



## TRANSCRIPT

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

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TV INTERVIEW  
SKY NEW PM AGENDA  
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**SUBJECT/S:** *Christmas Island; asylum seekers.*

**DAVID SPEERS:** With me now is the Shadow Immigration Minister Richard Marles, thanks for your time this afternoon.

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:** Good afternoon David.

**SPEERS:** So have you had any sort of briefing on this yet?

**MARLES:** I haven't yet, we've obviously sort that and I will be given a briefing by the government around tomorrow lunch time we obviously asked the question in the parliament today about this issue and people have heard the ministers response, so I know what you know.

**SPEERS:** Alright, so from what you know from what's been made public; do you have any concerns about the way this has been handled?

**MARLES:** Sure, I mean firstly it's a concerning set of circumstances that there has been a tragic death, it's concerning that we do have some sort form of disturbance within the facility I think what, and we don't want to sensationalize this and you know that we've not sought to do that in relation to any of these sorts of issues, but the question that is the foremost of our minds is around the safety of the detainees and the safety of the personnel working in the facility and I don't think that we have yet heard a full assurance from the Minister that those people, detainees and workers are safe in the circumstances that persist in Christmas Island at the moment nor have we heard a full explanation around that and that ultimately goes to the biggest question here or the biggest concern and that is one of transparency, this Government has a terrible record of being transparent in this area of policy and particularly in running these facilities.

**SPEERS:** Alright but what would you do different I suppose is the question for an opposition?

**MARLES:** Well we would absolutely be letting people know what's happened, we'd be letting people know what steps we were taking.

**SPEERS:** While this is still happening on the ground?

**MARLES:** We would be far more open about this than the Government; now we think that we do need to understand the circumstances of this man's death and coroner is obviously the main mechanism.

**SPEERS:** Police are going to investigate along with the coroner so that's fair enough.

**MARLES:** That is absolutely fair enough and whatever comes from that ought to be appropriately made public, but in relation to the facility itself there is a disturbance going on the Australian people have a right to know how that is playing out but most particularly we have a right to know that those inside, both workers and detainees are safe.

**SPEERS:** But hasn't the Minister just been doing that? He's been talking about what's been going on, there's a stand-off still underway, you know someone has been transferred for medical assistance but we won't know the extent of the damage until we can get in there and have a good look.

**MARLES:** He's provided some information for sure, but I don't have a sense of assurance that everyone inside is safe, both detainees and the personnel that work -

**SPEERS:** But you can't really know until that's resolved?

**MARLES:** Well then an explanation needs to be given about what steps are being taken to make sure that people are as safe as they can be and again I don't think we've been given that information either.

**SPEERS:** But this isn't the first time that this sort of incident has happened, in fact there were riots, centres on fire when Labor was in power.

**MARLES:** Sure and there was criticism around that and certainly the Coalition were extremely vocal about that but if we are also being honest about it David that criticism has been important in terms of managing our facilities better, which is why you have transparency so that there can actually be a public critique about the way in which things are being done, so we can learn lessons and improve going forward and that's what we need to see happen here.

**SPEERS:** Let me ask you this, is Christmas Island the detention centre there the right place for hardened criminals who are now being sent there?

**MARLES:** Look I think it is a place within the network which can handle people who if you like are in a more, need a more secure environment. There are other facilities in Maribyrnong and Villawood which have that capacity but we acknowledge that Christmas Island is one of the facilities within the network that can be used in that way and that's fair enough.

**SPEERS:** And are you fully supportive of the policy of sending those who have spent, I think it's what? A year in jail? In to that sort of centre awaiting deportation?

**MARLES:** Well we supported the strengthening of the character test when it went through the Parliament, we do think that it is appropriate that the character test should be applied in a strengthened way. Ultimately, this is a matter for the Minister; let me explain that, what the character test does is, if you like, it put things into the frame of the Minister, but the decision about whether or not to deport somebody is the Ministers decision or rather the decision to cancel the visa is the Ministers decision that's made in all the circumstance of the individual cases and I obviously don't have that information in front of me but we certainly supported a strengthening of the -

**SPEERS:** It sounds like from that answer you would want more flexibility for the Minister rather than an automatic detention of those who aren't Australian citizens who have spent a year in jail?

**MARLES:** The Minister has flexibility now, in fact arguably the strengthening of the character test does is give the Minister more flexibility as more people are brought within a frame from which the Minister to make a decision, so we certainly support that.

**SPEERS:** Let me turn to Papua New Guinea, you were there last week, talking to some of the officials, you've long been concerned about the failure to resettle any of those who'd been processed, had been found to be refugees while at Manus Island and then not being resettled, live in the community there. What did you find out from those talks?

