

Ali Boswijk / Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce

My first guest is Ali Boswijk, Chief Executive at Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce. Welcome, Ali. Thank you. I wanted to start by talking to you because you have membership of around 500 businesses and you span networks that are including investors, regulators, social networks. And we've discussed many times about how climate change isn't a new topic for business, but understanding operationally what it means is still in its infancy. Words like climate action I use five times in the intro.

What does [climate action] mean for our businesses here in Nelson Tasman?

I think the big problem is it means different things to different businesses, so nobody is in exactly the same place, so we can't just pick them all up and move everybody together.

We've got some businesses who think thinking about composting or doing something in an environmental way at quite a low level. And we've got businesses who are really sophisticated in what they're doing in terms of actually measuring their carbon and they're not just offsetting, but they're actually looking at how they can reduce. So they're right at the other end, but the majority are right at the beginning of this.

For a lot of people it's still something that's in the back of their mind they know it's something they should be doing. They've got some sense of it, but they're not really sure what it is. So it doesn't really come into operations in any clear, strategic or consistent way.

If we think of all of the individuals, businesses across our region, how would you give that climate savviness? There's an awareness. Is it a lack of appetite or is it lack of solutions? Where do you think we sit and what are the missed opportunities perhaps?

I think there's a lot of busyness in the space, so it's quite cluttered for people. So I think that there's an awareness. I don't think anybody's not aware right now that we need to do something. I think that we can kind of assume, very safely assume that that's the case with just about everybody we talk to, particularly if they've got children, because they're being told constantly actually. And that's what we hear quite a lot as my kids told me, that we've

definitely got that happening. It's more about 'where do I go' and actually 'what do I do that will make the best difference, most cost effectively for my business'.

So I think that there's an understanding and then when you go online, sometimes it's just overwhelming to know exactly what to do and at the same time you hear 'zero carbon economy'. All of these things are starting to filter through and become quite confrontational. So people, maybe there's a tendency as well to just think, oh, I'll get to it when I get to it. Right now I've got COVID, I've got labour issues, I've got supply chain issues, this is just something else. So I think it's just in the clutter for a lot of people. Yeah, we hear that a lot. As far as it's not only a complex topic, but it's really busy.

So are there things that you could see that businesses can be doing amongst all of those other competing demands to help either prepare for the risk but also start to capitalize on some of the opportunities that are emerging?

Definitely. And I think we're really fortunate here. I think we've got some great foundations to now build on for the business community to hook into. So we've got the Te Taihū Intergenerational Strategy as a starting point, which gives us a clear indication that actually the climate and climate change is really important.

So businesses that actually start to use that well will get a commercial benefit from that because we know that customers are going to demand it. We know that actually supply chain businesses are going to demand it. We know that investors are going to demand it and financial institutions. So for businesses that actually get on board and understand it and use it well, it will be an opportunity to do business better and hopefully more profitably.

At the end of the day, do you see any kind of key areas that we're missing as a business community and starting to take that big step or kind of increase our speed on that journey?

I think the biggest thing is probably just joining the dots for people. I think that's going to be the thing that really makes it easy. I mean, we know from a Chamber of Commerce perspective, we have businesses that come, they want a template. It makes it so easy. If you're a small business, you're in the business of doing what you do, you just want a template to help you get there or you want that guidance to take you to the next step. I think that's what we can do to help really elevate.

97% of our businesses are small business. So while we focus on the big businesses from a GDP financial perspective, and they're those frontier firms, we've got an enormous number of small businesses that actually make up the majority of this economy. They are the people who are going to be struggling to actually take those steps without very clear guidance about how to do it. Not to say they can't, they're all very good people, but actually it's a

question of giving them the tools so that they can do it easily or directing them to that place where they get that information. It's about making those informed choices and knowing where to go to find what the suite of options are and what they could mean for the individual business.

