



TRANSCRIPT

SENATOR THE HON NICK SHERRY

Minister for Small Business
Minister Assisting on Deregulation
Minister Assisting on Tourism

Sky News AM Agenda

Interviewer: **Celina Edmonds**
Panel Member: **Steve Ciobo MP**

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PROOF ONLY

SUBJECTS: Murray-Darling Basin Plan, Leaders' views on foreign policy, Industrial Relations

EDMONDS:Here in the studio this morning, Labor Senator and Small Business Minister Nick Sherry, good morning to both of you.

SHERRY: Good Morning Celina, good morning Steve and good morning to your viewers.

EDMONDS: Let's talk first about water. It is one of the big issues of the day, The Prime Minister returning home and the release of this plan tomorrow, but of course we already know a great deal of detail and you have just heard there from the National Irrigation Council words like devastation to regional Australia, destroying regional Australia, putting jobs at risk, seeing an increase in food prices, what do you think Nick Sherry at this moment?

SHERRY: Well, to make the obvious point, the report hasn't been released yet so there is speculation about what may be contained in the report when it's released tomorrow. But look, in terms of its authority, it is independent, they have carried out a rigorous consultation, the report will be released tomorrow and obviously the irrigators, the farmers, environmental people, all of the various groups that are interested in the future of the basin, the sustainability of our water resource, they will be consulted - it's a part of the process that's ongoing.

EDMONDS: Steve Ciobo, Senator Barnaby Joyce has certainly had quite a bit to say about the release of this plan, which as Senator Sherry points out, it is out tomorrow but we certainly do know an enormous amount already, it appears as if these leaks are to be believed in today's papers.

CIOBO: Sure, well Celina because we are concerned, I mean the Coalition views this very much as a test of this Labor Government's commitment to regional Australia. Let's be frank Celina, this shouldn't have to be a choice between the viability of regional communities that are dependant on this water or the environment. I mean good governance means that they can bring about outcomes that are going to be in the best interest of both the environment and the regional communities. It is a concern to us that the Minister has already foreshadowed that they will abide by the decision of the Murray Darling Basin Authority even though under section 44 of the act the ultimate decision lies with the Minister, so let the Minister make the right decision that isn't going to depopulate regional Australia, that isn't going to see families thrown off farms that they have held for generations but also a good decision that balances up the environmental concerns.

EDMONDS: Senator Sherry?

SHERRY: Well, let's wait for the release of the report tomorrow and then obviously my colleague Tony Burke and Joe Ludwig Minister for Agriculture will respond and consult. But I make this very, very important point - water is life, it's about sustainability in regional Australia. Sustainability of the environment and the lives of people and their businesses that live in regional Australia, water is life. There has been significant consultation, the report is released tomorrow, there's a lot of speculation about at the moment I am sure there will be a rigorous debate on it.

EDMONDS: What about the issue that Danny O'Brien raised, which is this report has been going on for the last 18 months and the suggestion that politics has played a part in the authority with the release of that report that has been due to be released before and that has been put off, what about that?

SHERRY: If it had been rushed and released in six months to a year you would have had the opposite allegation - that it had been rushed. You know often when a report takes 18 months to two years you get criticism that it's being delayed. It was appropriately not released during the election campaign, it will be released Friday and everyone will have their say and I am sure they will do so very rigorously.

EDMONDS: Now, Tony Abbot certainly has had quite a week with the jet lag defence as it seems to be now known and he is doing his best to push his

support for our troops in Afghanistan. Here is some of what he had to say a short while ago. (Abbott news reel)

EDMONDS: Senator Sherry do you think that the agenda has moved on from those choice of words from Tony Abbott? Certainly some of our viewers have emailed us saying they're tired of that constant debate over whether he should've or shouldn't have?

SHERRY: I would like to make two quick points; firstly it is appropriate for our political leaders whether Prime Minister or Opposition Leader, Minister or Shadow Minister to go overseas on business representing Australia – it's entirely appropriate. Secondly, the scheduling, the areas of travel etc is really an area for Mr Abbott that was his decision, his call.

