

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
AM AGENDA  
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***SUBJECT/S: Wentworth by-election, renewable energy, immigration, defence, NEG, defence industry.***

**KIERAN GILBERT:** We're speaking with Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles to get your thoughts on this polling and Labor might be a chance, who would've thought in that seat, that blue ribbon Liberal seat of Wentworth.

**RICHARD MARLES:** We'll I don't think we should get ahead of ourselves. It doesn't surprise me that people are struggling with the idea of Scott Morrison being the Prime Minister of Australia. But the starting point has to be when we're talking about Wentworth is that it is a blue ribbon Liberal seat. And anything other than a strong Liberal win in the Wentworth by-election is going to represent an initial rejection of the Australian people to the idea of Scott being the Prime Minister.

**GILBERT:** In terms of the polling on climate change action and so on of course as I mentioned with Richie Merzian just a moment ago, that was the catalyst, the division there that led to the demise of Malcolm Turnbull. In your area in Corio, around Geelong, what are you picking up from people in terms of reaction to all of this, this broader policy approach. Is there as Richie asks from the polling there today such strong support for renewable energy, for a tougher emissions reduction target given the flow on effect for power prices as so on.

**MARLES:** There is definitely support for renewable energy. You only need to look at the way that people are looking at putting solar panels on their roofs and how big an issue that is when you talk to people, certainly when I talk to people around my electorate, to understand that people do understand that renewable energy is part of the formula of how to reduce energy prices. That's not just a case at the micro level of the household, that is the case more broadly. This is a government that is completely out of touch. As distinct as from a decade or two ago, they haven't worked out that moving forward the way in which we are going to see energy prices come down is by investment in our energy grid and that investment is only going to happening in renewable energy. The market

has made it clear that they don't want to invest in coal. Yet the problem for the coalition is that they've got a lump inside their party room who are completely out of date who are now talking about subsidies of coal, that that somehow represents the answer going forward. I mean this is crazy and what is clear is that with the dumping of the NEG it would appear is that this government has absolutely no idea in terms of dealing with the energy crisis in Australia.

**GILBERT:** One component with this that I know you're very interested in is the reaction from the Pacific nations ahead of the Pacific Islands forum which Foreign Minister Marise Payne is going to attend on behalf of the new Prime Minister at the end of this week in fact at Nauru. When you look at the reaction here from the Pacific Island countries is this a risk in your view, a strategic risk in your view that if Australia were to pull out of the Paris Agreement which Mr Morrison is showing no sign at this stage that he will do that. If they were to do that it's not just about trade deals with Europe and so on, it would put at risk a presence that authority in the Pacific would it not.

**MARLES:** Certainly it would. You know for a long time I've made it clear that in my view that the biggest national security blind spot has been the Pacific and our role in it and the failure to demonstrate a role in it, in the Pacific and to demonstrate our intent in what we intend to do in a policy respect in the Pacific. There is no doubt that climate change being a voice for the Pacific and telling their story is so profoundly important in terms of demonstrating Australian commitment and goodwill to the Pacific and our playing any kind of leadership role in the Pacific. This is the issue which defines life for a number of counties like Kiribati and Tokelau, coral atoll nations that are literally on the frontline of climate change, for us not to be dealing with it in terms of our domestic policy and more than that, not to be telling the story of those island nations to the world in relation to climate change represents a complete failure in policy on the part of the Australian government. But let me also say this Kieran, the Pacific Islands forum meeting which I've been to a number of times is a leaders meeting. There will be the political leaders of the nations of the Pacific Island Forum who will be present. The idea that right up front that Scott has made it clear that he is not going is a disgrace and says everything about the lack of intent that this government is showing in terms of the Pacific.

**GILBERT:** To be fair to him he has only been in the job a couple of days and he is going to Jakarta understandably, the Fin Review reports it's going to be to sign off on a Free Trade Agreement. You'd welcome that surely. You don't cut him any slack that he's been in the job less than a week and obviously wants to get the focus on getting the show on the road here.

**MARLES:** I don't in respect of the Pacific, no. So this is what we've got in the first few days. No Pacific portfolio, no attendance at the Pacific Island forum by the person who is meant to attend and that's the leader of our nation. The big person at the Pacific Island forum year after year is the Australian Prime Minister. That's who people look forward to seeing and that person is not turning up this year and I can tell you we notice. Look, in terms of Indonesia when the Coalition came to power they famously said they the wanted to have a policy more focussed on Jakarta than Geneva and that has not really turned out that well since 2013.

**GILBERT:** That FTA I'd have to say is a big step forward. I think from memory, Indonesia are renowned in going into bi-lateral trade agreements. I think they've only got one other with Japan, so that would be a big coup.

