

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
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SUBJECT/S: Immigration Legislation; US election & Mosul

PETER VAN ONSELEN: As promised I'm joined now live out of Geelong of all places by the Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles, thanks very much for your company.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: G'day Peter how are you?

VAN ONSELEN: I am very well, I want to get straight into this issue around the government wanting to ram through legislation next week I believe, to prevent anyone that comes here by boat from being able to ever, come here subsequently resettled somewhere else. Whether it's on a tourist visa, attend a family members funeral, you name it. Does Labor support it or oppose these measures?

MARLES: Well, there are a whole lot of questions which are raised by what we've seen in the media, Peter, and the first point to make is; the motivation for this, why the government feels the need to put this forward has not been properly explained. I should make it clear we haven't seen the legislation; we haven't been briefed by the Government. I spoke with Shayne Neumann today, he hasn't had a briefing from his opposite number Peter Dutton about what is sought to be achieved here. So there's been a lot in media; this isn't the way you do good public policy in terms of just putting out press releases, there's been no discussion with us so it's very unclear what's sought to be achieved here.

VAN ONSELEN: I was going to say, look fair enough you want to see the legislation before making an ultimate position but it does seem pretty simple whether you agree or disagree with it. They want to make it so that anyone tries to come here by boat can simply never come here hereafter. Is that a principle that Labor agrees with or do you not like the bluntness of the instrument?

MARLES: Well as I say we need to see what's in the legislation. No one is talking about bringing the cohort from Nauru and Manus to Australia. That is not on the

books. At the moment we are very keen to ensure everything is done make sure journey between Java and Christmas Island remains closed. Offshore processing has been a critical part of that and no one is out there proposing that that cohort should come to Australia. Now what exactly is being sort by what the Government proposes here I think is unclear.

VAN ONSELEN: What they say Mr Marles is, and Peter Dutton spoke a short time ago; the argument is if they don't do this then we can't guarantee that boats stay stopped. Now we can agree or disagree on that, but what I want to know is what does Labor think about the idea? That if you've tried to come here by boat, you've been rejected, you might be a genuine refugee, we have a policy that if don't come by boat, if you don't come via the normal cue you get rejected, you go back to your homeland, you perhaps get in the cue. Years later you get settled in; let's just pick a country say Canada, does Labor have an in-principle problem with that asylum seeker who settles in Canada but did previously try to get here by boat. Do you have an in-principle problem with them one day seeking to come to Australia on a holiday or seeking to one day migrate here if they've got family here or do you say no, we have to send a message, that can never happen?

MARLES: Well I think as your question implies there's a whole lot of examples that you can think of where people might be coming to Australia or seek to come to Australia in future circumstances. I think it is confusing as to exactly what the Government is trying to do here. Let's be absolutely clear from the point of view of bringing to an end the journey of Java to Christmas Island it was Labor who understood that what we need to do here was to take Australia off the table. It was Labor who made it clear that anyone who came by boat would never be resettled in Australia and that decision taken by the then Rudd Government was the most significant decision that any Australian Government's taken in bringing an end to the flow of boats between Java and Christmas Island. Now, what we're talking about here, a lifetime ban, that there would never be a circumstance in which somebody might come to Australia, I can imagine a whole lot of scenarios as you've just painted which would go well beyond the question of people being settled in Australia. So I think the Government needs to explain what it is trying to do here. We've been going about this in a very serious and sober way. This is a difficult problem, we've tried to apply our values to this and come up with policy. We've never been about playing politics with this issue. It is complicated enough as it is, the Government needs to explain what's its intentions are here. What its motivation is here. I think at the end of the day there's a lot of distraction from the fact that they have not found a third country resettlement option for those on Manus and Nauru, and that is a disgrace. We do need to see people get off those islands, that needs to be happening as soon as possible and it needs to happen via a third country resettlement option, I think that ought to be the focus of the Government's attention, rather than whatever is going on with this pretty unusual proposition.

VAN ONSELEN: Well, just the last one on this and then we'll move on to other issues but the Government seems to be saying via the Immigration Minister that if you want to truly stop the boats you need to go down this path, legislatively, in terms of the total ban in to the future. Does Labor disagree with that proposition, do you believe that you can stop the boats without this legislation?

