

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**  
**DOORSTOP INTERVIEW**  
**PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA**  
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***SUBJECTS: Scott Morrison is making Australian less safe; Defence; state borders.***

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** This government is compromising Australia's national security. Let's be crystal clear, because of Scott Morrison, Australians are less safe. We've talked a lot about the submarine program and its delays, it's been delayed by ten years in the last seven. Yesterday, this government's fifth Defence Minister, couldn't even tell us when the last of the submarines will be in the water. For the record, it's 2054, 34 years from now. The frigates which are already delayed by two years, the Defence Minister now cannot even guarantee that work will start then. And what we've also learned is that the better part of \$40 billion of cost blowouts has been kept from the Australian public by this government for more than two years. That's an outrage. And the question that it begs is what cost blowouts are going on right now that they're not telling us about. COVID is not an excuse, COVID has made our strategic circumstances more complicated, COVID is actually a reason why we need to be getting these platforms sooner, rather than later. This government is failing us on the economy, and this government is failing us on our national security.

I'd also like to just say a word on Victoria.

The last few months have been as difficult a period as I can remember, in the life of Victoria, particularly for those who have been in Melbourne. People been doing it really

tough, and unless you've been there, I think it's really hard to understand the stress the people have been under. To get to a point yesterday where there was zero cases is an incredible achievement for the people of Victoria, and particularly for the people of Melbourne. And there will be an enormous sense of relief about the restrictions, which have been eased through the announcement of the premier yesterday. Light can now be seen at the end of the tunnel. I really want to say thank you to every Victorian for the role that they've played in this. Better times are ahead. I think it's now a question for the New South Wales government about when it will be prepared to reopen its border with Victoria. This has been a very difficult period of time, but we are getting through to the end of it.

**JOURNALIST:** On with New South Wales you would expect that they would want some sort of certainty that Victoria's case numbers can stay down, so you could understand why Gladys Berejiklian is reluctant to reopen just at this stage?

**MARLES:** There's been a lot of pressure on the Victorian premier about the restrictions that he's had in place. You know, there are decisions that other governments around Australia are making, which impact Victoria, and those decisions need to be examined as well. The fact of the matter is that there have been many days now in the last two weeks where there have been fewer cases in Victoria than in New South Wales. I think it's really important that Victoria is reintegrated into the Commonwealth. And I think it's a fair question now to ask the New South Wales government about when it's going to be in a position to open its border with Victoria, and we obviously need to hear from the federal government on that question as well. The question of our nation's internal borders has something to do with the Commonwealth Government. And the extent to which Scott Morrison has sought to remove himself from that question and avoid responsibility for internal borders is, frankly, astounding.

**JOURNALIST:** *(Inaudible)*. When should Queensland open its borders?

**MARLES:** Well, again, I think that is a matter where I would want to see leadership from the Commonwealth on this question. Obviously, we want to see borders around Australia get to a point where we're one country again, that has something to do with the Commonwealth of Australia. You know, Scott Morrison has absented himself from the question of our internal borders in a quite astonishing way. I mean, he has ceded this question to the States. We would expect to see leadership from the Prime Minister on this question, and bring the states and no, and bring the states along with him. Leaders engage in cooperation. But this guy can't bring anyone along with him.

**JOURNALIST:** What do you make of Peter Beattie's intervention this morning suggesting that Queensland needs to reopen, fully reopen its borders or the state could go broke?

**MARLES:** Well, again, what I want to see is the Commonwealth actually working with the States, to have this as a question which is, is not a matter of controversy internally around the country. I mean, what we're seeing with the Queensland, New South Wales border is two state governments having, arguing with each other and federal ministers are essentially sitting on the sidelines saying fight, fight, fight. I mean, they're not actually engaging in a process of cooperative leadership. They're just the hecklers in chief, this has something to do with the Commonwealth Government, and they need to show leadership in bringing people along, bringing the states along so that these are questions that can be resolved.

**JOURNALIST:** Most of the states and territories want to commit to this border goal of opening up by Christmas? Is it appropriate for WA to stay shut till potentially April?

**MARLES:** Well again, I think, if the national cabinet is meant to have any meaning at all, and the Government is touting the national cabinet as a great advance in cooperative federalism, you would expect to see these as decisions that are resolved and determined there. The federal government is unable to bring about a result in relation to this. And it's a very good question and one that the Prime Minister should have to answer. But the extent to which the Prime Minister ducks responsibility here is astounding. John Howard wouldn't have done that. He would not have done that. John Howard would have made himself a part of this question from day one. Scott Morrison, has relegated himself to heckler in chief.

**JOURNALIST:** Has the decision from the WA Premier - do you think is there is any way he can keep the state closed till April?

**MARLES:** I actually think it's a decision for the nation. I think it's a decision to be taken cooperatively. And it is the extent to which Scott Morrison has absented himself from this, which is what I find most astounding.

**JOURNALIST:** But what can Scott Morrison really do in the end? Aren't the states - they're in charge of their own borders? At the last national cabinet they all did agree to open up by the end of the year, except for Western Australia. In the end, it's up to Western Australia, whether or not it decides to open its borders to the rest of the country.

**MARLES:** Well, there's a lot of assertions in that question that I'm not sure are correct. And this is, but this is where the Prime Minister has taken this debate. Like we really need to think about it in those terms. That's where the Prime Minister has taken this debate. If everything you've just said is true, that is an astounding statement about where the Federation is at. I don't think John Howard would have allowed this to go to that point. And Scott Morrison- this should be done cooperatively- let's be clear about that. I'm not talking about High Court cases or anything else, this should be done cooperatively with people around the table in an act of leadership, which brings the states along with him. But from day one, the Prime Minister bailed out of this because it was just too hard. And that's what this guy does. Like he's there on the good days. But when there are difficult moments, he runs for cover.

**JOURNALIST:** Just on defence, I think that one of the things - issues that came up at estimates yesterday was the lack of being able to get people in, as a result of COVID to work on some of these projects, especially in South Australia, some of these defence projects and that could lead to some of the delays that you're talking about.

**MARLES:** I don't think that is a significant factor. Like, when you think about the impact of Coronavirus for most businesses around Australia, the way in which that's manifested is they've lost their customers, you know, people have been at home. Household consumption is down. Defence industry hasn't lost its customer. That's the Commonwealth. Now the basics of this is still in place. And when I speak to companies in the defence industry space, one of the points that they make is that they've been able to actually continue pretty well during coronavirus. Now-

**JOURNALIST:** Without overseas expertise?

**MARLES:** Well, there is a question about overseas expertise. But there's lots of other steps that can be taken in what are big, complex programs which would enable this to be kept on time. The fundamental point here is their customer is in place. Now they're still getting revenue. And that is the point that all the defence industry companies consistently make to me. But there's another point to be understood here; the complexity of our strategic circumstances needs to be driving this. That's actually an obvious statement. When things are difficult, that's when you need to have a defence program in place. And things have just got a lot more difficult in the last year. So if it says anything, it says that we need to have these programs up and running- sooner rather than later. And yet, they're all

going in the wrong direction, all of them. I mean, this is a shambles. The way in which this government is running our national security is a shambles and it really is something that needs to be brought to light to the Australian people, because it's of enormous concern, given the strategic complexity that we are facing at the moment. And the outcome of it is, is that Australians, as a result of the Morrison government are less safe.

Thank you.

***ENDS***

**Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.**