

The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP

Deputy Prime Minister

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coalition plan to increase Australia's sovereign maritime capability

If re-elected, within six months a Coalition Government will introduce measures to increase Australia's sovereign maritime capability that can be called upon in times of national crisis or natural disaster.

Ninety per cent of global trade is transported on ships and Australia's commercial fleet has fallen to 13 large scale vessels. Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said expanding our commercial fleet will build the nation's sovereign shipping capability to ensure we can always access vital supply links and goods.

"Australia has a maritime vulnerability. We are a nation that is surrounded by sea. If you can stop imports and exports into Australia, you can stop Australia. We must regain sovereignty in this space and give priority to Australian seafarers," Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said.

"During recent years of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and experiencing damage to vital supply chains due to rare weather events, we have seen the importance of Australia maintaining a strong sovereign capability in merchant shipping.

"The Coalition will make it less burdensome and more commercially viable for ship owners to choose Australia and we will take action quickly, in direct contrast to Labor's plan to establish another taskforce and review the situation, with no clear plan in place and no timeframe in sight.

"The Coalition Government will create the right environment for our sovereign maritime capacity to expand, including addressing uncompetitive tax settings that make it uncommercial and too expensive for ship owners to own Australian ships and employ Australian seafarers.

"The Coalition is the only choice when it comes to sound economic management and ensuring our sovereignty and security."

The Coalition Government will:

1. Review Australia's tax arrangements for Australian ship-owners to ensure they can compete on an even footing with foreign ship-owners. This will include assessing the current income tax exemptions for companies and seafarers and exploring changes that will promote Australia's sovereign merchant capacity.

2. Put arrangements in place to encourage Australian ship owners to look to our Regional neighbours for workers to complement the Australian workforce.
3. Implement changes to the Coastal Trading Act to remove red tape and increase the speed with which ship owners can service Australia.

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said he had consulted with the maritime industry and that the industry was overwhelmingly supportive of the proposed measures which were a win-win for both Australians and industry.

“This plan will not only offer supply chain security, but also a significant economic benefit for Australia with more maritime employment and training opportunities to build the capability of Australians across the maritime industry workforce,” Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said.

“These measures will help address a significant shortfall in work opportunities currently available on Australian vessels for Australian seafarers to fulfil their sea time requirements for initial training and ongoing experience and career progression.

“Australia cannot contract its way into securing shipping capability – only our own sovereign shipping can achieve this with the support of our maritime industry and a Coalition Government.

“Unlike Labor’s vague plan based on establishing a taskforce with no timeframe, the Coalition Government will take action to implement measures within six months of re-election.

“All Labor has committed to is a taskforce, with no considered policy or plan to consider yet – in contrast, the Coalition has a clear plan and will take action fast.

“This policy will have significant benefits for industry and for the sovereignty and security of our nation.”

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