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Federal Government goes missing in action on income support for arts and entertainment workers

Tens of thousands of freelance and casual performers and crew – and many of their employers – have been denied access the JobKeeper income subsidy following the passage of legislation last night, says the union for arts and entertainment workers.

Although the JobKeeper scheme will provide critical support for long-term employees with a single employer, sole traders and some casuals, these employees don't represent the majority of people employed in the sector.

"Freelance employees and many loyal casuals will – without urgent changes to the JobKeeper rules, be at least \$200 a week worse off. For those who were earning more than \$1500 per fortnight, the losses are greater," said Paul Murphy, Chief Executive of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

"The latest ABS COVID-19 data spells things out: the Arts and Recreation sector has 47 per cent of businesses still trading, while the figure for Media and Telecommunications is 65 per cent – the lowest of all 17 trading sectors. It is hard to comprehend why the Government would, through inaction, seek to compound this damage.

"Workers in the arts and entertainment sector have been stood down by their employers, their working environments (venues, sets and workshops) have been shut down by government decree, and they have been forgotten by the COVID-19 stimulus.

"We nonetheless congratulate the many thousands of MEAA members who have taken action in recent days, both through social media and by contacting their MP to bring attention to the inequity of the JobKeeper scheme.

"This has resulted in the final legislation leaving the door open for further changes to the JobKeeper access rules.

"MEAA and its members will continue to campaign for the scheme to be extended to include freelancers and short-term casuals who have regular employment with a series of different employers.

"We will also advocate for arts and entertainment organisations to have greater access to JobKeeper.

"MEAA members have a clear message for Arts Minister Paul Fletcher: step up and defend the community that looks to you as its voice in the Government. It is his job to make the system accessible and relevant to our sector.

"MEAA will also continue to harness our members' strength to push for industry rescue packages and for State Governments to play a greater role in keeping the performing arts and screen sectors alive.

"We cannot and will not let today's decision be the final call on this matter. Too many livelihoods and the fate of our industries are at stake."

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