



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

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Subjects: Australian economy, poker machine legislation, Abbott on leadership, asylum-seekers.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW: Well, the Federal Government's promise to return the Budget to surplus within two years is under question this morning, with the Treasurer Wayne Swan apparently indicating - giving - some doubts about the pledge. And the Government is facing a new battle over its plans to combat problem gambling, with the head of the AFL and NRL getting together today to discuss ways to fight the planned poker machine laws.

For a government view on the challenges facing it, Marius Benson has spoken to the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson. Here's what he's had to say this morning.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, can I begin by asking about the prospects of returning to surplus by 2012-13, because that has been a rolled gold

promise from the Government for quite some time.

Wayne Swan, the Treasurer, yesterday appeared to signal some uncertainty, saying we have to play with the cards we're dealt on the world economy. Is that still a rolled gold promise?

CRAIG EMERSON:

Well, yes, we remain determined to return the Budget to surplus. I think the point that Wayne Swan is making is it's potentially more challenging if there's an economic slowdown. But that's what we're working towards and we understand the importance of returning the Budget to surplus.

BENSON:

So, you don't think maintaining the surplus or achieving the surplus on schedule will cost jobs during a global downturn?

EMERSON:

We are very, very well positioned. In fact, any objective economist or commentator would say that the place they would like to be at this particular point in time is in the Asian region, and, of course, in the Asian Century.

BENSON:

Can I leave the economy there and go to another issue which you are under fire on today, which is that of the pre-commitment legislation for poker machines. Are you worried by the prospect of the Aussie Rules

heads and the Rugby League heads getting together to campaign against you on that?

EMERSON:

Well, of course, it's a democracy and they're entitled to express a view. But I think it would be very helpful if everyone accepted that there is a problem of problem gambling. Problem gamblers lose, on average, \$21,000 a year. Now, if the clubs want to campaign, well in a democracy that's their right. But I think it would be very helpful if people paid more than lip service to the issue of problem gambling. It is a real scourge in this country.

BENSON:

Eddie McGuire, the President of Collingwood, calls your plans a footy tax. Is that an accurate description?

EMERSON:

Everyone likes to call everything a tax. This is pre-commitment, and a pre-commitment simply limits the amount of money that a problem gambler or anyone else stands to lose.

Now, if Mr McGuire wants to call that a tax, I guess he can. I mean, it's up to him. But I can't quite conceive as to how that involves taxing people if it just means that they need to pre-commit to the amount of money that they are prepared to risk.

BENSON:

Could I go to the Opposition, which is conducting war games, as all political parties

do, looking at various scenarios of possible outcomes in politics? One is an early election. An early election preceded by an early return to Kevin Rudd as Labor leader. Is that a contingency the Opposition should guard against?

EMERSON:

These scenarios are conceived of and given to the media by the Coalition. And I can tell you this: the Coalition are not experts on the Labor Party. All they are seeking to do is generate stories. And, of course, papers like *The Daily Telegraph* are very happy to run stories about the Coalition planning this and planning that on the basis of what they hear from reliable Coalition sources who had a couple of bottles of wine with someone on the Labor side of politics.

It's trash journalism from a trash newspaper and it really doesn't warrant a serious response.

BENSON:

Does Labor want to run a full term?

EMERSON:

Labor will run a full term. You've heard the Prime Minister say that repeatedly. Labor will run a full term, and this is what absolutely terrifies Mr Abbott.

He thinks that during the period of putting in place a carbon price that he could profit from

an early election. And that's what he wants: an early election. He'd just like to be able to skate his way to The Lodge. That's not how it works. And Mr Abbott is going to have to roll up his sleeves, develop alternative policies, explain why he wants more boats to arrive in Australia, which means more deaths at sea and more Navy personnel risking their lives.

Now, Mr Abbott is a man without a conscience. He's so keen to be PM that he's willing to risk more asylum-seekers losing their lives at sea. And by blocking the Government's legislation, he's hoping that more boats will arrive and he doesn't care if that means more people dying at sea.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thank you very much.

EMERSON: Thank you, Marius.

BARTHOLOMEW: The Trade Minister in the current Government, Craig Emerson, with Marius Benson.