EDMONDS: The PM is returning today from her overseas trip. She has met with 13 leaders and it has been quite a meetings blitz, but she also made and brought into the discussion with this comment saying that it wasn't foreign policy that brought her into politics – now is that her saying to the Australian people I am not Kevin Rudd, Kevin 24/7 or 747 or is that saying to him: 'That's your domain Kevin I am leaving it well alone because I know that's what you want'.

SHERRY: No, what it's saying is like when I came into politics 20 years ago I didn't expect to be travelling overseas representing Australia and the Government and various business forums, I have been to the IMF, The World Bank The Asian Development Bank, what brought me into politics was wanting to do some good representing Tasmania where I come from. The last thing that I expected was to be going to those types of forums. My policy passion has been around superannuation and financial regulation - that's what brought me to politics, that was my interest and then you get as a part of your responsibility in Government and Opposition over time you are expected to go overseas quite reasonably that was all Julia was saying and I think that's true of everyone that goes into politics frankly.

EDMONDS: Steve Ciobo, I would like to come to you on the issue of Industrial Relations and just play a little bit of what Tony Abbott has had to say about work choices again it is an issue that doesn't seem to be going away for him even when he is overseas. (Abbott news reel)

EDMONDS: Steve Ciobo, you were quoted this week in the Australian talking about how Labor's work laws are unacceptable and Coalition policy should not mirror them and that a backbench push on Tony Abbott to abandon his promise not to touch Labor's industrial relations scheme - where do you stand at the moment?

CIOBO: Well Celina, firstly your proposition is ah you have effectively built a massive structure off a couple of sentences and I wouldn't agree with everything you have just said. Let's be clear about this every time I hear a Labor Party politician utter the words work choices in some pathetic attempt to try to drive a scare campaign I really think honestly I have seen talking parrots with a greater contribution to make to the political narrative of Australia than to hear another Labor politician try to raise the threat of Workchoices. What's going on is, I talk to many small businesses across Australia, I speak to many employers across Australia and what they are making very clear is they want the opportunity to employ Australians and to do so in a way that is good for the employee and the employer. Now I don't believe that Labor's laws are perfect, they are far from perfect, in the same way that there were many aspects of Workchoices that was far from perfect as well; neither policy is acceptable to me. I think there needs to be further refinements that will in fact create more incentive for people to get gainful employment; at the end of the day that's what this is about, reducing the cost of employment so that people actually get more money to take home and a better chance of getting a job.

EDMONDS: But the sense of that article that small business should be exempt, that was correct, did that quote you accurately?

CIOBO: Look, we have had small business exemptions that have applied for many, many years. It was a policy platform that the Coalition had for a great deal of time and you know Celina it's fascination to watch what happened when that reform took place, because with respect to small businesses for example, many people especially in the small business sector, many in hospitality for example employ workers as part-time or casual workers and they do it because there are so many red tape restrictions and concerns that they have now, when that exemption was brought in Celina there was a massive increase in the people that suddenly became full-time employees rather than part-time or casual employees and that's the exact kind of difference that I am talking about, because that's good for employers and that's also good for employees, because when you are a full-time employee it then means they are able to secure a loan to purchase a car or to secure a home loan or something like that ...

EDMONDS: I am just going to ask Senator Sherry to comment on this issue before we run out of time.

SHERRY: Well, it sounds like Steve wants to go back to key aspects of Workchoices ...

CIOBO: Here we go the same old tired refrain Nick; I mean honestly talking parrots would make greater contributions than this.

SHERRY: Well Steve I didn't interrupt you. I just make the point though that the response to Celina in your comments would indicate you do want a return to some aspects of work choices and that's a fundamental contradiction of Mr Abbott's position, a fundamental contradiction of the position that you outlined a few short weeks ago.

CIOBO: Are your labour laws perfect Nick?

SHERRY: We have struck a fair balance in the interest of employees and business; we believe we have struck a fair balance. I just make the point that Mr Abbott says it's dead and buried, but there are a lot of Draculas in the Liberal Party they just want to keep bringing it back to life! I mean they are out there Steve, my colleague Senator Abetz is obsessed with this issue it's in his DNA and it doesn't surprise me, just doesn't surprise me.

EDMONDS: Senator Sherry we will have to leave it there thank you very much for joining me.