



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
2CC with Mark Parton
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Subjects: asylum seekers, MRRT, Melbourne Cup.

MARK PARTON: And at this time on a Wednesday morning we tend to catch up with the Federal Trade Minister Craig Emerson, and he is going to join us on-line shortly. And, of course, one of the big stories that's dominating the news at the moment is that another asylum-seeker vessel has gone down, and virtually everyone on every side of this debate is standing up and saying 'see, I told you so' sort of thing.

Indonesian authorities say up to 15 asylum seekers are still missing. Eight are reportedly dead after their boat sank off the coast of Java yesterday. The vessel sank in heavy seas off the coast of Java. Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor said it's likely that those on board were heading to Australia. A total of 57 people have been rescued, and Indonesian authorities say they will resume the search this morning for about 15 people who are still missing. And we bring the Federal Trade Minister Craig Emerson into the discussion. Craig, I do hope that when this issue is discussed, as I know it will, at great length in various forums around the place that we do just stop for a moment and understand and remember that we're talking about people's lives here.

CRAIG EMERSON: I couldn't agree more. It's just horrible. It is what we've feared: and that is unless we do break the people-smuggling racket there will be deaths at sea. And I've said that on your program, Mark - and it's come to pass. And there's no reason to believe that the situation will get any better in the future. Little girls died

in this drowning, so I just hope that somehow the Parliament can find a way to agree to break the people-smugglers' model.

PARTON: Adam Bandt spoke to us on this program earlier this morning, and he referred back to the '70s, with the Vietnamese boat people who were coming in then - and the fact that we dealt with it in such a different way. And he was urging us to go back to those days. But I suggested to him that the world is so much different today than it was then. Would you agree with that?

EMERSON: Well, it is different. But I hope Adam remembers that in fact there were detention centres; I think there was one in Hong Kong and I believe there were detention centres in Malaysia. Effectively, it was offshore processing, Mark, and that's our point. It was offshore processing. And the Greens say they are against offshore processing because it's inhumane. What on earth is humane about little girls and other people dying at sea?

You're right; I don't want to politicise it. I just want the Coalition to agree to a piece of legislation which says there will be the capacity for offshore processing, and the location of any processing centre will be determined by the government of the day. And we have advice that Malaysia is the best arrangement. Mr Abbott is rejecting that advice and he says he wants to go back to Nauru. Under this legislation, if he becomes Prime Minister he can go back to Nauru. We're not stopping him. But he's stopping us exercising the Malaysian arrangement which departmental officials have advised us is the best way of breaking the people-smugglers' racket.

PARTON: Well, I hope there's some middle ground that can be found. Now, back under the big flagpole today and we've got the mining tax on the agenda?

EMERSON: We do, and this is a very important reform. I have a personal attachment to it, Mark, because I started working in the old Parliament House in 1984 for Senator Peter Walsh to implement my PhD, and we introduced the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax for offshore petroleum. And what this is, is an onshore tax - basically a cousin of the original Petroleum Resource Rent Tax. Just quickly: why do we do it? There are very large mining profits, but not everyone by any means is sharing in the benefits of the boom. We would use revenue from this for small business tax breaks and to increase superannuation for working Australians.

PARTON: The goose that lays the golden egg. We've got to look after it.

EMERSON: There's \$430 billion, Mark - these are huge numbers - of investment in the pipeline in the full knowledge - in the full

knowledge - of this mining tax. And, again, the Coalition has pledged to repeal it to give that money back to the mining industry, to withdraw the small business tax breaks and to prevent working Australians getting an increase in their superannuation contributions from 9 to 12 per cent. That means the mining industry gets to enjoy the benefits of the mining boom, but those benefits are withdrawn from the wider community, including working Australians and the small business community.

PARTON: Well, I look forward to discussion on that in the House today, because I'm sure it will be quite spirited. And at least perhaps it will mean there are not as many questions about Qantas, because I think we're all sick to death of them but at this stage of the game. A caller has just rung in and said ... very simple question which I think requires just a very simple answer: "Why, why won't you guys consider Nauru?"

