



**SENATOR THE HON AMANDA STOKER**  
**Assistant Minister to the Attorney-General**  
**Assistant Minister for Industrial Relations**  
**Assistant Minister for Women**  
**LNP Senator for Queensland**

---

**TRANSCRIPT – Sky News Credlin**

Tuesday, 08 June 2021

Subjects: Christmas Island and the case of the Biloela family, operation Ironside, and sea port security.

E&OE

**PETA CREDLIN:** Welcome back. Well, the long running deportation battle of the Tamil family fighting to be returned to the Queensland rural town of Biloela, has taken another turn, the family's youngest daughter was medically evacuated off Christmas Island, it is now believed she has a blood infection caused by untreated pneumonia. The federal government said it's considering resettlement options clumsily handled by the new Home Affairs Minister, Karen Andrews, today until the Prime Minister stepped in and made it clear that that comment was made in reference to a larger group of illegal arrivals beyond, of course, just this family. To discuss it more, I'm joined by from Sydney by Labor MP Joel Fitzgibbon and in Brisbane, LNP Senator for Queensland, Amanda Stoker.

Amanda, I'll start with you if I can. Now, from the outset I want to make it clear, I don't think there is anyone in the country tonight who doesn't want to wish this little girl a speedy recovery. This matter has had a long history, two parents they arrived illegally and separately, they got married in Australia, they had the two children. They've been told at every turn Australia would not change its mind and that the decision was backed in time and time again – every time they got a negative judgement, they appealed it, got another negative judgement, until we are where we are today with the family refusing to go back to Sri Lanka and back in court again. Now, it's hard but there are 50,000 similar arrivals under Labor when they couldn't stop the boats - What do you do with this one?

**AMANDA STOKER:** Look, I know this is a tough situation, it's really important that this little girl gets the medical care she needs and deserves, and it is worth noting that there was good quality enough medical care provided in detention, to first get her to this point and also to identify when it was necessary to get in other help. I think that's significant and worth noting that we provide care of that nature, as good as you would get in the Australian community for people in detention, but it is also true to say that this family knew the terms of the arrangement with Australia, they've known from the outset that people who arrive in Australia, to whom we don't owe protection obligations, who

are not refugees under law, don't get to stay here if they arrive illegally. It is a shame that they are being, particularly the children, being put through this process, but let's also be clear that those parents who are not found to be refugees, have the option of going back to Sri Lanka and giving their children the free and unrestricted life, if that's what they wish. If we don't have policies like this in place we know how the story ends, it ends with vulnerable people dying at sea and that is not a compassionate or humanitarian force.

**PETA CREDLIN:** I know, Joel, it was a tough one for Labor in opposition - sorry in government, we were in opposition - and the commitments were made by the Abbott Opposition, then government, to stop the boats. I have to be blunt, because you weren't tough enough on these issues we ended up with the fifty thousand arrivals because Tony Abbott, and Scott Morrison was his Minister, were tough on these issues the boats were stopped. That's how critical this decision is and whether it now creates a new right for people to get to Australia, have a couple of kids and then you'll be able to stay. That is the risk, isn't it?

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** Let me go to today's issue Peta, before I hope to give you a more balanced account of the broader issue, I mean what happened with this little girl was terrible. She didn't receive that standard of care our community expects as Amanda suggested, that wasn't available to her, that happened on this government's watch but as usual the government is taking no responsibility for it. On the broader issue, I think your viewers are pretty sensible and balanced, they can see that there are two sides to this story. This family has been deemed not to be at risk back in their homeland and therefore not afforded protection and should go home and I think that's what most people would think about these circumstances. But they also see a harmless family who were embraced and adopted by a regional Queensland community and loved by that community and it is difficult for people to understand why we can't make an exception to the rule in these circumstances. It's a difficult one and I don't have all of the answers but it is a very sad situation and frankly, I'd hate it to be happening on my watch as the responsible Minister.

**PETA CREDLIN:** Okay but Joel, just on that, how do you make an exception and not create a precedent?

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** I accept Peta, it's very hard. This has gone through a number of court processes, the family has been deemed not to be at risk in their own homeland and therefore able to return. Of course, if they did return they would be within their legal rights to make an application to come back to Australia. Exceptions to the rule are dangerous and are a risk, I accept that, but at the same time lots of Australians will be watching tonight and wondering why we couldn't have done better for this family.

