

**The Hon Stuart Robert MP**  
**Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme**  
**Minister for Government Services**

**TRANSCRIPT**

DOORSTOP
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Subject: Income compliance program
EO&E.....

MINISTER ROBERT: This morning my department commenced some refinements to the income compliance system. Refinements have been made a number of times over the last few years both before and after the Ombudsman report. The Government makes no apologies for fulfilling our legal obligations to collect debts with income compliance and of course with wider debt collection. We have an absolute responsibility to ensure the right people get the right amount of money at the right time. The integrity of our welfare system is important, and Australians rightly expect us to do that. So we'll continue the income compliance system, we will continue to use income averaging as the basis to identify, with other areas of proof point, whether a debt may exist, and to engage with Australians to ask them to speak to the department about whether a debt may or may not exist. The refinement we commenced this morning is income averaging plus other proof points will be used as the final determinate for a debt to be crystallised or for a debt to be raised. To ensure fairness and consistency for income compliance across all Australians, I've also asked my department to go back and identify the small cohort of Australians who have a debt raised solely on the basis of income averaging, so we can commence discussions with them and seek further points of proof. It's important for Australians to understand they don't need to contact the department, that small cohort of Australians that have a debt crystallised solely on income averaging, my department will reach out and contact them over the coming weeks.

QUESTION: What is to be the total cost of this Budget-back down with robodebts?

MINISTER ROBERT: We'll continue to identify the small cohort of Australians impacted. We'll contact them over the coming weeks, and we look forward to working with them to identify further proof points to identify if a debt does or does not exist.

QUESTION: Do you have a rough estimate at least of how much money is being sacrificed by not continuing with this?

MINISTER ROBERT: This is a small cohort of Australians.

QUESTION: So the onus of proof concept with robodebt, is it true that you're also scrapping that?

MINISTER ROBERT: There is no change to the construct of the onus of proof. We will still reach out to Australians to say that income averaging indicates they may possibly have a debt, and we'll use other proof points as well, and we will ask them to engage with the department to identify through bank statements or through pay slips or other means, that indeed, they don't have a debt. So there will be no change in that regard.

QUESTION: Are you still going to be leaving that process up to robots and algorithms?

MINISTER ROBERT: We'll continue to use income averaging with other proof points, as the basis to identify the possibility of a debt. The key refinement is that income averaging, plus proof points, will be used to crystallise or finalise the debt.

QUESTION: So just a simple answer, is it going to be humans or robots doing this?

MINISTER ROBERT: It's always been humans. There's no point at which I've been the minister that departmental staff have not been involved in the process of raising a debt. The refinement that my department started this morning is to ensure that before a debt is finally raised, income averaging plus other points of proof will be used as the basis for that.

QUESTION: Why didn't the government have this kind of [indistinct] when it started this scheme?

MINISTER ROBERT: Income compliance has been refined a number of times over the years. In fact, I think we're on the third iteration of it. This is simply a further refinement of a process that's been ongoing.

QUESTION: Do you think the Government has made some mistakes on this issue?

MINISTER ROBERT: The Government has an absolute legal obligation to raise debts where they exist. The average Australian expects us to use their funds wisely. The average Australian expects Government to ensure that the right people get the right amount of welfare at the right time. It's the most highly targeted welfare approach, literally, in the world. So we make no apologies and we do not stand back from ensuring the legal obligations, that the right people get the right money. And ipso facto ensuring that people who have been overpaid, repay that debt. The key message for Australians is keep your income up to date online. Keep the department informed as to what income you earn, and that will completely and utterly minimise or nullify the chance of actually having a debt raised.

QUESTION: So do you have apologies to make to Australians who you've pursued under robodebts?

MINISTER ROBERT: This program has been refined a number of times over the years. This is a further refinement this morning.

QUESTION: Has the Government learnt any lessons at all from this?

MINISTER ROBERT: We'll continue to refine this process in line with community expectations and standards, and that's what I've done this morning. Thanks very much.