Senator Mathias Cormann

Liberal Senator for Western Australia

Transcript of interview between Senator Mathias Cormann
Miranda Tetlow - ABC Kimberley Radio 675 – 10.05am – 01-04-09

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E&OE…….

Topic: Kimberley Gas Hub

…Greetings not transcribed…

MIRANDA TETLOW:

Now first of all though, of course we have just heard that Colin Barnett, the Premier of Western Australia, and the Kimberley Land Council and have just held a press conference announcing that they haven't reached an agreement. Does this surprise you?

MATHIAS CORMANN:

Well I do hope agreement will ultimately be reached and I do hope the project will go ahead. I do think it is an important project both for the economy and for the environment. People don't focus enough on the great contribution that the LNG industry is able to make to the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the world by exporting LNG to places like China and Japan. It's an important project for Western Australia. I think it's an important project for Australia and I do hope that wise heads are going to prevail and in the end agreement will be reached.

MIRANDA TETLOW:

Now you've weighed into the debate on the placement of James Price Point as the place for the James Point Gas Hub, as you heard Rob Hirst saying there he didn't believe that Peter Garrett would go ahead with that site. Do you believe he has a personal bias on the issue of the Gas Hub.

MATHIAS CORMANN:

Rob Hirst has made some very serious assertions about Peter Garrett's intentions when it comes to a gas processing plant in the Kimberley. He has told the world that his long time friend is going to do everything he can…. well he is going to ensure that a gas processing plant is not going to be built in Western Australia's Kimberley region. Now I have been looking for the Minister to come out and correct the record and say that Rob Hirst has misrepresented his views. But so far he hasn't. All we've had so far from the Minister through spokespeople or press statements is confirmation that there will be a thorough and rigorous assessment. What

Western Australians will want to know is will there be a fair and objective assessment by the Federal government and that the Minister is not going into this with a pre-determined view.

MIRANDA TETLOW:

Is there any precedent for a Minister removing themselves from a decision making process?

MATHIAS CORMANN:

Ministers remove themselves from decision making processes all the time when there is a conflict of interest. Clearly in this instance given the personal bias that Rob Hirst has indicated there is, I think that Peter Garrett has got no choice other than to remove himself from the decision making process. If he doesn't do it of his own accord then I think that the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has to act and essentially direct his Minister to remove himself. But the first thing is… Peter Garrett has had every opportunity to come out and say that he is committed to a fair and objective assessment process that he does not have a pre-determined view and that Rob Hirst essentially made assertions that are incorrect. I am surprised that a week down the track the Minister has not done that yet.

MIRANDA TETLOW:

The Minister has come out and said that an assessment is being conducted to ensure that economic development in the region is carried out with environmental integrity. What further clarifications do you think he should provide?

MATHIAS CORMANN:

Well there are two things that the Minister has to say because very specifically Rob Hirst has said that the Minister will do everything he can to ensure a gas processing plant is not built in the Kimberley. Now the first thing that the Minister has got to come out and say is that there is nothing that he has ever said to his long time friend, Rob Hirst, that could have led him to the view that this is indeed what the Minister intends to do. The Minister has to clarify that he has never said anything to his long time friend that could have reasonably have led him to the view that he has expressed. And secondly, he has got to come out and commit that the process that is going to be rigorous and thorough is also going to be objective and fair. And that the Minister is not approaching this very important development for Western Australia with a pre-determined view. Because if he does have a personal bias that means he does have a conflict of interest and he should absent himself from any decisions.

MIRANDA TETLOW:

You've aired your concerns in the Senate. What processes will be taken from here.

MATHIAS CORMANN:

I've asked a series of questions both of Minister Garrett and the Prime Minister. I've given Minister Garrett the opportunity to essentially reassure the public that no he hasn't got a personal bias and that no he hasn't made any statements to Rob Hirst to the effect that he will do everything he can to stop a gas processing plant to proceed in the Kimberley. I am surprised that he wouldn't immediately come out and provide that reassurance, instead talking

to the public through press statements and spokespeople. Formally he has 30 days to answer questions that I've put to him so I guess I'll have to wait 30 days to get the answers. But I would have thought that given the public interest and given the importance of the project that it is incumbent upon the Minister to come out immediately and reassure the public that he will treat this project fairly and objectively and that he will not approach it with a pre-determined view.

MIRANDA TETLOW:

Mathias Cormann, thankyou for your time this morning

MATHIAS CORMANN:

Thank you Miranda