



**THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP**  
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript  
2CC Breakfast with Mark Parton  
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E&OE

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*Subjects: Chilean miners; Asylum seekers; NBN; Climate change*

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PARTON: They have got the cage over to the hoist where it's going to go underneath the ground in Chile as the sun gets lower. We're certainly approaching twilight there and it's about an hour and a half away from the rescue operation and we'll give you blow-by-blow as it unfolds, right here at Talking Canberra 1206 2CC. It's just going to be one of those monumental days, particularly for the people of Chile. You know, they're all going to remember where they were and what they were doing; and as Claudia Soto told us from Santiago earlier, most of the country is just sitting in front of the TV, listening to radio and following it blow-by-blow. And as we're joined by Dr Craig Emerson, the Federal Trade Minister, in a world where it's often dominated by bad news, it's so good to see a good news story unfolding there in Chile, Craig, isn't it?

EMERSON: Yeah, it certainly is. What a relief, not only for miners, but for their families who must have thought the very worst at the outset. It's been a great endeavour by everyone involved. So, I love to see good news stories. There's no shortage of bad news stories in the media. But it's just heart-warming to see the imminent prospect of these mine workers being reunited with their families.

PARTON: Having said that, we did see some good news yesterday as far as the Government's offshore asylum centres - and I heard you commenting on it on other media yesterday - because I always thought it was smoke and mirrors with East Timor, and there was really no chance of it happening. But it does look like there is some chance after a meeting yesterday with Jose Ramos Horta and Chris Bowen.

EMERSON: There is a genuine engagement there. President Ramos Horta has had meetings with Chris Bowen, our immigration minister. And Chris has also met other senior members of the Government and officials. So, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves. But certainly the early indications from those meetings are positive. We believe fundamentally in a regional solution to a

regional challenge. Not putting people out in the middle of the Pacific, in Nauru, when in fact, the area where people are getting on to boats and then arriving in Australia is to our North-West, not out in the middle of the Pacific. So, as I say, let's not get ahead of ourselves, but there's some real positive engagement there.

PARTON: And there is a long way to go, particularly when you consider the sorts of numbers we're talking about. Australia has just over 2500 irregular maritime arrivals at the Christmas Island detention centre and just over 2000 at the onshore detention facilities. It does get bigger and bigger, doesn't it?

EMERSON: I'd like you to consider this though Mark, if I could put it into historical perspective. The total number of people who have arrived in Australia by boat since 1975, so that's 35 years ago, is around 25,000 people. Now, we've just been through the footy finals, 25,000 would be a pretty disappointing semi-final crowd at the footy. Now, I'm not talking about the last year or two, I'm talking about the last 35 years. And the hysteria that is whipped up, usually by our opponents - talking about armadas and invasions - is absolutely irresponsible. They're trying to give people the impression that because people are arriving by boat, this is overcrowding our roads, our hospitals, our schools.

PARTON: So Craig, if it's not a problem then why are we going down the line of setting up this offshore processing centre?

EMERSON: What I actually said is, let's keep it in perspective. I'm not saying that there's no problem or there's no challenge, and we're dealing with that, but the campaign that is being waged by Tony Abbott since he became leader, is one where they seek to give the impression we're being invaded, if you like, by people arriving by boats. I'm giving your listeners the true dimensions of this issue. Something of the order of 25,000 people over 35 years. Now we don't want people arriving by boat. It is a very risky journey, people have lost their lives. Lots of children have lost their lives as a result of this very dangerous journey. We don't support people smugglers. The Gillard Government has cracked down on that and increased penalties for people smuggling.

PARTON: It hasn't worked.

EMERSON: There are a lot of people going through the system. Dozens, something like 70, have already been convicted, so we are cracking down.

PARTON: It hasn't worked, I'd have to say.

EMERSON: Well, again, let's keep the whole issue in perspective. I'm not seeking to minimise it. I'm not saying it's not a problem. I'm saying that the deployment of this issue for base political purposes by the Coalition - giving the impression there is an invasion under way - is incorrect. And, I think, unproductive. But then again, that's Tony Abbott, and that's the way he conducts his politics.

