



Transcript

#BackAustralianBusiness

Event: Andrew McKellar interview with Kieran Gilbert, Sky News Afternoon Agenda.

Speakers: Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Kieran Gilbert, host Sky News Afternoon Agenda.

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E&OE

Kieran Gilbert, host Sky News Afternoon Agenda: Let's bring in Andrew McKellar now, chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Some compromise between the Small Business Council, and the unions, but not your organisation. Why are you so opposed to multi-employer bargaining?

Andrew McKellar, chief executive Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: Look, I think the important thing here is we are out talking to small businesses today in the wake of this. And I have to say they are puzzled because what they are looking for is they're looking for flexibility and they're looking for choice. I think, probably the number one priority for small business would be much more around issues like award simplification. I think here, really, this is adding another layer of complexity on top of that. We really don't see how this would work in any way for small business.

Kieran: Because you represent small businesses as well, or your chamber.

Andrew: The Chamber Network is the largest representative group for small business in the country. So, really, it's not something that we can see that there is any real desire from small business to go down this track. We know where the problem is in the enterprise bargaining system, it's that the situation where two parties can get together, they can negotiate for higher productivity and higher wages, they take that agreement to the Commission, and then it gets blocked.

Kieran: So why... We'll get to that in a moment, because we can drill into that in the moment, but why this split between you and COSBOA? Because that's the Council of Small Business, which you've come out today saying that they're open to this. They're saying it's not going to be compulsory, they wouldn't support anything compulsory, but if a small business wants to buy-in to build up their negotiating heft, then they can do that.

Andrew: Honestly, I think we've got to take it with a grain of salt. I'm not sure that is the way it would work in practice. I think we really would have to put that to the test. Look, obviously we'll see what they put on the table at the end of this week at the summit. But certainly, there's a lot of concern that we are hearing from small business out there today, that what's being talked about here, wouldn't deliver that flexibility, wouldn't deliver that choice. It would end up sucking small business into the morass of the Commission process. That's not where they want to go.

Kieran: But if it's voluntary, what's the harm?

Andrew: Well, I think this is the issue. And at the end of the day, does it stay voluntary? Do we get into a situation where there's a risk that they are being pulled into a much more complicated system? And I think, that's where part of our concern is.

Kieran: Mr. Burke, the employment minister, says that everyone should come with an open mind, is the business community doing that sufficiently?

Andrew: Absolutely. And I think, we've had good exchange between the various business groups and even listening to what the ACTU have been saying over the weekend. There seems to be a lot of common messaging around understanding where those problems are in the system currently. I think, between business and unions, there are some nuances on the proposed solutions as to how to make enterprise bargaining work more effectively. But we will certainly come with an open mind and I think, the government has a very constructive role to play here in trying to broker some sort of outcome, some sort of agreement between all of the different stakeholders.

Kieran: To go back to that point that you were making earlier, it does seem ludicrous that you could have the employer, workers, even the unions onboard with some changes, but they get knocked off.

Andrew: Well, that's-

Kieran: How do we have a setup where that operates?

Andrew: Well, we've got to restore confidence in the system. So, at the moment, where it's breaking down is in the application of things, like the Better Off Overall Test. I think we really have to store restore the integrity to that process, ensure that if you've got two parties that have reached agreement, they're not being blocked on artificial or hypothetical examples.

Kieran: Do you welcome the fact that federal government looks like they're willing to negotiate on that?

Andrew: I think that-

Kieran: Previously, they've sort of said it's a no-go zone.

Andrew: Absolutely. I think, that's a very constructive sign. And as we go into the last two days of this week, I think we'll get down to that detail, whether we get a defined outcome at the end of it. But I think, let's make some progress, it's an absolutely essential priority.

Kieran: Andrew McKellar from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Well, stay in touch, a big week ahead.

Andrew: Great.

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