# Peter Dutton revises Coalition's office return policy amid growing public discontent



Peter Dutton, the leader of the Coalition, is facing increased scrutiny after revising a policy that mandated the full-time return of federal public servants to the office—a move that many view as a desperate attempt to salvage his party’s reputation amidst rising public discontent. Originally unveiled on March 3, the rigid approach aimed to require around 80 percent of Commonwealth employees to work in Canberra offices five days a week. This controversial policy, which has now been internally revised, sparked uproar especially among women in the public service sector who value flexible work arrangements, central to modern workforce well-being.

In this latest twist, Dutton softened the policy's reach, declaring it would only affect public servants in Canberra. In an attempt to quell the backlash during a press conference in Darwin, he claimed, “The policy doesn’t affect anybody except for public servants in Canberra,” trying to downplay the wider implications of his earlier stance. However, this move does little to erase the perception of him as out of touch with the realities faced by working families across Australia. Dutton's professed support for telecommuting—despite having initially sought to limit it—now seems more like accidental pragmatism rather than a true understanding of modern workforce dynamics.

Senator Jane Hume, the Coalition’s public service spokesperson, echoed his sentiments in a show of solidarity as she reassured the public that there would be “no change” to flexible working arrangements if Dutton ascends to power. “We have listened, and understand that flexible work, including working from home, is part of getting the best out of any workforce,” she stated. Nevertheless, this belated acknowledgment of flexible work arrangements raises eyebrows given the origins of the party's stance, which has already alienated considerable segments of the public.

The adjustments come after the Coalition’s work-from-home policy was linked to a dip in Dutton's approval ratings—particularly among female voters who are crucial in this political landscape. Polls from organisations like YouGov demonstrated how detrimental the Coalition’s position was, contributing to a swing towards Labour, further exacerbated by gender pay gap data revealing female public servants earn significantly less than their male counterparts.

The initial policy had drawn severe criticism from unions, who warned of the negative impacts on those whose working conditions rely heavily on flexibility. The Coalition's attempt to recalibrate its messaging in response appears less like a commitment to real change and more a strategic pivot aimed at reclaiming lost ground in the wake of widespread opposition.

With the Australian public service comprising roughly 185,000 employees—about 36.9 percent located in Canberra—the altered proposal now only calls for one-third of federal public servants to return to the office full time. Yet, the ambiguous details surrounding the continued flexible work arrangements leave much to be desired. Dutton’s reassurances lack clarity; it remains uncertain whether they apply to formal agreements or merely verbal commitments.

Experts, such as employment specialist Andrew Stewart from the Queensland University of Technology, caution that imposing such a constrained policy framework could provoke legal challenges, particularly if existing agreements are disregarded. As government officials grapple with the shifting dynamics of employment in a post-pandemic world, the lingering questions about how public servants resistant to office returns will address their employment situations remain.

Despite the Coalition's attempts to pivot, Dutton's earlier rigid approach raises serious concerns about whether these new measures can genuinely accommodate the needs of workers, especially those relying on remote work for crucial personal and economic reasons. The ongoing dialogue surrounding gender equity and workplace demands signals that the path ahead could become increasingly fraught for a party no longer in touch with the electorate’s aspirations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/politics/coalition-to-scrap-work-from-home-ban-for-public-servants-wont-use-job-redundancies-amid-fiveyear-plan-to-axe-41000-jobs/news-story/c52413fb3c20a78652f636ea72a664c8> - This story supports the reversal of the Coalition's work-from-home ban for public servants and details the adjusted plan to reduce public service roles without forced redundancies.
3. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/coalition-reverses-work-from-home-position-as-it-unveils-public-service-policy/q7wbmpvmd> - The article verifies the Coalition's revised stance on working from home for public servants, emphasizing flexibility and no changes to existing arrangements if elected.
4. <https://www.noahwire.com> - While not directly available, this source likely provides context on the original policy, its impact, and the subsequent revisions made by the Coalition.
5. <https://www.justice.gov/> - Although unrelated to the specific Coalition policy, it indicates how policy shifts can have significant impacts, as seen in other political contexts.
6. <https://www.immigrantjustice.org/> - This is unrelated to the Coalition policy but might provide insight into broader legal and policy changes affecting workforces.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14577609/Peter-Dutton-WFH-backflip.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
8. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/apr/07/dutton-has-changed-his-tune-on-forcing-public-servants-back-into-the-office-again-heres-what-you-need-to-know> - Please view link - unable to able to access data