



30 May 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 19 April 2024, and subsequent refinement of 1 May 2024, requesting:

any advice (including memos, reports) between the Ministry of Social Development and the Minister for Social Development and Employment on the setting/establishment (or potential setting/establishment) of any targets to reduce the number of people on the Job-seeker benefit by 50,000 by 2030. The date range is between 31 October 2023 and 19 April 2024.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision set out below.

Three reports, with associated appendices, are in scope of your request, being advice from the Ministry of Social Development to the Minister for Social Development and Employment (the Minister).

1. REP/24/1/009 *Report Responding to the Prime Minister's letter 'Setting our priorities for the next three years'*, dated 11 January 2024

Some of the information in this report is out of scope of your request, as it does not relate to the target to reduce Jobseeker Support numbers. I have therefore decided to provide you with an excerpt from this report, consisting of the paragraphs relevant to your request. I have made this decision under section 16(1)(e) of the Act.

I am also providing the Appendix to this report as a PDF of a PowerPoint presentation, named *Data to support initial discussions on targets*.

2. REP/24/1/037 Ministerial priorities letter – first draft

Parts of this report are out of scope of your request, as they do not relate to the target to reduce Jobseeker Support numbers.

I am withholding Appendix 1, being the draft letter from the Minister to the Prime Minister, under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act to protect the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions. I believe the greater public interest is in the ability of individuals to express opinions in the course of their duty.

I am releasing Appendix 2, noting some parts are redacted as out of scope of your request as they do not relate to the target to reduce Jobseeker Support numbers. This is attached as a PDF of a PowerPoint presentation, named *Social Development and Employment portfolio targets, January 2024*.

3. REP/24/1/057 Ministerial priorities letter – second draft, 26 January 2024

Again, some parts of this report are redacted as out of scope of your request.

I am also withholding some information under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials. The release of this information is likely to prejudice the ability of government to consider advice and the wider public interest of effective government would not be served.

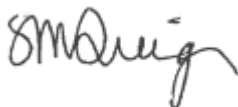
I am withholding both Appendices to this report under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act to protect the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions. I believe the greater public interest is in the ability of individuals to express opinions in the course of their duty.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp. 

Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

Excerpt from REP/24/1/009 – ‘Responding to the Prime Minister's letter 'Setting our priorities for the next three years'

Target setting

Context

- 35 The Prime Minister intends to establish 8-12 targets to drive delivery across core public services, to maintain the focus of Ministers and agencies on the most significant challenges facing New Zealand. Alongside your policy priorities, the Prime Minister has asked you to propose a shortlist (likely 3-5) of targets, including your preferred 1-2 targets.
- 36 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has provided MSD with more guidance on developing targets, and we will also work with MBIE and the Ministry of Education to test possible targets requiring or encouraging cross-agency action following our meeting with you next week.

Better Public Services measures and targets

- 37 Previous Governments have used measures and targets to support outcome focused performance, such as the then National Government's Better Public Services (BPS) targets (2012-2017). We provided you with a briefing last year on possible options for measures and targets (REP/23/957 'A Social Investment Approach within your Social Development and Employment Portfolio' refers).
- 38 From MSD's experience with BPS measures and targets, we know that a good BPS measure should:
- Have **one clear and simple primary measure** (with sub-measures if required)
 - *Speak to and motivate the front-line*
 - Be **available now** - can be open to improvement in the near-term
 - *Be as close to "live as possible"*
 - **Little lag** - fast actionable
 - Allow reporting at **multiple milestones** (month, quarter, half-year)
 - **Help "learn and adjust"** - rather than wait for a "yes/no" achieved
 - Inform vertically, from client outcomes, up to decision makers:
 - **Regional Commissioners and Directors** - "what is happening in the regions"
 - **National Office** - inform operational, policy, evaluation, research

- **Ministers**
 - The **public** ("retail")
 - The **measure already exists** to report/work from
 - **Be able to segment** - benefit type, age, region etc - granular as possible
 - Encourage MSD working with **all clients not just the "work ready" now**
 - As **robust as possible** - **discourage perverse incentives** - but MSD recognises nothing is perfect
 - Be able to have targets applied to meet Government expectations
 - **Enable/encourage** other agencies to contribute to the outcome.
- 39 In MSD's experience, three aspects are critical to a successful target. Targets need to be easy to communicate. They also need to speak to and motivate the front-line. Finally, there needs to be sufficient scale of people for MSD to work with and levers within MSD's control to improve outcomes.

Developing a shortlist of targets

- 40 Your targets will fall out of your confirmed policy priorities. Once you have confirmed your policy priorities, we will come back to you with our recommendations about which targets will work best, and more analysis of outcomes.
- 41 The Appendix to this report includes data on the areas that are likely to form the basis of targets (eg JSS, sustainability, work exits). While we don't currently produce forecasts in all areas, we have historic data and could make projections if necessary for the purpose of target setting.
- 42 During an economic downturn, our initial advice is to focus on Jobseeker Support clients, where you have greater scale and more levers to make a greater impact in a shorter space of time.
- 43 As such, we recommend that you consider targets that focus on getting people into work. This could include Jobseeker Support - Work Ready (JSS-WR), and Jobseeker Support - Health Conditions or Disability (JSS - HCD). Some potential employment measures are described at paragraphs 46 - 51 below.
- 44 As we work with you to finalise the shortlist of targets, and identify your preferred 1-2 targets, we will advise you on the scale of the in-scope groups, and the levers that you have to effect change. We will also consider how the targets can be communicated. As noted above, we will also work with other agencies on any targets requiring cross-agency action.
- 45 Lastly, we acknowledge that target setting is challenging in an environment where numbers are trending up due to the economic downturn. As we work with your office to support you finalise the targets, we will be conscious of

finding a balance between stretch targets that are aspirational and will make a difference to New Zealanders' lives, and targets that are achievable.

Potential employment measures

46 Employment measures can either be focused on people moving off benefit into employment, or focused on people getting into employment, including part-time employment.

47 Three potential types of targets are described below.

People getting into jobs

48 This target could be the proportion or number of people exiting the benefit into employment, including JSS-WR and JSS-HCD.

"At least [x%] of people move off benefit into work"

OR

"More than [x number] of people move off benefit into work".

People getting into and staying in jobs

49 This could be the proportion or number of people exiting the benefit into employment, including JSS-WR and JSS-HC, and who don't return to benefit within 6 months.

"A higher proportion of people who move off benefit into work, stay in work".

Beating the December 2023 forecast for people on a Jobseeker benefit

50 This target could be seeking a reduction in the forecast number of people on a Jobseeker benefit, including JSS-WR and JSS-HCD.

"The proportion of people on a Jobseeker benefit is reduced by at least [x%] below forecast",

51 There are also opportunities to include sub-targets or sub-measures, such as the proportion or number of Youth 18-24 moving off benefit, or a reduction in the number of people who have been on JSS-WR for more than 12 months.

52 We know that you are interested in sole parents and children in benefit-dependent households. Given this, there is the potential to include a sub-measure on children in Jobseeker benefit households. If you are interested in this, we will provide advice next week on this.

