

Transcript

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Compere: **JON FAINE** Summary ID: **M00034095897**

Item: **HEATHER RIDOUT, AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY GROUP, DISCUSSES THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S FAIR WORK BILL. SHE BELIEVES THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD ACCEPT AN AMENDMENT TO THE BILL CHANGING THE DEFINITION OF SMALL BUSINESS.**

INTERVIEWEES: HEATHER RIDOUT, CEO, AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY GROUP

Demographics:	Male 16+ 37000	Female 16+ 37000	All people 74000	ABs 17000	GBs 41000
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JON FAINE : Well, as you've just heard, the government are deciding what to do in relation to the amendments to industrial relations legislation.

One of the key lobbyists, Heather Ridout, from the Australian Industry Group, happens to be in London to discuss the global financial crisis in the G20 summit. But we thought it important - even though she's a long way from the action - to get her response.

Heather Ridout, good morning.

HEATHER RIDOUT: Good morning Jon.

JON FAINE : What do you want the government to do now?



HEATHER RIDOUT: Look, I mean, it's a very difficult issue for them. I mean, there's, there's a lot of law that suggests 20 is a reasonable cut-off. But, the position our organisation has always taken is that we want good law for everybody in this area. And that's not going to just come down to the kind of, the issues or the specifications of this law. It's going to come down to the process that's going to be played within the Fair Work Australia arrangement.

So, I mean, I think the government have made a lot of progress in their Act, and frankly, they probably should accept this, this amendment and move forward.

JON FAINE : Alright. Well, either way, I mean, the difference between 15, 20, definition of small business; it's really not the main game. I mean there's a lot more to this legalisation than just the definition of small business I...

HEATHER RIDOUT: Well I think it's a very small part of it. I mean, it is a very big part of WorkChoices - it and the no disadvantage test were clearly the issues that were part of the so-called fairness test of the whole WorkChoices legislation.

And that's why I suspect the government feels very strongly about it.

But in the end, this is a huge piece of legislation that will radically change the industrial landscape



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for employers and for employees. And, you know, whether it's 20, whether it's 15, may be symbolically important, but there's, you know, been a lot more fish to try in this legislation.

JON FAINE :

Alright. I do want to pick your brains on what you've learned about the global financial crisis - but just one more Australian question; even though you're on the other side of the world - the role of the Senate now is clearly in focus. The Senate is rejecting or amending all sorts of government programs. Do you think that's a good thing or a bad thing?

HEATHER RIDOUT:

Look, I think it's part of the parliamentary process. It may seem frustrating. Years ago I would have said it's too frustrating, but I think in the end we have to accept that's the composition of the Senate, and, I think the big issue is that people take their responsibility seriously in the area, and put forward sensible amendments. And sometimes that doesn't always happen. But in the end, that, this is the parliament and we all have to listen to it, whether we're employers advocating positions or governments wanting to achieve legislation.

JON FAINE :

From the perspective then of sitting in London in the meetings of G20 - the peripheral meetings around the G20 summit and the like - are we all ruined globally Heather Ridout?



HEATHER RIDOUT: Look, I think there's a lot of optimism that things can be achieved out of the G20. One of the things that really struck me when I sat in this business meeting yesterday was whether you were from Ethiopia or whether you were from Germany or Japan or China or Indonesia or Australia, you still had the same issues that needed to be addressed, and an awful lot of the same solutions to those issues.

And I think that's immensely positive. And, you know, I mean I think our leaders need to understand that business is quite united around the fact that the G20 has to come out with some really sensible and coherent and decisive outcomes on many issues.

JON FAINE : Such as?

HEATHER RIDOUT: Well I think restoring stability to the world financial system; dealing with the toxic assets; getting, getting credit flowing again; putting some floor under domestic demand in our economies that can then multiply across the world economy.

So these are really clear issues.

I think business doesn't want the government to get too cluttered in its agenda, and I think that's going to be one of the bigger issues for the G20.

JON FAINE : And is there a sense of urgency?



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HEATHER RIDOUT: Oh immense. I think this is, this, you know, talking to other people in London, this is not just months, this is a weeks issue. If this conference doesn't deliver some, some really sensible outcomes, I think we're going to have a much longer downturn than we need have. And frankly, this will be one of the most important meetings I think, when we all look back on this crisis, it'll be either a wasted opportunity or a real turning point in the downturn.

JON FAINE : And just finally, the other urgent matter being addressed is the survival of the human race and the planet. The global financial crisis is one thing; and of course, the environmental crisis is the other.

Is that even getting mentioned by the bankers?

HEATHER RIDOUT: It hasn't, it wasn't mentioned at all in our meeting. I think though that it's very much on the mind of Europeans. I think it's; the Americans are thinking about it. For Australia it's very much front of mind, because we've got legislation pending.

But, you know, I think, really that the big issue at the moment is trying to work out how we're going to, you know, get the world economy functioning again. And it's clearly not. You've got global industrial production really spiralling downwards. We've got, you know, the banking systems still not being able to deliver credit to the world.



So, I think these, that issue is really there, but, at the moment it's not, certainly not front of mind in these discussions.

JON FAINE : Mm, that's an interesting point. Thank you for your time from London this morning. heather Ridout...

HEATHER RIDOUT: My...

JON FAINE : ...from the Australian Industry...

HEATHER RIDOUT: ...pleasure.

JON FAINE : ...Group, speaking to us from the meetings that surround the G20 summit in London.

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