

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

2020 - 2021

Division: JobKeeper Division
Topic: JobKeeper used to pay bonuses and dividends
Reference: Committee Hansard pages 13 & 14 – 17 September 2020, IQ20-000257

Question:

Senator WATT: So Treasury has provided advice to the government about how we could stop businesses using JobKeeper to pay bonuses or dividends?

Ms J Wilkinson: I think I would put it that Treasury has provided advice to governments about the challenges around this issue in the context of the questions that have come up, including through this committee.

Senator WATT: Does that mean that it's been a decision of government or ministers to not act on this issue and not change JobKeeper so that businesses can't use it for bonuses and dividends?

Ms J Wilkinson: Like any programs, the design of the program is a matter that is the decision of government. It's not a decision that Treasury can take one way or the other about how to design a program.

Senator WATT: So Treasury has provided advice to government about how this issue could be dealt with—businesses using JobKeeper for dividends and bonuses—but government or ministers have made the decision that this is not something to be explored?

Ms J Wilkinson: I'll have to take on notice exactly what advice has been provided. But the information regarding how these sorts of issues might be dealt with or have been dealt with in other schemes has absolutely been discussed with government. But I'll have to take on notice the question about the specific advice that's been provided.

Answer:

Treasury has provided advice to the Government on the design of the JobKeeper Payment.

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Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

2020 - 2021

Division: Social Policy Division
Topic: Specific support provided to the construction sector
Reference: Committee Hansard page 17 – 17 September 2020, IQ20-000260

Question:

Senator STOKER: This is a pretty important part of the COVID-19 support for the construction industry. But what other support exists for people who are in those construction jobs, and how does it compare to other sectors?

CHAIR: Talk about multitasking, Senator Stoker! You're doing very well. We're all in admiration here—and welcoming our new committee members to the table as well!

Senator STOKER: We're adapting!

CHAIR: And speedy questions and hitting the mute button! The girls are most welcome, of course.

Ms J Wilkinson: In addition to HomeBuilder, workers in the construction industry are getting a very significant amount of assistance through the JobKeeper program. Both sole traders in the construction industry and also employees of construction businesses are very well represented in the JobKeeper program. Again, I don't think I have the details of exactly how much support has gone to employees in the construction industry, but I'm very happy to provide that to you on notice.

Ms V Wilkinson: And there's the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees program—

Ms J Wilkinson: Sorry, my colleague just reminded me that there's also the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees program, which, again, provides a significant amount of support to apprentices and trainees in the construction industry. And the third one—sorry to do a repechage—is that businesses in the construction industry are also a significant recipients of the cash-flow-boost grants, which were targeted at small businesses. Of course, construction businesses are well represented amongst small businesses.

Answer:

The Government is supporting the construction through measures such as JobKeeper, the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees program and the Boosting Cash Flow for Employers payments.