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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TV INTERVIEW  
SKY NEWS, RICH  
FRIDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2017**

**SUBJECT/S:** *Malcolm Turnbull's performance; defence industry; South China Sea; diversity in the armed forces; asylum seeker swap*

**GRAHAM RICHARDSON:** But in the meantime down in Geelong – in beautiful Geelong - in Victoria, is Richard Marles. Welcome to the program Richard.

**RICHARD MARLES:** Great to talk to you Graham. I'm happy to talk about Cory for the rest of the show – that was a fantastic opening.

**RICH:** Well as I said, Cory Bernardi free zone, as far as I'm concerned he is just not worth all the print and all the media and all the talk that he is getting. He's never been worth it and I don't intend to help him anymore. But, I have to ask you because it's been the talk of the week, what did you think of the Turnbull spray?

**MARLES:** Ah look, I know Tory's love their pantomime but I'm not into it so much myself and I can't imagine constituents of mine here in Geelong are going to be that interested in what Malcolm Turnbull had to say about Bill Shorten. I think it's one thing for a Prime Minister to throw a punch – that's kind of fair enough in the context of the political to and fro - but it would be nice if we actually saw him throw a punch on behalf of the Australian people. I mean all this was was bile directed at one person and that's Bill Shorten. He spoke nothing about the jobs for people who in my neck of the woods have been losing them; people don't feel like Malcolm Turnbull is fighting for them, they just feel like he's fighting for himself and I think that's all we saw during this week. I think it got some media on Thursday and I reckon like Cory, this is going to come and go.

**RICH:** Yeah I wrote about it myself today in *The Australian*, but then again I made the point that whether he did well or not – I think he did, it was as good as sprays go – but nothing's changed; every single problem that he had to deal with prior to that spray still exists and there still appears to be little or no strategy to deal with any of it.

**MARLES:** I mean, that I think is exactly right. This is a government which lacks any agenda, it doesn't know why it's sitting in the government benches and what it actually wants to do with the great privilege of being the government of this country. The thing that really surprised me this week Graham, coming back after the Christmas break, was the total malaise within the government party room and just speaking to government MPs around the corridors – I mean they are all thinking about what they are going to do next, after the next election, after they leave parliament. There's not a lot of talk about how they should be governing this country, they're all looking down at their boots and feeling pretty glum and I actually think Cory Bernardi was a symptom of that malaise and none of that really changes. Sure there was some theatre on Wednesday, but that comes and goes pretty quickly and ultimately all the issues which are about this government are still there.

**RICHO:** Now can we talk about defence for a moment, it seems to me that the creation of the job for Christopher Pyne in the cabinet, is the job that says we'll keep some defence bending for South Australia job – it doesn't seem to be anything else. Now, should we be building submarines in South Australia?

**MARLES:** Well, we should be building submarines in Australia for sure and it is inevitably going to happen in South Australia, so there's no question about that. I mean it is very important that in the program to build the future submarines we develop a sovereign capacity in Australia – a ship building sovereign capacity, but the capacity to build submarines. And, that is a strategic imperative – there's obviously a very strong industrial imperative as well and so, we are very committed to Australian jobs when it comes to the defence industry and subs is the big game in town, but we've always seen this as part of a strategic imperative to have that sovereign capability – and it's good that government are pursuing that, they've come to the party pretty late. But, it is important that these are built in Australia and South Australia is where it'll happen.

**RICHO:** It's pretty tough you know when you're a cabinet minister and decisions are being made on submarines or on say frigates or say whatever; whenever there is that big defence spending, it always seems to me to be a worry and you know you get lobbied. I can remember going way back and being lobbied by the Newcastle people – they mayor etc. sending delegations down and wanting things to be built there and you get all those local pressures, and that being said – how much local pressure is there now to get something built in Victoria?

**MARLES:** Look I think the Victorian government are keen to build their defence industry credentials – they are I think much more focused on this then they've probably been in the past, and I think you'll see a lot more activity from the Victorian government in trying to attract defence industry to that state of Victoria – and that's a legitimate thing for states to do; obviously the government of South Australia over a period of time have been very successful in building a defence industry in their state but I think for states like South Australia and Victoria which have had a manufacturing base and where that has been seriously eroded by the actions of this government – which frankly don't give a damn about manufacturing in Australia – defence industry is an obvious place to go in terms of looking at say continued manufacturing in you part of the world, and one of the good things about it as an industry is that it's a high-tech industry – we're talking about cutting edge science in building submarines for example, but in most of the defence industry builds, and that is the kind of industry that we need in this country. I was in Israel at the end of last year and you look at the innovation and tech companies that are going on there right across the board, but it begins in that country with defence industry and I think something of that role can be played here as well.

