

Transcript



MASTER BUILDERS
A U S T R A L I A

EVENINGS ABC NEWSRADIO

INTERVIEW WITH WILHELM HARNISCH, CEO OF MASTER BUILDERS AUSTRALIA.

FINAL REPORT, ROYAL COMMISSION INTO TRADE UNION GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION.

CATHY BELL (Program Host): Well among the damning findings of the Royal Commission's Final Report many are on the unlawful behaviour of the nation's building unions, in particular the CFMEU.

The Royal Commission has referred a number of CFMEU officials for investigation over allegations of unlawful behaviour. In the ACT Royal Commissioner Dyson Heydon has referred Dean Hall for investigation over allegations that he intimidated a Worksafe Inspector and also referred CFMEU officials John Lomax, Jason O'Mara and Anthony Fidler to Fair Work Building and Construction over allegations they coerced or induced union memberships in contravention of the Fair Work Act.

But he has also been critical of some employers and employer groups and has recommended that a single regulator be established to oversee employer associations as well as unions.

Master Builders Australia has long complained about the conduct of the building union and their CEO Wilhelm Harnisch says the Report contained no surprises.

WILHELM HARNISCH (CEO of Master Builders Australia): What the Report has shown is that there is an ingrained and institutionalised culture of unlawful behaviour in the CFMEU that creates an environment where criminality and corruption flourishes.

This was demonstrated by the evidence given by many witnesses during the Commission hearings.

CATHY BELL: The Commissioner said that it would be naïve to think in fact that this was not just the tip of a much broader iceberg. Do you think that the Royal Commission got to the bottom of the problems in the construction industry?

WILHELM HARNISCH: The Commission has not got to the very bottom of it but it has made a very good start. It builds on previous Royal Commissions that have exposed evidence of similar appalling behaviours where the building unions have simply flouted the law; thumbed their noses at the law and in fact take great pride in breaking the law.

CATHY BELL: We've heard from Dave Noonan from the CFMEU this afternoon and he has pointed out that the findings of a Royal Commission are not a finding of guilt. Aren't you jumping the gun?

WILHELM HARNISCH: Not at all. The evidence that has been provided to the Royal Commission is evidence that has been proven in previous court cases. If you look at the number of court fines that have been levied on the CFMEU over the past decade or so, it is getting close to the amount of \$10 million. Now \$10 million worth of fines shows that the CFMEU have not just been involved in minor parking ticket type infringements, they are substantial in nature.

They demonstrate, the extraordinary extent of the CFMEU's unlawful behaviours.

CATHY BELL: So you have no time for the arguments put today and previously by the unions that the Royal Commission was a political witch-hunt?

WILHELM HARNISCH: Look, the spin doctoring by the CFMEU and other unions is not unexpected. The reality is that they have been exposed. These claims are their defence of last resort when they seek to defend what is indefensible.

CATHY BELL: Of course the bulk of the criticism in the Report was for the union movement and the CFMEU in particular but there was some criticism of employer groups.

WILHELM HARNISCH: Yes, it must be recognised that employers and some contractors were named by the Royal Commission in its Report and were referred to the authorities by Justice Heydon.

Obviously those matters are equally serious and cannot be condoned. But it just shows the pressure the building unions put on contractors so that, while it can't be condoned, contractors unwillingly break the law as well.

CATHY BELL: What do you make of the proposal for an independent body with greater powers to investigate and oversee both unions and employer associations?

WILHELM HARNISCH: Look, Master Builders supports it. For those that don't break the law have got nothing to hide. Officials and office-holders of industrial registered organisations have to be held accountable for the monies they hold in trust.

CATHY BELL: You have called on Federal Parliament to legislative in response to this Report in a mature way. But already we've seen both sides of politics lining up take pot shots of each other as a result of the Report. Can you be confident that there will be that mature approach that you've called for?

WILHELM HARNISCH: The Parliament owes a duty of care to the community that has elected them. The Parliament has a duty of care to ensure that the behaviours of the CFMEU that are outside community expectations are stopped.

What the Royal Commission Report has shown is that there are behaviours of the CFMEU that need to be tackled; these are behaviours that are institutionalised; these are behaviours that are so ingrained and so extraordinary that the measures required to tackle them must also be institutional and strongly empowered.

CATHY BELL: That was Wilhelm Harnisch the CEO of Master Builders Australia.

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