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Madonna King, George Brandis

Subjects: Rebranding Australia, Peter Costello op ed on ABC bias, Brendan Nelson

KING: I'm Madonna King thanks for your company this morning. Twenty million dollars is on offer to rebrand Australia. That's right tenders will be called shortly to come up with a slogan to sell Australia to the world. And we've been told to think along the lines of New Zealand and Malaysia. New Zealand has '*100% Pure New Zealand*'. Malaysia has '*Malaysia Truly Asia*'. So how would you tag Australia? Obviously '*Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi*' doesn't quite cut it. 1300 222 612 if you have a suggestion there and we'll see what if our top creative thinkers, Small Business Minister in the Rudd Government Dr Craig Emerson and Opposition Attorney-General Senator George Brandis have any ideas.

Gentlemen good morning and welcome to 612 ABC Brisbane

EMERSON: Thank you Madonna.

BRANDIS: Morning Madonna, morning Craig.

EMERSON: Hi George.

KING: Let's start there I want to talk about this ABC bias claim too as well as Brendan Nelson leaving, a host of topics this morning. But do we need to spend \$20 million Craig Emerson on something like this?

EMERSON: I think we do. It actually comes originally from a report of the House of Representatives that was chaired by a Liberal, who's now left Parliament, Bruce Baird. I was on that committee Steve Ciobo was and we felt that, it's not just about tourism Madonna, it's about the whole image of Australia. Obviously for tourists, but for foreign investors and for the products that we sell overseas so that there is a sense of an image of quality and that people can identify with and I think there is merit in the idea.

KING: All right, just before I go to George Brandis, but we have a Department of Tourism, isn't that their job? Shouldn't they be doing that as part of their budget in their normal day to day work?

EMERSON: They do but this extends beyond tourism. It's not just a tourism promotion campaign it's promoting the brand of Australia around the world. We've got about 750,000 to a million Australians living overseas. It's part of, if you like, an integrated program to promote Australia to foreign investors and to people who we hope and expect will come to learn that Australia doesn't just produce iron ore and coal, that we produce quality manufactured products and high quality services.

KING: George Brandis \$20 million to do that, the support of the Opposition?

BRANDIS: Well I'm not the Opposition spokesman on this so the view I offer is my own personal view. I don't think that there is anything unusual about spending that amount of money on branding, a branding exercise, so I don't think it's an inappropriate thing to be doing myself.

KING: So what is the brand of Australia now?

BRANDIS: Well ...

KING: Do we have one?

BRANDIS: Whether you approach it from a tourism or a trade perspective I think it raises slightly different issues. From a tourism perspective and I'm not an expert on this. I mean what's the outstanding reputation Australia has to people overseas? I think it is the friendliness of the Australian people. I mean where ever you go and talk to people in England or America or where ever and they say Australians are such friendly people so I think that's what I would be emphasising from a tourist point of view. But from a broader perspective, I think the message we need to get out and about and I noticed this a couple of years ago when I was Arts Minister, is that I think that there is not sufficient appreciation of what a sophisticated and cutting edge culture Australia is. Not merely in the arts, but in business, in education in the professions Australians really is at the cutting edges of western democracy.

KING: And do you think a brand has to encompass both that? The friendliness and

BRANDIS: Well I don't know about that and I don't have a strong view about that but those are the two features that jump out at me.

KING: Craig Emerson what does Australia mean to you? Have you got a tag line that you think should be considered?

EMERSON: Well certainly the friendliness but if I could just add to what George was saying. Look at the quality of our scientific research, our medical research in areas of anti-cancer research and so on. These are the sorts of

things that we need to promote and as I say this idea came out of an inquiry into the service economy and not to manufacturing, not to mining and agriculture but to promote our services, the very qualities that George was just talking about.

KING: But I guess the question is do you need \$20 million to do that?

EMERSON: It's \$20 million over 4 years, \$5 million a year, you know every dollar is an important dollar if you like in a budget but I think it's better to be thought of as \$20 million over that period of time. And look I just think that there are benefits from it. Let's give it a go. It did enjoy bi-partisan support. I'm glad to hear the comments that George has made and I agree with him. We do have an image of wide open spaces, wide open smiles, friendly people but we are more than that and the service economy is about three quarters of the national economy

KING: Have we got a brand at the moment?

