

**RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
ABC – AFTERNOON BRIEFING
TUESDAY, 31 MARCH 2020**

SUBJECT/S: Virgin Australia; the resumption of parliament; Job Keeper Payment; social distancing measures; Private Hospitals agreement; flu shots

PATRICIA KARVELAS, HOST: I'm joined by the Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. Richard Marles, welcome to the program.

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY, RICHARD MARLES: Good afternoon Patricia. How are you?

KARVELAS: Good. Virgin Australia has asked the Morrison Government for a \$1.4 billion loan to help it through the coronavirus crisis. We know its competitor Qantas says, if that happens, it should get a \$4.2 billion package. Should Virgin get a bail-out?

MARLES: Well, we're not sitting in the room, so I think the details of this have to be answered by the Government. But as a matter of principle, the airline industry is one which has been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus. We want to see at the other end of this a competitive two-airline system in Australia. I don't think it serves any of us to have a monopoly in this country. We need to have the same kind of structure in our airline industry after this crisis as we had before. Two major airlines with their budget subsidiaries and a range of regional networks that have served Australia really well. So, around the world we will see governments providing support to the aviation industry. And, I think it's important the Government looks sympathetically upon requests in this country for support to make sure that we can continue the structure of the airline industry that we've enjoyed.

KARVELAS: Qantas CEO Alan Joyce has warned against Federal Government assistance for its competitor, saying help should not be offered to businesses that have been badly managed. What do you make of that, has it been badly managed?

MARLES: I think Alan Joyce is saying what you would expect Alan Joyce to say. At the end of the day, you can't deny the fact that aviation is on the front-line of the effects of the coronavirus. When we get into a place of recovery, you will see various parts of the economy start up earlier than others. Again, I think people getting on planes may take longer than other areas. It really matters in a country like Australia, where we have such long distances and we are so reliant upon a competitive aviation industry that is maintained. We need to have two airlines - I don't think our country would be served well by having a single airline operating in Australia - so competition has to be part of it going forward. And really the obligation of the Government in assessing this request and working out what it does is to make sure we have that competitive airline industry at the end of this crisis.

KARVELAS: The TWU National Secretary, Michael Kaine, has said that the Federal Government should move to take a stake in the airlines. Do you agree? Should nationalisation be explored at this point - have we got to that point?

MARLES: Again, when you look at the sorts of support that governments around the world are being asked for, and ultimately are providing to airline companies in the industry, it's one of the options which is on the table.

KARVELAS: But in your view, I know you're not in the room, but you know what the different models would provide. Do you think the Federal Government getting a stake in those airlines should be where it goes? Would that be in Australia's national interest?

MARLES: I think where the national interest lies is to make sure that we've got a competitive airline industry at the end of all of this. I think that is the statement of principle that we can make and beyond that I think it needs to looking at all the options that enable it to achieve that and this may or may not be one of them. When it gets into the detail, it's a bit hard to comment from where we sit about what is the best way forward, but the Government does need to be open minded, it does need to be looking sympathetically upon the requests that are coming its way from the aviation industry, because this is a fundamental industry to our nation and it's really important that at the end of the crisis we have it and have it in a competitive way.

KARVELAS: You're working with the Government to bring back parliament. It will be of course, a reduced parliament because of coronavirus. That's as quickly as possible. Do you have any indication of when that might happen? Could it happen next week?

MARLES: It's really a function of how long it takes to put together the legislation that comes out of the stimulus package that the Government has announced in the last couple of days. The important point to make here is that we stand ready to go back to parliament whenever is necessary. I think the sooner we are able to meet and the sooner we are able to get this legislation through the parliament and get money into people's hands, the better. That's the commitment that we have made to the Government about our attitude to this. We have made it clear we're supportive of the stimulus package, so we want to be very constructive in all this and I think ultimately it's a function of how quickly the Government can put the legislation together. And, I have no doubt they will be trying to do that as quickly as they can.

KARVELAS: Let's talk about this wage subsidy scheme. It's known as the Job Keeper payment. It was announced, of course, by the Government yesterday. You've said you will support it, but you have raised issues. I want to talk about some of those issues. Let's start with casuals. How long do you think casuals should be employed for to be able to get that payment? Given it's obviously linked to their particular work, have you got a time frame in mind? Because you've been critical about the 12 months the Government is requiring.

MARLES: Look, I don't want to be churlish about it. I think the starting point here is that we've been calling for a wage subsidy for some time now, for a number of weeks and fundamentally the Government has now agreed to that and put it in place. And that's going to make a difference to many hundreds of thousands of working people around the country and so I think the first point to make is that we welcome this. Yes, there are issues of detail, and you raised one about casuals who have been employed for less than 12 months- and we need to be thinking about the businesses which operate those casuals as well. We want to talk through all of those details with the Government to see whether we can make this better. I mean, the more people who are able to enjoy the benefit of this package, the better. I think the fundamental point we want to make today is that we welcome what the Government has done, it's in accord with what we've been calling for and it's really important now that we get this through the parliament as soon as we can.

