

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: The political uncertainty surrounding Tony Abbott's future is troubling big business in Australia.

One of a nation's leading industry organisations - the Australian Industry Group - is today releasing its annual Business Prospects Survey of the Australian CEOs.

It finds bosses are worried about an economy that's gone adrift, with a majority expecting conditions to deteriorate or at best show no improvement in 2015.

Amid that pessimistic outlook, there's concern the ongoing speculation about the Prime Minister needs to be resolved quickly.

The chief executive of the Ai Group Innes Willox is speaking to Nick Grimm.

INNES WILLOX: Well I wouldn't want to comment on internal machinations within the Government or what might be going on within Government at the moment. And you hear a whole lot being said by backbenchers and others at the moment and I don't want to really add to that.

But business is concerned about the overall economic environment at the moment and obviously government as a whole has a role to play in establishing the right economic environment. And there's concern that the economy is slowing as we go into the real business part of 2015.

So without wanting to sort of fall back onto a cliché, what the business people want more generally is a stable environment and an environment where good policy can be put forward.

And that's what business is looking for. We don't want to get into who says what to whom or what's happening in terms of speculation, but overall certainty is very crucial to businesses as they try to get themselves geared up for 2015.

NICK GRIMM: And of course business hates uncertainty. Given that CEOs do seem to be a little edgy about the leadership speculation happening right now, how quickly does this mean to be resolved?

INNES WILLOX: Well certainty is important, so as soon as we can move forward the better. There was obviously a result in the Queensland election where the electorate was split about directions for the state going forward and as soon as we get a result out of that the better. Then we can all move forward with whomever is in government and the business community then can advocate good and sensible policies in the time ahead. Business will work with whoever is in government, that's always true, we have to. But if uncertainty can be resolved as quickly as possible, the better.

NICK GRIMM: Let's talk about your survey of 352 CEOs from across manufacturing, construction, services and mining. Now political upheaval aside, what's the biggest thing keeping CEOs awake at night right now?

INNES WILLOX: Well obviously the economy is travelling very slowly across big parts of the economy at the moment. So the big wariness among CEOs as we go into 2015 is an absolute lack of demand to cross some parts of the economy. And that's really because we have very low confidence, both across the business sector and across consumers. So lack of demand is driving concern among businesses, that we're going to have a slower year, a further deterioration in general business conditions across 2015. That's a great concern for business. We need to get the spark. The concern among business community is that we're going to have another year of drift and that's of great concern.

The upside is that the dollar being at a lower level, that's obviously going to boost exports and CEOs are generally saying that in this environment they're not going to be looking to cut jobs, rather they're going to be looking to try to grow their businesses out of what is the general economic slowdown at the moment. So that's a positive.

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: That was Innes Willox there from the Australian Industry Group, talking to Nick Grimm.