



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP

Prime Minister

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH BEN FORDHAM, 2GB

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EO&E...

BEN FORDHAM: Prime Minister Scott Morrison joins us live. Prime Minister, good afternoon.

PRIME MINISTER: G'day Ben, how are you mate?

FORDHAM: I'm good. You must be exhausted. But you must feel relieved that we're on the way out?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, we're far ahead of where we thought we would be at this time. And the people I have to thank for that and it was very kind, what you just said the, but is the Australian people and their patience and their discipline and their application, I know it's frustrating and annoying and then all of those things. But this is really delivering for Australia and making us safer, which means we can as soon as we can and more quickly every day get our economy up back and running, get people back in work, get kids back in the classroom learning directly from the teachers, have those shops open and and sport running again. And this is where we want to get back to. And we're moving there as as patiently, but as quickly as we can.

FORDHAM: I know there have been some disagreements between the feds and the states, but I think that's understandable when you think about it. I mean, I can understand why Premiers are going to be a bit cautious on schools because they're, they're kind of carrying the baby and they're thinking if something stuffs up here, it's going to be on me. But from a federal level, you've been sending a message that that you think it's time to get back to school. We spoke to Tim Berryman at the start of the show today. He's the Principal of Fitzroy Community School. He's in an interesting spot because the official policy in Victoria is for children to be taught from home until further notice. But he says, look, I'm following the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Australia. So he's got the kids back.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, not just the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Australia, but of the expert medical panel. I mean, you've got the South Australian Chief Health Officer who wrote to all of the parents in South Australia sending the same message, in Western Australia they're following that practice, in the Northern Territory, they're all back at school now in the normal way. New South Wales is going down that path. So, look, that's always been the case that schools have been safe for kids. The issue that has been raised by teachers, understandably, is how safe it is for teachers now, for teachers there, the issue is that they are more at risk to coronavirus in the staffroom than the classroom, because that's the one thing we do know about this virus, is its its impact on children is far less. It's it's very reduced. So kids are safe. And what I'm concerned about and always have been, I said very early, we are going to lose a lot during this crisis, people losing their jobs and their livelihoods and we're seeking to hold on to as much of that as possible. But we also don't want to see a whole year of a child's education gone because you don't get to be 8 again, you don't get to be 12 again, or 17 and doing your HSC or in year 4 prep school that you're doing with the pre-school work. This is all, these are all incredibly important years -

FORDHAM: Well, with that in mind, let me ask you this, because I know there are a lot of parents who are concerned at the moment and they feel a degree of guilt. And let me talk you through that guilt, they've heard that at first it was only the children of essential workers who should be going to school. Now they're being told no we're, we're getting things back up and running again. But there are a lot of parents who are at their wits end because they've been teaching from home. They're exhausted. They feel like they can't give what they've been giving for the past month anymore to their kids. And they also feel that their kids have been withdrawing a little bit because they're losing out on that social contact and that classroom experience. Should those parents feel at all guilty about their kids going back to school next week?

PRIME MINISTER: No, not at all.

FORDHAM: Regardless of who they are or what they do?

PRIME MINISTER: Every job in this economy is essential. Every job is essential. It supports a livelihood. It supports an income for a family. It supports the economy. It supports every other Australian. I've never been an advocate of this essential definition. You got a job? You're essential.

FORDHAM: Alright, I presume maternity leave would be essential as well. So if you've got a scenario where you've got a mum caring for a baby and they've been doing that, and then they've added in on top of that, looking after three or four kids as well, if that mother feels like look I need to focus on the baby for a moment, I need the other kids back at school. They can go back to school?

PRIME MINISTER: Sure. I mean, the health advice hasn't changed and that is the children are not at risk at school. Now, I agree that in the schools themselves, we've got to put the appropriate safeguards in for the teachers, but that's to protect them from each other, and to ensure that a pick up, at pick up and drop off that the you know, the social distancing rules are followed there. That's where the risks are.

FORDHAM: Can you just elaborate on that and just send a message to parents not to feel guilty? Because I know that words come up a number of times when I've been talking to parents, they say, oh, yeah, but I oh, I want to send them back. I feel like it's the right thing to do. And I've heard from all the medical experts, but I feel guilty about it.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the medical experts advice is that it is safe for your children to be at school. And in terms of what we've been sort of arguing for and look, we fund predominantly the independent schools and the Catholic schools, we are 80 per cent funders of those organisations, the states do the state schools, 80 per cent. Now, what is also important is that when children go to school, they get taught in classrooms by teachers. And that is the best way for them to learn. I'm looking forward for my kids to be able to go back to school where they are taught in the classroom by the teacher. I mean, I've got wonderful teachers at the school that Jenny and I have our kids go to, they're tremendous. We respect them tremendously. And the leadership of the school, and the school board, and we're looking forward to getting back to where they, our kids are taught in the school, in a classroom by their teachers each and every day.

FORDHAM: If you don't mind me asking, when are your kids going back?

PRIME MINISTER: Well as soon as I can do exactly that. Exactly that.

FORDHAM: So if you want to send your kids to back to school next week, it doesn't matter who you are, what you do, what your reasons are,

PRIME MINISTER: Send them.