EMERSON: I don't think we do, we've tried a lot of the tourism ones and they're the ones that people identify with. I can't imagine ...

KING: They were the ones starring Lara Bingle, with *the 'where the bloody hell are you?'*

EMERSON: Yes, I can't imagine George standing on the beach saying *'where the bloody hell are you?'*

BRANDIS: Well, and I wouldn't. And can I just jump in and make this point. I think that in a sense that's the opposite of the image we want to be promoting. We don't want to tell the world we are all 'ockers' because we're not. That's an embarrassing old fashion cliché.

KING: So in a way has the whole advertising that's been done throw the prawns on the barbie, the Paul Hogan with the beer. Has that done us a dis-service in some areas overseas, do you think George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well you would have to test that empirically, I don't know what in marketing numbers.

KING: You haven't liked it

BRANDIS: I haven't liked it. It hasn't appealed to me and I don't think it's shown us to our best advantage.

KING: Craig Emerson would you agree with George Brandis there?

EMERSON: Yeah I do. It's very I mean I can understand why we have those sorts of campaigns. They are one dimensional and they are designed to attract tourists to Australia. That is the purpose – the start and the finish of it.

But what this is about is a brand for the country as a sophisticated modern democracy.

KING: All right let's move on to the next topic. It's 21 minutes past nine. You're on ABC 612 Brisbane listening to Dr Craig Emerson and Senator George Brandis. Peter Costello writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* this morning says everyone on the conservative side of politics knows the ABC is hostile territory. George Brandis is he right?

BRANDIS: Look I approach this question two ways.

KING: A few stumbles there.

BRANDIS: From my own experience and I've been a guest of the ABC on programs like Lateline and Q&A and of course your show too Madonna for quite a few years now. I have seldom, if ever felt unfairly treated. And I think interviewers like Tony Jones and Leigh Sales and people like that, have always, and you of course Madonna, have always approached interviews that I've participated in, in a balanced and very professional way. So I haven't had that experience though you know I've never been interviewed by Kerry O'Brien on the 7.30 report who is notoriously very aggressive.

KING: Is he notoriously very aggressive? Some people have painted it as notoriously pro ALP.

BRANDIS: Well this is the point I was going to make. I agree with Peter Costello up to a limited extent and up to this point. I think that the ABC always appears to be a little more eager to find fault with my side of politics than it does to find fault with the Labor side of politics. Now throughout the life of the Howard Government I would forgive that because I think the national broadcaster should always be an acute critic of the Government of the day but where I do criticise the ABC is in the 20 odd months we've had a Labor Federal Government the ABC seems to be rather mute in its willingness to critique the Rudd Government

KING: And when you say the ABC, ABC across the board as a cultural thing or individual presenters or individual programs? Because that's a broad sweeping statement.

BRANDIS: It is and it's a generalisation and like all generalisations there would be exceptions to it. So I don't generally go along with Peter but respect in which I think he's right is that there has been a bit of gutlessness in critiquing the Rudd Government.

KING: Craig Emerson are we soft on you?

EMERSON: I wouldn't accuse you of being soft on me Madonna and I for the life of me can't detect or pick any bias in the discussions that you George and I have in this slot every week. I thought Scott Emerson put it well too and that

is a professional journalist is trying to generate a story so it's very much against their interest to have a soft interview with someone from one political party and then a hard interview with someone from another political party.

KING: All right but is it possible and I'm just going on what listeners, or what some listeners have said. Let's take someone from both sides. Let's take Scott Emerson called in this morning. Maxine McKew the last high profile person who went to the ALP sitting as a journalist and loving the ideals of a particular party, as opposed to particular issues I guess. How hard would it be to divorce yourself totally from those issues in pursuing questions from the other side?

EMERSON: Well I did not know that Scott Emerson was any way affiliated in or had an interest in conservative side of politics and he has interviewed me and he has done stories for *The Australian* and I found him straight up and down.

KING: Well that's a fairly good indication isn't it George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well I think in that particular case it is a good indication and I'd agree with Craig. Can I add another name, your Canberra correspondent for ABC news Chris Uhlmann who I think myself who I think is very good. I know Chris Uhlmann though not very well, I wouldn't be able to tell you what his politics are.

