

Monday, 30 March 2020

Statement from Sally McManus on wage subsidy announcement

The Morrison government has heard the Australian union movement's call to ensure that all workers are covered by a wage subsidy program.

We need to carefully examine the details of this announcement, however we are glad to see that it will apply to all businesses and most workers.

We are concerned that the \$1,500 a fortnight subsidy may not be enough. We believe that allowing this amount to increase up to the median wage of \$1,375 a week is what is needed.

We also want to ensure all casuals who could have reasonably expected to work now but have lost their jobs because of the pandemic are covered. Many of these workers may not have worked the last 12 months. We also want to ensure that this subsidy applies to the 1.7 million visa workers who were working, there is no reason why it should not.

Over the past few weeks the Australian union movement has been working with business groups across the country to call for a wage subsidy of at least 80% to keep people employed, keep income flowing and facilitate self isolation without forcing people to go broke.

The union movement has worked doggedly to make sure this government understands the grave situation Australian workers find themselves in. Less than three weeks ago the Morrison government wouldn't consider the notion of a wage subsidy.

We now need employers to keep people employed and keep paying their wages. We are calling on all employers to do their part.

We also want to see workers who have been let go re-employed.

A wage subsidy program needs to have safeguards to ensure people are kept in employment and that any taxpayer money flows to the workers. The government has made clear that this is a wage subsidy and not a wage replacement program and we would expect to see people maintain their wage levels during this program.

Payments only start from March 30th and the delay to May 1st will pose cash flow issues for many workers who have already been laid off or who's employer may not survive another six weeks without immediate support.

The Australian union movement is pleased to see that the Australian government has heard the voices of millions of workers and we hope to work with them to make the program even better.

ENDS

Contact: Peter Green 0400 764 200 or 03 9664 7266