

Australia: Workers Push for Right to Disconnect

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One year after Australia introduced workplace legislation granting employees the right to disconnect outside official hours, new research shows the law is having a widespread impact. More than half of employers surveyed reported being approached by staff seeking to exercise their new protections, highlighting a significant shift in workplace expectations.

The legislation ensures employees are legally protected from being monitored, contacted, or required to respond to employers and third parties after hours. Refusals must not be deemed unreasonable, creating clearer boundaries between work and personal life.

A survey commissioned by recruitment agency Robert Half found that 56 percent of employers reported formal complaints from staff about after-hours contact, while an additional 15 percent received informal feedback on the issue. The survey included 500 hiring managers across finance, accounting, IT, technology, and human resources, covering both private and public sectors.

Small to medium businesses received 11 percent more complaints than larger organizations, suggesting less formalized processes for implementing the legislation may lead to higher tension. The survey also revealed state-by-state differences: Western Australia reported the highest level of formal complaints at 78 percent, followed by Queensland at 62 percent, New South Wales at 43 percent, and Victoria at 42 percent.

Robert Half director Nicole Gorton explained that local business practices and workplace culture influence how the legislation is received. “Local business practices and workplace culture have a direct impact on how the right to disconnect is being embraced,” she said.

The findings demonstrate that while employees generally welcome the law, it has introduced challenges for employers balancing compliance with business needs. Many companies are revising policies, providing staff training, and clarifying expectations around after-hours communication.

As workplaces adapt, the right to disconnect represents one of the most significant reforms in recent years, prompting both employees and employers to reconsider long-standing work habits. Experts suggest the legislation could set a precedent for other nations in the Asia-Pacific region considering similar protections.