

Morrison turns up heat on ALP's border policy



Labor border protection spokesman Shayne Neumann. Picture: Jack Tran

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Scott Morrison has hit back at Labor's claim there would be no change to Operation Sovereign Borders under a Shorten government, saying his opponent would kill the scheme he introduced. The political debate over border protection intensified yesterday after Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton used the disruption of a people-smuggling venture in Malaysia to insist the boats would restart and children would be back in detention if Labor won the election.

Mr Dutton also accused Labor of "completely abandoning" Operation Sovereign Borders.

But opposition immigration and border protection spokesman Shayne Neumann rejected the claim. Labor sources told The Australian it would not change in name or operation. "Under Labor, there will be no change to Operation Sovereign Borders. Operation Sovereign Borders will be fully resourced, we will maintain Australia's strong border protection measures and strengthen them even further with these new measures to stop people-smugglers in their tracks," Mr Neumann said.

“Labor will triple the number of Australian Federal Police officers overseas dedicated to deterring and disrupting people-smuggling ventures, something the Liberals have failed to do.”

The Prime Minister, immigration minister when the scheme was created in 2013, said Labor had already promised to destroy two of the three key pillars it stood on: temporary protection visas and offshore processing.

Labor softened its asylum-seeker policy at its national conference last month by formally endorsing doctor-ordered medical evacuations off Manus Island and Nauru, but it remains committed to boat turnbacks when safe to do so, offshore processing and regional resettlement. “They will abolish temporary protection visas and last year voted to end offshore processing as we know it in the parliament. And they had no clue what they had done,” Mr Morrison said.

“If you really think Labor will turn boats back with Tanya Plibersek sitting on their national security committee, you’ve got to be kidding. “Labor are just not up to it on border protection and the people smugglers know it. Every time they are tested they fail. I should know, I had to clean up their mess.”

Bill Shorten said it was “complete rubbish” to suggest Labor would abandon the operation and suggested the government’s language was encouraging people smugglers to “try their hand against the Australian system”. “We do support strong borders. We will do everything we can to stop the people smugglers getting back into business,” the Labor leader said.

“The government’s just saying this stuff to encourage the people smugglers and to basically try and get some cheap political point of difference.”

There are seven children still on Nauru, with four of them earmarked to go to the US under the resettlement deal.

Rosie Lewis