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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
TODAY SHOW
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SUBJECTS: COVID-19 Vaccine; Peter Dutton's artwork; National Cabinet; Alleged war crimes; Joel Fitzgibbon.

KARL STEFANOVIC, HOST: I'm joined now by Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton from Brisbane and Deputy Leader of the Opposition Richard Marles from Melbourne. Good morning gents, nice to see you this morning. To you first of all, Pete, a home grown vaccine proving successful. Good to have some hope at last, Pete, especially for the elderly?

PETER DUTTON, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS: It certainly is, Karl. A lot of people are hanging on this and the government has done a lot of work by investing and working with the university sectors. And not just here but internationally as well. So we have got in place an arrangement where we have got purchasing and hopefully a rollout of a vaccine as quickly as possible.

STEFANOVIC: I just can't get my eyes off that fat yak behind you. I mean, that's an interesting choice of lounge room art there, Pete.

DUTTON: This is very last minute Karl. Very last minute.

STEFANOVIC: How good is a fat yak?

DUTTON: I was let down by logistics this morning. I hadn't accounted for- I hadn't accounted for daylight savings when I was back in Queensland. So, I literally put this together in a matter of seconds.

STEFANOVIC: No, it's fine.

DUTTON: Not to give the secret away.

STEFANOVIC: It is brilliant but I just- it takes you into the mind of Peter Dutton that he would

have a fat yak on his lounge room.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: I'm sure he's wearing cowboy boots as well.

DUTTON: Too early Richard, too early.

STEFANOVIC: It is too early. We will continue with the interview. It is good news. Richard, National Cabinet meets today to try and break the border deadlock, among other things. If were you Leader of the Labor Party, which you may well be one day, who knows maybe even Prime Minister, how would you break the deadlock?

MARLES: Well, we need to see leadership from the Prime Minister. And we should have seen it from day one. Like the - when our founding fathers as they were set up our nation the idea was that the Commonwealth would engage in cooperation with the states but all we have seen from this Prime Minister from day one is kind of going to the sidelines whenever things have got difficult- and they have got difficult with internal borders. So, he needs to bring people along on a process which sees our borders open up before the end of the year.

STEFANOVIC: But how would you do it? You have been around the block a few times. And you know the Premiers very well. How would you in a meeting convince them that it's in the national interest to open these borders?

MARLES: Well, I tell you one thing-

DUTTON: It is a hypothetical Richard. It's a hypothetical. You assume you were Leader of the Labor Party.

MARLES: Stop it.

DUTTON: Come on.

MARLES: From the beginning-

DUTTON: You have poor old Joel Fitzgibbon.

STEFANOVIC: I will get on to Joel in a second.

MARLES: The tone of the interview- it is very hard to focus.

STEFANOVIC: Very hard to focus I admit. The fat yak.

MARLES: From the very start, Scott Morrison should have been making these announcements with the state Premiers around the question of borders. He should have assumed this was part of his decision making as well. He conceded this to the states right at the start, before it was even a matter of controversy.

STEFANOVIC: And now the horse has bolted.

MARLES: Correct.

STEFANOVIC: Okay. Peter, the PM has appointed- on a very serious note- a special investigator to assess possible war crimes by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan. This is really tough, I reckon. We ask these soldiers as, Ally said before, to do so much for our country, no-one can know who hasn't been there. But we have to be careful here too, that the men and women of our Defence aren't tainted with the same brush. Have you seen any of the evidence? What should we be prepared for here?

DUTTON: Well Karl, you are right, it's a very serious issue and we have engaged with Richard and the Opposition on it and they have been very constructive and I'm appreciative of that. But these are serious allegations and yes, our soldiers are put under enormous strain and stress and we expect there to be a high standard to be adhered to. So there has been a process within Defence, that's been run by the Chief of Defence for a period of time. There is a report now that's been handed to the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister, announced yesterday, that given the gravity of the allegations it's appropriate that we set up a process which will be in part ordered by the Australian Federal Police, and a special investigator and look at each of the cases that come before us. And that will take, I think a longer period of time than people probably expect. But it needs to be gone through thoroughly and we owe that to the soldiers but we need to take the allegations very seriously.