53 You may want to consider including sole parents with work obligations in the overall measure. If you are interested in this, we could provide you with advice next week about how this would work in practice. This is a relatively small group, and it would be useful to provide you with advice on suitability for retail communication, the scale of the in-scope group, and the levers you have to effect change ahead of making policy changes.

Next steps

- 54 We would like to have an initial discussion with you about these proposed priorities and targets at our officials' meeting on Monday 15 January 2024.
- 55 Following this meeting, we will provide you with a further briefing including a draft letter to the Prime Minister, for discussion at our next officials' meeting on Tuesday 23 January 2024. This briefing will include more detail on how the proposed targets could be most effectively communicated, the scale of the in-scope groups, the levers that you have to effect change, and how to set the targets.
- 56 We will provide your office with a final draft letter to the Prime Minister by Friday 26 January 2024, for provision to the Prime Minister's office by Monday 29 January 2024.

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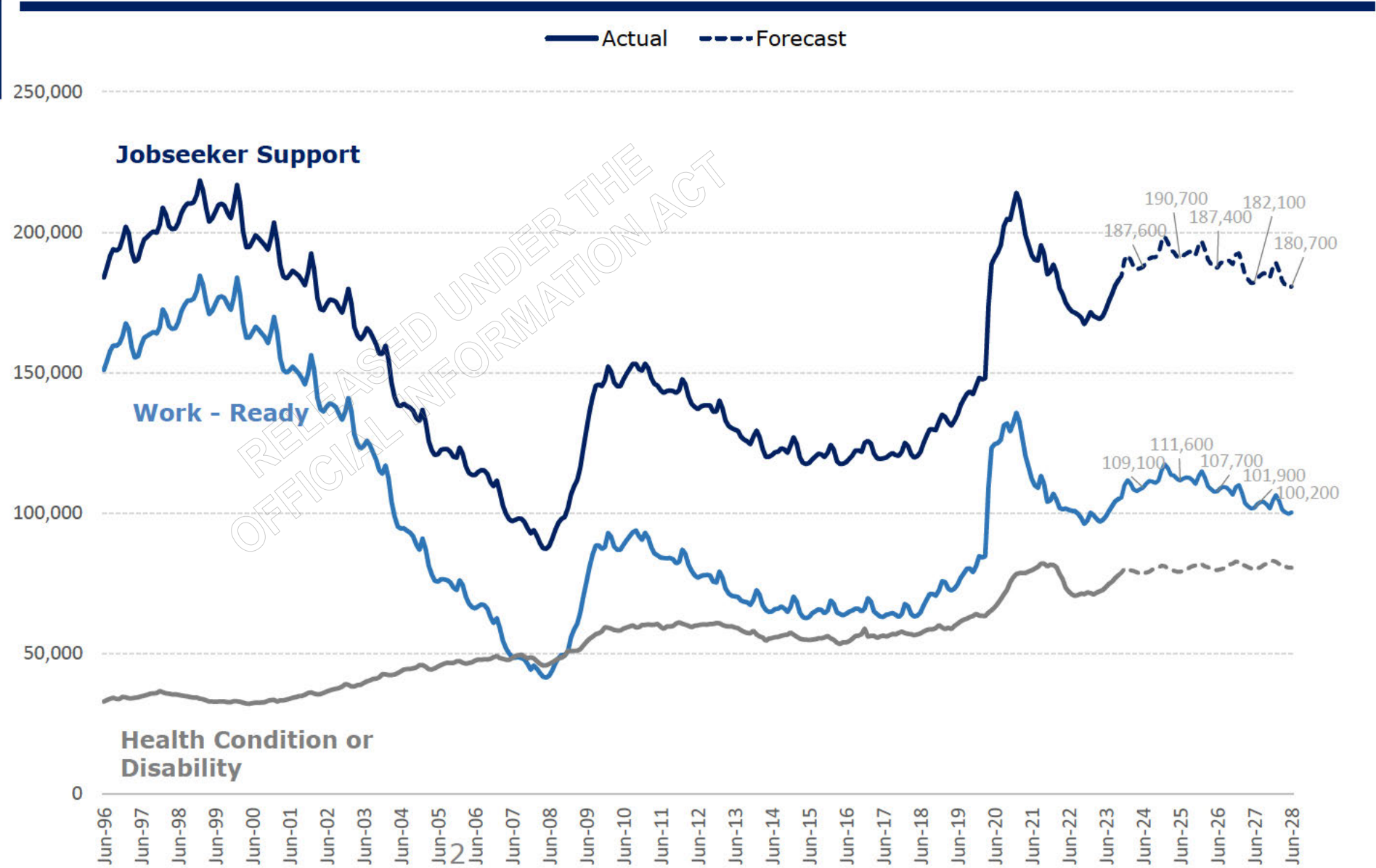


Data to support initial discussions on targets

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Data to support initial discussions on targets

