

# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## More than 70 per cent of public servants at Tony Burke's department work from home

**EXCLUSIVE**

By **JOE KELLY**

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More than [70 per cent of the public servants](#) in Tony Burke's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations – responsible for redesigning the nation's workplace laws – disconnected from the office in 2023 and 1,355 people signed formal “remote working” agreements.

As the government defends its “[right to disconnect](#)” overhaul, The Australian can reveal that [more than two-thirds of employees](#) at the department responsible for drafting the new laws said they had accessed arrangements in 2023 allowing them to work from home.

Under the government's IR shake-up, which [Peter Dutton has pledged to roll back](#), employees will have a right not to monitor or respond to unreasonable contact outside of work hours where they are not compensated.

If a worker wants to stop unreasonable out-of-hours contact, they can seek to settle the dispute at the workplace level.

If that is unsuccessful, they can apply to the Fair Work Commission for a stop order.

In response to questions on notice lodged by opposition finance spokeswoman [Jane Hume](#), the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations revealed that as of October 31, 2023, there were 1,355 employees with an approved WFH arrangement. This represented 36 per cent of the workforce.

But the DEWR Australian Public Service employee census survey of 2023 clarified this figure rose to 72 per cent when it included the total number of staff over the year who had accessed working from home arrangements – including workers who worked remotely on an informal and ad hoc basis.

Only the Health Department had more staff who had accessed remote work arrangements more frequently, with 80 per cent of its employees doing so according to the APS employee census.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs tied for second place with DEWR, with 72 per cent of its staff having accessed WFH arrangements over the year.

It was followed by the Department of Industry with 71 per cent and the Department of Climate Change with 70 per cent.

The FWC – the independent umpire responsible for settling workplace disputes – also provided responses to questions on notice revealing that 283 staff had a flexible WFH arrangement. Of these staff, 47 per cent or 133 people were estimated to be working from home three days a week.

The latest FWC annual report revealed that – as of June 30, 2023 – the industrial umpire employed 331 staff (not including commission members), suggesting that about 40 per cent of staff at the FWC worked more than half the week from home.

Australian Public Service Commissioner Gordon de Brouwer said last year that “active consideration” was being given by Finance to possible savings that could be made as a result of more than 72,000 public servants working from home.

The 2023 APS employee census revealed that 57 per cent of the 127,436 APS staff who completed the survey had access to WFH arrangements – up from 46 per cent in 2021.

After revelations from Treasury last week that it had initiated work over summer redesigning the [already legislated stage three tax cuts](#), The Australian can reveal that 65 per cent of its employees had accessed working from home arrangements.

Responding to questions on notice, Treasury revealed that “as at October 31, 2023, in the order of 713 staff have a formal flexible work arrangement in place”.

Of these staff, 62 per cent or 442 people worked from home twice a week, while 10 per cent or 71 people worked from home three days a week.



Treasury also revealed in responses to questions on notice by Senator Hume that, as of October 31, there were 2457 employees at the Australian Bureau of Statistics with WFH arrangements.

Of these, 1425 employees worked from home three days a week. The latest ABS annual report showed there were 3314 staff employed by the bureau – suggesting that about 42 per cent of ABS staff regularly worked from home three days a week.

**JOE KELLY, NATIONAL AFFAIRS EDITOR**

Joe Kelly is the National Affairs Editor. He joined The Australian in 2008 and since 2010 has worked in the parliamentary press gallery, most recently as Canberra Bureau chief... [Read more](#)



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