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**THE PACIFIC IS CORE BUSINESS – Q&A SESSION**

**THE LOWY INSTITUTE, SYDNEY**

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**HOST:** Thank you very much Richard for a really well-argued speech that I'm sure will be read closely in coming days. We've got about 15 or 20 minutes for questions; let me ask you the first one. You focussed on the Pacific, the region where Australia is the most influential power, the most important power, the metropolitan power; but of course Australia has a whole range of other interests that you didn't touch on, including an alliance relationship with the United States, attempting to maintain a liberal international order when the President of the United States is not liberal or internationally minded or orderly in his behaviour. Grappling with the very difficult question of the relationship with China at a time when China is being much more forward-leaning, maintaining our links with South East Asia at a time when South East Asia capitals are trying to work out how to deal with China, a long-term historical involvement in the Middle East, where Australian governments of both colours have often seen fit to deploy troops to the Middle East; so there's a whole range of interests that Australia has in the world.

If the Opposition becomes the Government and you become the Defence Minister, let me ask you, where would the Pacific sit in that hierarchy of interests? You've made an argument to us today that it's underdone at the moment, but how would you balance this – which after all would take your attention, would take resources, would take money, would take personnel – with these other questions, of the global order, relations with China, with South East Asia, the insurance policy with the Alliance and so on?

**MARLES:** Well, it's a good question, and obviously I wanted today to focus on the Pacific and make that argument. And make that argument to the exclusion of all else, because it's an argument which, in my view, deserves to be made. In other forums, I've obviously spoken about what is the critical strategic circumstances we face, how we see the rise of China, how we see the ongoing relationship with the United States, our place – as you say – within South East Asia. All of these are critical, and it's not to diminish them. But I think the answer to the question ultimately is to understand where the Pacific fits. Not just in terms of a kind of weighting, or giving each of these entities a mark out of 10 and then working out

which one you focus on, but understanding how it all fits together. Because that leads then to the answer of what emphasis you place upon it.

For me, there was a significant penny that dropped, when I was doing work in the Pacific as the Parl Sec for Pacific Island Affairs and then transitioning from that, in a way, or building on that, to perform a role in helping campaign for Australia to become a member of the United Nations Security Council, and in that, having a lot to do with the United States. And the idea that what we did in the Pacific actually was central to our relationship with the rest of the world is the point that we really need to understand. What I'm trying to say here is that in many respects, all of what I've articulated can be seen through the prism of our relationship with the US. I mean, if we just want to do the relationship with the US right, we have to do the Pacific, because it is the one place where they come to us and say "what would you like us to do, we will follow you". It's how we demonstrate to them what we look like as a leader, that we are a dependable, reliable ally that pulls its weight, but that we are something more. That something more we can only demonstrate in the Pacific. So if you only wanted to think about the world in terms of the United States and our relationship with it, it would demand extra attention in the Pacific.

But beyond that, that analysis you can apply to all the critical relationships that we have. A version of the analysis you can apply in terms of how we see our growing relationship with China. How we see our relationship within South East Asia. What was really interesting to me is – I represented Australia twice at meetings of the African Union and in the process met in 2012-13 just about all but one of the Foreign Ministers of the African countries. And in a huge number of those of meetings they were asking me about how things were going in the Pacific, and what we were doing there. It was really interesting. This is our global calling card. And the world understands it; it's just that at times we don't. And so, it is not about a sort of relative sense of needing to do more in the Pacific against others; it is about, if we want to take our place in the world, we need to be active in our backyard because that it is the ticket to taking our place in the world.

And it's that shift in thinking, which I hope a future Labor Government would engage in, but frankly it's bigger than that. It's a shift in thinking that all of us need to do – the commentariat, our media, our Defence Forces, DFAT, our bureaucracy – we're missing something here and it's deeply important that we figure this out, because I do think if we don't, it is going to affect the kinds of ways in which we relate to the rest of the world going forward, and achieving the sorts of things that we seek to achieve.

**HOST:** Thank you. Let me call on Anna Kirk from the Lowy Institute.

**QUESTION:** Hello, thank you for your speech today. My name is Anna Kirk and I'm the Project Director of the Australia-Papua New Guinea Network. I wanted to ask – I think a lot of us who work on the Pacific would agree with you that Australians do not have a very strong understanding of our region and the complexity of our relationship with a lot of these countries – how do you think we could build Pacific literacy in Australia?

**MARLES:** Well – so, maybe the starting point there is that those of us that have a passion about this – which clearly you and I do – also have an obligation. If we're not talking about it, no one is. So I think it's really important that we start exercising our voice. For me... and it's why – it's one thing to exercise your voice as the Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island

Affairs, and it was a wonderful experience for me, and obviously, as is I hope evident from what I've said today, I completely fell in love with the place, but in truth, I'd fallen in love with it well before then, and it was something of a dream job that I had – but it's another to articulate the same messages as the Shadow Minister for Defence, and one day potentially as the Minister for Defence. The Pacific needs to be elevated out of the niche and into the mainstream.

