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Transcript
ABC 666 CANBERRA AM WITH TONY EASTLEY
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E&OE

Subjects: Newspoll.

EASTLEY: The Prime Minister will be hoping this - his tax package and next week's Budget will give him a boost in popularity because at the moment he's lost some of his shine with voters.

Labor copped a hiding in the latest Newspoll results and, for the first time since 2006, the Coalition is ahead on two-party preferred votes.

As well, both Mr Rudd's preferred prime ministerial and personal satisfaction ratings have slipped.

From Canberra, Sabra Lane reports.

REPORTER: The poll published in today's Australian, was mostly conducted before Sunday's tax announcements but it followed a fortnight of woeful news from the Government, with the postponing of its emissions trading scheme, the axing of its insulation program, the ditching of more than 200 new childcare centres and the jacking up of tobacco tax.

In the poll, Labor's two-party preferred vote dropped five points. It's now down to 49 per cent with the Coalition ahead on 51 points. It's the first time the Coalition's been ahead in Newspoll since August 2006, when Kim Beazley was still Labor's leader.

O'SHANNESSEY: I have absolutely no doubt that the Government has had a very tough fortnight.

REPORTER: Newspoll's chief executive Martin O'Shannessy.

O'SHANNESSEY: The first time that we've seen the Coalition in front on two-party. That comes from a big surge in other and minor party vote up from seven per cent to 12 per cent, whereas the major parties are pretty stable.

The Liberals and Nationals coalition on 43 - only three points and that's within margin of error up from the last Newspoll.

Labor's taken a hit though. A major drop in their primary vote from 43 to 35. That usually falls into the range of what we call an outlier or a rogue poll. Interestingly though, throughout the rest of the poll that we have here, some pretty consistent results for the Coalition.

No big gain for the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, so we think that these numbers are probably telling us that there's a protest vote and that probably relates to the shelving of the ETS.

REPORTER: In just a fortnight Mr Rudd's satisfaction rating has slumped from 50 to 39 per cent.

His preferred prime ministerial ranking's also been slashed by six points, down to 50 per cent. But Mr Abbott's only picked up half of those votes.

Martin O'Shannessy says the result could be a rogue poll but he thinks voters are sending Mr Rudd a message.

O'SHANNESSEY: What you look at though is the first preferences, and it's very clear that Labor's taken quite a caning and the Coalition hasn't gained everything it can from that. And I think that probably is the story of this poll.

EASTLEY: Newspoll chief Martin O'Shannessy ending that report by Sabra Lane.

Our chief political correspondent Lyndal Curtis joins us this morning on AM. Lyndal good morning.

I suppose Labor's best hope is that Mr O'Shannessy is right and this is some sort of rogue poll. What, if anything, is Labor saying this morning about this?

REPORTER: Well, Labor's not commenting as much as it can. Strategists in Labor are happier when the primary vote is up around at least 41 or 42 per cent. Thirty-five per cent is well below that and it does seem, from what Mr O'Shannessy was saying, that it's the Prime Minister's decision to delay the emissions trading scheme that wears most of the blame for the poll and that that dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister, or the fall in his satisfaction, does show that he's wearing the bulk of the blame.

But certainly Labor wouldn't be happy. It's not a trend, but, certainly, Labor wouldn't be happy by these findings.

Craig Emerson is the Small Business Minister. He's one of the ministers responsible for selling the measures that the Government came up with after the Henry tax review and I spoke to him a short time ago.

EMERSON: Well, we don't comment on the polls. That's your job and the job of very highly paid political commentators around the country, and I'm sure they'll have plenty to say about it. But we just need to get on and do what we do and that is make decisions in the national interest.

Sometimes those are hard decisions. More often than not they're hard decisions and sometimes you see some consequences for that in opinion polls.

REPORTER: This poll does reflect a period of time where you dumped the insulation scheme, you dumped your childcare promise, the Prime Minister delayed the emissions trading scheme and increased the tax on smokers. After all those decisions, does it come as a surprise?

EMERSON: Oh, well I think that it's more likely than not after a period like that that the polls will go down rather than go up.

In terms of the quantum and, you know, who's going up, who's going down and what the two-party preferred vote is, what the primary vote is, where the vote's going to, I'm very happy to leave that to you.

REPORTER: Do you have to do more work now to turn that around?

EMERSON: We have to keep governing in the national interest. And the Australian people do have a sense that even though sometimes you have to make unpopular decisions, if you're doing it in the national interest they kind of sense that. And that's what we did, particularly in relation to the tobacco tax and a number of those other measures.

