Economy

**Mr JOYCE** (New England) (14:22): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development. Will the Deputy Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia inform the House how the McCormack-Morrison government is building resilience and growth in regional Australia? Will the Deputy Prime Minister outline how the blessing of recent widespread rainfall will benefit rural Australia and the national economy?

**Mr McCORMACK** (Riverina—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Leader of the Nationals) (14:23): The member for New England is rejoicing about the rain, as he should be. We are as one about the rain—indeed we are. He is nodding enthusiastically, as he should be, and as we all should be. It's raining outside, it's raining across Australia and we should, as the member for New England says, count our blessings. Tropical Cyclone Esther is producing rain. The Tenterfield Dam has reached 100 per cent, and it is spilling over the wall. The mayor of Tenterfield Shire, Peter Petty, said:

> Our dam is at 100 per cent! The lifting of spirits around the town is tangible and a real feeling that we can now move on from the dark days of 2019.

Indeed they will.

2020 will truly be a year of renewal for Tenterfield Shire.

Let me give you some figures. In Maranoa, Birdsville has had 67 millimetres and Thargomindah 100 millimetres. Stanthorpe, unfortunately, only had 10 millimetres. In the Parkes electorate, Bourke has had 62 millimetres and Menindee had 16 millimetres. Broken Hill, unfortunately, had just two millimetres. In these electorates, some of those communities are experiencing seven years of drought, and that is crippling. That is such an invasion and a hurt on their ability to make money. In Mallee, Ouyen and Mildura each had 25 millimetres—that's an inch in the old measure. Jason Scott, a grain farmer from Ouyen in Mallee, said: 'The rain will mean we have a great harvest potential, with solid soil moisture at the start of the cropping program. Let's hope it keeps raining.' Indeed, let's hope for that.

The member for New England would be well aware of Dungowan Dam. He and I were there on 13 October last year. There was $484 million invested, in partnership with the New South Wales government, increasing capacity at Dungowan from six gigalitres to 22½ gigalitres. It has served the community of the Peel River well. It's served the Tamworth community well since 1958. But 3½ kilometres downstream we're building a bigger dam. When you combine Dungowan and Wyangala Dam—the wall of which we're increasing from 85 to 95 metres—that is going to give the central west and northern New South Wales areas the additional capacity of an equivalent 1.2 Sydney Harbours. That's going to increase agriculture. That's going to help us get to where we need to get in the future to build agriculture to a $100 billion sector from the $60 billion it is now. That's progress. That's what we need in our country.

We're building dams. Through the National Water Grid, we're mapping the future of water security, applying the best science available. Not every community has received the rain that it needs. Even if it rained for 40 days and 40 nights in some of those communities, that would still not be breaking drought. But we will be there supporting them through it with $8 billion on the table already for the Future Drought Fund and other measures.

*(Time expired)*