Jobseeker Support – Actuals and Forecast

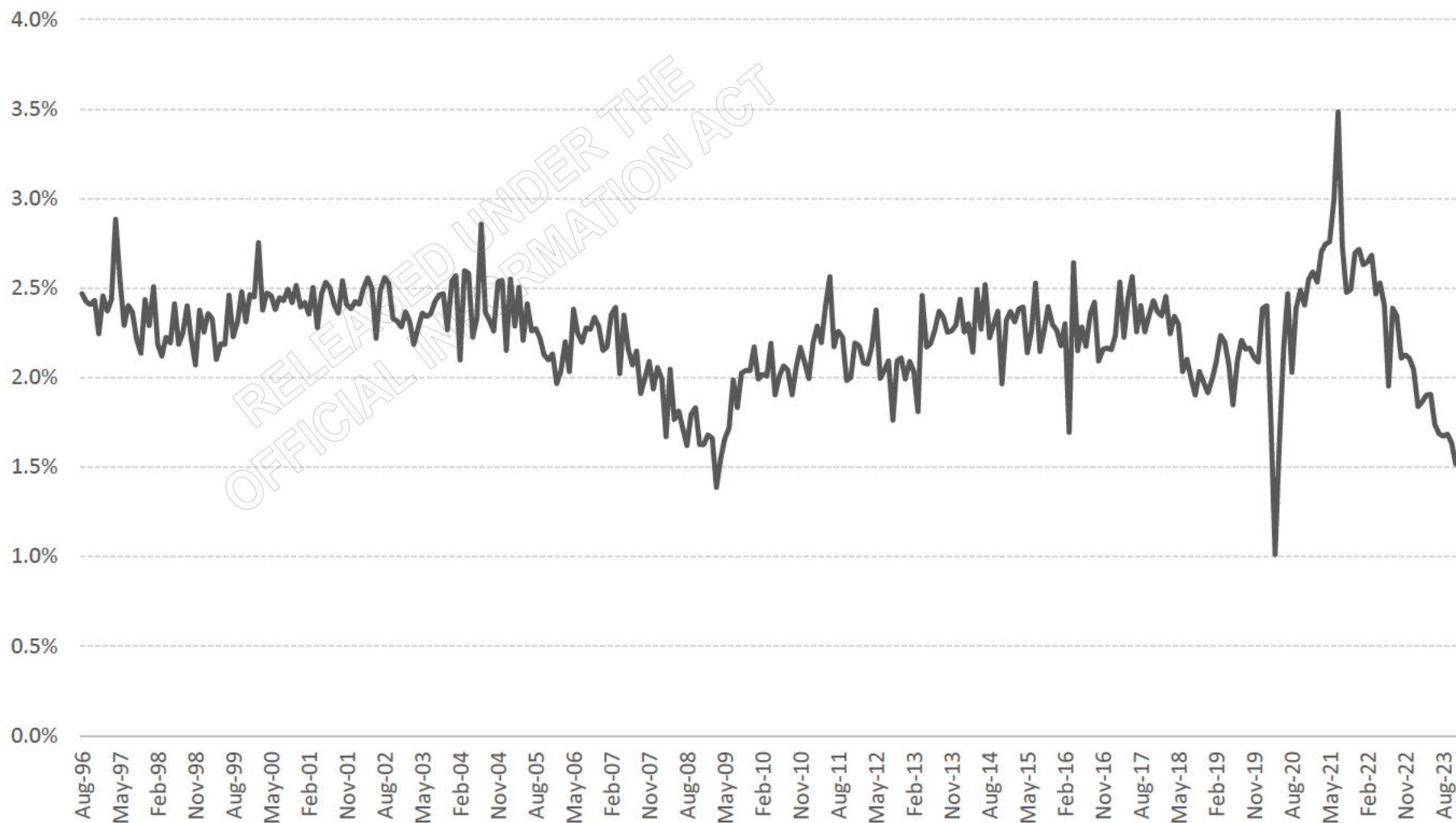


Data to support initial discussions on targets

Working-age benefits – proportion of people going into work (seasonally adjusted)

- The working-age benefit view allows us to see how the work exit rate changes over a longer time period.

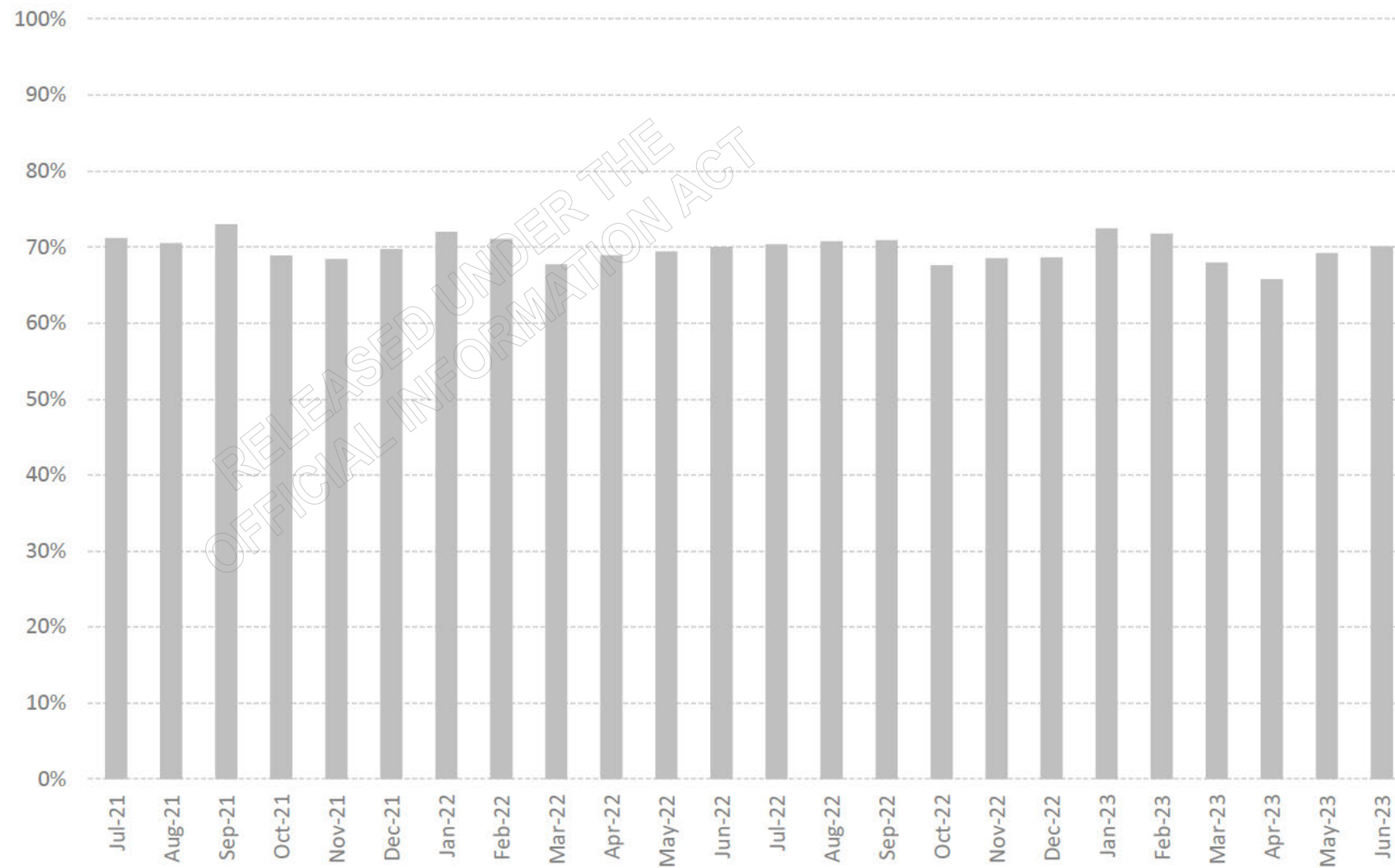
Working-age benefit work exit rate (seasonally adjusted)



