

James Packer tells politicians to curb foreign worker rhetoric

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AAP

James Packer says politicians should curb their rhetoric on foreign workers during the federal election campaign, saying the current debate damages the nation's reputation abroad.

The billionaire casino boss also gave Bob Carr his endorsement, saying whoever won the federal election should put the foreign minister in charge of Sino-Australian relations.

"Bob Carr truly understands China and won't waiver in putting Australia's interest first," Mr Packer said.

He said elections were "important and necessary", but could be destabilising and send the wrong messages overseas.

"If I can urge our political leaders across all parties to keep in mind when it comes to the issue of foreign and domestic affairs, the rhetoric we casually throw around is keenly followed throughout the region," he said.

"Some of the recent public debate does not reflect well on any of us.

"Even worse, it plays on fears and prejudices and is completely unnecessary."

The call came as Mr Packer said Australia must strengthen ties with China, claiming the Asian nation's increasingly wealthy middle class will "transform the world" and dramatically alter the local economy.

As part of closer relations, Mr Packer wants the federal government and state governments to increase the number of Chinese studying at Australian universities.

There should also be more reciprocal defence visits, according to Mr Packer, who highlighted and praised the "symbolism" of a recent visit by two Chinese navy frigates to Sydney's Garden Island.

The Crown Entertainment chief executive said Senator Carr's diplomatic skills with China should be utilised after the election.

"I urge whoever wins the next federal election to ensure Bob Carr is at the forefront of our diplomatic relations with China," he said.

Mr Packer did not take questions from journalists, but it's understood his reference to rhetoric about "foreign and domestic affairs" refers to recent debate about 457 visas and asylum seekers.

"Foreign investment, foreign workers and migrants are part of this country's proud history; in fact they built this great country we live in," he added.

"These issues should be bi-partisan."

Mr Packer said Chinese middle-class consumers, who number more than 300 million, present an enormous opportunity for Australia's tourism, financial and services sectors.

Mr Packer admitted the call was partly to further his own business interests, which includes a 33.6 per cent stake in Macau casino owner Crown Melco, a 10 per cent stake in Sydney's The Star casino, and gaming venues in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

"But it's also of critical importance to the future living standards of over 23 million Australians," he said.

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Gilbert Boffa, Thu, 2013-03-14 22:17

Diplomacy is something most Aussies and most of our politicians seem to lack especially during election time, something i call the Pauline Hanson disease which Julia Gillard is hoping to gain an advantage with her former ALP supporters without thinking about the greater consequential diplomatic damage she is unnecessarily causing the nation.

Imo James Packer is making the single most important point which we should all take special note of and reflect before we open any if our mouths. Diplomacy is another word for hospitality and James Packer would certainly be the most experienced and successful in that field. Free advice which we should all take onboard for the good of the nation.

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Tony Nedderman, Fri, 2013-03-15 08:13

There is already an Ambassador in Beijing. It is true that the last thing anyone holding that appointment needs in order to sustain credibility is short term political discontinuity. (But 'Yes Ministering' goes with the job, doesn't it)?

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