



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

Transcript  
Sky News Agenda with Ashleigh Gillon  
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E&OE

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*Subjects: Gay marriage; NBN; carbon price; Victorian election*

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GILLON: Well same-sex marriage is well and truly on the agenda with the Greens using the new political paradigm to give oxygen to issues that haven't received much traction in this place previously. Last night the Greens MP Adam Bandt delivered a passionate speech in the Lower House, urging his fellow MPs to open their ears and listen to their constituents for their views on this issue.

[Adam Bandt excerpt from Parliament]

GILLON: Joining me this morning on our panel of politicians, the Trade Minister Craig Emerson. Good morning to you.

EMERSON: Good morning Ashleigh.

GILLON: And the Shadow Environment Minister, Greg Hunt. Good morning.

HUNT: Good morning.

EMERSON: G'day Greg.

GILLON: So, we need your views on this issue. Craig Emerson, do you support same-sex marriage?

EMERSON: My view is that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, as set down in the Marriage Act. That's my view on this issue.

GILLON: And you're not just being one of these Labor zombies, just giving us the party line? That's your personal view?

EMERSON: Well, I'm entitled to a view and that's my view.

GILLON: Greg Hunt?

HUNT: Look, I think the Marriage Act is appropriate at this point in time. What is very interesting is that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century you've got two parties, one of which has a right to a conscience vote, so if somebody does have a different view, they can cross the floor in the Liberal Party. And I would quietly encourage Craig and the Labor Party to consider changing so as they have a right of conscience in the Labor Party. It seems absurd that at this point in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century people cannot cross the floor in the Labor Party without being expelled from the party.

GILLON: Well, this is an issue that some of your colleagues in the Labor Party do have very strong views on. Do you think they're feeling like they're not really being heard at the moment?

EMERSON: Under our system, the National Executive would determine, after considering the issues, whether or not there would be a conscience vote. This position has actually been resolved in the National Conference and it's in the National Platform. And that affirms the position that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. Now, people legitimately have views about this. No issue about that. They can take those views to the National Conference and we can debate this issue.

HUNT: It's not whether the parties say there's no position. It's whether a modern political party has a right for an individual to say 'Look, I simply cannot accept this position'. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is time for the ALP to drop the blanket ban on MPs having no right of conscience in any vote. And I think this is an interesting case in point.

EMERSON: I recall a very recent issue in the last sitting, I think. Two members of the Coalition would have crossed the floor, so the Coalition didn't call a vote. So, you know, how about a little bit of consistency.

HUNT: We have a, we have a...

EMERSON: You didn't call a right for a conscience...

GILLON: Well this morning, Adam Bandt...

HUNT: Anyway, it's just a...

EMERSON: You didn't call a vote because you didn't want them to cross the floor.

GILLON: Okay. Well, this morning, Adam Bandt did talk to us.

EMERSON: If it's all right to cross the floor, call the vote and have Judi Moylan and Russell Broadbent cross the floor, but you wouldn't allow that.

GILLON: Well, that's a different issue. This morning, though, Adam Bandt did tell us.

EMERSON: You wouldn't allow that. Tony Abbott wouldn't allow that.

GILLON: Okay. He did tell us on Sky News, Adam Bandt said this morning that he has actually been very encouraged by the support he's been receiving from MPs in both Labor and the Liberal Party. Have a listen.

[Adam Bandt excerpt from Parliament]

GILLON: Craig Emerson, Mark Arbib may not have had his head lopped off because of his decision to publicly express his views on this issue, but has there been a lot of anger directed at him for the way that he went about expressing his views?

EMERSON: I don't think so. And I saw that newspaper report. I wasn't contacted about the newspaper report. Apparently, I featured in that newspaper report. Maybe it would have been an idea to seek my view. I probably wouldn't have provided one, and maybe they knew that, because it was a discussion, you know, within a party room forum. But different people will have different views on this matter.

GILLON: Do you think it would have been better for someone like Mark Arbib, a senior figure in the Party, to keep his mouth shut on this issue?

EMERSON: Look, my position on this is as I stated. And if people have a view, obviously, some from time to time, they will express that view. But I think there is a matter here for the Government and that is there are a lot of mainstream issues. Many people would argue that gay marriage is a mainstream issue. Let's not get into whether that's right or wrong. The point is there are cost living pressures, interest rate issues, and so on. And I think a lot of Australians expect the Government to be dealing with those issues. It doesn't mean that the issue of gay marriage is an unimportant issue, but there are some priorities here, and we are dealing with those priorities. For example, the impact of the mining boom – yes, it's good in the fast-growing areas but it's having a negative effect in some of the struggling areas. They're the sorts of issues.

GILLON: Yeah, I do want...

HUNT: A nice segue.

GILLON: I do want to get...

EMERSON: I'm just saying they're the sorts of issues that people want discussed and want policy developed on.

GILLON: Just finally. Greg Hunt, do you think this is inevitable that in this country we will soon see same-sex marriage laws change?