EMERSON: Well, we're seeing advice from the departmental experts, who are the same ones that advised the Howard Government, that the Malaysian arrangement will break the people-smugglers' model. In respect of Nauru, it is now well known that the overwhelming majority of those who went to Nauru under the Howard Government ended up settling in Australia, anyway. And the people smugglers tell their clients that, and so that would not break the people-smugglers' racket. So the clients would say 'so, we'll spend a little bit of time in Nauru and then we'll get to Australia anyway'. That's the problem.

PARTON: Yesterday, of course, Melbourne Cup day. And it's just so Australian. And I was saying earlier that for me one of the greatest moments is when the race jumps. I was at a function at the Hyatt. And when the race jumps, and everyone just madly cheers...

EMERSON: There's a roar, isn't there?

PARTON: Just because the race has jumped. It's just like we're 6 or 7 years old, and I just love it. It says here you nearly picked the winner. You didn't back Red Cadeaux?

EMERSON: I did. I did.

PARTON: Craig, how could you back it?!

EMERSON: I know. This is the winning formula: over the last 10 years I've been absolutely hopeless. So, I thought well, it's better to go for something at 50 to 1 than all these other ones at 6 and 7 to 1, and then it comes screaming down the outside. But you know,

to give credit to the winner: it just hung in there. When they went past the post I actually thought Red Cadeaux had won...

PARTON: So did I.

EMERSON: But it literally was a bob of the head.

PARTON: You must have backed it each way?

EMERSON: I did not.

PARTON: Are you serious? Hang on, hang on! You backed Red Cadeaux straight out?

EMERSON: Straight out, because I thought this horse will either win or it will go very badly and stay in the barriers. And I'll tell you the reason: that horse has never run in Australia. It's never run and so that's why people didn't back it; they'd never had a look at it. And it's a relatively new training technique in Australia where imported horses will come here; they'll might run one or two races or none at all so they've got no revealed form; and the punters don't know if the horse knows which way it's running around the track, for a start. So it might just run really hopelessly or in this case, almost ...

PARTON: Almost, almost. Now, Emmo we don't quite have time but I'm going to try anyway. We've got Warren briefly on the line who just wanted to ask you something, Warren?

CALLER: Yeah, Craig. You mentioned that the majority of the people that went to Nauru came to Australia. What percentage was it?

EMERSON: Well, it depends on ... there was over 60 per cent ...Australia and more than 90 per cent came to Australia and New Zealand. And that is New Zealand ...

CALLER: Well, you want to get your facts right and stop lying. It was 43 per cent of the people who went to Nauru came to Australia.

EMERSON: No, that's not right.

CALLER: No, it is right.

PARTON: Warren, where are you saying you're getting this figure from?

CALLER: Well it's been bandied about; it's been worked out; there were some papers brought out on it...

EMERSON: Where'd you get the question from: the Liberal Party?

CALLER: I can't hear you when you're speaking.

EMERSON: Where did you get the question from: the Liberal Party? Even George Brandis concedes the majority of people who went to Nauru...

CALLER: No, it was 43 per cent.

EMERSON: You just sort of picked that up in a little bit of street talk, did you?

CALLER: I can't hear you speaking; there's a bad line.

EMERSON: Yeah. Good. Okay.

PARTON: Warren, listen. I'm just going to have to leave it there because I know you're having trouble hearing Craig, anyway. But thanks for the call. And, Dr Emerson ...

EMERSON: He's wrong about that.

PARTON: ... thanks for coming on this morning. And have a good week. We'll catch up with you next week.

EMERSON: He should tell his friends in the Liberal Party not to mislead him.

PARTON: You make plenty of friends on this program, Craig. Thanks for coming on.

EMERSON: Thanks mate. Bye-bye for now.