



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Doorstop at Parliament House, Canberra
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E&OE

Subjects: Abbott's tax cut claim, live cattle, Santo Santoro

CRAIG EMERSON: Today Mr Abbott has announced that a Coalition government would provide tax cuts for everyone, without indicating where he would get the money from. This is one of the great confidence tricks so far of the 21st century, an Opposition leader saying, "don't worry about that, here's a whole bunch of tax cuts, but I'm not going to tell you where I'm going to get the money from."

Now just in the week gone the Coalition had to support the Gillard government's budget because they were clueless about finding alternative spending cuts after criticising our spending cuts. So Mr Abbott has no idea where he's going to get the money from. Indeed he still has an unfilled \$10 billion black hole from the last election campaign, where the Departments of Finance and Treasury estimated that he had a shortfall of \$10 billion.

Since that time, Mr Abbott has recommitted to all of those election promises and therefore recommitted to a \$10 billion black hole. And now he's saying that he's going to provide tax cuts for all without having any idea where the money is coming from.

I'd also indicate that Mr Abbott made no mention of pension increases. Under Labor there would be a carbon price such that the big polluters would have to pay and a proportion of the revenue from that would be used not only to provide tax cuts, but also to increase the age pension and other pensions. Mr Abbott has made no mention of that because he would do nothing about age pensions. It is

a Labor government that provided permanent increases in the age pension. It would be a Labor government that provided them again. But Mr Abbott would leave age pensioners high and dry.

This is one of the great confidence tricks of the 21st century. You know, there was the guy who said that he would sell the Eiffel Tower to scrap metal dealers – and they bought it. There was the man who said that he would sell Buckingham Palace and Big Ben – and they bought it. And now there's Tony Abbott with one of his great funny money schemes. He's trying to tell the Australian people that they will give tax cuts to the Australian people, that Mr Abbott will conjure them out of thin air. He is a great con artist of the 21st century.

JOURNALIST: Mr Abbott is saying that the reason that they can't give any details on their tax cuts is they don't have access to Treasury documents, such as the government does.

EMERSON: This is one of the great excuses that Mr Abbott always uses. He said at the last election that they didn't have access to costings, but that their sums added up. He refused to subject costings to the Treasury and to the Department of Finance. And it was only because the Independents insisted on Mr Abbott's costings being submitted to the Departments of Treasury and Finance that it was confirmed that he had a \$10 billion black hole.

Last election Mr Abbott had a \$10 billion black hole, next election he would have a black hole even greater than that. And he is trying to tell the Australian people that he will provide them with tax cuts and conjure them out of thin air. This is just a great big confidence trick. Another one of phony Tony's funny money schemes.

JOURNALIST: The Coalition seems to be suggesting that the cost of living is a major battleground here. Is Labor ready to concede that it is such a major battleground?

EMERSON: We've indicated that we recognise that Australian families are struggling with the cost of living and that's why we have implemented measures such as three rounds of tax cuts. That's why we've implemented measures such as an education tax rebate. It's why we increase the age pension permanently – something that the Coalition government had talked about for years but didn't do. And now Mr Abbott is actually saying to the Australian pensioners – age pensioners and other pension recipients – that he's got nothing for them.

Well, what the Labor plan is, is to tax the big carbon emitters and use some of the proceeds of that to make sure that there are tax cuts for the Australian people and increases in pensions. We are explaining exactly where the money's coming from but in yet another phony Tony funny money scheme, he's saying he's going to give tax cuts without telling the Australian people which programs he would cut.

QUESTION: Would Labor give the Coalition full access to Treasury so they could cost their tax cut measures?

EMERSON: Under the Charter of Budget Honesty, which is actually a charter that was implemented by Peter Costello as Treasurer, when the political parties make commitments before an election they are to be submitted for costings. And it was Mr Abbott who broke that convention, implemented by Mr Costello, a Liberal Party Treasurer, by refusing to submit his tax and spending programs for costings by the Departments of Treasury and Finance. And it was only after the election, when the Independents insisted that those proposals of Mr Abbott be submitted to Treasury and Finance, that it was confirmed that he had a \$10 billion black hole.

JOURNALIST: Mr Emerson, can you let us know, is Kevin Rudd going to be stopping by in Indonesia to try and help deal with the cattle crisis?

EMERSON: Well I'm aware of what I've seen in the media today. There's a team of ministers working on this issue. We want to see a resumption of live cattle exports as soon as possible but also to ensure that the slaughtering of those animals is done humanely.

JOURNALIST: Should you or Kevin Rudd have gone to Indonesia earlier?

EMERSON: I've been in contact with my counterpart, Mari Pangestu, on three occasions now including on Thursday afternoon. So we are in fact in constant contact and are in constant discussion with our counterparts: Senator Ludwig as the Agriculture Minister, myself as the Trade Minister and of course Kevin as the Foreign Minister. This is a team effort because we want to achieve the resumption of the trade as soon as possible while ensuring that the slaughter of those animals is done humanely.

JOURNALIST: Is Santo Santoro's return to the front row of Liberal politics good news for Labor in your home state?

EMERSON: Oh well I don't like to comment too much on internal party matters, whether they're on the Labor side or on the Coalition side. But I know that there is a very bad relationship between the hierarchy of the Liberal National Party in Queensland and Mr Santoro, so much so that a number of leading Liberals or Nationals, or LNP members, or whatever they are these days, had written an open letter imploring that Mr Santoro not return to any position of authority.

And similarly today of course, four vice-presidents of the Liberal Party implored the Liberal Party convention not to re-elect Mr Stockdale. They thumbed their noses at those four vice-presidents and Mr Stockdale was elected by one vote. As Maxwell Smart would say of Peter Reith, "missed it by that much. Missed it by that much." Well Mr Reith, Mr Stockdale and those three I think re-elected vice presidents are somehow going to work out how they can get on. But obviously there's a lot of animosity and the Liberal Party has long memories.

JOURNALIST: Is there a recruitment drive under way for the next Labor leader, as the Liberals would have us believe today?

EMERSON: Well as I indicated at the beginning of this press conference, don't believe a word that Mr Abbott ever says. Don't believe him. He has just launched today another one of phony Tony's funny money schemes, saying that he's going to provide tax cuts for everyone, but not indicating where he was going to get the money from. Apparently he's going to throw in a set of steak knives for every Australian family and a penthouse at the Gold Coast. So if you believe that, you'll believe phony Tony's funny money scheme of tax cuts for everyone without saying where the money's coming from.

JOURNALIST: Thanks Craig.

EMERSON: Thanks a lot.