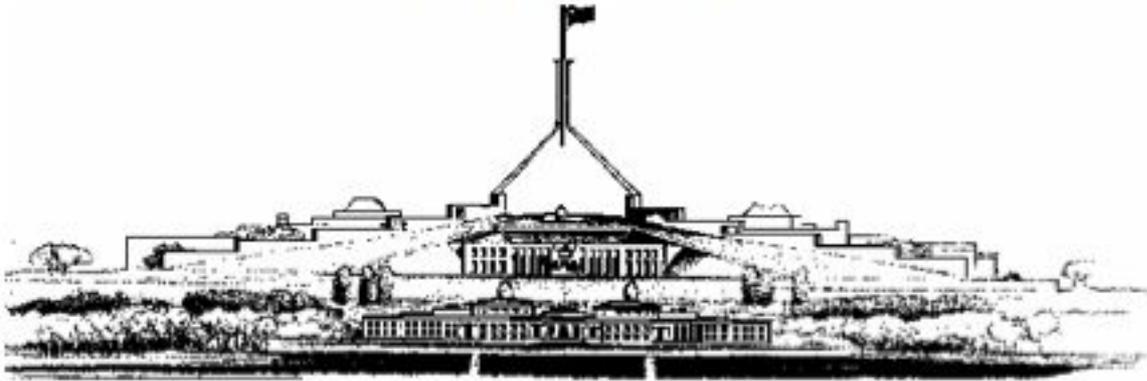




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SPEECH

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| Speaker Littleproud, David, MP | Question No. |

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Maranoa) (19:19): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is truly a great honour to stand in this nation's 45th Parliament representing the people of Maranoa as their 10th representative. I am extremely proud to stand here today as the third consecutive generation of the Littleproud family to serve the people of Queensland in all three tiers of government. My grandfather, George Littleproud, served at the local level as deputy mayor of the Chinchilla Shire; my father, Brian, served at the state level as Minister for Education and the Environment; and now I have ascended to the federal level, an achievement that my family and I are incredibly proud of and humbled by.

Maranoa is one of Australia's 75 Federation seats and the nation's fifth largest electorate in land size, spanning more than 730,000 square kilometres across Queensland, encapsulating some of our country's most diverse and productive land and, more importantly, some of its most resilient, hardworking and resourceful people. Maranoa extends along more than 90 per cent of the Queensland-New South Wales border, all of the Queensland-South Australia border and nearly half of the Queensland-Northern Territory border. From Stanthorpe in the south-east to Birdsville in the far south-west, and from Winton and Bedourie in the north-west to Kingaroy and Blackbutt in the north-east, Maranoa covers more than three-times the size of Victoria. It is managed at a local level by 17 regional and shire councils and seven state seats in the Queensland parliament.

Before I go any further, I acknowledge the 37 traditional owner groups across Maranoa, covering the Eyre, Riverine, Kooris and Murriss regions. I acknowledge their elders and the significant role they play as custodians in the preservation and advancement of Australia's first people's culture in Maranoa.

Maranoa, by reason of its sheer size, is a diverse electorate of industry and opportunity, ranging from mining, with the development of the gas and coal industry, to manufacturing, primarily in the value-adding of our agricultural products, to the increasingly important tourism industry. Tourism continues to mature in Maranoa as our brand develops and travellers gain an appreciation of our unique lifestyle. Tourism continues to play an important part in the diversification of our small communities and their economies, particularly through drought.

However, agriculture is the common thread that links each and every community across Maranoa together; it is the major contributor to every community's economy in terms of employment, returns to producers, and support to small businesses in each of our communities.

I am proud to say I have lived and worked in Maranoa all my life. I grew up in the little town of Chinchilla some 3½ hours west of Brisbane. Growing up in Chinchilla was the quintessential childhood in a small country town—plenty of mates, cricket, football, tennis, swimming, fishing and camping. You were raised not just by your family in Chinchilla but by the entire community. My pulse always lifts when I go home to Chinchilla; it is the knowledge and comfort that you are in the familiar surrounds of family. Chinchilla made me who I am today, and I am forever grateful for the investment the community of Chinchilla has invested in me.

Professionally I was fortunate enough to forge a career in banking, living and working in many parts of the electorate such as Miles, Nanango, Charleville, St George, Stanthorpe and ultimately Warwick, where my wife and I now live and raise our three boys, Tom, Hugh, and Harry, who are all here tonight. My wife and I have not only made the ultimate investment in Maranoa by bringing our family up there but also invested in our own small business in Warwick employing local people, because we believe in the future of our community and Maranoa.

I do not want to spend my time today talking about my life story; instead I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the people who have entrusted me to represent them, and the challenges we face—but more importantly the great opportunities that lie ahead of us in Maranoa.

Fundamentally I believe a federal government's responsibility is not to impose in the daily lives of Australians but to create an environment and the infrastructure around them so they can generate their own wealth that subsequently builds healthier communities.

