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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
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MARK COLVIN: The federal opposition says the conditions at the immigration detention centre on Manus Island are improving but that it's a disgrace not one refugee has been resettled into the PNG community. Labor's Immigration spokesman Richard Marles is just back from his first visit to Manus Island, he says offshore processing for asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat will remain a key part of Labor's future policy but he wouldn't be drawn on the prospect of a heated debate at this year's ALP National Conference. Richard Marles spoke to Naomi Woodley about his Manus Island visit.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION: The conditions are improving but what concerns me greatly is that when it comes to the Abbott Government is has taken tragedies before they've acted. Right now for example the health clinic on Manus is very basic and as a result we saw last year the tragic situation of a person pass though that facility, Mr Hamid Khazaei, who ultimately died of septicaemia. Now the circumstances of that have been investigated but is not until that has occurred that we see a new medical facility being built which is unquestionably state-of-the-art and that's to be opened in the next couple of months.

NAOMI WOODLEY: But Labor made the decision to reopen the Manus Island facility so how much responsibility do you have to take for the conditions that are there at the moment?

MARLES: We implemented a policy with regard to Manus which was an important step to take to see an end to the loss of life at sea. The fact is we're now almost two years into the Abbott Government and they need to take full responsibility for the way in which that policy is now being implemented and the state of the facility

today. Now, last year our Prime Minister promised that there would be resettlements occurring in PNG by May last year.

It's a year on from then and there's no immediate prospect of any resettlements occurring in PNG. That is a complete disgrace. There are a number who have been found to be genuine refugees and a number who have indicated they would like to be resettled. They are currently in the facility at East Lorengau, still on Manus but no one has been resettled in the community. No one is in gainful employment.

WOODLEY: Immigration policy, as it always is, will be a focus at this year's National Conference for the ALP. Does what you've seen on Manus Island change your view on Labor's support for offshore processing?

MARLES: No it doesn't. We need to be managing these facilities in a way which provides safe, dignified and humane refuge to people and it's important that that occurs and I don't think we can say that that is what's occurring when there are deficiencies in the way in which this government is running those facilities. But by the same token, offshore processing has been utterly critical to saving lives at sea and that remains an important focus and that we must never walk down a path again where we see people dying in their hundreds and ultimately their thousands on our border.

WOODLEY: None the less there will be some members of the left faction in particular that will be pushing, or believe, that the platform should include a specific reference that Labor is opposed to turning back boats. Is that something that you'd support, an inclusion along those lines?

MARLES: Look, I'm not going to get into the details of what may or may not occur at our National Conference. What I know though, and I know this from the many discussions I've had with party members and people who will be participating at National Conference, is that we're going to have a debate which will be dignified and that will be characterised by compassion, fairness and generosity and that's what should happen given how difficult and complex an issue asylum seeker policy is.

WOODLEY: But if Labor's opposed to boat turn backs, which you are, why not include that in your national platform?

MARLES: Well again, I'm not going to be drawn on the detail and the content of what may or may not occur at National Conference when it comes to this area of policy. I'll just reiterate, this will be a debate which will be characterised by compassion and fairness and dignity and that's the way we're going to go about this issue.

WOODLEY: Are you leaving yourself room to adopt a policy of turn backs in the future if the circumstances require?

MARLES: Look I'm not wanting to be drawn on that. I mean, our position in relation to turn backs is well known and it's on the record. We retain serious concerns about

the Government's policy of turn backs both in terms of their ability to conduct it in a manner that's safe and the impact it has on our ability to cooperate with our regional neighbours in relation to this issues. Those concerns remain.

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