

Unions welcome new right-to-disconnect laws as a cost-of-living win

Unions welcome the new right-to-disconnect laws coming into effect today as a cost-of-living win for working people. Today's new rights will empower workers to refuse unreasonable out-of-hours work contact, enabling greater work-life balance and reducing the burden of unpaid labour while families face cost-of-living pressures.

From August 26, most employees now have the right to refuse monitoring, reading or responding to unreasonable work-related communications outside of work hours. The right extends to all forms of work-related communication, including from third parties such as clients, customers and students. The new right kicks in for workers of small businesses from August 26, 2025.

The new rights are expected to reduce the amount of unpaid work hours Australians currently perform, which the Centre for Future Work estimates at an average for each worker of 5.4 hours per week or 230 hours a year, equating to \$131 billion in unpaid work annually.

The right-to-disconnect also addresses the growing crisis of increasing mental health illness and injuries in modern workplaces. Since the pandemic people's work and personal lives are increasingly blurred. The ACTU hails the new rights as a significant victory for workers across all industries, particularly those in jobs that face the expectation of constant availability, such as teaching, community services and administrative work.

The right to disconnect is directed at an employee's right to not unreasonably refuse contact – and it does not impose a blanket ban on employer contact. Instead, it gives workers the right to decide whether to respond to out-of-hours, based on the reason for the contact; the level of disruption it causes, and their family responsibilities. It makes clear that workers should be paid for all the work they do.

However, these hard-won rights are under threat from Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, who has pledged to roll back the laws if he wins the next election. The ACTU warns eliminating the right to disconnect would exacerbate cost-of-living pressures by forcing more unpaid labour and pushing workers further into financial and mental health stress.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O'Neil:

"Today is a historic day for working people. The union movement has won the legal right for Australians to spend quality time with their loved ones without the stress of being forced to constantly answer unreasonable work calls and emails.

"Australian unions have reclaimed the right to knock off after work.

"The right to disconnect is a cost-of-living win. The average person does five to six hours of unpaid work every week. Thanks to the introduction of this new law, Australians can now be paid for those hours of work.

"Cost-of-living is the number one issue for working people. Peter Dutton's pledge to abolish the right to disconnect would risk the end of the weekend.

"It would mean longer hours, lower wages, and more stress in workers' lives. We deserve leaders who are on the side of working people instead of the pockets of big businesses.

"Abolishing the right to disconnect would mean the Coalition's big corporate mates gaining more control over working people's free time and the extraction of even more unpaid labour.

"More money in your pocket, more time with your loved ones and more freedom to live your life – that's what the right to disconnect is all about."

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