



Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

TRANSCRIPT

Event: Andrew McKellar interview with Neil Mitchell, 3AW Mornings.

Speakers: Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Neil Mitchell, host 3AW Mornings.

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E&OE

Neil Mitchell, host 3AW Mornings: There's pressure from the business community to ease the rules around isolation because they're causing havoc in areas like airlines and also on the vaccinated economy. Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Good morning.

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

Neil: Okay. What do you want to lift? What do you want to change?

Andrew: I think the thing that needs to be on the table at the moment are the isolation rules, because they are having a significant impact out there in the economy, in the business community. And at the moment, I mean, we talk about living with COVID. But if you're not sick, if you don't have any symptoms, if you take a test and you get a negative result, then we would say in these circumstances, you should be able to go about your business and go back to work.

Neil: So, what is a close contact now? What is a close contact?

Andrew: A close contact is somebody who in a household environment, basically if a member of your household tests positive then you are required to isolate. Another member of that household is required to isolate for seven days. That's the case in most jurisdictions now. So that means a lot of

people who have somebody in their house who's tested positive, even though they themselves are able stay away from that. Even if they are negative themselves, have to stay out of the system. Now it is playing havoc with many businesses and we've seen the story with our airports over the Easter period where they've lost a lot of workers. It comes at a time when already, we have many shortages of labour.

Neil: Yeah. But we are also in this situation where we're getting 60,000 cases a day in Australia. California, which is twice our population is getting about 2000. The virus is still out there and we're heading into winter. Is at the time to ease? I mean, we got 60,000 cases a day and dozens of deaths and a new variant emerging. Is it worth the risk?

Andrew: Well, I think here, this is where we've got to react to the circumstances. We do have to have a winter preparedness plan. And obviously if the pressure on the health system grows and if we're seeing those infection rates really spiralling. But the reality is we've got very good levels of vaccination. There is a good level of underlying immunity out there. We have access to testing. And I think that's the thing. If we've got people testing, if you've got symptoms, if you get a test result, then yes, take yourself out of the system. But I think this is part of living with COVID now and ensuring that we aren't crippling society and the economy at the same time. We've got to get that balance right going forward.

Neil: What about retail? Do you want staff in retail to stop wearing masks? Do you want the vaccinated economy to go, so you don't have to prove you're vaccinated? Enough of that. That's not happening much anymore, is it?

Andrew: No, look. I mean, issues like mask wearing and I think that can be prudent, particularly if you are working in an environment where you're customer facing. So you're having contact with a lot of people then it's a perfectly sensible and prudent measure. And as you're saying, I mean, you're still wearing a mask around in public. I'm often doing that myself. A lot of people take that precaution. It doesn't cost you anything.

Neil: What about staff though? Do you want staff in the restaurant to still wear them or not?

Andrew: I think it's perfectly prudent. I don't think that's an unreasonable guideline that people can follow. Whether it's obliged or not, I think it's a prudent measure.

Neil: Okay. And what about the vaccinated economy? Should you still have to prove you're vaccinated to get into certain places?

Andrew: Look, I'm a little bit more cautious on that. I think the objective was to get to those very high thresholds up above 90 per cent. People have really, I think, bent over backwards to do that. And I

think what the community's done is really work hard to get up to those levels where we have strong levels of vaccination. So I think once we've got to that point, the necessity to continue to prove that you're vaccinated becomes less pressing.

Neil: Thank you so much for your time. Andrew McKellar, chief executive, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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