

News release

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Minister Abbott expected soon to read ABS Catalogue No. 6203.0

Claims by the Minister for Employment Tony Abbott that the ABS already collects the comprehensive data on underemployment demanded by Cheryl Kernot indicate that he is yet to come to grips with Australian employment statistics.

If he had read the Australia Institute report launched by Ms Kernot he would understand that:

- The ABS does not publish regular or comprehensive information on the number of hours of underemployment;
- The ABS publishes no information on the extent of overwork; and
- The ABS's continued reliance on a 1950s definition of employment means that the unemployment rate has greatly diminished relevance to the labour market of the 21st century.

Last month, on the release of ABS figures, Mr Abbott said that employment had fallen 'marginally' by 3,500.

The number of employed people fell only marginally but, due to the conversion of full-time jobs to part-time jobs, the amount of employment in the economy fell by the equivalent of more than 20,000 full-time jobs.

"The fact that Mr Abbot can hide behind a definition of employment that does not distinguish between full-time jobs and part-time jobs is exactly why new measures are needed", said Richard Denniss, Australia Institute research fellow and author of *Measuring Employment in the 21st Century*.

The ABS collects some information on the number of part-time workers who are underemployed but publishes very little data on the extent of their underemployment. The Institute report describes in exhaustive detail the employment data collected by the ABS.

"It is clear that Mr Abbott has not read the report", said the Executive Director of the Australia Institute, Clive Hamilton. "We had extensive discussions with the ABS to determine which data they do and do not collect, and that was the basis for our case for our detailed recommendations for more information to be collected on underemployment and overwork."

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