



**THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP**  
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript  
ABC 612 Inside Canberra with Madonna King

27 April 2011

E&OE

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*Subjects: Justin Bieber, immigration, school funding, China, cost of living, welfare*

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MADONNA KING: Immigration, school funding, budget looming, Justin Bieber - let's go Inside Canberra. Good morning Senator George Brandis.

GEORGE BRANDIS: Good morning Madonna. Good morning Craig. Good to see you back.

CRAIG EMERSON: Yes, you too George.

KING: Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Minister Dr Craig Emerson. Good morning. Happy Easter. Is it too late to say that?

EMERSON: No it isn't. And here's your Easter egg.

KING: Oh, now I've got to put that in the ABC directory.

EMERSON: No, we won't tell the rest of the staff.

KING: No. Thank you.

BRANDIS: And Craig, here's a Liberal blue Easter egg for you.

EMERSON: Oh, now I've got a multi-coloured Easter eggs for you.

BRANDIS: And there are plenty of little Easter eggs for your staff here Madonna.

EMERSON: All Australian-made.

KING: Thank you. Now we're all getting off on such a nice footing. How long will this last do you think?

EMERSON: Oh, 10 to 20 seconds.

KING: Ten to 20 seconds. I've got to ask you about Justin Bieber first. George Brandis, I suppose you weren't at the concert?

BRANDIS: Well I wasn't. But I know all about Justin Bieber. Ten minutes ago I knew nothing about him, but I was listening to your broadcast before and I rang my daughter. And I said 'Phoebe, tell me about this Justin

Bieber', and she said, 'oh he's adorable'. And I said, 'really?' And she said 'yes, he's very cute'. So that's what my daughter thinks.

KING: And she's 18?

BRANDIS: She's 18.

EMERSON: Eighteen?

BRANDIS: Yes.

EMERSON: I saw someone on television remarkably resembling George out on the streets looking up into a hotel, into a window to see if it might open and Justin would wave to George.

BRANDIS: No, no. That ...

EMERSON: That wasn't you?

BRANDIS: No, I don't think ... that wouldn't have been me. No, Craig.

EMERSON: It might have been that Rod McIvor, the President of that Liberal National Party.

BRANDIS: I think it might be the Kevin Rudd hairstyle that gets those little girls going.

EMERSON: Do you reckon Kevin would do a good Justin?

BRANDIS: Well, it's hard to see who's dominated the airwaves more. Whether it's Kevin Rudd or Justin Bieber.

EMERSON: I think there's no contest once Justin gets going. The screaming goes and it drowns out everything else.

KING: Yes, Justin Bieber's got nine million Twitter fans and I think Kevin Rudd has 1.6 million.

EMERSON: Oh, really, and I've got none. Not a one.

KING: George Brandis, you'd be more a monarchist looking forward to the royal wedding...

BRANDIS: I'm very much looking forward to the royal wedding. I think it will be a great event.

KING: Before we get into the serious things, I actually have a dilemma about the royal wedding. I am, I think, like most chicks really keen to watch it.

BRANDIS: Well why wouldn't you want to watch it?

KING: Well my husband has decided to go away for the weekend. Take me away without the children. And I'm saying 'can't we go Saturday?'. He said 'well, what's wrong with going Friday?' 'But, but, but, but, but the kids have swimming.'

EMERSON: The wedding.

KING: 'Oh, someone can take them to swimming. But...', and I'm just thinking I want to sit there with tissues.

EMERSON: Why don't I sit around with your husband and we'll have a few beers.

KING: I thought you were going to suggest you sit around with me for a while there ... George would be keen, too, wouldn't he?

EMERSON: Well, we could do that and we'd have several glasses of wine.

BRANDIS: Well, I'll come and have a glass of champagne with you Madonna and we'll watch the royal wedding.

KING: All right, I'm sick of being nice.

EMERSON: This can't last.

KING: It can't. I'll put my Easter egg aside and get into it. Look, on immigration: I want to be brief really because we've looked at it strongly in the last hour. But George Brandis, is the Opposition considering supporting Chris Bowen's Bill or is all this over nothing; it won't get through and we're back to square one?

BRANDIS: Well, we have to have a Shadow Cabinet meeting to consider what our position will be and that hasn't happened yet. But what Tony Abbott has said, which I wholeheartedly agree with, is that this is a weak and a half-hearted response.

These people who come to Australia asking Australia to take them in because they say they're fleeing persecution and they reward our kindness by burning down the very government buildings in which we are giving them shelter have no place in this country.

