



**Interview, Sky News: Wednesday 11 June, 2025**

**Ai Group Chief Executive Innes Willox speaks to Laura Jayes on the Prime Minister's announcement of a productivity round table and artificial intelligence**

**Presenter:** I look at this with the positives in mind thinking, well, he's got a bigger majority of Parliament, but I think Anthony Albanese can be risky, and he may just take that, you know, election cycle, opportunism out of this, and we may be able to get something done. Do you agree with me, or am I being naive?

**Willox:** No, I hope not, Laura, it's good to see you again. We take this as a positive. The thing is we have economic stagnation and the reality that we're dealing with declining living standards. So, you know, we have been talking about the productivity problem for a long time now. It's surely come to the fore since COVID, we've got COVID level and pre-COVID level productivity levels in Australia. So, we're not growing, we're not advancing, and all the rest of the world is moving forward. We're standing still, which means we're going backwards. So, we need to fix the productivity problem we have. We're really pleased that the government is looking to, at least, have some serious conversations around this. Productivity improvement can come in many forms across many different policy areas. From the business community's point, we need to talk about those to get our businesses and our private sector moving again and to get investment moving again. So, we're going in with open eyes, but also with great hope that we will be able to get some real policy improvement. This will take a long time to turn around, but this is a really positive step and a good time to start.

**Presenter:** What would be the number one thing that you'd want to achieve?

**Willox:** Well, firstly, we've got to recognise we've got a problem, and the Prime Minister was excellent yesterday in recognising that the government's role was to help get the private sector moving, and I could sit here for an hour and tell you a lot of ways how it hasn't done that so far, but at least the Prime Minister has recognised and the government recognised they have to do that – that's positive. So, we have to recognise it's a problem. The disappointing thing was we had the union movement come out last night and basically say, well, there's nothing to see here and that is all about cutting jobs and cutting wages and it demonstrably isn't.

**Presenter:** What do we want to do?

**Willox:** Well, some conversations around deregulation and around tax. We're not competitive in tax and around skills, education, and training, and the use of technology, which is impacting all our workplaces at the moment. We need to look at the whole range of other things, but they're the first places to start to have a conversation about economy-wide, productivity improvement.

**Presenter:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think the way we're thinking about AI at the moment is antiquated, and this might be where the unions come in as well. There's always this fear with the advent of AI, I would say, that jobs are going to be lost. Of course they are. I mean, I wouldn't go with the anthropic bosses, perhaps worst case now, 20% of white collar jobs in the next, you know, five to 10 years, but the reality is that if we don't embrace it, it's going to be forced upon us anyway. So I know your exercised about this. This was not a feature at all of the election campaign, which is so frustrating. How does the government need to think about, and embrace AI? Because like much of the rest of the world, Australia is so far behind, this is really a modern-day arms race between the US and China at the moment. So how do we embrace it? What's the best thing we can do to prepare the workforce for it?

**Willox:** Well, the first thing is to recognise, Laura, as you were saying, that AI is upon us, it's not going to stop coming. It's with us now. In this we are adapting artificial intelligence in different ways. Every time, they're doing it in the back office on the factory floor, in their sales and marketing, you know, all sorts of different ways that it's used in. There will, of course, be issues around jobs, retraining – reskilling is going to be an important part of it. And one of the frustrating conversations to have with unions at the moment is to hear them say yes, of course there'll be AI, but everyone's job will stay the same. Unfortunately, it won't, but we have to prepare people for that, and that will be a massive exercise in reskilling and retraining, and that's where this productivity summit is going to be so important. This, in many ways, is daunting, but it's also exciting. If you don't stop looking at it now and not just standing back admiring the issue, but actually taking steps to get ourselves educated, to make sure that the workforce is skilled and ready for it, management is skilled and ready for it, and it's utilising it properly, then we are going to get left behind and get further behind – productivity will continue to decline. It's not just our productivity against ourselves, it's our productivity against others, and that's what we need to really focus on here. And this summit, I mean we all remember 2022 and how that worked out, not well. Employers have heard the Prime Minister's words, about the government's role. Businesses are thankful for those and will be holding the Prime Minister to account for those words.