



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
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E&OE

Subjects: LNP leadership; climate change science; flood levy; Royal Wedding.

MADONNA KING:

And now let's go to Canberra.

George Brandis and Craig Emerson, good morning.

GEORGE BRANDIS:

Good morning.

CRAIG EMERSON:

Hello Madonna, and to you, too, George.

BRANDIS:

How are you Craig?

EMERSON:

I'm pretty well.

KING:

Did you enjoy that?

EMERSON:

Well, we were just having a bit of a discussion off-air. I think politicians are equipped to do some things but not very well equipped to comment on what are the most effective

communication strategies, particularly when it comes to ads.

KING: So what you're saying is you're ... are you saying you're not clever, witty or funny?

EMERSON: We are incredibly clever, witty and funny and I think I can speak on behalf of both myself and George. But in fact the ads that go to air during election campaigns are not normally the ones that George or I would select.

KING: Okay, well let's just look at this leadership issue briefly, and I do want to go onto some other issues. But Senator George Brandis, you are a Queensland LNP member. You're a senior member in Queensland. How do you see this unfolding?

BRANDIS: Well I think Campbell Newman presents a very formidable challenge to the Labor Party because the Bligh Government, let's face it - or the Labor Government I should say - has been in power with the brief interruption of the Borbidge Government for 22 years and it's not getting any better.

And I think the way a typical undecided swinging voter would assess this is they will look at the Bligh Government and the operation that Anna Bligh runs. And they'll look at Campbell Newman's administration and the operation he has been running over the last few years with the Brisbane City Council. And they'll simply ask themselves the question, 'who runs a better government?' It's a no-brainer.

KING: Yeah, but that's not the question I was asking, though, given that the person who is about to leave the party isn't endorsed, doesn't have a seat. And, on the party room vote last night, doesn't have the support of a big chunk of the sitting LNP members. Do you think Campbell Newman can pull it off?

BRANDIS: I do think he can. I mean I think the fact that he hasn't been endorsed is, with all due respect to the pre-selectors, a formality...

KING: Yes, sure, okay.

BRANDIS: And conceivably won't be endorsed. And you know, he didn't have a seat in the council when he ran for Lord Mayor.

KING: No, but it's different because he was the popularly- elected person. The party wanted him. In this case there was also a leader who wanted that job.

BRANDIS: Yeah, but notwithstanding that, I think that, you know, it's been a bruising time. There's no doubt about that. These things always are. Ask Kevin Rudd. But ultimately he, Campbell Newman, has emerged as the leader in these very unusual circumstances and, I think, inevitably and necessarily everyone will get right behind him and they should.

KING: Craig Emerson, one question that is being raised is if Campbell Newman loses his seat - doesn't win the seat, sorry, he doesn't have it to lose - but doesn't win that seat, who will lead the LNP? Is that what the ALP will target?

EMERSON: I haven't spoken to my colleagues in Queensland, but from where I sit in Canberra it all looks bizarre. And the reason I say that, Madonna, is whose policies are going to be released on behalf of the LNP and by whom? As far as I know, Jeff Seeney is the leader of the LNP: at least he has a seat in Parliament. Is he going to be releasing policies?

Is Campbell Newman outside the Parliament going to be releasing policies on the basis that if he is elected into Ashgrove these are the policies that will apply?

KING: All right, there - you've raised ...

EMERSON: Or will Mr McIver be releasing policies on behalf of the LNP?

BRANDIS: Well, Craig, look, look...

KING: Well, George Brandis, can I ask because I think two of those questions are very legitimate. Who is the person who has the final say on policy? Is it Campbell Newman or Jeff Seeney? And who do you see as the leader of the LNP once Campbell Newman is endorsed but still hasn't won the seat?

BRANDIS: Well, in relation to the second question, I think clearly the leader of the party for the purposes of the state election is Campbell Newman. I mean this is going to be a Campbell Newman versus Anna Bligh election. And the question will be who runs the better government: Campbell Newman or Anna Bligh?

And, as I said before, I think the answer to that question is a no-brainer. As to who develops

policy, well there is a process within the Liberal National Party whereby policies are developed through the various policy committees of the party organisation, and through the state of the relevant spokesman. And the leader has an oversight role in relation to all of that.

KING: Okay, so just let me ask this question George Brandis, then: if Campbell Newman doesn't win the seat of Ashgrove and the LNP win the election, who is the Premier?

BRANDIS: Look, I'm not going to - I'm sorry - go down that path ...

EMERSON: It's a fair question.

KING: No, no, but don't you think voters have a right to know - voters have a right to know?