Data to support initial discussions on targets

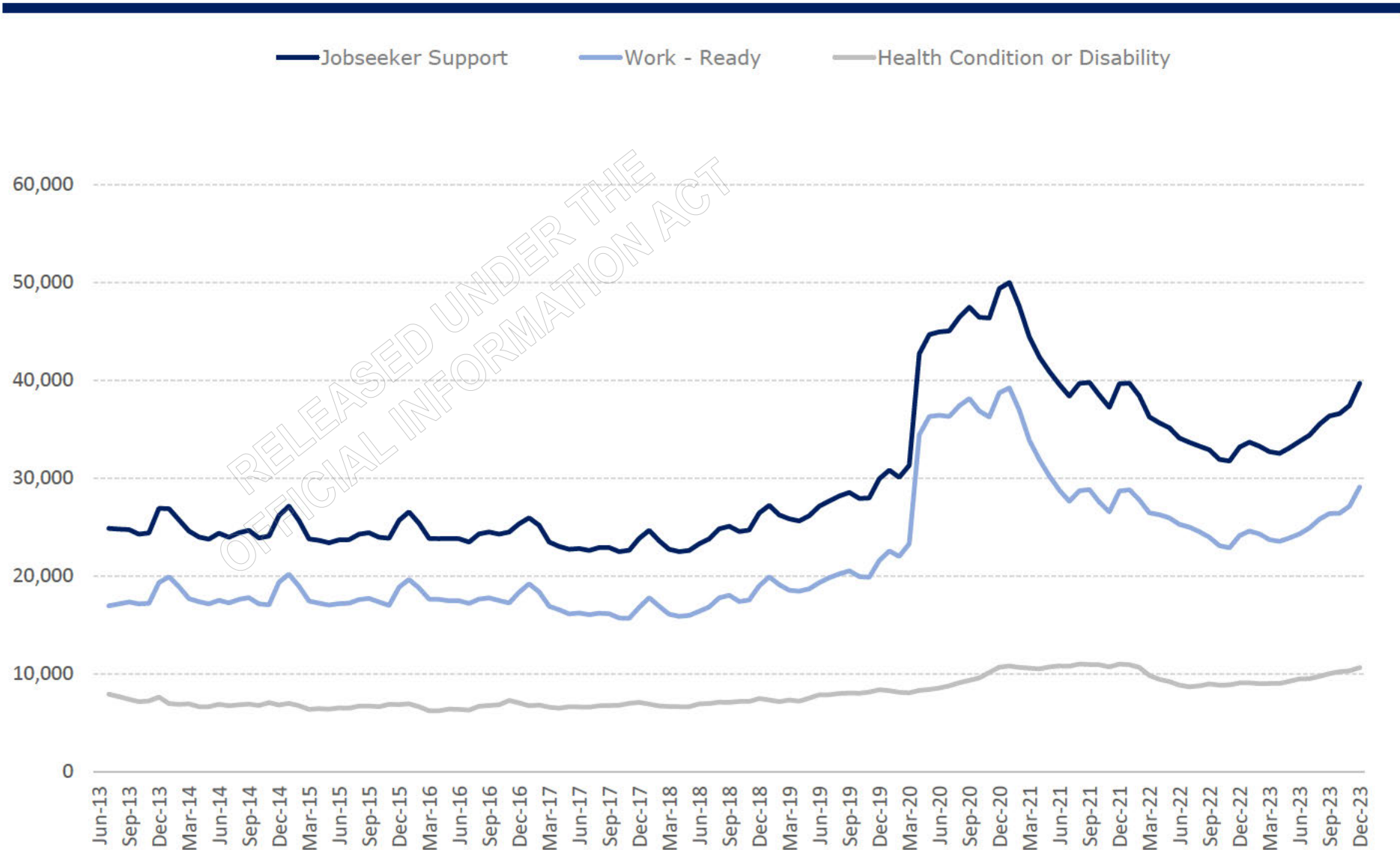
Proportion of sustainable work exits (stayed off for 6 months)

- Measuring sustainable work exits has a lag of at least 6 months.
- MSD operational measure – 6 months off benefit
- Additional measure using IDI – employment sustainability using income threshold (this has even more of a lag).



Data to support initial discussions on targets

Youth on Jobseeker Support (18 – 24 years old)

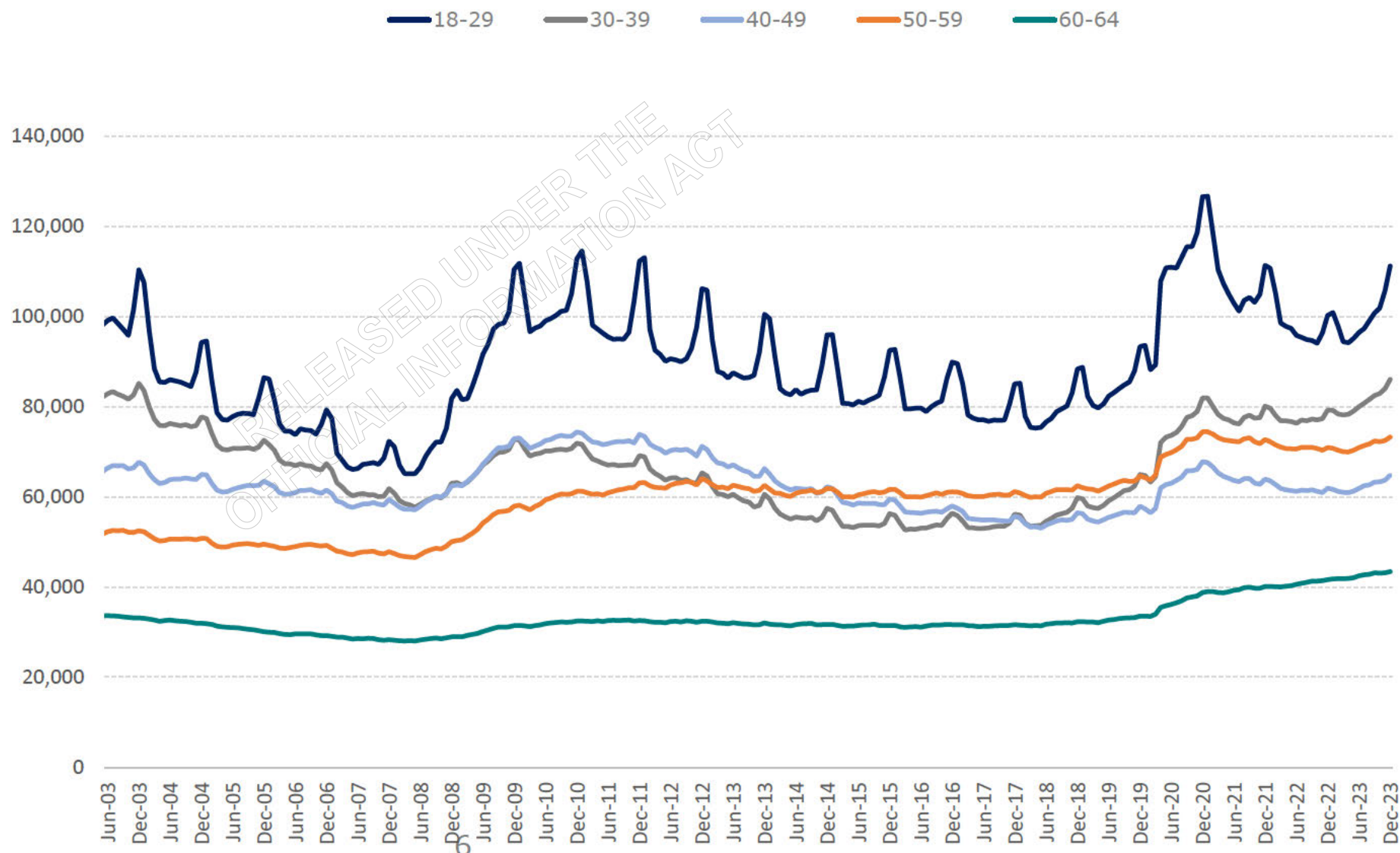


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Data to support initial discussions on targets

