

TRANSCRIPT

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**INTERVIEW WITH LORD MAYOR SALLY CAPP AND THE NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK'S ROSS MCEWAN**

**PROGRAM: NEIL MITCHELL / 3AW**

**NEIL MITCHELL:** We were intending to dedicate a whole program to that this week, now that's been delayed by lockdown five. There's no point, we've got to get through the initial days coming out of lockdown and then to talk about rebuilding the city. I know there was going to be a business breakfast about this as well involving the Lord Mayor Councillor Sally Capp and the Chief Executive of the National Australia Bank Ross McEwan. Instead they are both on the line. Lord Mayor, good morning.

**SALLY CAPP:** Good morning, Neil.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** And Ross McEwan, good morning to you.

**ROSS McEWAN:** Good morning, Neil, nice to be with you.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Well thank you for your time. Ross McEwan, you first, you've got one big idea.

**ROSS McEWAN:** Get vaccinated. Get people vaccinated. Let's get on with the job. And what's interesting, Neil, showing up in our latest survey that 80 per cent of Australians are actually happy to get a vaccination, 10 per cent, they say they'll swing towards it and 10 per cent say, 'Not for me, thank you'.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** How do we do it? How do we encourage it? I've just spent 20 minutes talking to the Prime Minister about exactly that, if I can name drop. How do we encourage it?

**ROSS McEWAN:** Well, first off let's target the 80 per cent who do want to get the job done and get the vaccination into their arms. So I've had my two. I think Lord Mayor you've had your two.

**SALLY CAPP:** I have.

**ROSS McEWAN:** Let's get those who want it first and then work on the 10 per cent that can be swung across, and then let's open this economy up because everybody's had a chance. I think a program that says, 'These are the times we're doing it, and this is what the ramifications are', I think that's where it's got to go. I'm encouraging all of my staff to actually get their vaccination. I'm very happy to open up my big buildings, like we do with flu vaccinations, to have people come in and do it. I'm happy to do it for staff and for their family as well. It's, you know, time we got some dates on.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Do you pay them a bonus for being vaccinated?

**ROSS McEWAN:** No, we don't pay them a bonus. I've got enough people actually who are very happy to get the vaccination.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Okay.

**ROSS McEWAN:** And I think we just need to make sure that we're giving them a chance to get it. We're giving them time off to do that. And today we're just announcing we're backing in with UNICEF, and every time one of my staff get a vaccination, we're going to give two vaccinations to places like Fiji and Papua New Guinea. I mean look at Fiji, they're really struggling. They need help. Let's get on and support some others. But we've got 80 per cent of the population who want a vaccination. Let's get on with that 80 per cent.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Yeah, couldn't agree more. Well, Lord Mayor, what about the idea of giving some sort of incentive to people who have been vaccinated; come to the city, prove you're vaccinated, and you get a free drink or a free meal or whatever? What about something like that?

**SALLY CAPP:** Yeah, we love the idea of lotteries, Neil. Anything we can do to incentivise people to become vaccinated. We're working on a lottery program at the moment and we're just working with State and Federal Governments to make sure that there's certainty of supply, because as we incentivise people, we want to make sure that it's available. I think it's that certainty issue that is really underlying so much of how we bounce back. This is bounce back number five, as you know, Neil, and it's certainty of support, certainty of the finish line and that will give people confidence in the toughest times they've ever experienced, give them some confidence that we will work our way out of this.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Well what do - okay, we'll take a quick call, if we may. Sam, yes Sam, go ahead.

**SAM:** Hi Neil, I am - I actually work on Postcards on Channel 9 so we're out promoting, you know businesses and cities, everything in the city.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Oh, Sam Groth.

**SAM GROTH:** I'm in the city this morning actually filming, and I've already had one parking inspector standing at my car one minute after my parking expired giving me a ticket. It makes it hard, and you hear it from a lot of the businesses, we get out and have seen a lot of businesses that are struggling and they're really appreciating what we do just trying to give them a little bit of support to promote what they're doing. But it sort of makes it hard when you're in the city and, you know, you can't even - I know it's part of my job, like I should be back before my parking expires maybe, but the fact that they're standing there waiting for your number to tick over just to hand out a ticket.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Sam, I'm not surprised you were late. I hear it takes you about six takes to get it right, is that right?