**MARLES:** Sure. Developing our economic relationship with Indonesia has to be a priority, it certainly has been underdone over the journey and so one hopes that this is a sign of moving in the right direction. But given the performance of this government since 2013 I am hardly holding my breath.

**GILBERT:** Tony Abbott has confirmed that via the Daily Telegraph Sharri Markson reporting this morning that Mr Abbott has sent a letter through to the new Prime Minister saying that he is happy to be this new envoy for Indigenous Affairs and what he wants to do is make recommendations of how we can improve remote area education. He says frankly by far the best way we can start is to ensure indigenous kids get as good an education as every other Australian in English so that they're capable of cherishing not just their own culture but being part of the great mainstream in this country. Is this a good step forward? Obviously we haven't used Prime Ministers in the past as effectively as we should. Do you welcome this?

**MARLES:** Well I agree with the last proposition. I am mindful of what Senator Pat Dodson has said in relation to Tony Abbott's appointment as special envoy. He is who as a Prime Minister cut hundreds of millions of dollars out of indigenous funding and who famously said that living in remote communities was a lifestyle choice. So I echo Senator Dodson's concerns about Tony Abbott cornering this role. But if we take a step back Kieran and look at what.....

**GILBERT:** He's has a commitment for over decades too, hasn't he, to our indigenous people. It's hard to deny that, even in opposition would spend a week in indigenous communities learning from them. Who knows what is needed. As I understand it he is very close to Noel Pearson and so it's not a universal condemnation by any stretch.

**MARLES:** Well I am very mindful of the role that Senator Dodson has played in indigenous affairs in this country for decades as well. I've got to say his view is very influential on mine in terms of how Tony Abbott will be received. But I do want to make this point Kieran, that this a band aid over what is chasm that is going right through the liberal party at the moment. We all know what is going here. This is an attempt to throw a bone to Tony Abbott to hopefully make him happy given the destruction that's been caused to the liberal party over the last 10 days. I think the idea that Tony Abbott is going to be satisfied with a job that doesn't have a title behind it is laughable. This is a recipe for a frustrated ex-Prime Minister going forward there is no doubt about that and the ideological rift which essentially means that the liberal party is two parties right now. They are in a very unhappy coalition with each other. I don't think this is going to do anything to change that reality. This is the point of giving Tony Abbott this title in Scott Morrison's mind. I don't think it's going to work.

**GILBERT:** There is a focus again on Immigration today front of the Australian, Simon Benson reports that the Morrison cabinet is considering this plan that

would see new migrants settle outside of Melbourne and Sydney at least for five years. Five years I think it is. What are your thoughts? Does it make sense? As a local member from one of the regional areas of the country?

**MARLES:** I do think that looking at ways that we can get new migrants settling in regional Australia is worthy of further thought, no doubt about that. The population looks very different depending on what part of Australia you live. As you say I live in regional Australia and for us we want to see a greater population and that's a very different perspective than for people who live in western Sydney for example. I am not sure that mandating new immigrants living in regional Australia is going to work. I am not actually sure there is the power to put that in place and mandate they do live there. I think there are other ways that we can creatively explore those who are coming to Australia moving to regional Australia. It's a great part of Australia in which to live. So I am a little worried about the particular prescription that they are putting in place to bring this about. Sure, looking at ways that we can new migrants living in regional Australia is worth exploration.

**GILBERT:** Finally their defence team under the new Morrison cabinet includes your counterpart, at least on Friday in Christopher Pine, the new Defence Minister.

**MARLES:** I've congratulated Christopher on this role. It does say to me Kieran that whole artifice of having a Defence Minister and a Defence Industry Minister makes no sense! Let's remember, I think that in the formal ranking, that when Christopher was the Defence Industry Minister and Marise Payne was the Defence Minister, Christopher outranked Marise. I wonder if that means that this was actually a demotion. But of course that is silly. When it comes to what material Australia should procure that is fundamentally a strategic decision. When we talk about whether Australia should have a defence industry I've long argued that the basis of that thinking needs to be of strategic and not of industry thought. Which is of course why all of the issues that Christopher was dealing with previously in the Defence Industry Portfolio should have rightly be done by the Defence Minister. I think the fact that Christopher will rightly feel that he's got a promotion in becoming a Defence Minister says everything about why this split makes no sense at all. I don't know how Steve Cibolo about filling Christopher's former role. When I look at Christopher going to the Defence role, congratulations to him, I think it is a promotion but it just says to me the whole split between Defence and Defence Industry makes no sense at all.

**GILBERT:** You don't need both. OK Richard Marles. Thanks for your time. Talk to you soon.

**ENDS**

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.