That has become the new normal. After that conversation has largely happened and been resolved, the conversation is now shifting from a location-agnostic working environment to the time we spend at work. It is triggering a more in-depth conversation, tying KPIs to performance, and requiring organisations to have a more in-depth look at how they conduct business. Where are those efficiency gains? Where can they chew some of the fat and provide a better work-life balance to their employees?

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.