

Axe state governments, says Freelancer's Barrie

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State governments should be abolished to encourage innovation, build cities that attract talent and allow the federal government to modernise education, says outspoken tech CEO Matt Barrie.

Mr Barrie, chief executive of the ASX-listed tech company Freelancer, said it was difficult to encourage innovation due to the "regulatory duplication, confusion, duplication of responsibilities, or mindless populism and absurd policies of state governments".

"I think we should abolish the [state] governments," Mr Barrie told the Knowledge Nation summit on Thursday.

He said trying to get the bureaucracies of the state governments to agree to modernise a curriculum was "an exercise of futility or sado-machism".

"I genuinely believe the federal government wants to fix the K-12 education but it can't," he said.

Mr Barrie said state governments' revenue raising methods, such as pay-roll tax and fines for not wearing bike helmets, posed problems for start-ups.

"If I hire more people I should get a discount, not a tax.

"If you're trying to attract young people to Australia, it's a bit hard when #nannystate is trending on Twitter," Mr Barrie said, referring to the fines for not wearing bike helmets.

Mr Barrie said the NSW government's "addiction" to the gambling tax has led to lockout laws, which makes it difficult to attract a young, technology-oriented workforce.

"It's a bit hard to build a technology district when every second 20-year-old wants to leave because they turned the

place into a bumpkin country town."

Mr Barrie also said it was difficult to attract tech executives from the Silicon Valley because of the perception Australia is "backwater".

When he tried to recruit a vice-president through a high profile Silicon Valley recruiter, the conversation lasted less than a minute, he said.

"He said, 'Look, as much as we would like to help you the answer is no. We just turned down another very well known billion dollar Australian company for a very similar role. Nobody from the Silicon Valley will come to Australia for any role. We used to think maybe someone would move for the lifestyle thing but nobody would do that any more.'"

Mr Barrie said to get more home grown talent technology should be taught as a main subject at schools.

He said the shortage of technology subjects at school was creating an imbalance in the workforce. He said the company looks to hire as many good software engineers as possible but there were not enough applicants.



Matt Barrie says recruitment is hard.