



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

Transcript  
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*Subjects: Australian manufacturing, Craig Thomson, Galaxy poll, political mood.*

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**GLEN BARTHOLOMEW:** Marius Benson is speaking to Queensland MP from Labor, and the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson.

**MARIUS BENSON:** Craig Emerson, the Prime Minister is meeting key manufacturing unions and the Australian Industry Group today to discuss the impact on manufacturing of the resources boom, which last week saw 1,400 jobs lost. What can the Government do to manufacturing?

**CRAIG EMERSON:** Well, everyone knows that when the exchange rate is floated, which it was back in 1983, then it floats. But we are extremely conscious of the impact of the high dollar on the competitiveness of manufacturing. And it's obviously frustrating for the employers and the workers who do everything they possibly can to

be efficient, and yet then get belted by a high exchange rate.

So the sorts of remedies that we can contemplate are doing everything possible to continue to improve the competitiveness of manufacturing by cutting its costs, by increasing investment in skills - which we are doing - and supporting innovation. Because the future of manufacturing in this country is in high-skill, high-wage work and production, rather than any sort of race to the bottom to low skills and low wages.

BENSON:

Craig Thomson: The Australian is reporting this morning that Julia Gillard, in the wake of the scandals around Craig Thomson, is preparing to announce a new clearing house to deal with misconduct allegations. Are you aware of that Government plan?

EMERSON:

Well, this is a consequence of an arrangement that we entered into with the minor parties after the last election. And so we're proceeding with that consideration of policy there. It's not specifically being generated in respect of Craig Thomson.

BENSON:

How would it affect Craig Thomson if it were operating? Would this clearing house require him to explain himself to Parliament?

EMERSON: Well, let's see where we land in terms of the actual clearing house policy, so to speak. But it won't do what the Coalition has sought: and that is, it won't lead to demands that Craig Thomson resign from Parliament, as called for by Barry O'Farrell. It won't lead to Craig Thomson losing the presumption of innocence. And it's not an easy, cheap, sleazy way to The Lodge, to deny or seek to pressure investigative processes.

BENSON: There have been some expressions for the personal welfare of Craig Thomson. How is he, personally?

EMERSON: He's okay. But obviously anyone who is subject to a very large number of allegations of this nature - none of them substantiated - would be feeling some pressure. He has a seven months pregnant wife, and I think people should give at least passing consideration to that.

BENSON: There are suggestions that you, the Government, might retaliate. Do you have a dirt file on the Opposition? Or are they all cleanskins?

EMERSON: We just would not behave the way that Mr Abbott, in his eagerness to get to The Lodge, has behaved. We actually do respect, and believe in, the presumption of innocence. We

don't believe in pressuring and interfering in processes.

BENSON:

Just finally, can I ask you about a new poll which is out this morning. It is a Galaxy poll reported in the Courier Mail in your home state of Queensland. It shows a 23 per cent primary vote for Labor; 8 per cent swing against you just since last year's election? According to this poll, you go, and in fact Kevin Rudd is the only Labor member to survive.

EMERSON:

Well, I think there was a similar poll; not the same numbers, but out a little while ago. There's no election on Saturday. That's the question that's asked: if an election were on Saturday, how would you vote? We will just continue to do our policy work.

BENSON:

Now several Labor MPs have been reported as saying that they sense an anger in the electorate towards Labor now that is as bad as 1975 and 1996, the years of election losses. Do you sense that anger in the electorate, when you go to your own electorate?

EMERSON:

Look, I think that obviously there is some annoyance with Labor; there's also annoyance, I must say, with the Coalition. But to make comparisons back to 1975, I mean I'd hardly call myself a spring chicken - I'm not an old bloke either - but I wasn't around in 1975

[laughs] in Caucus, and only a handful of people were around in 1996. So these Caucus members who look back on 1975 and the tough days under the Whitlam Government, I don't know who they are, but geez, they keep their appearance up pretty well.

BENSON: [Laughs] Craig Emerson, thanks very much.

EMERSON: Thanks very much. Bye bye now.

BARTHOLOMEW: Old MPs never die. The Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, speaking about the current political reality, to Marius Benson.