Preparing for this speech today, I took the time to read the maiden speech delivered in May 1990 by my predecessor, the Hon. Bruce Scott, who passionately and diligently represented Maranoa for more than 25 years—and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Bruce for his dedication to Maranoa and its people. It is interesting to note that, in that speech, Bruce described the hardship some parts of the electorate were suffering after devastating floods. Ironically, today many parts of Maranoa face a greater threat from years of enduring drought. The drought in central western and south-western Queensland over the past five years has been an economic, environmental and human catastrophe and it continues to unravel before our eyes.

While recent rain has created cautious optimism, it will take more than a few rain events to allow communities to recover in full. But to reinforce the resilience of the people of Maranoa this glimmer of hope is enough for them to continue on. Some would say it is a country thing, but I say it is a pride thing—pride in our communities and pride in our families. Nelson Mandela once said, 'The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.' That is exactly what the people of Maranoa are doing. Whether it is flood, fire or drought, the people of Maranoa have forged livelihoods but, more importantly, communities that have in turn nurtured some of our country's finest.

All my professional life has been involved in business, and I have therefore built a strong passion for economic development. I believe economic development not only creates opportunity for individual wealth but, more importantly, builds healthier communities—communities where you can educate your children, receive good health care and have good employment prospects, and that you can travel the world from and, above all, call home.

The trade agreements that this coalition government negotiated over the last three years are fundamental to setting the right environment for Maranoa. The direct impact—particularly for agriculture—has been profound, with those benefits finally being realised at a profit and loss level now. All across the electorate I have been listening to people who tell me of the tangible benefits of these agreements. Three weeks ago, I was told by one of our beef producers that only two years ago he was receiving \$400 a head for his steers but today he is receiving more than three times that amount. This is putting money into the pockets of every producer and, importantly, flowing back into our local communities and stimulating their economies.

But perhaps the most salient reinforcement that these trade agreements will deliver for all of Maranoa came from feedback I received this year when I visited a drought-affected farmer in central western Queensland. In the depths of financial and emotional despair after four years of debilitating drought, when asked whether they saw a future in agriculture, the response I got was that the only person important to them in politics in Australia was a man called Andrew Robb, our then trade minister, because they knew that when it did rain all the hard work they had done for years keeping their breeding stock alive would be worth something and there would be a future for them and their children.

In this producer's moment of utter despair and helplessness, the appreciation of the benefits these agreements would provide them and the fact it became a beacon of hope that gave them the strength and courage to fight on is a moment I will never forget. Trade agreements have been criticised by some who falsely yearn for the perceived comfort of economic policies of yesteryear, but the world has moved past them. In simplistic terms, we have a population of 24 million but produce enough food for 75 million, so if we do not engage the world we will not have communities like Longreach, Charleville, Roma, Kingaroy or Dalby.

We in Maranoa need to embrace the global economy more than anybody. We have what the world wants and our language and our actions need to reflect that; we are now global players. We need to engage the world like we never have before, because the opportunities are boundless. The people of Maranoa are not victims. We are not some economic backwater. Instead, we hold the keys to our own and the nation's prosperity. It is a matter of us grabbing it.

While the coalition government has done an outstanding job in creating the right environment around the people of Maranoa in negotiating trade deals and providing small business tax cuts to the 25½ thousand small-business owners in Maranoa, to take advantage of these opportunities it is imperative that we, as a federal government, complement this with the tools of the 21st century.

The great innovators of our country and adopters of technology and science have always been in electorates like Maranoa, because we have to be. Our history in this space runs deep, with the humble beginnings of Qantas nearly 100 years ago in the outback of Maranoa. To this day, Qantas is the only airline in the world to have built

its own aircraft. In a small hanger in the outback town of Longreach, commercial aviation in this country was born because of the vision and the need of those who pioneered this great country.

Fast forward this to today, where cutting-edge scientific research and technology has seen the development and production in Stanthorpe of the Queen Garnet plum, a fruit with the highest levels of antioxidants and anthocyanins in the world. Using the best minds and hands in Maranoa—amongst the best in the world—they are changing the shape of food and health globally.

So, when you define the strategic infrastructure needed to continue to forge Maranoa ahead and to complement its people, it comes down to one word: connectivity. It is a continual investment in telecommunications and transport infrastructure that connects our products to the world that will create the innovation and wealth that will make Maranoa a community of choice for people to live in and do business.

Rolling out the NBN to more than 68,000 households and businesses right across Maranoa over the next two years is paramount, but complementing this with mobile phone connectivity is essential. The businesses of Maranoa are operating multimillion dollar cutting-edge technology that requires connectivity to engage in a global economy.

It is not just about the economic benefits of providing these digital tools; there are social responsibilities that need to be met by us as a government. The benefits of telehealth have huge potential for not only improving health outcomes in regional and remote areas but also saving money for patients and taxpayers by reducing significant travel and hospital costs. More importantly, telehealth will allow people to be treated closer to their loved ones and homes.

