

14/06/2023

Remote Working is Now Law – What Does That Mean for the Office?



By: [Jared Hale](#)

In this article, we'll explain exactly what's in the new legislation, how it affects remote working and describe some strategies businesses are using the lure people back into the office.



A new law quietly came into effect last week that many Australian workers might not even know about. From June 4, 2023, workers will have the right to dispute a refusal of a flexible or remote working request. With many businesses preferring their employees come onsite, what does this new law mean for the humble office?

In this article, we'll explain exactly what's in the new legislation, how it affects the modern workplace and describe some strategies businesses are using the lure people back into the office.

The Critics of Remote Working

When it comes to flexible working arrangements, the idea certainly has both its supporters and its detractors. One of the biggest critics of remote working is Elon Musk, the tech billionaire with a flair for controversy.



Elon Musk – The biggest critic of remote working

For Musk, the issue boils down to fairness. He argued that if essential workers like food delivery personnel and construction workers couldn't work remotely, then office workers should be held to the same standard. He called the disparity "messed up" and a "moral issue," insisting that employees at his companies, be it Tesla, SpaceX, or Twitter, must come into the office every day.

Joining Musk's opposition, Commonwealth Bank CEO Matt Comyn is also urging employees to return to the office. Back in January, Comyn informed the bank's 49,000 staff that they must spend at least 50% of their working time in the office.

Seeking to drive innovation and collaboration, Comyn emphasizes the value of face-to-face interactions in building strong connections and fostering innovation. However, critics argue that maintaining a strong organizational culture can be challenging in a remote or hybrid work environment.



Commonwealth Bank CEO – Matt Comyn

While some employees are eager to return to the office, others view remote working as a desirable "must-have" option. Job site SEEK reports that "work from home" remains the top search term among jobseekers. Economist Callam Pickering from job site Indeed suggests that employers mandating full-time office work may need to offer higher wages or additional benefits to compensate for the loss of flexibility, as removing these benefits unilaterally could make the job less appealing.

The ‘Secure Jobs’ Bill

Despite the vocal opposition, the Secure Jobs Bill passed in December 2022. Coming into effect in June 2023, it brought with it a wave of reforms that prioritize job security, gender pay equality, and wage progression.

Fair Work: Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill a snapshot of the changes...



enterprise bargaining
& BOOT test



fixed-term contracts



flexible work



equal remuneration
& pay secrecy



sexual harassment

Secure Jobs Bill

Most notably is the expanded scope of flexible working arrangements, empowering employees to seek greater flexibility and seek arbitration through the Fair Work Commission (FWC) in case of disputes.



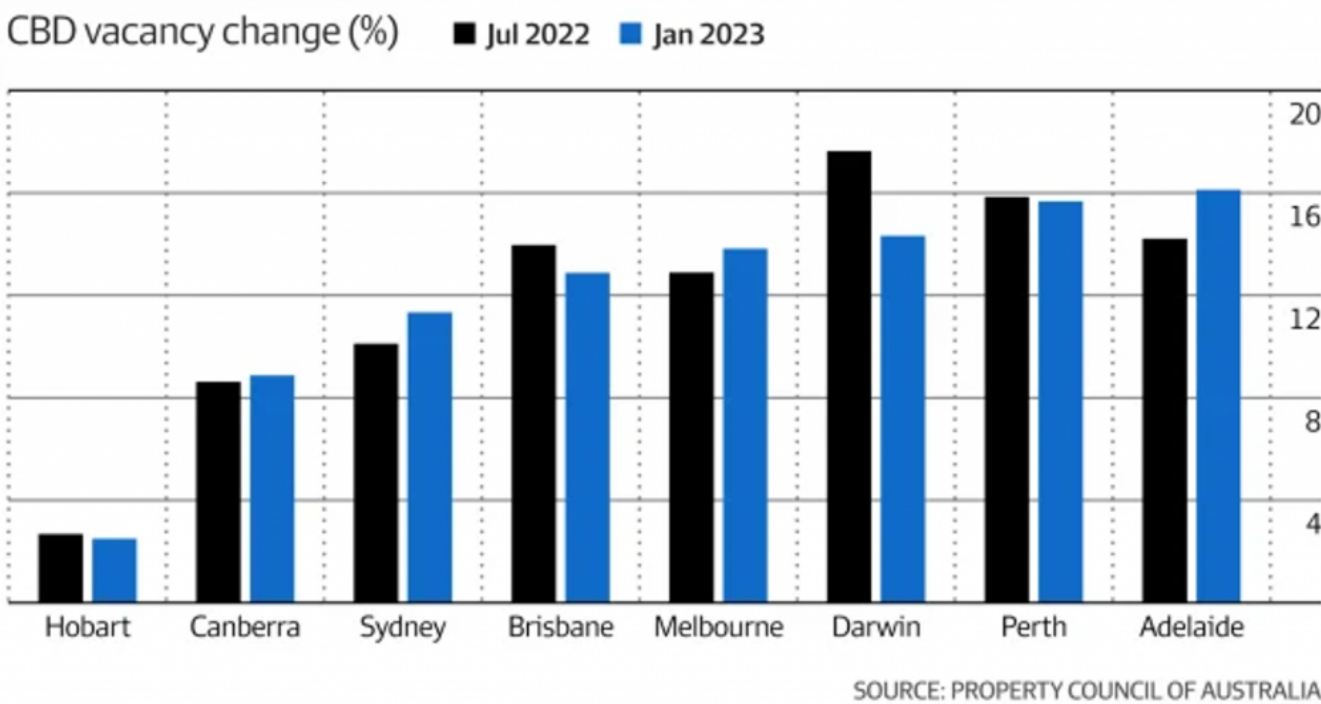
Acknowledging the shifting work landscape in a post-pandemic world, the legislation demands that employers genuinely make efforts to accommodate requests for flexible work. Notably, employees facing domestic, or family violence will have the right to request flexible arrangements, prioritizing their well-being and safety.

