

Transcript



MASTER BUILDERS
A U S T R A L I A

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INTERVIEW WITH WILHELM HARNISCH, CEO OF MASTER BUILDERS AUSTRALIA.

FINAL REPORT ROYAL COMMISSION INTO TRADE UNION GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION.

LUKE GRANT (Program Host) Now, back to the Trade Union Royal Commission. Wilhelm Harnisch, CEO of Master Builders Australia, they have been outspoken critics of the CFMEU of course.

They have been campaigning for industrial relations reforms in the building industry. They say, amongst other things, that corruption and criminal behavior have previously been identified but that it's sadly been allowed to flourish with the winding back of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

Wilhelm joins me on the line. Good Morning to you Wilhelm.

WILHELM HARNISCH (CEO of Master Builders Australia): Good Morning Luke.

LUKE GRANT: What do you make of what you've seen so far of the Report? Obviously some very damning findings. I think at the beginning, in his introductory comments, Dyson Heydon suggests that what the Commission has found is just the small tip an enormous iceberg.

Not too much comfort for the union movement and the CFMEU I wouldn't have thought?

WILHELM HARNISCH: Absolutely not, and no amount of spin doctoring by the CFMEU can deny the problem.

As you quite rightly point out, the Royal Commission report into trade union governance and corruption provides damning evidence, given under oath, of an ingrained, institutionalised culture of unlawful behaviour.

And what the report also shows is the evidence that the CFMEU have created an environment where criminality and corruption flourishes and that it's therefore very important to enact legislation that makes the institutional reforms need to tackle the culture of ingrained corruption and criminality in the union.

LUKE GRANT: I was watching this most days (the RC) and I looked in detail at what happened in Canberra where it seems to me that you needed the permission of the CFMEU to get work on any project. And getting that permission was getting involved in playing ball with them even if it was just around fundraising – buying tickets to union events.

Do you think as a result there will be enough noise about this? Enough to remind politicians when they come back from their break about the need to put a stop to all this by the CFMEU?

WILHELM HARNISCH: Look, the Parliament has an immense responsibility to deal with this CFMEU culture of corruption, criminality and bullying that has been so comprehensively exposed by the Royal Commission.

The Parliament, particularly the cross bench senators, who perhaps were not previously convinced or who were waiting for this report to be released, must now surely have the evidence before them which is compelling; which is damning; which is based on credible sworn evidence; for them to stand up and look after the interests of their community in passing the Government's bills to restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission and establish a registered organisations regulator.

Because in the end, the CFMEU cheats the community by making cost of building schools, hospitals and childcare centres up to 30 per cent higher.

This means that thanks to the CFMEU the community misses out. In fact the CFMEU cheats the community out of more of these community facilities.

LUKE GRANT: What about this new regulator? I notice there are calls for a regulator a bit like ASIC to oversee registered industrial organisations like unions and employer associations. Do you support that?

WILHELM HARNISCH: Absolutely. Master Builders has been calling for at least three things.

One is the reestablishment of the ABCC. We have called for greater accountability and part of the response would be a regulator with ASIC-like powers.

Thirdly, we want greater fines being imposed, because it would appear that unions respond to the costs of fines and penalties imposed on them. On that point, since the ABCC was abolished, the CFMEU have paid nearly 10 million in fines. That just shows you the extent of their unlawful behaviour.

LUKE GRANT: And what would you need to see Bill Shorten do or say today to be convinced that he is fair dinkum about ridding unions of corruption and looking after their members better?

WILHELM HARNICH: Look, my message to Bill Shorten is this: Bill, unions have a right to exist, but unions also have an obligation to behave more like normal people and abide by the law.

Since the ALP abolished the ABCC and the CFMEU was given a chance to reform itself, it has not. In fact, it is engaged in greater corruption and criminality.

LUKE GRANT: Alright Wilhelm, thank you again so much for your time. Good to talk to you always.

WILHELM HARNISCH: Thank you Luke.

LUKE GRANT: That's Wilhelm Harnisch, the CEO of Master Builders Australia talking about the trade union Royal Commission report that was handed down today. All the best Wilhelm!