



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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
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***SUBJECTS: China***

**HOST:** Welcome back to the program. Let's go live to Melbourne now. The Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles, joins me. A lot to talk about with you this morning, Richard Marles.

First, I want to get your thoughts on the economic coercion, as the Government puts it, that Qantas, not just Qantas but many other airlines, have faced when it comes to the Taiwan issue. I know for many people they'd see this is as a very small matter when it comes to booking flights, but it goes to values doesn't it, and the pressure that China can now wield?

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** Kieren, I don't see this in quite the same way as the Government, if I'm being honest. I actually think that Qantas should be getting its dropdown menus right and it seems to me that's the point Alan Joyce made yesterday.

We've had a long-standing policy in Australia of having a One-China view. That's been the case for decades. I actually think I would expect Qantas to get that right in the way it describes its dropdown menus, so I'm not quite sure there is the point of principle that the Government has been expounding yesterday in this issue.

I think this goes to a big fact here, Kieran, and that is I reckon the Government is clumsy in the way in which it deals with its relationships with China. I mean there are some areas where we need to be very robust in what we say. The South China Sea is an example of that and we might talk about that a bit later, but the dropdown menu of course isn't and I would expect Qantas-

**HOST:** -And you're not worried about it? You don't see this as a cop out?

**MARLES:** I'm not and I don't and I don't actually think Alan Joyce is asking anyone to join the side of Qantas on this. It seems to me that the comments of Alan Joyce

himself yesterday were that Qantas would expect to get it right and as he said it's a matter for countries as to how recognition occurs, not a matter for airlines. He's right on that. And you would expect, I would expect, at least, that Qantas's dropdown menus, the way it describes the world, reflects long-standing policy on recognition in Australia going back decades, so I don't think this is a great issue of principle and I do think it points to the fact that this Government is clumsy when it comes to the way it deals with China.

If you are going to have an anti-Chinese reaction to literally everything that comes up you're going to get this relationship wrong, and this relationship is too important to get wrong. There are plenty of issues where we need to express a robust voice. This isn't one of them, and when you express a robust voice in an area which isn't as important you dilute the message where the issues are important.

**HOST:** But you know as well as I do that there are big chunks of the academia, national security, the commentariat, where there is a reflexive reaction for everything to be anti-China. That's the bottom line. As much as people can criticise Bob Carr on the one hand for being a so-called panda hugger, there's also at the other end a very simplistic view of the world, isn't there?

**MARLES:** I think that does exist in some quarters, and frankly policymakers have to resist the reflex on both sides. This is a complex relationship. What we're not talking about the Soviet Union. China has been, the relationship with China has been, an incredibly positive relationship for Australia over many decades now. It is our biggest trading partner. Australia's economy has benefited greatly from the growth of China and we would want to continue to see the growth of China. We make the point consistently that the rise of China is ultimately something to be welcomed and we need to actually say that and I've made the point consistently. I'm probably somebody who is seen as having a hawkish brand when it comes to China and I certainly think there are areas where we need to be very robust and in ways I would like to see the Government more robust, but it's important that we build our political relationship with China and we're obviously not going to get this relationship right if all we do is act on reflex.

**HOST:** When it comes to that more assertive position that you'd like to see, does it go to the South China Sea where Jim Mattis, the Defense Secretary of the United States, accused China of that very, you know, the language he used at the Shangri-La Dialogue, was very strong in his criticism of China and its assertiveness in that region. We saw true freedom of navigation operations by US ships within the reclaimed territory, within the 12 nautical miles of the Chinese reclaimed territory. Do you want to see Australia follow suit, have naval patrols in that region?

**MARLES:** Well this is an area where we need to be robust. The dropdown menus of Qantas don't matter that much. The South China Sea is profoundly important to our national interest. Most of Australia's trade goes through the South China Sea. It's one of the biggest arterial trade routes in the world and what our interest is in the South China Sea is obviously navigation, and that's described, or the rights that pertain to that are described by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Our interest lies in the assertion of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Now, the International Court of Arbitration has found that the building of those artificial islands is inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and seeking to militarize those islands takes matters a step forward. So, when I hear Secretary Mattis describe concern about the artificial islands, when I hear him describe a serious concern about the militarization of those islands, he is right and this is an issue where we do need to be taking a very strong position which reflects Australia's national interests.

**HOST:** Richard Marles we'll talk to you soon. Shadow Defence Minister, thanks for that.

***ENDS***

***Authorised by Noah Carroll ALP Canberra***