

# Citizenship a privilege not a right says new Minister Assisting PM on Counter Terrorism

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Saying citizenship is a privilege, the newly appointed Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Counter Terrorism who adds that there will be investment in making sure all Australians feel part of the mainstream.

## Transcript

SABRA LANE, PRESENTER: The Federal Government's announced two new roles to improve the co-ordination of Australia's response to terrorism. It's handpicked experienced diplomat Greg Moriarty to co-ordinate the nation's efforts, keeping tabs on the Defence Department, the spy agencies as well as state and federal police forces. And the Justice Minister Michael Keenan's adding a new job title to his job description. Later this week he'll be sworn in as the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Counterterrorism. In making the announcements today, the Prime Minister said the threat to Australia was getting worse.

Joining me now to discuss his new role is Michael Keenan.

Michael, welcome to 7.30.

MICHAEL KEENAN, COUNTERTERRORISM MINISTER: Thank you, Sabra. Nice to be with you.

SABRA LANE: What will you do in this new role that the Prime Minister, Defence Chief, head of ASIO, the head of the Defence Signals Directorate, the National Security Advisor and you as Justice Minister haven't done previously?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, as you were saying and as the Prime Minister has been saying today, this threat is getting significantly worse and it's the most serious national security threat that we will face in our generation. So we do have an enormous whole-of-government effort onto it and you mentioned some of the agencies that are involved, but there is actually others. And so what we want to do is make sure that those efforts are as co-ordinated as possible, to make sure that the big investments that we're making, the legislative changes that we've made are working as effectively as possible.

SABRA LANE: So is this an admission that they haven't been well co-ordinated in the past?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Look, I don't think you should take the fact that we're changing these arrangements as an admission that something is wrong, but we want to make sure is that we are doing absolutely everything, that no stone has been left unturned. This is a significant challenge for the Government. We are doing a lot of things, but we need to make sure that all those things are moving in the same direction. I say that across Federal Government agencies, but also we need to reach out and continually reinforce our co-operation with the states and territories that also have

very extensive responsibilities in the counterterrorism area.

SABRA LANE: The Government is considering stripping citizenship of those citizens who have become foreign fighters, making them stateless. Where would these people go?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, these are - we've been looking at Australian citizenship for some time and - because we believe that if you're going to have Australian citizenship, it is a privilege. And if you're going to abuse that privilege and you would seek to harm the Australian people, then we're going to look about what we can do to take away that privilege from you.

SABRA LANE: Sure, but where do they go?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, look, can I say it's the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection who will be making some further announcements about this in the next few days. But as a broad principle, we think that citizenship is a privilege, it is not a right, and if you abuse that privilege, then we want to look about what action we can take to remove it from you.

SABRA LANE: If you deport them and send them somewhere else, is Australia effectively handballing the problem to another country?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, as I said, the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection will make some announcements about this in the next few days. But we want to make sure that if you are here in Australia, you've been given the privilege of Australian citizenship, that you don't abuse that right to threaten the security of the Australian people.

SABRA LANE: Why hang off on that announcement? If you're using today as a platform to announce the new roles, surely it would make sense to announce the whole strategy, given that the Government itself has said that it'd like this week to be the priority on the Budget?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, I mean, this role is very separate to what we're doing with citizenship, which will only be one part of the Government's national security efforts. This role is about co-ordinating those existing efforts to make sure that what we are doing is as effective as possible. And I will work very closely with Peter Dutton in his role as the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection to make sure that whatever changes we make in citizenship are actually going to work to keep the Australian people safe.

SABRA LANE: Broadly, though, does a person become less dangerous when you send them somewhere else?

MICHAEL KEENAN: No, but obviously if somebody's not in Australia, they don't have the ability to threaten the security of the Australian people in quite the same way.

SABRA LANE: But are we abrogating our responsibility by giving the problem to someone else and not dealing with it?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well our responsibility always and the primary responsibility always is the security of the Australian people. And obviously if we're removing people from Australia who might pose a threat to Australian security, we are doing exactly that.

SABRA LANE: But you're removing it to somewhere else.

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well our primary responsibility is the security of Australia.

SABRA LANE: The radicalisation of youngsters, particularly into being attracted to Islamic State - they're becoming younger and that radicalisation process, I understand, is happening in a much shorter timeframe - weeks, a matter of weeks in some cases. How on Earth can you combat that?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well these are the great challenges and this is why it is such a difficult challenge for the Australian Government to respond to the heightened security alert that we have. We are finding that people are being radicalised very quickly. They are being radicalised when they are younger. And we need to work out what we're going to do to stop that from happening. That means training front line officers, service providers to work out what the signs are of people who are moving down this dark path. That means working ...

SABRA LANE: But if it's weeks, you're not getting the signs, like, there's no chance to get those signs.

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, we need to make sure we get the messages out there. So it's for families, it's for communities, it's for front line officers, be they law enforcement or in other government agencies to be able to recognise: what is it that is happening with someone? They start to withdraw from their family, withdraw from their social group. What is the process of radicalisation and how can we stop it?

SABRA LANE: Given that, the Government set aside \$40 million for the Countering Violent Extremism. Is that enough given that \$1.8 million of that money is actually given to organisations outside of government to be the coal face and deal with that? Is that really enough given the \$1.3 billion spent on national security?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well it's a very significant investment, \$40 million, and part of the changes today is that I will be taking responsibility for the Countering Violent Extremism program. It's always a balancing act about what we spend our money on. That is a very significant initial investment of \$40 million.

SABRA LANE: But \$1.8 for those who are facing this on the ground, outside of government.

MICHAEL KEENAN: Yes, but remember that is also a very significant investment in social cohesion as well which feeds directly back into the CVE programs. So it's not the case that all of that is just going to our security and intelligence communities. We are investing very heavily in making sure that everyone who is in Australia feels part of the mainstream of Australian culture and we are investing very heavily about working out how it is that people are radicalised, what is it that we can do to stop that and particularly how we're going to get into the online environment and stop people from moving down - getting the wrong messages from these barbaric and violent terrorist organisations and how it is that we can intervene, if they are moving down the wrong path, to stop that from occurring.

SABRA LANE: We saw earlier in today's inquiry in Sydney that Man Haron Monis managed to carry out his rampage in Sydney because he was able to get a gun without having a licence, that he was out on bail for serious crime and ASIO didn't deem him a high threat. Will today's changes stop another event like this from happening?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well we've already had a significant review into the Martin Place siege, which we did jointly with New South Wales and was conducted by the head of the Prime Minister's Department and the head of the Premier's Department. And for anyone who read that review, of

course it makes for very uncomfortable reading because there was a whole series of decisions that were taken that gave Man Monis the benefit of the doubt, when really we should've been prioritising the security of Australia. We have responded to that review. We are making some of the changes that have been recommended. Well, we're making all of the changes that have been recommended. And we want to make sure that in the future, we can't have a situation where someone essentially gains the system, could come into Australia, take advantage of the generosity of our systems here and then go on to threaten people and actually murder people in the way it happened.

SABRA LANE: Just quickly, the changes announced today, that wouldn't stop that from happening again?

MICHAEL KEENAN: Well, this is another arrow, if you like, in our quiver to be able to make sure that we're doing everything we can to stop another terrorist incident from happening in Australia.

SABRA LANE: Minister, we're out of time. Thank you very much for talking to 7.30.