BRANDIS: Look, this is an election between - going to be an election between - Campbell Newman and Anna Bligh in which people will be asked who is more capable of running a good government.

KING: Yeah, but several people have asked that question. I'd like you as part of that leadership team to give it a go in answering it. Who, if ... it's got a 7 per cent Labor margin ... if Campbell Newman wins that seat, he's the leader. If the LNP wins he's the Premier. If he does not win that seat and the LNP win, who is the Premier of Queensland?

BRANDIS: Well, look I'm not going to play hypothetical games, Madonna, because I fully expect that Campbell Newman will win the seat.

EMERSON: George is embarrassed by the situation - it's a good question. But, equally, a good question is whose policies would be applied? Campbell Newman, according to George, would be presenting policies on behalf of the LNP despite the fact that the actual leader of the Opposition, Mr Seeney would be there.

If Mr Newman did not win the seat of Ashgrove and we have a very good Member for Ashgrove, then do they default to Mr Seeney's policies or Mr Campbell's policies? I have no idea.

KING: Won't they be - Craig Emerson in fairness - won't they be the same policies because they're the LNP policies?

EMERSON: Well, I don't know. So Mr Seeney will have to ring up Mr Campbell on a daily basis. There'll be a six o'clock phone link-up to say 'what are my policies?'

BRANDIS: You know, Craig ...

EMERSON: You know who will really set the policies is the man behind all of this, the faceless man, Mr McIver.

BRANDIS: Look, Craig – look, I know this seems to me, with respect, to be very petty criticism. The policies are ...

EMERSON: [Laughs] I think the people of Queensland deserve to know.

BRANDIS: The policies are the policies of the Liberal National Party and you've got the - if this is a

problem and I don't think it is - you've got the same issue in the Brisbane City Council election, because your candidate isn't the leader of the Opposition of the Brisbane City Council.

Your candidate, whose name I can't even remember, isn't even a member of the council. So, is it Shayne Sutton, your Opposition leader who speaks for the Labor administration, the Brisbane City Council? Or is it your mayoral candidate?

EMERSON: This is a very conventional situation in the Brisbane City Council. It is a bizarrely unconventional situation for state politics.

KING: We may see more of it. If this works, could we see more of this in Australian politics: that the next person who runs as prime minister of the country might be someone who has the support of the party, but who is someone who is not yet elected to Parliament?

EMERSON: And may not get elected, that would be crazy stuff.

BRANDIS: It's not quite as unusual as you may think, Craig.

EMERSON: Back in 1921...

BRANDIS: No, well, Barrie Unsworth, when he moved from the Legislative Council to the lower house in New South Wales.

EMERSON: But he was a Member of Parliament.

BRANDIS: No, no there was a period of time when he was - a brief period of time - when he wasn't. After the death of Holt, there was a period of time when John Gorton was not a Member of Parliament before he was elected at a by-election. There are lots of precedents for it in other parliamentary systems.

KING: All right, and just before I let this go, George Brandis, when were you aware and did you have any role in this behind the scenes?

BRANDIS: I had no role in it, and beyond that I don't propose to have anything to say.

KING: But you can't just say 'I'm not answering the question'. I asked when you were aware of it and you say, 'I don't propose to have anything to say'. That's a legitimate question.

BRANDIS: Well it might be a legitimate question, but I'm not answering it.

KING: So you've known about this for some time?

EMERSON: Because he was aware of it, when? I suggest the other possibility...

BRANDIS: There were whispers about this in Brisbane certainly last week.

KING: All right, let's move onto the flood levy. Most people will now be forced to pay a flood levy. Who will be exempt, Craig Emerson? When will we start paying and how do we find out whether we're exempt or not?

EMERSON:

Well, the levy will apply to people who are ... a majority of people will not pay the levy. Those who are exempt will be lower income earners. The people who were in the flood-affected areas and received some sort of payment are not subject to the levy. And the good news, as you know and I think you probably told your listeners, is that the flood levy has in fact been passed by the Parliament. It was passed yesterday.

KING:

And from July this will kick in. But can you just be a bit more specific? You say low income earners and those in flood areas won't have to pay it. How low is the income before you are exempt? And when you say in flood areas, there's all sorts of debate here that some people whose homes were inundated don't show up in flood maps.

So they are not receiving the grants. Will they have to pay it?

EMERSON:

If their homes were inundated then they would have received some assistance, some support, under the national disaster relief and recovery arrangements. And in those circumstances they wouldn't have to pay the flood levy.

KING:

Okay and the lower income earners? How low?

EMERSON:

I did know that figure. I just can't remember it now but I'll get it back to you. I'll get back to you straight after the program.