**PETA CREDLIN:** Amanda?

**AMANDA STOKER:** Look, I just don't think exceptions send the right message. I understand this family situation is an unfortunate one and I understand there's lots of people in the community who like and value them and that is entirely appropriate. But if we soften the rules about how people who choose to ignore this country's rules about how you can and can't come here, well, it has consequences. We were told under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd Governments that we could be a little softer on this front and it wouldn't make a difference. Australians were told that 'you know, we could show a little heart and it wouldn't make anything wrong in our community' and we saw that not to be true. Fifty thousand people on more than 800 boats, too many people dying at sea. That is not compassion. That is not doing the right thing by people who are coming from dangerous places, risking it all to come to safety, who are, you know, the kind of people for whom we owe protection.

And it's not the right way to deal with people who are trying to do the wrong thing, either. And when we empower people smugglers, who are always waiting for an opportunity to make a buck on the vulnerability of people who want to seek a better life, then we are empowering some of the worst elements of the world and the way that they would seek to exploit us. That's not good for anyone as much as we are all I think quite rightly concerned for the health of this little girl.

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** Peta, can I just very quickly say-

**PETA CREDLIN:** Joel, I want to just go to the big drug bust-

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** Can I just quickly say-

**PETA CREDLIN:** Sure.

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** Amanda does herself no favours invoking lines like the 'Rudd-Gillard-Rudd Government' and politicising the situation. But I think it is hard to argue given they watch us so closely, that there's going to be a pull factor or that we're going to embolden the people smugglers by making an exception in such exceptional circumstances. Now I know it's hard, I acknowledge all the risks of exceptions, but these are exceptional circumstances and I'd hate to be a people smuggler trying to sell that to my clients.

**PETA CREDLIN:** Well, Joel Fitzgibbon, look I'm going to step in there because Amanda wasn't even in the Parliament when we lived through stopping the boats, and I have sat there and I have heard communiques and read briefs from plenty of people smugglers -

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** Yeah, sure.

**PETA CREDLIN:** -who sold this sort of story from your time in government, you couldn't bloody stop the boats. Fifty thousand on your watch. We lived it as Australians, thankfully they've stopped. Thankfully, we don't have the loss of life and I'm not going to cop it. I'm not going to cop it, as good as a bloke you are, I'm not going to cop this one from Labor. I've got to ask you today, when the PM made that announcement in relation to the drug bust, he talked about legislation in relation to, he says, access from workers and in this case criminal identities to the wharves around Australia, he said that legislation had been blocked by Labor. It appeared that Kristina Keneally said there was some softening of your position, is that right?

**JOEL FITZGIBBON:** Actually, Peta, I'm sorry, this one I know nothing about. Obviously, we need to have zero tolerance for people who exploit their employment for wrongdoing but I have no idea to be frank, what Labor's position has been in the past and what might be the softening. I'm sorry I have no idea.

**PETA CREDLIN:** Amanda, I mean, stopping criminals getting access to Maritime Union passes or identification to be on wharves, Prime Minister was pretty tough today saying legislation has got to pass the Parliament.

**AMANDA STOKER:** Look, the Coalition's policy on this is very simple. We have very strict what's called ASIC checks for people who work in airports, and the same checks should apply for people who work in our sea ports. Labor blocked this through the Senate, on the basis that they believed that unless foreign people on boats were being subjected to the same kind of standards, then they shouldn't apply to people who are working in the ports. Now, that might be a convenient excuse, but the reality is our responsibility is to make sure people who are regularly, day-to-day working in Australian ports meet the grade to make sure they're not involved in criminal elements, to make sure they don't pose a security risk and to suggest that, unless we're prepared to background check

everyone in the world, we shouldn't have those standards for Australians is, I think, pretty non-sensical. It shows the fact that it is still the MUA who pull the strings on Labor policy day in, day out. And if it doesn't suit the Union, Labor doesn't have the spine to do what's right. But we're prepared to do what's necessary to make sure illicit drugs and other dangerous items aren't being trafficked into this country, and we'll do whatever it takes to get it through the Senate.

**PETA CREDLIN:** Alright, got to leave it there. Amanda Stoker, Joel Fitzgibbon, thank you for your time.

[END]

**Media Contacts:**

Valeria Cheglov – 0438 494 351

Patrick Hannaford – 0424 625 518

**Authorised by Senator The Hon Amanda Stoker, Liberal National Party, Queensland**