PARTON: Let's move on to another issue, which is certainly not in the realms of your portfolio umbrella, but I know you've been following very closely, and that's the role out of the NBN. We've always been talking about it as a \$43 billion project, but it looks as though we're going to start talking about it as a \$44 billion project, because there's been some changes to the principles of the Tasmanian roll-out, and if they're adopted around the country, it's going to cost around an extra \$1 billion. This is just going to keep on blowing out, isn't it?

EMERSON: Well, I don't accept that it's just going to blow out. I think, obviously, there will always be media reports about the National Broadband Network. It is the largest modern infrastructure project, arguably the largest infrastructure project in Australia's history. As you know, Mark, I'm a big defender of this project, and we'll see these arguments that the cost has just gone from \$43 billion to \$44 billion. There will be reports like this on almost a weekly basis and ...

PARTON: Well, it looks to me as though it's pretty much on the money. If they're going from street to street, actually to house to house, it surprises me that it's only going to cost an extra \$1 billion.

EMERSON: Well, we actually did always talk about fibre to the premises. This is in the pre-election period - that we were going to deliver fibre to the premises, rather than what's called fibre to the node, where it then has to be further extended into the premises. Look, I'm a great defender of this project, Mark. And of course, again, we've got the Coalition saying that we shouldn't be doing a National Broadband Network. Their little third, or fourth, or fifth-rate \$7 billion job is good enough for Australia when Korea and other countries with which we need to compare ourselves with are up to a thousand megabits per second. That's what we'll be capable of doing too. Often we talk about regional Australia. Well who are going to be the great beneficiaries out of the National Broadband Network - regional Australia. And of course, Tony Abbott says he's the great champion of regional Australia, but people in regional Australia don't deserve high-speed broadband.

PARTON: Dr Craig Emerson is with us, the Trade Minister, and before we let you go, Julia Gillard, your leader during the election campaign, said Labor wouldn't be putting a price on carbon in its first term and now it appears that you are. Was she lying or ...

EMERSON: No, in fact, we said that we would be seeking to build a community consensus on putting a price on carbon. That's exactly what she did say.

PARTON: She said there would be a community consensus, but she certainly steered away during the campaign of committing to the fact that there would be a price on carbon in the first term and now it looks as though there will.

EMERSON: Well, it's exactly what Julia Gillard was saying, Mark ...

PARTON: No it's not.

EMERSON: ... that we would be moving to put a price on carbon. This isn't a surprise to anyone that we would be doing this - we would be seeking to put a price on carbon. We don't believe that climate change is absolute crap. That's the official position of Tony Abbott and the Opposition. I'll tell you who else was wanting to put a price on carbon: John Howard.

PARTON: He was, I understand that. But it's still my understanding that Julia Gillard said categorically that there would be no carbon tax in this term of government.

EMERSON: Julia Gillard spoke often about putting a price on carbon. That's what she said during the election campaign. That's what was said before the election campaign. That's what we sought to do before the election campaign. That's what we were going to do before the election campaign. When Malcolm Turnbull was the leader, because he had come to an agreement with us to do exactly that, and we said that we would seek to build a community consensus to put a price on carbon. The only person standing between that and the reality of the need to do so was Tony Abbott.

PARTON: So, what I want to know is, what's the difference between a price and a tax? Because she clearly said there would be no carbon tax.

EMERSON: Well, there are various mechanisms for and ways of putting a price on carbon. An emissions trading system is a way of putting a price on carbon. And it will not surprise any of your listeners, Mark that we support an emissions trading system because we sought twice to get an emissions trading system through the Parliament but was thwarted by Tony Abbott.

PARTON: So, do we just have to, in the context of the election campaign, just side-step that and just suggest there wouldn't be a carbon tax so we could just pick up enough of those voters in the middle to get over the line?

EMERSON: We said consistently, and we have said during the last term of the Parliament consistently, that Labor wants to put a price on carbon. That's what we've said. That's what we're seeking to do through the multi-party committee and our own Government processes. We'll see how we go with that. We know that people like Malcolm Turnbull dearly want to see this happen. Malcolm has been quite honourable in all of this. To this day, if you got him on the program, he'd say he supports an emissions trading system and putting a price on carbon. But he and others are being prevented from going on to this multi-party committee by Tony Abbott who has said that no Coalition Member of Parliament will join the multi-party committee. We've got the Greens, of course, we've got the Independents on that committee. Obviously Labor people, but no Coalition people - why? Because Tony Abbott believes climate change is absolute crap.

PARTON: Craig, thanks for your time this morning.

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