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Transcript
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E&OE

Subjects: Resource Super Profits Tax.

DYER: Do you think it's fair that your taxes have been spent on Government ads spruiking its mining tax? Not surprisingly mining magnate Clive Palmer isn't happy about it, neither is the Federal Opposition, which has called for a Senate Inquiry into this ad blitz because it wasn't brought up in a Senate Estimates Hearing.

Craig Emerson is the Small Business Minister. Mr Emerson, good morning.

EMERSON: Good morning Nicole.

DYER: Would you be happy? Do you think that this issue should go before a Senate Inquiry?

EMERSON: The Senate's master of its own destiny and the Government doesn't control the Senate, so I'm sure it'll chart its own course and wouldn't take any advice from me one way or the other. Never has, never will.

DYER: But do you feel strong enough that if this did go before a Senate Inquiry you would stand by the Government's decision to spend \$38 million on this ad campaign?

EMERSON: The Government will stand by its decision to launch an advertising campaign, because we do want to inform a public

that at present is being misinformed by the likes of Clive Palmer and Tony Abbott and the Liberals.

Clive Palmer confirmed yesterday that he's a major donor to the Liberal and National Parties. He also confirmed that his objective is not to change or modify the tax, but to change the Government of Australia.

Clive Palmer and Tony Abbott share the view that the mining industry already pays its fair share of tax, or in Tony Abbott's view more than its fair share of tax.

DYER: Okay. I don't really want to get into the reason - the debate, the ongoing debate about this. I know that we will but not in great detail. I guess the concern this morning is the \$38 million. I mean, how is it that you needed to spend that much money to get your message across?

EMERSON: Well, there is a role for public information campaigns. At no point did the Labor Government or in opposition say that there would be no expenditure of taxpayer money on public information campaigns.

We said that there would be a set of guidelines and that set of guidelines has generally been applied. However, in the guidelines there is an exemption from the full processes in cases of extreme urgency.

It's not as if this campaign was not going to happen. It's actually provided for in the Federal Budget, but it is...

DYER: [Interrupts] How do you define - that's interesting though, you say extreme urgency. Why would you say consider this campaign one of extreme urgency?

EMERSON: At the moment there is a campaign being well funded - including by people like Clive Palmer - that is claiming that the Resource Super Profits Tax essentially will end civilisation as we know it.

This is damaging to the economy. It is incorrect and it is highly misleading in that it doesn't say at any place in the ads, the benefits that will come from the Resource Super Profits Tax; including small business tax breaks, a reduction in the company tax rate for every corporation including mining corporations, increasing superannuation for working Australians and investment in nation building infrastructure...

DYER: [Interrupts] Why not save - why not save that \$38 million and go to the polls over this issue?

EMERSON: We'll go to the polls at the appropriate time. I mean, as I said there was never an indication that there would be no public

information campaigns. There were under previous governments, there are under this government and there will be under future governments.

There is a role for public information campaigns, including in circumstances when there is an extremely well-funded campaign that is false and misleading, funded by people like Clive Palmer whose objective is to change the Government of Australia.

The Australian people deserve to know why the Federal Government, the Australian Government is implementing this Resource Super Profits Tax. It's not true that it will end civilisation as we know it, as this very well-funded misleading campaign is asserting.

DYER: What are the rules relating to publicly funded advertising campaigns?

EMERSON: Well, there's a set of procedures; that is, processes that are normally followed that take many, many months. Now, this particular campaign was always envisaged; it was budgeted for in the Federal Budget.

What's happening is the campaign is being brought forward under the exemption, which allows for that to happen in cases of extreme urgency.

DYER: Are you worried that Australians will process what you've done by putting this forward, by breaking your own rules when it comes to this sort of thing? I guess there's the trust issue that Australians will no longer trust the Government to follow its own rules.

EMERSON: Well, as I say, there is within the rules that were written down and that are publicly available, there is provision for an exemption in circumstances of extreme urgency and in circum... and for other compelling reasons.

There is an urgency about this because this campaign that is being launched now and being waged right now, is asserting that the Australian economy will be badly damaged. And we are concerned about the impact of that campaign on confidence in Australia, on Australians generally when you've got a well-funded campaign, a misleading one that is talking the Australian economy down.

And we believe that the Australian people deserve to know the benefits of the Resource Super Profits Tax.

DYER: Mining companies have started it, the Federal Government has responded, this tit for tat campaign, where is it going to end?

EMERSON: No, what I'm saying - what I'm saying and I'll cover it again. This campaign was already budgeted for. It was already envisaged. It has been brought forward. We are not - you're putting it as if this campaign never existed until...

DYER: [Interrupts] Was kick started. So, you're saying that - but you're...

EMERSON: You're putting it that this campaign did not exist until a couple of days ago when Senator Ludwig's letter was released.

What I'm saying is that in the 2010-11 Budget brought down some weeks ago provision of \$38.5 million was made for this campaign. We have brought it forward.

DYER: So why not mention it in a Senate Estimates hearing if you had so much knowledge of the fact that you're going to spend this money on this campaign? Why not bring it up then?

EMERSON: Well, the letter was released for all to see on Friday. You've got access to it. The media has access to it. The Senator's...

DYER: [Interrupts] Yes, but that was Friday. The hearing - the hearing was before Friday though wasn't it?

EMERSON: Sure, well, we don't control the numbers in the Senate and if the Senate wants to pass some sort of resolution in relation to this, that is a matter for the Senate. It has the capacity to do that.

So what I'm saying though is that we do need, in the interests of the Australian people and in the national interest more broadly, to at least advise people that there are very substantial benefits from the Resource Super Profits Tax. And it won't have the effects that the Clive Palmers of the world are claiming and the Tony Abbotts of the world, two of very few Australians who believe that the mining industry is already being overtaxed.

Clive Palmer has indicated that his objective is to change the Government of Australia in this very well-funded, very well-funded misleading advertising campaign.

DYER: Craig Emerson, thank you very much. Craig is the Federal Small Business Minister.

That is, of course, one side of this and we did put a call into Mr Palmer, Clive Palmer this morning to offer him a right of reply. As yet we have had no response. I'm getting the shaking of the head there from my producer, so no response at this stage, but that right of reply has been given.

But this is a campaign which they believe is an information campaign to do with the mining tax, has been in the pipeline for some time. They managed to get it through rules to do with publicly funded ad campaigns, because it comes under an extreme urgency, an issue of extreme urgency.

Does that bother you, that \$38 million of taxpayer money has been spent on this information campaign - 1300 903 917 - or do you believe it is in a government's right to explain something like this, so we're all on the same page?

ENDS