



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
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E&OE

Subjects: poker machine reforms, asylum seekers, anniversary of ACT bushfires.

JORIAN GARDNER: Labor's politically damaging row with the clubs industry may be over, after independent MP Andrew Wilkie said he would be willing to allow a delay in the introduction of mandatory pre-commitment pokie machine technology until well after the next election. I wonder what Dr Craig Emerson, who joins us on the program every week, thinks about that – it's his government. Good morning, Dr Emerson.

CRAIG EMERSON: Good morning. Happy New Year, and happy Year of the Dragon.

GARDNER: Happy Year of the Dragon to you, too. And welcome to the program for the first time in 2012, great to have you here. Dr Emerson, what is going on? Now that you don't need Andrew Wilkie to back up your government, to keep you in power, you're backpedalling on the promises you made.

EMERSON: We've always said that we favoured a trial, and the positive indications coming out of Clubs ACT, in your home territory, are that they are going to be interested in implementing a trial, so that's good. The position of Clubs Australia has been, as you know, 'won't work, will hurt.' And our view has been 'let's test this.' This is something that has been advocated by

the Productivity Commission and that's what we are seeking to do in the discussions with Mr Wilkie and also with Clubs ACT.

GARDNER: With all due respect Minister, Clubs ACT has been saying this for some time. They've been saying 'let's do a trial here in the ACT.' But it wasn't until Peter Slipper went into the Speaker's chair and you had a little bit more breathing space that everybody started to come to the party on this issue. Why did it take so long? Were you all very, very scared of Mr Wilkie, were you?

EMERSON: Unfortunately what you've just said is false. And...

GARDNER: Which bit was false?

EMERSON: Well, I'm about to tell you. If you look at the transcripts that I have – and I will send them to you – I've been, as other ministers have been, saying that if Clubs Australia is so confident that it won't work then they should be relaxed about a trial. And we've been asking for a trial and it's Clubs ACT who appear to be coming to the party to implement the very trial that we have been calling for. Not since Mr Slipper became the Speaker, as you've asserted, which is untrue, but well before that, well before that. So let's start the new year on the basis of covering the facts and not covering assertions based on your political analysis.

GARDNER: Well, it's not just my political analysis. We have been talking about this here in the ACT for quite some time. I just wondered why it took so long to get to there – that's all, Minister.

EMERSON: The answer to that is that we've been seeking the cooperation of Clubs Australia. Clubs Australia has, to their credit, said that they are interested in a trial. And we are moving to implement that trial through discussions with Clubs ACT. We're not talking about an Australia-wide trial, because that defeats the purpose of a trial. That is the fact. I am covering the situation that actually existed, rather than the one, frankly, that you sought to misrepresent.

GARDNER: Gee, you're having a go at me all ready. It's 2012 Craig! Come on, give us a break, will you?

EMERSON: I'm just interested in the facts. But anyway, I will add this: they say it's the Year of the Dragon. I think with Des Hasler at the helm, it may be the Year of the Bulldogs? And with Jake White in the coaching job, it could be the Year of the Brumbies.

GARDNER: Dear me, let's hope it will be the Year of the Raiders. I don't think there's a Chinese new year for that one. Let's move on. Refugees deemed a security threat should be able to live in the community on control orders or wearing an electronic labour monitor...uh, electronic monitoring devices. That's what a senior Labor MP has urged. Daryl Melham, the head of the parliamentary committee on detention, said there must be a solution other than being condemned to life in a detention centre. Your thoughts on that?

EMERSON: Well, there is a real issue here of security. ASIO doesn't make these judgements for fun, they make them in the interests of national security. Daryl is certainly entitled to his view, he's a very decent human being and he is Chair of that committee. But it's not as if ASIO just makes a judgement at random, that various people are a security threat. This is a very serious issue...

GARDNER: Indeed.

EMERSON: ...and they have the responsibility of protecting national security.

GARDNER: Just before I let you go Dr Emerson, today is the ninth anniversary of the terrible bushfires which struck Canberra. I'm sure you're aware, nine years ago...

EMERSON: I do, I remember.

GARDNER: I had the Chief Minister on the program earlier today. What I wanted to know was what we were going to do next year, for the tenth anniversary. Maybe we should kick some ideas around up there on the big hill about some ideas for some funding for a major memorial for the ten year anniversary next year.

EMERSON: Well, I obviously haven't given that much thought about, you know, money from the hill so to speak. But our children

arrived in Canberra on that very dark day – and it literally was dark, there was so much smoke in the air, and they were telling us it was as if it was night time – anyway, that’s the least of it. The most of it was that terrible loss of life. You know, some of the suburbs in the south were absolutely devastated. You might recall that one house would be taken out, and the next house unaffected, then the third house would be wiped out. But there was a terrible and tragic loss of life and certainly we do need to commemorate not only the victims of that, but the fantastic work of the emergency services personnel...

GARDNER: Indeed.

EMERSON: ...who did so much to minimise that loss of life.

GARDNER: They did, they did a great job. Look Dr Emerson, you’ve got me in the chair for the next couple of weeks, so you can give me a hard time for the next couple of weeks...

EMERSON: I’m sure you’ll give me a hard time, too.

GARDNER: ...before your best mate Parto returns in a couple of weeks.

EMERSON: All the best.

GARDNER: Thanks very much. Dr Craig Emerson, the Federal Trade Minister.

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