



Transcript

#BackAustralianBusiness

Event: Andrew McKellar interview with Allison Langdon and Karl Stefanovic, The Today Show.

Speakers: Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Allison Langdon and Karl Stefanovic, co-hosts The Today Show.

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Topics: COSBOA-ACTU Memorandum of Understanding; Jobs and Skills Summit; BCA, Ai Group, ACCI & ACTU joint statement on skills and training; artificial intelligence changes to workforce.

E&OE

Karl Stefanovic, co-host The Today Show: Welcome back. All eyes will be on Canberra later this week when industry heavyweights gather for the prime minister's much hyped Jobs and Skills Summit.

Allison Langdon, co-host The Today Show: It comes as small business and unions strike a deal to simplify pay deals. For more, we are joined by chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Andrew McKellar in Canberra. Nice to see you this morning.

Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: Very good morning, Ally.

Allison: I wonder what your thoughts are on this one. You've got small business on board, but I know big business fears that it will lead to more power for the unions and potentially more strikes.

Andrew: Well, look, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry represents more small businesses than just about any other organisation. I have to say, we're a little bit puzzled by what's been announced by those groups today. Really, we think the most important thing here is that you've got to retain the flexibility for small business. Where the bargaining system is broken is really a bit further up the chain with medium sized businesses, and that's where we've got to fix the problem.

Karl: Okay. But there's an agreement being done by some groups with unions. How does a deal overall get done if you don't want it?

Andrew: Well, I think that's for them. It's between those organisations. I think business doesn't speak with just one voice. There are many different organisations. But clearly this is something that will be on the table at the end of the week, and we'll have to look at the detail of what's being proposed.

Allison: How are you feeling about the summit? I mean, there's a lot of different players with different agendas all coming together. Are you confident that you're going to find an agreement on some of those issues?

Andrew: Look, we're very hopeful that there'll be good progress made. Business, unions, government, we've all been talking a lot before we get there, but I think some good ideas are in the pipeline. Just yesterday, business groups, the major business groups, and the ACTU, we put out a statement about the things that we see as being important in skills and training. I think there is a lot of common ground there, and I think if we can address those sorts of priorities, then I think we're well on the way.

Karl: But as far as those deals go, those organisations that have come up today saying they've got a deal, you certainly don't, so how are we supposed to have industry-wide deals?

Andrew: We think you've got to fix the things that are broken. I mean, I think there is a lot of agreement on that. We know that enterprise bargaining is a major part of the problem. We've got to restore flexibility and we've got to get it back to its intent so that if two parties make it an agreement, they don't get blocked in the Commission. They don't have other parties coming in and stopping an agreement that will deliver productivity and higher wages. Really, that's the source of the problem at the moment. If you can restore confidence in that, then I think we can move forward.

Allison: Andrew, the opposition is boycotting the summit, claiming it's being overrun by the unions. Is that the view of the business community?

Andrew: No, it's not. I mean, the business community comes along to the summit with goodwill, bring the best ideas forward, will contribute to the discussion. At the end of the day, if we want to get economic reform going, if we want to deliver better jobs and higher living standards, then we've got to have this sort of engagement right across the economy. Unions have to be involved, business has to be involved, other parts of society have to be involved. So, we will certainly be there.

Karl: Will you get a deal done?

Andrew: Look, we hope there'll be agreement. We know there is a lot of agreement about the fundamental pathway here. So, look, we'll go in with the best will, and hopefully we'll get a good outcome.

Karl: Artificial intelligence, that's front and the centre, isn't it? How worried are you about taking future jobs?

Andrew: Not at all. Look, this is a great opportunity. The reality is artificial intelligence, automation, these sorts of technologies are coming through. They're coming through in all of the major economies. They are the way of the future. If we invest in the right skills and training in engineering and science and technology, then we give our young people a huge opportunity to participate in what is going to be the way forward in the future. We've seen in the past significant technological changes have driven higher living standards, better jobs, better remuneration, and it's the same here, so there are going to be much better opportunities coming out of this.

Allison: All right. Andrew, good to talk to you this morning.

Karl: Good talking to you, dude. Thank you.

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