So the immediate impact usually is that there's a - you know, a lack of popularity in - of those decisions, but people get the sense that, for example, in relation to tobacco tax rises, if you're a smoker, you're not going to say, well that's terrific, what I really wanted is to pay more for cigarettes.

But the Australian people understand that this is, you know, a part of an overall health reform, the sort of health reforms that Kevin Rudd achieved with the states and this is an important element of it.

REPORTER: The pollster who conducted this poll has sheeted most of the blame though home to the decision to delay introduction of the emissions trading scheme.

Do you think the Prime Minister dumping what had been one of his core principles was always going to have this sort of blow back for you?

EMERSON: Well, as I say, I'm not going to go and analyse all of the consequences. I will point out that the Green vote didn't go up. But whether that's the truth or whether that's - you know, the statistical aberrations of an opinion poll that the Green vote didn't go up, that's up to you guys. That's up to the commentators, and the analysts and the statisticians.

We just needed to make some decisions in the national interest and we will continue to make decisions in the national interest including on tax reform. And not all those decisions will be popular.

REPORTER: You released the response to the Henry review after the dumping and changing of all those promises. It was a start - it was a chance for you to start getting back on the front foot. But the reaction to the Henry review has been critical. Were you surprised by that reaction?

EMERSON: No. In fact, I don't agree that it's been overall critical. Of course, the mining industry again is not happy about the prospect of increased taxes. But let me point out that 25 years ago when I was a junior staffer for Senator Peter Walsh, the Minister for Resources and Energy in the Hawke Government - having finished my PhD on resource rent tax, we actually introduced a petroleum resource rent tax.

The Australian people are probably not acutely aware of that.

That's been in place for 25 years and it has the support of industry. It's one of the most stable taxation regimes in the

world. And, as a concept, it's very similar to the super profits tax that is being proposed now.

So we got a similar reaction 25 years ago. And I'm not saying that the mining industry is not entitled to voice their concerns. I respect the spokespeople for the mining industry, the CEOs, but I'm just saying that 25 years ago we got a similar reaction. And what did the Hawke Government do? It pressed ahead with it.

EASTLEY: Labor frontbencher, Craig Emerson speaking there.

Lyndal Curtis is our chief political correspondent.

Lyndal this latest poll is not all goods news though for the Coalition is it?

REPORTER: No, it's just one poll. There is no sign yet that there is a trend.

And most of the loss from Labor didn't go to the Coalition - the Liberals picked up one point, the Nationals picked up two. But by far the biggest group that picked up votes was others. So people aren't yet ready to shift from voting to - for Labor to voting for the Liberal Party.

It's also a time where, as we've said, Labor has been junking some of its promises. It's starting to move back onto the front foot and the Coalition still has its work cut out for it to put forward policies that people are going to support.

The National Party leader Warren Truss recognises that. I spoke to him earlier this morning as well.

Warren Truss, the Coalition's now in front of Labor on a two-party preferred basis but this is just one poll. Do you take much heart from it?

TRUSS: Well, it's encouraging but clearly we've got a long way to go yet. Clearly, the public are asking questions about the Rudd Labor Government and they're interested in looking at alternatives.

Our task now is to prove to them we're ready for government and that we can do a better job than Labor.

REPORTER: Because most of the vote didn't go to the Liberal and National parties. You both picked up slightly.

Most of the vote went to the others category. Does that show that you haven't yet convinced voters that if they wanted to desert Labor that they should come over to you.

TRUSS: Well, that's an ongoing task. Clearly, the stellar popularity levels that the Prime Minister has enjoyed, the love affair that he had with the people has gone cold, but that doesn't mean that people will automatically move to us and we do have to prove to the people of Australia that we can provide better government.

I believe we can do that but that will be a task that will take us week after week, month after month.

REPORTER: And do you expect that these numbers will continue or will that verdict really have to wait until you start putting out your own policies which you haven't largely done yet?

TRUSS: Well I think the polls are showing considerable volatility. That's not unusual.

We'll be comforted, I suppose, if there's some degree of solidarity in the trends that are shown today, but that's still some time ahead of us.

We've been putting policies through to people. They know we have alternatives and, in many instances, they're finding those alternatives attractive.

REPORTER: But is that- when you really start laying out your policy case, is that where the rubber hits the road for you?

TRUSS: Well clearly we have to prove to the Australian people that we have an alternative agenda that's better for them and better for our country.

EASTLEY: The Leader of the Nationals, Warren Truss, speaking there with Lyndal Curtis.

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