



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

Transcript  
ABC 612 Mornings with Madonna King

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E&OE

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*Subjects: Malaysia asylum-seeker deal, Hendra virus, US economy*

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MADONNA KING:

And a big story, and we will speak to the Immigration Minister later this week. But something you wanted to know more about this week is this Malaysia refugee swap deal. It has swung into action and the question you asked yesterday is 'will it work in stopping the boats arriving in Australia?'.

The other question you asked was, you know, 800 people, 800 asylum-seekers, when we have 53,000 or between 53,000 and 100,000 people illegally overstaying their visas.

Gillard Government Minister Dr Craig Emerson, good morning.

CRAIG EMERSON:

Hello Madonna and welcome back. You're a little bit croaky...

KING: Yeah.

EMERSON: ...but obviously a lot better.

KING: I've had a little bit of a downturn today, I think...

EMERSON: Oh dear. We'll cheer you up.

KING: ... but it's going to go back up again by the end of the day.

Deputy Opposition Leader in the Senate, George Brandis. Good morning.

GEORGE BRANDIS: Good morning Madonna.

KING: Very nice jumper.

EMERSON: Hi George.

BRANDIS: Thank you.

KING: I really like it. Purple. Is it bought or handmade?

BRANDIS: Well, it's certainly not handmade. It's bought.

KING: Well not by you. But I'm thinking someone may have.

EMERSON: And I didn't knit it for him.

KING: I like it.

EMERSON: But I did buy a very nice bright pink shirt for the spring. I can hardly wait.

KING: No? We can hardly wait either, can we Senator?

BRANDIS: Yeah. That's very metro of you, Craig.

EMERSON: Oh thank you George.

KING: Malaysia's agreed to process 800 asylum seekers from Australia in return for us accepting 4,000 settled refugees, or refugees, over the next few years.

Craig Emerson, when will we be expecting the first group of refugees onto our shores in Australia?

EMERSON: Oh, from Malaysia? I don't know a particular day. But the deal is now done and we are accepting 1,000 a year. That's on top of the 13,750 refugees we accept for people under the humanitarian program. So it's now going to be 14,750.

KING: But in the next few weeks?

EMERSON: It should be. Yes. Yeah.

KING: So one question that several people wanted to ask someone from the Government yesterday is 'what happens when we reach the 800 quota of asylum seekers we can send to Malaysia and another group of asylum seekers arrive in Australian waters?'

EMERSON: The best way to answer that is to think of the incentives from yesterday onwards for asylum seekers who seek to come via Indonesia across the water.

The proposition from the people smugglers from yesterday onwards would be you get onto a leaky boat or a, you know, not a very secure boat, go across the sea, risk your life, end up in Australia, go back to Malaysia where you came from in the first place.

This is not a very good commercial proposition, given that it's a very costly exercise for those asylum seekers and that's what it's all about.

KING:

It's all costly for the Australian taxpayer, isn't it?

EMERSON:

Well, I'll come to that. This is about breaking the people smugglers' model. And it's a poor proposition to put to ... for people smugglers to put to asylum seekers: what we're going to do it take \$10,000-plus from you in order for you to go from your country of origin to Malaysia, to Indonesia, to Australia and then to Malaysia.

KING:

All right. Can I go to Senator George Brandis here, just on this issue of whether this will act as a deterrent. Obviously you will think that it doesn't. Just give us the rationale there.

BRANDIS:

Well Madonna, for a start let's ... let me explain how silly this policy is. As your listeners have pointed out, it only applies to 800 people. There's no commitment to extend it beyond that. There are these pious hopes that maybe it might be extended, but there's only a deal for 800 people. We get 4,000 returned. So it's a five for one deal that people I think find counter-intuitive.

Since this policy was announced in principle 11 weeks ago, there have been another 11 boats - one a week.

Since the policy was announced, there have been 567 at last count - as of yesterday - 567 new asylum seekers. So the quota's practically used up.

KING: [Interrupts] All right...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] That's not true. That is completely untrue.

KING: And I'll come back to you on that. But that's not the question I asked you George Brandis. Can you answer the question I asked? What's your rationale for this deterrent not working?

Craig Emerson said that people will be sent here, come to Australian waters and then they know they'll be sent back to the place where they started.

BRANDIS: Well, okay. Two points: first of all, I think the people smugglers have well and truly got this Government's measure.

Ever since they abandoned the tough Howard Government policies that worked, three years ago, the people smugglers have been playing this Government off for a break because they know they don't have the political will to be genuinely tough. And secondly, as I said before, they also know it's a deal for only 800 people.

KING: But could the proof be in the pudding when they see successive boats of asylum seekers then move from Australian waters to Malaysia?

BRANDIS: Well, let us see.

KING: They will think twice?

BRANDIS: Well, let us see. I will be most surprised if this stops the boats. And that's the test by the way Madonna. Will it stop the boats? You see, when the Howard Government adopted its policies in 2001, it stopped the boats.

KING: All right and if it stops the boat will you pat Craig Emerson on the back and say 'look, I'm sorry. It worked'.?

BRANDIS: If...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] I'm not holding my breath.

