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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**  
**TELEVISION INTERVIEW**  
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***SUBJECTS: Protests; Australia-China relationship; Trade with China; Chinese students and racial discrimination; Australia's Future Submarines***

**TOM CONNELL, HOST:** Joining me live now, my first guest on the program, Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles. Thanks for your time, as ever. I might just start on these protests—the Prime Minister well kicking on this topic a little bit this morning, saying the prospect of another protest is now offending Australians and this is a double standard. What's your reaction?

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** Well you know, I think this has been a difficult issue but I've had a consistent view that I've been concerned about mass gatherings in the context of a pandemic. In the lead up to last weekend's protests it was my view that people shouldn't attend and I say that obviously with a huge amount of sympathy to the cause that people were pursuing in the protest, it is to state the obvious that if you are born indigenous in this country or life starts to be materially worse than if you are born non-indigenous. And so you know, I absolutely understand the frustration of indigenous Australians around this question. But we are in the middle of a pandemic. It affects every aspect of our lives. And it affects the way in which we make these points.

**CONNELL:** Is that the right way though, to bring people back from the strong desire to

protest to say that they're offending Australians?

**MARLES:** Well look, I think this is a very difficult issue and you know, I have made my call in relation to it which is; I don't think that people should be engaging in mass congregation at a time when we need to be pretty cautious about how we come out of the COVID crisis and making sure that we don't give rise to anything which would prolong it. Now that is a difficult call in the context of all the issues involved but that's where I land. I think it is possible to make a call to land in a position but to have some empathy for the complexity of this because that's just obvious. It's an obviously difficult issue, it's one that we've been wrestling with as a nation for a very long time. And so you know in taking the position I do, I don't judge those people who are standing up against racism but standing up in support of doing everything we can to close the gap in relation to indigenous and non-indigenous Australians- and particularly in respect of the rate of incarceration. This is something which should change. So, where I get to is, I just think this is a really complicated and vexed issue-

**CONNELL:** Okay so would you say they are offending Australians, these protesters?

**MARLES:** It's not the language I'd use and the sense I've described how I see this. It doesn't- it doesn't detract from the fact though that my very clear view going forward is that people shouldn't be protesting in this way because we've got to get out of the coronavirus pandemic. And we do need to be getting back to a point where we can open up our economy and I do think that Australians have been magnificent, really, in the way in which they've dealt with the issue of the coronavirus over the last few weeks and few months. And it's important that we don't, you know waste that good work and mass gatherings are a risk to that. And that's the problem here.

**CONNELL:** Your colleague in Victoria, Raff Ciccone has come out on the issue of the Australia-China relationship and says Australia needs to diversify its export markets away from China to prevent the relationship being used as a weapon by China. Do you agree?

**MARLES:** Well, I think we need to have the most diverse range of trading relationships that we possibly can have. I think it is really important that, you know in an open trading economy- and we are so reliant on trade- that we're doing everything we can to try and open up new markets and make sure that we are not overly reliant on one market. And you can say that irrespective of who that market is, and for a whole range of reasons. So you know, I think diversifying trade is a really important objective. We will always have though

our biggest trading partner. You know, like whether that be China or anyone else, there's always going to be one country with whom we do more trade than any other and right now that is China and it's China significantly. And so this is obviously a relationship that matters and it matters deeply. And to that end, you know, it's really important I think that the Government grabs a hold of this. And you know, I do watch with concern the way in which this relationship is unfolding and I do think that the senior figures in the Government need to grab hold of this relationship and actually take it in a better direction but also give a sense to the Australian people about what is the guiding philosophy which underpins the way in which they are engaging with China because you don't hear that. But as it is at the moment-

**CONNELL:** Just the context of these Senators comments, where we are right now, the latest missive from China; a warning to students from education providers not to come here because first of all, COVID-19 which appears ridiculous right now if you compare us to the rest of the world but also because of racism. What's your response to that?

**MARLES:** I don't accept the statements of the Chinese Government in relation to racism in Australia of that kind. I don't think we are immune from racism. I'm sure there are Chinese Australians who have felt like they are on the receiving end of racism but I don't think that we have a particular issue with racism- I think every country needs to be better when it comes to racism and we can always do better. But I don't I don't agree with the way in which the Chinese have characterised the situation for Chinese students in Australia at all. And I think that Australia offers a fantastic experience for students around the world, including Chinese Australians both in terms of the education that they would receive here through our fantastic institutions but also in the experience of spending time in Australia. So, I absolutely don't accept the characterisation that is being made by China here.

**CONNELL:** Does this show China does use the trade relationship as a weapon?

**MARLES:** I'm not going to make that comment. What I think is though; this is our largest trading partner and we need to get this relationship back on track. And well before, Tom, well before COVID there have been issues in relation to this. And one of the things that concerns me is, you cannot point to a single senior member of the Commonwealth Government who has a relationship of substance with any member- senior member of the Chinese Government. There is not one relationship there. People are struggling to get their calls returned. That is not how you manage a relationship with a country that is so significant to us, which is our most important trading partner. And to be leaving this space

to fringe dwellers on the Government side is a real problem.

**CONNELL:** Just finally, you've raised a big issue this week; questioning the submarine project. In particular the cost blow out from \$50 billion to \$90 billion. In 2015, the Defence Secretary Dennis Richardson was adamant the costs included inflation. Now apparently it doesn't and that's why the blowouts happened. Does he need to be called back to explain what he was talking about at the time?

**MARLES:** I think the situation with subs is pretty simple; in 2015 you have a senior government official saying that in outward terms the costs of the future submarines is going to be \$50 billion and now the outward costs of the future submarines is being budgeted at \$90 billion. Like that is a massive increase. That is going in the wrong direction. We're seeing real questions about the level of Australian industry content with the Future Submarines, with reports this year that steel fabrication is now going to be done in France- which you know, for some of it, in relation to the first submarine,. Now that is a complete breach of faith to the working people of South Australia and indeed this country. That is not what this Government promised in terms of building these subs in Australia and when you look at the time frame, that's going backwards as well. I mean basically the timetable of the submarines has slipped by ten years in the last six. So on Australian industry content, on cost, on timing- all the indicators are going in the wrong direction. You know what COVID has done, I think has made clear that Australia's strategic circumstances are so much more complicated that they were at the start of COVID- and they were pretty complicated then. The idea that the submarine project is heading in this direction whatever it meant six months ago, now it seems to me to be a massive, massive problem. And we need to be hearing from our Defence Minister about what is going on, and we need to hear an explanation from her to the Australian people that we're going to get these Future Submarines on time, on budget.

**CONNELL:** Richard Marles, always appreciate your time. Thank you.

**MARLES:** Thanks Tom.

**ENDS**