



## SENATOR THE HON SIMON BIRMINGHAM

Minister for Finance  
Leader of the Government in the Senate  
Senator for South Australia

### TRANSCRIPT

#### E&OE TRANSCRIPT

Interview on FIVEaa, Breakfast with Will Goodings and David Penberthy

Topics: *Full-cycle docking; Future Submarine Program; Outbreak in Victoria*

07/06/2021

08:45AM

**Will Goodings:** Federal Finance Minister, South Australian Senator Simon Birmingham joins us. Senator, good morning to you.

**Simon Birmingham:** Morning Will. Morning Penbo, and morning listeners.

**David Penberthy:** Thanks for joining us Birmo. So are you in a position to give us a bit of a nudge, nudge, wink, wink about the subs yet? Because the Sunday Mail got very excited about it yesterday. Page one news. It sounds like, according to the paper, a decision has either been made or is imminent. You'd have to sign off on it, wouldn't you, in your finance role?

**Simon Birmingham:** Oh, look, I'll certainly be involved in any final decisions, but no, I'm not going to pre-empt where government will ultimately land. What I would say, though, is everybody should be certain there are many more jobs being added, to be added, down at Osborne as part of the shipbuilding effort. I was talking to BAE the other day and they reminded me they put on 1000 extra staff last year as part of the Future Frigates build and they're intending to put on another 1000 staff this year as part of that build as well. And it's just a sign of the growth that is happening and will continue to happen down there.

**Will Goodings:** How precarious is the current state of play with Naval Group? With the future subs project?

**Simon Birmingham:** The Prime Minister is heading off to the G7 meeting of leaders over the next week. And that's his opportunity for the first time to meet with Joe Biden in his new capacity as President, have a range of discussions; that's going to include the opportunity to meet with President Macron of France. And I know that the PM is looking forward to talking about how we continue to work together on the attack class programme, we are serious about delivering regionally superior and capable, highly, highly skilled submarines for our future. And the partnership with Naval Groups is an important vehicle for doing that. And that's what the PM and President Macron will be talking about.

**Will Goodings:** Defence told Senate estimates that they've been working on a contingency, a plan B. If the deal did fall over, would that contingency be an off-the-shelf purchase or would it remain something that would be built in South Australia?

**Simon Birmingham:** I think all Defence said was that it was always prudent to have contingency planning. And of course, I think Australians would expect our Department of Defence to be the type of organisation to engage in prudent contingency planning but we're committed to having submarines built and constructed in South Australia, to delivering the capability that our Navy needs, but also developing the skills on top of the highly skilled subset that we already have at the ASC to be able to enhance our defence industries across South Australia and indeed right across Australia, as part of that process. And

so the plan is still well and truly one of having them built in Australia, in South Australia, and delivering those extra subs and that particular regionally superior capability for our Navy in the future.

**David Penberthy:** Hmm. Senator, can I ask you, we were saying before the Victorian lockdown to us is now looking less like some terrifying public health sort of imposed set of circumstances and more an act of political pride for the Victorian government. How worried is the federal government about the blunt instrument of lockdown being used to jump at what now appears to be a minor outbreak that could have been managed through effective contact tracing?

**Simon Birmingham:** We would always urge proportionality in the response that states and territories apply. Now, they have all of the evidence at their fingertips in terms of where the cases are coming in from, the number of exposure sites, the process around contact tracing, all of those different variants that they have to consider in terms of how they apply those restrictions. But I do hope that if we continue to see reductions in case numbers in Victoria that they look very carefully at whether there's still any chance to perhaps ease restrictions a little early or whether indeed they are able to at least let some kids get back to school, let some people get back to work. These are important things for the overall health and wellbeing of society, whilst, of course, keeping COVID under control and suppressed is crucial. And that's why we do ultimately back the judgement based on the evidence that is there.

**David Penberthy:** Yeah, but I mean, as Finance Minister, surely as a country. And when you consider there's been more people in hospital in Queensland with COVID than in Victoria, Queensland hasn't gone into a lockdown. New South Wales managed the Barbeques Galore case, it managed the Northern Beaches cases without shutting down the entire state. I mean. We can't surely, as a country, have a situation where you have this skittish response that personified by the Andrews/Merlino government and you as Finance Minister, i.e. us the taxpayers are expected to underwrite decisions like that into perpetuity.

**Simon Birmingham:** Well, the consequences are real. Consequences in terms of the economic consequences, the budget consequences, but also the human consequences. And a number of friends in Victoria have spoken to me quite passionately about and concern for their kids who endured such a tough year last year, turned to school closures and facing all of those stresses again. And so they all have to be really carefully weighed. There is no doubt the Berejiklian government in New South Wales has shown a real resolve in terms of backing their contact tracers and their systems and have been successful in doing that without applying such widespread lockdowns. And I hope that every other state continues to learn from each of these outbreaks and find the best possible way to minimise the need for lockdown, maximise the ability to suppress using those other techniques and systems.

**David Penberthy:** Good stuff. Senator Simon Birmingham. The Federal Finance Minister, a Liberal Senator for South Australia. Thanks so much for joining us this morning.

**Simon Birmingham:** Thanks guys. My pleasure.

[ENDS]

#### **Media Contacts**

Benn Ayre: +61 428 342 325

Julia Ebbs: +61 417 097 644

*Authorised by Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, South Australia.*