

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&EO TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
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***SUBJECT/S: The Coalition in division on how to deal with the drought;
Economy.***

ANNELISE NIELSEN: Joining us live now is Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. Richard, Thank you for your time.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Annalise, good morning. How are you?

NIELSEN: Good thank you. How are you?

MARLES: Very good.

NIELSEN: We're all well!

MARLES: On the Thursday of a sitting fortnight looking forward to getting back to the family tonight.

NIELSEN: Big week, especially in the drought space. And we have this news

this morning, Laura Jayes broke the story \$1.3 billion The Nats are asking for; for drought ravaged regions. Do you think that's fair enough?

MARLES: Well what's amazing to me is the level of division that exists both within the Nationals but within the Coalition and the Government. And what you've got is a Government right now which is absolutely focused on itself and having a fight here in Canberra- when you've got Tenterfield looking at running out of water by Christmas. If you're in drought affected Australia right now you've got to be scratching your head that the Government is here focused on itself in Canberra and not focused on you and that's what we actually need to see. I mean this speaks to the fact that the Government has not had a proper drought plan but we've actually now got to see the Government get itself together, come out with a drought plan and deal with what is just about the most significant issue which is facing our country today.

NIELSEN: We heard in Question Time yesterday the Prime Minister responding to these criticisms, talking about all the money that they have put into the regions, about tax concessions that they're given to farmers, extending the Farm Household Allowance. Why isn't that enough?

MARLES: They are kicking people off the farm household allowance. I mean their strategy is about getting people off the land rather than helping them keep farming on it. That's what we're seeing from this Government. I mean these aren't answers and when you look at the so-called money that they're putting forward you know it's all smoke and mirrors. They're putting forward loans which people are obviously going to have to be repaying back. They talk about a large infrastructure fund which is in fact actually money in the bank here, it's not money going out to farmers and what that small amount does we won't see until July of next year. The reality is that this Government is completely surprised to be finding itself on the side of the Parliament that it does. It doesn't have a plan and it hasn't worked up a plan in the last six years to deal with this drought. And now what we're seeing is that spilling out in a massive fight internally within the Government which has them focused on themselves here in Canberra, while people in drought affected Australia are left stranded.

NIELSEN: When it comes to what's happening on The Nationals side of things, we've also seen criticism of Bridget McKenzie coming out of The Nationals party room even the fact that we've heard it is a bad sign that we're hearing all these criticisms. Do you think that there is just kind of the 'female factor'? That they're not happy with a woman running the show?

MARLES: Well you'd have to ask that question of The Nationals. But what again is absolutely clear with all of this is they are totally focused on themselves. I mean The Nationals are ripping themselves apart right at a moment in time when their constituency is crying out for their help. And all the while all they're watching is a group of people focused on their own petty issues in this building engaged in internal warfare with total disregard to drought affected Australians.

NIELSEN: Now when it comes to John Setka, that news broke yesterday that he's been dumped from the Labor Party. He says he left, but obviously not on great terms. What more can be done? You know Jacqui Lambie support or not, the decision to not support Ensuring Integrity relies on John Setka leaving the union. Are you doing anything to try and get him out?

MARLES: Well Annelise, I suppose the first point to make is that this is a very significant victory for the values of the Australian Labor Party. This was an important stance that Anthony Albanese took within the first two weeks of his leadership to make it clear that values around the respect for women values, around the abhorrence of domestic violence were at the core of what Labor was about and that's somebody whose conduct and behaviour and comments were inconsistent with those values had no place in our party. That was actually a risky and courageous stand to take but he did it. And it has led to what occurred yesterday, with John Setka leaving the Labor Party. That is an enormous victory for a value based Labor Party. I think it says everything about the character of Anthony Albanese and his leadership and I guess from my point of view I feel a sense of confidence that if values are front and centre in terms of how we go about our business and that places us very well going into the next election.

NIELSEN: He's still ahead of one of the most powerful chapters, in one of the most powerful unions in the country. They get to sit at the table at Labor Conference and decide what your policy is going to be. Why should he have that privilege?

MARLES: Well ultimately that's a matter for the CFMEU. I mean the only issue we get to determine is the relationship that John Setka has with the Australian Labor Party, and that's a matter that we have determined. And it's a matter for the CFMEU in terms of how they deal—

NIELSEN: So you have no sway with CFMEU in Victoria? Even though you're one of the most senior Victorian Labor members—

MARLES: It is absolutely at the end of the day a matter for the CFMEU. But I also make this point; John Setka doesn't define the CFMEU. This is a large organisation with a very significant history that's done, you know a heap of incredible work for example in relation to occupational health and safety, across a range of the most dangerous industries in this country. John Setka does not define the CFMEU. Now, his place in the CFMEU ultimately is a matter for them, it's not a matter for the ALP. What we can't control is John Setka's relationship to the ALP and that matter was dealt with. It was dealt with very promptly and courageously by Anthony Albanese and it was dealt with to conclusion yesterday.

NIELSEN: And just finally, the economy has been the other big topic this sitting fortnight. We've seen some improvements; auction rates are up, house clearance rates are up, it's something where we have seen global forces are going in our direction at the moment. So isn't this a good sign for the economy?

MARLES: Well I think if anyone is taking heart from that- particularly in the face for example of the IMF downgrade of the Australian growth forecasts- well then they are the eternal optimist. The truth is that we've got anaemic growth in this country right now, we've got stagnant wages which have been the defining

statistic in the economy for the last five or six years and that is bringing about, you know real life examples which last week, for example we highlighted in the suburb of Corio in my electorate, one in nine households in the last three years have had their electricity cut off because people can't afford to pay the bills. So that is the real consequence of an economy which is not growing, of wages which are stagnant. And that and in the face of that, you would expect there to be some kind of plan from this government but there is nothing. There is absolute idleness on the part of this government and a sense of smugness about what happened in May and I think that that is starting to look increasingly offensive to ordinary Australians who are finding it really tough to make ends meet.

NIELSEN: One way to stimulate the economy could be an extra \$1.3 billion for drought ravaged regions.

MARLES: Well that's a matter for the Government to work through and certainly they need to come up with a drought plan.

NIELSEN: But would you support that?

MARLES: Well they're the Government, Annelise. And what we think is that there needs to be a plan from this Government about how they deal with drought. We've proposed that there be a drought War Cabinet so that you can get a bipartisan approach this; you take all the politics out of it. I mean one of the difficulties about the Government signing up to a bipartisan approach with us is they need to get a bipartisan approach with the National Party first, I mean they are hopelessly divided. But actually a War Cabinet does make sense because it would mean all of that stuff is put in the background and we can focus on the people who matter and that is the people living in drought affected Australia. So we've been trying to come up with positive suggestions about how to move forward but ultimately the Government is the Government and it is for them to come up with a plan.

NIELSEN: So what is your solution to stimulate the economy, is it just to raise

Newstart or?

MARLES: Well we've talked about, for example, moving forward infrastructure projects and that's been a-

NIELSEN: Which ones?

MARLES: Well there's a whole range of infrastructure projects that are before the Government, but the Government- I mean what characterises the Government's infrastructure strategy is that all the money is on the never-never. You know again, they talk about a \$2 billion dollar promise for new fast rail between Melbourne and Geelong. I mean this is all money which is often in the late 2020s. We're not going to see anything eventuate from—

NIELSEN: We're going to have to let you go, because there is division you need to get to the House, to vote. I don't know if you're organised to pair for it?

MARLES: I definitely need to get there to vote.

NIELSEN: You go Richard Marles, thank you for your time, you can run out now.

MARLES: Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.