

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into Coronavirus Economic Response Package Amendment (Ending Jobkeeper Profiteering) Bill 2021

Division: Labour Market Policy Division
Topic: Treasury officials
Reference: Spoken (10 September 2021)
Senator: Rex Patrick

Question:

Senator PATRICK: I just want to find out a couple of things. I understood, from answers to questions from Senator McKim, that advice was given in relation to a clawback and that it was discussed with the Treasurer. That's correct, isn't it—at the start of the program?

Ms Wilkinson: That's right. In his op-ed today, the Treasurer said that in our view it would have been a handbrake on the recovery.

Senator PATRICK: Sure. I'm just trying to understand the basis on which you followed that advice. Did you commission someone to give advice in relation to that or was that just someone sitting around a coffee table and deciding that was the answer? How did you come to that conclusion?

Ms Wilkinson: We weren't spending a lot of time around coffee tables in March last year, I can tell you, Senator.

Senator PATRICK: Fair enough, okay!

ACTING CHAIR: We hear that!

Ms Wilkinson: As I said at the outset, I'm completely open with you: it was our best professional judgement—

Senator PATRICK: When you say 'our', who is 'our'? Is that yourself—

Ms Wilkinson: Treasury. The advice that the Treasury provides to the government—

Senator PATRICK: No, let's get down to the detail of it. Who actually provided this advice? I'm happy if you just stick to SES people, or perhaps the secretary. Who actually provided that advice and came up with that advice? I want to know who they are. I'm trying to understand the basis on which they came to that conclusion or, at least, formed up the advice that went to the Treasurer.

Ms Wilkinson: I'm happy to take on notice who formally signed off on minutes, but this was a discussion that was taken at very senior levels in Treasury involving myself, the secretary and the relevant SES in the division that was designing JobKeeper.

Senator PATRICK: Thank you. I'm mindful of junior officers not being named, but I think it's fair to ask that question of SES. Can you provide a copy of that advice to the committee, please?

Ms Wilkinson: I'm happy to take that on notice.

Answer:

1-2. The advice was based on the collective expertise of the Treasury, drawing upon experience in policy design and informed by an understanding of the impacts of policy on the incentives faced by businesses.

Advice on the design of the JobKeeper Payment was provided by Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary to the Treasury, Ms Jenny Wilkinson PSM, Deputy Secretary, Fiscal Group and Ms Philippa Brown, First Assistant Secretary, Labour Market Policy Division.

3. Detailed advice on all aspects of the design of the JobKeeper Payment were provided to Government over the period the scheme was being designed and implemented.