



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
ABC NEWS RADIO
23 JANUARY 2012

E&OE

Subjects: Poker machine reform, Craig Thomson.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, good morning.

CRAIG EMERSON: Good morning, Marius.

BENSON: Craig Thomson – the other Craig – says it’s a big win for New South Wales Labor MPs, the dropping of the Wilkie plan, a win for good evidence-based policy making. Is he right?

EMERSON: In fact, it’s a product of the numbers in the House of Representatives. There just wasn’t the support. You need majority support in the chamber in order for legislation to pass. That support wasn’t there.

BENSON: The Prime Minister did give the numbers as the reason, but now Craig Thomson has put an article in the Daily Telegraph newspaper saying Labor backbenchers were arguing strongly for the Prime Minister to drop this plan. And the dropping of the plan, it’s a win for them.

EMERSON: Oh well, Craig is entitled to his view, and I'm sure he does have a view on poker machines and reform of the issue of problem gambling. The fact is, we are in a position where we couldn't pass this through the House of Representatives and the choice facing the Prime Minister and the Labor Government was whether to do nothing or to do something. And we are committed to doing something on problem gambling. It's a huge issue in Australia, and that's why we've gone down this particular path. Our alternative prime minister, Mr Abbott, is committed to doing nothing. And so that's the real choice: between doing something on problem gambling. Including on, I might say Marius, banning the featuring of moving odds during sporting events, which I think is something that people are very concerned about. We're proceeding with that. This is an important reform and it's certainly better than doing nothing, which is Mr Abbott's plan.

BENSON: Perhaps better than doing nothing, but nothing like what the Prime Minister agreed to in writing with Andrew Wilkie. Tony Abbott says if you get a written agreement from the Prime Minister and that can't be trusted, she can't be trusted at all. Is that a fair assessment? That the Prime Minister just can't be trusted?

EMERSON: I don't think we'll be taking advice from Mr Abbott on such matters when he, in fact, rang his own Moderates in the shadow cabinet to assure them that there would be a conscience vote on same-sex marriage. Only when they turned up to the relevant shadow cabinet meeting, the last meeting of last year, to tell them that he'd

changed his position, and the Moderates are furious. So I don't think we need any lectures from Mr Abbott.

BENSON: Well, put Tony Abbott aside. Can the Prime Minister be trusted? Here was a written guarantee, a contract effectively, with Andrew Wilkie. Nothing about if the numbers are there or if we can do it. We'll do it, we'll deliver, and she hasn't delivered. She's abandoned it, she's reneged on a written agreement.

EMERSON: I think people understand that if there isn't majority support, if you don't get sufficient votes on a piece of legislation, then it cannot pass.

BENSON: But that was known, that was understood by the Prime Minister when she was doing the agreement with Andrew Wilkie after the last election. She knew she was in minority, she knew the constraints, but she promised the world.

EMERSON: Well, she promised to proceed with reform of a very big issue and that is problem gambling in Australia and that needs the majority support of the House of Representatives. Now, the Prime Minister sought that majority support. It is simply not there. It is physically impossible, and I think your listeners fully agree and appreciate this point, it is physically impossible to pass legislation if you do not have sufficient numbers in the House of Representatives. It's like saying, Marius, it's like saying that if we put items in a budget and if they are blocked by Mr Abbott, which is far more likely than not, then we've broken a promise.

BENSON: Okay, let me just take you back to Craig Thomson. Now, are you addressing a fundraiser with Craig Thomson tonight?

EMERSON: No, I'm not.

BENSON: That was reported in the Daily Telegraph some days ago. That's wrong? There was a \$3000 a head fundraiser at the Aria restaurant in Sydney. Not the case?

EMERSON: Well, I'm just indicating that I'm not doing a fundraising function for Craig Thomson tonight.

BENSON: So that's all wrong, as described?

EMERSON: Well I either am doing a fundraising function for Craig Thomson tonight, or I am not doing a fundraising function for Craig Thomson tonight. I think I would know. The answer is that I'm not doing a function for Craig Thomson tonight. That doesn't rule out the possibility of me doing a function for Craig Thomson at some time in the future.

BENSON: Do you have one scheduled?

EMERSON: No, I don't.

BENSON: Do you have confidence in Craig Thomson?

EMERSON: Well, this is my position on Craig Thomson; that he, like every other person in Australia, is entitled to the presumption of innocence. Now, there is an investigation. Mr Abbott says that therefore Mr Thomson should not be a member of parliament. Three members of the Coalition were investigated for rorting – allegedly rorting – printing entitlements before the last election. And they are, those who survived the election, are still in the parliament. I have no problem with that. I have no problem with the legal processes proceeding. I have no problem with investigative processes proceeding. What I have a problem with is Mr Abbott's hypocrisy, where they had three Coalition MPs who were under police investigation. He never went to Mr Howard and said those Coalition MPs should quit parliament. Nor, should I say, in respect of a senator, who was not only under police investigation but charged. And he didn't say that that senator should quit parliament. The only difference is because it's a Labor MP, not a Liberal or National Party MP.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thank you very much.

EMERSON: Thank you. Thanks, Marius.

ENDS