



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

Transcript  
2CC with Mark Parton  
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*Subjects: Trade; gay marriage.*

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PARTON: Federal Trade Minister Dr Craig Emerson's been a notable omission from this program for the last couple of weeks because he's been off doing what Trade Ministers do. He's been jetting around the globe, talking up Australia and sitting down to high level talks – like, you were in China, Emmo, there for a while.

EMERSON: Indeed. I was on the long and winding road, to borrow a phrase from The Beatles. I've been to Korea, China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan in the last fortnight.

PARTON: What a whirlwind.

EMERSON: Yeah.

PARTON: And this is what the new role is all about. How did you find it?

EMERSON: I found it really encouraging actually and maybe it is because I'm an irrepressible optimist, but when I talk to Trade Ministers from within the region we are positioned in the most dynamic, rapidly-growing region of the world and a real willingness to open up their borders to more trade. So, that's more jobs for Australians, high-quality jobs for Australians and it's my job to land those trade deals.

PARTON: Craig, I want to know more about the nuts and bolts – and I know there will be some things you can't share with us – but the nuts and bolts of

what happens as an Australian Trade Minister. When you go to China, what sort of discussions do you have and with whom?

EMERSON: Well, I obviously had discussions with my counterpart Mr Chen Deming. He's effectively the Trade Minister of China. So, in many ways it's a privilege to meet someone who's Minister in a country that's got 1.3 billion people. We used a translator and our discussions centred on a proposed Australia-China trade deal that's been mooted since 2005, but hasn't really gone very far. So, we resolved together to get involved politically, rather than simply say to the negotiating officials, who have met many times, 'you must try harder'. I think politicians need to take responsibility and look for ways of breaking an impasse. So that's what we've undertaken to do.

PARTON: Ways like what? How can we?

EMERSON: Well sometimes the negotiators, that is the officials, will hold their cards very close to their chests waiting for someone to play a hand and then, having the advantage of that hand being on the table, if you like, and then seeking to trump it or deal with it. Whereas, I think if they had the confidence of the Trade Ministers, which is to sit down frankly and say look what's really important to you and what's really important to us, and we need to make some compromises. But if officials don't have the authority to make compromises, then, on both sides, they'll say no to each others' propositions and it just becomes this head banging exercise.

PARTON: Massive cultural differences obviously between Australia and China. And those cultural differences certainly extend to the way that we talk, the way that we negotiate. What sort of advice did you get as to how to handle things differently in China, in Japan, in Korea, than you would have speaking with someone from here in Australia.

EMERSON: Not much in this sense that – I learned this too, particularly Parto, the Yokohama meeting of the APEC countries, 21 economies – Australians are actually very well known and respected as straight talking people, and they like to hear that. You know, we don't go on with a lot of flowery speech. We just get straight to the point. And I was just amazed and heartened at how often the Ministers of 21 countries would turn to Australia and say 'what's your opinion?', because our opinion is held in high regard in the region.

PARTON: And they know that you'll give it.

EMERSON: Exactly. They don't think 'oh you know he's just going to go on with all this bullshit basically'. And that's what they hope, and that's what they expect. I remember the first breakfast, it was called an informal breakfast. I couldn't have imagined anything more formal. We had

officials sitting behind us while we were tucking into a meal. And the Japanese host then said 'well any comments around the table?' And I was the new kid on the block. No one made any comments and I said 'well when it comes to trade liberalisation Australia's always happy to go first' and everyone had a bit of a chuckle. And then I put in my two bobs worth. And that helped get the conversation going. Others then came in. But I was surprised, in the sense, the hesitancy I think, because other countries, and I understand this, they're very respectful and they want to do things the right way, and then the Australian Trade Minister just sort of opens up, and I did so in a very friendly way but in some senses it breaks the ice.

PARTON: I had the great pleasure of hosting the launch of the Prime Minister's XI cricket match at Manuka oval yesterday. And the official launch was done by the Sports Minister Mark Arbib – who apologised for not doing Movember because he said he was too follicly-challenged it would be embarrassing and I can certainly, because I've got more upstairs than him, but yeah, my moustache would look as crazy as his might have too. But I can tell you one of the things that he didn't mention at all at the launch was gay marriage. Because to some extent he has succeeded in throwing the cat amongst the pigeons within the Party, getting it back on the agenda. Where do you sit on it?

EMERSON: My view, and it's a long held view, is that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. That's as provided in the Marriage Act. It's actually Government policy. It's in the ALP's National Platform. And there is a capacity for people to go to the next ALP National Conference, express their views on this and then we'll either reaffirm this platform or we'll make modifications. But that's the democratic way of doing it.

PARTON: Mark Arbib is a very, very smart political operator and I can't help but get the feeling that his moves in the other direction are to, I don't know, win back support of some voters who've drifted off to the Greens.

EMERSON: Well certainly in Queensland, and many other parts of Australia, there's an expectation that while issues such as gay marriage are important, there are other priorities as well, such as cost of living pressures, what the banks are up to, the effect of a two-speed economy where the mining states are doing well and other regions not so well. They're the sorts of issues that my constituents in Logan City want me to be talking about and want us to be developing policies on. So, it's not a matter of gay marriage being unimportant, but it's just not the only issue.

PARTON: Yeah, but it's interesting too, the way that the political wind blows. You must have seen those figures out earlier in the week about the perception of gay, not necessarily gay marriage, but gay relationships in various regions of Australia. Have you spied them?

EMERSON: I did see something in the paper on that.

PARTON: Certainly in a lot of areas of Queensland the perception of gay relationships is very different than, say, central Melbourne.

EMERSON: And my views aren't being influenced fundamentally by polling and surveys like that. I've long held this view. But on the issue of equality, Robert McClelland, our Attorney-General, tells me that we have amended 84 pieces of legislation to provide for greater equality for gay couples. So, we're making changes where it really counts. But look, let's have the debate at the National Conference on gay marriage. But there are a lot of other pressing issues around and there won't be any change in Labor policy, if there were to be a change in Labor policy, before the National Conference. And even then I'm not saying there will be a change. I'm just saying that's the proper forum in which the debate should occur.

PARTON: Dr Emerson, thanks for your time this morning.

EMERSON: Okay Parto thanks a lot.

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