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T R A N S C R I P T

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Minister Littleproud iv Sky News with Pete Stefanovic

PETER STEFANOVIC: Well, the Prime Minister is under pressure to build more quarantine hubs across the country to lower the risk from hotel quarantine. Joining me live now is the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, David Littleproud.

Minister, good to see you. Thanks for your time this morning. So it seems as though Victoria has opened up the floodgates when it comes to quarantine facilities. Would you like to see one in every state and territory?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, they haven't opened up the floodgates. We've already got one in Howard Springs. The Federal Government has committed and already committed over \$500 million towards Howard Springs, and there'll be a 2000 bed facility up there. There's not quite that there at the moment, but it's been ramped up as we speak. So this isn't a first, this is something that obviously the states, when we first went down this track, decided that they wanted to undertake quarantine and they'd do it through hotels, because there was a real issue around the number of people who stay in hotels and they were worried about losing jobs.

So in whole, it has worked well. I don't think we should reflect poorly on what the states have done with respect to hotel quarantine - it has worked 99.9 per cent of the time. But obviously we're trying to bring in additional Australians and increase the caps, and so it's important to understand that these facilities are in addition to what is being done in each state under their caps through their hotel quarantining.

And Victoria put a very professional proposal to the Federal Government, through Avalon, and we're happy to support that. Now, obviously, other states after National Cabinet would have to meet the requirements that National Cabinet agreed to around being in close proximity to a tertiary facility, a hospital of such a facility to be able to handle it. I mean, we've seen a proposal from Queensland that was half-baked, and out in regional Toowoomba that didn't have the capacity nor capability to handle such a proposal.

So I think the Prime Minister led on Friday by saying, if you want to look at this, that's great. It's in addition, and it need to have it in close proximity to tertiary medical facilities - not just transfer a problem from metropolitan Australia to regional Australia and say we've done our bit and good luck to regional Australia.

PETER STEFANOVIC: So where would you suggest a better option would be for Queensland?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, there's very limited scope in terms of Queensland, as I understand it, in terms of tertiary facilities. So that's something the Queensland Government

would have to go back to the drawing board on and put these proposals. Again, this is something that the states bring forward. The Federal Government simply look at these proposals once they are brought forward because quarantine is a shared responsibility, despite what the Labor Party is saying that we own it all. It doesn't, we actually do it in partnership. And I only take you- cast your mind back to the Ruby Princess. The only reason that we provided visas for those people to come off those boats is because the New South Wales Health Department said we could do so. And as in every state, they have decided their own individual health protocols that we've accepted.

So this is a partnership, and once they're agreed, we simply stamp the visas. But the states have done an outstanding job in making sure that the protocols they put forward have kept us safe from those coming in, making sure that we've done that in a balanced way in reducing the risk to Australians exposure to those people coming in that have been open up to variants of this- to this virus that other countries have not enjoyed.

PETER STEFANOVIC: I take your point that is not opening up the floodgates. But Howard Springs was first, you are correct. But since you've had to deal with Victoria's Government, New South Wales is now putting up its hands off the back of Victoria. So given the heavy lifting that New South Wales has done throughout this pandemic, should it get a priority when it comes to its extra quarantine facility? Should it get a rails run?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, like Victoria it'd have to bring forward a proposal that meets the requirements as agreed by National Cabinet, and I think the balls been put in that court. I think we've got to appreciate that Victoria put forward a very professional proposal that met the requirements, that looked at those parameters that were going to keep Australians safe from people coming back to Australia that may have been exposed to, to more strident variants.

So, I think this is the opportunity for the states to have a look at this - obviously, they're going to do this in addition to hotel quarantine. But New South Wales has done the heavy lifting. If it wasn't for them, I can tell you, most, most of the numbers that have come into Australia would not have- would still be waiting. So, to New South Wales, they've done an outstanding job. They've led the way, they've understood their, their responsibilities in terms of the quarantine piece. And when you put that in reflection, what happened with the Ruby Princess, they could have shut up shop and done nothing. But, you know, Gladys and her team looked at this, looked at the science and just kept on working at it. And, you know, I think the partnership that we've struck up in New South Wales is the gold standard the rest of the states can look at. And I think Victoria is now putting their hand up as well.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Sydney should get one, though, right? Sydney should have its own quarantine facility.

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, look Mate, I'm a Queenslander and I'd hate to tell someone from New South Wales what to do because if someone from New South Wales tells us what to do, we usually tell them to take a running jump.

PETER STEFANOVIC: But, but it seems to me, though, that given the fact that we were just talking about how New South Wales has done the heavy lifting, it's done a great, it's done a great job throughout this pandemic - Now, Gladys Berejiklian and Dominic Perrottet, they've got their hand up. Of course, they've got to go through the, the process, first of all, but, but the idea itself makes sense for you?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well look, I'm not I'm not a medical professional, and nor am I in the New South Wales Government. The New South Wales Government will make that determination; they're the ones that will decide whether it's worthwhile putting one of these

proposals these proposals up where they find the facility to be to be built - that's, that's a matter for the New South Wales Government, it's not a matter for the Federal Government. They're their own sovereign governments that have their own resources and responsibilities in which to live up to. They've lived up to them, and they'll make that determination - not, not a federal politician from Queensland telling them what to do.

PETER STEFANOVIC: But ultimately, and not just Sydney as well, ultimately, should there be - and just to clarify, should there be an extra quarantine facility in each state and territory?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well again, that comes back to each individual state because they're allowed to set their individual caps of what they're comfortable in taking in. Because this is what you've got to appreciate, is that they're then responsible for the quarantine, so they've got to have the resources to be able to manage these facilities. So that's why it's not beholden on the Federal Government to say, yes, we'd like to have one in every, every state and territory. They've got to work this through in our entire health system, in being able to understand whether they have the capacity to do it; and, what is their capacity in addition to hotel quarantining arrangements that they have that wouldn't put pressure on their more broader health system?

PETER STEFANOVIC: Should Victoria open up before Thursday? Should Melbourne, I should clarify, should Melbourne open up before Thursday?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Well, again, I'm not the chief medical officer down there. I think it's important they work through the science of this quickly, and give those people that have been locked down for so long - I mean, 140 days plus. You know, the mental anguish on those living in Melbourne and throughout regional Victoria as well that have also had this imposed on them. This is this is really something that I just implore the Victorian officials to think carefully through, make sure they've got the science to work closely with our chief medical officer at a Commonwealth level to make sure that we're making and predicating our decisions on the best science.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay. Just finally, have you got a tip for Wednesday night, Minister?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: Queensland by about eight, Mate.

PETER STEFANOVIC: A closer one. Okay. All right. I thought it might be, might, be...

DAVID LITTLEPROUD: No. We'll give you hope. We'll give those New South Wales people some hope, Mate.

PETER STEFANOVIC: Okay. David Littleproud, appreciate your time. Thanks for joining us. Talk to you, soon.

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