



MEDIA RELEASE: Monday, March 23, 2020

Assistance to businesses must keep the arts workforce in work, not push them onto welfare

Employers in the media, entertainment and arts industries must ensure that cash payments set to flow to deal with the impact of the coronavirus crisis are used to keep people on their payroll – and that obligation must extend to any freelancers and contractors on their books.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance is concerned that yesterday's economic stimulus package places no obligations on businesses to use payments to boost their cashflow to retain their workforce.

As a result, Centrelink is today being inundated with applications for the new Job Seekers Allowance from workers in the sector.

MEAA is calling on all employers to explore creative ways to keep people in work rather than pushing them onto the welfare system.

"We are concerned that no conditions requiring employers to keep workers in jobs have been attached to the money set to flow to businesses," said MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy.

"The over-riding objective must be to keep people in work, not push them onto the welfare system. All businesses that are receiving government support must do all they can to ensure that the money is used to keep people on the payroll.

"Given the lack of conditions attached by the government to business cashflow payments, MEAA is putting all employers in the arts and entertainment sectors on notice that we will be watching them very closely to ensure that money coming their way is used to keep people in jobs.

"Everyone has to play their part during this unprecedented time, and employers have a moral obligation to do all they can to keep people in the workforce.

"But this message also needs to be conveyed by the government – otherwise we will see a mass exodus of workers from this industry, some of them forever.

"The obligation of businesses to keep people in work needs to include freelancers and contractors who make up a large part of the workforce in most theatrical and screen productions.

"The simple fact is that if producers want these professionals to be available for work in the future once the crisis is over, they need to be looking after them as well as their employees on salaries and wages."

Mr Murphy reiterated that MEAA is also working with other peak bodies in the sector – including Live Performance Australia and Screen Producers Australia – to obtain from the federal government a targeted and specific rescue package for the arts.

Media contact: Mark Phillips – ph: 0422 009 011; mark.phillips@meaa.org