



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

2CC Breakfasts with Mark Parton
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E&OE

Subjects: Ministerial titles; Peter Garrett; Kevin Rudd; NBN.

PARTON: Nineteen to nine, ladies and gentlemen. We give you Australia's new Minister for Trade, Dr Craig Emerson. Congratulations, Craig, well done.

EMERSON: Thanks, Mark. It's just such an honour and a privilege and I'll be working really hard to live up to the job of being a Cabinet Minister and Australia's Minister for Trade. I'm absolutely thrilled about it.

PARTON: Do you know, I have got to say that I think the new Ministry does reveal some great depth within the Labor Party. And you will have, of course, some very unique challenges.

EMERSON: Of course, with such a tight Parliament we'll need to do our very best for the Australian people. We'll need to be very consultative, not only with the Coalition, but especially with the Independents and the Greens. So it's a real challenge on the policy front, but also in what Bob Hawke used to call consensus building and that is letting people know what we're on about at the early stages. And interestingly and importantly, Mark, using the parliamentary committee process to engage people at the ground level. I think that's a really good reform that Rob Oakeshott has initiated, and has been signed up by the Coalition and Labor. So a high-quality Parliamentary process is on the way.

PARTON: I've got to say though, the announcement of this Ministry on the weekend was a bit of a shocker. I mean, there was nobody carrying the title of Education Minister, there was nobody carrying the title of Competition Policy there was no one carrying the title of Indigenous Health. And, of course, everything then was sort of tidied up and changed. It wasn't really the best way to start things, was it?

EMERSON: Look, I think it's one of those things where there were some constructive suggestions and some criticisms, there's no doubt about that, of titles. Where that criticism had some basis, Julia responded. And I actually think it's a strength of Julia. If improvements can be made, let's make improvements. In the education area, there was no re-allocation of responsibilities amongst the relevant Ministers, but the sector said 'well, we want the word "education" in there in relation to universities, in relation to schools', and that's now happened.

PARTON: Look, I got to tell you, there's a part of me that was surprised that Peter Garrett remained in the Ministry in any way shape or form. He's going to have a very challenging portfolio when you consider what's ahead as far as the school funding formula, and... it's going to be a steep learning curve for him.

EMERSON: It will, and the school funding arrangements are always an issue of great concern and interest to parents and to the various categories of schools. We're committed to supporting all schools in Australia. And I think Peter will do a really good job there. He is a very approachable, affable fellow. He listens, he takes on board the views of people in various groups and schools and so on. So, I think Peter will do a really good job. And he'll be very popular; he's actually a very popular man. Not only for his Ministerial duties in the Parliament, but for his past and the fact that if you did have the opportunity to meet and spend some time with Peter Garrett, you'd say 'hey, this guy's really a decent, wonderful human being'.

PARTON: Except when he's talking to Steve Price in an airport! But that's a whole different story. Craig, in your role as Trade Minister you're going to get to work pretty closely with your old mate Kevin Rudd. So many people around Australia who are still looking at the situation saying, 'how's this going to work?'

EMERSON: It's going to work fine. And you're right that Kevin and I are actually sworn into the same department, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There will be some overlap, but on the other hand there are clear distinctions between the responsibilities of the Trade Minister and the Foreign Affairs Minister. We've already had several discussions, so I think it's going to be a very productive relationship. Kevin does have high-standing in the international community. That will also help our trade interests.

PARTON: But see, you talk about that high standing in the international community; I'm staggered by the sort of conversations he's going to have, for argument's sake, in New York which is when, later on this week there's going to be a lot of people around the world who will sort of say 'oh, Kevin, I thought you were dead. You know, what's... what the hell's been going on down there?'

He's going to have to have a stock standard reply to those because there's going to be some embarrassment surely isn't there?

EMERSON: I don't think so.

PARTON: Of course there will.

EMERSON: The people you're talking about are very well-informed, they know what's happened here in Australia, they know that Kevin does have high standing, high credibility, around the world. That will be an asset, not only for the Gillard Government, but for Australia as a whole.

PARTON: So, if they know...

EMERSON: ... [Indistinct] Initiatives...

PARTON: If they know what went on in Australia, they'll know that Kevin's own party believed that he failed, and yet, he's back as Foreign Affairs Minister. Is that going to...?

EMERSON: Well, I think if you looked at elections and changes of leadership around the world, this would not be, by any means, unusual. There's a lot of...

PARTON: Yeah, it's not Italy here, mate...

EMERSON: No, but there's a lot of countries where leaders change. And I won't go through naming them because they might get a little bit anxious about it. But we have Prime Ministers one week in countries around the world, and then the next week they're no longer the Prime Minister. That's what happens in democracies, and that's what's happened in Australia. I don't think people will find it especially unique. They'll actually be able to recount plenty of experiences of their own that they then deal with the person who is sworn into the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. And Kevin will do a sensational job there.

PARTON: But you sound genuinely re-invigorated by this role of yours, and I know that you'll go your very hardest. Are you frightened looking over the other side, are you frightened of the prospect of Malcolm Turnbull talking up, well talking down, the NBN?

EMERSON: No, I'm not, and if I could acknowledge Malcolm's contribution to public policy and to public policy debate in this country. There are many times in which Malcolm and I, and Labor, we don't agree. But we do... well I, I'll speak for myself. I think he works pretty hard, he's got creative ideas, he was a bit unusual as a Liberal Party Leader, so much, so unusual that they actually removed him. But he, too, is a good guy and while we may not agree and while of course he'll hold this Government to account

as the Opposition should do, I just enjoy the discussions and the debates with Malcolm because he does put a lot of thought into them. I don't agree with them on the NBN. I think it's one of the great innovations of the 21st century in Australia. So do the Independents, by the way. And I think that was one of the key reasons why the Independents, representing regional Australian electorates, actually went with Labor. Because Tony Abbott said 'oh, we've got, we've got one of these schemes, you know, it's only \$7 billion and just as good.' Well I don't think that passes the laugh test.

PARTON: And this is Tony Windsor, who doesn't even have a computer on the desk in his office?

EMERSON: Well, lots of people in the electorate do. And increasingly they will require high-speed broadband, because it does equalise Australia. It does give people in regional and remote areas the sorts of services and the advantages that we tend to take much more for granted in major capital cities. I think it's a really good boost for regional Australia and a very modern boost for regional Australia.

PARTON: Good on you, Craig, thanks for your time this morning.

EMERSON: Ok, thanks Mark.