KING: That's the way it should be.

BRANDIS: I think that's the test. I think everybody has politics but you shouldn't be able to tell what a particular journalist politics are.

KING: Could you tell what Maxine McKew's politics were prior to her joining the ALP?

BRANDIS: I wasn't surprised she joined the ALP.

KING: But that's skirting over an issue. What are you saying?

BRANDIS: Well I was interviewed by Maxine McKew on Lateline more than a dozen times. I never felt that she treated me unfairly or that when I was in a debate with a Labor politician, the balance of the debate was not appropriate but having said that I still had a bit of an inkling, if I could put it that way, that Maxine McKew was on the other side.

KING: A couple of other issues I want to quickly get too. So if I can move on, you're listening to Senator George Brandis and Dr Craig Emerson. One is Brendan Nelson. He's resigned, he says its hard being the leader, the alternative Prime Minister on the winning team to being thrown into opposition with your responsibility just to your electorate. George Brandis you might know how he's feeling?

BRANDIS: Before I answer that question I can't forebear from noting the irony that we've just been having a conversation about whether the ABC has a soft left bias, Madonna and you've just been presented with a coffee in a Barack Obama mug.

KING: I say that, now I'm just going to say that one of the producers, Kelly Higgins-Divine's producer Vanessa went overseas and she bought back a present for all of us and that was my present.

BRANDIS: Indeed. I just couldn't let that exquisite moment pass.

KING: I'm happy to go and get one on the other side if they're sold in America and if there is a Kevin Rudd and a Malcolm Turnbull mug around I'm happy to drink alternatively.

BRANDIS: I'll get you a Malcolm Turnbull t-shirt Madonna. Look could I pay a tribute to Brendan Nelson. He is one of the finest people I've met in politics.

KING: But answer my question, now I didn't say can you pay a tribute to Brendan Nelson, and that's when sometimes we're then accused of being hard on you. I'm saying did you find it hard going from a big wig in a Government to being in Opposition?

BRANDIS: Look it is hard to go from Government to Opposition but it also depends what point you are in the trajectory of your career too. I mean in my case I was a very junior minister in the Howard Government and we went into Opposition and I became, courtesy of Dr Nelson in fact, a member of the Shadow Cabinet so although you know you'd rather be in Government my career, at that time, was still on an upward trajectory. Now in his case, having become the Leader of the Party after we lost the election, which was the most difficult thing you can possibly do, and then having lost the leadership 10 months later then from that point then I think it was a matter of time before Dr Nelson would call it a day.

KING: Should Peter Costello go now and have a double by-election?

BRANDIS: Look that's a matter for him. I think ordinarily, there are different considerations here at play. Dr Nelson says you shouldn't continue to serve in Parliament if you've run out of puff. Peter Costello is still a big contributor in the Parliament I might say so I wouldn't say that Peter has run out of puff.

KING: Craig Emerson should you run an ALP Candidate in a by-election prompted by Brendan Nelson?

EMERSON: I can say that no decision has been made on that. It is the safest Liberal seat I think in the country so obviously we have budget constraints just as other political parties do.

BRANDIS: Come on Craig. Offer the people of Bradfield a choice. Come on it would be very very cowardly for the ALP not to run in Bradfield.

EMERSON: You just accused John Howard of cowardice. When Mark Latham finished up as the member for Werriwa he did not run a Liberal.

BRANDIS: I think we should have. I think the major parties, as a matter of principle, should always offer themselves and the people a choice.

KING: All right. We need to leave it there this morning but I want to put you on notice one issue which we didn't get to was this suggestion put to the Henry review that the Federal Government takeover tax collection. Most states have said they support it except Queensland and a lot of our listeners have wanted to know should the Federal Government take over taxes and the distribution of that be done by the State or local government or indeed only one of those governments. So that's your homework for next week. Craig Emerson look forward to talking to you then.

EMERSON: Okay thank you very much Madonna.

KING: And Senator George Brandis look forward to talking to you then.

BRANDIS: Thank you Madonna, thanks Craig.

Ends.