



MEDIA RELEASE

DR CRAIG EMERSON

Minister for Trade

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COALITION EMBRACING ECONOMIC ISOLATIONISM

Under Tony Abbott's leadership the Coalition is increasingly embracing economic isolationism, Trade Minister Craig Emerson said today.

"Mr Abbott has indicated his willingness to breach the world trading rules and tear up trade agreements with neighbouring Asian countries, just for a few votes here in Australia," Dr Emerson said.

Apples

Shadow Agriculture Minister, John Cobb, has introduced into Parliament a Bill on New Zealand apples that would breach the world trading rules, exposing Australian exporters to retaliation.

"If the Bill, due for consideration tomorrow [Monday], passes, it would be the first time in history that Australia had rejected a decision of the World Trade Organization," Dr Emerson warned.

Palm oil

The Coalition is supporting a Private Member's Bill on palm oil labelling, which risks provoking a trade war with Malaysia and a complaint to the World Trade Organization by Malaysia and Indonesia.

Indonesia has indicated it "strenuously opposes" the Bill, which it describes as "discriminatory and divisive", warning of a challenge against Australia in the World Trade Organization.

Malaysia has told a parliamentary committee the Bill "poses a threat to regional trade ... violates several principles of the WTO and the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement and ... undermines relations between Malaysia and Australia".

Anti-dumping

The Government announced improvements to Australia's anti-dumping regime in June 2011, which are fully consistent with Australia's obligations under the World Trade Organization.

The Shadow Industry Minister has described these improvements as “a damp squib”, and “a token effort” that rejected “a series of sensible changes” emanating from a Private Member’s Bill on dumping.

The changes the Coalition describes as “sensible” actually violate Australia’s World Trade Organization obligations – again leaving Australian exporters wide-open to retaliation.

The Coalition has indicated it will go much further than the Gillard Government’s measures that are all WTO-consistent.

“By placing Australia outside of the World Trade Organizations rules, the Coalition would remove Australia’s capacity to take action on behalf of our exporters against illegal import restrictions,” Dr Emerson said.

Coal seam gas exploration veto

Last week’s anti-trade policies come on the heels of Mr Abbott’s declaration that landholders should have a right of veto over exploration for coal seam gas on their land.

This would overturn Australia’s minerals property rights system, which recognises that minerals under the ground are the property of the people of Australia.

It would indicate to foreign mining companies that they are unwelcome in Australia.

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