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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
RADIO INTERVIEW  
2GB BEN FORDHAM SHOW  
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***SUBJECT/S: Veteran mental health.***

**BEN FORDHAM:** There is a suggestion today from the Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles that we could learn a lesson here from America and make the armed services more welcoming to our veterans. He's on the line, the Shadow Defence Minister and Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles, good afternoon.

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** Good after noon Ben, how are you?

**FORDHAM:** Good, I just think this is a great idea.

**MARLES:** Well what it speaks to is that people in our armed forces have an enormous sense of identity and belonging, and actually when you see in action - which I had the privilege of doing over the last few years, it is wonderful to see. But part of the issue, I think, is that when people leave our armed forces, a lot of the things which go with it and the power that is their sense of identity and belonging is in a sense taken away from them

and I think as we look at this issue of suicide amongst veterans - and not for a second I'm saying this solves the whole issue and obviously it doesn't - but it does seem to me that making sure that people feel like they remain part of the family for the rest of their lives is something that we need to be looking at and that's exactly what happens in the United States.

**FORDHAM:** Well I mean in that there the ties that bind right and you often hear from people who've served in our defence force that that it's that team mentality that group feeling that really matters to them so you can imagine that when they come back and all of a sudden they find themselves on their own and sure they can catch up with their mates when they organise it, but if they had the ability to be able to walk into one of these bases and clearly not just walk in there willy nilly but certain areas where they could go and they could socialise that would make a difference.

**MARLES:** Well and it would be about acknowledging them as special. Not just anyone who could walk up to the base but having served in our armed forces you carry with you a lifelong badge as it were which allows you access to these facilities. But if you're somebody who's gone into our army at the age of 18 this is a part of your life which is absolutely central to your identity and you're absolutely right that the expression of team which I have seen in the armed forces, is so much better than anything I've seen anywhere else including professional sporting clubs. It really is amazing and it's something to behold. But you can imagine that when that's been central to who you are and then the day comes when you leave and you have to leave all of that behind as well that becomes something which is really difficult and I just think whatever it is, we need to be looking at it because right now Ben, the rates at which veterans are suiciding is double the national average and to the national average is too high, so we need to be doing something to address this issue.

**FORDHAM:** Do you support a Royal Commission?

**MARLES:** At the end of the day I think that is a matter for the Government. But

whatever it is, something must be done and it has to start with the Government.

**FORDHAM:** But you are the alternative government, you wouldn't fob something like that off on many other issues. Do you support it or not?

**MARLES:** At the end of the day Ben, we are not going to be the government for three years at the earliest and this can't wait until then. Exactly what is the step that government takes is ultimately a matter for them but it must be taken and it must be taken now because this is a situation which cannot be allowed to continue. Be it this as a small gesture, or be it other measures to deal with questions such as PTSD, we have got to address this issue because the rate at which people are suiciding who have served in our armed forces is just totally unacceptable and it feels profoundly wrong, actually.

**FORDHAM:** No doubt.

**MARLES:** There are more people dying at their own hand than on the battlefield and we need to deal with this issue.

**FORDHAM:** You sidestepped the question of a Royal Commission but I am happy to put that to one side and acknowledge the fact that you have picked up on this idea from the United States and I know that it is not going to be the be all and end all solution but I think it is a really good idea and that is what we need. We need smart, creative ideas. We will talk again about this issue, Richard. Thanks for coming on.

**MARLES:** Pleasure Ben.

***ENDS***

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.