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TRANSCRIPT – Sky News First Edition with Peter Stefanovic

7 October 2021

Subjects: Queensland borders, CIC, ICAC, IBAC

E&OE

PETER STEFANOVIC: Joining me live now is the Queensland Senator Amanda Stoker, who is also the Assistant Minister to the Attorney-General. Amanda, appreciate your time this morning. What do you make of that? It's a trial involving a thousand people at this stage. Bearing in mind there's some 3,000 people in hotspots at the moment, who are still trying to get back into Queensland. But is it a good start or does it need to be broadened and extended?

AMANDA STOKER: Good morning, Peter. Look, it's something. It's a beginning. But in circumstances where we have at least 3,000 Queenslanders waiting to come home, 11,000 - possibly more - people trying to get into the state from various places, and in circumstances where many of those people have been double vaccinated and every other place seems to be able to contemplate the idea of home quarantine in circumstances where you don't need a trial 18 months into the process – it's not as much as I'd like to see. But at least it's a step in the right direction, but from here we need a lot more from the Palaszczuk Government before we're getting to any semblance of the reasonable. It shouldn't be a case that you need to be part of a select elite, you know, plucked from obscurity crowd, in order to have the right to come back to your own state, to the home you pay for, to the area where you pay your rates and your taxes. It shouldn't be the case that while Queenslanders trying to get home are being sent to homeless shelters on the other side of the New South Wales border, people who have big names or football families get the red carpet rolled out. There's still great inequity in this system, in circumstances where it's not obvious, other than perhaps to say they're being overly bureaucratic, why this needs to happen.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Yeah and perhaps next it'll be the English cricketers and the Ashes, bearing in mind it's the Gabba where they'll be going to first. I just want to get your thoughts on Nikki Savva's column this morning where a Labor MP has told her that the Queensland Premier is going to keep the border closed until after the federal election, primarily so that the Prime Minister can't campaign in Queensland and Anthony Albanese won't have to. What do you make of that?

AMANDA STOKER: Well, my instinct is to say that is an anti-democratic and arguably unconstitutional move if it were to be made. We are a country that has an implied freedom of political communication that has to extend to the ability of elected representatives to be amongst the people they are representing or seeking to represent in high office. The political games that are being played by both Premier McGowan and Premier Palaszczuk are next level, highly partisan and unprecedented in the way that they are willing to weaponise fear for a political end. I think we need to be cool-headed about the issues we face as a country. COVID is real and COVID is a problem. But we have a National Plan to step through it to get people safely back to normal, to get people safely back to work and back to school and back to business and beyond the threat of constant lockdowns. It's just not right to continue to manipulate people's freedom, to hold their right to gather with their families to ransom for a political end. And I hope that Australians would, if that were the Premier's motivation, to judge her harshly for doing so.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Just with an eye to Victoria at the moment, the Victorian Premier is under the steely gaze of IBAC at the moment and some people have drawn parallels between Gladys Berejiklian and Daniel Andrews. Should he step aside while this plays out? Or, bearing in mind this is quite different, is he right to stand his ground?

AMANDA STOKER: You know, this is one of those moments where I think we have highlighted the importance of some of the features that are present in the Victorian IBAC model as compared to the New South Wales ICAC model. It should be the case that where there is an investigation underway, and we know that the IBAC has one underway in relation to the United Firefighters Union, we don't know whether or not that involves Premier Daniel Andrews. But it shouldn't be the case that a Premier, who is elected to do a job, who has a degree of legitimacy that comes from being elected to do that job, shouldn't be unable to discharge those duties because of allegations – before they reach the point of being substantiated by evidence – and made out in a way that means they aren't going to be a scurrilous distraction from what needs to be done. If you contrast that to what you've got in place in New South Wales, you've got a system where allegations can be made and ventilated publicly in a way that tarnishes permanently people's reputations, tears down careers and ends public contributions at their peak in ways that, too often, remarkably often, are shown to be without foundation, without sufficient evidence, don't lead to criminal charges or convictions and-

PETER STEFANOVIC: It might come to that though.

AMANDA STOKER: And if it does, fine. If it does, fine. If there's evidence to back it up, if the IBAC can show there's a case backed in by evidence, well then, yes he should be held accountable. We can't tolerate corruption. Corruption must always be stood against in the firmest of ways but until we reach the point where there's an evidentiary basis for that, then the guy's got a job to do and he should do it, and he should do it-

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay. Just finally, Senator, I mean just on plans for a federal ICAC, there was independent analysis this week that suggested that plans for a federal ICAC would be the weakest in the country. Does it need more teeth?

AMANDA STOKER: Well, there's a range of different analyses that have been produced by people in different bits in the community and I know that some of the most passionate groups on this front are ones that come from a particular political position on the subject so I don't want to get too carried away with that example in particular. But what we're trying to do in the model that's been proposed is properly balance the risks here. I don't want to see public servants – I mean, no one really cares about the needs of politicians here – but we don't want to see public servants, police

officers, departmental staff, border force, people who are trying to honestly and diligently do their jobs, have their work publicly torn down, their reputations and families and lives destroyed with insufficient foundation. We don't want to find that we get the balance wrong between the importance of chasing down every complaint in a way that means corruption is genuinely protected against but find that, in doing so, we have accidentally empowered the misuse of this body to tear down opponents, whether that's competitors in a department, or competitors for a contract or even political competitors. We've got to get the balance right between those fundamental principles of criminal justice and fairness, and on the other hand, the need to give the body the powers it needs to chase down corruption wherever it occurs.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay.

AMANDA STOKER: It's very easy for those on the sidelines to say 'more teeth, more teeth, more teeth' but I'm pretty sure that if it were their career or their life or their family or someone they cared about who was being torn down in the unfair ways we've seen the New South Wales ICAC operate, they'd have very different perspectives.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Amanda Stoker, appreciate your time.

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