



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
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Subjects: Qantas decision, mining tax.

GLEN BARTHOLOMEW: The Government is claiming success for its intervention in the Qantas dispute, an industrial battle where we saw tens of thousands of passengers stranded. It will turn political when Federal Parliament resumes in Canberra today.

To look at the political fight that's set to follow the industrial battle, Marius Benson is speaking this morning to the Trade Minister in the Government, Craig Emerson.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, everyone is spinning the Fair Work Australia decision. The unions and Qantas are both saying ... they're giving quite different readings of that decision; the Government claiming it as a win for its intervention. That's your reading of the situation?

CRAIG EMERSON:

Our concern has always been for the travelling public. And the termination of the dispute by Fair Work Australia means that planes can be put back in the sky as of this afternoon. That's a good outcome for the travelling public; it's also a good outcome for those hundreds of thousands of Australians who work in the tourism industry.

BENSON:

The Transport Workers' Union, one of the three unions key to this dispute, says it's now up to you, the Government, to fight hard for Australian jobs. Is that how you see your task?

EMERSON:

Well, always, from day one of the election of a Labor Government, we've fought hard for Australian jobs. And we have a good record there.

BENSON:

But in the specific case of these Qantas jobs: are you going to protect them? Because Qantas says, in international terms, they're not competitive at the present numbers and present pay rates?

EMERSON:

Well, Fair Work Australia has made its decision to terminate this dispute. That means no more lock-outs; it means no more industrial action; it gives the parties 21 days to seek a resolution. And if that is progressing well - and is not complete - there is capacity for a further 21 days. If it's not been successful then Fair Work

Australia will make a decision on all of these matters.

BENSON: Qantas is at the moment heavily protected by government restrictions on access to Australian routes. Is that subject to review if the Government is not happy with the way Qantas is operating?

EMERSON: No, well Qantas is the national carrier, and that's the status that it enjoys under the Qantas Act, when Qantas was first privatised. So there's no plan to change the national carrier status of an airline, because Australia does need a national carrier. But Qantas probably should reflect on the strategy that it's adopted.

BENSON: Is it the case, as reported in the Daily Telegraph this morning, that the Government is considering allowing foreign airlines to fly Qantas domestic routes?

EMERSON: I haven't had any indication of that whatsoever. But I think Qantas now needs to do the right thing by its customers and get those planes in the air, and not seek to shift the blame to the Government. Qantas needs to take responsibility for its own strategy.

BENSON: Qantas does enjoy special status as the national carrier under legislation. The unions working in Qantas say it's not meeting its

obligations under that. Is Qantas doing the right thing by its special status?

EMERSON:

What we need to see now is the planes back in the sky. It's not a time for going back over all of these issues, reviewing the performance of Qantas over the last 10 years. What we really want to see here is the inconvenience to the travelling public and the damage to the Australian tourism and broader damage to the Australian economy now halted.

BENSON:

Craig Emerson, can I turn to the political week ahead? Parliament is resuming this week - one of the last sitting weeks this year. The carbon tax is expected through the Senate; but trouble with the mining tax. That may not be getting through this year. That's the expectation. Is that your expectation?

EMERSON:

Well again, let's see how the Parliamentary processes go. But we will be introducing the mining tax. This is a very important mechanism for ensuring that the broader Australian community benefits from the mining boom.

But the Australian people will be appalled - appalled - that Mr Abbott believes the mining industry already pays too much tax, and that he will return the revenue from the mining tax to the mining industry, rather than sharing the benefits of the mining boom with the small

business community and the broader Australian community.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thanks again.

EMERSON: Thank you, Marius.

BARTHOLOMEW: Craig Emerson of the Government, speaking to Marius Benson.