**RICHO:** But Richard you had a pretty vibrant – if you go back a decade ago – a pretty vibrant defence industry in Victoria, what happened?

**MARLES:** Well I mean, this government when it came to maintaining a continuous ship-building capacity, has been absolutely hopeless. You've seen the supply vessels, be not only contracted out to other countries, but there wasn't even opportunity for Australian companies to bid for those and so there now being built in Spain and as a result you're seeing thousands of jobs in the shipyards across Australia and here in Victoria in Williamstown being shared and, it's a total inditement on the Turnbull government in relation to this-

**RICHO:** -But what would you do about it? What kind of jobs can we give Williamstown to get it back up and running and employing the thousands it used to employ?

**MARLES:** Well look, I'm not sure how it plays out there – specifically in terms of Williamstown, but we need to be having a defence industry in Australia, first and foremost because of it's national strategic value having the sovereign capacity to build submarines and the sovereign capacity to build ships is an important part of our defence architecture but it has an important industrial role as well – and that's why we've always had a focus in Labor

on defence industry being based at home, being based in Australia and that's not the case with this government.

**RICHO:** The other thing we need to do, where we're doing well we need to do a lot better at trying to export. You've got a factory at Lithgow making a tremendous rifle that the troops are using – I wish to God it was being used by some other armies because it is obviously an excellent weapon.

Can I move on from that though – one of the great defence worries that people keep talking about is what the Chinese are doing in the South China Sea – constructing islands and then arming them if you like. Some people are saying we should be going back to the gun boat era and we should send a ship – the Americans are apparently going to do that – what is Australia Labor party's view of how this should be handled?

**MARLES:** You're referring I think to comments the new Secretary of State made, Rex Tillerson in his confirmation hearings. I think the idea of doing any kind of blockade would seriously escalate tensions in the South China Sea and we don't want to be a part of that. We need to be seeing a de-escalation of tensions and everyone says this but it's important to say it, these are issues that need to be sorted out through negotiation and diplomacy and that's what we should be seeking to promote in our part of the world. And I think with the election of the Trump Administration what it requires us to do, as we should always do, is be very clear eyed about what our national interest is, what Australia's national interest is. When it comes to the South China Sea it is about freedom of navigation. We have something like 60% of Australia's trade goes through the South China Sea. It is the UN convention on the law of the sea, the rules that apply in relation to that sea which are important in terms of Australia's national interests. So that's where we should focus our activities.

**RICHO:** But what activities should we have? What should we do?

**MARLES:** We talk about freedom of navigation operations which assert the UN convention on the law of the sea because that goes to the question of our national interest. Now the court of arbitration last year did hold that the construction of these artificial islands by China was in breach of the UN convention on the law of the sea but what we need to be doing is being very tightly focused on what our national interest is. There are a whole lot of sovereignty disputes in the various countries in respect of various reefs, we've never taken a position on those and we shouldn't. That's not about our national interests. Why this part of the world matters to us is because a lot of ships carrying a lot of exports from Australia go through the South China Sea. They need to be able to continue to do that unfettered in accordance with the UN convention on the law of the sea. So that is the issue that we need to pursue and freedom of navigation operations which assert that are an appropriate activity for us to partake in-

**RICHO:** -I take it you don't believe we should be sending naval ships up there?

**MARLES:** I mean, part of what navies do around the world, and part of what our navy does in a very routine way is assert the UN convention on the law of the sea in a range of places by the freedom of navigation operations, but to have a situation where you're talking about some kind of blockade which seemed to be the implication of what Rex Tillerson was saying in his confirmation hearings, I note also that it seems that the Americans are kind of walking away from that but that would see a serious escalation of tensions within the South China Sea, that's clearly not in our interests.

**RICHO:** Tillerson's outburst was similar to a number of ones from Trump, I think from the hip without too much thought but the reason I ask these questions is it seems to me we don't have many ships we could send. It seems amazing to me that Australia has very few ships up and running at any one time.

