



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

Transcript  
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*Subjects: Cabinet leaks, asylum-seekers.*

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FRAN KELLY: Trade Minister Craig Emerson is a member of the Queensland Right and he was also around the Cabinet table at that meeting on Thursday we've just been discussed ... discussing.

It was reported in the leaked details over the weekend that he and fellow Queenslander, Kevin Rudd, backed the Prime Minister in the decision not to endorse Nauru as an option for offshore processing.

Craig Emerson is in our Parliament House studio. Minister, good morning.

CRAIG EMERSON: Good morning, Fran.

KELLY: Do you know who the leaker is?

EMERSON:

No, and I'm not going to break the habit of a lifetime and start speculating and talking about Cabinet leaks. I'll only make one observation: and that is Cabinet leaks never benefit the Government of the day. They always benefit the Opposition.

KELLY:

Nevertheless, as we've been discussing with Michelle, every leak is strategic. Who does this benefit strategically within Labor?

EMERSON:

It benefits Mr Abbott and he's not in Labor. He's in the Opposition. He's the Leader of the Opposition. Any leaking benefits the Opposition of the day; it never benefits the Government of the day.

KELLY:

It doesn't benefit Chris Bowen? It doesn't benefit the Right, who got rolled on this, does it?

EMERSON:

It doesn't benefit the Government of the day; it only benefits Oppositions. I can make that same point 23 different ways, but it's a view that I've held for a professional lifetime. I won't depart from that view. You did ask, however, whether I support Julia Gillard's position on asylum-

seekers: and the answer is 'absolutely I do'. I'm a member of a Cabinet. I always supported the Prime Minister's proposition that we need offshore processing to break the people-smugglers' rackets. And in that ostensibly we're joined by Mr Abbott, who says he supports offshore processing but said he will vote for onshore processing. He is showing a callous disregard for human life.

We saw 45 people, including little babies, lose their lives before Christmas when they were smashed up against the rocks at Christmas Island. We want to stop that loss of life.

Now, I could be accused of playing political games in making that accusation against Mr Abbott. The truth is, this is not a political game. And Christopher Pyne, you know, lurching out of a ... of a room at Parliament House saying, 'oh, isn't this wonderful that Labor's got all these problems on asylum-seekers?'. The fundamental problem is the lives of asylum-seekers. It's not a game.

KELLY:

If you support offshore processing as the best way to ensure more lives aren't lost, why didn't you buy into the notion of adding Nauru as an option to that? Why not?

EMERSON:

It's clear from Mr Abbott's behaviour, as confirmed in the media today, that simply offering Nauru - and that's not a policy that we supported - but simply offering Nauru would make no difference because he wants to see more boats arrive. He said publicly in the newspapers today that he would want not only Nauru, he would want to strike out Malaysia. He thinks Malaysia is no good, but Somalia, as a signatory to the Refugee Convention, is fine. He wants a return of temporary protection visas, and he also wants to be able to tow boats back out to sea. We will never embrace Tony Abbott's callous, mean, horrible policies on asylum-seekers. Never.

KELLY:

When Kevin Rudd was overthrown as leader he talked about ... he warned the party against lurching to the right. Does this leak benefit Kevin Rudd? Because he's there clearly not

voting against what he would describe perhaps as lurching to the right.

EMERSON:

I think ... I'm happy to discuss the policy position with you until the cows come home, Fran, but I'm not happy to discuss Cabinet leaks. I will not break the habit of a lifetime.

I simply point out that this is not a political game. There is far more at stake here than Mr Abbott's aspiration to be Prime Minister. During the Opposition years that Labor occupied we *did* vote in the national interest on national security Bills. We did. We believed that we had a responsibility on that.

Mr Abbott believes he has no responsibility to the national interest. Mr Howard had called in 2001 on the Labor Opposition to join him in the national interest, and we did. And we did. But Mr Abbott believes the only interest that counts is the aspiration that he's long had to be Prime Minister. And he's prepared to sacrifice the lives of asylum-seekers in order to achieve that aspiration.

KELLY:

What should the Prime Minister's message to Cabinet be today?

EMERSON:

The Prime Minister's message should be to not only the Cabinet, but the Caucus and the Australian people: that she will continue to make the hard, courageous decisions that she has been making in the national interest, whether it be in relation to carbon pricing - it is true that that is not a popular policy but it is a fundamentally important reform - whether it is in relation to her courage in pressing ahead with offshore processing.

And Michelle [Grattan] is saying, 'well, Mr Abbott made his intentions clear earlier'. What do we really do in these circumstances: pursue the right policy or make some sort of political manoeuvre? What the Prime Minister did is pursue the right policy, which is offshore processing. It took courage to do that and the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, demonstrated that courage.

KELLY:

Making the hard decisions is one thing; making the right strategic decisions is another. What was

your view of the PM? We now know it was the Prime Minister's strategy of persisting with introducing this Bill into the House of Reps, or planning to even though it was always going to be doomed in the Senate; was going to go down.

EMERSON:

You see, this is this distinction that you're drawing. You called it a strategic decision, or a political decision.

KELLY:

Well, it must have been, mustn't it?

EMERSON:

The Prime Minister is driven by policy; that is, doing the right thing...

KELLY:

Yes, but the policy wasn't going to get up.

EMERSON:

...for Australia.

Do the right thing for Australia. And if we're in the situation where we're engaging in political games then that diminishes the whole Parliament, not just the half of the Parliament that's occupied by the Coalition. What the Prime Minister did is demonstrate the courage of

her convictions. That is, to press ahead with what she knows, what Mr Abbot knows is the right policy, and that is offshore processing as advised by the Immigration Department and other officials who also advised the Howard Government.

Now, Mr Abbott is ignoring that advice. The Prime Minister has accepted that advice and prosecuted that advice, seeking to implement the right policy for Australia, the right policy for our borders, the right policy for asylum-seekers. We do not want to see asylum-seekers lose their lives. We've got the monsoon season coming up. We do not want to see boats arriving and people losing their lives like they did just before Christmas last year.

KELLY:

Craig Emerson, it's always bad news for a leader when Cabinet starts leaking, and that's clearly what's happened this time. Peter Beattie wrote on the weekend that the PM should basically call people on this, bring it to a head, call a Caucus meeting and call for challenges to stop all this. What do you think? To lance this boil.

EMERSON:

What I think is that Cabinet leaks aren't a new phenomenon. As you know, I was an adviser to the Hawke Government. I have at home a note written by a Cabinet Minister to the Prime Minister apologising for the leak from that Minister's office that was given to the newspapers. The Howard Government had Cabinet leaks. How else did we know that Mr Howard approved \$10 billion for the Murray-Darling Basin system, none of which was actually spent, without going to Cabinet? There are Cabinet leaks from time to time. The only beneficiary of a cabinet leak is the Opposition of the day.

KELLY:

Craig Emerson, thank you very much joining us.

EMERSON:

Thanks a lot, Fran. Thank you.

KELLY:

Federal Trade Minister Craig Emerson.