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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
RADIO INTERVIEW  
ABC BRISBANE DRIVE WITH STEVE AUSTIN  
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***SUBJECT/S: Veteran mental health.***

**STEVE AUSTIN:** How do we make sure that the men and women who serve Australia's military re-enter civilian life after their service in a healthy mental state? As you know it's drilled into pretty well every member of the ADF the importance of the individual submitting to the collective. But at the end of the day, according to my next guest, all soldiers stand ready to lay down their lives for their comrades in arms. But Richard Marles, who is the Shadow Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the Federal Labor Party says there's something incumbent on Australians, and that is to do more than simply express their gratitude on Anzac Day to those who served. Richard Marles is in Queensland I think as an observer of Exercise Talisman Sabre. Richard Marles, thanks for coming on the program this afternoon.

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** It's a pleasure Steve. Thanks for having me.

**AUSTIN:** I want you to tell me the story of Bradley Carr from Queensland

please.

**MARLES:** Well Bradley Carr was a young member of the army. He served in Afghanistan. He spent eight months on his tour there and saw terrible traumas of war, the sorts of things that many thousands of people who have served with our defence forces have seen. He returned to Australia. He suffered from PTSD, very common. I mean it people who have seen those kind of traumatic events very often are going to have that experience. For a long time he wrestled with the Department of Veterans Affairs in order to obtain a Gold Card, which is basically the level of support required for people who were experiencing what Bradley experienced. It took a while, many years for that to come through, it actually did come through last year, but sadly on Anzac Day this year Bradley took his own life. And he's one of so many veterans now who have suicided.

The fact of the matter is, and this has really got to be the statistic which is the cause of action or the call to action for all of us: veterans are suiciding at a rate twice the national average, and the national average is way too high as it is. And so this is a really tragic story but it's not unique. And it's really important that we do something about it. And part of it is making sure that we are dealing with conditions like PTSD as best as we can, with the latest science, and a whole lot has improved in that regard, but there's more that can be done. But part of it also I think is making sure that people who serve in the army and across the defence forces, who become a part of a team as you described, and for them serving is so fundamental to their own identity and their sense of belonging, that when people leave the Defence Force they don't leave that as well.

**AUSTIN:** They seem to go through an almost an existential crisis of sorts, the modern professional soldier, male or female when they leave the military and re-enter civilian life.

**MARLES:** I wonder whether there is a sense in which when you make the decision to finish your service, that in a sense at that moment you know some people feel as though the Defence Force is then showing them the door to the

house. And given that has been your family, really, for many people since their late teens, that's a really significant and difficult moment to deal with.

**AUSTIN:** You've written that it's incumbent on all Australians to do more than simply express gratitude on Anzac Day and I think you're suggesting that we find a way of keeping them somehow loosely connected to the military family they've left, similar to what the United States has done. What are you suggesting?

**MARLES:** Indeed. Well firstly I think in the United States there is a very different culture around military service.

**AUSTIN:** Yes it is very different.

**MARLES:** And in terms of acknowledging the service not only of existing servicemen and women but of veterans as well. And when I say it's incumbent on all of us to think about this not just on Anzac Day but every day of the year I'm really referring to that: I think that we could take a leaf from the American book in terms of acknowledging the service of those people who have served, and veterans who have served. But also in the United States servicemen and women when they leave their service, still retain some of those things which go with their service, for example access to a whole lot of facilities on base. It's a small thing. Access to gyms, access to other facilities on base, but it does say to those ex-servicemen and women, those veterans, that they remain connected to their military service and they fundamentally remain a part of the family, and I wonder whether there is something or more that could be done here in Australia to acknowledge that service by our Defence Force so that people who leave the Defence Force can retain some of the benefits that go with participating in our armed forces. And there are lots of facilities on base which ex-servicemen and women might be able to enjoy. But mostly it would be a gesture to say you remain part of the family and that sense of identity and belonging that you've had as a serviceman or servicewoman continues.

**AUSTIN:** Richard Marles is the Shadow Minister for Defence. He's also the

Deputy Leader of the Federal ALP. This is ABC Radio Brisbane, Steve Austin is my name, 12 past 6. We had the Productivity Commission that was very damning of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the three Acts of Parliament that veterans have to deal with. You've noted the sad suicide of Bradley Carr and noted that it's double the national average for returned servicemen and women. Who is best to look at ways of dealing with the suggestion that there has been that there actually needs to be a Royal Commission. There are so many things around veterans: the Productivity Commission, the Veterans Affairs, the whole PTSD argument, and the modern professionalisation of the Australian military which is very different from Australia's previous century. Is there a need for a Royal Commission into this?

**MARLES:** Look there are people who are calling for that.

**AUSTIN:** Are you?

**MARLES:** Well ultimately I think that is a matter for the Government. What I'm really concerned about is that there be some form of action that takes place, and that that takes place as quickly as possible. So I understand that call, the Productivity Commission or some other form of investigation all I know is that there needs to be action now. That action has to start with the Commonwealth Government. If the Commonwealth Government aren't going to act here in some form of investigation no one will.

**AUSTIN:** Have you raised your idea of access to the military base in some form with the military hierarchy at all?

**MARLES:** Well I mean I guess in putting it out there today that, that's what I'm seeking to do. And it comes from the observations that I've had over the last few years seeing the military up close, and seeing a whole lot of wonderful aspects of it. But that sense of team, that sense of family is very central to it, and in discussions that I've had with people about what is happening out there, why is there such a high rate of suicide compared to the national average, it just strikes me that that that sense of being removed from that sense of identity that

you've experienced, for a lot of people from the time they left school, that being removed is obviously going to be a really significant factor. And I know that lots of people go through changes of jobs, and there is a change in identity that goes with that, but serving in our armed forces is a bit different. It's a bit different to any other job and you put it well in your introduction: that sense of the individual submitting themselves to the collective, being a part of the team, being part of something bigger than themselves, that is absolutely drummed into people from day one –

**AUSTIN:** And when they enter civilian life it's a dog eat dog world in civilian life and no one is looking after them.

**MARLES:** Well I think I mean in many ways that that sense of team is a wonderful embrace actually that people in the military I think feel. And when they go into civilian life, I've spoken to a number of veterans who put it exactly as you just did. And which in a sense is a surprise. But when you think about it, it makes sense. And so I just think we need to be looking at ways in which there can be gestures from our Defence Force, but more than that from all of us, to say to people who have served in our armed forces: you remain a part of that family, you retain that identity, and you absolutely retain the gratitude of the Australian people.

**AUSTIN:** Thanks for your time.

**MARLES:** Thanks Steve.

**AUSTIN:** Richard Marles is Shadow Minister for Defence and Deputy Federal Leader of the ALP.

**ENDS**

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.