



11 December 2019

Future Drought Fund
Department of Agriculture
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601 Australia

Dear Sir

Submission on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan

Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network

About Landcare

Landcare is a grass-roots movement that started more than 30 years ago when local communities mobilised to repair degraded natural assets, including farming land, public land and watercourses. It has expanded significantly since then, with more than 5,000 groups now in action across Australia. The movement includes Landcare groups, farming systems groups, 'Friends of' groups and indigenous land management groups. Landcare groups work across a diverse range of landscapes, typically focused on sustainable agriculture and better management of natural assets such as soil, water resources, native vegetation and habitat.

Landcare seeks to build resilient, healthy and productive landscapes cared for by resilient, healthy and engaged communities. The social capital of Landcare's volunteers and their communities are one of Australia's greatest assets.

The Landcare community is involved in a range of activities, including:

- developing and promoting sustainable farm practices
- restoring native habitats and vegetation communities
- controlling invasive weeds and pests
- sharing local natural resource management skills, knowledge and information

About the National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia

The National Landcare Network (NLN) is the representative body for Landcare groups across Australia and works to provide a voice for Landcare at the national level. The NLN is made up of representatives from each State and Territory, who come together to share their successes and support one another in overcoming challenges. The NLN shares the experiences of Landcarers across Australia, and advocates for the Landcare movement to enable it to continue its essential work building resilient and productive landscapes, and protecting our natural environment.

Landcare Australia is a not-for-profit organisation with a vision of all Australians actively caring for the natural land and water resources that sustain us. For 30 years, Landcare Australia has worked



collaboratively with federal, state and local governments, corporate partners and sponsors, and individuals, to build capacity and support for the Landcare community to better manage Australia's crucial land and water assets.

Submission

Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network welcome the opportunity to make a brief submission on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020-2024 (the Plan).

It is encouraging that the Australian Government proposes the Plan will implement funding from an on-going capital base to enable land managers and rural communities better manage the periodic impacts of drought. It is particularly encouraging that the on-going annual funding from July 2020 will continue to support improved drought resilience, even in non-drought years. This commitment recognises that periodic drought is a characteristic of our climate, rather than an exceptional event, and drought resilience occurs through a continuum of on-going improved management responses.

We request that the Australia Government consider the following points and incorporate the relevant changes into further development and implementation of the Plan.

- 1. The plan should have a *Definitions* section, which should clearly define the terms *co-investment*, *complementarity*, *additionality*, and *innovative*, in the context used in the Plan.**

The Consultation draft of the Plan specifies that proposals will require co-investment to secure disbursements from the Future Drought Fund. Discussions with the Department of Agriculture Future Drought Fund team confirmed that co-investment would be a critical funding principle. However, the Department revealed that they had not yet considered grassroots co-investment and in-kind contribution as "co-investment" for the purposes of assessing proposals.

Landcare groups, networks and organisations make substantial co-investment and in-kind contributions to all projects in which they participate. It is essential that Landcare co-investment and in-kind contribution at all levels, from grassroots to national, be recognised as legitimate co-investment.

When this issue was raised, the Department proposed that it may be outlined in the *Application Guidelines* once a request for applications is called.

An absence of clarity potentially allows too much "interpretation" on this critical issue, and risks restricting the valid and important role of the Landcare movement as a significant contributor to drought resilience within local communities.

The same concern applies to definition of the terms *complementarity* and *additionality*, which will be equally critical to Landcare applications at all levels. While it is clear the Plan intends that the Future Drought Fund does not support 'business as usual', or replace existing funding, the lack of succinct definitions for the above terms risks confusion for applicants and a subjective interpretation during assessment of proposals, which may penalise large sectors of the Landcare movement.

The plan's Strategic Objectives and Actions make constant reference to the term *innovation*, however, it is not included as a funding principle. A clearer understanding of how the Plan will guide



assessment of *innovation* as a component of proposals will be of substantial benefit for Landcare applicants. Including a definition of *innovation* in the context of projects to increase drought resilience will strengthen the Plan, and further supports the requirement for a *Definitions* section. .

The focus on innovation should not become a barrier to the Future Drought Fund supporting the continuation and implementation of a range of established, but not yet fully adopted, drought resilience practices which are low risk and are demonstrated to work. For example, supporting the adoption of zero-till and rotational grazing onto farms where they currently do not occur, should be included within a badly needed definition of *innovation*.

2. The plan should also include evaluation of risk in the funding principles, and be applied for the assessment of future applications.

Many innovative proposals include components that are untried and unproven, and therefore constitute high risk.

In the funding principles, there should be a focus on low risk actions to ensure the Future Drought Fund supports effective, rather than potentially speculative projects.

3. A number of other terms used extensively in the plan also require clear definition, in a Definitions Section.

Much of the other discussion with the Department covered the potential application of funds which, to our understanding, is not the purpose of the current request for submissions. However, a *Definitions* section, if included, should also cover the following terms;

- Private Good
- Public Good
- Infrastructure

Each of these terms were used frequently in our discussions and are contained in the Plan, but remain largely undefined.

It is appropriate that the final *Application Guidelines* provide more clarity on important terms, but these significant, high level terms guide the future implementation of the Plan and definitions should be included in the Plan due to its function as a disallowable instrument.

4. The revised Plan to be submitted to Parliament should be published as soon as possible, and before it goes before the Parliament.

We, like the Department, the Minister and all other stakeholders, wish to see the Future Drought Fund program proceed on the timetable intended. Publishing the revised Plan prior to its submission to Parliament will ensure that all stakeholders understand how the revisions improve the Plan's intent and functionality. Parliamentarians, many of whom are strong supporters of Landcare and will be aware of the Plan's implications for Landcare's role in contributing to drought resilience, will respond to the interests of their many Landcare constituents.

Publication of the revised Plan content will contribute to ensuring that a positive response supports an expeditious passage through Parliament. Alternatively, uncertainty about the revisions may slow the passage of the instrument and the program.



Conclusion

Developing and supporting drought resilience across rural Australia is critical for the sustainability of agriculture, communities and natural assets. Well established clarity in the Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020-2024 as a disallowable instrument will ensure on-going drought resilience funding is targeted effectively and meets the needs of all stakeholders and.

Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network look forward to the implementation of much stronger drought resilience, on the basis of a clear, well informed, practical and effective Drought Resilience Funding Plan. We are committed to the principles of collaboration and supporting partnerships between government, the agriculture sector and rural communities on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shane Norrish".

Dr Shane Norrish
CEO | Landcare Australia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Adams".

Mr Jim Adams
CEO | National Landcare Network