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MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Sky News AM Agenda with Kieran Gilbert

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E&OE

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KIERAN GILBERT: Welcome back to *AM Agenda*. With me now in the Canberra studio, the Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, and from Brisbane the Shadow Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis.

Gentlemen, good morning.

Craig the Rudd intervention last night: that's not helpful is it?

CRAIG EMERSON: I don't see it that way at all. Kevin was asked a direct question on a program, Q&A, where they ask questions and he answered questions. I think there should be an understanding that if you are asked a direct question you should do your best to answer it.

GILBERT: But he breached Cabinet confidentiality in doing so. He said that he conceded that some of the ministers at the time last year wanted to scrap the ETS altogether. That's not a good look, is it?

EMERSON: That's all come and gone and the fact is that we are pressing ahead with putting a price on carbon. We're doing so because we want ...

GILBERT: [Interrupts] But that's the point: it's come and gone but it's back again because Mr Rudd spoke about it last night.

EMERSON: And there's plenty of discussion about putting a price on carbon right now. We know that and we're going to press ahead with doing it.

GILBERT: But this is a distraction because you've...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] No it's not: it's absolutely about putting a price on carbon.

GILBERT: But you've got the former prime minister saying that some of your colleagues don't actually hold this as a very strong value because they wanted to scrap it a year ago.

EMERSON: What I'm saying is that that happened, what, a year ago in a Cabinet room. I wasn't in the Cabinet room. I can't enlighten you any more on that. What I can talk about is the present

and the future and we will put a price on carbon, on the top 1,000 polluters in Australia, and that is a reform that is needed for both environmental reasons and, very importantly, in addition for economic reasons.

GILBERT: But why is Kevin Rudd doing this, this confessional right now?

EMERSON: He appeared on a program called Q&A - Question and Answer. It runs for an hour; you get asked questions; you give answers. Just like I'm giving you answers today.

GILBERT: But it's not always a confessional where you admit mistakes and where you essentially say that some of your colleagues don't believe the policy that now you're in a...

EMERSON: [Interrupts] Well hold on, well hold on, hold on Kieran. It's a bad thing for a politician to admit mistakes? I mean you're entitled to ask me questions and then if I've made a mistake you'll say 'won't you admit that you made a mistake'. I say 'yes, I admit I made a mistake'. Exposé here we are: "Emerson admits making a mistake".

GILBERT: We'll accept that. Let's look at the focus, then, on the fact that he's basically put some of your colleagues in it saying they don't believe the policy that you guys are fighting a war of

attrition over right now. That's the key point, isn't it?

EMERSON: No it's not. He's talking about what happened a year ago and what is happening right now is that we have the Australian Labor Party pressing ahead to implement an environmental and economic reform.

GILBERT: Well, you're trying to press head; last night Mr Rudd was looking back.

EMERSON: No, he was looking forward as well, saying 'this is a very big battle', and it is - and we will win this battle because it's a fundamentally important...

GILBERT: [Interrupts] So, you think Julia Gillard, when she was watching that last night wasn't, would have been entirely pleased with what she saw?

EMERSON: Well, I don't know whether Julia was watching it or not. What she is doing, what I am doing, what all Cabinet colleagues are doing and the entire Labor Party is doing is implementing a fundamentally important reform to tax the top 1,000 polluters.

GILBERT: She would have been, she would have been furious last night, wouldn't she? You know she would have been.

- EMERSON: Why would I know that? What I know is that...
- GILBERT: [Interrupts] Because she was essentially dropped in it by her predecessor.
- EMERSON: No she wasn't. I don't ... that is completely incorrect. That is completely incorrect. He did not say anything specifically about Julia Gillard. What he was saying is that this was a tough battle, this was a...
- GILBERT: He side-stepped though, didn't he? He didn't answer it; he could have said, didn't he?
- EMERSON: If you answer a question you're in strife; if you don't answer a question you're in strife.
- GILBERT: Okay, let's bring Senator George Brandis. The ... Kevin Rudd struggled to sell that message when he was in office. He seemed to be clearer last night, but obviously this isn't a problem just on one side of politics. You've already lost two leaders over this issue as well?
- GEORGE BRANDIS: I think it's a problem for the Labor Party. We've resolved our issues on that.
- Look, what we saw last night on Q&A was really quite an extraordinary thing which, as long as I've been involved in or following politics, I have never seen and that is a

government visibly falling apart on live television.

