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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **AFPA SUPPORTS “RIGHT TO DISCONNECT”**

The Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA) supports the Albanese government’s initiative to introduce ‘right to disconnect’ legislation.

Since 2022, the AFPA has been working hard on behalf of its members to formalise the ‘right to disconnect’ and improve the work-life balance and mental health outcomes of Australian Federal Police (AFP) employees.

Discussion around the right to disconnect has become increasingly relevant in today’s digital age, with many employers expecting employees to be available around the clock. The right to disconnect recognises the importance of uninterrupted rest away from work.

AFPA President Alex Caruana said that his previous discussions with the Government had been fruitful, with Minister Tony Burke leading the way in supporting AFP officers through industrial reform.

“Minister Burke has already done a fantastic job by introducing presumptive legislation; the introduction of ‘right to disconnect’ legislation would be another positive outcome that would allow all AFP employees to recuperate and recover without interference from the employer.

“Policing is an incredibly demanding profession; police officers and other AFP employees are often not afforded the right to disconnect that other professions enjoy. The AFP issue their employees with mobile devices, making the option to disconnect even harder, with work encroaching more and more into our members’ personal lives.

“We have no hesitation in telling our members that if you aren’t on-call, receiving an on-call allowance, and have not been recalled to duty, there is no obligation for you to utilise your AFP-issued device outside of work – leave it at the office or station in your locker until you’re getting paid to activate it,” Mr Caruana said.

The AFPA’s original intent was to have the right to disconnect enshrined in the upcoming AFP Enterprise Agreement. Due to the subsequent formalisation of the Government’s workplace bargaining policy, the AFP and AFPA were prevented from including the right to disconnect as a fundamental component of the next EA.

Mr Caruana said that this had been a disappointing development, but would ultimately be a more than fair trade-off if the right to disconnect was legislated rather than simply included in internal policy.

“If this legislation is enacted, it will greatly benefit all AFP employees. Legislation is always better than internal policy, as the AFP Executive cannot override legislation arbitrarily.

“Within the operational policing environment, we accept that there will be times when employers will need to contact an employee, such as during an emergency or genuine welfare matter. However, employers must always respect their employees’ leave and rest days periods,” Mr Caruana said.

Many other countries have already passed legislation to protect the right to disconnect. In 2016, the French Government passed a labour law that included the right to disconnect. In 2021, the European Parliament passed a resolution to protect the right to disconnect. The resolution was accompanied by a legislative proposal that defined disconnecting as ‘not engaging in work-related activities or communication by means of digital tools, directly or indirectly, outside working time’.

Italy, Ireland, and Spain followed France’s lead and introduced legislation granting employees the right not to respond to work-related communications outside their agreed working hours.

Mr Caruana said that the AFPA frequently assisted members who suffered from anxiety or depression induced by poor workplace practices yet maintained a strong sense of personal obligation to the AFP and Australia more broadly.

“We hear of supervisors who expect that level of commitment in their team but don’t understand the ramifications of not allowing employees to have their own personal time uninterrupted.

“The right to disconnect should be a right for all employees and something all employers should adopt as part of their ongoing duty of care and welfare initiatives,” Mr Caruana said.

**For comments:**

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