



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Sky News PM Agenda with David Speers

19 August 2011

E&OE

Subjects: Live animal exports, New Zealand apples.

DAVID SPEERS:

The humble apple has been at the centre of a trade war between Australia and New Zealand for decades. That finally came to an end yesterday when the Trade Minister announced kiwi apples will now be imported to Australia. For 90 years apples from New Zealand have been banned on the grounds they could carry fire blight and other diseases.

New Zealand long argued Australia's quarantine restrictions had nothing to do with the science, and in November they won their fight in the World Trade Organization.

Well, tough restrictions will now apply to the imports but the industry here isn't convinced. We'll hear from them in a moment.

But first, the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, joins me now from Canberra.

Minister, thanks for joining us. Apples in a moment. I just want to ask you, firstly, though on the live cattle and sheep trade. The Government banned live cattle exports to Indonesia after some shocking images of mistreatment in those abattoirs in Indonesia. The images we've seen today in Turkey are as bad, if not worse. Will you be banning live animal exports to Turkey as a result?

CRAIG EMERSON:

I don't want to get into semantics but, in fact, what the Government did is suspended live cattle exports to Indonesia so that we could put the industry on a sustainable basis so that international standards would be observed for those cattle that came from Australia.

SPEERS:

So will you do that now for Turkey?

EMERSON:

In relation to Turkey, people who have filmed these sheep, and the treatment of them, are unable to confirm that these are Australian sheep. We are not responsible for all practices in all countries. What we seek to do ...

SPEERS: But these are abattoirs where Australian animals go. These are abattoirs ...

EMERSON: What we seek...

SPEERS: ... where Australian animals go.

EMERSON: What we seek to do is to put these industries on a sustainable footing; that is, where animal welfare standards are observed. And that's why we have Mr Bill Farmer, anticipating that this issue wouldn't be restricted to one country, doing a report, visiting these various countries. And he will give us that final report, I think it's at the end of August.

So ...

SPEERS: Sure, but isn't there a double standard...

EMERSON: ...we will await...

SPEERS: ...here? Isn't there a double standard here?

EMERSON: We will await that report.

SPEERS: But isn't there a double standard here? You didn't do that report before suspending the trade to Indonesia, and yet here we have images of abattoirs where Australian sheep

and cattle are processed, and similarly shocking scenes.

EMERSON: Well, we're putting in what's called traceability in relation to Indonesia. We will take on board recommendations from Mr Farmer about other markets. We suspended in relation to Indonesia. We do not know, nor do those who have filmed, know that these are Australian sheep. There is no such claim...

SPEERS: Well, Lyn White said she saw Australian sheep in the yards there...

EMERSON: ... that they're Australian sheep.

SPEERS: She saw Australian sheep in the yards of one of those abattoirs.

EMERSON: Yeah well, as I say, I know that as a fact, as a result of discussions that have occurred with Animals Australia, that it is not a claim that those sheep that we saw being mistreated were Australian sheep. Nevertheless, nevertheless, David, we're not relaxed about this. This is why Mr Farmer is doing this work. There are a number of countries that are covered by it. It's not just Turkey; it's other market destinations for live animals.

And what we seek to do is to put it on a sustainable footing. And of course...

SPEERS: Sure, but...

EMERSON: ... we have critics in the Coalition who say that there should never have been any suspension whatsoever to anywhere, other than for those facilities that were on the *Four Corners* program. I mean, they had blanket suspensions that lasted for years.

SPEERS: Yeah, well, I want to focus on what the Government is doing here. I mean, why can't you just pick up the phone to these abattoirs? They're all named. One is the big abattoir, government abattoir in Istanbul. So, do you guys process Australian cattle and sheep? And then perhaps follow the same path you did in Indonesia, and put that traceability in place.

EMERSON: This is what we're doing through the Farmer review. You don't seem to have taken on board what I just said in relation to the Farmer review is to get...

SPEERS: That's a review, Minister. I'm asking what the Government is doing as a government.

EMERSON: The Government has commissioned Mr Bill Farmer to do this work. That's my answer to your question. David, you've asked me a direct question. I've given you a direct answer. The report will be...

SPEERS: But how long will that take?

EMERSON: Well, I told you. You're not listening to the answers, which is interesting. I told you...

SPEERS: Well, no...

EMERSON: ... at the end of August. You were...

SPEERS: Your answer was...

EMERSON: ... getting ready for your next question without listening to the answer...

