



**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

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SUBJECT/S: Sam Dastyari; South China Sea; Foreign ownership.

TOM CONNELL: Hello, welcome to the program, we are going to have live later on, on the program the Treasurer Scott Morrison but first of all Labor front bencher and the Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles joins me from our Geelong studio, Richard Marles thanks for your time this morning, if we can start on Sam Dastyari within your portfolio do you think he should at least clarify what he did say about the South China Sea all we have known so far is that he said he may have misspoken in relation to Labor's policy on this and what he said.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well firstly Sam has apologised for his actions but in relation to what he said in respect to the South China Sea he has made it completely clear and that is he supports Labor's position and Labor has a very strong position in relation to the South China Sea and that is that this is a very important part of the world for our trade for global trade an international rules based order is what needs to apply here we are obviously concerned about Chinas construction of artificial islands within the South China sea and our navy ought to be given full authorisation to engage in freedom of operation navigation. Now that's Labor's position and Sam has made it clear he supports it.

CONNELL: He has made it clear he supports that, now what he didn't explain was whether or not reports were accurate that he did say Australia should back China's position or respect it. He hasn't said exactly what he said. He's mentioned misspeaking. I wonder what you think as Shadow Defence Minister essentially, this isn't really an area where he should be freelancing on.

MARLES: Well what matters is that Sam supports the Labor Party's position, I've articulated that. He strongly supports that. I think Sam has made clear that that's where he's at and that's the end of the matter.

CONNELL: So you think there's nothing more to clarify from Sam Dastyari expanding on, as I said, what he's actually said on the South China Sea. What we've got at the moment is reports in Chinese newspapers.

MARLES: Well, I don't think you can be clearer than saying you support the Labor position. And the Labor position is what I've just outlined. It's been a long held position.

Sam's made it absolutely clear that he stands in lock-step with the position of Labor Party in relation to this, and I don't think he can be any more clearer than that.

This has obviously been a difficult issue for Sam over the last week or so. He has apologized for what has occurred. He made that clear yesterday. And in respect of the particular policy issue he couldn't have been clearer in saying he supports Labor's position.

CONNELL: More broadly than the attention on the South China Sea; China seems to have blatantly ignored the recent ruling in regards to its dispute with the Philippines. Do you think there's going to come a time soon when the US and its Allies might need to push back in a more firm sense against China's posturing and militarization of some of these islands?

MARLES: Well the construction of the artificial islands by China is obviously a concern. The decision of the Court of Arbitration is very significant and it is very meaningful. It speaks to a rules based international order which is what we have always supported. In relation to the law of the sea in respect of the South China Sea specifically. We have always been trying to encourage China to operate in regard to having an international rules based order. Now it's important that as we move down this road we're not overly inflaming issues. This needs to be resolved through negotiation and discussion, obviously. It's why Labor was very keen while we were in government to get China into as many rooms with ourselves and the United States as possible, at the East Asia Summit which is occurring now at Laos, is a good example of that.

Australia under Kevin Rudd was very keen to get China a part of that, at a leader's level as we were the United States. This is how these issues need to be resolved.

CONNELL: The audit on Australian farmland has been released today. More than 85% Australian owned, half of one percent Chinese owned. Do you think this is a good idea from the government? You can clarify; dispel some of the myths out there about who owns what.

MARLES: Well, what we've got from the government in terms of this register is a halfhearted effort in terms of what Labor had planned. You should be able to with the click of a mouse be able to determine exactly who owns what and where in Australia when it comes to agricultural land. That's what we say should occur. I think if you go to the substance of this it's clear that the amount of agricultural land owned by China is perhaps less than what people imagined. In fact they rank number 5 in terms of foreign investors.

I think what it also says is that this government has been acting on emotion when it comes to questions of foreign investment and the thresholds that apply. Barnaby Joyce is on radio today saying that in the past the government's been engaging on the basis of guesswork. But that hasn't stopped it from reducing the thresholds. And that sends mixed messages to foreign investors coming to this country and we need foreign investment. It's a critical part of how we develop our nation.

CONNELL: Ok Richard Marles. Thanks for your time on the program this morning.