**SAM GROTH:** I wish I could get it right.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Sam Groth, former tennis player of course from Postcards. Well, Mayor, parking, can you do anything?

**SALLY CAPP:** Gosh, Sam, that is a very frustrating story on a day like today when you're doing a great job promoting our city. We do have our inspectors out just watching turnover because all of our traders want to make sure that there are spaces available for people to come and pick up goods, people to come and pick up food, and it's the turnover that's been a real focus for us on behalf of our traders.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** But your park, I was looking at the figures, the amount of money you collect in parking is going to go up significantly in the next year, does it need to? I haven't got the figures in front of me, it goes up significantly, doesn't it?

**SALLY CAPP:** It does, but that's really a reflection of us forecasting more people coming into the city, Neil.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** But they won't come in if you're going to --

**SALLY CAPP:** As bounce back continues, as vaccination programs rollout, we're expecting more people into the city. So that's nothing to do with a price hike or any extra activity. It's really just reflecting the number of people coming into the city and we hope that that's a very positive story.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** But how many millions extra are you going to take in in parking fees?

**SALLY CAPP:** Well the forecast is that we'll start to return to sort of pre-COVID levels

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Yeah.

**SALLY CAPP:** And we take that again as a very positive reflection if we can get to those levels. They're our forecasts at the moment.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** How many million?

**SALLY CAPP:** And we know, Neil --

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Okay.

**SALLY CAPP:** We'd be heading back into the just over \$100 million mark and that is normal revenue for pre-COVID levels.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Can I just ask, sorry, Ross McEwan, Innes Willox said Victoria was broken, do you agree?

**ROSS McEWAN:** No, I don't think it's broken. Victoria's incredibly robust and we've seen that after each of these lock downs, the bounce back is always strong. But it's hurting. I mean let's be quite clear. You only need to, you know, step outside our building or even talk to the two chaps who run our cafeteria inside our building, Nick and Don, they're hurting. This is the fifth lockdown they've gone through. They're really struggling. They say this is the worst. So you're right, it's hurting more this time round than probably any other, but we need to get actually the whole city, both Sydney and Melbourne, back running again and the only way we do that is around certainty and getting people vaccinated so people can come back into these great cities and do what they love doing. You know, sporting events.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** What percentage of your staff would be back in the office?

**ROSS McEWAN:** Today, about 200 out of - oh, 300 probably out of about 12,000, they're just sitting here --

**NEIL MITCHELL:** That's awful, isn't it? I mean that --

**ROSS McEWAN:** The only way out of it - Neil, I totally agree with you.

The only way out of this though is get people vaccinated, because the minute you put restrictions on them around a mask they might as well be at home and that's what they're saying to us. And we go down from last, you know, prior to lockdown we had about 2,500 in the building I'm in. Today I doubt there'd be 200. So vaccination is the only way through this.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Sally Capp, any ideas?

**SALLY CAPP:** Neil, we know that we have lags from lockdowns, that the restrictions ease gradually and it's often, you know, these times when businesses are really struggling the most. It's terrific that the State Government and Federal Government have increased the amount of support available, but we really need to know what that finish line looks like and then we can start getting excited and planning for the future, all the fabulous things we love about Melbourne.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** What do you mean by finish line? I was talking to the Prime Minister today, he expects everybody to be vaccinated, who wants to be, to be vaccinated by the end of the year. Is that what you mean by finish line?