HUNT: Look, I think that there is a progressive increase in rights for same-sex couples. And I know that myself and Warren Entsch and others in the previous Government that worked hard for increased rights. I think it's something that's very important. As to the future on that particular question, I don't know the answer. I do think that we are after a situation where couples have full general rights, irrespective of their preferences.

EMERSON: And do you know that this Government has amended 84 pieces of legislation to provide equality for gay couples. It's not as if we're...

GILLON: Yeah, and that certainly has been...

HUNT: Look, I think the test, at the end of the day, is that it would be a great point of modernisation for the Labor Party to allow their members a right of conscience on the floor of the House in general matters.

GILLON: Okay.

EMERSON: Well, you can carry, you can carry that forward yourself ...

GILLON: Well, we've covered that issue. Let's look at some of the more mainstream issues.

EMERSON: ... that conviction, that's great, you carry it forward, Greg.

GILLON: Let's look at some of the mainstream issues that you were talking about before, Craig. One of them is the National Broadband Network. The Government's under a lot of pressure to allow more scrutiny of the scheme. The Greens are demanding the Government release the business plan – the 400-page document that the minister, Stephen Conroy – received last week. The Coalition wants a cost-benefit analysis. Why is the Government shying away from all this?

EMERSON: We committed, way before the last election, to implement a National Broadband Network, and that's what we're doing. You know, you do these things and then people – if you say 'oh well, now we're not so sure, we'll do a cost benefit analysis, maybe we won't do it' – people would legitimately say 'well yeah, hold on, you went to the election saying you're rolling out a National Broadband Network and now you're not'.

GILLON: But isn't the point that you should have done this all before the announcements.

EMERSON: Well, I don't know. Was there a huge benefit-cost analysis done on the copper wire network? One of the criticisms of the Coalition is that this is a monopoly. Well, it's a wholesale service. I don't remember the previous Liberal-National Party governments protesting against rolling out the conventional telephone network by Telecom, which was a monopoly.

GILLON: That's old news though. The NBN is a big project worth billions of dollars.

EMERSON: Well, and so was rolling out the copper wire network, and I don't remember Coalition parties saying 'This is an outrage, Australians in the bush should not have a telephone, this is too expensive, there should be a benefit-cost analysis'.

HUNT: All right, I think I better intervene here. Firstly...

EMERSON: And I was going so well.

HUNT: Firstly, the history is that we actually privatised and introduced competition into the telecommunications network. The second thing is that there is no other country in the western world that is going through a process of creating a new state-owned enterprise and monopoly in the telecommunications sector. And thirdly, the history of the world that is occurring at the moment is that we are moving away from fixed line systems to mobile and satellite, and we are about to make an extraordinary investment, \$4000 per household approximately, and, as a result of that, we will be fixed...

EMERSON: You're just making up these figures.

HUNT: No, it's not. Ten million households. \$43 billion, that's actually \$4300 per household. The point being...

EMERSON: That's actually not correct.

GILLON: Okay, we'll come back to you.

HUNT: The point being that to make the biggest expenditure of public monies – having seen what's happened under the home insulation programs, green loans programs and now, the cash for clunkers program. To add a zero to that and not to have public analysis, not to have Productivity Commission analysis, is a monumental waste. And it should go to the Productivity Commission and they should release the business case.

GILLON: So if that's such an obvious point then, why has the Coalition so far failed to get enough support from the Independents to support Malcolm Turnbull's private member's bill calling for exactly that?

HUNT: Well, we are doing what we believe should happen. I have great respect for the Independents and I will not presume on their final position. I know that they will consider it very carefully. I hope that they will support transparency. I hope that they will support accountability. Both of these matters were missing under the home insulation program and green loans programs and they were minor examples of the level of waste of money which comes from taxpayers.

GILLON: Craig Emerson, the Coalition also wants the ACCC to scrutinise this deal. Is that not already set up that way?

EMERSON: The ACCC does have the capacity to analyse the competition aspects of this. But the truth is that the Coalition is not interested in a benefit-cost analysis. Tony Abbott in his Deakin lecture described the National Broadband Network as 'officially sanctioned cargo cult' and 'counterfeit reform'. He is not a man who in any way, shape or form, subject to a benefit-cost analysis, would support the National Broadband Network. He is totally opposed.

GILLON: Is that right, Greg Hunt?

EMERSON: He is totally opposed.

GILLON: Would the Coalition be open to this if you did see all of the numbers in a cost-benefit analysis?

HUNT: Step by step. Let's see what the figures are.

EMERSON: You're repudiating your leader.

HUNT: Let's see what the figures are. But our starting point is that a state-owned monopoly in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with no cost-benefit analysis is an unprecedented potential waste of public money. And we are jumping worldwide to wireless and satellite networks – Telstra's fixed line business is collapsing. And the last point here is: the legislation the Government has specifically exempts the National Broadband Network from scrutiny by the ACCC.

GILLON: Another big issue I want to get to – let's move on – is the carbon price. Yesterday we saw in Parliament Julia Gillard launched a staunch defence of the Government's decision to pursue a price on carbon. Have a listen.

