



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
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DAVID LIPSON: First to our political panel, Trade Minister Craig Emerson and the Shadow Small Business Minister, Bruce Billson. Good morning to both of you gentlemen. I'll start with you, Craig Emerson, and a response to the comments there from Scott Morrison. Do you believe that these talks on the offshore processing of asylum seekers will continue?

CRAIG EMERSON: Well, it's clear that the Coalition leaking of the letters is an indication that they don't want to stop the boats. That's the truth of the matter. They want boats to keep coming because they think that in boats, there are votes. More boats, more votes. More people dying at sea, more votes for the Coalition. That's the crude, cold, callous calculation that Mr Abbott has done. That is, it is in his political interest for more boats to arrive. That's why they leaked the letters. And for Mr Morrison now to say that their primary concern about Malaysia is about compassion, that we're being too harsh on asylum seekers, but they, the Coalition, would take boats, tow them out to sea, risk the lives of Navy personnel and obviously risk more asylum seekers drowning at sea is just absurd. And I think that your viewers would understand that Mr Abbott cares not a tinker's cuss about the welfare of asylum seekers. The only welfare he is concerned about is his own.

LIPSON: So politics aside, what's the Government's next step? Or are you just hoping to ride this out?

EMERSON: Well, we need legislation in order to deal with the High Court ruling. And the legislation that we have offered would provide for Nauru. We are saying that legislation...

LIPSON: But it won't get through unless it gets the Opposition's support.

EMERSON: Well, this is the point, isn't it? Does it not fall upon the Opposition to also behave in the national interest? There were plenty of pieces of national security legislation when the Howard Government was in office that were put to the Labor caucus – some of which were quite difficult for us. We didn't say 'here's an opportunity to jam Mr Howard on national security issues.' We actually considered the national interest. We suggested some constructive amendments and we passed them. And it is an obligation on all parliamentarians, and especially opposition leaders, to work in the national interest on matters, such as people losing their lives at sea. And in this case, Naval personnel risking their lives. Mr Abbott, and I see Mr Morrison, has said 'this is not a new policy.' Well, has Paul Kelly misreported Mr Abbott? Has The Australian newspaper misreported Mr Abbott? What Mr Abbott wanted to do in the New Year was to show how tough he was and how they were going to tow all boats back to sea. I have heard Mr Morrison make similar comments and then a few sentences later add 'of course where it's safe to do so.' Today the Indonesian authorities have slammed it. The former head of the Navy has slammed it. The United Nations High Commission for refugees has slammed it. Why? Because it's reckless, irresponsible and callous.

LIPSON: Bruce Billson, Toyota has announced it's sacking 350 workers in your home state there in Victoria. That's one in ten of its workforce. Yet your policy is to cut \$500 million out of car subsidies. That's going to mean more job losses, isn't it?

BRUCE BILLSON: No, I mean our thoughts are with the people that are facing a difficult economic climate trying to find a job. To those Toyota workers, our thoughts are with them. And our commitment is very much not only supporting them, but the entire

manufacturing sector. Our position is to have \$1 billion on the table for automotive transformation plans, a co-investment with the car industry. Now, that's in keeping with the level of investment that was made during the Howard Government years. And it's worth reminding your viewers, David, that in the last years of the Howard Government there was more than 150,000 vehicles produced by Toyota under those policy settings. It's now a little under 60,000. We think we should return to the policy settings of the Howard era. And there's a need for consistency as well. I mean, one of the issues the car industry is pointing to is a need to take a longer term view. They are sick of these flip-flop cuts that the Government announces shortly after a big fanfare of some new plan that doesn't have a shelf life beyond 12 months. They want certainty and consistency. And they also want an economic climate that is competitive. And that's where the carbon tax is such a great concern for the car industry. That's going to make manufacturing in Australia more difficult. For the component industry that supplies the assemblers, it's going to be more difficult for them. You know the car industry wants predictability and certainty. It wants a government that partners with them rather than looks for a media opportunity when some big announcement is made and then punishes them with a cut in funding down the track. We saw that with LPG. You know, the car industry invests in direct injection LPG for vehicles. What's the Government do? It takes away the LPG subsidy. It then puts up a tax on LPG. This is the kind of lack of certainty that the car industry is concerned about. And of course, then there's the carbon tax that's going to punish every stage of the manufacturing process.

LIPSON: You say that you want to return to the Howard-era policies. One of the policies was to phase out subsidies for the car industry by 2015. Are you including that in what you're saying about Howard-era policies?

