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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
TODAY SHOW
FRIDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2019**

SUBJECT/S: Fires; The Government's lack of economic plan; Aus Music T-shirt day.

DEBORAH KNIGHT: As the bushfire blame game rages. There has been an unprecedented show of force from former fire chiefs, 23 from around the country joining forces, demanding more resources to fight fires and a national debate on climate change. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton, joins us now in Brisbane along with Deputy Opposition Leader, Richard Marles. Good morning to you both.

PETER DUTTON: Morning Deb.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:
Morning Deb.

KNIGHT: Peter, we can see the smoke haze behind you, the impact of the bushfires being felt very much in Brisbane and in Queensland. This group of Emergency Services leaders, they have been trying to speak directly with the Prime Minister since April, they wanted another meeting in May. Why won't the Prime Minister meet with them?

DUTTON: Well, Deb, I think the Prime Minister's pointed out we are providing whatever support is needed within these communities. We are working closely with the NSW Government and the Queensland Government in this instance. Obviously WA is a worry as well. We are worried about weather conditions in Queensland over the weekend.

It's predicted to worsen there. Look, there is a lot of debate and a lot of background noise going on at the moment. My honest judgment is, is that there is a time for all of that, and for people to make particular stands and comments, etcetera. The concentration at the moment now is to make sure that we can protect property and life and I think anything else from that is a distraction. We are putting in place significant support for all sorts of ways in which we can respond; aircraft, etcetera. If there is a post-mortem to take place at some point about the response then that can take place. But, at the moment when you've got people losing their property and in some cases tragically lives, I think we are better off to concentrate on the here and now, the threat as it presents, and we can have the discussion and people can put their different points of view in the not too distant future.

KNIGHT: Richard, what's your view on this? Because the Fire chiefs, they want politicians to work together. They have been calling on debate for months now. Is now the time to be talking about these issues, including climate change?

MARLES: I think the community want a sensible conversation about climate change and obviously our Emergency Services need all the resources they can get in terms of being able to deal with this. But, actually think Peter is right. There is a time and place for everything. While fires are raging, while homes are being threatened, while lives are being lost that has to be the focus right now.

KNIGHT: To be fair though, Peter, these fire chiefs said they have been trying to talk to the Government since April. It's not as though they are just talking about it now. On the issue of resources though, will the Government commit to buying or leasing more aerial water bombers? Nationally we have got seven at the moment and Greg Mullins, the New South Wales Fire Chief, said on a single fire in California they had 30 of these water bombers. Do we really have enough to be fighting these fires?

DUTTON: Deb, again it's a question for down the track. We had a briefing in Cabinet from the head of Emergency Management Australia during the week and his advice was, I think there was one aircraft, one helicopter which had crash landed and fortunately the pilot was able to walk away. But, there is a national plan where if there is not a fire threat in Tasmania obviously we are deploying assets from Tasmania to the hotspots. That's the way in which the plan has been designed over recent years. I think it makes sense. Whether it's adequate, as I say, people will make that assessment in time. The resources that we are providing both at a state and federal level is unprecedented and we need to continue to support these volunteers and if more assets are required, or they believe that the threat is going to be different and more severe, perhaps more widespread in years to come, then that analysis will be done. And I just don't think it's an issue of politics. I think

everybody is happy to talk and to look at the suggestions that are being made. But here and now we have got people who are trying to work out what they are going to do with their kids in terms of emergency accommodation, how they are going to rebuild their lives, and in my judgment that's the best area for us to try and concentrate on. Now, to help them through what is obviously the darkest hour of their life.

MARLES: I mean, Deb, it is at a situation which is getting worse, I don't mean just in terms of this bushfire but the threat of bushfires around the country. Obviously we do need to be listening to our Fire Chiefs around the nation and making sure that that plan is fit for purpose but also that there are the resources there. But look, Peter is right; right now it is about focusing on the crisis at hand. I think it's also about acknowledging the incredible volunteers around the country who often are fighting fires when their own homes are at risk, they are putting their own lives in danger.

KNIGHT: They are the heroes of this country.

MARLES: You watch it during the week; it really is a remarkable thing to see them put themselves forward in that way.

KNIGHT: Yeah, there is no debate about that, that is for sure. Not good economic news this week, the first one month fall in jobs in more than three years. Peter, will the Government consider bringing forward the second round of tax cuts because they are due in 2022. The economy needs a boost right now though, doesn't it?

DUTTON: Deb, I think people can look to the Australian economy and have a level of reassurance about the settings that are in place, the tax cuts that are there, the way in which the Government is managing the Budget-

KNIGHT: The Treasurer has indicated he would consider bringing them forward.

DUTTON: And of course we will always consider ways in which we can cut taxes to help people make decisions about their own spending, whether they invest into their home, another asset class, whether they put money into their small business, employee another trainee- we will do all of that. But we have to look and be responsible, I mean I can predict, I mean, I love Richard, but I can predict his will be a whinging winy response, that's his job and he is very good at it in Opposition. Our job is actually to deal with it. So, if you look at the trend of economic growth, the trend of unemployment in this country, we have a very good story to tell about the jobs that have been created, the full-time jobs that have been created. The fact is we are in a much better position than most of our other

competitive nations. People are worried about what they are seeing between US and China, they are worried about Brexit and those international factors. But if Labor was in power now, I promise you they would be spending like crazy as they did under the Rudd-Gillard years. Now is the chance for Richard to reply. Let's see if he sticks to it.

KNIGHT: Are you going to gripe?

MARLES: Listen Deb, whatever it's about, it ain't about Labor. Listen, I can feel the love coming. I can feel the love coming from Peter, all the way from Brisbane.

DUTTON: Disappoint me. Say something positive.

MARLES: We will have a man hug later. If Peter really feels that the Australian people are reassured about the economy right now and how it's being managed, with the greatest respect Peter is in cloud cuckoo land. The fact of the matter is, the Reserve Bank is out there saying it can't do all the work here. We have actually been calling for these tax cuts to be brought forward. But it's got to be more than flying a kite with a vague idea. The Government has to actually do something. Since the election, these snoozers have been asleep at the wheel. I think people are seeing more and more people looking for work. They are finding the economy harder and harder. The situation is getting worse. They are looking at a government which is doing nothing about it.

KNIGHT: Alright, let's end on this; today's 'Aus Music T-shirt Day', and it's a chance to be loud and proud about your favourite Aussie band or musician. Richard, who is yours?

MARLES: I have officially said Midnight Oil. I actually wanted to say The Seekers, but my office vetoed that, once they found out who The Seekers were. The idea you don't know who Judith Durham is a national disgrace.

KNIGHT: Alright, that is a good one. What about you, Pete?

DUTTON: I've gone with INXS, I finished school in 1987, so a long time ago and they were pretty hot then.

KNIGHT: A bit of music for you there. Beautiful, I can't argue with that. Mine is probably more in The Wiggles, that is what is playing on high repeat at my joint. But yeah, a great day to really celebrate Australian music. Fellas, thanks so much for joining us.

MARLES: Thanks, Deb.

DUTTON: Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.