



**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP  
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
RADIO INTERVIEW  
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***SUBJECTS: By-elections; foreign interference; South China Sea***

**HOST:** Well, Richard Marles is Labor's Defence spokesman. He joined me earlier and I asked him first about the Government's announcement of the July 28 date for the by-elections.

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** Well, this is a decision, Linda, which lacks any credibility at all. The Labor Party national conference has been a date which has been public for months. Now, this is a by-election or series of by-elections which are going to be held, I think, more than 70 days after the last resignation of a member of parliament to the Speaker – more than 70 days. If the Prime Minister went to Yarralumla this afternoon we would have a general election for all 150 seats within 33 days, but this Government has found a way to have these by-elections for five seats in more than 70 days - by coincidence on the very same day as the ALP national conference. So, I think this lacks any credibility at all.

**HOST:** OK, but the Electoral Commissioner has made a recommendation. There are factors: the largest number of by-elections to be conducted at one time since Federation across four states; likely changes to nomination processes because candidates need to be made aware of their obligations regarding citizenship. That's how we got here in the first place. Are you saying the Electoral Commissioner doesn't have a legitimate argument, is doing the Government's bidding somehow?

**MARLES:** Well, we would be having a general election for 150 seats within 33 days if the Prime Minister went to the Governor-General this afternoon, and I might say the Electoral Commissioner made it clear in his letter that it was possible to hold elections on 30 June, so I think this lacks any credibility at all. No-one who follows politics could seriously believe that there was any other agenda here on the part of the Government than to try and land this on precisely the same day as the ALP national conference, and to be frank this is a government which in doing this is just being too smart by half. I think people around Australia are going to see it, and the consequence of this, Linda is that representation is going to be denied to these five seats and the electors within them for months as a result of what is a pretty cynical decision on the part of the Government.

**HOST:** Let's go to another issue that's really been exercising the nation over the last few days and that's a question of Chinese influence, and specifically Andrew Hastie's revelations under parliamentary privilege this week. Some have claimed his actions may be political, but do you accept that he is genuine in his concern about Chinese Communist Party influence and the need for an open debate in Australia?

**MARLES:** Let me make this point first: there was information that was revealed by Andrew Hastie in the parliament and the circumstances in which he was given that information matter. Now, only Andrew is in a position to be able to explain the terms on which he was given that information and the decision that he has then made to reveal that in the House of Representatives.

I'd make the point that when you have a meeting which is a private briefing everyone who gives that is expecting that the briefing remain private. Now, it's for Andrew to explain the terms on which he was provided that information and how he justifies making that public through saying what he said to the House of Representatives.

Given that the information was put out there and the statement was made, what it says to me, actually, is the need for us to deal with the whole question of foreign interference. Now the ABC-Fairfax report around Chinese donations that was given more than a year ago I think was a seminal moment actually and a wake up call for the Australian political system.

From June of last year Labor, as a result of that, was calling for a ban on all foreign donations. That's what the foreign interference laws will provide. It is really important that we find a consensus in relation to these laws and get that Bill through the parliament. It's particularly important that we do it before the next federal election.

**HOST:** And more broadly, the Pentagon has withdrawn an invitation to China to take part in the RIMPAC international military exercise in the Pacific next month. That's an expression of displeasure at China's militarization of the South China Sea. How significant is that?

**MARLES:** Well, I can understand the decision that the Americans have taken. Ultimately the militarization of those islands is a concern. It's unquestionably a concern, as indeed is the building of the artificial islands in the first place.

From an Australian point of view, what matters about the South China Sea is that it's our main arterial trade route; that 60 percent of our trade goes through the South China Sea by some estimates, and so freedom of navigation through the South China Sea is at the heart of Australian national interest and that is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

So, it's not a surprise to me that the Americans have taken the decision they have

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

**MARLES:** Thanks, Linda.

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*Authorised by Noah Carroll ALP Canberra*