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DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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SHADOW MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW
ADELAIDE
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SUBJECTS: Full Cycle Docking; The Government's failure on our future submarines; Coronavirus; White Supremacists in the ADF; Luxury Car Tax; Superannuation.

MARK BUTLER, SHADOW MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY: Thanks, it's a great pleasure to welcome Richard Marles here to hear directly from workers down here at Osborne, about the importance of these jobs that have been here literally for decades in the case of the Collins class submarines and for many years, extending back to the Howard Government and obviously through the Rudd and Gillard Governments, in relation to the Air Warfare Destroyer. We have the third ship which is almost ready for commissioning, an incredibly high quality piece of work constructed by South Australian workers. It's really important that we have our Shadow Ministers down here listening directly to the workers here at Osborne and hearing how important these jobs are for them and their families.

I note that the Prime Minister flew into Adelaide for a very short visit in spite of all of the questions now over jobs here at Osborne. He didn't address the questions and he certainly didn't come down to face the workers here. So I'm incredibly grateful for Richard for coming down here and listening directly to the Adelaide workforce. Over to you Richard.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Beautiful, well thank you Mark and it's great to be here with Mark and it's fantastic to be here at Osborne and it's great to see behind us HMAS Sydney which is now almost complete it's an Air Warfare Destroyer which is going to be a fantastic asset for our Navy and which is being built by South Australian workers ahead of budget and ahead of time. It is a quality piece of work and what it

speaks to is the ability of Australian workers, South Australian workers to produce quality naval assets. This speaks to the importance of Australian industry content and what can be done in this country. But sadly what we've seen over the last month is evidence of a Government which it seems to me has really abandoned the workers of South Australia, the workers here at Osborne when it comes to the Future Submarine. We were initially being told that 90% of that build would be done here in Australia. That quickly turned into 60% and in the last week or so Naval have now said that they're not sure that they're going to be able to do a 50% build of the Future Submarines here at Osborne. We learned in January that the Government is sending a hull fabrication work to France in respect of the first Future Submarine. Now that is a complete breach of faith with the people here at Osborne, with the people of South Australia, frankly with the people of Australia about the commitment that this Government made to building twelve submarines here in Australia. But if you aren't going to do hull fabrication here at Osborne, it begs the question as to what you are going to do. This morning we read in the media about a list of contracts that the Government have entered into in relation to the Future Submarine. There's a lot of consultants in that, that's all well and fine, that list is incredibly skinny in terms of companies which are actually making things that will be on the Future Submarine and there is a debate in this country now about the future of 700 workers when it comes to full cycle docking, that is being put into stark relief precisely because the Future Submarine is behind time, it's over budget and what we're seeing in respect of Australian industry content is that that indicator is going the wrong way as well. By the way it is so important that the Government actually makes a decision in relation to full cycle docking to give certainty to this community here. But what we really need to say is this Government actually doing something about making sure that the Future Submarines are really being built here in South Australia, that there is Australian industry content in that and that there are thousands of workers who are able to do their job in building that and HMAS Sydney behind us stands as a testament to the quality of Australian work in terms of our major naval assets that's what we have got to see with the Future Submarines as well.

JOURNALIST: Is it your belief that those 700 maintenance jobs should be remaining here in SA, or is it your preference for it to go to WA?

MARLES: Well ultimately this is a question for the Government, they're the ones who have any information in front of them. These are decisions which I made behind closed doors and I understand that, but I'd make this point the most precious resource we've got right now in Australia is submarine workers. Everyone says that's going to be the biggest capacity constraints of actually building future submarines here in Adelaide. So the idea that any submarine worker, a person with a skills in relation to working on submarines is going to be asked to pursue their career interstate makes no sense at all.

JOURNALIST: That's the same then for maintenance jobs?

MARLES: Well I think that the point I'm making is that having skills in respect of working on submarines is such a precious commodity right now. We're going to need to be training people, all people in the future in relation to that and that's a really specialised skill. So the idea that you would be asking people to do that work interstate and to follow their careers interstate makes no sense.

JOURNALIST: Mr Marles we're asking you as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition what your parties position is on the maintenance work on existing submarines, where do you think that work should go? Should it stay here in SA or should it go to WA?

MARLES: And the point I'm making is that ultimately that is a question for the government and the government are the people who have all the information available to them, which I don't, in relation to the making of that decision. But I make the point that I just did then the most precious resource we have here is people who have skills in relation to submarines and the idea that people who have those skills would be asked to pursue that work interstate makes no sense and it makes no sense because obviously a whole lot of people won't pursue this skills with their work interstate and if we are losing submarine workers to this industry now that is going to be a real problem in terms of building 12 future submarines in Australia. But ultimately this is coming about as an issue because future submarines is falling behind time and we're learning that the work which should be done here is actually being done in France.

