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Consultative Committee
Drought Resilience Funding Plan
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Dear Consultative Committee

Feedback on Drought Resilience Funding Plan

Thank you for the opportunity for The Australian National University (ANU) to provide feedback on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan. As Australia's national university, our unique responsibilities include offering policy solutions to the complex policy issues confronting our nation.

In addition to the feedback in this letter, we refer the Department to our recent submissions to the Inquiry into growing agricultural productivity to \$100bn by 2030, and our submission to the review of the Rural Research and Development Corporations system. These submissions are attached.

Drought affects all Australians, not just those in regional and rural Australia. ANU welcomes the government's initiative in establishing the Future Drought Fund and the opportunities that it may bring to drive benefit for all Australians. Investment in the Drought Resilience Fund is an investment in Australia's future.

The challenges of drought are systemic. The changing climate will likely make droughts more frequent and more severe. Programs and policies that help Australians mitigate, adapt and build resilience to drought are timely and welcome.

We note in the draft plan the three strategic priorities of social, environmental and economic resilience. ANU is already supporting a broad range of activities that align strongly with those priorities, outlined below:

Economic:

The Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology (CEAT), in partnership with CSIRO and the ACT Government, is aiming to drive productivity growth through:

- interdisciplinary approaches, combining plant sciences with digital technologies, to generate crops with improved traits; and
- tools for robotics and automation, producing innovations that support farmers to maintain (and increase) productivity using less resources, both under favourable and drought conditions.

The concept of revenue-contingent loans for farmers has been developed by Professor Bruce Chapman, who designed the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). This concept has the potential to allow farmers to manage the drought-driven peaks and troughs of farming using their own income. Based on serious policy analysis, this mechanism would reduce volatility and stress for farmers, boosting their economic resilience.

Social:

ANU hosts the Centre for Social Research Methods, and owns the Social Research Centre. Combined, these are able to provide rigorous and valid approaches to surveying the most inaccessible communities. The Centres use data from Australia Post and the Australian Bureau of Statistics combined with their approaches to experimental design. We believe there is a significant community resilience benefit to be derived through the use of such methodologies.

Environmental:

ANU hosts the Sustainable Farms Initiative, which brings together the multiple benefits of biodiversity monitoring and management approaches to farming – mental health and economic (profitability) as well as environmental.

Based on ~20 years of longitudinal data, the Sustainable Farms team has accumulated knowledge of the optimal practices to achieve high biodiversity of farms whilst simultaneously achieving improvements in economic, environmental and social resilience.

Feedback on the Drought Resilience Plan:

Together with the Universities of Adelaide and of Western Australia, we have proposed in the attached prior submissions that a mission-based approach to knowledge, innovation and extension in the context of Australian agriculture is merited.

This obviously applies to drought resilience too, noting that the three universities have offered – through a National Mission - to focus their world-class research and training science, engineering and socio/economic policy capabilities on developing solutions to the challenges facing Australian agriculture.

This includes the ongoing effects of drought on agricultural productivity, profitability, wellbeing and resilience – economic, environmental, and social. National Missions are a proven long-term strategy for addressing societal grand challenges, and drought represents one of the most pressing challenges facing Australia.

We will shortly be engaging further with the Ag2030 Taskforce with the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment regarding policy development work to further inform the proposed National Mission.

We recommend that the use of (part of) a Future Drought Fund to help resource a National Mission in Future Crop and Community Resilience could be a transformative opportunity for Australians.

Should the Consultative Committee require any further detail on any aspect of the ANU submission, please contact Belinda Lawton A/g Government Relations Manager at government@anu.edu.au or 02 6125 3549.

Yours sincerely



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