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E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS LIVE - CONROY & KROGER
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SUBJECTS: Australian Labor Party; Israel; religious freedoms

STEPHEN CONROY: Today, we're interviewing Richard Marles, the new deputy leader of the Labor Party. It's his first interview since he was elected earlier today. And we welcome Richard Marles to *Conroy & Kroger*. Welcome, Richard.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well, it's a real honour and pleasure to be here, Stephen and Michael.

CONROY: I mean, you know you never had me on your show. I don't know why we're having you on ours.

MARLES: Well, this is the question I want to ask, because it's been suggested to Christopher and I that the two of you are our first spin off.

MICHAEL KROGER: Is *Pyne & Marles* still going to keep going, by the way?

CONROY: No, it's hit the fence.

KROGER: It's hit the fan.

CONROY: Richard, earlier today we interviewed Christine Wallace, a noted writer and journalist who did an analysis of what went wrong for Labor, but more importantly what can it try and learn from the 2019 defeat. What are your thoughts around issues like what went wrong with the polling? How does Labor get right what went wrong this time with its polling?

MARLES: Look, I think at the highest level, Steve, what we've got to do is take our time to get the lessons of the election right. In a sense we do justice to the decision that the Australian people made by actually working through this. We're within two weeks of the election result. Any specific answers to these questions at this moment is almost by definition knee-jerk, but we need to actually take the time to work through each of these questions and have a proper understanding of it.

I guess we can say a couple of things. I mean, the hard, cold, truth is - and it would be nice to sugar coat this but it's impossible to do so - the proposition that we took to the Australian people got rejected. We need to understand that and to deal with it. I think the other point that comes out loud and clear is we need to be talking to the widest possible range of Australians that we to possibly can. We do need to be talking to working Australians who go to work every day, who might wear overalls and get dirty and come home. We need to be the party that those people identify with. We need to be talking to people with aspiration and they need to feel that we're a party which is on their side as well. We've tried to be that but it's really important going forward that we are that and that we are talking to the widest possible group of Australians that we to possibly can. I think that's going to be a big emphasis for us in the coming few months and in the year or two ahead. That is, to make sure we are there listening very carefully to make sure we get this right.

CONROY: Richard, as you know during the campaign there was a lot of doubt about how we were faring in Queensland. Our primary vote is at a catastrophic level. It's about 25-26 per cent, and if you add the Greens primary to that, it only gets us to between 35 and 36 per cent of the vote. Barely one in three Queenslanders voted for what you could describe as the left of politics. What went wrong with our what primary vote in Queensland, and what are Labor going to do about it?

MARLES: Firstly, we're going to go and listen to Queenslanders. We're going to go there very quickly and make sure that we are talking to as many Queenslanders as possible so that we can make sure that we get the answer to the question that you have asked right, because it's to state the obvious that unless we increase our representation in Queensland we will never be governing Australia. So, this is an absolutely vital question that we need to find the answer for and the starting point there is that we go out and listen. You know, we do need to do a full review of the election, which obviously we will do, to get a sense of what it means and where votes were and what lessons we can learn from it.

I think the first answer to this question is we need to be going to Queensland and listening and that's what we're going to be doing.

KROGER: Richard, first of all congratulations on your election as deputy leader. Anyone that gets to that esteemed office in the Federal Parliament has obviously done an exceptional job, so personal congratulations to you on that.

MARLES: Thanks, Michael. I appreciate it.

KROGER: Can I now go to look at the question of Israel? You know as well as I that the NSW Labor Party isn't as pro-Israel as it was, for all the reasons we know. With Albo now as leader of the parliamentary party from the left, Penny Wong from the left, is there any expectation that Labor's traditional support for Israel which ran all the way through Shorten all the way back to Hawke, et cetera, is there any thought that that position will change?

MARLES: Firstly, Michael, you know that I'm a big supporter of Israel. I'm also a supporter of a two-state solution. This is a question that many of us have thought a lot about. The answer to your question ultimately is at the last national conference, which was only in December, we reached a position there which was a consensus position across the Party. Now, people can go and have a look at that resolution. That's what stands. That's what's going to guide us going forward.

We are friends with Israel. We understand the need for a two-state solution. I don't think that the change in leadership in the last two weeks really has much bearing on our attitude to that question.

KROGER: OK. That's good. And secondly though, mate, can I ask you, going back to the campaign, you saw Scott Morrison very openly at a Pentecostal church. You saw a lot of work now being done on how all the religious groups, a lot of people of faith in this country moved towards Scott Morrison and that his vote in the bible belt suburbs which run across Australia went heavily to Morrison. They call them, now, the Morrison Liberals. Is that of concern to you? Do you think that was a reasonable thing for those people to do? What is Labor's position in relation to that issue going forward?

MARLES: Well, that people aren't voting for us is obviously a matter of concern. That's the issue that we need to be looking at and trying to understand exactly what occurred two weeks ago and get to a point where the broadest range of Australians are identifying with Labor, and that includes people of faith. People of faith need to know that they can identify with our Party and feel free to vote for us. So, I think it is really important that we are reaching out to people of faith and making that clear, but I'm also aware that that rolls off the tongue pretty easily. We actually need to go out and listen and get a sense from people of all faiths about exactly how they do see us and how we can then make sure that we are presenting to them as a party with which they can identify. That's absolutely essential.

CONROY: I mean, Michael is right to focus on that Richard. An acid test will be the issue around religious freedoms. They will try and use this to cement their position in support of the Christian seats and the religious seats in a way that tries to exploit tensions inside the Labor Party. You and I have both seen that many times.

KROGER: Perhaps we want to do the right thing, Stephen. Perhaps it's about doing the right thing, not a wedge.

CONROY: How difficult will it be able to manage between those who don't have a belief in faith and those that do, that are trying to ensure that religious freedoms are protected? How are you going to manage that balance?

MARLES: Again, we're going to manage it by listening and by working through these questions thoroughly. It's going to depend on whatever propositions are put by the Government before the Parliament.

These are difficult issues. Whenever you are talking about questions of religious freedom they're always difficult or complex issues to balance, but both of you know the business we're in is about balancing complex and difficult issues.

You know, you don't come into politics to do things that are easy. This is something that we're going to need to work through. In working it through there are lots of people of faith who are on our team and who absolutely share the perspectives around questions of faith that we've seen on display over the course of the election campaign. So, it's not like we don't have a group of people within our Party who we can talk to, draw from, make sure we get this issue right.

Come back to the fundamental point: we need to be a party that people of faith can identify with. That's really important, and I think all of us are committed to ensuring that, just as we are committed to ensuring that we are speaking to the broadest range of Australians that we possibly can, because that ultimately is going to be the key to put us in a position where we can win the next election, and I'm actually very optimistic that we can do that.

CONROY: Thanks very much, Richard. It's been an absolute pleasure to have you on, your first interview as deputy leader of the Labor Party. I know it's something that you have aspired to, and again, personal congratulations on achieving this and good luck in bringing the Labor Party together and holding it in behind Albo as we move forward in what will be a tough couple of years. Thanks very much for joining us.

KROGER: Thanks, Richard, very much.

MARLES: I really appreciate it, guys. Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.