

Transcript

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 Compere: **KATHRYN JENSEN** Summary ID: **A00030702967**
 Item: **DON MACASKILL COMMENTS THAT THE ASSISTANCE OFFERED BY THE GOVERNMENT IS MERELY CATERED TOWARDS START UP ENTERPRISES THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE CONNECT INNOVATION CENTRES PROGRAM.**
INTERVIEWEES: DON MACASKILL, CEO, AUSTRALIAN NEWSAGENCIES FOUNDATION

Demographics:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people	ABs	GBs
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

KATHRYN JENSEN: The announcement of the 08/09 Budget has left some small businesses feeling even smaller. While much of the budget focuses on start up enterprises, there is very little offered to keep those 1.8 million established small businesses afloat.

Don MacAskill is the chief executive officer of the Australian Newsagencies' Foundation and he joins us this morning to share his perspective.

Good morning, Don.

DON MACASKILL: Good morning how are you?

KATHRYN JENSEN: Good. Now what elements do you feel have been overlooked in this year's Budget?

DON MACASKILL: Well, look, I guess we're a little bit disappointed that the assistance offered by the Government is



merely catered towards start up enterprises through the Enterprise Connect innovation centres programs, which largely ignores most of those existing small businesses.

KATHRYN JENSEN: And do you think that the unemployment is one concern highlighted in this Budget. Do you think, how will that affect the benefits offered to new small businesses as well as existing small businesses?

DON MACASKILL: Well I guess what's really lacking in this Budget - [coughs] excuse me - is that the Government consistently talks about the need to increase productivity and the need for increased skilling of Australia. But, I mean, you do have 1.88 million small businesses which has been traditionally the engine room of the national economy and there's been little focus on training and mentoring for existing small businesses.

I mean what we're seeing at the moment with the boom in the mining industry, currently, a lot of young people which would have seen retailers as a natural, you know, progression for career are now being diverted into other trades, which is going to leave, in the long term, a distinct deficit in the retail industry.

KATHRYN JENSEN: And what do you think would be an idea that you could put forward to maybe keep people in these existing small businesses.

DON MACASKILL: Well, like I said, I mean we would like to see more stimulation in relation to training and mentoring, and highlighting that retail is a viable career alternative. You know, that there is some real, genuine benefit in participating in the retail environment and is a career option.

KATHRYN JENSEN: And do you think it allows small businesses like newsagencies to match up to their big business counterparts, with this new budget scheme?

DON MACASKILL: I think, ultimately, there's always going to be quite a distinct, you know, disparity between our interests and some of the bigger, bigger business interests. I guess, given the fact that we constitute such a large part of the national economy, it's disappointing that once again, you know, with this Budget like past budgets have merely paid lip service to small businesses.

I mean, what we have is a Budget that is either, you know, most small businesses are subject to greater tax and cost cutting, but there's not really any real incentive for small businesses to succeed. We're seeing a distinct lack of those programs that were - I'm not saying that the previous government was getting off completely scott free in relation to funding, but you know, there were some programs that were there that were quite valuable for small business to access that are now actually being dumped or not continued.



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KATHRYN JENSEN: Now the legacy of the Howard Government was tougher GST and taxation expectations on small business. Do you see that there may be changes with the Rudd-Swan Budget making this process more manageable?

DON MACASKILL: Look, we've heard a lot of rhetoric from the previous government and from this government and in relation to simplifying the administration issues for small business. But, I guess, the real issue here is we've been seeing a lack of action on that front, consistently, by the previous government and the new Rudd Government.

KATHRYN JENSEN: Now there were some other factors addressed in the Budget, such as fuel and transport costs that also, you know, small businesses rely heavily on. Do you think that they're going to help, overall, provide like a positive outlook in those kind of areas to help small businesses?

DON MACASKILL: Well I just look, fuel is definitely a major gripe from our membership. You know, newsagents are really starting to question the viability of home delivery. You know their commissions hardly, or their costs hardly cover the increase in fuel prices.

I mean if you look at the last few years, I mean, we've gone from basically a fuel price of just under a dollar, now to over \$1.50 a litre. Now that's going to undermine the viability of home deliveries for newsagents.



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You know, this is - although this Budget talks about you know, greater focus on trying to reduce the cost of fuel, I guess, although we welcome that, we would be looking for some meaningful, genuine assistance to offset fuel costs. Because, you know, if it continues the way it is going, it really does undermine the viability of small business.

KATHRYN JENSEN: Definitely. Now they have set up, or instituted, a Small Business Advisory Committee, to facilitate, regularly reform and to reduce the impact of, they're saying regulatory burdens to the small business. Do you think this is going to make a big difference?

DON MACASKILL: Well, look again, look, we welcome any opportunity to, you know, see regulatory reform in the interests of small business. You know, for example from a newsagent's perspective, our membership would be looking at some meaningful reform to section 51AC unconscionable conduct of the Trade Practices Act, where we could get some more, I guess, certainty around business to business transactions.

You know, we see the new AUSTRAC anti-money laundering legislation being a major issue for our channel, because the compliance aspects, in relation go the administration of that legislation would virtually shut down the ability of newsagents to facilitate Western Union or financial services products, which are you know - and I think that's an important point to make.



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Because, I mean, in many rural and regional communities you've seen the withdrawal of banks and some LPOs and ultimately the newsagent is the last front line in that, in providing those services. So I mean, if we keep seeing continued regulatory burdens on small business, then naturally it makes it very difficult for those businesses to continue to operate. And you'll see those decline.

KATHRYN JENSEN: Well thank you for your time this morning, Don, and hope that we'll see some changes as the Budget progresses.

DON MACASKILL: Well we, we would welcome some changes and we hope that this government is a little bit more mindful of the interests of small business in their next Budget.

KATHRYN JENSEN: Definitely. Thank you Don.

DON MACASKILL: Thank you for your time.

KATHRYN JENSEN: And that was Don MacAskill and he's the chief executive officer of the Australian Newsagents' Federation.



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ABs = Managers, administrators, professions. GBs = Grocery buyers.