**SALLY CAPP:** Yeah, well we think it's got to be a combination really of what is the target vaccination rate at which we can open with confidence? Businesses can open their doors, cities can stay open, interstate borders can stay open, and our international borders can open. What is that vaccination rate or what is that vaccination date at which we feel we've reached the finish line and the majority of people can get on with their lives and they can do that with certainty and a sense of positivity about the future.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** I agree entirely. I'm going to ask you both about this. I agree entirely people need some sort of strategy. You can never lock it in stone and say, 'This will happen' but they like to have something to aim to. What would you think, Lord Mayor, about, okay, the Prime Minister says everybody vaccinated by the end of the year? Maybe February, March we have a freedom month, you know, we plan to have a freedom month, February or March, where we actually get back to it. Would that help?

**ROSS McEWAN:** Neil, I think it would help. Like any business you need to target things. Of course sometimes you don't hit those targets but at least you've got it directionally right and people have something to focus on, and that's why the Prime Minister's now getting to is what's the date when we're planning to have at least the first vaccination into everybody that want it? And when can we then start opening up the borders without the closure programs that we go through every time we get a case inside a State? And when can businesses have certainty around opening up? When can sports clubs have certainty about opening up? When can the theatres of Melbourne have certainty of opening up?

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Oh, yes.

**ROSS McEWAN:** When can we get the place back going again? Those are the dates we need to have as targets and we need to expect that there'll be some push and shove around those, but that's like any other business.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Lord Mayor, just --

**ROSS McEWAN:** The public shouldn't be that critical of the Prime Minister or the State Governments for missing out by a week or two here.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Of course, of course. Lord Mayor, just seeing as we're talking, what about that injecting facility in the city? I was talking to Tony Doherty yesterday; he's already cut back the hours of his gym in the area because people are avoiding it. Have you nailed that yet or do you think it's still a possibility?

**SALLY CAPP:** Well there has been no announcements from the State Government yet, Neil, and until that time there's nothing firm that we can respond to. As you know, when the initial preferred site near Queen Victoria Market was announced we rallied very quickly, and we were able to set up a process with Ken Lay that was successful in terms of representing the interests and views and concerns of traders and residents. But until there's --

**NEIL MITCHELL:** It is agreed though that that's being considered. Wouldn't it be legitimate for the City Council to lobby against it on the basis we're trying to reinvigorate and restart the city?

**SALLY CAPP:** Yes, so we've made it very clear if that was the proposed site then we see a lot of issues with that site similar to Degraes Street as similar to QVM. It's a major trading precinct. It is a place where people live, international students in that area. And of course it's the gateway to the city so absolutely have made those things known to the State Government, Neil, and now we have to wait to see formally from the State Government where they're proposing to put that site. Until that time, it is really difficult so we will continue to strongly represent the views of locals, as we have done through your radio station and certainly through my email box.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Okay.

**SALLY CAPP:** We understand those views very clearly.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Thank you both very much for your time. What I would like to do as we do come out of lockdown is come into the city, do a program from there and just dedicate it to this discussion all the way along the line. That's the Lord Mayor Councillor Sally Capp, Chief Executive of the National Australia Bank Ross McEwan. Ross McEwan, just finally, and it is another area, Sydney, how concerned are you about what's happening up there?

**ROSS McEWAN:** It is a concern when any of our big cities go into lockdown, as we've seen from Melbourne and we're now seeing it in Sydney. Again, I think it's great to see that the State Government and the Federal Government are working as one to actually put a program in place to help out there. It's going to be needed. Look, we are seeing more calls coming into our centres. The first week of lockdown we saw 10 per cent increase, this is increase in calls coming in. The week after it was 40 per cent increase. This week it's been 80 per cent increase. Some of that is to do with I wrote out to five million of our customers saying, 'Look, if you need help here's the number to ring'. So we've, you know, we've pulled forward some of that. But look, it does hurt. But again, we know that these cities bounce back quickly once we've got certainty and that's what we need. Can I go back to where I started, Neil, let's get the vaccinations going. Let's get 90 per cent of the population vaccinated and give them freedom. And for those that don't want the vaccination, well they can stay at home. Let's get on with looking after 90 per cent of this great population. They want to do the right thing, let's do it.

**NEIL MITCHELL:** Thank you both very much for your time, that's the chief Executive of the National Australia Bank Ross McEwan and the Lord Mayor Councillor Sally Capp.

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