



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND
THE SERVICE ECONOMY
MINISTER FOR COMPETITION POLICY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE ON
DEREGULATION

Transcript
Radio 2UE with John Stanley and Sandy Aloisi
Monday 15 February, 2010

E&OE

Subjects: Grocery Choice Website

STANLEY: Yes now someone I've known for more than 25 years wants to take me to task for something that I said last week and we were talking about competition in the grocery sector. This goes back to last year when the Choice organisation was going to bring in its grocery choice website and at the at the very last minute, I think three or four days before it was due to go online, it was kyboshed by the Consumer Affairs Minister, Craig Emerson. He had taken over from the previous Minister and he, he decided having had meetings with the supermarkets that they would not be able to put all their prices online. We now have Woolworths with some 5000 items online and Craig Emerson wanted to reply to some of that he's on line with me now, good morning to you Minister.

EMERSON: Good morning John, and I'd never take you to task.

STANLEY: Well, you are, aren't you? You...

EMERSON: I just wanted to explain the situation. The background again on the grocery choice website is that they were to go live in about three or four days time from when I made the decision, and that was seven months ago. Only now have Woolworths been able to put up a website. So my concern wasn't about having my arm twisted from Coles and Woolworths but about the accuracy of the information that would have been posted back then. Your listeners, John, would have been entitled to ring in everyday and

say: "Hey, what's this Emerson doing? These prices aren't accurate" and they wouldn't have been accurate. Now that's no disrespect to Choice. They were doing their best but I was very concerned about the unavailability at that time of information, and prices that would be reliable and timely.

STANLEY: The impression we had was that Craig, Chris Bowen, who was your predecessor, he was quite gung-ho about this. You got in and you weren't as, you weren't as keen so they were able to get you to put the kybosh on it.

EMERSON: Yeah, that's not right in the sense that it wasn't about pressure - it was about concern that your listeners would say: "Well, look I've been into the supermarket at Burwood and you know this thing, this website, says that at that supermarket T-bone steak would be \$14.99 a kilo and it's \$16.99 a kilo. What's the government doing? They're misrepresenting, they're misleading us.

STANLEY: Now they've got the 5000 items on there and Coles could well follow suit. I think Aldi has got theirs online. Is it possible that this could be revived down the track?

EMERSON: Well, what I'd like to see is other supermarkets, as you say, following the lead that Woolworths has now set. The technology now is available. I don't think Woolworths are claiming that their site is foolproof at this stage but it'll improve over time and I think the force of competition at the very least, John, will drive the others to do this.

STANLEY: But is there a chance of the grocery choice website coming back? It was a broken promise wasn't it?

EMERSON: In a sense it'll be constructed by the existence of websites for at least Coles and Woolworths. Aldi, as you say, have got a more limited range but you know they do a good job and...

STANLEY: But you're not looking at drawing it together in a government website?

EMERSON: Well let's just see how these develop. Just as back then - when I said I don't think we can proceed with Grocery Choice - I don't want to say now, let's revive an - or set up - an industry website without knowing that the information will be timely and accurate.

STANLEY: But it was a broken promise wasn't it? It's one that will be highlighted in the election campaign.

EMERSON: Well, in fact what happened is that we'd said that we'd work with the ACCC and we did but that wasn't satisfactory and that's why

we went to plan b with grocery choice that's with the organisation...

STANLEY: All right well look down the track we might be able to get you in here and we can chat about some of these issues and maybe our listeners can deal with you as well.

EMERSON: Yeah and I'd like the opportunity too to talk about more competition in the grocery retailing which is what's happening right now.

STANLEY: Thank you.

EMERSON: All right thanks, John.

STANLEY: Craig Emerson, the Consumer Affairs Minister and we might do that down the track.