



## TRANSCRIPT

### **THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION MEMBER FOR CORIO**

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***SUBJECT/S: Peter Dutton's Border farce; China FTA***

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:** Well today we learn that the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton was informed ahead of time about Friday's Operation Fortitude debacle. And his excuse is that he didn't read the brief. We are not talking about a school kid forgetting to do his homework here, we are talking about a cabinet minister. A member of the National Security Committee. And when it comes to our nation's security there is no fine print, everything must be read. This is an astounding admission which portrays an incompetent minister. And now that we know that this matter did go through the Minister's office, it only heightens the need for the Minister to come out of hiding and face the Australian people. It is all well and good to put those in uniform in front of cameras, in Parliament House no less and expect them to clean up the Government's mess. But this is the responsible minister and Peter Dutton needs to take responsibility and explain to the Australian people what was intended with Operation Fortitude and who made the decision to abandon this operation? What other material is there in his office which he has not read? These are all legitimate questions which the Australian public have a perfect right to expect an answer from their elected Government.

Frankly, the six-hour farce on Friday is turning into a 48-hour disaster for Peter Dutton. But what worries me most is that this is undermining the confidence in Australia's newest national security agency –Australian Border Force. This is an important agency with an important job to do, that is why Labor supported its creation. But here we are two months since its inception and it is being held up to ridicule and every minute that goes by without Peter Dutton coming out an explaining what happened only further erodes the public confidence in Border Force and that is a real problem. Now for a Government which seeks to stand on national security, Friday's events and today's revelations that members of the National Security Committee don't even read their

briefs, well I've got to say that does not make me feel safe. Now Peter Dutton may feel that he can stay in hiding until the caravan moves on, if that's his view he has got another thing coming because we are going to continue to ask the ever growing list of questions which are being raised by this incident and the Australian public expect answers to this and it is imperative that Peter Dutton stands up today and gives the Australian people the answers they expect.

**REPORTER:** Why did it take Labor so long to realise or speak out when it was clear that a lot of the community were questioning whether checking people's visas on the streets was appropriate?

**MARLES:** Well firstly, we did speak out on Friday as this was happening.

**REPORTER:** Bill Shorten at that time did say that he was just hopeful the action was to try and protect Australian laws and to make sure that people were not overstaying their visas, that is not questioning the powers.

**MARLES:** Well, our first reaction was one of disbelief, that this could be so and we sought an explanation from the Government as to what they were doing, an explanation that we continue to seek today and that is what we said on the day. There is obviously a legitimate role for Australian Border Force to make they are cracking down on visa fraud and we would obviously support that, but a circumstance where what you have is a proposition which is that officials of ABF stand up in strategic locations in Melbourne CBD and ask people, who ever comes across their path is absolutely astounding. Now we need to know whether or not that's actually what was intended or this was an appalling piece of communication which ultimately led to this operation being abandoned, but they are precisely the questions we need to have answers to from the Government today.

**REPORTER:** The Government does say it was clumsily worded press release so just explain what it is exactly you want answered.

**MARLES:** Let's be clear what we have heard, or who we have heard from is the Commissioner of Australian Border Force, we've got a minister who has been in hiding. The Minister hasn't said a word since Friday. They need to explain exactly what was intended with Operation Fortitude. The Minister needs to explain exactly who made the decision to abandon this operation. How has this all come to pass and what other material is there in his office today which he hasn't read? These are the critical question which the Minister himself has to answer, not put those in uniform in front of a camera, but for him to come out and explain what has happened here.

**REPORTER:** The Greens are saying that the Minister should consider his position and resign, would you agree with those thoughts?

**MARLES:** Well look ultimately that is a matter for the Prime Minister, but a good start would be if the Minister actually turned up to work and face the Australian people and have the courage to do that, and explain what has happened here.

**REPORTER:** On the free trade agreement with China, are you demanding that the Government renegotiate that FTA with China?

**MARLES:** Well look, Labor supports a free trade agreement with China, we have always supported that. In fact when the Trade Minister talks about the ten years of work being done in seeing a free trade agreement with China, most of that occurred under a Labor Government. What we do say though, is that an agreement which has a labour mobility clause which is open for abuse is one which needs to be examined properly, and we have a perfectly legitimate right to raise questions about that labour mobility clause, which is what we are doing.

**REPORTER:** So what is it that Labor wants to see?

**MARLES:** Well, we have made very clear the concerns that we have around the labour mobility clause, what it would do in terms of removing labour market testing in a whole range of circumstances, it is a clause which in our view is open to abuse and its perfectly reasonable that we question that and that is what we are doing. But we obviously understand the significance of a free trade agreement with China which is why we pursued this when we were in Government.

**REPORTER:** Are there other aspects of the free trade agreement that you are questioning?

**MARLES:** The focus of our criticism has been in respect of the labour mobility clause of its potential for abuse and of the removal of labour market testing in a whole range of circumstances, that is our concern and it is a legitimate concern. We would not have signed an agreement with a labour mobility clause of that kind which is why we are raising that concern in the context of the China free trade agreement. That is different to saying we absolutely understand the significance of a free trade agreement with China to our nation's economy.

**REPORTER:** Are you prepared to block enabling legislation in the Senate if you don't get what you want?

**MARLES:** Well right now what we need to do is see what comes before the Australian Parliament, the Government actually needs to explain right now, how it sees this labour mobility clause working in a way which promotes Australian jobs rather than working against them.

**ENDS**

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