



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

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SANDY ALOISI: After a month dominated by international events, the Prime Minister is back to domestic political realities today with Parliament gathering for the last scheduled sitting week of the year. The Government is hoping to tie up some loose ends at the conclusion of what the Prime Minister promised would be Labor's year of decision and delivery. To look at the week ahead, Marius Benson is speaking to the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, there are a few unknowns going into the final week of Parliament. Indeed, we don't know if it'll be the final week - Tony Abbott wants an extra week - but one of the unknowns is the mining tax. Will you, the Government, be able to get enough cross-bench support for the mining tax? Do you think you'll succeed?

CRAIG EMERSON: Oh, we will work hard at it. And we have a pretty high success rate at getting legislation through the Parliament; in fact, extremely high. And that means we've been able to work with constructive-minded Independents against the obstructionism of Mr Abbott. Of course he'd want another week, because his

favourite word is “no”, and he’d have another four days to say “no, no, no and no”. But, meanwhile, we’ll get on with the business of seeking to get the mining tax through, because we’re on the right side of the argument - and that is that the Australian people believe that the benefits of the mining boom should be fairly shared. And that’s what the mining tax does.

BENSON: Tony Abbott wants an extra week because he says effectively the Government is going to bring down the Budget with its mid-year economic figures, and Parliament should be able to debate that. What’s wrong with that idea?

EMERSON: We’ve always had a mid-year economic and fiscal outlook. The Coalition had them. We didn’t have big Parliamentary debates about MYEFO, though, in the Coalition years. What we will do is continue with our fiscal consolidation, because we want to create room in the Australian economy to at least give the Reserve Bank the capacity to further consider interest rate policy settings.

BENSON: The Prime Minister did declare this the year of decision and delivery for Labor. Can I ask you about how successful you’ve been in delivery? You’ve delivered a carbon tax, and there’s an asterisk against that achievement because you said there wouldn’t be a carbon tax. You say you expect to be delivering a mining tax perhaps this week, but only through the Lower House; not the Senate. On asylum-seekers - the third big issue the Prime Minister nominated as a big issue when she took over the top job - you have had no success in getting legislation through there. So that looks like one and a bit out of three: not a pass mark in the year of decision and delivery.

EMERSON: I think it's more than 200 out of more than 200 pieces of legislation that have passed through both houses of Parliament - almost invariably against the opposition of Mr Abbott. But we are able to work constructively with the Independents, with the Greens' Member in the House of Representatives and with the Greens in the Senate, because they actually think there is something more important than politics, and that is getting good policy in place.

BENSON: About 150 members of Labor's Left met in Canberra yesterday, working on their tactics on issues like gay marriage, uranium sales to India and the asylum-seeker policy for the National Conference in a couple of weeks. Is the Left doomed to lose on all those issues?

EMERSON: Well, it's going to be a very robust conference - which is exactly what the Prime Minister has encouraged. I've long had the view that the Labor Party is at its best when it's debating ideas, and these are important policy ideas. We'll see how the debate goes, and we'll see how the numbers fall. But no party is at a disadvantage by debating ideas at the right forum. And this is the right forum: the Labor Party's National Conference.

BENSON: But you, the Right, have the numbers already. You'll win the votes.

EMERSON: I don't think anything is pre-determined. But at the same time there does seem to be pretty strong support for uranium sales to India, under strict safeguards to ensure that it is used for peaceful purposes. That's why India wants Australian uranium. And this, too, is a very important relationship that's going from strength to strength.

BENSON: At that meeting of the Left yesterday, Senator John Faulkner - the elder statesperson of the Labor Party is how John Faulkner's described - he says Labor is a declining political force in need of reform. Do you agree?

EMERSON: I think that structurally the Labor Party can always benefit from more members. Yes, we should try and lift our membership. I'm sure the Liberal Party feels the same, and the National Party feels the same. We can do that through constructive engagement; through forums such as National Conference.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, thanks again.

EMERSON: Thank you very much, Marius.

ALOISI: Trade Minister Craig Emerson there with Marius Benson.