KING: No, okay, but you're a lawyer. Don't you think it's fair that they go to a general court of law and be tried and found innocent or guilty before being put on a plane?

BRANDIS: Well, nothing I've said is inconsistent with that.

KING: But isn't the Opposition saying 'no, put them on a plane and send them home'?

BRANDIS: They should be. If they are found to have committed these crimes, they should be deported.

KING: But isn't that all Labor is saying? They will give them a temporary visa until such time as a court finds them...

BRANDIS: No, they're not you see. This is the difference. We are saying if they've done these crimes deport them. Labor is saying if they've committed these crimes give them a visa, a temporary protection visa.

Remember those temporary protection visas that Craig has spent two years telling your listeners on this program were such a bad idea? They've now been adopted by the government as its policy.

KING: Craig Emerson...

EMERSON: There are already a number temporary visa classes and this would give a temporary protection visa only to those asylum seekers who were found to be genuine refugees. But if they commit a crime, then they will be deported. That's the arrangement. So what we're doing is...

KING: But that could take two years. By the time they go through our court system, are found to be guilty or innocent ...

EMERSON: Well, there is such a thing as a judicial system in this country. And like everyone I think, or most people, what we've seen on the top of these buildings, this destruction of these facilities, is absolutely inexcusable - it's outrageous. And certainly we don't in any way condone it and they, if found guilty of a crime, would be deported.

Now, for those who are not genuine refugees, they don't get a temporary protection visa. It's only those who are genuine refugees. If they're not then it's *out-ski*.

KING: Isn't that the humanitarian approach, George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, look, my view Madonna is this: if you're a genuine refugee, a temporary protection visa is what you should want. Because if you're a genuine refugee it means you are leaving your homeland under compulsion. Not because you want to; but because you have to.

And under the temporary protection visa system you ... that temporary protection visa allows you to stay in Australia until it's safe for you to go home. If you're a genuine refugee you should want to go home as soon as it's safe to.

EMERSON: Under the Howard Government, the proportion of genuine refugees who were given temporary protection visas that stayed was very high.

KING: All right. Can I ask this question before we move on? Liam, who is a listener, said 'can either of you answer whether genuine refugees must stop at the first safe port of call?'

BRANDIS: Well, it all depends. I'll tell you what the answer to that question is. It all depends on whether the first safe port of call will take them. And most of ... and your listeners should be aware of this. These people you see coming from boats, on boats across the Timor Sea: they have transited through, in some cases, several countries on their way to try and, to come to Australia unlawfully, right? Now, they're not fleeing from Indonesia. They're not fleeing from Malaysia. They are fleeing from west Asia and they have been through a number of other countries on the way.

KING: Okay. So the country has to accept them for them to stop at a safe port of call. So that's ...

BRANDIS: Well, I mean the country - the intermediate country - each intermediate country will have its own system.

KING: Yes, okay. And I suppose Liam's question, then, is well 'why aren't they applying at any of those six countries along the way?'. Something that both of you would probably agree with.

EMERSON: Well I think that's a reasonable point to raise.

KING: All right, I want to move on. So many other issues this morning. It's 18 minutes to 10 and you're listening to Senator George Brandis, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Minister in the Gillard Government, Dr Craig Emerson.

What's the big challenge facing Australia today? What is it? What's the biggest thing?

BRANDIS:

I think the biggest challenge facing Australians today is that the cost of living is out of control. And, you know, I unapologetically make a political point about this. We elected a government three and a half years ago and one of the big issues on which the Labor Party got elected was they said 'we'll do something about the cost of living'.

And yet, almost everything this Government does seems to be calculated to force the cost of living up. Whether it's higher interest rates, whether it's the new carbon tax, whether it's the new mining tax. Whether it's ... almost every measure this government takes, it's hard to see how it's taking the pressure off Australian families.

KING:

All right Dr Craig Emerson: can I ask you is it living standards or is it North Korea, the global downturn, where Australia fits in Asia? If we're looking at the big challenge what would you say it was?

EMERSON:

Firstly, I have to just respond quickly on the question...

KING:

No I'll get ... come back to that in a tick.

EMERSON:

All right, okay. Well I think the big issue is the fact that we are here in the Asian region in the Asian century. And we should be taking every opportunity to get the benefits from that.

Now, we are to a very significant extent and you've seen Prime Minister Gillard's visit to China and also to Japan and Korea, which is designed exactly to do that.

But the more we can engage commercially with those countries, the higher the quality of the jobs in Australia. Because what the statistics show is that people who are involved in our export industries tend to get substantially higher pay than those who are involved in the non-export industries.