MARLES: Well the Government has been saying that for some time now that it has stopped the boats. Now, actually I think, in truth, it is a range of policies that have been introduced by Labor and indeed the Coalition, we've accepted that in terms of the policy around turn backs, which have brought an end to the journey between Java and Christmas Island but if I wasn't mistaken I thought I'd heard successive Immigration Ministers under this Government claiming mission accomplished, the boats have been stopped. So if it's now being said that some other thing needs to be done here, that is a little confusing against the backdrop of what is already being claimed by this Government. Be absolutely clear we are 100% committed to seeing an end to the journey between Java and Christmas Island which saw so many people lose their life at sea. We have taken very difficult decisions internally and as the Government of the day, to bring an end to that, we are not about to do anything which sees the people smugglers get back into business again. As to this particular proposition, frankly we need to see more detail here; we need to understand what is sought to be done. I don't want to be cynical about it, about its motivations, but it's hard not to be in terms of circumstances where the Government has been so unclear about what it is they're specifically trying to achieve with this. If you want to talk about what is the next step in terms of policy around asylum seekers, it is to find a third country resettlement option for those on Manus and Nauru and the Government needs to get on its skates right now and make that happen.

VAN ONSELEN: On a separate matter, I want to talk to you about Andrew Robb, it's been revealed his appointment, he's been appointed to the Chinese leaseholder of the Port of Darwin. Any concerns on that front?

MARLES: I think again there are some questions which need to be answered by the Government in relation to this; it's not long ago that Andrew Robb was the Trade Minister, a Member of Parliament and also a special envoy in respect of trade under this Government, now none of that came to an end until the election this year. There is a protocol, I think, which sees an 18 month gap between the time that members of the Executive under this Government leave office and are able then to lobby their colleagues; we'd want to know that that is going to apply to former Minister Robb.

Obviously we're talking about a company which is the lease holder of the Port of Darwin and we expressed our concerns at the time that a Chinese owned company would have such an important contract in Australia in terms of our own infrastructure and in the context of our own national security. A former Cabinet Minister carries with him a lot of information about this Government. I think we need, we deserve to be told by the Government that all our national security concerns are being met here and that there's no need to worry about it in terms of this appointment of Andrew Robb.

VAN ONSELEN: As the Shadow Defence Spokesperson, just looking to the US election, does Australia have anything to worry about, defensively, I guess I could put it that way, with Donald Trump's election to the Presidency of the United States or is this something that you just stay right out of, it doesn't matter to us whether it's Trump or Clinton?

MARLES: At the end of the day it's not up to us whether it's Trump or Clinton and we will find out in the next ten days or so who the American people have chosen.

The American alliance is central to our defence strategy, it's central to our foreign policy and whether it is a President Trump or a President Clinton, we will have interests within our alliance with the US that we are going to need to actively pursue in respect of the new administration.

VAN ONSELEN: Can I jump in though. Because Donald Trump, one of the things that he said publicly is that he'd like to see some of the US allies armed with nuclear weapons. If he starts arming allies with nuclear weapons, presumably, we'd want in on that?

MARLES: I don't think that's precisely what he said but I think the point here is that we want to see; it is in Australia's interest that we have a strong American presence in the East Asian time zone, I think it's in Australia's interest that there is a strong American presence, through its alliances with Japan, with South Korea, and obviously our alliance with America is very critical and whoever is elected next Tuesday week, it is critical we are arguing and in the context of the alliance for, as big an American presence within this part of the world as we can see, in the pivot that has been underway since the first term of the Obama administration there is a very important step being taken by the US from the context of Australia's national interest, we need to continue to argue that that continue.

VAN ONSELEN: And just finally Richard Marles if I could ask you about the situation in the Middle East, this assault on Mosul. As far as I can see there are two schools of thought here. One is that you surround Iraq's second largest city, it'll be a tougher fight against Islamic State but nonetheless you'll seriously degrade them once victory is won. The other school of thought is you keep a corridor to Raqqa so that it becomes an easier victory in Mosul liberating Iraq essentially and also given a PR victory to allies more quickly possibly taking out Islamic State on the road to Raqqa. But it does ultimately make it harder to then defeat IS in Syria, in Raqqa particularly knowing as well as we all do how complex the situation is. Which school of thought do you fall into?

MARLES: I don't feel like I have all the information at hand in terms of the briefings I've received to give a sensible contribution on that specific question of military strategy. What I do know is this, defeating Islamic State is absolutely essential, denying ISIL any sense of legitimacy it might claim in terms of the geography of the caliphate is really important in terms of the way in which we do that. You're right in saying it's not a matter of Mosul at the end of the day; Raqqa is part of the geography that is inhabited by ISIL at the moment but capturing Mosul is a critical step along the way. What I think is important from the point of view of the Australian Government and indeed the Australian Opposition is that people know that we are committed to that task. That the wonderful work of the Australians involved in this is completely supported in a bipartisan way here.

VAN ONSELEN: Richard Marles we appreciate you joining us on the program. Thanks once again.

MARLES: Thanks Peter.