



Senator Mathias Cormann

Senator for Western Australia

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Apprenticeships and Training

**Transcript of interview between Senator Mathias Cormann
and Grant Goldman on 'Breakfast' 2SM Radio Sydney**

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Topic: JOBLESS HOME INSULATION WORKERS RESCUE PACKAGE

GRANT GOLDMAN

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says he's disappointed in himself for not paying closer attention to the roll out of the Government's home insulation programme. That will get him a few votes, by the way. By taking that tact, which is the one they should have taken in the first place saying 'we stuffed up, we made a mess of it, but we're going to fix it.' He said there was no time to ask more questions about the programme and he said that he accepts responsibility for that. But he's also standing by the embattled Environment Minister Peter Garrett. Oh, he's won the embattled word, has he? Mind you he's stood him to one side and has taken over hasn't he? Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister. He's saying problems associated with the scheme were largely due to the failure of the compliance system that had been put in place. No, largely due to the failure of the Government for not strengthening the compliance system and not allowing the new cowboys in in the first place for such an important roll out. The Prime Minister said the compliance system that had been put in place to ensure the scheme was safe, and those working in the industry safe, was not up to scratch, very simple. He said plainly that what has gone wrong, is those that are rorting the system, those whose were shonky operators, were not picked up by the compliance mechanism that was established. He went on to say "in the case of those installations where we have had a safety concern arise as a result, we see evidence plainly of the system not having worked as it needed to."

The Federal Opposition says jobless home insulation workers won't be helped by new money from the Rudd Government in the wake of the rebate scheme's axing. Instead, the Coalition claims the rescue package announced by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is made up by existing programmes. So, they're rebuilding the house on shaky foundations in many ways. Joining us on the line we have Mathias Cormann, he's the Shadow Employment Participation Minister, and I thought we'd have a few words from him. Good morning Mathias

SENATOR CORMANN

Good morning, Grant. Good morning to your listeners.

GRANT GOLDMAN

Thanks for making the time. You say, as most of the Opposition are saying, that the Government is trying to pull the wool over the eyes of vulnerable people here.

SENATOR CORMANN

Well, at the moment everything we see from the Prime Minister and from the Rudd Government is about a political strategy to dig themselves out of a hole. So they have cobbled together in a rushed fashion this \$41 million announcement using existing programs because some workers had arrived in Canberra to complain to the Government about their failings.

GRANT GOLDMAN

One of those women was from Grasson that met the Prime Minister who actually ran a call centre that's responsible for the installation of 60,000 of them. So, she made millions and here she is with a hand out.

SENATOR CORMANN

The thing is, what's been happening, what got us into this mess and what got home insulation workers across Australia into this mess in the first place was that the whole thing was rushed, it wasn't properly thought through. Senator Arbib, incidentally who was involved in this right from the word go with the stimulus package roll-out at the time, he was involved with all of the failings of the compliance regime from the word go. Now we are lead to believe that he will be able to help fix it and that's really very difficult for us to go along with.

GRANT GOLDMAN

The stimulation package really stimulated the People's Republic of China because that's where most of the pink batts came from of course, because the Australian production arm ran out of it pretty quickly.

SENATOR CORMANN

Yes, we made that point at the time. If you throw money around in this sort of fashion you create all sorts of unforeseen circumstances and of course there are thousands of people around Australia who are now getting caught up in this.

GRANT GOLDMAN

Alright, so what is the Government supposed to do here? My way of thinking is stop everything until they have a good look at all the ones that have been installed, apparently not safely. There are thousands of homes that are believed to be electrified. This is something that has amazed me. I would have thought you would stop everything, fix that first, before you go any further?

SENATOR CORMANN

The first thing the Government should do of course is to sack those that are responsible for the failure in the first place. The Government wants us to believe that those that have stuffed this up over the last 12 months will now be able to do a better job second time around. What we are seeing, for example with the \$41 million rescue package is the same people going about their

business exactly the same way in the same rushed fashion without thinking things through properly and without crossing all the T's and dotting all the I's.

GRANT GOLDMAN

Do you get the feeling that perhaps it's a lot worse than what we're lead to believe? Because a lot of these houses haven't been inspected and we're hearing incidences where there are elderly people and they've just simply shoved the bags of pink batts up in the rood without even installing them correctly.

SENATOR CORMANN

Grant, there's absolutely no doubt that we're not being told the whole story. Having asked questions in the Parliament all week, there's absolutely no doubt that Peter Garrett and Senator Arbib to this day are not telling us the whole story. They're ducking and weaving in terms of providing answers to questions. For example 'when were you first aware of the serious safety issues involved for workers in the home insulation program? When were you first aware of issues in terms of risk of electrocution and risk of house fires?' To this day they're not giving us answers to those very reasonable questions. So how can we have any confidence that those same ministers will now be able to fix things up moving forward? You just can't.

GRANT GOLDMAN

Do you get the feeling this rescue package announced by the Prime Minister will not be presided over by Peter Garrett?

SENATOR CORMANN

We've been calling for Peter Garrett to be sacked, but clearly the Prime Minister has made a decision to stick by him.

GRANT GOLDMAN

But at the same time stick by him, but now suddenly become to representative and the old 'buck stops here' line comes out so basically he's the one at the head of it all now. I can't see Peter Garrett coming back into this.

SENATOR CORMANN

The Government is making it up on the run. They are desperately looking for a political strategy that is going to get them out of this mess. Last Friday we had the announcement that the program will be scrapped. This week we had a rescue package that was quickly cobbled together based on existing programs. Then we have got the Prime Minister taking responsibility and quasi, not quite apologising, but saying it's all his fault. They are looking for a strategy that is actually going to get them out of the public relations mess, rather than to fix the issue once and for all.

GRANT GOLDMAN

Let me tell you it's going to be a very big ask. Thanks for your time this morning Mathias.

SENATOR CORMANN

No worries, thank you Grant.