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DEWR call centre staff say they're being refused breaks, fair pay



By [Justine Landis-Hanley](#)

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Justine Landis-Hanley and Miriam Webber explain some of the notable results from the latest APS census.

Call centre staff at the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations have claimed the agency is denying them eye-breaks and refusing to pay for the time it takes to set up and pack down each day.

A Contact Centre Branch staff member, in comments provided via the main public sector union, said that staff are "burnt out" and taken to task if they leave their desk for more than five minutes.

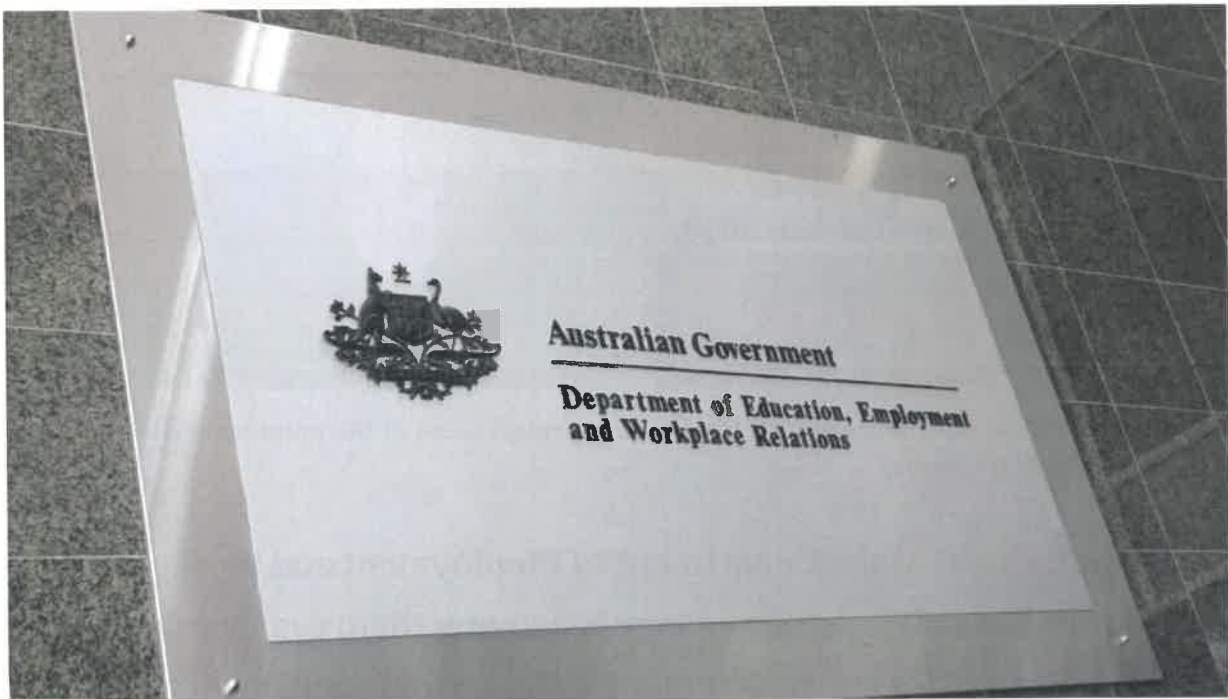


"Management often request that toilet breaks be deducted from their allocated tea breaks which makes it difficult to get fresh air [or] go for a walk because there's no time left," they said.

"I have noticed lots of people losing their voice because they are on calls all day non-stop and then have to take unpaid leave as they are contractors."

In a statement on Tuesday, the Community and Public Sector Union said that it has tried to raise these concerns in bargaining, but accused the department of refusing to move on the issues.

A DEWR spokesperson told *The Canberra Times* that the department "continues to negotiate in good faith with bargaining representatives, including the CPSU".



📷 Call centre staff at the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations claim they are being denied eye-breaks and fair pay. Picture by Jeffrey Chan.

CPSU deputy secretary Beth Vincent-Pietsch said the union, its members and DEWR staff were "incredibly disappointed by the approach management are taking to these negotiations".

"On a daily basis, [contact centre staff] deal with volatile people in sometimes very complex situations," she said.

"Many of the phone calls our members have would see most people wanting to take a breather afterwards, but our staff in DEWR are being denied this."

Staff at the Contact Centre Branch are required to log into four different programs by 8.30am, after which every action, keystroke, and mouse click on the computer is tracked.

Staff, via the union, said that everything was "micromanaged down to the minute", and that they would have to "justify why we are taking too long on the phone".

"We have to placate the customer who has been on hold for an hour, been transferred two to three times before we can even begin to sort out the purpose of call," they said.

The union said that staff had been advised that the time it takes to get set up before 8.30am, and pack down at the end of the day, was not considered paid work time.

"Their entire day is not only tracked in a way that denies adequate breaks for staff, but also in a way that denies them pay for the time it takes to set up and pack down each day," Ms Vincent-Pietsch said.

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