

MASTER BUILDERS ACT

Transcript

Summary

Stephen Cenatiempo interview with Master Builders ACT's Anna Neelagama discussing the secure local jobs code, the code's failure to support local workers, and the inconvenience to small businesses.

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Transcription

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: Master Builders ACT has backed calls to abolish the Secure Local Jobs Code, saying that it's failing local builders, workers and taxpayers. The code, according to Master Builders, creates unnecessary administrative burden, particularly for smaller businesses, while failing to ensure ACT Government projects are awarded to local companies. CEO of Master Builders ACT, Anna Neelagama joins us. Anna, good morning.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Good morning. Great to be here.

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: This makes no sense at all, that you call something Secure Local Jobs and it doesn't actually do that.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Absolutely. It's a complete myth that it's tied to driving local economic employment outcomes. If you were code compliant, you can be interstate, and you can be a big multinational company. And it doesn't mean that you pay any payroll tax in the ACT or indeed employ a single local.

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: The broader problem, I mean, any mug can drive through any of the disruptions going on at the moment and see the signs on the side of the various trucks and bits of equipment, and there's not one of them says Canberra.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Yeah. So, I mean, the Secure Local Jobs Code is all about employment and employment conditions. It's not about driving the ACT local economy or ensuring, you know, that the employers who are code certified pay payroll tax locally or are contributing to the local economy.

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: So, one of the current issues around this, and I guess it's what's probably raised the calls to scrap it this time around, is that we've had work shut down on the light rail, which is the most disruptive thing that's ever happened in the history of Canberra, because one of these certificates expired. It just, it makes no sense to me that we are using such draconian measures at a time where we desperately need these projects finished so they can get out of the way of small businesses so they can keep operating.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Look, I absolutely agree, but I think what we agree on is that employers on construction sites should be meeting their obligations and not short-changing this.

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: Sure, yeah.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: What we absolutely saw in the light rail is the Secure Local Job Code is actually not achieving this. All it does is it assesses the company's ability to fill out pages and pages of additional paperwork before they submit a tender. Once they've got a certificate, no one's checking whether they're treating their employees well at all. We already have the Fair Work Ombudsman, and we already have WorkSafe who ensure that staff are paid and workplaces are safe. So, why do employers, why do local businesses, why do small and medium-sized family businesses actually have to fill out these reams and reams of paperwork if it's not even doing anything for the worker?

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: Well, that's the broader issue that you've talked about here. I mean, this code is just a box-ticking exercise. But you've also criticised the government for having no clear measures to work out whether procurement policies are actually strengthening our local industry, or whether it's the same as what we're seeing in Victoria and Queensland, where we're adding 25 per cent to the cost of projects.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Absolutely. And I think it's even worse than that here in the ACT. We've seen dodgy interstate contractors who haven't paid their bills and they've been banned on NSW Government sites, actually obtain a secure local jobs code certificate and win work within the ACT. So, it's actually leading to very perverse outcomes for local workers.

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: Absolutely extraordinary. Anna, I appreciate your time this morning.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Thank you so much.

STEPHEN CENATIEMPO: All the best. Anna Neelagama, the CEO of Master Builders ACT.

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