Working-age benefits by age group

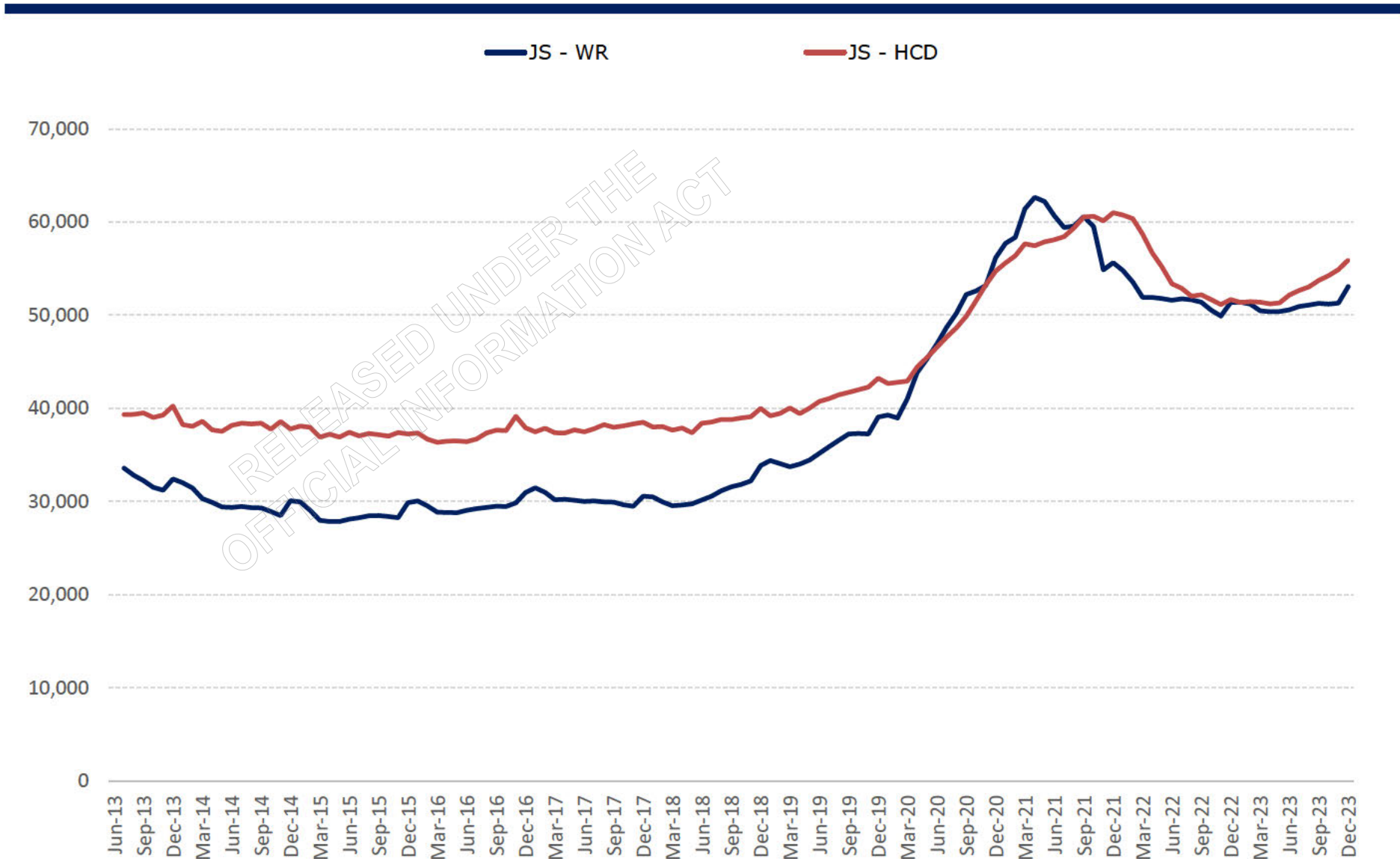
- Youth aged 18-24 only make up around 17 percent of people on a working-age benefit
- 26% on JS – Work Ready is youth, making up the largest age group.
- Young people tend to drive benefit numbers during economic slowdown and recoveries.



Data to support initial discussions on targets

Jobseeker Support 1+ year on benefit

- Around 50 percent of people on Jobseeker Support – Work Ready have been on benefit continuously for 1 year or more.
- For Jobseeker Support – Health Condition or Disability this number is around 70 percent.



Report



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Date: 19 January 2024

Security Level: In Confidence

To: Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Social Development and
Employment



Ministerial priorities letter – first draft

REP/24/1/037

Purpose of the report

- 1 This report supports your response to the Prime Minister's request for a letter outlining your Ministerial priorities, by providing:
 - 1.1 draft letter content outlining your priorities and proposed targets
 - 1.2 material for a discussion to refine your proposed targets and measures.

Executive summary

- 2 Out of scope


- 4 We have developed proposed targets based on your feedback, and want to discuss specific options with you on Tuesday 23 January 2024.

Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **discuss** the draft letter at MSD Officials on 23 January 2024
- 2 **note** that officials considered options for targets based around both the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support (Measure 1) and the number of people exiting Jobseeker Support into work (Measure 2)

3 **discuss** Measure 1 and Measure 2 and provide feedback on what you consider are realistic and achievable targets that also provide enough stretch

4 **agree** that your shortlist targets are based on the following two measures:

- the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support
- the number of people exiting Jobseeker Support into work

AGREE / DISAGREE

5 **indicate** your preferred target measure between:

5.1 the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support (Measure 1)

YES / NO

OR

5.2 the number of people exiting Jobseeker Support into work (Measure 2)

YES / NO

6 **note** that further work will be done to refine the targets before the letter is finalised

7 **agree** to recommend that the following sub-measures be monitored and reported alongside progress towards the headline target:

7.1 the number of children (aged 0-17) living in Jobseeker Support benefit-dependent households

AGREE / DISAGREE

7.2 the number of young people (aged 18-24) receiving Jobseeker Support

AGREE / DISAGREE

7.3 the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support for more than 12 months

AGREE / DISAGREE

8 **note** that officials recommend proposing a supporting measure based on the number of young people receiving Jobseeker Support, rather than a measure based around reducing the number of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs)

9 **note** that we will provide you with a further draft letter by 26 January 2024, reflecting your feedback.

Simon MacPherson
Deputy Chief Executive
Policy Group

Date

Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Social Development and
Employment

Date

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Background

- 5 Following the Prime Minister’s letter to you on 18 December 2023, we provided you with initial advice regarding Social Development and Employment priorities on 11 January 2024 [REP/24/1/009 refers].

Out of scope

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Out of scope

Options for your proposed targets and measures

- 10 In your previous discussions with officials, you indicated that you wished to explore options for targets in the Social Development and Employment portfolio based around:
- reducing the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support (JS)
 - increasing the number of people on JS exiting benefit into work.
- 11 To ensure progress was also being made for specific groups, you also indicated your desire to regularly report on a number of sub-measures, including:
- children living in benefit-dependent households
 - young people on benefit
 - people receiving JS for more than 12 months.

12 We have attached information for discussion in Appendix 2, including data to help inform your decisions around the targets and measures on which you wish to report depending on your level of ambition. We have included:

- out of scope

13 We have considered what targets could be appropriate for the two kinds of measures you specified.

Measure 1: Reducing the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support

14 It is important to ensure the targets are ambitious but achievable. Even during an expansionary and supportive period for the New Zealand economy, previous BPS targets for reduction in the number of people on a working-age benefit were challenging to achieve.

15 The Treasury is forecasting a relatively weaker period of economic growth. Current forecasts are for JS numbers to rise over the first year (2024), and then to fall again over the subsequent two years (2025 and 2026). The current forecast is for JS numbers in June 2026 to be broadly the same (0.6 percent lower) as they were in December 2023.

