



The Hon. David Littleproud MP
Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency
Management
Deputy Leader of the Nationals

T R A N S C R I P T

Wednesday 21st April 2021

Minister Littleproud iv Sky News with Peter Stefanovic

PETER STEFANOVIC: Well, let's bring in David Littleproud now, the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management. Minister, thanks for your time this morning. So, we'll start there. You've got one vaccination hub underway. When would you like to see the rest of them rolled out?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: As safely as they possibly can. I don't think we need to rush this, it's not a race. We need to make sure that we give confidence to the community about what we're putting in our arm, and that we're doing that in a methodical way that gives them confidence to put their arm out. And I think that's really where we're at, at the moment. I don't think anyone's rushing to beat down doors to get there. They want to know that they can get the safest jabs in the world - which I think we've got the two safest in the world. And because we've been careful acquiring those, and we're able to see we hadn't had to rush into it, like the rest of the world did. And that's why it's dangerous to compare us to the rest of the world. Even though the Chief Medical Office in the United States even said, yesterday, that Australia's probably the best place in the world because of the fact that we've dealt with COVID better than anyone else, that we haven't had to rush in to put in jabs into people's arms that weren't tested as thoroughly. And now, we've been able to pivot, and we've been able to pivot with science to give an Australian public the confidence that they need.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Yeah.

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: And I think working now, get new states up and going, will mean that we'll get these jabs out and give the community confidence to go out and get them.

PETER STEFANOVIC: With the benefit of hindsight though, do you accept probably should have had a few more vaccines?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: No. We actually had three million ripped from under us by the EU. You've got to put this in perspective, it was simple maths. We had an order, the EU withheld 250,000 of them to start with, and then we felt that was putting a risks, a sovereign risk of putting jabs into people arms. [Audio skip] made sure that we ramped up the manufacturing here in Australia and in Melbourne, to make sure that Australian's were manufacturing it, we had that confidence of supply. And obviously, because of the work that we did with Pfizer, we were able to ramp up the contract to take an additional 20 million for those that are under 50 to able to get the Pfizer. That was a very smart move by Greg Hunt and the Chief Medical Officer because it was predicated off medical advice - it wasn't predicated off, off politics, it was the best, best scientific advice in the world at the time. And I think it still is, and we'll continue to make sure that if we get further medical advice, we'll pivot. And if we have to pivot, we will.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay. Onto the path towards net zero, Minister. Can it be achieved without hurting the mining and agriculture sector?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, that's what the National Party wants to see. I mean, we've fitted the bill for the social conscience of this nation for far too long, and we've got Australia to, to meet its Kyoto commitments as well as its Paris - we'll not just meet it, we'll beat it. We've done the heavy lifting and we can't continue to foot that bill for the nation. We're prepared to look at it in an open, transparent way to see how we get there and who pays for it. But I think we need to back ourselves as a nation, a nation that can embrace technology, that will achieve what we've said we'll do internationally.

You've got to put this in perspective. Of 130 nations that have signed up to net zero emissions by 2050, only 16 of them can tell us how they're going to get there. So at the moment, it's a lot of platitudes. I think Australia's an honest country. If we're going to commit to it, we're going to look the, look the people down the eye and tell them how we're going to get there and who pays for it. And I think if you can embrace technology, and particularly the investment the Federal Government's making today - carbon capture storage, this is exciting. If you get back to first, first principles about reducing emissions, well, if you can retrofit our, our coal fired power stations - four of which sit in my own electorate - to be able to have carbon capture storage, you can reduce emissions, potentially, by 90 per cent. And in fact, it's already started. At Millmerran Power Station in my electorate, they're embracing this. And when you have Joe Biden to sign up to it, our investment will complement his, that we will see the extension of the life of coal fired power stations to provide cheap energy but reduce emissions.