STEFANOVIC: I find it incredibly upsetting. I've had friends and family members who have had great friends, dear friends in the SAS and no-one can know the sacrifices they make. No- one can know what it's like to be in the hills of Afghanistan for months, that is incredibly difficult mentally to handle. And so now we have an inquiry that may taint them. Something needs to be done here to ensure that those members who are protecting us now and continue to be overseas aren't drawn into this and don't doubt themselves, Richard.

MARLES: Yes, but absolutely that's right. And but actually that's what this process is ultimately about, Karl. Look, as the Shadow Minister for Defence for the last four years one of my great privileges has been to get to meet the men and women in our defence force and they are remarkable people. And including those who are in our special forces. I think the Prime Minister is right when he says that we are going to be shocked by what is brought to light when these substantive allegations ultimately do come into the public. And it is appropriate we are shocked by that. But I would say that the way in which the government is going about this, and indeed the way in which the defence force is going about this is almost unique in the world. We are holding ourselves to account. And that is ultimately what Australians and other members of the defence force can take heart from in terms of knowing that we are - we have one of the most ethical militaries in the world by virtue of the way we are treating this. And it's going to be difficult but it's a really important process. And ultimately it does say a lot about our country that we are willing to do this to ourselves.

STEFANOVIC: Very well said and a bipartisan approach to this, as Pete mentioned there is incredibly important too, to get this right and in the national interest. Having said that, about that particular matter, I'm going to move on to something much more divisive. Richard boy oh, boy, is Labor a mess over climate change? You have rounded on poor old Joel Fitzgibbon like hyenas on a baby giraffe on the Serengeti. And Joel's great sin, Joel's great sin is trying to look after the workers and industries that Labor used to put first. How disgusting.

MARLES: Look, Joel has been a fantastic member of the shadow cabinet, a member of cabinet when we were in government. He has made a mighty contribution in his career and I do

feel personally sad that he made the decision this week to step down from the shadow cabinet. Look, it's been a difficult process we have been going through in relation to climate change and in relation to energy. We were beaten badly at the last election. And it's really important that we are able to lift our eyes and speak to a wider group of people which includes those who, as you say are traditionally supporters of ours who work in areas like coal and gas. And as we go through that process there are going to be bumps. That's what we've seen this week. But I tell you, I would prefer we are doing that than what the government is doing where they have got their head in the sand, they have had 22 different energy policies as the government. We have got energy prices higher than they should be, that we are not making the most of the opportunities in the renewable sector

STEFANOVIC: Joel Fitzgibbon is smart. He sees the writing on the wall. If he doesn't support the industries that Labor used to put first, he will lose his seat and Labor will continue to struggle on a national level to win government. Peter, it is a happy day is it not for the Coalition when Labor makes you guys look positively loyal?

DUTTON: We are rock solid, I have got to say, Karl. It is a very nice place to be in. I have been where Richard has been, it's not a very pleasant experience. But let's call it what it is, Joel is a lovely bloke, great bloke, but he's a stalking horse. This is about the leadership of the Labor Party. And they are going to have a challenge shortly. The trouble for Joel is that he's a fairly slightly built bloke and Richard's a pretty big jockey. So pony up and watch this race. It will be interesting.

STEFANOVIC: Beautifully said-

MARLES: That is the silliest thing ever.

STEFANOVIC: Before we go, Pete can you work that analogy in with the fat yak over your right shoulder. Because as Ally rightly points out-

DUTTON: No, I can't. It's too early.

STEFANOVIC: That goes for about \$380, she has done the research.

ALLISON LANGDON: It is on sale at the moment for \$364 online.

STEFANOVIC: \$364, you can buy it.

DUTTON: It will probably trend from here, I would say.

STEFANOVIC: The fat yak. Gentlemen have a great week. Appreciate your time today.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.