KARVELAS: I know that some business groups are also going to be making the case for some changes - casuals is one point; the unions have been pushing - but that issue around the turnover decline and this 30 per cent decline that the Government has put into the rules, do you think that should be altered? Is that something that you've thought about?

MARLES: Well, again, it's in that bag of issues where we're going to want to talk to the Government around the detail of this, and I mean we obviously have not seen the legislation yet- and wouldn't have expected to, they will be working on it. But we will go through those matters of detail with the Government and we want to look to every area, including this, where we think we can make this a better package, but

you know, we don't want to be churlish about it. The Government has done the right thing here and we want to acknowledge it and say that we fundamentally welcome the announcement they made yesterday.

KARVELAS: Richard Marles, Labor raised questions or critiques around the way that the rules on the way we socially distance, physically distance, are operating or the laundry list of rules. Are you now satisfied with those rules? Do you think that the system that we have, where states and territories of course can go a little further, but we have a national architecture - are you satisfied? Do you think the rules are clear?

MARLES: Look, I think there is an argument here to say that we could have been served better by a clearer and more consistent set of messages from the Federal Government. It is obviously better to do this at a national level and to that end, the Government should be commended for putting in place the National Cabinet and they've obviously been working with the states to try to get what consistency they can. We have certainly seen a huge progress over the last few weeks around social distancing. I mean, our point that we've now been making for a number of weeks is that the logic of this problem means that whatever you're thinking of doing in a week or two or three weeks from now, we should be doing today. We are at a point where there's a lot of measures in place. I think it would be good for the Government to give a sense of what it sees its overall strategy as being here. With a view to what particular end game. I think that sort of articulation of what are the guiding principles behind the decisions that have been made has probably been missing. Having said that; we have come a long way in the last few weeks around the question of social distancing. It is certainly a lot better now than it was a few weeks ago.

KARVELAS: Are you satisfied with where it's at? Because Labor was calling for a wider shutdown. Do you think it's okay where it is based on is, based on the fact that if you look at the trajectory the Government is arguing, so is the Chief Medical Officer, that if you look at the numbers, we are now, well, we're tracking at a better direction than we were.

MARLES: Yes, there's no doubt that there's been pleasing results from the numbers. Again, you know, we're not sitting in the seat where we get the daily reports day in, day out. So, it's hard to answer that question with precision. I think the point I would make is that there is no doubt the numbers are better. That is a huge relief to all of us. There's still a long way to go here. We have to remain vigilant. We are in a better place now in terms of what we're doing around social distancing than we were a few weeks ago. Our view is that it would have been better to have got there earlier. As to whether or not we should go further; really that is a question which can only be answered with the briefings in hand. But the same principle applies; if the Government is thinking of doing more, whatever applies in the future should be done now. We are in a very different place. To that end I think Australians do need to be

commended on coming to terms with this. People have changed their lives in radical ways and they're doing it for the national good and there is a sense in which people are pulling together to get us through this and the fact that there is some encouraging news, in relation to figures but it is early days, should- is something we ought to be congratulating every Australian about. But there is a long way to go. We need to maintain our vigilance here.

KARVELAS: Just briefly; private hospitals will deliver additional capacity for the public system and in turn the Government will ensure the viability of the private hospital sector. This is all of course COVID-19/pandemic related. Is this something you welcome? And do you see that kind of arrangement being potentially more longer-term?

MARLES: We certainly welcome it. I think it is right that it's reviewed over a period of time. It's an arrangement that is in place given the extraordinary circumstances that we face right now. We understand that the decision that was made in relation to elective surgery - it did in terms of its timing, create a hiatus which needed to be resolved and it's a pity it got to that point, but we certainly welcome the resolution of that issue today and the extra capacity that the private sector beds is going to give to the entire system is clearly going to be welcome in terms of whatever we face around coronavirus hospitalisations going forward.

KARVELAS: Just really briefly; the Greens are calling for flu shots to be offered for free during the coronavirus. Do you think that would be a move in the right direction?

MARLES: Look, I think that is something we need to take a look at, but what's really important here is that flu shots, people get their flu shots.

KARVELAS: Sure, but obviously, the cost is prohibitive to some people.

MARLES: It really matters, that we're making flu shots as accessible as possible and it matters that people get them. Getting the flu and the coronavirus at the same time is something that people do not want to have happen. So it is as important as ever to make sure that you get your flu shots and I'm really encouraging people to go out and get them.

KARVELAS: Thanks so much for your time.

MARLES: Thank you.

ENDS