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SUBJECTS: Carbon Capture and Storage; Climate change; Labour Force Figures.

TOM CONNELL, HOST: Joining me now, live is Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. What do you make of this pitch? Two different energy agencies would still be able to fund renewables but would also be able to do carbon capture and storage so to create so-called lower emissions technology, not just zero. Is there any scope for Labor supporting this?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well firstly Tom, I think it's not a coincidence that on a day when the Government is expecting to get really bad unemployment figures it is desperate to talk about absolutely everything other than the question of jobs. When it comes to carbon capture and storage, we support it. You know, we were the Government which put in place the carbon capture storage flagship. It was actually this Government which defunded that. Only a couple of months ago we wrote to the Government trying to get carbon capture and storage back on the agenda, in terms of ways which would be funded and there's lots of ways that could happen. ARENA is focused on renewable energy, so we don't think that is the proper vehicle, but at the end of the day that there are a million ways in which the funding can be put forward to get carbon capture and storage going and we completely support that occurring.

CONNELL: So this is one of the ways, it might not be your ideal one, but you're opening the door here, as long as there's still a capacity obviously for these agencies to fund renewables.

MARLES: Well, no, but-

CONNELL: Is that all encompassing? Sorry, yeah go.

MARLES: Well our point is that ARENA is about renewable energy and that's what it should remain. But there is lots of other ways in which the Government can put money into the question of carbon capture and storage and we think it should. And indeed a couple of months ago we wrote to the Government precisely asking it, and how it intended to get carbon capture and storage going again, pointing out ways in which that could occur. We've heard nothing from the Government in respect of that. I think the Government is putting up this particular measure here and focusing on ARENA which is not so much the vehicle, it's the fact that whether or not you're going to pursue funding in relation to carbon capture and storage which we think should happen. We don't think ARENA is the right vehicle-

CONNELL: You are focusing on a vehicle, they would need legislation to do this. If that's the path they're going to take, will Labor support the legislation or not?

MARLES: This is a- on the Government's part, an attempt to get up a faux debate about something which really is not at the heart of issue. The heart of the issue is whether or not they are going to put up the money in relation to carbon capture and storage. It's not about what the rules of ARENA are. And so if they are going to focus this debate on the rules of ARENA, that says everything about how fair dinkum they are in relation to carbon capture and storage. ARENA is for renewable energy. If the Government is serious about it, let's look at these other vehicles where you wouldn't need the legislation in the same way and get going. That's the obvious play here. But I don't think issues about-

CONNELL: So, where does it actually go? What's your preference?

MARLES: From the Government's point of view, I don't think it is about a carbon capture and storage, I think it's about trying to have a fight about something. And to us that's silly. At the end of the day, if you're serious about carbon capture and storage there are many vehicles by which you can have it. You don't need to go to ARENA. ARENA is not for this;

it is for renewable energy.

CONNELL: But this is the path they are taking, so where does Labor sit on legislation right now? Are you uncommitted?

MARLES: Well I've made the point, if at the heart of the issue here is whether or not you want to start carbon capture storage happen. We have been for that from day one, right back to the Rudd-Gillard Governments. They are the Government which defunded the carbon capture and storage flagship and instead what they're now trying to do is get up and argue in relation to ARENA. Let's be clear; in the space of energy policies, we've lost count as to how many this now represents on the Government's part. This Government is not about building a census in this country around energy and investment which is actually what we need. It is about going out and having faux debates, faux fights in order to avoid talking about other issues of the day and there's a pretty big one happening today in terms of those unemployment numbers.

CONNELL: I'll get to them in a moment. Can I ask you one more in this area; 2030 emissions target. A leaked policy platform suggested perhaps through emission there wouldn't be one. Mark Butler's come out and said no there will be one. Where do you sit on this?