BRANDIS: If it stops the boats, I'll acknowledge that it has been successful. But will Craig acknowledge that if it doesn't stop the boats that it's been a failure?

EMERSON: Well, it is designed to stop the boats, and I think it is very disingenuous - and I'm very disappointed, I must say, with George - to say 500-odd are already out of the 800. He knows that not to be true.

KING: And why isn't it true?

EMERSON: He knows that not to be true because the 800 started as of yesterday, and George knows that to be a fact.

BRANDIS: [Interrupts] Well, if that's the case Craig...

EMERSON: So I wish he wouldn't mislead your listeners.

BRANDIS: [Interrupts] Well, well Craig...

EMERSON: I just wish he wouldn't mislead your listeners.

BRANDIS: [Interrupts] If it's...

EMERSON: Now, the second point...

BRANDIS: [Interrupts] Well, hang on...

EMERSON: It's just untrue George.

BRANDIS: I can't let you get away with it. If that's true...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] You know it to be the case.

BRANDIS: If that's true, if the clock starts tomorrow...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] Yesterday.

MADONNA KING: [Interrupts] Last night.

BRANDIS: ...starts yesterday...

EMERSON: On the 800.

BRANDIS: ...then at the current rate it will be only another 11 weeks before we've got the same numbers.

KING: Yeah, but that's not what you're arguing. You were saying there that the tally is almost full. It...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] It's incorrect. It's wrong.

BRANDIS: Well, I might say that if it's meant to have a deterrent effect you'd expect the deterrent effect to start operating from the time it's announced.

KING: All right.

EMERSON: We would expect the deterrent effect to start operating...

KING: All right. Okay.

EMERSON: ... in full on the day that the deal was signed, which is...

KING: [Interrupts] yesterday.

EMERSON: Yesterday. Right?

KING: All right. Craig Emerson, thank you. We'll just go to news headlines and we'll be back *Inside Canberra* in just a moment.

Kirsten McGregor, good morning.

[Unrelated item - news]

KING: All right. Kirsten thank you and we look forward to more news at 10 o'clock with our newsroom. You're on 612 ABC Brisbane. We'll also be crossing live to that press conference by the Premier as soon as it is available.

I'm speaking with the Deputy Opposition Leader in the Senate, George Brandis, and the Gillard Government Minister Dr Craig Emerson. And just while still on the Malaysian deal, Senator George Brandis, many listeners said yesterday 'what does it matter?'

It's 800 people going to Malaysia. Why don't we just accept those people and why isn't the Liberal Government, the Liberal Opposition, and the Labor Government focussing more on the between 53,000 and 100,000 people who are illegally staying in Australia?

BRANDIS:

Okay. Well let me explain why. Because the ... I know people say 'well, you know, there's no difference between people arriving by boats and people arriving on planes'.

There is a big difference, and that is that people arriving on planes don't get past border control without passports, without a passport and a visa. So they are not people who arrive in Australia illegally. They are people who arrive in Australia legally and the illegalities supervene some weeks or months down the track or perhaps in some cases years, when they overstay the visa.

Now, these are people in respect of whom the Australian Government has some documentary ... a paper trail of documents so that they can be ...

KING:

[Interrupts] Are you saying they've been vetted, in a way?

BRANDIS:

They've been vetted. They haven't come here illegally. They've come here legally. But now, look, the second

point I quickly want to make - and this is, you know, in my area as the Attorney-General spokesman. I'm sorry to say that the amount of resources that the Labor Government has contributed in the Budget to tracking down visa overstayers has been reduced over recent years.

KING: All right. But also as a shadow Attorney-General, can you tell me how many people who have arrived as asylum seekers have ended up ... it's found out they are really bad, they are potential terrorists, they have long lists of convictions?

BRANDIS: They are a number of instances of that, particularly asylum seekers arriving from Sri Lanka after the Sri Lankan Civil War. They're all subject to ASIO assessments and there have been numerous instances. I'm not going to give you a figure. But there have been ...

KING: [Interrupts] But do you know a figure?

BRANDIS: I've been told a figure by ASIO.

KING: Why wouldn't you tell us? Oh, because it's confidential.

BRANDIS: Because I've been briefed.

KING: Craig Emerson, can you help us there? Do you see them as different categories of immigrants? Because it was something listeners were struggling with yesterday.

EMERSON: Yeah. I ... and there's a fair bit of agreement between George and me here and that is there is a vetting

process. These are over stayers. That doesn't make it acceptable. It's not.

But I do want to do a little more than simply have to respond to a false claim from George. The Coalition is now saying that 'oh, it's a bad deal because 1,000 asylum seekers - who are mainly Burmese by the way, and in my local community very well accepted - will now be coming to Australia; 1,000 extra.

Now, Tony Abbott in negotiations with Andrew Wilkie actually offered to double the number of the people coming under the humanitarian program, from more than 13,000 to more than 26,000. Now they're complaining about 1,000 more coming to Australia.

BRANDIS: Well, we're talking about four now, Craig...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] One thousand a year. One thousand a year.

BRANDIS: One thousand a year for four years.