KING:

George Brandis, why don't you put that over cost of living?

BRANDIS:

Well, I think that cost of living is what ordinary Australians feel. I mean Craig is ... the observation Craig makes about Australia's geo-strategic role in the world and our trade and commercial relationships with China and other East Asian countries is also very important of course.

But I think the person in the supermarket today or the mum taking the kids to school or the dad going to work today, he is not thinking about these geo-political issues. He's thinking about 'why is it that everything this Labor government does seems to make life harder for me'.

KING:

Craig Emerson?

EMERSON:

And on the cost of living, obviously there are many, many people who are finding it difficult to make ends meet. But there have been some positive developments, too. For example, we're seeing in the supermarkets price wars between Coles and Woolworths.

And when that happens, a whole lot of people come out and condemn them for reducing their prices. They also condemn them for increasing their prices. The

Consumer Price Index, which is the official measure of inflation, I think is coming out this week.

In general, it's around 3 per cent, so some things are going up by a lot more than 3 per cent. Just look at fresh fruit and vegetables after the natural disasters here in Queensland.

But obviously some things are going down or up by far less than 3 per cent. I don't seek to diminish the difficulty that people are finding in making ends meet. But we're not talking about inflation of 10 or 12 per cent; we're talking about inflation of around 3 per cent, but some things are going up much higher than that.

BRANDIS:

But there's a broader point though, Craig. I'm not having a go at you personally. If I may so, frankly I think you're one of the better ministers in the government. But ...

EMERSON:

I'll put that on my CV: 'Recommended by George Brandis'.

BRANDIS:

Almost every decision that this government makes - whether the carbon tax, it's going to force electricity prices up and without reducing the global temperature. Whether it's the tax on the mining industry ...

EMERSON:

The tax on the mining industry has no impact on the cost of living.

BRANDIS:

... that is going to destroy jobs in Queensland and Western Australia, in particular. Whether it's having a go at people who want to play the pokies...

EMERSON: Completely disingenuous.

KING: Doesn't it depend on ...

BRANDIS: Almost everything the government does seems to be to have a go at every...

EMERSON: But George, you repeatedly say the mining tax will increase the cost of living. It is rubbish. The mining tax is on coal, it is on iron ore. These prices are set in the world marketplace and you know that. You come on to this program week after week and say, 'look what the mining tax will do to the cost of living'.

It is completely false.

BRANDIS: I must say, your friends in the AWU agree with me not you.

EMERSON: On the mining tax?

BRANDIS: Yes, they do.

EMERSON: Sorry, you're wrong there.

KING: All right, I'm moving on. It's 14 minutes to 10 but I just had a laugh and perhaps this is a bit unfair. Brett, on Twitter, said, 'look, Craig Emerson and George Brandis have just given me Easter eggs - are they trying to soften me up?'. Brett's quick response says 'typical political response, late and answering the wrong questions, laughing online, re the Easter eggs'.

Let's come to the Budget. Craig Emerson, we keep getting warned that it's going to be a tough Budget. Are

you trying to soften us up, so that it's not as bad as we expect or do you believe that this Budget will - given what George Brandis has said over the cost of living - will really hurt?

EMERSON:

Well, there will be cuts in expenditure and we know that in any event because the government has put a limit of 2 per cent growth in real terms on government spending. George and I had quite a constructive conversation not so long ago about this.

Given that most of the Budget spending is non-discretionary, it's on the age pension that we're not going to cut and it's on so many things that are automatically provided, then obviously in those areas of spending that are discretionary, the burden will fall more heavily.

KING:

Let's broaden this a little bit. This morning there is news: *The Australian* reports that a special funding deal for the nation's private schools will be scrapped. Sky Television has said that you've launched a review into school funding, but what's happening there?

EMERSON:

There is a review and it hasn't reported yet. So we are committed to funding government and non-government schools. We've got a very good track record on that. I think the 'quadrennium', they call it, it's a four-year funding arrangement, is up for review.

KING:

Is this part of the Budget or totally separate?

EMERSON:

Look, I don't anticipate that it would have any short-term impacts because it's reviewing the arrangements to apply to the future.

BRANDIS: I think, Craig, that it's a bit more serious than that. The report in *The Australian* newspaper this morning quoted what Mr Garrett, the Minister for Schools, had said in a ministerial council meeting last week. And it appears that, in particular, the Catholic schools are by this fu... in the gun for this funding review.

KING: All right, can I just go back then. Before we go on to that, just for people listening, the government funds Catholic schools, private schools, state schools, how? What's the break-up?

