

Select Committee on COVID-19



Australian Government
Australian Taxation Office

Opening Statement

- > I would like to update the Committee on the work the ATO has been doing to deliver the government's economic stimulus measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- > Before I do, I will briefly refer to today's media about fraudulent activity in relation to early release of superannuation.
- > I can confirm that some limited fraudulent activity has been identified and immediately acted upon.
- > It is now an operational matter with our colleagues at the AFP and so I cannot comment further today.
- > I would remind all Australians to be vigilant in keeping their personal information secure and private.
- > Now back to my main statement.
- > In response to COVID-19, the ATO has pivoted our focus to ensure the efficient roll-out of five key measures in particular:
 - the JobKeeper Payments,
 - early release of superannuation,
 - cash flow boost,
 - increasing the instant asset write-off and
 - accelerated depreciation.
- > Our priority has been to deliver on the government's commitment to get millions of Australians access to financial support as quickly and easily as possible during this difficult time.
- > I am pleased to report today that across the three main measures, this support is now flowing.
- > As of midnight on 4 May, the ATO had received almost 750,000 enrolments for the JobKeeper program. And more than \$7 billion in credits have been applied to eligible business under the cash flow boost program.
- > The early release of superannuation program has had over 1 million applications approved, totalling more than \$9 billion.
- > Of course undertaking all three of these measures in such a compressed timeframe does not come without risk. And while thankfully there have been no serious problems to date, we won't be dropping our guard.
- > The demand for information and assistance from us has been unprecedented.
- > Meeting this demand has only been possible through a rapid transformation of our workforce and systems – all the while carefully ensuring the health and safety of

our more than 18,000 staff members, including more than 11,000 who transitioned to working from home.

- > We acted quickly, bolstering systems capacity and the number of staff in call centres, to ensure the community could continue to access and rely on our support.
- > We've seen a record number of people calling us – towards the end of April we averaged 90,000 calls every day. Our previous record was 71,000 calls in a day.
- > Our people have been flexible and committed despite the challenges many face personally. I'd like to take the opportunity to recognise all the ATO staff who have worked tirelessly over the past months.
- > This substantial work, much of which was developed and implemented within days or weeks, has occurred while remaining focused on our governance and integrity obligations.
- > We have proactively engaged with our external scrutineers, including the ANAO, to ensure our governance processes and risk frameworks are potent.
- > We've also worked with our colleagues across the APS to ensure the government's response and advice to the community during this challenging time is consistent, streamlined and trusted.
- > While our immediate focus is on delivering these support measures, we are also working closely with other agencies, including the AFP and Treasury, in looking toward the horizon for the challenges ahead.
- > While we know most Australians want to do the right thing, our robust compliance systems and partnerships with other agencies will allow us to quickly identify those intending to fraud the system.
- > I can assure the Committee that the ATO's response will continue to evolve to meet the challenges posed by this pandemic.
- > I am proud of the way the ATO has responded to this current crisis, and in particular, I hope we get the chance to talk to you more about the seismic IT shifts, led by our CIO Ramez Katf, that have occurred within our organisation in order to make sure the systems have been ready to administer these new measures.