



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript

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E&OE

Subjects: MPs' pay rises, tax summit, gambling reforms.

NATARSHA BELLING: Tax reform tops the agenda in the week ahead in politics. And joining us now to debate the issue is Trade Minister Craig Emerson in our Canberra studio, and Shadow Environment Minister Greg Hunt in Melbourne. Thanks so much both of you for joining us tonight.

GREG HUNT: Evening Natarsha.

CRAIG EMERSON: It's a pleasure, Natarsha.

BELLING: Minister Emerson, if I can start with you. Many may say there's great disillusionment in our community with politicians, and there's a push for politicians to have their wages increased. The average wage in Australia is about \$64,000. There's speculation an MP's wage could increase from 140 to \$250,000. In the

current economic climate, why should MPs get a wage rise?

EMERSON:

You're right, it is speculation. Earlier in the year, the Government moved some legislation through the Parliament to take this decision-making out of the hands of politicians, and it's probably not a good idea for politicians to be setting their own pay. So, depending on your sport, an independent umpire, independent referee, the Remuneration Tribunal, is deliberating on this. And I'm just going on the basis of what you are, Natarsha, and that is a newspaper report.

There'll never be agreement on what is the right level of wages for politicians, so it is best that the independent umpire makes those decisions.

BELLING:

Mr Hunt, the next question: looking ahead at this week's all-important tax forum. Now, the aim of this exercise is to bring ideas to the table. The Opposition wasn't invited. Firstly, would have you liked to have been invited? What sort of ideas would have you brought to the table? Or some may say it was just an opportunity to have a go at the very controversial carbon tax.

HUNT:

Well, unfortunately, our invitation appears to have been lost in the mail. But if we were

there, our view would be very clear. Firstly, no new taxes, including no carbon tax. And secondly, we think that the Prime Minister should use this forum as an opportunity to say to the Australian people, 'I will take the carbon tax legislation to an election to give the people a say'.

If the people, ultimately, have to pay through higher electricity prices, surely the people must have a say at an election. That's what we would be saying at a tax forum.

BELLING:

Mr Emerson, what's your response? And, second of all, I would like to ask: are you ruling out there will not be any increase in the GST?

EMERSON:

Well, I'll handle the second first with a simple word: we are ruling it out. That's more than one word, I accept that. There will be no change to the GST.

In relation to Greg's point, he and Tony Abbott have actually in the past advocated a carbon tax. We are, in implementing the recommendations of the Henry Review, putting in place a mining tax which will fund small business tax relief, and an increase in people's superannuation savings.

So now we've got Greg saying no new taxes, but his boss, Tony Abbott, has got a proposed

increase in the company tax rate to pay for his paid parental leave scheme and a \$70 billion black hole. So, we do want a constructive discussion. We want to make a fairer tax system. We do want to support small business in particular, but to make sure that there is ongoing support for Australian families, because we do know that they're struggling with the cost of living.

BELLING:

Mr Hunt, do you think the Government's going to make its deadline on the controversial pokies tax? We saw another pretty stern warning this morning from the Independent MP.

HUNT:

Well, clearly, the Government is divided on this issue. There are many members across Sydney and across New South Wales, as well as in other states, who are deeply concerned about the social fabric.

It is the Government that should be driving the agenda, not individuals. And what we see now is that we have an unstable government, which is uncertain as to what they want to do. Our view is that let's focus on those who have a gambling problem and not try to disrupt the social fabric.

I hope the Government agrees with that; but they're deeply unstable and now, as of today, there's greater instability.

BELLING:

I'm sorry, we've run out of time; we'll have to leave it there. Craig Emerson and Greg Hunt, thanks so much for your time tonight.

EMERSON:

Righto Natarsha.

HUNT:

Thank you.

