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Nothing for workers in federal government arts package

The so-called 'JobMaker' package announced today by the Federal Government ignores the thousands of arts workers who have been without work for months and need immediate income support.

While the \$250 million in grants and low-interest loans is welcome after months of inaction, it could be some months before money flows and productions can recommence. In the interim, JobKeeper needs to be extended to the many thousands of creative workers currently excluded from it.

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance Chief Executive Paul Murphy said the package was the result of lobbying and advocacy by arts organisations who have been pleading for targeted industry assistance for more than two months. He said the federal government had been far too slow in responding to the crisis facing sector.

"While any form of assistance is welcome, this package is another slap in the face for the thousands of arts and entertainment workers who are not eligible for the JobKeeper income subsidy scheme," Mr Murphy said.

"The grants and loans will help arts organisations begin to recover from the coronavirus shutdown, but there is absolutely no relief for freelance and casual workers who have lost their jobs and suffered significant reductions in income.

"These workers are the backbone of the industry.

"It is essential to provide capital injections and financing and investment incentives to the bodies that provide employment in the industry, but there is no point in doing that if you don't have a workforce. The stark reality is that we are in danger of losing a generation of creative professionals in this country without an adequate income support scheme."

Mr Murphy said the size of the federal government package still fell short of what industry organisations such as Live Performance Australia had been calling for, and was much less than previous Government claims that it was providing up to \$10 billion in support for the sector.

"It will also be critical to see this money flow quickly. Any delay will cause further damage to businesses already teetering on the brink," he said. "You can't just switch the lights back on overnight. Theatrical and screen productions, festivals and concerts all require long lead times and months of planning before opening night.

"We all want to see people back at work, but this has to be done safely and with appropriate measures to ensure health and wellbeing of both workers and audiences.

"What this could mean is that the majority of workers in the arts and entertainment sectors will remain out of work for several more months, which is why income support is so important. The biggest help the federal government could provide right now for workers in the sector is to change the eligibility rules for JobKeeper so arts and entertainment workers can claim the income subsidy."

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