



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
2CC WITH MARK PARTON
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E&OE

Subjects: Paul Keating, NSW elections, Bali conference.

MARK PARTON: And we're about to go to Federal Trade Minister Craig Emerson. And, in fact, we can do that now. Thanks for waiting for us, Craig.

CRAIG EMERSON: You're right Mark - no problem.

PARTON: Do you wish - with all respect to the former Prime Minister - do you wish that Paul Keating would shut the hell up?

EMERSON: He's entitled to his view; he's not only a former Prime Minister: he's a former President, I think, of the New South Wales Labor Party. But look, I think what it comes down to is that over time the Labor opposition will need to develop alternative policies because in the end that's what people pick on. What will political parties do for me and do for my state; do for my country? So we can do a lot of analysis, just about who's who, but ultimately it's about policy. But I think in Sydney, in particular, they've got transport - and the electricity privatisation which ended up not having at all a happy passage through the state Labor system would have actually funded some very important transport links in Sydney. Anyway, it didn't happen and that's one of the reasons that Barry O'Farrell got elected, and congratulations to Barry.

PARTON: Your leader has answered questions since Saturday suggesting that what's gone on in New South Wales will have absolutely no implications federally. Paul Keating suggested otherwise yesterday: you know, he said that this election loss will have federal implications and he

called John Robertson, for arguments sake, 'more weight for Julia Gillard to drag along'. Your thoughts?

EMERSON: My thoughts are that what Julia was saying was specifically in relation to a particular policy issue and policy issues more generally. That is, the carbon tax, and I've talked to a number of our federal colleagues who were on the booths in New South Wales on Saturday - some for five or four hours at a time - and they are saying to me that no one mentioned the carbon tax. Now, that's just a fact. Obviously Tony Abbott would like us to believe it was a referendum on the carbon tax and there wasn't any problem with New South Wales state Labor government. Well, that's his spin: the truth is there was either none or virtually no reference whatsoever to the carbon tax.

PARTON: I know that there's discussions going on - well in fact it went on last night - involving the Foreign Minister and the Immigration Minister - in Bali regarding, well, a number of things. But one of the things I know they weren't discussing was this so-called East Timor solution as far as refugee processing. It's completely off the agenda. Was it ever on the agenda with anyone?

EMERSON: Well, what we're seeking is a regional solution to a regional problem. And, a regional processing centre would be part of that. The Bali conference, as I understand, is overwhelmingly about the broader issues of people-smuggling and cooperation amongst different countries. And, I certainly have seen even in the last few days, Mark, references to policies never being able to see the light of day - that they're going to be blocked. Remember the Queensland flood levy? That was never going to get through the Parliament, but it did. Remember the National Broadband Network? It was never going to get through the Parliament, but it did. Even yesterday, the Mineral Resource Rent Tax was never going to get through the Parliament. The Greens Party has indicated that it will vote for it. And then the tax cuts for companies and for small business were never going to get through the Parliament and - hallelujah! - you wouldn't believe it, Tony Abbott said he might even think of voting for tax cuts for small business. Well I think he should.

PARTON: These are, these are ...

EMERSON: The point I'm making is that time and time again we're told this isn't going to happen; they'll never be able to do

it. And every bit of legislation that we've actually put up, Mark, every bit of legislation has got through. We've managed to get it through. It has actually been a stable government. Let's see what happens with the regional processing centre. But what I'm saying is this conference itself was not ... this was never going to be the focal point of the Bali conference.

PARTON: Yeah, I just, I mean it's one thing to talk about pieces of legislation getting through Parliament here. I think it's quite another to talk about twisting the arms of these people in ... in places overseas and convincing them that they can be the solution to our problem.

EMERSON: Well it is a regional problem. People-smuggling is not unique to Australia, nor to the region. Have a look: we might have a chat in about six months time as to what happens in southern Europe as the people flood out of North Africa and into southern Europe. Now, this is not a problem that is not unique to Australia - of course it's an issue. We want to deal with the issue. There has been some expressions of support for the concept of a regional processing centre from a couple of countries, but it was never to be the focal point of the Bali conference and the broader point I'm making is that time and time again we were told we would not be able to achieve something and each time we've been able to defy the pundits and achieve it. That's what we are: an energetic government. We'll press ahead with our programme.

PARTON: Well, thanks for your energy this morning, as always.

EMERSON: Thanks, thanks Mark. Thanks a lot.

PARTON: Federal Trade Minister, Craig Emerson.