Exactly. And I think it's great we hear Fonterra or Air New Zealand, all these big companies and what they're doing, and small companies look at that and think, well, that's all very well, but you've got a big workforce that can help you do that. You can employ staff, you can think about this. I'm just here with my five people, how do I actually do that? So you have to bring it down to that scale, I think, for people as well, so that we can get everybody in behind us. At some point. Everybody's got to get behind it. The choice is not going to be there.

So right now, if we can make it as painless and actually as profitable at the end, I'm not just talking about financial profit, but for the whole organization, I think that's what we need to be thinking about right now.

Very good. Have you heard any advice from businesses about how they're starting to integrate that into their other decision making? So if we're looking at beyond just the bottom line, there are a lot of other stuff, there's a lot of other opportunities that we see within the business community. Anything that you see that stands out as a really great example or advice that you've heard?

Yeah, I mean, I think the main thing is for people, and there are a number of companies we know in the region that are doing it brilliantly. We can't ignore the fact that we've got some great first movers the likes of Chia Sisters or 141, the Forestry Company, Sealord. We've got some big companies that are actually starting to do this at a level.

And I think when I talk to people who are just setting out on that journey, it sounds a little bit cliché, but really it's about just starting, but getting your team around you. So I think the clear thing is everybody in the organization understanding what it is you're trying to achieve and then the steps that you need to take to get to that point, because if it is just a lone voice, you very quickly slip off the agenda if you've got other things going on.

So it's a question of actually the organization making the determination to do this. And as soon as people do and then people get excited by it, that's what we've discovered is actually for businesses that do it, their team, their staff are really happy that they're doing it because then they can go home to the kids and say, oh, actually we're okay, but I think there's something in there as well.

So by getting everybody excited and involved is a really good way to start.

Yes. And you've been doing your survey. Now. What have you found in that first set of questions and results?

Yes. So we asked people if they were either measuring it was all around carbon measurement and what they were doing, and if they were doing it, what else they were doing, and the vast majority of people were not, but also the vast majority of people said they want to be.

So they're really looking for support and information about how they can help them take that first step. So that actually they start in a way that works for their scale, as I say.

So I think the really pleasing thing was it was quite sad to see very few are, but it was also really pleasing to see that people really want some help in that space.

And as people start to take action, and even if we get into the carbon certification space, is there collaboration that's being built in either achieving outcomes or accessing the capability that they need? Are those starting to emerge as well through the business community in a certain way?

I mean. I think what we've seen is some nice, some great collaborations and obviously Businesses for Climate Action is a fantastic collaboration. But also, even on a smaller scale, the people who came on board with the Zero Carbon tourism itinerary, which on the surface seems just like a sort of nice thing to do, but actually the conversation and the network that's developed from that is really impactful and really important.

So I think what we're seeing is these groupings are naturally coming together and people are wanting to help and saying "I use this tool" or "I did this" or "this is how I'm dealing with my transport issues" so that people can actually get some really practical advice from others in terms of how particularly to reduce and offset.

Very good. I guess if we look over kind of the next twelve months, are there any key things that you see that are coming? You want to give a heads up to the business community and say, hey, look, this is what we're hearing, we're seeing, we're feeling and ways that you could prepare.

Yeah, I mean, I think the big thing is that we are hearing from financial institutions that if people actually want to be, if they need to access capital, they need to be thinking about this. It's not going to be the case anymore that lending institutions actually ignore it. They're going to be legally obliged to actually do something about it.

So I think that that's something that's really important for businesses to consider. So we want to basically make that as painless as possible because everybody at some point in business

needs to access financial support generally. So we need to ensure that people really understand the implications if they're not actually doing something in this space.

Fantastic. Well, I know there's a lot of support at the Chamber of Commerce, there's a lot of support that we're bringing out through Mission Zero.

And so thank you for your insights that you've brought to this initiative as well. It's so important that what we do provides tangible results for businesses amongst all of the other competing demands, expectations and opportunities that they face. So we look forward to continuing that partnership and thank you for joining me.

Thank you. No, it's great. Thank you so much.