



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

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Subjects: asylum-seekers, Nielsen poll, carbon price, leadership.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW: A bit more noise expected in Federal Cabinet in a meeting in Canberra this morning, settling on a new asylum-seeker policy before Parliament resumes later today.

The week's opened with another disastrous opinion poll for Labor. One of the Ministers at today's Cabinet meeting will be the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson. He's speaking to Marius Benson.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, Cabinet is meeting this morning to settle on an asylum-seeker policy - one that backs offshore processing - and then that deal will go to Caucus at nine o'clock Canberra time. Is there any chance that all Labor MPs, when they gather at

that Caucus meeting, will reject the deal put by the Prime Minister, and Cabinet?

CRAIG EMERSON:

Well, there's a compelling case for offshore processing, and I'm not going to in any way pre-empt the deliberations of the Government, including the party room. But the argument here is that we need to break the people-smugglers' model, and onshore processing doesn't do that.

BENSON:

Is it a problem that offshore detention, offshore processing, is contrary to the Labor Party's platform?

EMERSON:

Well, let's see how the deliberations go today. I simply am not going to pre-empt them, because we need to have a genuine discussion about this.

BENSON:

There is another poll out today, a Nielsen poll, and it is again disastrous for Labor. You're getting nowhere from the very low primary vote you've had for some time in that poll; Julia Gillard actually going backwards. Does that surprise you?

EMERSON:

Well, we're going through some very challenging times. And I reckon there'll be a poll - the way we're going - every second day, maybe every day; maybe twice a day. And if we were to govern ourselves, and govern the country, on the basis of opinion polls, we'd be doing nothing else than rolling out of bed and checking the polls.

The Australian people don't want that. What they want is a determined Government, a party that will govern in the national interest, not for some sort of political opportunism; and also one that will make the decisions that are necessary to secure the country's future, whether it be on asylum-seekers, whether it be on sound economic policy instead of Mr Abbott's economic Hansonism – they expect governments to make the tough decisions. That's why we were elected; that's what's expected of us; that's what we'll deliver.

BENSON:

But these tough decisions that you say you're taking - and paying a price in the poll - these are actually contrary to Labor principles, as declared. The

asylum seekers: offshore detention contrary to the Labor platform. The carbon tax, which will be debated this week: that's not a Labor policy that you're suffering in fighting for; that's a Greens policy. That was not the Labor policy before the election.

EMERSON:

Indeed, we have consistently said that we wanted to put a price on carbon. That's what we're doing, and this particular arrangement has a three-year fixed price permit, followed by a floating price...

BENSON:

Yes, that fixed permit is the carbon tax. That's the Greens' policy, which was the price of forming a minority Government with their support; not a Labor policy.

EMERSON:

If I could just finish, this is a three-year fixed price permit, followed by a floating price. Last time we put up the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, which was a one-year fixed priced permit followed by a floating carbon price. It's a difference of two years.

Now, some people want to call that a carbon tax. That's fine - we understand that. Why wasn't it called a carbon tax last time, when it was a one-year fixed price permit, compared with a three-year fixed price permit? It is, in fact, a market-based mechanism. We have said consistently we want to put a price on carbon, and the best way of doing that is through a market-based mechanism.

BENSON:

Kevin Rudd is preferred as ALP Leader, by 44 per cent of voters, according to the Nielsen poll; Julia Gillard just 19 per cent. Why is Kevin Rudd so popular?

EMERSON:

My sole interest is in supporting Julia Gillard as the Prime Minister of Australia, and getting on with the hard policy work. I think you understand from my background, Marius, that my interest is in policy; doing the right thing by the nation. That's what we're doing with Julia Gillard as the leader, and that's what we'll continue to do.

BENSON:

But you were one of those who removed Kevin Rudd last year and replaced him with Julia

Gillard. Is it time for you, and particularly the Right faction of which you are part, to say 'we made a mistake'?

EMERSON:

I've always backed the leader. And if you look at that, my record, I've always backed the leader. And the reason that I've backed the leader is pretty simple. One: basic loyalty; two: leading a party and leading a country if the party is in Government, is a hard job, and it's a challenging job. And it's best to let people do that job without talking about leadership changes all the time. I'm not interested in leadership changes; the Caucus is not interested in some sort of merry-go-round here. What we are doing is focusing on the important issues for this country. So these are the sorts of policy contrasts that are available to the Australian people. They're available now; they'll be available at the next election under the leadership of Julia Gillard.

BENSON:

Craig Emerson, thanks very much.

EMERSON:

Thank you, Marius.

BARTHOLOMEW:

The Federal Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, speaking with Marius Benson there.