



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
NINE NETWORK NEWS

September 23, 2011

E&OE

Subjects: asylum-seekers, leadership.

ALICIA GOREY:

Let's get the details now on our top story, and the blame game over the arrival of two more asylum-seeker boats has begun. Both the Government and the Opposition are demanding support for each other's policies.

For a government perspective, we're joined now by Trade Minister Craig Emerson.

Thanks very much for your time Dr Emerson.

CRAIG EMERSON:

My pleasure Alicia.

GOREY:

You're both blaming each other, so who is to blame for these latest boat arrivals?

EMERSON:

We've got legislation before the Parliament that would provide for offshore processing. Our arrangement is Malaysia, but we haven't actually prescribed Malaysia; we're just saying the Government of the day has a right to smash the people smugglers, and this legislation would do that. Now Mr Abbott says he will only support Nauru, whereas we say, based on advice, that only the Malaysian arrangement would work.

But the government of the day should have the right to be able to smash people-smuggling, and that's all we seek from Mr Abbott. And he is saying no. As usual he's saying no.

GOREY:

The Opposition says it has a simple solution. It wants Julia Gillard to recall Parliament to pass their amendments and just to phone Nauru.

EMERSON:

Yeah, but you see, they are saying it must be Nauru; it cannot be Malaysia. And what we're saying is we're not prescribing whether it's Malaysia or Nauru; we're simply saying the government of the day can make that decision.

Mr Abbott should give the capacity of the government of the day to make what it considers the right decision, and that is the Malaysian arrangement in our case.

Mr Abbott, if he were to be Prime Minister, and wanted to exercise Nauru as an option, he would be able to under this legislation.

We're not seeking to dictate to him, but he is seeking to dictate to this Government that it must be Nauru and it can't be Malaysia. What we have to do is bust the people-smuggling rings. We're advised that it's Malaysia. But whether it's Malaysia or Nauru this legislation would enable that to happen. And Mr Abbott is saying he will oppose it.

That means he is giving a green light: he's saying to the people-smugglers 'gentlemen, start your engines; come on down'. And they are.

GOREY:

All right, well let's just move on to another topic: on a Kevin Rudd resurrection. If these shocking poll figures continue for Labor, will you have to reconsider the leadership at some point?

EMERSON:

We've got a perfectly good leader in Julia Gillard.

GOREY:

The polls don't say that, though.

EMERSON:

And she'll continue to be the leader. Well, what's going on of course is that we're making some hard decisions in the national interest.

We are making decisions to smash the people-smuggling rings. That's not universally popular. But I think most people actually think that we should protect our borders; and we should, at the same time, protect asylum-seekers from dying at sea. We've got carbon pricing and so on. All of these are issues may not enjoy short-term popularity but are in the nation's interests. And it's Julia Gillard who's driving that policy agenda in the national interest.

And we're not going to roll out of bed every second day, check the polls, and see who should be leader. The leader is and will be Julia Gillard. And, of course, a lot of this speculation is actually created by the Liberal Party. And they'd be the least informed, but the most motivated to create a distraction around the leadership.

I can put out a press release next week and say I have it on good Liberal Party authority that Malcolm Turnbull's going to challenge Tony Abbott.

It would be false. I'm not going to do it. But that's the sort of caper that's going on.

GOREY:

All right. Only time will tell.

All right.

We really appreciate your time Trade Minister
Craig Emerson. Thanks so much for joining us.

EMERSON:

Thank you. Thanks, Alicia.

