



**THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP**  
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript  
ABC NewsRadio with Marius Benson

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*Subjects: Newspoll, carbon pricing, business and union attacks.*

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- PRESENTER:** The Federal Government has some better news today on its drive to sell the carbon tax: an opinion poll showing a rise in support, although a clear majority still against the tax. But Labor still under attack from both business and some unions over the tax. For a Government view on the continuing battle to sell the carbon plan, Marius Benson spoke to the Trade Minister Craig Emerson.
- MARIUS BENSON:** Craig Emerson, can I start with the good news for the Government, which is the poll today. The Newspoll today shows that you have marginally improved your catastrophically bad position.
- CRAIG EMERSON:** Well, perhaps people are starting to see through Tony Abbott's hysterical scare campaign, which got to such absurd levels last week that he was actually attacking his own policies, so negative has Mr Abbott become. But look, we'll keep ploughing on. We'll keep talking to the Australian people about carbon pricing; the need for it from an environmental perspective; and also, importantly Marius, the need to put a price on carbon from an economic perspective - that is, to ensure that we don't have retaliation against us down the track as one of the few countries on earth that refuses to put a price on carbon as more and more countries move to do so.
- BENSON:** The good news for Labor specifically on the carbon price is that support for you has improved. But the bad news is you've

still only got about one third of the electorate in favour of what you're proposing.

EMERSON: Well, I don't recall in the past, Marius, too many big measures like this where people have actually said 'it's really popular - we'd love to do it'. Economic reform is hard, but economic reform is nonetheless necessary. Economic reform was pursued by the Hawke and Keating governments. Most of those reforms at the time were not popular, were not popular. Nevertheless, they pressed ahead with them.

Julia Gillard has shown all of the desirable features of leadership by pressing ahead with an important economic reform, even though in the short term it may not be popular. In the long term it will be absolutely necessary to secure Australia's future prosperity, to secure future jobs as we make this transition to a cleaner energy future. So there's no surprises in the statistics which suggest that a minority support the carbon pricing mechanism. It's a growing minority and, in time, in time, people will accept, I believe, that this is an absolutely important reform for Australia's future.

BENSON: A growing minority? It used to be a majority.

EMERSON: Well, I think when you come to a point, Marius, where you actually put the features out, they understand that it does have some sort of impact on the economy; it can have a cost-of-living impact on them. But we've also explained that the average cost of living impact is \$9.90 a week, whereas the average compensation is \$10.10 a week. So it's true that when you ask people would they like to see some sort of action on climate change, in the past the majority has said so, at present the majority has said so. But when it can actually affect them, then they have a slightly different view. But it's a view that is moving in favour of the Government's position.

BENSON: Just looking at some of the criticism of the Government, why are you having such difficulty winning over the big end of town? People are pointing to Bob Hawke's success in winning over the business sector, or at least placating it. But you've got miners, coal, manufacturing, transport - you've got everyone against you and a fair smattering of unions.

EMERSON: We're very happy to defend the National Broadband Network. Far from being a thought bubble as was suggested, the National Broadband Network is a vital investment in Australia's future. The Australian people knew all about the National Broadband Network over the last few years. We're implementing a stated Labor policy. Now, some businesspeople don't like that. Well, we need to govern for the

Australian people; not for a particular business owner or two or three business owners.

Similarly, putting a price on carbon - there's actually quite strong support within the business community for putting a price on carbon. But it's true that some members of the business community don't support it. What are we supposed to do - take a poll and then find out from the business community who supports it and who doesn't and make a decision on that basis? That would be an abrogation of our responsibility to govern in the national interest. And, similarly on industrial relations: perhaps some people in the business community are still fond of WorkChoices. Well, if you believe Tony Abbott, and I don't, then WorkChoices is dead. But maybe they actually - some of them, some - hanker for the return of WorkChoices. That won't happen under a Labor Government. But it's true that under Mr Abbott the worst elements of WorkChoices may well come back. Again, we don't see that in the national interest; we don't see that in the interest of working Australians.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thanks very much.

EMERSON: Thanks a lot.