JOURNALIST: You're the Opposition though, this is a question for you as well, do you just not want to piss people off in different states?

MARLES: Ultimately this is a matter for the government and they are the ones who have the information before them in terms of a decision –

JOURNALIST: You can say that about any topic though.

MARLES: That's actually not right because so much of this happens behind closed doors which is something I understand, you know we're talking about contracts in relation to submarines and you know a lot of this does exist in the classified space so it's impossible to be in a position to properly answer that question. But you can make certain observations from opposition which I've done. Do you want to say something in relation -

BUTLER: Yeah the really important thing is we've seen through history is that if South Australia is going to get an even break from Canberra and from Melbourne and from Sydney, South Australians need to stand up with a very loud voice. The only reason the Collins class was built here and was maintained through the full cycle docking process here is because you had loud South Australian voices from both parties, Mick Young my predecessor as the Member for Port Adelaide. The Labor Premier John Bannon saying this work must be done here in South Australia and we had those voices during the preparation for the Air Warfare Destroyer as well. That's why I have been arguing so hard that the full cycle docking work, the seven hundred workers currently performing that, they've been performing it for decades should remain here in Adelaide and frankly I should be joined in that by Simon Birmingham the senior Liberal Party member of the federal government and by Stephen Marshall you're just not hearing loud enough voices from South Australia to make the case why for a whole range of reasons that work should stay in Adelaide.

JOURNALIST: You're standing next to your Deputy Leader who cannot explicitly state that those jobs should stay here.

BUTLER: So my job as the local MP is exactly what Mick Young's job as the local MP was 30 years ago. It's the stuff of legend that he was in the office of Kim Beazley, the then Defence Minister almost every single day in Canberra making the case for South Australia to have that work. I can tell you as a local member that is exactly what I'm doing with Richard Marles and with every other person who has an interest in this question. Frankly it's what Simon Birmingham and Steven Marshall should be doing. But instead of loudly making the case Steven Marshall seems to be taking the view to just sit quietly, cross your fingers, don't make a fuss and hope that Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne will make a decision to the advantage of Adelaide - well that's

never happened in history. They need to muscle up, they need to get louder and they need to be making the case that I'm making to Richard Marles and my colleagues about why that work should stay here.

MARLES: Obviously I understand the questions you're asking and the reason you're asking them, but all of that also points to this the government needs to make a decision they promised to make a decision back in November they promised then to make a decision by the end of the year we're now in the middle of February, we still don't have a decision. We have had prime minister who came here last night and this morning but didn't come here to Osborne has said nothing about the making of this decision. One of the points that comes from the questions you're asking and the points that Mark's making is there's obviously a whole lot of uncertainty here and it's absolutely essential that the Government comes clean and lets us know what it's actually going to do because for all the questions you're asking of me they are the ones who will actually make this decision.

JOURNALIST: But how can you come here today and stand with these workers and say that we support you and support your jobs but not explicitly state that the jobs should stay here.

MARLES: There are a whole range of issues in relation to the future of Osborne which we need to be really signing from the rooftops about, I mean the lack of Australian industry content in relation to the Future Submarines goes to the question of thousands of jobs here in Adelaide. And we're absolutely making that point, they are Australian jobs which right now are being sent to France and that is in complete breach of the commitment that this government made to the Australian people, to the whole nation but also to the people here in South Australia.

JOURNALIST: There's two different issues that you speak about there, I'm specifically asking about the maintenance jobs, you've not stated the Labor Party's position on where those jobs should be, I'm asking you how can you do that and also say that you support the workers at Osborne?

MARLES: I'm not about to make pronouncements on questions where I don't get the information -

JOURNALIST: But on the information that you have you can state –

MARLES: On the information that I have, I have stated the case and I'll state it again. The idea that we would be asking any person with skills in relation to submarines, those who are working on a full cycle docking right now, the idea that we would be asking any of those people to pursue their careers interstate in the context of the work we need to do in building the next generation of submarines here at Osborne makes absolutely no sense at all.

JOURNALIST: If the government has decided or decides to keep the maintenance contracts in WA they should just rip the Band-Aid off here for South Australian workers so that they at least know what's going to happen?

MARLES: I think that the failure of this Government to come clean with whatever decision that's going to make given how long they've been sitting on this is frankly [inaudible].

JOURNALIST: Mr Butler, again where do you think the jobs should go?

