**Citizens Party calls for Senate inquiry into Port of Darwin, potential US pressure and interference**

The Australian Citizens Party (ACP) is calling for a senate inquiry into the proposed cancellation of the Port of Darwin’s 99-year lease to, Chinese-owned company, Landbridge, that is now official policy that both the Labor and Liberal/National parties are taking to the upcoming election.

Says ACP’s research director and senate candidate for Victoria, Robert Barwick, “Voters must be sick of the major parties deliberately conflating the issue of national security with national interest. The Port of Darwin’s sale, and its subsequent operations have been subject to considerable government scrutiny that has found no security breaches by the port’s operators.”

The initial 2015 sale of the Port of Darwin’s operations, via a 99-year lease to Landbridge, was approved by the then Liberal/National government. It was then subject to a Defence Department review in 2021, handed to, then Defence Minister, Peter Dutton, concluding there were no national security concerns over the port’s operations.

In 2023 an Albanese government review declared, “as a result [of the review] it was not necessary to vary or cancel the lease.”

According to Mr. Barwick, “The major parties are in a race to the bottom on national security. It’s rank hypocrisy to claim that Landbridge’s links to the Chinese government are grounds for concern. Tens of billions of dollars in Australian resource exports are destined for companies with direct and indirect links to the Chinese government. Do we cancel those supply contracts with China?”

In 2015, then Secretary of the Defence Department, Dennis Richardson told a senate committee that security concerns over Landbridge were “alarmist” and “absurd”. His views were similarly endorsed by, then Defence chief, Air Chief Marshal Mark Binksin.

Says Mr. Barwick, “The major parties owe it to the Australian people to come clean and prove there are genuine national security issues. Defence Minister Richard Marles has refused to rule out that the Australian government is under pressure from the Trump administration to eject Landbridge. One must question whether the ownership of the port is more about preserving US interests than protecting our own sovereignty?”

The move to cancel the lease has potentially damaging commercial implications for taxpayers, which could result in a large compensation payout to Landbridge. In the absence of buyers, a forced sale might see the government having to stump up more than the $506 million Landbridge initially paid in order to secure the deal. A report in the *Australian Financial Review* suggests the current sale price could be as high as $805 million.

The ACP, which is fielding senate candidates in the Northern Territory as well as candidates across all states, has a strong record of successfully influencing the outcome of parliamentary inquiries. These include, the 2019 bill to ban cash transactions; the inquiry into the collapse of WA financial scheme, Sterling First; the senate inquiry into bank closures in regional Australia; and the 2021 senate inquiry into Christine Holgate’s unfair removal as CEO of Australia Post, which cleared her name and recommended the PM apologise.

“There are a multitude of issues that need to be considered and this knee jerk reaction of one party calling for the cancellation of the Port of Darwin lease, followed by the other parroting those calls is completely short-sighted. Any move to take back the port needs to be examined thoroughly and, given defence department reviews have been ignored, it’s time for a senate investigation into the proposed cancellation of the Port of Darwin lease,” says Mr. Barwick.