**MARLES:** You are right, we have been concerned about that. Here we are in November, two years after the Regional Resettlement Agreement was signed back in July of 2013 and it's only now that we've seen a settlement policy being adopted in PNG which will open the door to resettlement, now I don't blame PNG for that, I blame the active, or rather inactive management of this relationship on the part of the Turnbull Government a policy now has gone -

**SPEERS:** Surely PNG has to wear some of the blame at least?

**MARLES:** Well, what we need to understand is that this was an Australian initiative; this is PNG essentially coming to our assistance in working through this problem and so ultimately the principle issue here lies with this Government, lies with the Australian Government and they were a Government who sat on their hands for months after being elected, before they had a meaningful conversation up in PNG about the question of resettlement in PNG, months that were a lost opportunity in terms of getting this policy up and in a way in which it could be adopted.

**SPEERS:** Alright so where is it at now?

**MARLES:** Well my understanding is that a policy now has gone through the PNG Cabinet, that is good news, that does open the way for some resettlements to occur and I hope that will occur and certainly the briefings that we got indicated that that would happen in the near future, but it's very important that this Government, the Australian Government actively manage the relationship with PNG and I think the way that they have gone about that has been utterly hopeless. To have a situation where they didn't have a meaningful conversation for months, to have a situation where they've not been able to resolve issues along the way such that here we are more than two years down the track before this policy is going through the cabinet is a concern.

**SPEERS:** Now what about regional resettlement, Labor often talks about a regional solution to this, but whenever the Government has revealed it has been talking to various countries, whether its Cambodia where they've got some sort of arrangement but not many asylum seekers going there, the Philippines which hasn't got off the ground yet and my understanding Myanmar there's been talks with as well, isn't this part of regional resettlement?

**MARLES:** Myanmar is news to me, but certainly we were aware of Cambodia, of the Philippines and there was a proposition circulating in the media around Kyrgyzstan. Look I think the thing to say about all of this is that to have resettlement of the numbers that we would be talking about coming from Manus and Nauru in any of those countries would require vast resources from the Australian Government and we saw that in respect of Nauru \$55 million is what they were putting on the table, which ultimately will go towards three people being resettled in Cambodia and that's because we are talking about a country with no history of doing resettlement of this kind, where you're really having to build infrastructure from scratch. We have heard much fanfare around the Philippines and my understanding is the Philippines are now saying that whilst they think they can handle people in a temporary way they are not a place for permanent resettlement. The issue here ultimately David is this, this is a Government which really has turned its back on the world at a point in time of great global need, great global humanitarian need, it should not be therefore surprised that the world is turning its back on the Government.

**SPEERS:** Has it turned its back? It is taking 12,000 asylum seekers?

**MARLES:** Sure and that is unquestionably a step in the right direction, I think we all know that the Government...

**SPEERS:** Has it turned its back?

**MARLES:** The Government were dragged to that position kicking the screaming - it was certainly not how they entered that crisis that they were going to offer a single additional place -

**SPEERS:** But it was more than Labor suggested..

**MARLES:** And after Labor suggested and we all know why they ultimately went to the 12,000 because we'd suggested 10,000 a couple of days earlier, but literally the day before that announcement the then Prime Minister was saying there wouldn't be a single extra place.

**SPEERS:** Okay, but has it turned its back?

**MARLES:** For that a perfect example -

**SPEERS:** To take twelve thousand?

**MARLES:** No to go out there and say until you are dragged kicking and screaming that you are not going to take a single extra person in relation to the Syria crisis. Earlier in the year we saw the situation of people crossing the Mediterranean and the only offering we had from the Government at that time was, '*if you turn boats back like we did it will all be okay*' that is a silly thing to say, we saw that again in May in terms of how this Government responded to the Rohingyas crisis, again trying to promulgate turning back boats as some kind of global panacea, sure we support that in the particular journey between Java and Christmas Island, but to suggest this is how countries around the world should be adopting their behaviour in all these set of circumstances is just ignorant, but what you've got here until that decision that followed what we did, you've had a Government that's basically been critical of the UNHCR - a Government which has said to the UNHCR that they will do things on Australia's terms, now if you're going to turn your back on the world in that way, it shouldn't be a surprise that they are really struggling to find suitable countries that will come out and help in respect of the people on Manus and Nauru.

**SPEERS:** Shadow Immigration Minister Richard Marles, thanks for joining us this afternoon.

**MARLES:** Thanks David.

**ENDS**