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'Right to disconnect' a key win for education workers

The union representing staff in Queensland and Northern Territory non-government schools has welcomed and commended the 'right to disconnect' being enshrined in legislation as part of the *Closing Loopholes Bill*.

The new laws represent a major win for IEU members facing unrelenting workloads in schools.

Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) Branch Secretary Terry Burke said new laws mirrored what had already been won last year by IEU members in Queensland Catholic schools through their collective bargaining action.

"Employer requests, parental queries and student contact regularly encroach on the personal time of staff," Mr Burke said.

"With the growth of mobile technology and assumed 24/7 connectivity, critical workload and work intensification issues have only been exacerbated.

"Teachers cannot be permanently 'on call', particularly when our sector is facing an attrition crisis.

"Employees need a break from work and are entitled to valuable downtime.

"While there is still much to be done to address workload pressures in schools, a 'right to disconnect' will provide overworked school staff a right to refuse to monitor, read or respond to employer or work-related contact after hours or on weekends," he said.

Mr Burke said pushback against this legislation from business lobbies and the federal opposition was unnecessary and harmful.

"We have only seen the widespread adoption of smart phones in the past 20 years and prior to this it was much more difficult and uncommon for employees to be contacted at all hours of the day.

"To listen to the employer and conservative commentary, one would presuppose that not only is the sky in imminent prospect of falling, but the employee and employer relationship is irrevocably rendered.

"The legislation in essence codifies fundamental common sense - workers need time away from work," Mr Burke said.

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