EMERSON: Look, in terms of state schools, a lot of the funding actually comes from the states and the Commonwealth does provide funding according to a particular formula. There's been a model that was actually introduced by the Howard Government, called the SES funding model, socio-economic status, and that actually applies to non-government schools.

And essentially it's meant to be a needs-based funding model.

KING: So poor private schools, is that what you're saying?

EMERSON: They would get very considerable funding. They'd get very considerable funding under this model.

BRANDIS: Well, hang on a second, Craig. It's a bit more complicated than that. In fact, under the school funding model that the Howard Government introduced and that we now learn that the Labor government is going to get rid of ...

EMERSON: No, no, no ...

KING: No, there is a proposal.

BRANDIS: That is what Mr Garrett has reportedly told the minister ...

EMERSON: No, he did not. I read the report. I read the report in the paper, George. You must come here ... I'll take the Easter eggs back off you because you must come here and be truthful. Peter Garrett did not ...

KING: ... decided or proposed - what's your point?

BRANDIS: My point is this: that the most needy schools in this country are typically the poorer Catholic schools ...

EMERSON: That's true.

BRANDIS: The government schools, in fact, on average enjoy a better funding arrangement than the poorer Catholic schools, and all this class war rhetoric that Labor politicians engage in talking about elite private ...

KING: I think Craig Emerson is agreeing ...

BRANDIS: ... but I've heard so many Labor politicians, from Wayne Swan and Julia Gillard down go on about a l ...

EMERSON: You've not heard that from Julia Gillard.

BRANDIS: Julia Gillard, Craig, was the Shadow Education Minister at the time of the infamous private schools hit list.

EMERSON: There was no hit list, as you well know.

KING: Just so people understand this, so you're saying that ... do private schools get as much funding as state schools? Irrespective of whether it comes from the state or federal governments?

BRANDIS: Well, no, because the government provides 100 per cent of the funding for government schools. The government - the Commonwealth Government - under a series of measures initiated by the Howard Government, I might say, provides a share of the funding to private schools and then those schools provide the balance from their fees.

Now what the relativities are depends on the needs of the school. But the point I really want to make - emphasise - is that the real beneficiaries of this funding model are some of the poorest schools in the country but particularly the Catholic systemic schools in the outer suburbs.

KING: You don't disagree with that?

EMERSON: That's right, and the Labor Government continued the Howard Government funding model, except with at some point that funding model expires - every four years, we're having a review. Let the review take its course.

BRANDIS: No, no, no, that's wrong, Craig. The quadrennium expires obviously at the end of four years, the fu...

EMERSON: That's what I mean.

BRANDIS: Well, okay, that's not what you said. You said the funding model ...

KING: No, but I understood.

BRANDIS: The funding model was a good funding model.

KING: Yes, I understood that ...

BRANDIS: [Indistinct]

EMERSON: ... still in, it would be reviewing every four years as ...

BRANDIS: No, no, Craig, you're wrong. The funding model is a good model and it should be left alone.

KING: But Craig is saying that Labor is renewing the funding under that four-year ...

EMERSON: ... have done that and we're doing the review and it is...

KING: I'm moving onto the next topic, which relates to the dole, and I want to see if you can confirm this or not. But both of you, or your parties, have warned of a crackdown on welfare recipients not really trying. Concerns this morning that unemployed people aged over 55 would be treated the same as young people on the dole, forcing them to look for full-time work in order to receive their welfare benefits.

I'm just wondering how you strike a balance here on welfare, both parties, protecting those who need it and penalising those who essentially take us for a ride. Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: It is important that we encourage into work all of those who are able to work. There are jobs around and we've

seen quite startling statistics on the proportion of people who don't turn up even for their first interview.

KING: Are they over 55, though?

EMERSON: I haven't seen an age breakdown, but it's a disturbingly high proportion of people who just don't turn up for their first interview. What we're saying is that if they don't turn up for their first interview, then they will be breached.

KING: You don't disagree with that, George, do you?

BRANDIS: Well, as always, I'll reserve my position on the detail but the principle is a principle that not only I agree with but which my side of politics pioneered in the teeth of opposition from the Labor Party some years ago, particularly when Tony Abbott was earlier in his career the Minister for Workforce Participation.

KING: So is there - am I being unfair to you in saying - but is there an argument sometimes to turn and say, 'good on you, you're doing this' and vice-versa?

BRANDIS: Well, of course there is, and to the extent to which the Labor Party is now adopting Coalition principles, which they are ...

KING: That Easter spirit has just gone.