Part of why I referred to the Constitution at the start, is because there is a lost truth in this. This is something that was understood in our past which we don't understand as well today, and I think PNG is a really good example of where an older generation, perhaps emanating out of the Second World War, there was a huge affection and a lot of thought given to PNG which is not experienced now. So I think – coming back to it – those of us who have passion need to argue the case.

There are obligations everywhere. The media has obligations. I've told this story a number of times, but it was an ongoing battle for me to try and get the Today Show, which at that point broadcast into – and I think it's different now – but at that point back in 2012 it was broadcasting into PNG on two stations – Imparja and EM TV which is the privately owned TV station in Port Moresby – you got the Today Show in the morning. I was really keen for the Today Show to just do one thing – tell us what the weather was going to be in every morning in Port Moresby. And it's not that hard, because it's the same every single day. I went to Channel 9 to ask them to do that, and I got all sorts of answers back about intellectual property and it's a bit hard to do this here, and we need to get access – I mean, you're kidding me? Just tell us what the temperature is going to be in Port Moresby every morning! Firstly, you've got a viewership which is watching you; you should treat it with respect. Advertisements are being sold off the back of your program in Port Moresby; you should treat those people with respect. If you did it, you would let people in Australia know that there is an island north of Cape York. If you did it, you would provide the opportunity for one day actually doing the weather from Port Moresby; and maybe you could do a show from Port Moresby leading up to Anzac Day. But just start by telling us the weather. Now that – I failed. But I think we've got to encourage – I really hope one day our media does that.

I would like to see News Limited, and they have a particular role as owners of the Post Courier, to have more exchanges between journalists in the Post Courier and journalists on publications here. I don't really get why when you see stories – and I kind of live in a News Limited world given I come from Geelong and the Geelong Advertiser is a News Limited paper, so I like News Limited, it's an unusual thing for a Labor person to say, but that's fine – you see more and more stories shared throughout the News Limited network, that makes sense; except stories from the Post Courier. Why can't we get more stuff from PNG in the Telegraph? I mean, it is a really interesting country; amazing stuff happens there, it's very newsworthy.

So I do think there is a kind of, a campaign that we need to run at all levels and obviously in the speech that I gave I also think that it's really important at a bureaucratic level that greater encouragement is given to up and comers in DFAT, for example, that not just a great place, but almost the most important place to start your career is in the Pacific. It's deeply frustrating to speak to a room of DFAT graduates and hear about aspirations of serving in a European capital. That's great, Europe's important – Port Moresby's more important, and that's where they should go.

**QUESTION:** Hello, Shadow Minister, Richard Broinowski, I was General Manager of Radio Australia in the early 90s and at some stages in the 80s and up to that time, such was our influence, that the Fijians would stop their Cabinet meetings to listen to Radio Australia news. I read also a summary of what you were going to say in The Australian this morning, and it seems to me that you say, look if we don't get in there and do more, then other people, other countries will fill the vacuum. We have American Admirals coming here frequently, brass hats who advise us on what to do in the South China Sea, and yet you say they take the lead from us in the Pacific. I wonder if that is really true. But let me ask you, if and when you become Government, how are you going to handle the Chinese expansion into what is their littoral region, including the Pacific, do you envisage having some definite meetings, an exchange with the Chinese so that you understand each other? Or is it something that you feel, no we simply have to go it alone and work in the Pacific by ourselves?

**MARLES:** So I think your question begs two answers about the Pacific and more generally. So let me start with the more general. We welcome the rise of China. China is not the Soviet Union. We have benefitted enormously, in economic terms, from the rise of China and it ought to be embraced. In saying that, obviously, the sort of China that we want to encourage is a peaceful China, but a China which embraces and contributes to a global rules-based order. Now I think, to be frank, there are anxieties in terms of what's occurred in the South China Sea, which we need to be thinking very carefully about. And it does mean being upfront and honest with the Chinese about our concerns in respect of that, about what our national interests there are, for example, which is clearly freedom of navigation given so much of our trade goes through the South China Sea. So I think having an honest and frank relationship which does articulate our national interests without compromise is important. It's also important though to acknowledge that we benefit from the rise of China.

In the background of all of that of course is also the fact that, I think, that our relationship, our Alliance with the United States, is a relevant today as it has ever been and I'm a huge supporter of the Alliance, as people in this room would know, and probably represent one end of the spectrum of thought in respect of that, and see the US's presence in East Asia as critically important going forward. So that's the attitude, if you like, to China in the general.