FORDHAM: Send them. As the New South Wales Premier said, there shouldn't be any questions asked about why you're choosing to do that. Just do it. I'm wondering what other kind of carrots you can dangle at people, I know that this might seem a little bit cheap, but I've got a feeling at the moment, Prime Minister, like, people need to see a bit of a light at the end of the tunnel. And yes, we've started having a few beaches open. I've got a mate called Miles. Now, you know, those mates who just chew your ear off about one subject over and over again, Miles has been saying to me. Miles' relief in life is jumping on his motorbike, getting away from the kids and riding up to the

Hawkesbury for about an hour and then riding back. He goes on his own. But you're not allowed to do that at the moment. Are there gonna be things like that? Is this something like that? Or, you know, I've got an old mate who just loves getting in the car with his wife, driving to the beach, buying a milkshake from a takeaway and sitting in the car and looking out at the waves. When can those people do those things, do you reckon?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I'm going to leave the specifics of that to the Premiers, because ultimately mate they make those calls. And I don't want to make their job harder. In making those difficult calls. One of the things we agreed to do today at the National Cabinet is by next week, we will have a set of national principles for sport and recreation. And what does that mean for elite sport, obviously, and professional sport? So there's a common set of ways that we can deal with that very soon. That will obviously help what is trying to be sorted out at the NRL and the AFL. For Olympic athletes and rowing and all that sort of thing, then is the community sport. The competitive sport at a local level. And that's a huge part of how our communities operate and what we love doing. And then there's the recreation side of things as well. And that is fishing, it's going for that surf for all that's walking in the national park and many, in many states they are closed. And so getting some common principles on all of those things.

FORDHAM: And it would it, would it make sense to me to be thinking about every week or heading into every weekend or at some stage every week to be thinking, okay, we can throw just a couple more little carrots the way of Australians to say okay,

PRIME MINISTER: Sure, and that's already happening. I want to stress, that is already happening, in New South Wales that's already happening. And I know more of that will be happening, in Western Australia that's happening, in the Northern Territory it's already happened, in South Australia and in Tasmania they're all moving on a lot of these things already and they'll keep doing more and more in the weeks ahead. I mean, elective surgery, that was a big one, that got lift. We're seeing the changes in what's happening at schools. And I think you will see more and more of this in the weeks ahead. But the other thing that has to happen at the same time, because it's a two way street, the way we keep on top of this are 3 things. The first one is, we're doing more testing than ever before, and that is being stepped up even more where the testing regime, the coronavirus is being applied in a lot more circumstances, that means we can stay on top of it. The second is we've got to help, the second point is we've got to help those health workers who are ringing people. And when someone gets coronavirus and finding out who they've been in contact with, a very important job, you do that. You can stay on top of this thing and you can isolate those who may have been in contact and we'll be certainly soon releasing that app. Which if people download, your information, privacy, all of that is protected. The only people who gets to see what that is, is that health officer, who, the person who has coronavirus would need to tell anyway who they've been in contact with. This just speeds it up.

FORDHAM: We have been, we have been told that gyms might be one of the last frontiers as far as things re-opening. I would just raise one thing with you, with a guest this week who said to me, he runs a smaller health and fitness centre. He said, look, I hope that some of the smaller ones are able to open before we get right to the end of the line. But the other one is the pub. Now, I don't want to put you on the spot here, but can you just, I know you're not a betting man, but mate when are the pubs reopening? Just have a punt?

PRIME MINISTER: These are some of the hardest ones, the larger gatherings and the social gatherings. I mean, one of the things that a lot of people also want to see is you know when can I have just a couple of friends over and that sort of thing? These sorts of engagements, look at the highest priority for me as Prime Minister really relates to how we get the economy up and running again, because that's what's going to ensure that people get their jobs back and they can get back to work and not be reliant on income support, through JobSeeker and JobKeeper-

FORDHAM: Yeah I know but all these businesses are part of that economy. And they, anyway I know I know you don't have the answers to it because it's it's it's silly to even suggest that you you've got all these dates worked out because it's moving as we go. But anyway, we'll wait for the weekly updates.

PRIME MINISTER: A lot of retail shops. That's, you know where things have been shut down. I mean, that's where we're looking to try and move when we say and we talk about the baseline. But but large, people getting together in social settings, that is where it can all go pear shaped. And those figures you read out before I came on. I mean, the thing about it. In France? A hundred times the death rate than in Australia, in the UK, just under a hundred times the death rate, and those terrible figures you read out from Netherlands and Belgium and places like that. This thing

moves fast, if you let it get away from you. And we've done so well to get on top of it. And you don't want to have a stop-start recovery. You want to just keep building it up and improving each and every day.

FORDHAM: We appreciate your leadership. And I'd say the same about all the state and territory leaders. I think at the end of this whole thing, you all deserve a medal. Thank you so much.

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks mate and a shout out to Glenn Wheeler, whose birthday it was, 60 this week.

FORDHAM: He looks older than that.

PRIME MINISTER: He sounded good though, it was great to him. All the best mate.

FORDHAM: Good on you mate, Scott Morrison our Prime Minister.

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