BRANDIS: When we introduced work for the dole, one of the most successful programs of the Howard Government, in the early days of the Howard Government, the Labor Party fought it tooth and nail.

EMERSON: There was only one reason for that: it provided no training. It wasn't that we didn't believe in mutual obligation; it was actually the Hawke Government that introduced this. It was the Hawke Government.

KING: All right. But one charity this morning is concerned that unemployed people over 55 will be treated the same as young people on the dole, forcing them to look for full-time work in order to receive their welfare. Irrespective of whether that's on the drawing board or not in the Budget, is it something you agree with, that people over 55 should be treated the same as 18 year olds when it comes to welfare?

EMERSON: Well, see, I'm in a difficult position of not being able to speculate on these matters. But as a principle, if people are able to work - that is, they do not suffer from a disability and therefore are not on a disability support pension - then you'd expect them to turn up for job interviews.

KING: All right, two more brief questions before we go. Julia Gillard: China, Japan, how's she being received do you think, George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, I'm sure she's being received politely. But I'm sorry, you might think ...

EMERSON: I am taking the Easter eggs back.

BRANDIS: ... you might think I'm being remorselessly negative - I'm actually helping here, Craig, I'm trying to find something good to find ...

KING: I don't think he's in the mood to help.

EMERSON: Won't be any difficulty; I'll respond in a second.

BRANDIS: But the trip does seem to be a bit of a fiasco for this reason that you've ...

EMERSON: For goodness sake.

BRANDIS: No, I'll tell you why. Because you've got Julia Gillard telling the Chinese leadership why it's a good idea for Australia to have a carbon tax, while the senior business leaders - including Mr Walsh, the head of Rio Tinto and Mr Kloppers, the head of BHP Billiton, who are accompanying the Prime Minister on this trip - are telling the senior Chinese leadership and the heads of the Chinese trading concerns why it's such a bad idea for Australia to have a carbon tax.

So heaven alone knows what the Chinese think about what's going on in Australia, except complete confusion about the carbon tax.

KING: I was wondering - and let me change tack here, Craig Emerson - just about the treatment of Julia Gillard as a female Prime Minister. This morning's stories about her partner and how he waves, for example. We've got a book out from a politician looking at the colour of her hair. We've got horse trainer, Gai Waterhouse, this morning attacking her fashion sense.

These are things that would not be directed at a male Prime Minister, am I wrong?

EMERSON: I think you're right. But I'm not going to have a whinge about it. I mean, that's just the world as it is, or at least some parts of the world as it is. The trip, I think, by any measure has been very, very successful. The Prime

Minister has been very well received in Japan, in Korea and in China.

They are enormously important trading partners for this country. They are the source of many jobs that have been created and will be created in the future, not only in minerals and energy, but in services where a memorandum of understanding was signed.

I might say, because in part I was there just before the Prime Minister and we arranged that with the Trade Minister. But also increasingly in agriculture because they will need high-protein beef sources, meat sources more generally, so it's a very bright future for Australia in its engagement with Asia.

KING:

And just before you go, the royal wedding on Friday night, George Brandis and I are watching it together. I think you're taking my husband to the football or something, Craig Emerson?

EMERSON:

Yeah, the Bulldogs are playing the Broncos.

KING:

I don't care, as long as I can watch the royal wedding in silence. But are people closet monarchists? Are people going to be watching this in Australia? What kind of percentage of our population and we'll see how close...

BRANDIS:

Well I reckon that given that every news ... every main TV channel except SBS is broadcasting it live, that gives you a pretty good indication about the level of public.

EMERSON:

I'll have to agree with that. We'll end up in agreement because I notice the commercial TVs have been there

all week talking to each other and just ... and wandering around London and trying to find a glimpse of the dress.

KING: We're ending on the same Easter spirit - enjoy your Easter eggs and thank you for that, Craig Emerson.

EMERSON: My pleasure, Happy Easter, in retrospect.

KING: Did you bring me an Easter egg, George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Yes. That was a joint Easter egg.

EMERSON: It was a joint Easter egg. Can you believe it?

KING: Who paid for it?

BRANDIS: We've both contributed to the cost.

KING: Possession is nine-tenths of the law. George Brandis, thank you.

BRANDIS: Thank you, Madonna.

EMERSON: Thanks, Madonna. Thanks, George.

KING: Craig Emerson, thank you.

BRANDIS: Happy Easter, Craig, belatedly.

EMERSON: You too.

MADONNA KING:

Back on Wednesday, next Wednesday, with Inside  
Canberra.