KING: All right, and George Brandis this will deliver \$1.8 billion. A lot of that will be spent in Queensland. Is this something you applaud?

BRANDIS: I absolutely applaud the expenditure of this money on flood recovery. What the Opposition says is that it's a shame the bloated Federal Government didn't cut its budget so that we didn't have to impose a new tax to pay for a cut budget.

EMERSON: We did cut the budget.

BRANDIS: Yeah, but you could have cut it more in the way in which we pointed out to you. But you chose not to do that. Rather, as the Labor Party always does because it's part of Labor DNA, your default position was immediately to impose a new, an unnecessary new tax.

KING: But have you ...

EMERSON: You imposed six different levies George.

BRANDIS: An unnecessary new tax.

EMERSON: Six different levies. Were they all unnecessary new taxes? Your Coalition imposed six different levies and now you're saying they were unnecessary. This is a revelation.

BRANDIS: Well, we, what we say Craig is that the new tax that you, you've imposed - and just like the carbon tax you're now threatening to impose - is unnecessary, undesirable and, in the case of the carbon tax, a flat-out breach of an election promise.

EMERSON: So, six Coalition levies were unnecessary, undesirable. The truth is that when the Labor Government applies a levy you call it a tax and say it's unnecessary and undesirable.

When you were in Government, you applied or set out...

BRANDIS: No, no, no.

EMERSON: ... to apply six of them.

BRANDIS: A big difference, Craig.

EMERSON: ... which, by your criteria, should be judged as being unnecessary and undesirable.

BRANDIS: There's, there's...

EMERSON: It's just the opportunism of ...

BRANDIS: There's a big difference Craig.

EMERSON: ... an Opposition which has not supported, as strongly as it should, the recovery efforts in Queensland...

KING: All right, let George...

EMERSON: and the flood levy...

KING: ...let George Brandis...

EMERSON: ... is a very important part of financing.

KING: Let George Brandis answer that, please.

BRANDIS: There is a very big difference, and the very big difference is when those levies are for very limited purposes, by the way...

EMERSON: Well this is a limited purpose.

BRANDIS: ... and of much, much smaller magnitude were imposed by the Howard Government. The nation's finances were in extremely good shape. They were imposed by a Government which had an ...

EMERSON: Well why were they necessary?

BRANDIS: ...were - had an exemplary record for keeping the nation's finances in good shape.

EMERSON: Why were they necessary?

KING: All right. I'm just going to leave it as you both have a very different view on the flood levy.

But Craig Emerson, a question from Brett and perhaps you need to get back to us on this, too, because people are wanting to know whether they pay or whether they don't.

Brett says, 'do people who were victims of The Gap storms a couple of years ago still pay the levy?' Is there a timeframe on the victims of natural disasters?

Now my understanding is they would pay the levy?

EMERSON: We're talking about those who are adversely affected by the floods in Queensland.

KING: All right, and the cyclone Yasi.

EMERSON: The cyclone in ...

KING: Cyclone Yasi. All right.

EMERSON: ...north, far north Queensland...

KING: But if you could get back to us with the specifics that would be appreciated.

George Brandis, you mentioned climate change. Tony Abbott is going to address an anti-carbon tax rally outside Parliament today, I think. Does Tony Abbott believe in climate change?

BRANDIS: Yes, he does. I mean, [laughs] I think everybody believes in climate change; I don't think that's really the question.

The question is how you deal with it. Either you can, as the Labor Party wants to do, have yet another new tax to deal with that problem, or you can take direct action as the Coalition is proposing through smart technology, re-forestation and soil sequestration.

KING: Craig Emerson, where does this go now? Your Government has said they're going to do this. They haven't put a price on carbon. We've got Tim Flannery talking through community meetings on this now.

At what point will this go to Parliament and we will know what the specifics are?

EMERSON: Well it will go before implementation from 1 July 2012. We have outlined the basic structure of it; more detail will come.

KING: But when?

EMERSON: There has been criticism ... in the coming months. There has been criticism that we should have set everything out, all of the detail. We would then have been subject to criticism that there was no consultation with industry.

So what we've done is set out the basic architecture as to how this will work.

KING: Yes, I understand that, and we've talked about that previously.

What people want to know is when will we know the details, because many of them will make up their decision on whether they support it once they know the details.

EMERSON: Of course, and that will happen over the coming months, with the implementation date being 1 July 2012, if indeed we can get this through the Parliament.

We would be looking for support this time. We had support under Malcolm Turnbull as leader, but he lost the leadership over this very issue ...

BRANDIS: He didn't propose a carbon tax.

EMERSON: ... and now - no, I'm talking about an emissions trading scheme.