I've never before seen a situation in which a senior Cabinet minister - indeed a former prime minister - was openly discussing deep splits between the Prime Minister and other senior Cabinet ministers over the policy issue, which is the great policy issue of the day because this Government has made it so.

Now, you know, I feel quite sorry for Craig because he's not a player in this, but ...

EMERSON:

[Interrupts] How sweet of you George.

BRANDIS:

I do, I do - but Craig must feel like a passenger on an aeroplane that's heading for the mountainside while the pilot and co-pilot are having a big fight over the controls.

But, unfortunately, I think that's the way the country's feeling now about this Government. It is a government that is falling apart before our eyes.

GILBERT:

Well, Craig, that was an issue that Martin O'Shannessy pointed out that this news poll seems to reflect: a government that hasn't been able to stamp its authority; the claims that it's half run by the Greens, by Bob Brown. Is that what you see in this opinion poll today

which shows that the primary vote is still languishing in the low 30s?

EMERSON:

I think I should make this important point: that the media, you included, legitimately have said that governments should not be poll-driven, should not be focus group-driven, and yet every Tuesday we have a big long chat going through the entrails of polls.

Polls will come, polls will go. Polls will go down, polls will go up, but what won't change is the ALP's resolve, Prime Minister Gillard's resolve, to tax the 1,000 top polluters in this country by putting a price on carbon.

GILBERT:

Senator Brandis, [indistinct] ... but I also want to ask you ... I'll let you respond to that, absolutely. I also want to throw in a question if I can. Tony Abbott's disapproval rating remains very high despite the fact that the Coalition's pushing forward here.

That's got to be a bit of a remaining concern for you?

BRANDIS:

Look, I'll tell you what won't change, Kieran, and that is - also won't change - and that is former prime minister Kevin Rudd's resolve to get square with Prime Minister Gillard for stabbing him in the back last year, and that was what Q&A last night was all about.

And I know Craig has to trot out the party line - you know, we're all ... we all sometimes in politics have to speak to an impossible brief - but the fact is that this is a government in which the civil war that's been going on in a subterranean way between Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd and other senior ministers has now broken out into the open on live television and it's an extraordinary thing to watch.

GILBERT:

Now, just tell me about that poll question...

BRANDIS:

Now, coming back with your question - coming directly to your question - I don't think that I could say that we're particularly disappointed with this opinion poll.

It does show a significant shift of public sentiment away from the Government and towards the Opposition and it shows, coming directly to the issue you raised, a significant lift in Mr Abbott's rating. So, you know, we're well content with these findings.

EMERSON:

Isn't it interesting, though, that every second fortnight when the issue of polls comes up, I say 'we don't discuss polls we press ahead; George says, 'that's right we don't discuss polls, we press ahead', except if the polls are in his favour.

I hope you'll answer the question honestly in a fortnight's time or a fortnight after that because ultimately, ultimately, George this is, this, too, is an important point: ultimately, the Australian people do support governments that are interested in pressing ahead and implementing major reforms for this country.

That is the Gillard Labor Government and it is an opportunistic Abbott-led Coalition who wants to stop those reforms, reverse them and tear them up.

GILBERT:

Okay that's it. Senator Brandis, your response to that, yep?

BRANDIS:

Sure, Craig. Okay you can trot out the boiler plate rhetoric for all your worth, but sadly for you the public have stopped listening. They've stopped listening to your Government and they've

stopped listening to its rhetoric because they know they were had.

They know they were lied to by Julia Gillard at the time of the last election. They know that the only reason your side is in power at the moment is because your leader five days before the election lied to them about her intentions in relation to a carbon tax and now, you know, it's all coming out.

The entrails of this Government are being exposed for all to see by its second most senior member, Kevin Rudd, who's got an agenda here.

GILBERT:

All right, gentlemen it's always great to chat. I appreciate your time this morning. Senator Brandis and Trade Minister Craig Emerson, thanks for that.