

national debt is a smaller proportion of the economy (GDP) than it was in the 1990s.

These people should get JobKeeper for longer



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SHRINKING and disappearing JobKeeper payments are piling extra stress on many workers and business owners, but a simple act by the Federal Government could ease it.

During COVID's economic carnage, JobKeeper wage subsidies have propped up about a million businesses and provided a financial lifeline for 3.5 million workers.

But it's coming to an end. The maximum payment was scaled back last month from \$1500 to \$1200 a fortnight, from January 4 it drops to \$1000 a fortnight, and on March 28 it's bye-bye JobKeeper.

It's understandable the government needs to wean people off these payments, and to kill off the so-called zombie companies that were struggling before the pandemic but have sailed through it on government handouts.

However, some workers and businesses have little or no chance of returning to normal operations



The tourism industry has no hope of returning to normal before JobKeeper is phased out.

before March 2021. Think aviation, travel agents, tourism operators and transport services that all rely heavily on the overseas travellers who are still banned from visiting Australia.

It's likely these bans won't ease significantly until later in 2021. Many restaurants and cafes remain unviable because

social-distancing rules mean the only way they can operate is by running at

a loss. These business owners and workers can't be blamed for their predicament. It's the federal and state governments that have set the rules

(some more draconian than others) and that bloody virus that created the need for those rules.

Why, then, should business owners and workers be thrown on the scrap heap because of temporary rules being forced on them?

Tourism and hospitality businesses will eventually play a huge role in rebuilding Australia's economy when international travel and hospitality services return to normal.

Oversas visitors should flock here after seeing how well we've handled the pandemic.

But if we don't have the businesses to service those visitors, they will stay

away and deprive our nation of a welcome cash injection.

The Federal Government is spending an estimated \$86bn on JobKeeper, and hundreds of billions in total on its COVID-19 economic response.

Surely a few billion more bucks aimed at helping the hardest-hit sectors and businesses won't blow up the budget much more than has been hit already.

Record-low interest rates here and globally mean the cost of repaying our fast-growing national debt is a smaller proportion of the economy (GDP) than it was in the 1990s.

The Federal Government has done a great job shielding Australians from the worst financial impacts of COVID-19, and I do believe it will help still-affected industries beyond March 2021.

There's no political mileage to be gained by announcing targeted extensions of JobKeeper five months before the March deadline.

But it would make a massive emotional difference to those who worry what 2021 will mean for their sector, their career and their life.

A simple message from the federal government that "we've got your back" until this pandemic is over is all that's needed.

Hopefully, it comes well before March next year.