In the more specific about China's place in the Pacific, firstly, we don't have exclusive rights in the Pacific. We can't – any notion that we can say to the Pacific: "you can only be friends with us" is silly and counterproductive. The Pacific has a right to make whatever relationships they want and be friends with whoever they want. And I think it's completely natural that they would seek to build relationships with China and I don't criticise any of the countries in the Pacific for that at all. The point I do make is this, who cares the most in the Pacific is the country that will have the biggest influence and the most determining outcome. Who cares the most. And the idea that we would not be that country, I find amazing. It is absolutely essential that Australia places itself as the country which sees itself as the country which has the biggest focus on the Pacific of any first world country in the world. Now, let me also say, there is a degree to which we obviously do that in partnership with New Zealand; I think encouraging the French, who are a Pacific country as well, to play a bigger role is something we need to do, but Australia needs to make a pledge to the Pacific so that it is absolutely clear that the country that is caring the most is us.

**HOST:** I'll call on Jemima Garret who certainly has put the Pacific first in her career. Jemima?

**QUESTION:** Well, having worked in the Pacific for 30 years, I'd have to say this is refreshing and not before time and absolutely music to my ears because it's so needed. My question is around how you implement it, in particular to what extent have you had talks with Penny Wong about this and how would it pan out if Labor were to become Government? And also in two particular areas, one is tuna fishing where the Pacific is the global power, 56 per cent of the world's tuna is caught in the Pacific and Australia is part of those negotiations, and how do you see that working and what role for Defence in terms of things like surveillance – monitoring control and surveillance? And secondly, a more thorny one, climate change is really starting to tell in relations between Australia and the Pacific over coal and how do you see that panning out in terms of domestic policy in Australia so that we have something to go as a partnership with the Pacific that is something that they'll find acceptable?

**MARLES:** Firstly, let me say I'm – Penny has a very strong commitment to the Pacific and one of the very first trips that she made as Shadow Foreign Minister was to the region and she's now been there a number of times. So that for me is a great thing to see.

It's obviously hard to go into a whole lot of detail now about how you would go about these things but I do think that the two areas of activity which I flagged represent the most fertile ground for elevating in a practical sense what we want to do in the Pacific. I didn't mention development assistance in terms of the future and that's not to say we wouldn't do it, it's more a reflection of the fact that we do a lot now and I think we do development assistance well. But I do think the defence cooperation with defence forces in the region I think is really important and I genuinely believe, as I said, that there is room to enhance that significantly, and I say all of that acknowledging the significant amount that's already done. But the point is not to see it as, we do enough already, but rather this indicates we could do a lot more.

The idea of government service delivery and leveraging that to perhaps perform some of that for countries of the Pacific I think is also a critical area where a lot can be achieved. You know, I was asked this morning is that in some respects counterproductive because – this was on Radio Australia – because shouldn't we be talking about countries in the Pacific standing on their own two feet? Well, yes we should, but there is a – I think we need to better understand the small island nation story around the world. The aggregation of government services is a real feature of the story of countries not just in the Pacific but in the Caribbean, in the Indian Ocean as well. All sorts of government services when you're talking about very small populations, in very remote parts of the world, end up being aggregated as the only way in which public functions can be delivered. We can play more of a part there. And I think the Exclusive Economic Zones is particularly a place where we can play more of a part. And I don't think necessarily with an additional huge amount of cost.

When I was in Funafuti, for example, and looked in the lagoon there and there was a fishing vessel which had been apprehended with one of the patrol boats that we provided. And the penalty, the fine, that would be yielded from the successful prosecution of the fishing company would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to Tuvalu which for them, given the size of the population, is a lot of money. And yet the complete impracticality of going through that prosecution, you just look at it and think "this is crazy". Like you're 90 per cent

of the way there in terms of what you need to do – you’ve actually apprehended a vessel, you’ve discovered they’ve illegally fished, you’ve brought them here, you can’t do the final bit. It begs the question. And I found that questions like that pose themselves all-round the Pacific. Which is not directly development assistance, but I actually don’t think is that hard for us to do. And then you discover that there are examples of us doing it in small ways. But we are doing it. We’re doing it in Nauru, I think we do it in Solomon’s as well. I think that Air Services example I gave is something that we do in – I stand to be correct on that – but in Solomon’s as well. There are lots of ways in which that could – with some wit – we could go through that, and I think that a whole lot of things could be thought through there which I reckon would make a huge difference and which right now we’re not acting upon enough.

**HOST:** Ladies and gentlemen, I know some others have been trying to get my attention today, unfortunately we’ve run out of time, so apologies to those people who were trying to catch my attention. Let me say, Richard, that the big difference often between a speech that’s really powerful and one that’s not, is belief. And it’s impossible to listen to what you say and not realise that you’re a believer in this stuff, that you show enormous familiarity with it and real passion with it, it’s obviously a theme of your public life, and today I think you’ve give a very powerful speech on an important topic and certainly one that is welcome to those of us who care about the Pacific. I’d like to thank you for that.

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