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**E&EO TRANSCRIPT
RADIO INTERVIEW
ABC RADIO NATIONAL
MONDAY, 29 JUNE 2015**

SUBJECT/S: Immigration policy

ALISON CARABINE: Richard Marles, welcome.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION: Good morning Alison, how are you?

CARABINE: Very well thank you. Is Joel Fitzgibbon right, will Shadow Cabinet end up supporting turnbacks?

MARLES: Well we retain concerns about turnbacks, it is a really difficult area and there are a range of views on this issue within the party and out there in the community. It's complex and I understand those different views. But at the end of the day we are concerned about the impact that turnbacks have in relation to the relationship with Indonesia specifically when it comes to cooperating with Indonesia around the question of asylum seekers vessels and of course all of this happening under a shroud of secrecy. And I think all of that was brought into vivid light with the incident that occurred a few weeks ago where there seems to be an allegation that maybe money was paid to turn back an asylum seeker vessel. Now obviously if that happened we are very concerned about that. But the point about that incident is we still don't exactly know what happened out there and it is really clear that Indonesia were deeply concerned about it and I think that highlights the concerns we retain around this issue and the Government frankly have been hopeless in answering them.

CARABINE: So Labor does have concerns, it's a difficult issue, there's a range of views, that's all fair enough but a decision will have to be made because it will come to a head at Conference next month. You have previously expressed qualified support for turnbacks, is that still the case? Are you still open minded about adopting the policy?

MARLES: Well in terms of what I've said in the past, a lot was made of a little but really the point I was making previously was –

CARABINE: Well what you said was that you would accept turnback if Indonesia cooperated and it was safe to do so. That was pretty straight forward.

MARLES: Well the concerns that I expressed previously are not unlike the concerns I just expressed to you now, we do – we are concerned about what this is doing in terms of our relationship with Indonesia. And the point about that is, it's not just a question of seeing an end to the flow of asylum seeker vessels last year and this, we need to be making sure we have an enduring resolution here which sees an end to – you know, in this decade and the next and I don't understand how one can do that unless we do have a functioning relationship, cooperation with Indonesia on this question. So I think it's a pretty important point to ask what is this doing in terms of our relationship with Indonesia and the Government is in the position to understand that and they are being hopeless in explaining that to us but also to the Australian people. But I want to make this other point Alison, we are not about to do anything which sees a reopening of the journey between Java and Christmas Island, we're not about to do anything which puts people smugglers back in business, and we're not about to –

CARABINE: Does that mean adopting boat turnbacks? If you don't want to see the passage between Java and Australia reopened isn't it fair to extrapolate that means adopting turnbacks?

MARLES: Well I've just explained the concerns we have in relation to turnbacks and explained the fact that the Government has failed to answer those concerns and I think it's also important then to state that the most significant step that any Australian Government has taken in bringing an end to the flow of boats from Java to Christmas Island is the Regional Resettlement Arrangement, offshore processing that Labor put in place with PNG and Nauru back in July of 2013. But look, these are, they're obviously difficult issues, we are going to review all of our policies in the lead up to the election and I've got no doubt that these matters will be discussed at Conference in a month or so.

CARABINE: Yeah, there is no reference to turnbacks in the draft platform for National Conference. Doesn't that silence suggest that you are keeping your options open? You want the room to move if the boats start arriving again?

MARLES: Well it doesn't suggest anything more than what I've just explained to you now. We've got concerns in relation to turnbacks, the Government have refused to answer those concerns. We are not about to do anything which sees a reopening of the journey. Now in terms of what happens at that conference, I genuinely don't want to preempt what debates may arise there other than to say that I think what you'll see at Conference is a debate about what is a really complex and difficult issue undertaken from a perspective of people having nothing other than compassion and a sense of dignity in relation to those in the world who are seeking asylum and it's a very important difference to how we are going to consider this issue to our political opponents in the Coalition.

CARABINE: Well some on the Left, not all, but some on the Left will never accept turnback, it's your job as shadow minister to come up with a policy. How are you going to craft one which doesn't end up splitting the party?

MARLES: Well I don't think we're going to split the party. This is a very difficult issue and it's been a difficult issue for a very long period of time –

CARABINE: But Richard Marles, New South Wales right, New South Wales right want turnback. It looks like the party, at least the right wing of the party, is bending over backwards to eliminate any difference between the Government and Opposition when it comes to asylum boats. If indeed you adopt turnback how are voters going to tell the difference between Labor and Liberal at the next election?

MARLES: Well actually I think that's not right at all in terms of your, the way you've characterised what people in the party are seeking to do and there is a huge difference between Labor and Liberal in relation to this question. We don't want to see a reopening of the journey between Java and Christmas Island and for good reason, we don't want to see - you've just got to let me finish this.

CARABINE: Sure go ahead.

MARLES: Because we don't want to see the human tragedy which has unfolded in the past happen again. We are motivated by a position of compassion but whereas for the Government that is really the central piece of an architecture which is really about putting a wall around Australia and turning Australia's back on the world's problems. That is not Labor's perspective at all. We acknowledge that right now the world is going through its greatest period of humanitarian need seen since the Second World War. There are more people seeking refuge, more people -

CARABINE: Okay.

MARLES: - displaced than at any other point in time and we will have, we are about having a much greater engagement with the world than we've ever had before. As well –

CARABINE: And you can do that with turnback?

MARLES: Well we're talking, this whole discussion that we've had this morning and in the context of whatever tactics people use is about a particular journey between Java and Christmas Island, there is a much bigger world out there. Increasing the humanitarian intake –

CARABINE: Okay.

MARLES: - Which you'll see is in our policy as well is very important. How we engage with entities like the UNHCR, like the region, that has a huge impact on the way in which we work with the rest of the world on these issues as does the way in which we treat people who are here –

CARABINE: Okay Richard Marles.

MARLES: - such as temporary protection visas, so there's a huge difference out there.

CARABINE: Okay, Richard Marles, thank you for your time this morning.

MARLES: It's a pleasure Alison.

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