In education, the coalition government's commitment to creating designated data plans for distance education students is another initiative that every Australian should be proud of. It is abhorrent to think that the quality of education for children in Maranoa and other regional electorates is determined by their postcode. This initiative keeps families from having to leave the regions and, invariably, secures the precious human capital we need to be the most productive to build better regional communities.

Physical connectivity needs to complement our investment in the digital economy. Our roads and rail are the arteries of Maranoa. While I acknowledge the social and safety benefits of the coalition's \$1.6 billion investment in the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing, the real beneficiary is Maranoa. The connectivity this infrastructure will provide in building efficiency into our exports will be profound and return real dollars to towns right across Maranoa. Coupled with the inland rail, which is one of the great visionary builds of our generation, it will build the framework for innovation and investment that will deliver further opportunity to Maranoa. It will create an Australian export hub right on our doorstep. These two key infrastructure assets will be further complemented by the new Wellcamp airport, which will see Maranoa's produce exported around the world and again provide Maranoa the tools of the 21st century.

The story of Maranoa from an agricultural perspective is that of 'just add water'. While, ultimately, that lies with Mother Nature, there are a number of man-made initiatives that can also play a key role in developing Maranoa and inland Australia. The Murray-Darling Basin plan has had a significant impact on communities in Maranoa. The balance has been weighted disproportionately, without an understanding of the social and economic impacts on our communities. The responsible stewardship of our water is something every Australian takes seriously, and now we have an opportunity to reset the triple bottom line.

The coalition's commitment to the \$2.5 billion water fund is a significant step in acknowledging the power of water to local regional economies. This initiative has set the foundation to reset the mindset around water usage to one predicated on science and technology and not a blind green agenda.

The coalition government has committed to exploring two projects that could potentially transform communities across Maranoa. Transferring the nearly 150,000 megalitres of recycled water a year from Brisbane to the Darling Downs could potentially contribute to addressing the triple bottom line sought in the Murray-Darling plan. Building a business case for the Emu Swamp Dam will potentially also give just as much significance proportionately to the Stanthorpe and Granite Belt region. Having worked in banking in Stanthorpe, I can assure you of the value that a megalitre of water can contribute to not only the agricultural sector but the entire community.

Water infrastructure will not only stimulate Maranoa; it will build resilience for dry times. There are many locations in the central west and south west where water infrastructure opportunities are limited. But the coalition's investment in dog fencing is also building the resilience of and the opportunity of diversification for many graziers affected by drought.

The economic return to not only the producer but also regional communities is exponential, but so too are the environmental gains. The protection of vulnerable native fauna is something that this initiative has also achieved and should be supported further.

Continued infrastructure investment that connects us in Maranoa to a global economy is critical. I believe any investment by government in Maranoa would not be a handout but something that could be prosecuted on an economic case that we can demonstrate will progress not only Maranoa but the entire nation.

Maranoa contributes more per capita GDP than the Gold Coast, Toowoomba or Townsville. Three regional councils in Maranoa alone contribute more per capita than Brisbane city. Maranoa's unemployment rate of 2.62 per cent reinforces our economic credentials, our resilience and our work ethic. It is important to remember that this contribution to our nation has been achieved through one of the worst droughts in living memory over the last four years.

It would be remiss of me before I close not to pay tribute to the party people who have guided and counselled me over so many years for their tireless work during the campaign. I thank Phil and Arngel Sturgess; Jen Tunley; Denise Jeitz, who is also here today; Dawn Scrymergour; and Fiona Gaske, to name a few, for all their work. I am humbled by their support. To run a campaign across such a vast electorate with 119 booths was nothing short of a herculean effort. To Gary Spence, the LNP President in Queensland, I offer my sincere thanks for his support during the campaign. He is a friend I have truly gained through this. I thank my good friend and mentor Lawrence Springborg for his support, friendship and guidance over so many years. I can only hope that in some small way I can emulate the dignified and statesmanlike way he has held himself over a long career in public office.

I thank my National Party parliamentary colleagues, both here and in the Senate, for their congratulations and support. I am in admiration of the collegiate and nurturing culture that they have preserved as custodians of this great party and to which I now commit myself. But above all I look forward to working with each of them to progress regional and rural Australia.

In closing I would like to pay tribute to my family. My wife, Sarah, and our three boys—Tom, Hugh and Harry—are a constant pillar of support for me and for that I am truly grateful. I also pay tribute to my parents, Brian and Peta Littleproud, who have shaped me into the person I am today. I have had a privileged upbringing not in a material sense but in that I have never wanted for anything that I have needed. For that I am eternally grateful.

I am proud to say that I am the product of Maranoa. It has allowed me to build a career, start a business, travel the world and, above all, raise a family. No matter how long I am given the privilege to represent the people of Maranoa, if the only thing I achieve is to provide those same opportunities to our current children and the generations to come I will have succeeded, and that is all I ask. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable member for Mayo, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.