EMERSON: Yes, and they're doubling from 13,750...

KING: To 27,000.

BRANDIS: Craig, Craig...

EMERSON: ...per year. It's just the same basis, George. Don't distort the truth.

BRANDIS: We don't ... we in the Liberal Party do not have a problem with a generous humanitarian program. In fact, the humanitarian program was expanded...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] Well don't call it a dud deal.

BRANDIS: ...under the Howard Government. But what we do have a problem with is that there should be a *quid pro quo*, so that we are no longer in control of our own humanitarian program...

EMERSON: We are. Absolutely.

BRANDIS: ... and the ceilings on the humanitarian program.

EMERSON: We have set a new ceiling.

BRANDIS: There is a *quid pro quo*, that we take 4,000 people effectively selected by the Malaysians...

KING: [Interrupts] But isn't that a ceiling?

EMERSON: By the United Nations High Commission for refugees.

MADONNA KING: Isn't that...

EMERSON: By the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. You say 4,000. That's over four years.

BRANDIS: What...

EMERSON: It's 1,000 extra a year, going from 13,750 to 14,750. You're completely distorting the facts.

BRANDIS: Craig, why are you...

EMERSON: That's the most generous thing I can say about you.

BRANDIS: Why are you running away from that 4,000 figure?

EMERSON: I'm not running...

BRANDIS: You said 4,000; Australia takes 4,000, over four years. Australia takes 4,000...

EMERSON: Yeah, and I pointed out ... can I have a go here? I pointed out that Tony Abbott offered to double it from 13,750 to 27,000 per year. Per year! And Tony Abbott and you and Scott Morrison will say 'what a dud deal; what a terrible deal that we are allowing 1,000 more per annum into Australia', when your policy on offer to Andrew Wilkie to form a government was to double the number per year.

KING: All right. Okay. So George Brandis, answer my question.

BRANDIS: Yes.

KING: Did your leader offer to add it by 13,000 a year?

BRANDIS: I'm not aware of that, and I don't think that Mr Abbott has ever acknowledged that he said that. And I've not seen Mr Wilkie claim it.

EMERSON: He has.

BRANDIS: But I assume that Mr Wilkie has made that claim because Craig wouldn't say so if he hadn't seen Mr Wilkie make that claim. But I'm ...

KING: [Interrupts] So aren't you then disagreeing with your boss on this?

BRANDIS: No, no. I'm not aware that Mr Abbott has ever acknowledged that he made that ...

EMERSON: So Andrew Wilkie made it up?

BRANDIS: Well, I'm just saying that...

EMERSON: It's a fabrication?

GEORGE BRANDIS: ...I am not aware that Mr Abbott has ever acknowledged that that claim is true.

KING: All right. So let me ask you ask you this: you said earlier 'well, you know, that's five coming here for one going over there'.

EMERSON: That's right.

BRANDIS: It's a done deal.

KING: Do you think 4,000 over four years is too many refugees for Australia to resettle?

BRANDIS: Madonna, that's not the point I'm making.

KING: Extra. No, but I'm asking...

BRANDIS: That's not the point I'm making.

KING: But I'm asking you a question, which is what we do, as a journalist.

BRANDIS: Sure. Australia has per capita one of the most, if not the most, generous refugee resettlement programs in the world. That was significantly expanded under the Howard Government and I think we need to maintain the integrity of our humanitarian program rather than make it...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] Which we're doing.

BRANDIS: ...rather than using it as a *quid pro quo* or a trade-off to try and sanitise a deal that's not going to work to get rid of 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia.

KING: All right. Shortly we are going ...

EMERSON: You hope it's not going to work.

KING: Shortly we are going to cross to a press conference with Anna Bligh, who has been meeting with experts from New South Wales and Queensland this morning over this issue with Hendra virus.

I'm just wondering if we need a more national approach to this, given it's now surfacing in New South Wales and in Queensland. For the first time in the world it has been contracted by a dog. Do either of you have a strong view on that?

EMERSON: There'd be some logic to it if it is turning up in other states. Usually what happens, Madonna, regardless of political persuasions, is health authorities start working together on these things. That is the Commonwealth Health Minister and portfolio with the State portfolios.

So, while I don't have any information, logic would suggest that that may well be something that happens.

KING: And would you agree with that, Senator Brandis?

BRANDIS: I think that there is a level of national coordination. But it is primarily a state-based issue.

KING: All right. George Brandis, just staying with you: this US debt crisis - and I know you are quite knowledgeable on things American. Next Tuesday the US Government will hit its debt ceiling, the point at which the country runs out of cash really. If the Democrats and the Republicans can't reach an agreement to raise the debt ceiling, what can we expect?

BRANDIS: Well, I think what we can expect is a very, very severe shudder in global financial markets.

KING: Like we saw a couple of years ago?

BRANDIS: Well, I'm not an economist or an economic forecaster. But I think it's a matter of common sense that if the most powerful economy in the world were to default on public debt, that would have very significant consequences in financial markets.

KING: All right. We're just going to leave it there and we're going to cross live to a press conference with the Premier over the Hendra virus.

