



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

Transcript  
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*Subjects: Libya, Labor leadership*

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**GLEN BARTHOLOMEW:** The Federal Government is now looking for a new approach on boat arrivals after the High Court's demolition of its Malaysia people swap deal and that debate is taking place and it reports of calls in some Labor ranks for a shake up in the Government, and even some private calls for the Prime Minister to go. One of the strongest backers of the Prime Minister has been the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson. He's currently leaving Paris after representing Australia at the international conference on Libya in place of Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd who's still recovering from surgery. Craig Emerson spoke to Marius Benson and Marius began by asking him about the Libya summit and what it's achieved.

**MARIUS BENSON:** Craig Emerson, you've been speaking in Paris at the conference on a new Libya. A new Libya appears to be emerging but Colonel Qaddafi is still defiant even in defeat. The war is not over, NATO strikes are continuing.

**CRAIG EMERSON:** That's all true and what transpired at the conference was the great sense of solidarity for a

new Libya. The National Transitional Council is guiding Libya through to both freedom and over time to a transition to democracy. So around 60 nations from around the world pledged their support for a democratic, free Libya and Australia was able to pledge its support to the tune of \$4.6 million in humanitarian aid through the Red Cross.

**BENSON:** Beyond that short-term assistance is there a role for Australia in rebuilding Libya post-Qaddafi?

**EMERSON:** Australia will be involved in the reconstruction and rebuilding of Libya. But the immediate concern is the humanitarian one and given that the fighting hasn't stopped completely, there was a lot of support given to obviously the notion that Qaddafi should go and he should instruct his supporters to lay down their arms because there's been much horrible bloodshed to date.

**BENSON:** Craig Emerson, you've only been out of Australia for a couple of days but it has been a tumultuous couple of days for the Government. Tony Abbott says in light of the High Court demolition of the Malaysian people swap deal, your government, the Labor Government, is now dying of shame. Is he right?

**EMERSON:** Well Mr Abbott is almost universally wrong in the statements that he makes. He should get on and do some decent policy work. This is a time for strong, determined government and that's what Julia Gillard is providing: strong leadership; always looking to the national interest; and being prepared to make the hard decisions, make the hard calls in the national interest.

BENSON: Many newspapers are reporting this morning that senior Labor figures, senior Government figures, are saying that Julia Gillard has now lost her authority. Do you agree with that?

EMERSON: Julia Gillard is a great and strong leader. She has supported everything that I have sought in terms of sensible economic policy. She has always operated in the national interest and I think she is a fantastic leader. Yes, these are challenging times for a government. It's not the first time a government has been through challenging times. It's just the mettle of the leader and Julia Gillard shows her mettle through her strong, determined leadership and that's why I think she's such a great leader.

BENSON: Some senior Labor figures are being quoted anonymously this morning as saying she has to consider her position. Maybe step aside maybe for Stephen Smith, maybe for Kevin Rudd?

EMERSON: I'll just reiterate once again that Julia Gillard is a strong, determined leader. Through all of her professional career she has had one criterion in mind and that is to make policy decisions in the national interest. That's what she's done. She's unwavering in her commitment to making the hard policy choices and sometimes they're not universally popular. But if you just got up, rolled out of bed every morning, checked the latest opinion polls then that is itself a betrayal of the Australian people. They expect strong leadership, they expect leaders to make tough decisions, even if those decisions aren't always popular in the short term.

BENSON: Many people are saying that Labor's electoral position is now terminal. Do you think they're right or can Labor win the next election?

EMERSON: I believe and I'm quite confident that Labor will win the next election because here's the contrast between Julia Gillard, a strong determined leader, and Tony Abbott a rank opportunist.

BENSON: All the evidence both in the polls and anecdotally is that the Government and Julia Gillard are deeply unpopular. Does something have to change with Labor?

EMERSON: We just need to continue to move ahead with the sorts of decisions that are in the national interest and the Australian people will respect a government that makes decisions in the national interests, that doesn't go weak at the knees and crumble and resort to political opportunism as Mr Abbott has. That's what they expect of a prime minister. That's what they're getting out of Julia Gillard and that's what they'll continue to get even if sometimes those decisions aren't the most popular in the short term.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thank you very much.

EMERSON: Thanks very much, Marius.

BARTHOLOMEW: The Trade Minister Craig Emerson speaking from Paris to NewsRadio's Marius Benson.