SPEERS: Well, okay...

EMERSON: The end of August. What's difficult to understand about the end of August?

SPEERS: What's difficult to understand is that's some – a couple of weeks away. With Indonesia, you whacked an immediate suspension in place. There is a double standard.

EMERSON: And similarly we put in place at that time - as you well know actually, as you well know - we put in place the Farmer review where Mr Farmer and his team have been going to these very countries and examining the standards that are being applied in those abattoirs. And

the end of August is not a long way away in order to get that process completed.

Now, of course, this is an issue in which some people think that there should be no standards whatsoever. Other people think that the trade should be banned altogether. And you've got the Government that is interested in the continuation of the trade on a sustainable basis, through which animal welfare standards are met, and a review process that is well underway and will be completed and will be reporting by the end of this month.

SPEERS: Alright...

EMERSON: What's the date today? You know, I mean, it's not that far away.

SPEERS: It's 18 August, no, a couple of weeks.

EMERSON: Yeah, exactly.

SPEERS: We'll look forward to that report.

EMERSON: That's right. Exactly.

SPEERS: On apple imports, can you guarantee that the rules you're going to put in place - now allowing the import of apples from New

Zealand - can you guarantee we won't get fire blight in Australia?

EMERSON:

We take the advice of Biosecurity Australia on this, and Biosecurity Australia has advised that the measures that are being put place, the quarantine measures that are being put in place, will prevent the importation inadvertently of fire blight and other diseases.

What we seek to do here, David, is to stop diseases coming into Australia but not necessarily to stop apples coming into Australia. And what the Coalition wants to do is stop apples coming into Australia.

SPEERS:

Well, the industry is still worried the conditions aren't strong enough. It's saying that what you perhaps should do is go further and say that exports from any New Zealand orchards where there has been fire blight, they should be banned. Why not take that extra step?

EMERSON:

Because it would be in breach of our obligations under the World Trade Organization. And in your introduction you pointed out that this dispute has been going on and off, basically on, for the best part of 90 years. And, as a result of complaints that New Zealand took to the World Trade Organization, which have been going on for a number of years, the WTO through the so-called

Appellate Body - appropriately named - produced a report in November of last year. We have brought in line the quarantine requirements with the provisions in that report. We have accepted the decision.

What the Coalition again is doing - and I know you'll say 'don't talk about the Opposition' - What the Coalition is doing...

SPEERS:

I was going to say that.

EMERSON:

... is going to do, is put into the Parliament a Bill that overturns the decision, rejects the decision of the World Trade Organization, and therefore endangers the livelihoods of farmers against whom - not necessarily in the apple industry - New Zealand can retaliate through the imposition of tariffs of up to 100 per cent.

This is against the interests of Australian farmers, and the Coalition should be ashamed of itself for putting Australian farmers in a position where they could be caught in the crossfire.

SPEERS:

Well, the Greens and Independents may well back that, so it might get some support in Parliament.

EMERSON:

Well, indeed, if they do back it and the Coalition wins that vote, then that would

become the formulation of a piece of law which is in absolute contravention of Australia's obligations under the World Trade Organization.

Now, we might have...

SPEERS: Are you similarly as...

EMERSON: We might have Mr Abbott saying, 'well, why would we bother being in the World Trade Organization?'. Here's why: people want to be in it because they can then take action against other countries to which we export in order to prevent them applying unfair practices and restraints on our exports to them. This is the problem.

SPEERS: Are you similarly as critical of the Tasmanian Government, because the Labor Government there is determined to keep its ban in place on New Zealand apples. Can you overrule them on that?

EMERSON: Indeed, the obligation is not on the state of Tasmania but on the nation of Australia. The state of Tasmania is not a party to the World Trade Organization. It is...

SPEERS: So they can't do anything...

EMERSON: an organisation of nations and we are supposed to abide by the decisions.

Let's understand: this would be the first time in Australian history that a Parliament would reject a decision, properly made, of the World Trade Organization, thereby triggering the possibility of retaliatory action by New Zealand and undermining our capacity to take action against other countries. All our other agricultural exporters - our beef producers, our sugar producers, our sheep meat producers, our producers of fruit and vegetables - would all be in the firing line if this legislation is supported and put forward, as Tony Abbott's Agriculture Shadow Minister has said he will do on Monday.

SPEERS: Alright, Trade Minister Craig Emerson, thanks for joining us this afternoon on those two issues.

EMERSON: Thanks David.