And I think if you could take the religion out from both sides, if that's what we're going to get back to as first principles, we can create jobs and maintain the jobs we have - those thousands of jobs even in my own electorate, in coal fired power stations, then isn't that a good thing? We've met our international commitments to reduce emissions and we've kept prices down. Then you look at new technology like hydrogen. That's a big investment that we're going to lead the world on. We should be proud of it.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Your Nationals colleague, though, Matt Canavan, he said on our program yesterday that he's going to vote against it. So, could this lead to a war within the Coalition?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: No. I think what's healthy is to have a diversity of the ideas, and I agree with Matt. As I said earlier, regional and rural Australia has footed the bill for the social conscience of this country for far too long - we paid the bill. Our farmers had their property rights taken away from them for no monetary return. It's time that agriculture and mining doesn't take the heavy lifting on that, that we look to technology, embrace technology to maintain those jobs in those sectors and do that. We don't have to do that by the end of this, end of this decade, we have to do it by 2050. And to put this in perspective, when you get countries like the EU wanting to impose tariffs on us, let me put this in perspective - of the 27 EU states only - 21 of them won't meet their 2030 commitments. But yeah, they're imposing a moral tariff on us about a 2050 commitment, and saying, well just trust us. We're going to meet 2050, but most of us aren't going to make 2030?

I mean, let's get real about this, and I think there needs to be some honesty. And that's what the Australian Government is doing, is we're going to be honest with people, tell us how we're going to get there, who's going to pay for it. And there'll be diversity of ideas within every party, as there is in the Labor Party. I know Joel Fitzgibbon probably more aligned to the National Party, and he can join on mine at any time. Whether we get in through vetting is another thing, but there's diversity and that's a good thing, that adds to the public debate.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Yeah. But Matt Canavan, he said that the targets are achievable and if we do go towards that, it's only going to help China, it is going to cost jobs as well. Are you concerned in any way about voter backlash?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, I'm worried about the detail. And I want to be able to look my electorate in the eye and tell them that they're not going to foot the bill, because we already have to get us to where we are now. So, I think that's where I want to be pragmatic. I'm open and constructive. I think there is a way in which agriculture can actually benefit financially. I'd like to think that we can invest in CCS technology that will keep our coal fired power stations going longer, particularly those thousands of jobs in my own electorate. And then if you look at hydrogen in regional areas, the new technology, that'll create new jobs, well you know, that that to me is a pragmatic way that I think people are looking for answers. If we can provide it to them honestly, and tell them how it's paid for, then I don't think you should close your mind to anything just yet.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Well, didn't, didn't the Government refer to Labor's previous pitch about hydrogen as snake oil?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: No. What we, what we committed, what we said to the Labor Party is what they went to the last election is, they said they went to- wanted to get the country to net zero emissions by 2050 but couldn't tell you how you're going to get there and who was going to pay for it. What the Australian public want, and what they're what they said at the last election is they didn't trust Labor because they were telling us all sorts of things that they couldn't cost and they couldn't tell us. Well, we've actually costed it and we're telling you how we're going to get there.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay.

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: That's what the Australian public want from the Government, is honesty...

PETER STEFANOVIC: And I just-

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: ...and that's what we're going to give them. And we won't commit, as a National Party, until we get that honesty and transparency.

PETER STEFANOVIC: I've just got one more. The US Secretary of State, Minister, he seemed to fire a shot, perhaps at us as well, promising those countries that are still investing in coal, we'll hear from the US. Is that not a shot across the bow- the bow?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: No. Particularly when the United States is investing in carbon capture storage for their coal fired power stations. Joe Biden [audio skip] I think, outranks him and he has been very clear about that investment in CCS, as we are. And I'm excited about CCS technology because that keeps the regional jobs, keeps coal fired power stations going, reduces emissions, which is what everybody wants. So why wouldn't we use it? I think I'll take the US president over anyone else, and when he's going to invest their money in that, and we are, I think that opens up enormous opportunity for investment and technology both between here and the United States.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay. David Littleproud appreciate your time this morning. Thanks again. We'll talk to you again soon.

Media contact
0455 448 985