



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Ten Morning News political debate with Ron Wilson
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E&OE

Subjects: Asylum seekers; banks.

WILSON: The war on Afghanistan, asylum seekers and Government control of the big banks hit the headlines during the return of Parliament this week. Joining us to discuss these and as many other issues as we can get through in our Friday morning political debate, Trade Minister Craig Emerson in Canberra and Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison in Sydney. Gentlemen, thank you very much for having a chat to us this morning.

MORRISON: Good morning

EMERSON: Thanks for having me on the program.

WILSON: Dr Emerson, last night there was some very heated scenes in the Adelaide Hills as locals reacted angrily to news that your Government is about to dump an asylum seeker detention centre right on top of them. They're saying it's policy on the run. They've had no discussion with you about it, and it's all due to happen before Christmas. Is this policy out of control at the moment?

EMERSON: We do have the view, which we hope is shared by the Coalition, that accommodation for families, and most particularly children, needs to be suitable. That they are able to get a decent education and we do know, I think the experts have said that harsh detention facilities are a breeding ground for mental illness, particularly in young people. So this is the Gillard Government ensuring that these families, especially children, are housed in suitable accommodation rather than tents on Christmas Island or in motel accommodation. I do know, too, that the Australian public doesn't regard accommodating asylum

seekers in motels as being the right way to go. This will help relieve that sort of pressure.

WILSON: But it's not just about accommodation. This is a small community and the asylum seekers who will move there are going to be families. Those families are going to have to integrate in a great degree. Under your new policy, they're going to have to integrate into that community and that community simply doesn't want them at this stage.

EMERSON: Well, it's a Defence facility that we're talking about...

WILSON: Yes, I know. But the community that they will have to integrate into isn't a Defence facility.

EMERSON: All right, let's not start this sort of hysteria that they're somehow horrible, dangerous people. These are people who will be assessed using the normal checks that were put in place many, many years ago. The sorts of checks that have been applied by the previous Coalition Government are being applied by this Government. And I have seen in other places, not in this particular debate, in this particular location, some pretty wild and unfortunate allegations about the health of these people and their motives and so on. They are human beings. They are children. They deserve to have a reasonable education. And I think that most people around Australia would agree with that proposition.

WILSON: Mr Morrison, both sides of politics have shown support for the war in Afghanistan this week. Clearly the war though is contributing to the refugee numbers. So shouldn't we be prepared to accept more of these people coming to Australia?

MORRISON: Well, what we have is a rolling detention crisis of this Government. I mean, the reason people are being moved to Inverbrackie in South Australia is because the detention network is full. We've had over 8,300 people arrive over the last two years. There were facilities on Christmas Island. They are now full. The Government needs to be accountable for the fact that they've had this situation develop under their watch. There are just so many people now that they're trying to accommodate, that the community of Inverbrackie, without any consultation, without any forewarning, has had this forced upon them. And I'm just amazed that the Government is surprised that there would be some reaction from the community when they haven't even been talked to. And so the Coalition will be moving...

EMERSON: I didn't say that, Scott, so don't put words into my mouth.

MORRISON: I'll finish Craig, I let you speak. What the Coalition will be doing is moving a motion seeking for a Parliamentary Committee to consult with the local community on their views and report back to Parliament. And the Government should have the good grace - with Jamie Briggs, I should stress, it'll be Jamie's motion - to listen to that report so the Parliament can understand what the issues are. Because you make a good point, Ron, and that's this: these are not refugees who have been settled into the community, who have had their asylum claims proved. They are people who are maybe there for six months, three months. They will engage with this community, many of them will fail in their asylum claims. They'll then have to be removed. It'll create all sorts of confusion with young people they engage with. I mean, this is happening on a scale which has never happened before in terms of children and families being in this situation. And it is all because of one thing and that's 8,300 people have turned up, 107 boats, the 21st yesterday. And that's the crisis this Government has, which they will not address.

WILSON: Another thing.

EMERSON: Well let's put a little perspective into this. It's in the interests of the Liberal Party, or it seems to feel so, to create the impression, I think the word used yesterday in one of the debates was a tsunami. I'd ask your viewers to take a guess at this question: how many asylum seekers have arrived by boat, in Australia, in the last 35 years?

WILSON: Well, 88 have arrived yesterday.

MORRISON: Well how many have arrived in the last two years, Craig? When you...

EMERSON: You see you don't want the answer to that. And the answer is around 25,000, which would be a disappointing crowd at a football semi-final. But what we hear from the Coalition, what we hear...

MORRISON: So you're happy with the rate of arrivals, Craig? You think it's all fine? No changes necessary, let them all come in.

EMERSON: I thought we were going to not speak over each other. So we are going to speak over? Let's go. Right. The number of asylum seekers in the last, arriving by boat over the last 35 years is in the order of 25,000. I'm simply saying...

