



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

TAKING AIM AT A SUB-PAR PERFORMANCE ON SUBMARINES

Scott Morrison visited South Australia last month and brought with him a bag full of disappointment.

Standing at Osborne shipyard, the Prime Minister came to do no more than cut a ribbon and acknowledge that part of the shipyard for the Future Frigates was now complete.

These are the same frigates that Christopher Pyne promised would start construction this year, before they were delayed by two years. The very same ships that now reportedly face another two year delay. And the same ships that have blown out in cost by over \$10 billion.

But never one to let facts about his government's gross mismanagement stand in the way of a photo op, Scott Morrison proclaimed "another local jobs boom" is underway.

Tell that to the workers at ASC maintaining our critical Collins class submarines just a stone's throw away from where Morrison gave his press conference.

Those workers deserve answers from the Prime Minister. They were promised

an answer by the Morrison government last year, and yet nearly a year on they are still in limbo.

Instead of making an announcement about the future location of Collins class maintenance, the Prime Minister said it wasn't a priority for his government.

When asked explicitly about the delay in making a decision, Morrison said; "it's not a decision that is pressing" and "right now, it is not the priority decision".

That is hard to swallow if you are one of the 700 workers and their families who were promised a decision before Christmas last year.

No worker should be told that their job and livelihood isn't a priority by the Prime Minister.

So why won't Morrison make a decision?

It hasn't been delayed because of coronavirus. When asked in June whether the decision was delayed because of COVID-19, Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said "no, it hasn't."

So why is Morrison so determined – when unemployment is at record highs – to leave 700 South Australian workers and their families in limbo?

Standing next to Morrison last month was Mathias Cormann, who will resign before the end of the month.

South Australia's Simon Birmingham is confirmed to succeed Cormann as Leader of the Government in the Senate, and importantly to this state, the Finance portfolio.

Why is this important in the context of the submarine debate?

Because as the powerful Finance Minister, you are ASC's sole shareholder Minister. And right now, ASC is at the heart of the long-awaited decision on the location of Collins maintenance.

When Simon Birmingham becomes the Finance Minister, many South Australians might hope this government will no longer be paralysed by a decision on Collins maintenance.

But the last time we heard boo from a South Australian Liberal on our submarines or defence industry was when Christopher Pyne was still in the job.

Christopher was never one to waste an opportunity for a photo-op, but even he couldn't give an answer on Collins maintenance.

As the Shadow Minister for Defence, my colleagues in South Australia talk to me overwhelmingly about one pressing issue: submarines.

The debate over our submarines – both current and future – centres on our defence capability, our sovereignty and the jobs that stem from them.

These issues should be front and centre for a Prime Minister, Defence Minister and their South Australian MPs.

And yet we don't hear a peep from the SA Liberals, the Defence Minister or the Prime Minister about Collins maintenance.

The paralysis of this government to make a decision on this issue is hurting South Australian workers and their families.

And it is dangerously undermining confidence in our submarine capability.

Meanwhile, there is nothing but bad news on the Future Submarines due to the government's gross incompetence. Costs have blown out by nearly \$40 billion,

promises about Australian content are in tatters, and the first one won't be operational until the mid-2030s, a decade later than originally promised.

I have made the case time and again, if the Future Submarines were running on time, there would be no shortage of work at ASC and no shortage of jobs in South Australia.

South Australians know that the Future Submarines are not running on time. There is no naivety about the Morrison Government's track record on this critical project and how it has grossly mishandled this acquisition at every step.

So whether it is the Collins class or the Future Submarines, or even the Future Frigates – you have to wonder what exactly is Scott Morrison's priority, because it obviously isn't these vital capabilities or the local jobs that depend on them.

Richard Marles is the Deputy Leader of the Australian Labor Party and Shadow Minister for Defence.

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Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.