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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
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***SUBJECTS: Bushfires; Medevac; China; New South Wales Labor.***

**KIERAN GILBERT, HOST:** Welcome back to the program. Joining me now is the Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles, Mr. Marles thanks so much for your time. I'll ask you the same question as I asked Mr Dutton before the break, and that is do you think that our political leadership both at the state and federal level, and by that I mean the Opposition as well, needs to be doing more in terms of how we adapt and mitigate what are longer and more fierce fire seasons right now.

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** Well certainly it's an enormous challenge, I mean we go into what is the most dangerous season on our continent and that's been understood for a long time. But you look at this year and that season has begun very early on in an unprecedented way, and so I think we do need to be looking at every way in which we can make sure we've got every resource out there and we're coordinating in the best possible way and a number of fire chiefs themselves have raised this point. We've talked about potentially doing a COAG around bushfires so that we can get it right. But I think you know it's important that we do everything we can, obviously to keep this above politics. But just to be working as best we can to make sure that we're dealing with what is a growing challenge.

**GILBERT:** So you think that a bipartisan approach via a COAG Summit of some sort is the best way to do that because quite clearly it is best where this is done across the aisle so to speak and take that politicisation out of it.

**MARLES:** It has to be done across the aisle. There's no doubt about that, And disaster management over a long period of time has had a quality of bipartisanship to it, or really more than that it has been above politics and it needs to be that way. We just need to be bringing our best ideas to the table to try and deal with this as we can. And you're right, it's not just a federal issue it's federal and state. There's a long running protocol in terms of the federal government's engagement in natural disasters. I think it's important that we just keep reviewing this and making

sure that all the assets that are available to governments across the states and the Commonwealth are able to be used to deal with this. But you know this is an example of what's going to come. We're talking about longer fire seasons and it's a much bigger challenge to what was already a very last challenge.

**GILBERT:** You heard the Home Affairs Minister talking about the medevac repeal he's very cautious as has the Prime Minister been this week, or last week, in relation to the New Zealand option. They clearly don't want to provide any incentive to people smugglers he referred to renewed activity in Sri Lanka and so on. Is that a risk in your view of this New Zealand scenario, which Labor's been supportive of now for a number of years.

**MARLES:** Well we are supportive of taking up the New Zealand offer. I mean there are risks whichever way you go. There's risks in the US option but it's what needs to happen, but the biggest risk of all is to leave people on Manus and Nauru indefinitely. I mean that raises appalling prospects not just for the people involved but actually it raises very real risks for the ongoing viability of our border security because it places into question the effectiveness of offshore processing which is a really important tool in terms of establishing strong border protection. So if offshore processing is to work and it needs to be processing it can't be indefinite detention and that means you need to find options. So there is no risk free solution here, but you've got to do your best to manage those risks, and right now a situation where you're leaving people on Manus and Nauru for a very long period of time is a much bigger risk than anything else and I fail to really see how the offer of going to, taking up the offer of going to New Zealand is in any significant way a different risk to the offer which the Government is rightly pursuing in terms of taking up resettlement options in the United States.

**GILBERT:** And is there a way in your view to implement a permanent ban on that cohort if they are resettled in New Zealand from coming to Australia because that is both Labor and the Government's position that they should not be allowed to come to Australia, is that possible?

**MARLES:** Well let's just, there have been ideas putting New Zealand to one side that the Government has put forward about permanent bans of people ever coming back, coming to Australia in any context that's not the position. If people go and take up the US option for example and in due course become American citizens then you would relate to them in an immigration sense as you do to any other American citizen. But what is important is that those who went to Manus and who have come to Manus and Nauru those who have sought to come to Australia by boat after July of 2013 never able to resettle in Australia, that's really the point and that's a very important principle to put in place so that the border security is strong.

**GILBERT:** Would you look at supporting a ban though, of them from ever visiting Australia because that's certainly the message from the Government that if they were ever to countenance the New Zealand deal that would also be the arrangement.

**MARLES:** Well I think we have to be sensible here. I think they're potentially are options for looking at how the immigration relationship between people going to New Zealand under this offer are in respect of their relationship with Australia. But ultimately you know this is for the Government to work through that. The issue here over a long period of time has been the Government's failure to pursue and realise genuine third party resettlement options with countries around the world. It took a long time to get the American deal going, all their eggs have been in that basket. It is an important arrangement but it's not one which is going to resolve the fate of all of those who are on Manus and Nauru and ultimately there does need to be resolution

for everyone on Manus and Nauru because to have anybody on in those places indefinitely gives rise to as I said earlier a terrible situation for them one, which we should not be countenancing as Australians but also a really dangerous situation in terms of the ongoing viability of our offshore processing. That's what the Government needs to resolve, and you know the New Zealand offer I think has a role to play here and we've been making that point for some time. But you know I think the Government needs to be looking at other third country resettlement options as well and we've been making that point also.