[Julia Gillard excerpt from Parliament]

- GILLON: Because of the makeup in the US Congress, of course, Barack Obama has needed to put this issue almost on the backburner. Because it's just not realistic that he's going to get an emissions trading scheme through the Congress, as it is, at the moment. As the Trade Minister though, don't you worry that if Australia has a price on carbon, that'll have a negative impact on our exporters? If companies here have to pay a price on carbon but in the US they don't have to?
- EMERSON: Well, I'll make two points about this. One, other countries do one way or another have a price on carbon, and that is actually the purpose of the Productivity Commission analysis to estimate the price on carbon through various devices. So that's number one. Number two, I heard Coalition members lining up to say the OECD is absolutely right about, you know, various issues yesterday, as the terrible criticism of the Government. What did the OECD say about putting a price on carbon? The Government should do it, the Government should do it. And Greg Hunt actually believes that.
- GILLON: And it did say sooner rather than later, actually.
- EMERSON: Exactly. And Greg Hunt believes it and I commend him for it. And I am still to read his Honours thesis, but I'm sure it's very persuasive. And Greg has argued to put a price on carbon through a market-based mechanism, and that's what we're trying to do.
- GILLON: Greg Hunt, this Productivity Commission, looking at the way that other countries are dealing with climate change, do you believe that we are underestimating what other countries are doing on this issue?
- HUNT: Well, there are, there's progress and there is a set of different initiatives being undertaken. The most significant thing is that the largest economy in the world has just said no, we will not be proceeding down this route. In fact, it was famously a West Virginian Democrat Senate candidate, Joe Manchin, who'd nailed a copy of the Cap and Trade Bill to a tree and shot it. And that was what Barack Obama's friends were doing. Now, what we see is that that has profound implications for Australia. And the question is whether there is a better way than a massive hike in electricity prices. We are seeing enormous pressure on pensioners and small business owners from massive electricity rises; low income families, farmers. Our view is that there is a better way and that is an abatement purchasing or carbon buyback. It is, by the way, very similar to what Canada, a comparable economy, has proposed. They are proposing the equivalent of our carbon buyback until 2020, almost identical to our position. You look at Switzerland, you look at Japan. So, there is extraordinary precedent for what we are proposing.
- GILLON: Just very quickly. We do need to go to a break. But Craig Emerson, isn't that right that prices, electricity prices are on the way up?

EMERSON: Electricity prices are rising, we're not denying that. There is an upgrade of the transmission system and that is costly and that is being passed on to consumers. But Greg said the largest economy in the world hasn't put a price on carbon. The seventh largest economy – the State of California – has.

GILLON: Look, we do have more issues to get to but we are going to go to a quick break. So both of you, stay with us. After the break, we are going to be crossing live to Bendigo.

[Live cross for Victorian election]

GILLON: Greg, what's your take on the preferences deal? Jeff Kennett said it isn't a decision he would have made. Do you think it was a smart move by the Liberal Party?

HUNT: Look, I support the decision and it's very clear that we aim to win in our own right because what we're seeing at the moment is this sense of descent into chaos. The transport system is in chaos in Victoria. And, in particular, there's a complete loss of public confidence in the Police Minister. A Minister who is incapable of understanding the most basic parts of the system, cannot even describe what they're doing on public transport. So, we aim to win in our own right.

GILLON: But Greg, doesn't that mean that the Labor Party doesn't now need to spend much attention focusing on some of those inner city seats, Melbourne and Brunswick and the like?

HUNT: Look, they still have to do their work there. But we've set out a very clear position that we seek to be a Government in our own right in Victoria. And the descent into chaos that you've seen in New South Wales and at the Commonwealth level is occurring in Victoria. It's not quite at the stage, and we want to prevent it from occurring, but the transport and policing approaches are exemplars.

GILLON: Well, Barry O'Farrell in New South Wales, I note, hasn't ruled out doing a preferences deal with Greens before the New South Wales state election next year. Craig Emerson, what's your take on this? What do you think the implications are for that deal?

EMERSON: Oh look, it's a matter for the Liberal Party. They've obviously got their own motivations. I doubt that they're altruistic in any way. I don't think that they're saying 'well, we should hand a gift to the Labor Party'. This would be a self-interested decision. But it's up to every political party to make decisions like that. It's interesting – I'm not an expert on Victorian state politics – but that the launch is in Bendigo. I think one of the real successes of this Labor Government in Victoria, for Steve Bracks and John Brumby, is they are both from regional Victoria. And they've really concentrated a lot of their resources into that area. But,

at the same time, if you look at Melbourne, there have been massive investments in public infrastructure, public transport and so on. So I genuinely think this has been a very strongly performing government and deserves to be returned.

GILLON: Yeah, there has been a lot of focus on those regional seats. I know that there are a number that the Coalition really does need to pick up if it's going to win at the end of the day.

Craig Emerson, Greg Hunt, we are out of time. Thank you both for joining us this morning.

EMERSON: Thanks, Ashleigh.

HUNT: It's a pleasure.

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