



Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**


**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 July 2020

**MOTION**

**Coronavirus, JobKeeper**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (4.16 pm): I rise to support the motion. North Queensland has been hit hard by COVID-19. Our government has responded quickly and effectively to the COVID-19 crisis, especially in North Queensland. Our government had the first major response of any state or territory back in February, with the initial \$27 million package that has now been boosted to nearly \$6 billion assisting Queenslanders through business grants and a range of other assistance. Since then, our government has provided the following in Townsville: \$42 million in loans supporting over 3,400 jobs; \$21 million in Works for Queensland projects, which the other side objects to all the time, which are supporting nearly 300 jobs; \$9 million in payroll tax refunds to 357 businesses like the Brothers Leagues Club in Thuringowa; and \$2 million in grants supporting 250 small businesses.

The federal government's JobKeeper has been an important lifeline. There have been 548 businesses in my electorate which have benefited from that, but it does not go far enough or cover enough workers. Unemployment in Townsville has increased as a result of COVID. JobKeeper does not cover short-term casuals, temporary migrants or other workers crucial to the North Queensland economy, and only two days ago they pulled JobKeeper from childcare workers.

Across Australia 900,000 businesses and 3.3 million workers are at risk if JobKeeper is ripped away suddenly in September. Credible economic institutions, including the Reserve Bank, have repeatedly highlighted the significant uncertainty Australian businesses and workers are facing. The RBA governor, Philip Lowe, said it was very important that we do not withdraw the fiscal stimulus too early. Chris Richardson from Deloitte Access Economics has urged the Morrison government not to withdraw supports too soon.

I have spoken with local businesses in my area, including recent conversations with the manager of Cactus Jack's. They have three restaurants in Townsville and 200 workers. He told me that if JobKeeper is taken away in September they might need to shut the doors. They need certainty for their business and their staff. We cannot forget that the Morrison government was dragged to the table kicking and screaming on the wage subsidy program, delaying it for weeks and needlessly putting jobs at risk. JobKeeper was announced as a \$130 billion program but it is now the biggest underspend in Australian government history and was subject to the \$60 billion bungle.

The success of JobKeeper—for those lucky Australians it covers—and the massive underspend should be reason enough to extend it beyond September and to those not covered. This is not a normal jobs market. The federal government cannot go back to business as usual because there just are not enough jobs for people to apply for because of COVID. Millions of people across Australia and here in Queensland will suffer if JobKeeper ends in September. I urge the LNP on the other side to pick up the phone and get the PM to keep JobKeeper going.