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MEAA seeks answers on government support claims

The union for Australian arts and entertainment workers has today lodged Freedom of Information applications seeking details of government claims that it is supporting the sectors during the coronavirus pandemic to the tune of up to \$10 billion.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance has applied to the office of Arts Minister Paul Fletcher and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications for any documents that contain estimates about the level of JobKeeper and JobSeeker funds that would flow to the Australian arts sector through these programs between March 30 and May 25.

MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy said the union was concerned that a lack of rigorous modelling had been applied to the estimates of support, which Mr Fletcher has put as high as \$10 billion.

Mr Murphy said the only public explanation provided to date by Mr Fletcher's office for its \$10 billion estimate was that it was based on a two-year-old working paper that analysed employment in the sector between 2008-9 and 2016-17.

"Given the massive \$60 billion miscalculation of total JobKeeper expenditure revealed on Friday and a growing body of evidence that indicates a significant proportion of arts and entertainment workers have been unable to claim JobKeeper, we have real doubts about the accuracy of Mr Fletcher's claim that government support will total \$4-10 billion.

"Even at the lower end of his claim, it seems a vast exaggeration of the income support being provided to workers in these sectors.

"We know that tens of thousands of workers in the arts and entertainment are not eligible for JobKeeper because they work as freelancers or casuals from gig to gig and production to production.

"In a survey of more than 1000 MEAA members, about 35% said they had been unable to access JobKeeper, although 16% of them were able to claim for JobSeeker.

"Clearly, the support provided to arts and entertainment workers has been inadequate because the eligibility rules for JobKeeper shut out freelancers and short-term casuals.

"The arts and recreation sector has been the second hardest hit by the economic slowdown, with 19% of payroll jobs lost since mid-March.

"If the Minister really wants to help workers in the sectors he is responsible for, he should be knocking on Josh Frydenberg's door and advocating for a broadening of JobKeeper criteria to include all freelancers and casuals."

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