



Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

TRANSCRIPT

Event: Andrew McKellar interview with Michael Rowland, ABC News Breakfast.

Speakers: Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Michael Rowland, co-host ABC News Breakfast.

Date: 27 January 2022

Topics: International tourists, international border closures, Omicron cases peak, close contact isolation exemptions, staff shortages, rapid antigen tests.

E&OE

Michael Rowland, co-host ABC News Breakfast: The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry argues now is the right time to reopen the border and restart the struggling tourism sector while vaccination rates remain high. The Chamber's Chief Executive Andrew McKellar joins us from Canberra. Andrew, very good morning to you.

Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: Good morning, Michael.

Michael: What sort of timetable are you talking about here?

Andrew: We think this has to happen very quickly now and we're urging government to get ahead of the curve, start talking to the industry about how quickly it can happen. And if you look at things really, we understand that at the moment with the Omicron surge, it might not happen immediately. But we do think in the weeks ahead, as we get past this, as the pressure comes off the health system, we hope, then really the health rationale for keeping these international border restrictions in place can be revisited and revisited very quickly.

Michael: I know there's a lot of pain out there in the tourism industry. We have spoken to dozens, if not hundreds, over the course of the pandemic, Andrew. But equally, and you touch

on the very important point here, do you believe with the health system stretch, the case number's still very high, the Omicron wave is still going to have a very long tail. Do you think there's really an appetite out there to even be talking about allowing tourists in?

Andrew: Look, we think that we have to plan. We have to plan right now, and realistically it is something that we can do in the near-term. Now, as I say, we understand that that may be still a few weeks away and we hope that the Omicron wave will abate fairly quickly from here. But we have to look forward and we have to say, well, what are the criteria for removing those borderer restrictions? How are we going to do that? What are the other things that the industry will need to get itself back on its feet? And in the meantime, if we're going to keep those businesses shuttered, then what sort of support will we need to have in order to ensure that the industry can be there when the doors are opened? This is an industry which generates about \$60 billion as a year in gross domestic product. There are over 300,000 businesses out there in the tourism industry, more than 600,000 Australians working in that industry. So it's a critical step that we have to take if we're really going to maximize the strength of the economy going through the course of this year.

Michael: Is one of those support measures lumping tourism and hospitality workers into the list of industries that if you're a close contact of a COVID case, you do not have to isolate for seven days?

Andrew: That has to be looked at, and in some cases that will be the right solution, but not for every business, and we understand that. It does create its own complexities. The feedback we're getting from a number of businesses in those sectors is they're cautious about that. Obviously, they do have issues with labour shortages at the moment. We would like to see that more generally extended. But there are issues with the availability of test kits and these sorts of things. So it needs to be on the agenda, but I think there are many other issues that we will need to talk to government about if we're going to get tourism fully back on its feet.

Michael: Rapid test kits have been, as everyone watching knows, a very big issue. It's hit households and businesses. What, in general terms, what do you think of the government's handling of the rapid test rollout that given that there were plenty of warnings to the government in the middle of last year to be proactive on this front?

Andrew: Look, we've been very consistent on this issue. Going back to September last year, we and others started to say we need to plan for this. We need to make sure these kits are going to be available when we need them, and they need to be freely available in the community. That doesn't mean that there's just an unlimited supply that anybody can take, fill

your basket up. It means that there need to be clearly defined criteria. They do need to be accessible in the community so that people can have them and use them. Now, we've been saying that since around September last year, I think 8th of September was the first time we put out a statement on that particular issue. We don't agree with where National Cabinet has gone on this issue, and that's not just the Federal Government, that's all state and territory leaders and the Federal Government together. We think that is an area where they haven't made the right call

Michael: Andrew McKellar from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, thanks for joining us this morning.

Andrew: Thank you.

Media contact:

P | 02 6270 8020

E | media@australianchamber.com.au