MARLES: Look this is actually pretty simple as well. What Labor supports, certainly what I support, is governments and this country's commitment to the Paris Accord, and I assume the government supports it as well. It does a couple of things, Paris. One is it requires net zero emissions by 2050 and the other is that it requires there to be some medium-term target in terms of how you get there, so I support all of that. The problem that we've got at the moment is that the research which would underpin the development of a target is pretty old now and this government hasn't done any research for some time. So no one really is in a position right now to determine what a target should be. So how we address that dilemma, it's impossible really to answer that question now. But when we get to the election, we will have a very clear position in relation to this and what it will be is consistent with this country's obligations to the Paris Accord.

CONNELL: So just to clarify on that; that means 2030 or 2035 specific target from the Labor Party?

MARLES: Well what it means is we've got to know what is the state of information

available at that point in time. What can be determined at that point in time, what can't be. What might need to be done in terms of putting the nation in a position to determine and target that time. The problem that we've got here is that the Government has done no work in relation to the kind of research which would allow one to give a credible medium-term target consistent with what our obligations are under Paris, that's the dilemma that we're now faced with-

CONNELL: You seem to be saying there, there might not be one depending on what's available?

MARLES: It is the last comment that you just made; we don't know what's available. There are a lot of variables in place here and that's actually in the hands of the government, and so you can't meaningfully answer that-

CONNELL: But you can set one, like last time.

MARLES: Yeah but last one was also three years ago. And research gets old and that's the point here. And so we need really, I mean the honest answer the question is, all we can do is assess the state of knowledge as we are closer to the election and make our position clear then, which obviously we will do, so that when Australians go to the polls the next time they'll be no doubt about what our position is.

CONNELL: No doubt about it. But right now you're not saying one way or another whether there will be a target, it's a maybe.

MARLES: Well right now Tom, the fundamental problem is that this Government has not done the work, the research to enable a proper consideration of what the pit stop is, if you like, between here and 2050 as is required under the Paris Accord –

CONNELL: We know they don't have a net zero by 2050. Anyways-

MARLES: No it's not just that Tom, they've not done the research which would allow you to articulate what the pathway is. Now in that circumstance it puts everyone in a dilemma and all we can do is work out what is the best state of knowledge in the lead up to the election on the basis of that, and give a very clear position which we will do.

CONNELL: Alright. And just finally; you mentioned jobs there, so the jobs figures coming

out today, big part of this slump is going to be Victoria. That's not the Federal Government's fault, is it?

MARLES: I don't know what point Victoria stopped being part of Australia –

CONNELL: I'm not saying that but –

MARLES: Well but that is the argument of the Federal Government. I mean literally when you listen to Scott Morrison talk about everything in relation to COVID, the economy- you name it, it is as if it doesn't count when it comes to federal responsibility if it had happened in Victoria. You know aged care; Federal Government is responsible for aged care but if it happens in Victoria that doesn't count because that's Victoria. Jobs, if it happens Victoria it doesn't count, Victoria is a part of Australia –

CONNELL: Hang on, but aged care hasn't been the slump of the economy in Victoria. It's the outbreak, which is traced back to the hotel quarantine, that's not up for debate is it?

MARLES: Well what is really clear here is this Tom; the Federal Government is responsible for the governing of Victoria in respect of a whole lot of areas, including I might say our national border, where the virus first came. And it is absolutely responsible in relation to a whole range of economic matters, including what relief measures are in place such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker. For the Federal Government to kind of go out there today and say in the light of what is going to be a very, very difficult employment number for the nation, that it's not our fault because it's all happening in Victoria, would be a complete abrogation of their responsibility. But it won't surprise me if that's exactly what they do, because they are essentially going out there and saying if it happens in Victoria, it's got nothing to do with the Commonwealth Government, that is wrong. The Commonwealth Government is responsible for a whole range of governance in this state because it turns out Victoria is part of Australia.

CONNELL: Richard Marles, Deputy Labor Leader, appreciate your time today, thank you.

MARLES: Thanks, Tom.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.