**MARLES:** That I think has actually improved over the last few years but there's no doubt that readiness and capability is an important part of what we need to have in place and particularly for Australia, as an island nation our navy is so critically important but I actually

think the question of readiness of ships has improved. Certainly that's been the case in respect of submarines and the former Labor government has been a part of that but I think when you come to the South China Sea the critical issue there, indeed the critical issue on all these matters that are raised in respect to East Asia, particularly with the Trump Administration saying what it says is we have to be very clear eyed about our national interests and stick to that.

**RICHO:** Very. Now the next thing I wanted to talk to you about is recruitment, now currently the army is satisfied with the numbers but they're that concerned they're not getting enough women which I take it is a problem right through the services. How do you address that?

**MARLES:** It's a good question and I think that one of the things the army has been very good on and David Morrison, as chief of the army and Angus Campbell as the current chief following on from him have been very vocal in relation to this, that the army ought to represent the people it defends. It ought to be a microcosm of the Australian community, both in terms of cultural makeup, its ethnic makeup but if you like but very much in terms of its gender makeup as well. So making sure that there are enough women involved in the army, but throughout the ADF as well is critically important. I think there are cultural changes that need to be done in order for that to occur so women feel like a career within the ADF is something they want to pursue. Again I think what David Morrison particularly did in relation to this has been really important, this is going to change overnight but it is a very important aspiration for our armed forces that they reflect the Australian community.

**RICHO:** Yes, but one of the problems especially would be with the navy given some of the incidents that have been so well publicised over the last five to ten years, there's a lot of young women that wouldn't relish the thought of jumping on a ship with a few hundred blokes.

**MARLES:** And that's a fair point to make. That's why the cultural changes that have to occur within the armed forces need to be followed through on there has to be a zero tolerance attitude to any form of sexual harassment for example which might occur. I actually do think that we are seeing improvement within our defence forces there to be fair there has been a difficult past in relation to this but all the defence chiefs that I speak to on this question make it really clear that there is a commitment to make sure our armed forces do reflect our community, that means having more women in there and it does mean that those sort of attitudes of the past and issues of sexual harassment and all of those matters are removed from our armed forces so this is a place that people want to serve and have a career.

**RICHO:** Indeed, let's hope that works. Now one last question to deal with your former shadow portfolio. Where are we up to on this deal with refugees, is it going to hold or is it not going to hold? What is the Trump administration likely to do?

**MARLES:** Firstly, in my view its very critical that it does hold. It matters actually to be getting people off Manus and Nauru, this government has been singularly hopeless in trying find third country resettlement for those on Manus and Nauru and people have been spending far too long there. I think their state, particularly their mental state has been in terrible state so this deal simply has to go through.

I don't understand why the government does make more plain, in fact Australia's met its obligations under this deal in relation to taking refugees from Costa Rica but Malcolm Turnbull seems very reticent to go out there and say that. There's a sort sense in which the US is doing a favour here, actually it is part of a deal and it's really important Malcolm Turnbull follows through and makes sure the Trump Administration adheres to this deal. And again it seems to me that it's been a, I mean it is good news to the extent that we've heard that the US Administration are planning to uphold it but I'm astounded that this blows up in the last couple of weeks. This ought to be something that was being spoken to the Trump Administration the day after they were elected. The fact that we did not have an AUSMIN meeting in 2016 for example was a complete failure on behalf of the Turnbull government in getting itself ready for the Trump Administration.

**RICHO:** Were any of us ready for the Trump Administration, I'm not sure it was possible to get ready for Donald Trump. I don't know how you prepare for something that's so difficult.

**MARLES:** Yeah but my point there Graham is there should be an AUSMIN, there is meant to be an AUSMIN every year. In 2016 of all years, particularly knowing that there was going to be a new administration of one variety or another and then Donald Trump being elected it was absolutely critical for AUSMIN to have happened then. The fact that it did not is a total failure of Australian diplomacy and that absolutely lands at the desk of Malcolm Turnbull and I think the question of the refugee deal. This is not something that should have been left to the last minute. Now we hope that the Trump Administration follow through on it, it's fundamentally critical that they do.

**RICHO:** Indeed it is, now I've got to leave it there.

**MARLES:** This government needs to make sure it happens.

**RICHO:** It's always a pleasure to talk to you, I hope we can do it again soon.

**MARLES:** Look forward to it Graham.