



## **Transcript: Innes Willox speaks to David Speers and Jane Norman on ABC Afternoons about the Economic Reform Roundtable**

### **Presenter:**

Innes Willox, as someone who's been around policy and political debates longer than I have, what do you think, realistically, are some easy wins that can quickly be moved on by the Government in this moment?

### **Willox:**

Well, we've had conversations this morning around two areas: international and trade, and then job skills and training, and then there's a lot more to come. And it's really important we do get some quick wins. So out of this morning, there's some agreements around... I think some understandings are that we need to speed up the system. If I can put it in terms of three Ss: we need to streamline, speed-up and simplify. That's the take-out.

### **Presenter:**

You're talking about trade skills?

### **Willox:**

Yeah, education, training and skills development; the way we trade; the way we connect with the rest of the world. This will be a theme that goes right through these three days.

### **Presenter:**

You just said there's been some agreement you picked up on this morning in the session. Does that go to permanent migrants here with skills and how their qualifications are recognised, but also people moving interstate with their qualifications?

### **Willox:**

Yeah, I think there's recognition, David, that the system is glued up, it's jammed up. People who have qualifications that are not recognised, be that migrants or be that people trying to transfer between states or even people trying to transfer between occupations – there's a big problem there. So this is called the recognition of prior learning and there's agreement there that we have to work through that pretty quickly to take advantage of people we have here. We have millions of people here who are doing jobs which are way below their skill level.

**Presenter:**

Does that mean lowering our skills standard at all? That's often been the fear around this?

**Willox:**

No, not at all. It's about recognising what people have and properly working it through. And there's also been understandings, I think, today that we need better connections between employers, business and the education sector and the vocational education sector. They need to be tied up better. Things like careers counselling. I mean, you know, the Treasurer expressed surprise at the end of that session that careers counselling got such a big run because it just does people's heads in that kids are emerging from school, not getting clear direction around the skills of the future.

**Presenter:**

And around the table, we've got Daniel Mookhey, the New South Wales Treasurer, who we just spoke to a moment ago. So many of the issues at this summit actually relate directly to the states. Are you satisfied with the level of state representation? And are they actually, you know, Daniel Mookhey on behalf of the states, is he coming forward with a willingness to actually change things to, you know, reduce duplication?

**Willox:**

I would never say Daniel Mookhey's sort of a backward person when it comes to coming forward. He's been quite on the front foot. He's been very, very cooperative and has explained the State's role and has been open to change and going back to his state counterparts. I think another big theme, I said three Ss before, the fourth will be the states and this will come up about regulation and compliance and those sort of issues. So I'm pretty confident from this morning's session that we'll get some clear movements on some key directions for the country which in the end, this is about productivity. This is what the conversation has come back to in many ways.

**Presenter:**

So they're the easy wins that you're forecasting. Tax seems to be the more difficult part. I know you're not getting to that until day three, but I'm very keen for your thoughts. The Productivity Commission, as part of the lead-up to this summit, put forward this idea. Quite a big change, reducing the company tax rate down to 20% for most businesses, but then this cash flow tax on top of it with big investment incentives as well. I think you have said, you know, it has some attractions, but on the whole is a flawed approach. But is there something that can be salvaged there, do you think?

**Willox:**

Well, we haven't had the conversation yet, but I think there's understandings that have

emerged, that will emerge, that the tax system is an inhibitor to growth and productivity. And that's the tax system at many levels. So, as I've made the point, if you're a national business in Australia, you're paying over 100 different taxes, charges and levies. We had a conversation this morning about training and fringe benefits tax came up there. You might hear more about that in time to come. So, look, tax has many different foundations and many different aspects to it. But again, it's about simplicity and speed and simplification.

**Presenter:**

And just to finish off, we've got about 30 seconds. Can you give us an idea of how it's working in the room? Like, we don't have cameras in there. Is it a free-flowing discussion? Does the Treasurer come up with points for people to respond to?

**Willox:**

What is happening, it's not a great mystery, is that there are a few people who are brought in to initiate conversations and we've had very good thought starters, thought leaders. And then the conversation flows. There are designated people who, from earlier conversations, have expressed a particular interest in an area. They speak and then the conversation opens up and the Treasurer is basically the field marshal directing traffic and then at the end he's doing a pretty good job at summing up.

**Presenter:**

Innes Willox, thank you.