BILLSON: The Industry Minister, Kim Carr, has been out on a rant this morning – similar to Craig Emerson's rant just before – claiming that we will end all subsidies by 2015. That's not the position at all. There's been no announcement of that kind whatsoever. That's a Labor lie. What we're saying is in terms of calibrating the policy settings, the \$1 billion that is of the

order of what was in place in the car industry is the way to go. And we'll announce further industry policy nearer to the election that takes us beyond that window. But certainty and predictability, not flip-flopping, is what the car industry needs.

LIPSON: Craig Emerson, the money that the car industry does get is so much more than many other industries that are struggling. For example: retail; tourism; even other manufacturing companies and industries. We've been told for so many years that these car subsidies are to jump start the industry, but it doesn't seem like that's happening. How much longer do we keep pumping money into this industry? Is it as long as it needs to be done?

EMERSON: Well David, I don't think you can have it both ways in this debate. That the Government is putting too much money into the car industry, but there's terrible job losses are occurring and what's the Government going to do about it? What we have is a very substantial amount of money and support, through co-investment going to the car industry. I might say that the Toyota workers and workers in the car industry don't need Mr Abbott's thoughts being with them. They need policy being with them, and Mr Abbott is going to cut – and this has been confirmed – Mr Abbott is going to cut \$500 million, that's half a billion dollars, out of industry support for the car industry. You didn't hear Mr Billson mention the \$500 million cuts that Mr Abbott has reaffirmed after their Shadow Industry Minister, Sophie Mirabella, said she would fight to ensure those cuts did not proceed. And Mr Abbott again got a good story up and said 'no, those cuts are proceeding.' So let's not again have this fake empathy for the car industry when the Coalition policy is to cut. And on the issue of returning to Mr Howard's policy that's what Mr Billson just said. Now Mr Reith is in the media saying Mr Howard's policy was to phase out car industry support by 2015. You think that Mr Reith would know. So far from it being the Labor Party saying this – we don't associate ourselves with Mr Reith. He was a cabinet minister and he ought to know. And Bruce Billson was not.

BILLSON: I mean, David, you can't let that fly. I mean the Industry Minister has been out there making ridiculous claims about the cut. The parallel with the Howard Government era is the quantum of the funding. And also look at how the industry is

going under those policy settings. So Craig goes off and sort of runs on a complete nonsensical line that's a Labor line. We have no commitment, no announcement has been made whatsoever to cut assistance to the car industry as the....

LIPSON: We're really short on time. I do need to get another couple of questions in. Craig Emerson, the Opposition seems to be setting the groundwork for a vote of no confidence in the Government on the basis of Craig Thomson and the investigations against him. Last night a fundraiser for him, as I understand it, in which you were the headline speaker or due to be the headline speaker, was cancelled. Why is that?

EMERSON: Well, I'm not sure actually. That was the decision that Craig made. We're looking at possible future dates. But in respect of your initial question, David, that obviously now Mr Abbott has made this calculation that anyone who is under police investigation must resign from the parliament. Well, Ross Vasta, I'm sorry you need to resign from the parliament. He is the Member for Bonner. And then of course we've got Andrew Laming, the Member for Bowman. Both were under police investigation – both were cleared, by the way. But Mr Abbott is not interested in the presumption of innocence. He's got a senator who was not only investigated, but charged. Now she, according to Mr Abbott's standard, must resign from the parliament. I don't think we'll be seeing the announcement from any of those. Hypocrisy, thy name is Liberal.

LIPSON: Just a very quick comment from you Bruce Billson to wrap up our panel, we're out of time.

BILLSON: You know, three years for an investigation by Fair Work into Craig Thomson. What a curious delay that's been. And you've seen the Health Services Union make their own conclusion that Craig Thomson's got to go. But Craig Thomson's holding this government together. He's the very weak and dishevelled thread that holds up Julia Gillard's prime ministership. And it's an issue of trust. I mean poor old Andrew Wilkie got done over. You know, and now you've got Tony Windsor coming out today and saying 'Andrew didn't work hard enough to get his pokie reforms up.' But at the same time, we've seen government ministers going around white-anting the very reforms. Now this is why Julia Gillard is the conniver-in-chief if

Australian politics and why there is no trust in this dishevelled, tainted government. Craig Thomson is the epitaph of that. Why it takes three years to have an investigation...

EMERSON: That's a serious allegation, that's a serious allegation...

BILLSON: We know the Prime Minister's rung Fair Work...

LIPSON: All right, I've got to wrap it up. Bruce Billson, Craig Emerson, thank you very much...

EMERSON: So much for the presumption of innocence.

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