

MASTER BUILDERS ACT

Transcript

Summary

Joe Prevedello interview with Anna Neelagama discussing the Canberra Liberal's call to abolish the Secure Local Jobs Code.

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Transcription

JOE PREVEDELLO: Joe Prevedello on the Canberra Weekender. Now, since the ACT Integrity Commission's release of the Kingfisher Report a number of weeks ago, the Master Builders ACT have really led calls to abolish this procurement verification process, I guess you would call it the Secure Local Jobs Code. Now during the week, the Canberra Liberals, the Opposition here in the ACT Legislative assembly, made the official call on the Government to abolish the Secure Locals Jobs Code, backing those Master Builders calls. Joining us now on the phone is the Chief Executive of Master Builders ACT, Anna Neelagama. Hello, Anna.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Good morning, great to be with you on this beautiful Canberra day.

JOE PREVEDELLO: It is a beautiful day out there. I'll be out there very shortly. Now, obviously, you welcome these calls, Anna, from the Canberra Liberals to abolish the Secure Local Jobs Code. But I was interested to read this morning in the Canberra Times a major story in the paper today that work was disrupted on the light rail extension project in the city this week

because one of the firms involved in the project, their Secure Local Jobs Code certificate actually expired. Now to me that suggests there really is a problem with the code, the processes around it, if it's going to disrupt work like that.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Yeah, thanks, Joe, that's a good point. And I've read that article too, and I think the basis on which we've called for reforms and removal of Secure Local Jobs Code, if you take away the Operation Kingfisher, it's really about red tape and regulation because it imposes a lot on small and medium-sized family businesses, and it is relatively easy for something like a renewal to be missed. So, the whole system, the whole point of the code, it really advantages big firms that have dedicated compliance people, and it's not perhaps, you know, a husband and wife team doing it all themselves. So, that's why we've called for reform on the code for a very long time. That red tape regulation is disadvantaging Canberra locals and disadvantaging, you know, small and medium-sized businesses, which is, you know, the heart blood of construction here in the ACT.

JOE PREVEDELLO: I guess that's the, it's the confusing thing about this code. I mean it's called the Secure Local Jobs Code but it's not really about securing local jobs. It's about verifying businesses and whether they meet certain compliance standards that the government wants, particularly in relation to working with unions on projects. So, it's not really what it preaches to be, is it?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Absolutely. There's a lot of mislabelling when it comes to the code. What the code is meant to do is say, I'm a good employer, I'm a compliant employer and I'm hitting all these legal points in terms of treatment of workforce, which all of our members are already doing. So, it's hard to understand why there needs to be another step simply to compete for government work. But the second part is voters and the community are of a view if you've got that certificate and that code and you've gone through that verified process, you actually get preference towards government work. But what we see is it disadvantages true locals, it disadvantages small and middle-sized businesses and it actually, if anything, gives a competitive advantage to interstate providers or big multinationals.

JOE PREVEDELLO: Ok, so the Canberra Liberals, they've called now for it to be abolished. So, you would assume if they were to come into government, they'd look to dismantle the code as it stands. Now, are you looking for it to be replaced with something else or abolishing this code and just not having this sort of checking process in place for procurement. Would you prefer not to have anything?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: I think it needs to be independently reviewed at the very least. But obviously in this economic environment, the removal of layers of red tape and regulation from small and middle-sized family businesses absolutely makes sense. So, we really call on the Government to implement that Assembly recommendation in the first instance to do a complete independent review to see whether it's fit for purpose, to see whether the policy is actually delivering on its intended purpose. And I think really we need to get back to a system that supports small and middle sized businesses working within the Canberra economy, give them less compliance to do, so we can get on with the job of building houses and community infrastructure.

JOE PREVEDELLO: I'm sure you've definitely heard the same, but I mean, I've heard from local businesses that you go through a process of being audited to become eligible for, to be verified under the Secure Local Jobs Code. And then every time you tender for a job, for a government job, you then have to rehash all of that. And, as you say, it favours those bigger firms that are expert when it comes to compliance, regulation and red tape. And it makes it just so much harder for, as you say, mum and dad businesses that are just trying to get some work done 100 per cent.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: And what we're hearing from builders who employ subcontractors locally is that some subcontractors are simply choosing to say, look, we don't want to go through that process. It's too onerous. We're a very small team. We're not going to quote for your work when it's tied to government procurement. And I just think that's a real shame.

JOE PREVEDELLO: Yeah. All right, Anna, stay on it. I know you definitely will. And we'll catch up soon.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Good on you, Joe.

JOE PREVEDELLO: Thanks, Anna. That's Anna Neelagama there, CEO of Master Builders ACT in response to the Canberra Liberals' calls this week to abolish the Secure Local Jobs Code.

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