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E&OE

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*Subjects: Poll, Resource Super Profits Tax, ETS, Kevin Rudd*

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**BENSON:** Craig Emerson, for the Labor Government, things are bad and they just seem to be getting worse.

**EMERSON:** Well Labor does have a lot of work to do to convince voters of our policies to strengthen the economy, to improve hospitals and get the budget back into surplus. The truth is, if this poll was reflected on the actual election day Tony Abbott would be Prime Minister of Australia. And we need to alert people to his plan to cut funding for public hospitals and schools and to bring back Work Choices. So I guess there is a stark alternative between a government that's got a positive plan to bring the budget back to surplus, to strengthen the economy and improve hospitals and, what we see is Mr Abbott and his negative plan to cut funding for public hospitals, schools and to bring back Work Choices.

**BENSON:** Well that is the Labor sales pitch but the fact is that the electorate doesn't, doesn't like Labor increasingly, in fact increasingly dislikes Labor, and the real turning point was the abandoning of the ETS.

**EMERSON:** Well look, there's a number of tough decisions that we've had to make. No one made the decision in relation to the ETS with joy in their hearts. It was a difficult decision. But the rest of the world is showing a real tardiness and unwillingness to, you know, to engage in very meaningful reductions in emissions...

**BENSON:** But on that point, on what the rest of the world was doing, the Prime Minister had stressed the point that to wait for the rest of

the world would be an act of political cowardice, and then that was the act he took.

**EMERSON:** And we took to Copenhagen a plan that did not involve waiting for the rest of the world but, we, and the purpose of that was to seek to encourage the rest of the world to follow Australia's lead.

**BENSON:** What you can see in these polls is, the good news for Labor is that the Opposition is not greatly favoured and the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott isn't greatly liked but the electorate increasingly dislikes Kevin Rudd personally.

**EMERSON:** Well again, Kevin has had to make a number of tough decisions so I suppose people will interpret this poll result as also reflecting the debate about the mining tax, and I notice that there's divided opinion about that – but perhaps more saying they're against it than for it. There is a very well-funded campaign going on at the moment, basically saying that this mining tax will be bad for everyone. We don't agree with that. We believe it's in the national interest. We strongly believe that and we strongly believe that it's an essential part of tax reform to give small businesses a tax break, to increase people's superannuation from 9% to 12% and to invest in nation-building infrastructure.

**BENSON:** Sure. And you're actually spending more from the public purse than the miners say they are, to sell your argument.

**EMERSON:** Well indeed we do need to explain to the Australian people the purpose of the Resource Super Profits Tax, especially in the context of a well-funded industry campaign.

**BENSON:** But again, that's damaged the Prime Minister because he has had to go out and say 'we are going to use public funds for advertising in a way I once described as a cancer on democracy.'

**EMERSON:** Well I'm saying that this is an important tax reform, and tax reforms are not initially popular. Certainly the major tax reform of 1985 which actually involved broadening and strengthening the base of the income tax system to cut down on rorts and avoidance was unpopular. It was unpopular. But it's been in the national interest and it hasn't been reversed because it has been in the national interest.

**BENSON:** Craig Emerson can I ask you about the Prime Minister, because as the polls show that increasingly people don't like him. He's been plummeting in personal standing. At the weekend there was a new portrait of him from the journalist David Marr

portraying him as an angry man given to violent swearing. Is that the Prime Minister you know?

**EMERSON:** Well actually it's not. I've known Kevin Rudd for 20 years and there's not that many people in the political field who have known him longer than I have. And that goes back, as I say, in fact to 1989. And the Kevin Rudd that I've known is a purposeful, methodical man who has a very strong commitment to governing now as Prime Minister in the national interest and that is the most important thing.

**BENSON:** Craig Emerson thank you very much.

**EMERSON:** Thanks Marius.

**END**