BUTLER: I was very clear in my response to the last question. They should stay here, they've been here for decades. These workers are highly skilled and highly dedicated, they should stay in Adelaide.

JOURNALIST: Just on another matter as well, there's a push from some Coalition MP's to scrap the luxury car tax following Holden's demise, do you think that the tax should be abolished?

MARLES: Well ultimately, we will talk about our tax propositions when it comes to the election. But this is a complete diversion from the fact that this Government is responsible for goading the car industry offshore. I mean the idea that Scott Morrison would complain about the loss of the brand of Holden when he was a part of a Government which saw the Australian car industry, in terms of the making of cars come to an end, beggars belief. I say that as a Member of the Opposition, I also say that representing a car electorate in Geelong and I know what it is to see a car plant sitting there every day which is not making cars. I know what that means for my community, and I know what it means for the communities here in South Australia and this is nothing other than a diversion from the fact that this is a Government which allowed the car industry to leave. I'm not sure what else this Government's actually done since it was elected back in 2013 but I can tell you this, when history actually writes up the achievements of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government, right there at the top will be this is the Government which lost the car industry to Australia.

JOURNALIST: But do you believe that the luxury car tax should be scrapped?

MARLES: Well I mean ultimately we will look at the question in relation to all our tax policies when we get to the election, we've made it clear that we're doing a review of all of that. We've got a bit of time to get there. But let's not, like let's be clear that the whole discussion of that right now is trying to divert from the fact, make excuses about the loss of the car industry on this Government's watch. It doesn't cut the mustard, ultimately this is a Government which refused to partner with the car industries around the world to make cars here in Australia and that's why we no longer have a car industry here and it is completely on the Government.

JOURNALIST: How concerned are you that Coronavirus has already cost Australian universities two billion dollars with students stuck overseas?

MARLES: The Coronavirus is obviously a global incident and people are very concerned about the impact that it's having on the Australian economy in relation to international students as you've asked, about also in respect of tourism. It is really important that in terms of a response to the Coronavirus the decisions being made on the basis of the best possible advice, the medical advice, and that's the advice which is being taken and I do think that we are fortunate to have some of the best public health officials in the world. I'd make one other point as well, whatever is the ultimate economic cost associated with the Coronavirus and for that matter the fires over the summer, again it puts into stark relief the negligence on the part of this Government in the failure to act in respect of our economy which was stagnant throughout last year and when we were calling for action on the economy, in terms of bringing infrastructure projects forward, actually having a plan in relation to dealing with the fact of record low wage growth, we saw nothing from this Government and the fact that we've now got these issues facing the economy now just puts into stark relief the negligence of that inaction then.

JOURNALIST: The Government says that universities aren't exactly small businesses and that they should have been prepared, do you agree that they should not receive any public funding?

MARLES: Well, I think ultimately it is a matter for that to be worked through. I think, the economic impact of that we need to actually see what it ultimately is before we walk down that path. I just come back to the point I made before, the steps that are taken in relation to protecting the Australian public in respect to Coronavirus, needs to be taken first of all on the basis of people's health and I think that's what's happening and it needs to be done in taking into account the best possible medical advice.

JOURNALIST: And just on the legislated superannuation rise. Why do you think low income workers would like money directed into super instead of getting it up front as wages. What is the benefits of that?

MARLES: Again this is the Liberal Party making it clear that they, right down in the depths of their heart, in the core of their DNA, they do not support superannuation. Superannuation has been so important in terms of protecting the retirement incomes of millions of Australians. It has built a national savings base that's really central to our national economy. But the fact that you've got Liberals now talking about whether or not we should be having a compulsory superannuation scheme in the way we've got now, speaks to the fact that the Liberals deep down actually don't support super. They never have and that's what this is about.

JOURNALIST: Mr Marles on a separate issue again, the army has announced a crackdown on the use of the OK symbol, also the white supremacy symbol. They've threatened officers termination if it's found they used it, in that way. Is that the correct approach from the army?

MARLES: Well, a correct approach is to take an absolute zero tolerance approach to anything, any material of that kind. There is no place at all for that within the Australian Defence Force and within the Australian Army. The Australian Army actually ultimately needs to be the expression of the Australian people in all of its diversity. And just as there is a multicultural society, we need to see that reflected in our army and that kind of material is profoundly offensive and has no place in the Australian Army at all and it's really important that this is dealt with in the strictest possible way.

JOURNALIST: Is it possible some soldiers might get into trouble for using the symbol as a symbol for OK rather than it's white supremacist?

MARLES: I think there has to be a zero tolerance approach to this, Australians need to have a sense of confidence that the Australian Army is theirs and it represents them and there is no place for this in the Australian Army. Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.