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MINISTER FOR TRADE

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SANDY ALOISI: Australia is part of a push for lower trade barriers at the APEC meeting in Honolulu, where leaders of 21 countries have been holding a series of informal meetings.

The national leaders will gather later today for their first formal session of the talks, which are again expected to be dominated by trade issues.

The Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, is one of those who have been representing Australia at APEC talks in Hawaii. And he's been speaking to Marius Benson.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, there's a lot of talk about more trade and freer trade for the world - for the region in particular. Will those words translate into action, do you believe?

CRAIG EMERSON: There's certainly almost unprecedented political momentum behind the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which at present involves nine APEC members, including the largest economy on earth, the United States. And Japan as the third last-largest is expressing an interest. But certainly President Obama and the other eight TPP parties are really interested in this, and want to see the deal done. And the goal is to get the deal done in 2012.

BENSON: Is the elephant in the room - or possibly the giant panda - China, in terms of free trade? Because people often point to China as not playing by the rules, of artificially manipulating its currency to advantage itself in trade.

EMERSON: We have a fantastically productive trading relationship with China. And China, as a member of the World Trade Organization, is expected to comply with those rules - just as every other country, including Australia, is.

BENSON: Is China playing by the free trade rulebook at the moment?

EMERSON: Well, I think broadly it is, and sometimes there are actions known as anti-dumping actions. Some succeed; some don't. We have improved the anti-dumping regime in Australia, and I notice Mr Abbott has come to an extraordinary policy position - which completely violates the

world trading rules - which says that the onus of proof shifts to the person or the company that is allegedly dumping.

Now, that is in clear breach of the WTO rules. And it's another example of Mr Abbott behaving completely economically stupidly, to the detriment of Australia's trading relationships.

BENSON:

The trade announcements out of Honolulu have had a mixed reaction here. The Liberal Party seems to be pretty much standing by you, endorsing what you're doing. Some unions, the Greens, and some Labor MPs, indeed, have said the deal mustn't disadvantage Australia. And the Nationals have got a separate point of view. They say it's rubbish. They say it's an empty PR stunt, the whole deal.

EMERSON:

Well, let's start at the end. I saw Jock Laurie on behalf of the National Farmers' Federation strongly welcome the Trans-Pacific Partnership proposals, so obviously the Nationals and the National Farmers' Federation have a very different perspective on this. And I, in fact, have heard suggestions that the National Party believe that there's too much trade going on in Australia; that we export too much. Well, let them say so.

BENSON:

Can I turn from trade to a domestic issue, which is a new opinion poll out today: a Nielsen poll which shows the Government's up a tick and the Prime Minister is up quite a bit? You'd be pleased with that?

EMERSON:

Yes, I'm in Honolulu so I haven't picked through the entrails of the latest poll - there seems to be one out every second day - but the trend is in the right direction. But it is true that we're operating in the published polls from a low base. But I'd rather the trend that Labor is experiencing than the trend that the Coalition is experiencing - because the trend for Labor is up; the trend for the Coalition is down. And people are coming to realise that as an alternative Prime Minister you need to do more than say 'no, no, no, no, no, and no', and that's all that Mr Abbott has been saying.

He's just opposed to everything that Labor does. And people are worried that in Mr Abbott they would have an alternative Prime Minister who has no positive plans; who's a very negative man. And being negative is not what the Australian people want. They actually want leadership; they want vision.

They're getting that from Julia Gillard. And while we're here at APEC, it's relevant to remember that Julia Gillard had the foresight to launch recently the Asian Century White Paper to integrate further the Australian economy in

the fastest-growing region at the right place at the right time, in the Asian region in the Asian Century.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thank you very much.

EMERSON: Thank you very much, Marius.

ALOISI: The Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, speaking from the APEC talks to Marius Benson.