16 We have provided options around the size of the reduction in the numbers of people receiving JS, based on different levels of reduction relative to the forecast at June 2025 and June 2026.

Measure 2: Increasing the number of exits from Jobseeker Support into work each year

17 Outside of the extraordinary economic circumstances of COVID-19, the number of work exits each year has been relatively stable – the five year average to June 2019 sits at around 58,000 exits per year. Numbers were larger in the financial years that followed COVID-19 – with 95,000-100,000 work exits from JS per year in 2020/21 and 2021/22 (and 113,000 exits across all main benefits in both years).

18 We are heading into a weaker period of economic growth, which will make supporting clients into employment more challenging over the coming year. Given the current environment and based on the current rate of exits being achieved, we would expect the number of JS exits to be around 53,000 people for 2023/24.

Out of scope

[Redacted text block]

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Out of scope

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1 Out of scope

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

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22 Out of scope
[Redacted text block]

Next steps

23 We recommend that we discuss this with you at MSD Officials on Tuesday 23 January 2024. Following that discussion, we will provide you with an updated draft letter by Friday 26 January 2024.

24 The Prime Minister has requested your response by Monday 29 January 2024.

Appendix

25 Appendix 1: Draft Ministerial priorities letter.

26 Appendix 2: Social Development and Employment portfolio priority targets.

File ref: REP/24/1/037

Author: Nicholas Fitzpatrick, Principal Analyst, Welfare System and Income Support Policy

Responsible manager: Bede Hogan, Acting General Manager, Welfare System and Income Support Policy

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Social Development and Employment portfolio priority targets

January 2024

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Social Development and Employment portfolio priority targets

Background

- > MSD has been asked to provide advice on potential priority targets including:
 - > The target measure
 - > What's in scope
 - > Out of scope [REDACTED]
- > Shortlisted measures include reducing the number of people on Jobseeker Support (JS) and increasing the number of JS work exits.
- > We have provided advice on setting targets for the overall number of people on JS and for the number of people exiting into work.
- > Out of scope [REDACTED]



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Current economic climate

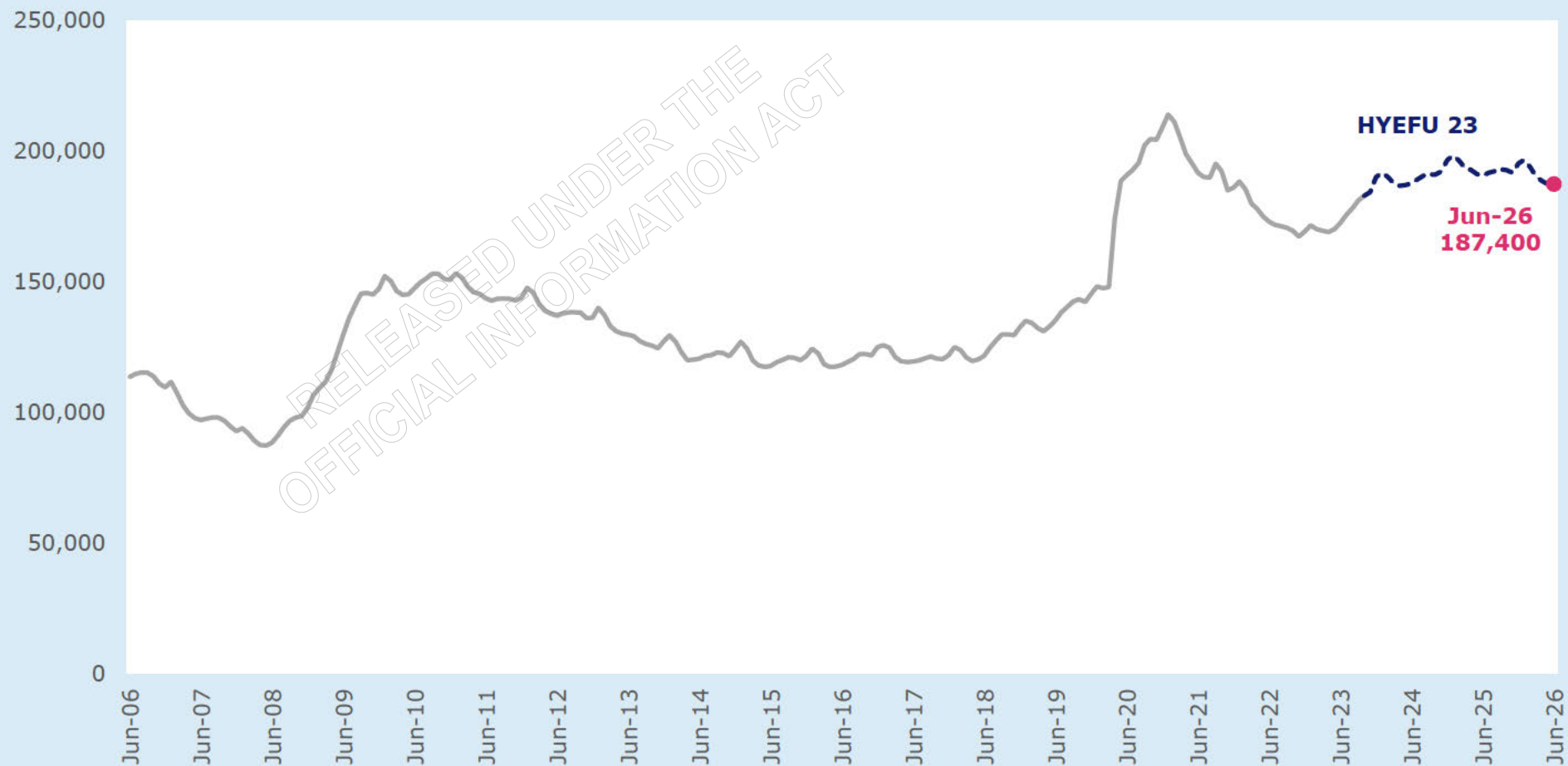
The Treasury expects a period of weak economic growth as the Reserve Bank addresses high and persistent inflation:

- › High interest rates have meant that the Treasury is forecasting a period of subdued economic growth.
- › As economic growth slows, it can become harder to find and retain work. This can potentially result in an increase in benefit numbers. The Treasury have forecast that the unemployment rate will continue to rise.
- › MSD is forecasting benefit numbers to continue rising throughout 2024 and to peak in January 2025 (HYEFU 2023).
- › After January 2025 benefit numbers are expected to begin reducing as the economy recovers.

Current JS forecast (HYEFU 23)

- > JS numbers are forecast to continue rising and peak in Jan 2025, in line with the Treasury's forecast of weak economic growth.
- > After Jan 2025, JS numbers are expected to fall, as economic conditions improve.
- > The expected reduction after Jan 2025 is driven by reductions in the JS - WR group, with JS - HCD expected to continue rising.

Jobseeker Support Actual and Forecast number of people





**Advice on targets in the Social Development
and Employment portfolio**

Target overview

- › We have included two measures for you to consider:
 - › Reducing the number of people on JS
 - › Increasing the number of JS work exits.
- › Within each measure we have included targets, with increasing levels of ambition.
- › These targets for consideration demonstrate our dedicated focus of getting people off benefit and into work.
- › They are readily understood and meaningful by speaking to our aspirations to do better for people on benefit and for New Zealand as a whole.
- › The measures are different, but the intention is the same, taking people from Jobseeker Support to a wage earner.



