

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Government attempts to evade judicial scrutiny of robodebt

As they search for payslips and bank statements from up to a decade ago, the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Australians hit by robodebt wonder why the earnings declarations and employment documents they provided to Centrelink at the time are suddenly not good enough.

On Friday 26 April, in Federal Court, the Government told Victoria Legal Aid's client Madeleine Masterson that Centrelink had actually had a person look at her case, and seen that they should have believed her. That they had made an error.

Victoria Legal Aid's Federal Court action was expected to provide clarification on the legal soundness of the radical reverse-onus Compliance system known as robodebt: for victims, for the public, and for other cases making their way through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Instead, the Government took away the debt demand that it claims was the basis of the case.

NotMyDebt coordinator Amy Patterson is disappointed and frustrated, but hardly shocked. "After spending nearly two and a half years helping ordinary Australians fight this nightmare of maladministration, we know that questionable tactics are routinely used to prop up this system.

If robodebt was an honest system for collecting real overpayments, the 'debts' would be proven and itemised, like a real debt, and not delivered as an unjustified shifting amount for the recipient to somehow disprove.

If robodebt was an honest system they wouldn't need to frighten people onto payment plans without challenging debts they don't believe are fair, and they wouldn't need to funnel people away from the review processes they need, like a review by an Authorised Review Officer, and into an endless loop of unproductive informal 'reassessments'.

If robodebt was an honest system, this court case by Victoria Legal Aid would never have been necessary - and the Government wouldn't now be trying to evade scrutiny by the Court."

"Wiping this one debt just to try and avoid having the robodebt system examined by the Court doesn't pass the pub test," she continued. "It's a cynical move - and as the election looms Australians should be angry about it. We're two and a half years in, with countless hours wasted by employers as well as individuals, a blow-out of program costs, and there's still no certainty that it's even legal. It's a disaster and a disgrace. The only way to restore any trust here is to rewind robodebt."

It's never too late to challenge a Centrelink debt you don't believe is fair.

If you have a robodebt you don't think is right, challenge it – you're not alone.

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