Mr Abbott became the leader over that. You asked as to whether he believes in climate change or not.

KING: Yes.

EMERSON: He's the guy who said it's absolute crap, and he also said just last week that carbon dioxide might not be the villain that people paint it to be.

BRANDIS: Some people ... some people ...

EMERSON: It is carbon emissions. It is carbon emissions...

BRANDIS: Let's get the quote right please Craig.

EMERSON: ... into the atmosphere that are contributing to climate change.

BRANDIS: Look, this is, this is such a red herring of an issue.

KING: Very quickly, George Brandis.

BRANDIS: There is such a range of scientific opinion about this, even within the majority scientific opinion, if you like; there is a range of views about the dimensions of the problem and the various causative factors.

If anybody looks you in the eye and says the science here is absolutely settled, they're a fool.

KING: All right. Let's leave it there and that paints your positions very clearly [laughs].

Steve from Alexandra Hills wants me to get a big ruler, Craig Emerson, and to give you a smack every time you talk over George Brandis. What would you think of that?

EMERSON: Well, so long as he smacks George on the bum every time he talks over me.

KING: All right [laughs], okay.

EMERSON: I want an even-handed smacking.

KING: All right, [laughs] that seems fair. Should Julia Gillard go to the royal wedding?

EMERSON: She is going to the royal wedding.

KING: Yeah, but should she? There's been a debate this morning on whether she should - she's not a monarchist.

EMERSON: She's Prime Minister of Australia.

KING: Yeah, so do you think she has a duty to go?

EMERSON: I think if you're invited to the royal wedding as the Prime Minister of Australia, you should go.

KING: I would go, if I was invited.

EMERSON: I bet you would.

[Laughter]

KING: Well, wouldn't you want to see the dress? See what everyone is dressed in? Craig, George Brandis, you'd certainly go if invited?

BRANDIS: Well, I would, and I think that Julia Gillard should sort of take her little republican heart into Westminster Abbey and perhaps even, you know, she might emerge as a changed person, as a constitutional monarchist.

She seems to have abandoned everything else she ever believed in.

KING: Well I look forward to that interview of her becoming a monarchist.

Just a couple of other issues: the MPs' pay...

EMERSON: Don't hold your breath.

KING: No [laughs]. MPs' pay is now going to be set differently, I understand. Very briefly, can either of you explain how it's going to be set differently?

EMERSON: It hasn't been released yet. There is a story in the papers today, so I can't really pre-empt that. That would come out tomorrow.

KING: All right. Well, we will continue to follow that up because my understanding is it's now set by the Remuneration Tribunal, that's right?

EMERSON: As I say, I'm just in a difficult position; I can't make an announcement on your programme, as worthy...

KING: Why not?

EMERSON: ... and valuable as it is [laughs]. I'd love to.

Let's do a deal. I'll come up with an announcement on something else and we'll use your programme to do it. But I'm not the relevant Minister and I think this is more likely to appear tomorrow.

KING: All right, speaking of whose got what job. A bad job that asks too much without giving back enough is just as stressful as having no job at all.

This is a big Australian survey – 7,000 people were surveyed - and I'm wondering what the worst job both of you have ever had.

EMERSON: I think mine was probably working in a sheet metal factory in the early 1970s, which was more like a warzone in terms of the relationship between the employees and the employers.

It was a shocking industrial relations environment for ... probably shared equally for both sides. Neither wanted to give an inch and I worked shift work, which is quite tough and many of your listeners would know that.

When we were working double shifts - that's 18 hours - and going home, getting six hours sleep and then doing another 18 hours: that's pretty hard yakka.

KING: How long did you last?

EMERSON: It was actually during the holidays, mercifully. So I was actually able to leave, finish school and go to university.

KING: All right, George Brandis...

EMERSON: I'm glad I made that career choice.

KING: ... the worst job you ever had?

BRANDIS: Look...

KING: Opposition?

BRANDIS: I suppose the worst job I had, like Craig, was a university job during the holidays, cleaning railway carriages in the main railway workshops.

EMERSON: Ah.

KING: How long did you do that for?

BRANDIS: Mercifully, not for very long [laughs].

KING: Mercifully, not for very long.

EMERSON: Did you do a good job?

BRANDIS: I, I'm sure I did Craig.

EMERSON: A bit of Steel-o, get the old ...

KING: [Laughs]

EMERSON: ...Steel-o out.

[Laughter]

KING: I'm going to leave it there today. Gentlemen, thank you.

EMERSON: Thank you ...

BRANDIS: Thanks a lot Madonna. Bye.

EMERSON: ...Madonna.

KING: That is Senator George Brandis and Dr Craig Emerson.