MORRISON: So you're comfortable? You're comfortable with the policy?

EMERSON: I'm simply saying it's not an armada, it's not a tsunami, it's not an invasion. It's Tony Abbott...

MORRISON: Oh, you're not going to change anything? You're totally relaxed and comfortable about it. Okay.

EMERSON: ...with arrows coming from the north-west of Australia, this huge threat.

MORRISON: Oh, I think the Australian public understand, Craig. You don't want to change anything. You're happy with it.

WILSON: Gentlemen.

EMERSON: And they absolutely understand, they understand, Scott, that your predecessor, Bruce Baird, would be absolutely ashamed.

MORRISON: Don't verbal Bruce.

EMERSON: Your disgraceful behaviour over this, because Bruce Baird at least had some humanity in him and you're behaving appallingly, absolutely appallingly.

MORRISON: Oh, so you're now accusing me of not having humanity? I have no humanity, Craig?

EMERSON: The way that you've tried...

MORRISON: Oh, we're back, we're back to the pre-election. I thought the Government understood community concerns about the issue. Now we lack humanity. We're back to the old rhetoric. I knew it wouldn't be long.

WILSON: Gentlemen I'm going to have to step into another issue that has community interest at the moment. Of course, interest rates. Joe Hockey believes the government should be putting more pressure on the big banks not to raise interest rates above what the RBA determines. Minister, that doesn't seem like a bad idea?

EMERSON: Oh well, it is a bad idea; it would be a re-regulation of interest rates. I'll be fascinated to hear Scott Morrison back that in. We actually had a backbencher Don Randall from Western Australia, when asked about this thought it was Greens' policy and said 'This is a policy from the lunatic fringe'. Now that's what he's described Joe Hockey as embracing, a policy from the lunatic fringe.

WILSON: But you've allowed the Greens to become manipulators of the Government at this stage and they say they have legislation that they say they can get up with the support of the Opposition.

EMERSON: Well we won't support the re-regulation. That will be fascinating to see Malcolm Turnbull supporting the re-regulation of interest rates, to see Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey and, obviously, Scott Morrison supporting that. I'll be absolutely fascinated to see that because you know who will miss out in all of this? And it's a point made yesterday by Treasury Secretary Ken Henry. And that is that loans would be rationed and it would be low income people who would just not get a loan. But, absolutely, if the Coalition wants to embrace this policy, if Scott wants to embrace the policy right now, I'm all ears.

WILSON: Mr Morrison, are you going to jump into bed with the Greens on this?

MORRISON: Labor in Government but the Greens are in power. I think we all know that. The point I'd make about this issue.

EMERSON: Just answer the question.

MORRISON: The point I'd make about this issue is that the Treasury Secretary yesterday confirmed what Joe said and that is that the spread that the banks are putting above the official cash rate has actually grown larger today than it was before the GFC started.

EMERSON: Are you going to re-regulate? Answer the question.

MORRISON: Joe Hockey has not suggested the regulation of interest rates. What Joe Hockey has flagged is everything from backing claims from the ACCC chair on price signalling and controlling over that. I mean, there are discussions about whether APRA should be looking at what banks are doing beyond their core activities. These are specific things.

WILSON: But will you get into bed with the Greens on this?

EMERSON: He won't answer the question.

MORRISON: The Greens' Bill is something very different. What we're talking about here is the tension in the relationship between the banks and the Government.

EMERSON: You said you'd legislate.

MORRISON: The banks, at the moment, are a protected species and should be, should be, but it can't be heads that the banks win and tails the taxpayer loses.

EMERSON: So, you will legislate?

MORRISON: They are in a very special arrangement, which is important. And that needs to be understood when they make decisions which shows that today, around 2.8 per cent is the gap between the cash rate and what the banks are now charging. It was about 1.9 per cent before the GFC. That's what has happened under this government and they're doing nothing about it.

WILSON: Gentlemen, gentlemen.

EMERSON: Will you legislate? Will you answer the question?

WILSON: Well I don't think we're going to get an answer from him. I think the answer is probably no.

EMERSON: Yeah, exactly.

MORRISON: I said very clearly we're not going to legislate; we're not going to legislate interest rates. That's what you're saying we're going to do, Craig. And you can't verbal us. You should act.

EMERSON: You've just contradicted Joe Hockey.

MORRISON: No I didn't, at all.

WILSON: Gentlemen thank you very much for your time this morning. Craig Emerson, thank you very much. Scott Morrison, also in Sydney, thank you very much.

EMERSON: Lots of fun. Thanks a lot.

MORRISON: Good to be with you Craig. Good on you Ron.

WILSON: I think we'll all go take a Bex and have a good lie down.

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