



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
2CC Breakfast with Mark Parton
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E&OE

Subjects: Food security, live cattle trade.

MARK PARTON: Let's go to Craig Emerson, the Federal Trade Minister. Lots on his plate at the moment. G'day, Craig.

CRAIG EMERSON: G'day, Mark.

PARTON: Fascinating comments from you as reported in The Australian this morning that one of the greatest issues that this planet is facing is food shortages. And that we've really got to think seriously from a planetary basis how we deal with it, but also on a basis of, you know, how it's going to affect Australia.

EMERSON: We certainly need to think very carefully about this. There's going to be in the next half-century or even less at least two billion more human beings on earth. They'll all want to be fed.

PARTON: The sums don't work.

EMERSON: The sums don't work very well. In fact, just last year or so, about one billion people went to bed hungry each night. So it's not as if it's all hunky dory at the moment, and we've got a looming issue. It's not hunky dory at the moment; there's already big problems with hunger and, in a bad season, of course that leads to starvation. We can play a really important role here. Australia can be the food bowl of at least the region. But that means liberalising trade, opening up access to these countries' markets.

PARTON: That's to some extent a short-term solution, isn't it? And the longer-term solutions are the ones that are going to be harder to arrive at.

EMERSON: I think it's a bit more than a short-term solution, in that if we have proper open trade then the production of agriculture tends to gravitate to those places on earth that are best at doing it. So the consequence of that is you get more production and lower prices – both of which are good. So it is part of a longer-term solution this trade liberalisation. But also in the longer-term equation if we simply seek to resolve this by every country driving for self-sufficiency, every country clearing more land - then that has implications for climate change because of the carbon sinks, namely forests, are being destroyed.

PARTON: Cattle exports. While I was ... this all unfolded while I was away in South America and I've been fascinated to track back through it and see how it's unfolded and where it's going to end. I know that cattle exporters fear that our failure to resolve this live cattle export crisis could mean that the whole Indonesian market we're shut out of.

EMERSON: I don't think that's likely and Senator Joseph Ludwig, as the Agriculture Minister, has just come back from Indonesia. I was speaking to him 10 minutes ago. What we're doing, Mark, is working on the resumption, sooner rather than later, and that would involve working with a handful of the abattoirs or processing facilities that are either close to or at the international standards. We then need to be able to trace the cattle from Australia through into the feed lots and then through into the abattoirs. Once we do that, once we've got those arrangements in place, we'd be able to resume.

PARTON: Craig, we're just about out of time. I know you've just come out of a Cabinet meeting. We're friends: is there anything you can share with us that is, you know, potentially going to burst out onto the news cycle in the next couple of hours? Just between you and me, of course.

EMERSON: Well, a rather gorgeous display of flowers in the anteroom to the Cabinet room and ...

PARTON: Wasn't exactly what I meant!

EMERSON: And a sensational cup of coffee so, you know, we've started the day well. Flowers and coffee and goodwill all round. And I send my best wishes and love to Tony Abbott.

PARTON: Excellent. All right, thanks for coming on and I'm sure we'll ... well I hope we can catch up with you next week.

EMERSON: Thanks, Mark.