



TRANSCRIPT

THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION MEMBER FOR CORIO

E&EO TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS AM AGENDA
FRIDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT/S: *Cash for people smugglers, media access to Nauru, Abbott speech*

DAVID SPEERS: Good morning to you Richard Marles, can I start on this, what do you think of the idea of a Royal Commission into border protection policies?

RICHARD MARLES SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION: I don't think we need to get ahead of ourselves here; Malcolm Turnbull doesn't need a Royal Commission in order to just tell us what happened. There are certainly unanswered questions about whether or not people smugglers were paid to turn around boats and if that was the case I think there's a whole lot of unanswered questions, precisely about the legality of that tactic, and we need to hear from our Prime Minister about whether this happened. The former Prime Minister at the time -

SPEERS: Is it actually the wrong thing to do though? What's your view on whether we should make payments?

MARLES: It's clearly the wrong thing – paying people smugglers to turn around boats would clearly be the wrong thing to do, not least because it affords a different model for people smugglers in terms of their business. The idea that you can turn up beside an Australian navy vessel and there is half a chance that you're going to be given some cash to go and do a job, that's a real problem –

SPEERS: We still don't know what's happened here, I mean we know that typically they are the local fishermen in the village who are sent out to crew the boat, it's not the people-smuggling king-pin who is sailing the boat, and if a payment is made to convince them to go back, perhaps to get information on how the people smuggling network works, who the kingpins are, maybe that's a good idea.

MARLES: Well there are a number of ideas there that you've mixed up in terms of what is being provided. The allegation here is that money was paid to have these vessels turned around and taken to Indonesia. Now if that's the case, that is wrong and I think it does give rise to a dangerous business model that is being offered to people smugglers. But you're right there are unanswered questions and there are unanswered questions about the legality of this, which is why Malcolm Turnbull needs to come clean right now in the light of this Amnesty Report and tell us what happened; was this tactic used or was it not? But we need to hear from our Prime Minister.

SPEERS: We know Labor in government, payments were made to some people smuggling operators, in Indonesia - on land in Indonesia - for information, presumably, to crack these syndicates; I mean how do you know that this isn't happening in these cases as well on the water?

MARLES: Well, firstly, it is obviously difficult to go into these questions, but let me put it this way; there is a real difference between what may have happened in the past and what is alleged to have happened now. There would be law enforcement agencies around the world which pay people to infiltrate criminal networks, now that is one thing. But it's an entirely different question indeed to start paying those criminal networks to undertake an activity and that's the allegation here when we are talking about paying people smugglers to turn around boats, if that's what's occurred, and take people back to Indonesia. Now that's what we need to understand, whether it happened or whether it did not, and the former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, essentially in his silence, invited us to believe that's exactly what happened, we need to understand what occurred here, particularly in light of this report and we need to hear from our Prime Minister.

SPEERS: Another issue, Nauru this week issued a statement basically saying that Australian journalists treat the country with disrespect and it will maintain its essential ban on Australian media getting in and having a look around there, you believe we should have greater access for journalists in Nauru, how would you get the balance right though and what could you do to bring pressure to bear on Nauru?

MARLES: Firstly, I do understand why Nauru has a sense of wariness about Australian media, if you look at the way in which Nauru has been cast in the debate here in this country, I mean at times it has been appalling. It's a country I've been to a number of times, I've dealt with the Nauruan Government a lot and I do think that some of the commentary from a number of people in Australia borders on the bigoted in terms of the way that Nauruan's are cast, so I get the wariness. Having said that, I've long advocated for countries in the Pacific, that in terms of trying to increase the profile of the Pacific in Australia's discourse, it's actually in the interest of the countries in the Pacific to allow more Australian media to come and visit them; so I think there is a question of winning the trust of the countries of the Pacific; I think it would be good for them to be honest, and it certainly would be good for us, if we could have more journalists visiting them and obviously in the case of Nauru, when you're talking about the detention facility we need to, from an Australian perspective, to have transparency about what is going on there, we need to be able

to give Australians a sense of confidence about the way in which affairs are being conducted.

SPEERS: Cutting to the chase, would you make it a condition of Australia's financial support for Nauru and the detention centre?

MARLES: I think that these are matters that need to be worked through and negotiated, I think that sounds like a heavy hand, but this can be talked through with Nauru and I think there is a case of winning their trust, but let's be clear – this is not even on the table under this Government. This Government – the Australian Government I mean – the Australian Government is very happy to have a situation where this is no transparency in respect of the facility on Nauru, in respect to the facility on Manus. No attempt to try and negotiate independent oversight arrangements with these countries about the operation of these facilities on Nauru and Manus, now that is what we would be doing if we were in government and to that extent we would call on Malcolm Turnbull now to begin those negotiations for independent oversight and obviously we should be doing everything we can to get more transparency. The starting point though is for the Australian Government to have the conversation about the access of media to these facilities, and I don't even think that's happening.

SPEERS: Richard Marles a final one, a lot of commentary this week about Tony Abbott's speech that he has given in London, about whether he should be giving advice to the Europeans on their refugee problems or not, but I want to ask you about the substance of it, what he's had to say. Does he make a point, what do you think about what he is actually arguing here about what Europe should be doing?

MARLES: I think the idea that an Australian Prime Minister is trying to take tactics which apply to a very particular journey, on our side of the world, between Java and Christmas Island and then somehow saying that that is somehow a global panacea to what is a very different situation in Europe, both in the way in which it's been carried out and the sheer magnitude of it, is frankly ridiculous. And it says everything about where this Government is coming from. Yet there is bipartisanship about the fact that we want to see an end to the journey between Java and Christmas Island, but we get there from a very different place and the difference in attitude is on display in terms of what Tony Abbott has been saying in Britain over the last few days. Whereas for us, we don't want to see people drowning at sea and we are motivated by compassion in that sense, and that then leads us to want to engage more in the world. From the point of view of the Coalition it has always been about putting a big wall around Australia and turning our back on the world and that was on absolute display in the way Tony Abbott described these events in Britain over the last few days

SPEERS: Shadow Immigration Minister Richard Marles, live from Geelong, we will have to leave it there, thanks for joining us this morning.

ENDS

MEDIA CONTACT: LIDIJA IVANOVSKI – 0427 051 563