

Submission to Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan

13 December 2019

Introduction

This submission is made by the Lockyer Valley Regional Council (Council) to the Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan to:

- Highlight current initiatives that the Drought Resilience Funding Plan could consider when making funding decisions;
- Suggest considerations that may be undertaken when allocating the funds; and
- Implore that local solutions should involve meaningful consultation with local people.

This submission will provide some brief information on the Lockyer Valley to provide context and will then provide comments on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan draft.

Lockyer Valley Region

The Lockyer Valley is a Local Government Area in South-East Queensland, situated around one hour's drive - or 70km - to the west of Brisbane, and borders Toowoomba to the west.

The region, covering approximately 2,200 square kilometres, is primarily an agricultural area and is recognised as one of the "top ten most fertile farming areas in the world". Most of the land is rich agricultural farmland, which is heavily cultivated, and produces one of the most diverse ranges of vegetables and fruit of any area in Australia. As such, the area is often referred to as "Australia's salad bowl", with production valued at \$469 million per year (2016-17), supplying most of Australia's vegetables during the winter months, and accounting for 28 per cent of Queensland's total horticultural production.

Water, rather than land availability, is regarded as the limiting factor in production within the Lockyer Valley. The Lockyer Valley, like many other parts of rural Australia, is currently experiencing and suffering from drought. Through partnerships and collaboration, the Lockyer Valley has already commenced identifying and initiating drought resilience efforts, to ensure secure, reliable water for agriculture for current and future generations. The Lockyer Valley and Somerset Water Collaborative was established in 2018 and continues to work towards ensuring long term water security for agriculture, in part through building drought and flood resilience for sustainability and future growth.

Drought Resilience Funding Plan

Council applauds the Federal Government's decision to assist with building resilience to drought through the development of the Future Drought Fund. This will provide ongoing funding to deliver drought resilience initiatives and for ongoing tangible actions into the future.

We note that the Fund is to remain future focused. Council's preference is that the Fund is also able to take a long term, apolitical view to the support of actions and initiatives that build drought resilience, separate from political cycles and/or terms of government.

The Lockyer Valley, and many other regional areas, has agriculture at the core of their community and economic prosperity. Resilience to drought initiatives should recognise regions, rather than urban communities, when planning initiatives that bring improved resilience within communities.

Council recently consulted with our community to hear directly from livestock owners about the current scope and impact of the drought. Feedback from that consultation has been used to inform a Lockyer Valley Livestock Farming Drought Support Action Plan (Action Plan). The Action Plan is available online and can be downloaded from this link. [\[Lockyer Valley Livestock Farming Drought Support Action Plan\]](#)

Our community identified a range of drought resilience actions which are included in the Action Plan. Of note was the need to establish a local Drought Resilience Working Group. It was proposed that this working group could investigate options and disseminate information to facilitate drought resilience. Council firmly believes that in order to find solutions to local problems it is imperative that there is meaningful consultation with local people.

Council has also identified that there is a need for each regional local government area to have a dedicated Drought Resilience Coordinator to provide leadership for communities and drive drought resilience initiatives. The ability for drought-affected local governments to fund such a position varies considerably and funding of such positions from the Future Drought Fund is sought. Such positions would fund a network of on-the-ground workers who could network to inform trends and share best practice across the country.

Economic Resilience

Whilst recognising that organisations and individuals should not profit from the fund, efficiencies could be realised by combining the resources of universities and industry to develop more productive agribusiness methods. Supported programs should also consider opportunities for co-investment approaches to attract private sector research investment where partnerships are established with research and industry bodies. This approach could see the private sector adding value to drought resilience research, innovation and actions, while also increasing the likelihood of take-up by Australian farmers.

The draft Funding Plan identifies changes in consumer preferences at domestic and international levels. Improving drought resilience, in an economic sense, will benefit from ensuring agricultural decision makers have capacity to understand (and have access to) supply chain research and the identification of emerging consumer trends. This will provide investment certainty for growers and producers that markets exist for agricultural produce.

Environment Resilience

Council's preference is for directing funding to add value or implement trials and actions that are identified in existing research and strategies that have been developed with a coordinated partnership approach. A good example is the Catchment Actions Plans developed by the Council of Mayors South East Queensland in their Resilient Rivers Initiative.

The Lockyer Catchment Action Plan [\[Download link: Lockyer Catchment Action Plan\]](#) identifies that a holistic approach is essential to maintain the resilience of catchments and their communities. There are often unique and complex interactions between land use, catchment flows, water quality, aquifer recharge, riparian vegetation and aquatic ecology. Managing individual elements is unlikely to address all of the relevant aspects and leaves considerable potential for adverse environmental effects on other elements.

Drought resilience concepts, like multi-functional agriculture and natural sequence farming acknowledge the importance of agriculture in providing a range of public goods and services. These include the maintenance of the national landscape character, enhancing biodiversity and the maintenance and

restoration of natural water cycles.

From this perspective, diversification opportunities that are good for the environment should also contribute to retaining agricultural prosperity and contributing to drought resilience.

Social Resilience

Council is pleased to see that social resilience is given strategic priority in the Draft Plan. Connected communities with strong social fabric and connection are better able to adapt and build resilience. Rural and regional communities often experience decline due to the economic impacts associated with drought.

When community services and connections are lost to a regional or rural community, they are usually difficult to re-establish. Supporting communities, through providing people and resources to lead and drive drought resilience will help ensure prosperity. This is especially the case for those rural communities who depend on agriculture in their local economies.

Programs that enhance community connectivity provide a key role in preventing and managing mental health risk factors that often arise during adverse conditions such as drought. Investments from the Future Drought Fund in local community connectivity initiatives should be seen in the same light as clinical responses as it is both preventative and resilience building.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan, we look forward to the positive outcomes of future support for preparedness and resilience to the effects of drought.