



## Senator Katy Gallagher

Shadow Minister for Finance  
Shadow Minister for the Public Service  
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate  
Senator for the Australian Capital Territory

Mr Grant Hehir  
Auditor-General for Australia  
Australian National Audit Office  
GPO Box 707  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: [grant.hehir@anao.gov.au](mailto:grant.hehir@anao.gov.au)

Dear Mr Hehir

I write to request that the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) develop an audit program related to the Australian Government's economic response to COVID-19.

Over the past three weeks the Australian Government has announced just over \$200 billion in direct Commonwealth spending as an economic response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Over \$100 billion in balance sheet assistance has been provided to support the flow of credit to business.

As you would be aware, legislation relating to the first and second tranches of the Government's economic response to COVID-19 with financial implications of \$84 billion passed the Parliament in a single day sitting due to the social distancing and health precautions associated with COVID-19. Labor expects the third tranche valued at \$130 billion will be dealt with in a similarly expedited way.

In addition to these economic responses there have been two other areas where new arrangements have been put in place in response to COVID-19 which Labor believes would benefit from the ANAO's attention.

First, in association with the supply bills which passed the Parliament on 23 March 2020 a significantly increased Advance to the Finance Minister (AFM) was agreed providing the Finance Minister with \$40 billion to meet any urgent and unexpected expenditure. This is almost twenty times the amount provided in association with normal appropriations in any given year.

Whilst there are some agreed (but not legislated) conditions on the use of this increased AFM, Labor believes there is a strong case for close monitoring of the use of this mechanism as part of the COVID-19 response.

Secondly, the Parliament also agreed to a government amendment to the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 which gives the Minister for Families and Social Services unprecedented ability to make modifications to a range of qualifications and payments under social security law until the end of this calendar year.

These powers to set and amend various pensions and eligibility for pensions have never been delegated to a Minister before and, as with other elements of the response to COVID-19, Labor believes special consideration should be given to monitoring the use of these powers, particularly in an environment when the Parliament is not able to sit in the usual way.

Due to the unprecedented amount of taxpayer funds proposed to be expended over the next two financial years, along with the novel arrangements and extra powers being provided to Ministers over coming months, Labor believes there are good reasons for you to audit the implementation and ongoing performance of the Australian Government's economic response to COVID-19.

I am happy to discuss this request with you in more detail if that is useful. The contact in my office is Mr Alex Lim, who can be contacted at [Alexander.Lim@aph.gov.au](mailto:Alexander.Lim@aph.gov.au)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katy Gallagher".

Katy Gallagher

**Senator for the ACT**

31 March 2020