Reducing Jobseeker Support

Here are five options for you to consider to reduce the number of people working-age people on Jobseeker Support (based on reductions of 5%, 7.5%, 10%, 12.5% and 15%):

- > Targets have been set by reducing the June 2026 HYEPU 23 forecast number of people on JS by a given percentage with increasing levels of ambition.
- > The table shows the target number of people on JS by June 2026 and the difference between the current HYEPU 23 forecast.

Targets based on HYEPU 23 June 2025 forecast

JS numbers = 190,700

Proposed percentage reductions over three years to June 2026	<i>Interim</i> Target by June 2025	Decrease compared to June 2025 forecast	Decrease compared to December 2023 actual
Target 1a – 5% reduction	185,000	(5,700)	(4,800)
Target 1b – 7.5% reduction	182,100	(8,600)	(7,700)
Target 1c – 10% reduction	179,200	(11,400)	(10,600)
Target 1d – 12.5% reduction	176,400	(14,300)	(13,400)
Target 1e – 15% reduction	173,500	(17,200)	(16,300)

Targets based on HYEPU 23 June 2026 forecast

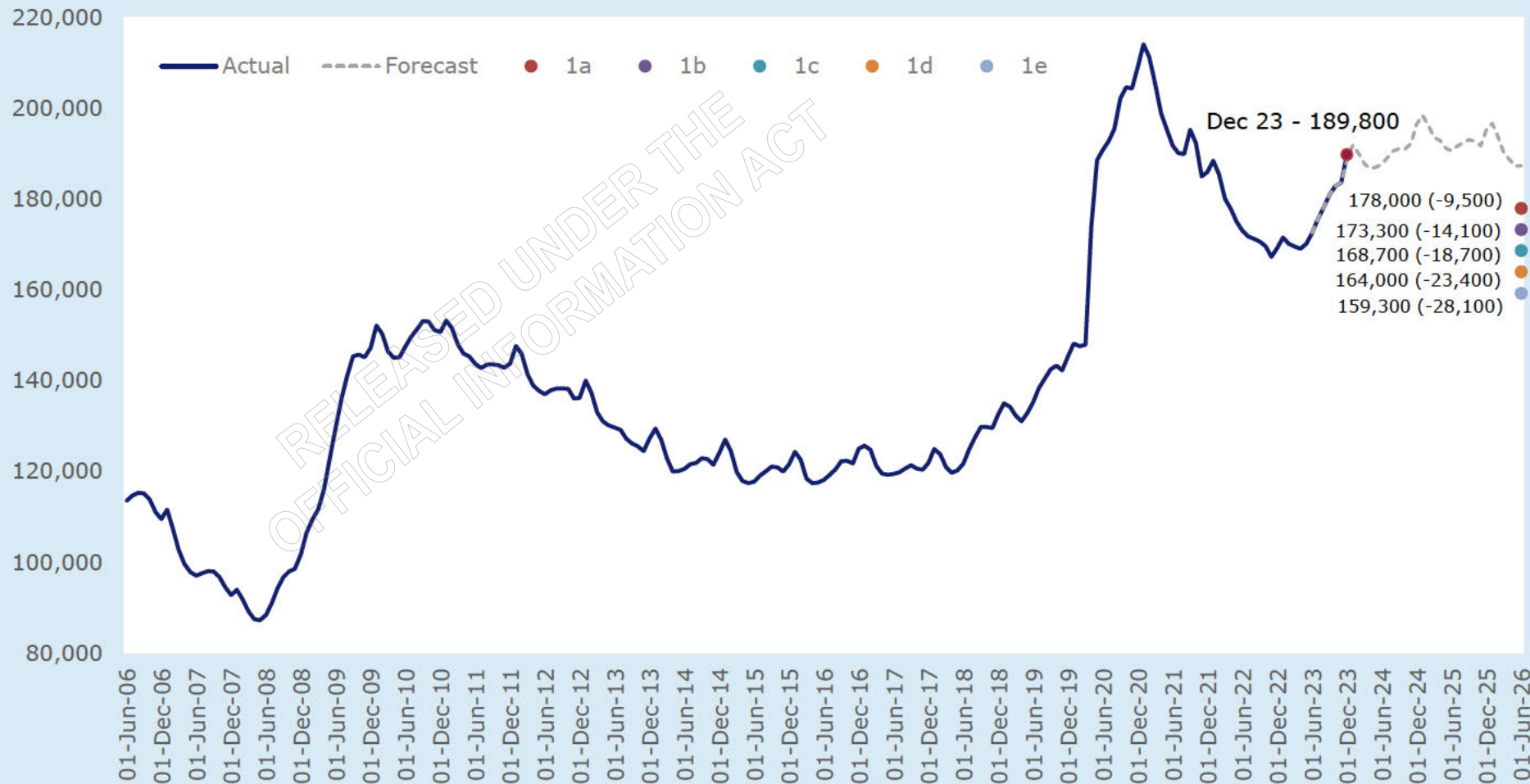
JS numbers = 187,400

Proposed percentage reductions over three years to June 2026	Target by June 2026	Decrease compared to June 2026 forecast	Decrease compared to December 2023 actual
Target 1a – 5% reduction	178,000	(9,400)	(11,800)
Target 1b – 7.5% reduction	173,300	(14,100)	(16,500)
Target 1c – 10% reduction	168,700	(18,700)	(21,100)
Target 1d – 12.5% reduction	164,000	(23,400)	(25,800)
Target 1e – 15% reduction	159,300	(28,100)	(30,500)

Reducing Jobseeker Support

We have compared these options to the HYEFU 2023 forecast, as this gives a baseline for current expectations in benefit numbers.

