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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
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SUBJECTS: COVID-19 in Victoria; Energy Policy.

PATRICIA KARVELAS, HOST: Richard Marles, welcome.

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

KARVELAS: Good. We've seen another 20 new COVID-19 cases in Victoria, and a death as well. The virus reproduction rate has hit 2.5. What do you think has gone so wrong?

MARLES: Well, I don't know the answer to that question and I think we do need to be investigating the answer to it. I think what it serves as a kind of cautionary tale, is that short of eradicating the virus completely, we need to be very vigilant about it and that we can go back to life as normal but, if we do that with the virus present at any level within our community, then it's going to flare up. So it's really important that we take steps forward in terms of easing restrictions carefully because this is a process we only ever want to go through once.

And obviously it would be very devastating for the economy if we found ourselves in a position of having to go to the kind of lockdown that the country's experienced over the last couple of months.

KARVELAS: The Victorian Government has requested some logistical support from the Australian Defence Force. Is that what's needed, and should it have happened earlier?

MARLES: I think it is important that the ADF has been providing support not only to Victoria, but to all the States throughout COVID, and they're playing a really important role. They have a particular task force which has been stood up to do this. So it's been there and has been present, but it has a really important role to play. But I think we do need to do our best to understand exactly what's gone on here, and if there is a particular problem. When you're talking about low numbers, the maths of this is that numbers can bounce around. So there may be a degree of randomness in this, and that's something that other States need to bear in mind, because I think being cautious about this is not just a lesson for Victoria, it's a lesson for the nation. But certainly we do need to be trying to do every investigation possible to see whether there is a particular issue that has to be addressed in Victoria.

KARVELAS: Labor was very outspoken about the Ruby Princess disaster-debacle, however you want to describe it. Poor infection control at hotels housing people who've returned from overseas, though, has been a huge issue here in Victoria, where I'm broadcasting from, and there's been, of course, links to some of these outbreaks in Melbourne too. Does that concern you? And does that need to be investigated? As I say, a big deal made of Ruby Princess, but is this something we need to be asking more questions on, and should there be an investigation?

MARLES: Well, there needs to be constant investigation into every aspect of this, because dealing with COVID is a work in progress. I mean, that's to state the obvious. Everything that's happened in relation to COVID

has happened in the last eight months- literally. And so there is a learning process that we're all going through. But I'd also make this point; this is pretty different to the Ruby Princess, which was really a question of, you know, how people were allowed to come onshore and the circumstances in which they did. So, I don't think these are comparable problems. But, absolutely, of course there needs to be absolute vigilance and total scrutiny about every aspect of the handling of this, including how quarantine facilities are maintained with respect to their hygiene.

KARVELAS: Labor has invited the Coalition to work on an energy framework. Why now? Why have you made this announcement? I know some of your colleagues have privately told me they see it as a sort of a surrender note.

MARLES: Well, it's important that coming out of COVID that we are best placed to rebuild the nation's economy, and having cheap, affordable power is central to that. And in the middle of that question, is about having a settled architecture around energy policy in this country. So, I don't think there is a more apposite time than right now to be saying; in the spirit of cooperation- which has been a hallmark of how politics has been conducted over the last few months- we need to be extending that to what has been a vexed question over the last seven years around establishing a settled framework for energy policy in this country because without that, we're not going to have policy certainty for those investing in the sector. They invest over a long period of time. They need that certainty. Without that investment, we're not going to have cheap power in this country. So it's critically important now-

KARVELAS: So does that mean you're willing to embrace the Coalition's Technology Roadmap?

MARLES: Whatever it is, it is not a framework around energy policy in this country. I mean, it describes a destination- it's not really a mechanism by which we get there. I mean, we've had so many different energy policies that have been put forward by the Government over the last seven years, and it has been

a failure in government in this country that there hasn't been an ability to settle on any one of them. And that's one of the real problems that faces the country in terms of how we rebuild our economy in the aftermath of COVID and how, to be honest, we reimagine Australia at a pretty significant moment with the impact that COVID's had and the recession that it's brought about.

KARVELAS: Okay. Just briefly, The Greens say any agreement with the Liberals would sort of amount to a surrendering on the issue of climate. Is that what Labor's doing here? You're just sort of saying, "we don't want to have this fight again"?

MARLES: Frankly, I think that observation from The Greens political party is patently ridiculous, and obviously not in the national interest. I mean, we need settled energy policy in this country. When companies come and invest in energy projects, they're doing it over the course of decades. That means they're doing it over the course of multiple governments. They need to have a sense that there is a settled policy in this country around the question of energy. The country desperately needs some form of agreement between the parties of government. Now, before we get to that, there actually needs to be an internal agreement within the existing party of government. We hope that offering this olive branch at this moment is an opportunity for the Government to find a position that it can start talking to us about. But we desperately need an agreement in this country. And to have this as an area of contested policy going forward is obviously bad for the country.

KARVELAS: Richard Marles, thanks for joining us.

MARLES: Thanks, Patricia.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.