



Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

TRANSCRIPT

Event: Andrew McKellar interview with Ash Gillon, Sky News Afternoon Agenda

Speakers: Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ash Gillon, host Sky News Afternoon Agenda

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E&OE

Ash Gillon, host Sky News Afternoon Agenda: Let's bring in Andrew McKellar. He's the CEO of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Andrew, let's have a look at some of the demands Sally McManus from the ACTU was making today in this letter that she sent the Prime Minister. As we all know, you're not usually on a unity ticket with Sally McManus, but what do you think of her plan to get paid pandemic leave reinstated, restored essentially, for workers who are close contacts with a work colleague? Is that something that you'd throw your support behind?

Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: No, we wouldn't support that specific proposal. I think there are some things in the letter that Sally McManus has sent to the Prime Minister that business would be happy to support, but this claim around so-called paid pandemic leave, of course, for any permanent employee at the moment, they have access to personal leave, to sick leave, which they can use if they have to take time off work, and of course, if they have symptoms or they're a close contact, then they should take time off work as they're required to, and employers will support them in that regard. If there are circumstances where they don't have access to that existing leave, then there are still options in place which have been funded by state governments, and I believe there's also some Federal Government co-funding in there for pandemic support payments.

These sorts of things are available, but it would be completely ridiculous, I think, in this current circumstance to expect that businesses, at a time when they're struggling to keep their doors open, when customers are not out there spending, to be asking them to be funding additional costs. I think we'd be very wary of that particular proposal which the ACTU are putting forward.

Ash: Just looking at those businesses who are struggling at the moment, there's been a lot of talk about the shadow pandemic, that these businesses are having to close their doors because of the current outbreak, the only real difference between now and several months ago is that the financial support isn't there on tap. Do those businesses deserve more financial support at this point?

Andrew: That sort of thing has to be on the table, and I think it's an entirely reasonable discussion. As you say, it's been described as a shadow lockdown. Very much at the moment, there are severe shortages of labour. It's been compounded across many sectors, in retail, trade, in food and groceries, in the hospitality sector, and in other areas, in transport and freight, of course. Very severe shortages of workers at the moment. Many businesses are struggling to keep their doors open, to keep their operations flowing at this time when there are so many cases in the community and so many close contacts as a result. Look, I think some sort of ongoing support, and it needs to be for the individuals who are affected, through those continuing pandemic support payments, as well as for business, and at the moment, business has very few options. Look, we think there needs to be a dialogue with Government. Hopefully this current crisis point that we're in will only be another two, three, four weeks before we get past the worst of this particular wave that we're enduring at the moment, but it's a real test for the economy that we're experiencing at this point in time. We have to be flexible. We have to consider those options that might need to be looked at right now.

Ash: When you look at other options being considered right now, what else is on your wish list? We've obviously seen that wish list from the Sally McManus today. What else do you think could be happening today, tomorrow to make these businesses be able to get through this next tricky period of hopefully only another few weeks before things can start to revert and case numbers can start to drop?

Andrew: Well, one thing I think we would agree with the ACTU on, and that is the idea that rapid testing should be freely and widely available in the community. That's not to say that if you think you want 50 or 100 tests, you can go down and fill your basket and take as many as you like. Of course, what we think is that business, and particularly small business, should have access to these tests, and that should be freely available, as it is in other countries. It's

not a silver bullet, but at this point in time, it's an important tool that businesses can have to help keep workplaces safe and healthy, to protect their workers, to protect their customers. To be able to turn around a rapid test if somebody comes in who's unsure of their circumstances, you can take a test, you can see whether that's positive or negative, and you can very quickly move to take the appropriate steps to protect the workplace. I think things like that need to be on the table. We didn't agree with the decision that was recently taken in National Cabinet not to extend this sort of support. As supply of these tests improves in the coming weeks, we think that this issue should be revisited as we continue to face the pressure point that we have at the moment in the economy.

Ash: Andrew McKellar, always appreciate you joining us. Thanks so much for your time.

Andrew: Thanks very much, Ash.

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