



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

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NIKOLAI BEILHARZ:

Now let's take a look at the kangaroo industry. And it's hoping that Russians could again be eating kangaroo meat depending on some negotiations on a deal to reopen the market.

Russia banned kangaroo meat imports two years ago, saying it had bacterial contamination concerns. Federal Trade Minister Craig Emerson will meet with the Russian Agriculture Minister this week during a meeting of 19 Agricultural exporters called the Cairns Group in Canada to discuss this issue.

Minister Emerson told Mary Goode that the Cairns Group will focus on two main issues: food security and the Doha trade negotiations.

[Beginning of interview excerpt]

CRAIG EMERSON:

So the first one obviously is that we want to see a successful conclusion to a decade-long round of negotiations. Because a very important part of that is the negotiations relating to agriculture, where Australia and a number of other countries are pushing for severe cuts to farm subsidies in the United States and the European Union, and also to the ending of export subsidies on agricultural products.

MARY GOODE:

Every time we speak to a trade minister over the last few years who's returned from a trade forum - including the Cairns Forum - the message has been that there's been an agreement to push forward with the Doha trade talks. Yet, then nothing happens. Is it time to put hopes of a Doha trade deal to one side?

EMERSON:

I think from an Australian point of view, what farmers would expect of Australia is that we never give up. Australia has a very good reputation in the World Trade Organization as a cleanskin, if you like, that has always argued that our farmers are efficient and that we seek simply to have good access to other countries' markets and not have to try to get over the top of high trade barriers.

So as cleanskins, if we gave up then you'd have to think that the whole thing would be finished.

GOODE: As you mentioned before, the main sticking point is that the EU and US don't want to reduce their agricultural subsidies. You can imagine the uproar from those farmers if they did reduce those subsidies. So is a breakthrough realistic on that point?

EMERSON: In relation to farm subsidies, there is new thinking in the United States and the European Union, and that is that their farm subsidies are expensive and there are real debt problems in the United States and also in parts of Europe.

And so the new thinking is that they do need to limit those. The sticking point on the negotiations is actually in relation to manufacturing more than anything else. But nothing is agreed until everything's agreed, which is the way that it was set up, the way this Round was set up back in 2001.

I think we could look for - with some hope - for caps on farm subsidies and the elimination of export subsidies for agriculture, but only if we can get a breakthrough on other areas that are holding up all of the negotiations.

GOODE: Over the next few days you'll meet with the Russian Agriculture Minister. Now there have been problems for Australians getting kangaroo and beef meat into the market. What will you be saying to the Minister?

EMERSON:

We've been working with the Russians on that and they are expressing a positive disposition in exchange for us granting what's called market economy status to Russia. This is in relation to anti-dumping procedures. When Russia does accede to the World Trade Organization it will get market economy status. They've asked for early recognition from Australia. We're prepared to contemplate that, but we do want them to open up their markets for kangaroo meat in exchange.

And also, as you indicated, we will do some more in terms of the ease of getting our beef into their market. I have had discussions with the Minister from Russia; we'll have further discussions this week. We're kind of agreed in principle, and we've just got to make sure that we keep driving that through together.

NIKOLAI BEILHARZ:

Trade Minister, Craig Emerson.