**GILBERT:** On the China relationship, the Home Affairs Minister argues that the Government's got the balance right, that the Prime Minister's got his language right. Do you agree with that, I know you've been critical that there hasn't been enough consistency, but under Morrison, Prime Minister Morrison do you think that they're starting to get that nuance correct in terms of pushing back on the one hand but engaging on the other?

**MARLES:** Well I think that this is a very complex relationship that Mr Dutton was right in making that observation. We need to be thinking very carefully about how we get it right and it's not one that is binary, it is a mistake to consider China as the enemy. We need to be doing everything we can to make sure that we create the space and have the courage to articulate Australia's national interest when it differs from Chinese action in places like the South China Sea for example and we need to be very clear about all of that, the place of the American alliance and its centrality and Australia's world view that needs to be a critical message that is sent to China. But from there we actually need to be saying to China that we do value the relationship with China greatly and we want to try and engage to the fullest possible extent from that basis. Now I think a guiding philosophy which underpins the way in which we relate to China is something that I've not really heard from the Government and they need to start articulating that because you know it's critically important that this is not a relationship which is allowed to drift because it is one of the most important bilateral relationships that this country has.

**GILBERT:** There seem to be quite a firm position though as articulated by Peter Dutton that's been the view of others expressed by the Prime Minister down basically in terms of defending Australia's sovereignty, how democracy, is in that sort of message something that you know should be welcomed because it does give the Chinese certainty as to what our position is?

**MARLES:** Look, that message is it's fundamentally important. We absolutely as I said before, need to be making sure that we have the courage to articulate Australia's national interest and particularly in circumstances where it differs from Chinese action and our national interest is absolutely about defending our sovereignty maintaining our position as a nation which is a liberal democracy. These are incredibly important principles in the way in which we relate to China, as indeed we relate to any country in the world, we need to be able to state who we are and the terms on which we engage with the world. Having said that it's that important that there is a process of engagement, because we're talking about Australia's largest trading partner, and if we are going to do the level of business that we do with China it's also important that we seek to engage with them politically, and I think that's the, you know, there's a lot of work which needs to be done in that space.

**GILBERT:** On finally to the wrap up of the year for Labor, you've seen the parliamentary year conclude. Are you encouraged by the unity of purpose within your opposition right now, because we've seen elections gone by where an opposition suffers a devastating defeat, like you did. I think back to 2001, and the party basically ripped itself apart over leadership issues over a number of years. Are you confident that you're beyond that now within your party, what's your

sense of it as you wrap up, is Anthony Albanese - has he got that sense of confidence among your colleagues?

**MARLES:** Look I think he has, I think Anthony has done an incredible job. And you know, your observation before was correct this was a devastating defeat that we suffered in May, and it struck me soon after the defeat that in a sense our story that would be written over the course of this term would largely be about whether we were able to come to terms with, learned the lessons from and get past the election. I mean that was perhaps going to be our biggest challenge given the size of the devastating defeat that we suffered. But I think we've done all that, you know we've had the review, it was a review which was very honest and there was no holds barred in it, and it contains within it a whole lot of very important lessons for us to take forward, but we've done that review it is now in the rearview mirror. We finished the year absolutely with a sense of purpose and unity, I think Anthony is doing a fantastic job in all of that and really has done I think a remarkable job in leading us through what has been a very difficult period, and that we get to this moment at the end of the year with a spring in our step. It is, I think actually an unbelievable achievement in the context of what occurred in May.

**GILBERT:** Is there still some life left in the old left wing warrior though, Anthony Albanese, because we've seen the review in New South Wales of the party there, Michael Lavarch review, which has seen some changes to the way the state party works including 75 per cent of the New South Wales branch needs to elect the president and so on. It's seen these changes as boosting the Left faction and diminishing the traditional power base of the New South Wales right. Is as I say, Is this the old left warrior taking this opportunity of reform to smash the right faction basically?

**MARLES:** No is the short answer to that question. Look Anthony is now the leader of the Labor Party and one of the steps, indeed, in a sense an automatic step that he took on becoming the leader of the Labor Party was to leave behind his his factional past and be the leader for everyone. So he's no longer in the left and I make the point in relation to the Lavarch review that this was an independent review that was done. It's Michael Lavarch's recommendations which are being put in place and they are ultimately about making sure that the New South Wales branch is in the best possible position to -

**GILBERT:** But the right...

**MARLES:** Well it's about making sure that, that branch is in a position to contest elections both state and federal in New South Wales and you know this is Michael Lavarch's work and Michael Lavarch is actually of the right, and so, this is not a factional thing, this is about trying to put the New South Wales branch in the best position possible and in that sense this is that's what's at the centre of this.

**GILBERT:** Richard Marles appreciate your time.

**MARLES:** Thanks Kieran.

**ENDS**

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.