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DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
TODAY SHOW
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SUBJECT/S: Bioela Family; drug testing for welfare recipients; AFL finals

DEBORAH KNIGHT: A Tamil family at the centre of a bitter deportation row will today learn their fate in a final Federal Court challenge in Melbourne this afternoon. While they face being sent back to Sri Lanka, they could return to Australia within months, or sooner if the Government fast tracks their bid for asylum. Home Affairs Minister, Peter Dutton joins us now along with Labor's Deputy Leader, Richard Marles. Gentlemen, good morning to you both.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:

Morning Deb.

PETTER DUTTON: Morning Deb.

KNIGHT: Peter, you have said repeatedly that this family has no hope of staying here in Australia. If they are deported, will you deal with any legal visa applications quickly, will you fast track it?

DUTTON: There is no fast tracking, there is no treatment more or less than anybody else would receive so if somebody is offshore and they are eligible to apply for a visa to come into our country, maybe to work, maybe as a tourist, then that will be assessed on its

merits.

KNIGHT: And does this family fit that bill?

DUTTON: I don't know what visa they might apply for so that's an issue for them to take advice on.

KNIGHT: Well the abattoir in which the father was working at is applying for people to have work and they said that they would sponsor him.

DUTTON: And maybe that's the answer, I don't know. This is a difficult case, no question about it, but we've been very determined in making sure that people realise that there are 1,500 before this case, of people who have gone back including men and women, mums and dads- with young children. There are thousands behind. And I know Mr Albanese has been out there this week saying that this family can stay. I don't know how he can look the other families in the eye and say that 'you're not eligible to stay as well.' If you do that, you end up with thousands of people here, the boats will restart.

MARLES: Well, this is not about boats restarting. This is about a group of people who are already here. I know that is the kind of the reflex of the government to constantly go to the boats message. The fact of the matter is in July 2013 a line was drawn in the sand by the former Labor Government which you backed up. Boat turn backs, offshore processing and that is why boats aren't coming. It is not about that. It about the people who are already here and that is who this family are.

KNIGHT: If you make a rule, you've got to stick to it don't you?

MARLES: Sure.

KNIGHT: Doesn't this send mixed messages if you allow one family through, then you've got to look at the others as well?

MARLES: Well, there are thousands of people who came by boat who have stayed in this country under this government, that's already happened. There are going to be some that are going to be returned, there is a whole lot of cases which are quite difficult in the middle and that is why you have ministerial discretion.

KNIGHT: So, this is not a back tracking of Labor policy then?

MARLES: It is absolutely not a backtracking-

DUTTON: It's a flip-flop. It's the complete opposite of what they have said at the last two elections –

MARLES: It's not about that at all-

DUTTON: This is why people are confused.

MARLES: It's not. This is about people who are already here, Peter. As you know, this is not about people who are coming in the future.

DUTTON: Richard, you went to the last election and the election before that in 2016 saying somebody who came by boat would never settle in our country. Bill Shorten said those words and you repeated them.

MARLES: Yes, and that is absolutely the case because a line was drawn in the sand of July 2013. But people who came prior to that, have settled in this country under your government. You've already been doing it. And the whole point of ministerial discretion is to allow the rule of common sense to apply and Peter, if it is not going to apply here, when would it ever apply?

KNIGHT: In terms of the timing though, I would like to hear from you as well, would you be prepared to waiver the ruling where it is a 12 month limit of anyone who is being deported?

DUTTON: No. As I say Deb, we're not wavering, were not making it harder, were not making it easier.

KNIGHT: Would you lift that 12 month exclusion?

DUTTON: No, we wouldn't. The arrangement is no different for anybody else, okay.

KNIGHT: So they couldn't be back here in months or weeks?

DUTTON: There are thousands and thousands of people in Sri Lanka, I can tell you now.

MARLES: It's not about people in Sri Lanka.

DUTTON: It actually is, Richard. This is the problem for Labor because they are speaking from a position of ignorance. I've got to look at the whole picture. I've just had the General of Operation Sovereign Borders come back from Columbo. This case is prominently talked about in Sri Lanka this very day. There is misrepresentation of this case that somehow this family will settle permanently in Australia, there is a misunderstanding. There are others who are using it to their own advantage, trying to get people on the boats now. So for Labor to say, when they haven't had a security briefing, Mr Albanese has not had a security briefing about the current threat in Sri Lanka, I think it is dangerous actually and this family is used as a pawn as others have been by people smugglers –

MARLES: These are people who have been –

DUTTON: We're not going to allow these people to get back into Australia.

MARLES: They came before 2013. They came in 2012 and in the beginning of 2013, anyone coming from Sri Lanka by boat now either gets turned back or they end up in offshore processing. That's your policy, that's our policy and it stays the same.

KNIGHT: We'll see what happens in the Federal Court this afternoon with the ruling. Now there are reports in the paper this morning, The Herald and The Age in Melbourne that the government is considering reviving the controversial plan to drug test welfare recipients. Peter you failed to win enough support in the Senate in previous attempts, have you got it now, and what would it involve?

DUTTON: Well it is a common-sense approach and I think the Labor Party should support it this time. I would be surprised if the Independents don't support it because we know that people who are unemployed are three times more likely to be using methamphetamine for example, it is a barrier to getting a job. It results to constant drug use or people who are addicted to illicit drugs have relationship problems and we want to help those people get the help they need. It is not about punishment, it is about making sure that money spent on them, on their kids- if that's the case- but not on drugs or illicit substances. I think it is a common-sense approach, I think it reflects community values and it's a measured approach which I think the Opposition should support.

KNIGHT: More than 40 welfare groups and the AMA have actually said they have concerns about this thinking it stigmatises people who are on welfare and potential drug users, but what is wrong Richard, with doing this? With helping drug users get clean and get jobs?

MARLES: Well Deb, we are for anything that gets people back into employment.

KNIGHT: So, you will back this?

MARLES: Well, we are for anything that gets people off drugs. We'll have a good look at the legislation when it is given to us. But, we want to know that this actually works. We are mindful of the advice of experts around this. We've got to be really careful that whatever measures we are putting in place don't end up demonising the most vulnerable.

KNIGHT: So, is that a hard no? Because you rejected it in the past?

MARLES: We'll have a look at the legislation when it is given to us, but it's really important we don't demonise our most vulnerable.

KNIGHT: Now the political fight always gets put to one side for the sporting stoush at this time of the year. The pointy end of the finals, in the footy in the NRL and AFL, you're wearing your Cats tie –

MARLES: I'm wearing my Cats tie and I'm beyond excited this morning Deb.

KNIGHT: And you're a big fan, even Queensland where blood runs maroon. You've got your scarves here.

DUTTON: That was the first test we didn't drop them.

KNIGHT: You didn't drop those. I want to put you on the spot. We've got the two songs here as well.

MARLES: So the last time you did this to Stephen Conroy, it ended his career.

KNIGHT: Well there you go, bring it on.

MARLES: Oh my god.

KNIGHT: Can you sing this at all?

MARLES: (*Singing*) We play the game as it should be played, at home or far away.

KNIGHT: No talking, all singing. Here we go, come on.

DUTTON: I'm not singing and dancing.

KNIGHT: Well done, put your scarves on.

DUTTON: The finals should be in Brisbane; no scarf is required.

KNIGHT: Just put the scarf on and enjoy the game.

MARLES: The finals should be in Geelong, I am about moving from the MCG, that's for sure.

KNIGHT: Fellas, we're all winners, sport is the winner this morning. Thank you so much for joining us.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.