

Australian  
**Labor**



## TRANSCRIPT

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

**E&EO TRANSCRIPT  
RADIO INTERVIEW  
ABC RN BREAKFAST  
THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2015**

***SUBJECT/S: Asylum seeker boat turn backs***

**FRAN KELLY:** Richard Marles welcome to breakfast.

**RICHARD MARLES:** Good morning Fran, how are you?

**KELLY:** I'm well thank you. Now how do you and Bill Shorten sell this to voters as anything other than a total surrender on border protection?

**MARLES:** Well this is, we saw over the time of the former Labor Government 1,200 people lose their lives at sea. We saw a situation where people smugglers, not Oscar Schindlers, but criminal syndicates making huge profits, preying upon some of the world's most vulnerable people with the result that hundreds and ultimately more than a thousand people died at sea. There is simply no way that a future Labor Government can re-open this journey. I mean in my view it would be profoundly immoral to see that happen again and I think knowing what we now know were we to be a party to that in the future we would be rightly condemned.

**KELLY:** In the past you have condemned this policy as a three word slogan, one of Tony Abbott's three word slogans and Labor's criticised turn backs as unsafe, they've criticised it for damaging the relationship with Indonesia, are all those things not true?

**MARLES:** No, we've had concerns about this policy and we've raised those concerns and to be frank the Government have been, have refused to answer our concerns about that and in many respects they still haven't.

**KELLY:** But you're adopting the policy now?

**MARLES:** If I can finish Fran. The facts are these: we know what played out when we were last in government, we know that people smugglers now are largely out of business, we know that turn backs have had an impact and that is something which I have consistently said now for a long time. And we also know that since 2013 with the way in which turn backs have been conducted no one has lost their life at sea, and no one has lost their life in the course of a turn back operation. Now they are compelling facts and whilst we don't have all the answers, and we should have all the answers, the fact that is being conducted by the Government under a veil of secrecy is a disgrace.

**KELLY:** So would that not be your policy?

**MARLES:** We would be absolutely be conducting all our operations with transparency I can assure you of that, and we would be doing so in way which absolutely met our international obligations at every step along the way. But I think given what we do know, it is now important to say that to rule this out as an option for us in the future would be in my view a big mistake and it is very important that Labor is not a party to seeing the reopening of this journey, it is really important that we do not see a loss of life at sea again and that we do not put people smugglers back into business. And on that basis we simply cannot move forward on terms where we rule this out. We must retain this in my view as an option for a future Labor Government.

**KELLY:** This will be divisive within your party, you've acknowledged that, Bill Shorten acknowledged that, your former Parliamentary colleague Steve Gibbons tweeted last night this policy is being quote 'driven by those gutless Western suburbs MPs who let rednecks determine Labor policy'. How much of this is also being driven by pure electoral fear? Depriving Tony Abbott of his most potent three world slogan is how you've described this in the past.

**MARLES:** I think this has been a, this is a complex issue, but it's been a terrible debate that our country has gone through in my view since 2001. There is so much baggage that is carried into this and what began as a terrible debate, again in my view was that back in 2001, John Howard really in the way he handled the Tampa appealed to the very darkest angels of our humanity and he did so in my view for political gain. But I think what we now need to be doing as a party and for that matter, we need to be doing as a country is trying to not be distracted by all the noise. We actually need to make sure that we are analysing this not from the point of view of politics and this is not about politics. We just need to be doing our best to apply values which make sense to us as a Labor Party and as a country, I think values like compassion and fairness and generosity and applying them with sincerity to what is a complicated issue and if we can get it right I think the politics will follow.

**KELLY:** But one man's values does not necessarily match another man's values. You're saying this will improve the debate, doesn't it just take the point of debate off the table, what does it do, how does it allay the concerns of all those people who have heartfelt concerns for the people who are travelling here by boat, what does it do, it might stop those boats coming, but what does it do for the people who have suffered persecution, who are genuine refugees who are stuck in Indonesia and can't move?

**MARLES:** One person's values are not the same as another's but that is why I articulated values in the answer I just gave before and I think that values of compassion,

fairness and generosity are values which would resonate with members of the Labor Party and we need to be applying them to this issue and we need to be just trying get the issue right and the politics will follow. Now there is nothing compassionate about having a situation where more than 1,000 people died at a rate of more than one a day on our border.

**KELLY:** That is absolutely true.

**MARLES:** There is nothing compassionate about putting people smugglers back into business so that they can prey upon the very people that you described in Indonesia.

**KELLY:** I understand that Richard Marles and I'm not trying to say there is, but it's also, we've got to be clear here, it's not just a one or the other because what is compassionate about leaving people, who have fled persecution, who are essentially homeless, with little rights, as stuck somewhere? Where's the compassion in this policy?

**MARLES:** But, in a sense your question goes to the very point here. We live in a world today where there are about 100,000 humanitarian places on offer by resettlement countries, which the UNHCR estimates meets about 1 per cent of global demand. That implies something like 10 million people out there today seeking permanent resettlement. No one, no resettlement country, and indeed no one in Australia, not even the Greens, are putting forward policies which can answer the question to the totality of that sum of human misery. All we can do at the end of the day is make sure we have a generous offering, and we will be doing that. I mean a generous offering by global standards, a generous offering by Australian historic standards, and doing so in a way which reduces the sum of global human misery. Now I think that is a mission statement for us, and that is not about politics. But can we honestly say that we are doing that when 1,200 people die on our border? I don't think we can and I think if we actually want to play a bigger role in world, if we want to see more refugees come here, and if we want to see them do that in a way which is safe, we cannot be doing that with this journey open. Because what this journey ultimately does is completely the reverse – less refugees come here and more asylum seekers die, and there is nothing compassionate about that.

**KELLY:** Richard Marles, thank you very much for joining us.

**MARLES:** Thanks Fran.

**ENDS**

**MEDIA CONTACT: LIDIJA IVANOVSKI – 0427 051 563**