JS reduction targets and HYEFU 23 forecast



Increasing the number of exits from JS into work

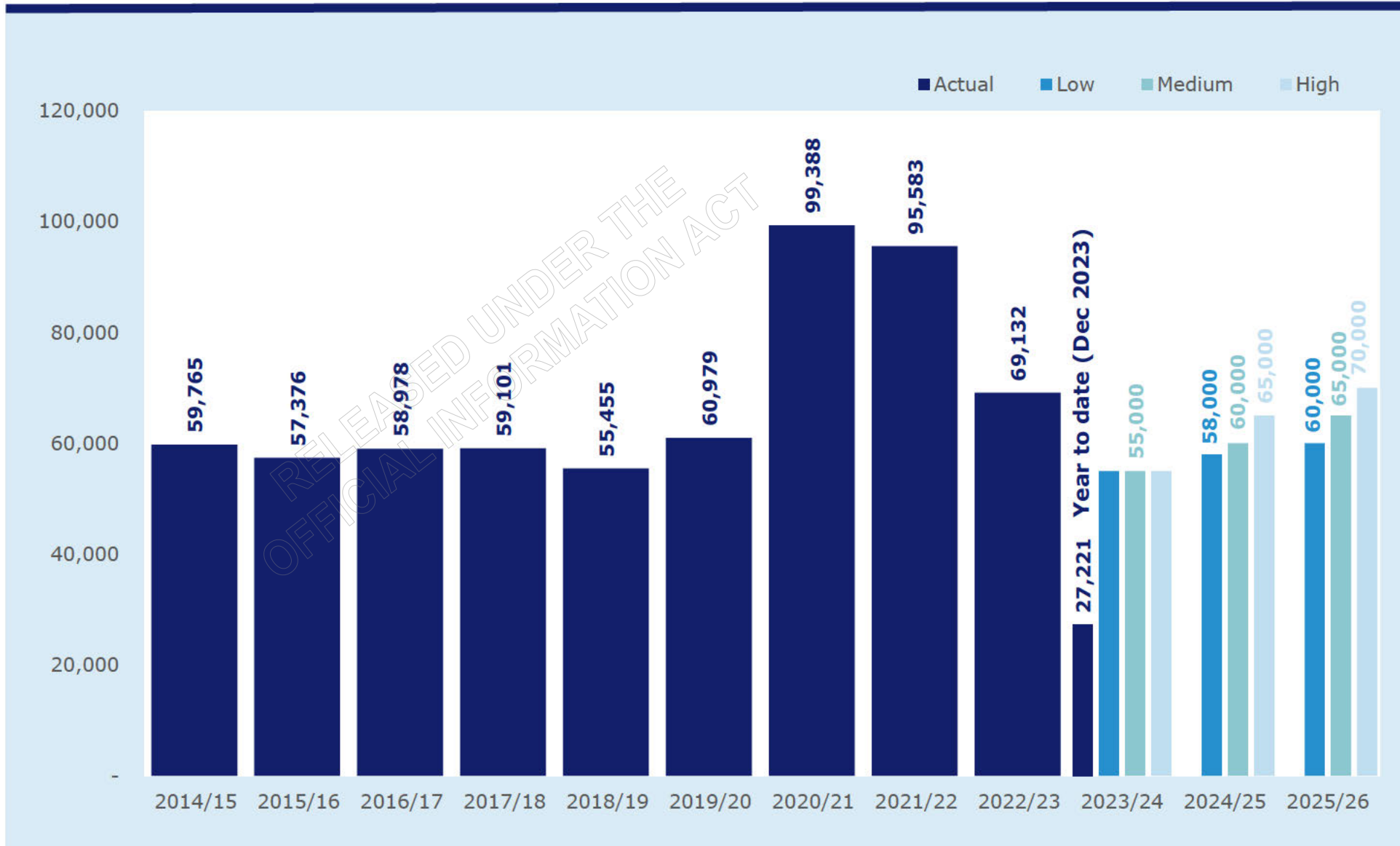
- > The table shows three options for you to consider for increasing the number of Jobseeker Support exits into employment, based on historical averages prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- > Exits in the year to June 2024 are expected to be around 53,000 so we have proposed 55,000 as an ambitious but achievable target in the first year.
- > Proposed increases in exits in subsequent years are based on returning to pre-2017 levels with a margin added in, depending on your level of ambition.
- > We propose targets that increase in ambition over the next three years, as economic conditions improve alongside policy changes and continued efforts from MSD.

Option 2: Increasing the number of exits from JS into work each year

Proposed range of targets	2023/24 Target	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Target
Option 2a – Low	55,000	58,000	60,000
Option 2b – Medium	55,000	60,000	65,000
Option 2c – High	55,000	65,000	70,000

Optional target – Work exits

- > We have set three annual work exit targets to reach by June 2026:
 - > High – 70,000
 - > Medium – 65,000
 - > Low – 60,000
- > During economic downturns such as Covid – 19 and the GFC benefit numbers can rise causing increases in work exits due to the higher number of people on a benefit.
- > Higher work exits may not result in reduced numbers of people on benefit.



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Report



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Date: 26 January 2024

Security Level: In Confidence

To: Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Social Development and
Employment

Ministerial priorities letter – second draft

REP/24/1/057

Purpose of the report

- 1 This report responds to your feedback on the first draft of the Ministerial priorities letter to the Prime Minister [refer REP/24/1/037] by providing:
 - updated draft letter content to reflect your feedback at MSD Officials on Tuesday 23 January 2024 regarding priorities and proposed targets
 - material to help you finalise your proposed targets and measures.

Executive summary

- 2 At MSD Officials on Tuesday 23 January 2024, you provided feedback on proposed priorities and targets for inclusion in your response to the Prime Minister's letter 'Setting our priorities for the next three years'.
- 3 We have updated the draft letter to reflect your comments, in particular reducing the length and incorporating your feedback for the targets including:
 - 3.1 providing options for targets at the 1, 3 and 5 year mark, and a single proposed target at the 10 year mark on Measure 1: Reducing the number of people on Jobseeker Support benefit
 - 3.2 providing options for targets that will motivate the front-line by being highly ambitious yet sufficiently in reach to be achievable when backed by MSD as a whole and provided with the appropriate levers
 - 3.3 Out of scope
- 4 The Prime Minister has requested your response by Monday 29 January 2024.

Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **provide** feedback on the draft response to the Prime Minister's letter, including what targets you would like included, by Monday 29 January
- 2 **note** your feedback will be incorporated into the final letter to the Prime Minister and provided back to you on the same day
- 3 **note** that options have been provided for targets based on 'the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support' (Measure 1)
- 4 **note** that you have indicated 'the number of people exiting Jobseeker Support into work' (Measure 2) is not a preferred measure
- 5 **note** we have provided three options for targets on Measure 1 at the 1, 3 and 5 year mark and that we recommend Option 2 for striking the right balance between ambition and achievability
- 6 **note** we do not think Option 3 is achievable
- 7 **agree** that your preferred 1, 3 and 5 year targets are:

Option 1 – Returning to December 2022 levels

AGREE / DISAGREE

Option 2 – Returning to pre-Covid levels

AGREE / DISAGREE

Option 3 – Surpassing December 2019 levels

AGREE / DISAGREE

- 8 **agree** that the longer-term target is based on returning to December 2017 levels by June 2033

AGREE / DISAGREE

- 9 Out of scope

[Redacted content]

10

Out of scope

[Redacted content]

Sacha O'Dea
Deputy Chief Executive
Strategy and Insights

Date

Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Social Development and
Employment

Date

Background

- 5 At MSD Officials on 23 January 2024, you provided direction for refinement of the draft response to the Prime Minister’s letter ‘Setting our priorities for the next three years’.

Out of scope

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

Options for priority targets

- 8 Your comments regarding the targets included:
- that measure 1: reducing the number of people on Jobseeker Support benefit, is your preferred measure, and that we should re-work options for the targets to reflect levels that are ambitious yet achievable, and will motivate the front-line, backed by the support of the whole of MSD and appropriate levers
 - that measure 2: increasing the number of people on Jobseeker Support exiting benefit into work, can be included as a second option in your response letter to the Prime Minister, noting it as an option you considered but have disregarded for a number of reasons (which are set out in the draft letter)

Out of scope

- 9 Appendix 2 provides supporting analysis and information on three options for targets at the 1, 3 and 5 year mark to help inform your decision:

Option 1 – Returning to December 2022 levels

Option 2 – Returning to pre-Covid levels

Option 3 – Surpassing December 2019 levels

