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TRANSCRIPT

Interview on RN Breakfast
Topics: PM China Trip

E&OE

STEVE CANNANE: Joining us now is Kevin Hogan, the Shadow Minister for Trade, Investment, and Tourism. Thanks for your time this morning.

KEVIN HOGAN: Pleasure, Steve.

STEVE CANNANE: We just heard the treasurer suggest that there was anecdotal evidence that the uncertainty over Donald Trump's tariffs is affecting decisions by Australian employers about whether to hire or not. Do you agree with that assessment?

KEVIN HOGAN: Look. I don't know if the impact's been that strong immediately, but look, I share a lot of people's concerns about Donald Trump's tariffs, and I think it's more in the sense of if we get retaliatory tariffs from countries like China and other players around the world to the US. I think that could slow down global growth enormously.

We are a big exporting nation, you know, \$650 billion worth of stuff we sold overseas last year. So, we want global growth to be strong. We don't like tariffs, and it's a bipartisan position here in Australia. So, yeah, look. It's a big concern.

STEVE CANNANE: Was the prime minister right to focus on trade during his six-day trip to China?

KEVIN HOGAN: Yeah. Look. He's had a working holiday there, and I think that's important that he's gone there. They are a huge trading nation for us, so I'm glad he went there.

It was disappointing not to see blueberries get access, through the agricultural processes that we have because a lot of people were expecting that. I think it was an important visit. I'm glad he went.

I think it's a shame he doesn't have the same exuberance, if you like, to meet with the US president and go to the US, but, you know, that's something we need to work on.

STEVE CANNANE: Do you know that that's the case? I mean, he might be trying behind the scenes. It's hard sometimes can be hard, to predict whether Donald Trump wants to meet with you or not.

KEVIN HOGAN: Well, look, I think he's you know, I think some of the commentary showing that. I think I think initially, he didn't put out too hard to have a meeting. I think he's now trying to get a meeting. I think that's good. I think it's important he does.

We have an important economic relationship with the US. We have an important national security relationship with the US. So, I think it's important that he keeps continuing to reach out. Look. He's made unfortunate comments about Trump in the past as has Kevin Rudd. I'm sure that's not helping. But look, again, I'm glad he's been to China.

STEVE CANNANE: You just referred to his trip as a working holiday. James Patterson, made some criticisms yesterday suggesting that aspects of the trip were being indulgent.

The Prime Minister, hit back and said the coalition government failed to hold a single phone call with China for years. Does the PM have a point on that?

KEVIN HOGAN: Look. I, you know, I think it's good that the prime minister went to China. I think it's good that he did the pant thing and, you know, reenacted Gough Whitlam's Great Will of China visit. I don't I don't have a criticism of that.

Yes. Look. I take that back, though, Steve, the coalition went in government. We signed the free trade agreement with China, ten years ago. We had President Xi Jinping address the Parliament when we were in government.

So, the relationship has had ups and downs, and it did at one stage because they had 14 requests to the Australian government, which we thought was unreasonable.

But look, they're an important trading partner. I'm glad the Prime Minister has visited there and been there, because of that reason. I'm just also adding that it's a real shame he doesn't have the same exuberance about doing that with The US president.

STEVE CANNANE: It's twelve to eight on Radio National. We're talking to Kevin Hogan, the Shadow Minister for Trade, Investment, and Tourism.

You mentioned the free trade agreement just then. We now know that both countries have agreed to review that free trade agreement. What do you think needs looking at?

KEVIN HOGAN: Well, the one I just mentioned, Steve, which would be really good, we have a two by two agricultural process where we accept, they accept agricultural products into China, and we have a reciprocal thing.

Apples and blueberries have been on that list for years as the two to deal with. Apples were accepted onto that and got access to China a number of months ago. The one that's been waiting at is Blueberries, and it's literally been a multiyear wait.

And we were hoping I know the industry was really, hoping that something would be announced in the prime minister's visit, so we were hoping to review that that gets access soon.

STEVE CANNANE: The Chinese ambassador to Australia has said both countries should actively explore new growth areas in emerging fields.

He didn't mention the blueberries, but he did mention artificial intelligence, health care, green energy, and the digital economy. Are there any pitfalls in opening up trade in these areas, do you think?

KEVIN HOGAN: Well, look, I think the review is healthy. The normal part of a free trade agreement where you review the existing FTA and see how it can be improved. So, I think that's a great thing.

I mean, some of the areas that you've mentioned, look, I'm not going to make a public commentary on, but I would make the statement that some of those might cross over into areas like national security concerns or others, and we would have to take the government, I'm sure, will take advice from a whole lot of different departments on that.

But certainly, I think the discussion and reviewing the FTA is a really good thing.

STEVE CANNANE: One of those obvious areas is artificial intelligence. Do you think the government should be cautious in opening up, that area, in relation to the free trade agreement?

KEVIN HOGAN: Well, look, it's a new and growing area, and I think some of the things in AI we haven't even predicted or seen yet. But look, there'll be experts in the field, especially in the national security aspects of that and others that the government will take advice on.

But look, I think the review is good, but, certainly, we need to, you know, maintain our national sovereignty is number one.

STEVE CANNANE: During the visit, China's premier Li Qiang said in a speech that Chinese businesses are being treated unfairly by Australia because of foreign investment restrictions. And he said that building a non-discriminatory business environment should be a goal for both countries.

Do you think Australia is running a discriminatory policy on foreign investment when it comes to China?

KEVIN HOGAN: No. I certainly don't. And look, I think, obviously, the most topical one is the Port of Darwin.

You know, we welcome foreign investment from countries, but, obviously, there are going to be certain infrastructure, assets, and certain things that we think are too important for national sovereignty to be in certain people's hands. And I think a lot of countries respect that.

Reciprocally, I mean, obviously, China themselves would have limitations on what people can buy and do in China, and I think that's fair enough for their own national sovereignty as well.

And I'm sure in the bigger picture, they'll respect the fact that that we will do that with certain assets and certain infrastructure as well.

STEVE CANNANE: The Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles told me yesterday we support the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, and we do not support any unilateral changes to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.

Given what Angus Taylor said on 07:30 this week, is the coalition moving away from that policy?

KEVIN HOGAN: Not at all. And I saw Angus' interview and don't think he was out of step with that approach.

STEVE CANNANE: He did say that you can make principled commitments to the security of Taiwan. That seems to be a little bit different to, saying we support the status quo.

KEVIN HOGAN: Well, look, I think, you know, there's been a, you know I think the position of both the government and the opposition has been pretty clear on Taiwan.

I don't think there's a big difference between the opposition and the government's approach to it.

STEVE CANNANE: Alright. We'll have to leave it there. Kevin Hogan, thanks for your time this morning.

KEVIN HOGAN: Thanks, Steve.

STEVE CANNANE: Kevin Hogan, Shadow Minister for Trade, Investment and Tourism.

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