Previously, challenging an employer’s refusal of flexible work was limited, often dependent on the terms of an enterprise agreement and reasonable business grounds. The Secure Jobs Bill brings clarity to these grounds, considering factors such as the size and nature of the employer’s business when evaluating refusals. This clarifies the landscape for employees seeking flexible work arrangements.

What Does This Law Mean for the Office?

As it stands today, up to 40% of Australians work from home at least one day a week. That’s up 30% from pre-pandemic levels. Those kinds of numbers are already having an impact on office vacancy rates across Australia’s cities.

The number of empty offices has been slowly creeping up since the pandemic, but the biggest jump in vacancy rates occurred between 2022 and 2023. Sydney CBD’s vacancy rate jumped from 11.1% in Q4 2022 to 11.3% in Q1 2023. Melbourne also experienced similar rises, with many firms choosing to downsize to accommodate hybrid working spaces instead of the traditional office.



This trend is expected to continue throughout the year as building managers report a noticeable drop-off in new tenant inquiries.

So, are we seeing an end to the traditional office? Interestingly the answer is both yes and no.

What Does the New Office Look Like?

If you're a romantic at heart and feel nostalgic about rows and rows of uninspiring cubicles, the office of the future probably won't appeal to you.



Office cubicles or prison cells?

Businesses realise that to coax their staff into the office, they need to provide both a culture and facilities that employees can't get at home. This includes embracing [modern office trends](#) like health and wellness services, biophilia, immersive technologies.

But the biggest change in modern office spaces is centred around collaborative spaces that can involve staff both in the office and at home. Bespoke meeting areas with a physical seat reserved for every attendee, either in-person or remote, can help give an equal voice to everyone in the meeting.



Hybrid meeting spaces

Advances in technology also mean that remote workers are equipped to stay up to speed with their in-office counterparts.



Apple's Vision Pro

But what about the elephant in the room? You know, the generation of Australians that are on the verge of becoming the largest working age group in the country?

What Does Gen Z Want at Work?

Generation Z, the young and vibrant workforce born between 1997 and 2002, is stepping into the professional world with their own unique set of expectations. As business owners, it's crucial to understand what this demographic desires in the modern office environment, especially if you're looking to attract and retain these valuable workers.

It doesn't matter if you disagree with flossing, TikTok or obscure slang references. No cap. Gen Z are coming, and they need to be accommodated.

CloudBees conducted a survey focused on Gen Z in the workplace. The results revealed that software development was their top career choice, with 90% of respondents predicting its continued importance. Tech companies like Google, Apple, Netflix, Amazon, Microsoft, Sony, Tesla, and SpaceX dominated their list of desired workplaces.

So, how can you attract and retain Gen Z employees?

Here are some key takeaways:

1. Pay well above the minimum wage: Gen Z expects wages that surpass the legal minimum. Offering competitive salaries is crucial to attract and keep them engaged.
2. Offer comprehensive benefits: A great benefits package goes a long way. Health insurance, retirement plans, commuter benefits, and stock options are highly valued.
3. Provide free food: Gen Z loves their snacks and meals. Organize workplace lunches or offer snack options to keep them satisfied and engaged.
4. Keep work hours reasonable: Gen Z values work-life balance. Consistently asking them to work long hours can lead to burnout and decreased motivation.
5. Avoid micromanagement and toxic environments: Gen Z dislikes heavy-handed upper management and toxic work environments. Give them autonomy and create a positive, supportive atmosphere.

6. Embrace flexibility: Even if remote work isn't feasible all the time, provide flexibility whenever possible. Allowing remote working options to employees when they don't have in-person meetings can enhance their satisfaction and productivity.

As Generation Z takes centre stage in the workforce, understanding their wants and needs is essential for businesses across industries. Whether you're in tech or not, incorporating Gen Z values will help attract and retain this talented group of individuals. As modern offices evolve to accommodate a more flexible working arrangement, one thing is for certain. There are no one-size fits all recipes for the offices of the future. Every industry, location and collection of staff is different, and will require unique problem solving for each.



OLG Supports You.

As one of Australia's leading office furniture wholesalers, we do everything in our power to [support our project managers](#) and [resellers](#). For a full list of everything we can do, check out [How OLG Can Win You a Deal](#).

If you're stuck for ideas, or simply want an office furniture wholesaler that you can rely on, feel free to give us a call at **02 8188 2732** or [send us an email](#) so we can discuss some options.

Want to keep reading? Find out [what's new with OLG](#) or head over to the [OLG Learning Centre](#). You'll find a curated archive full of educational articles and industry content, all completely free to use.

