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3 November 2019

The Hon David Littleproud, MP
Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance,
Natural Disaster and Emergency Management
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020 to 2024: Consultation draft (the Plan). This Fund is an excellent opportunity to set Australian agriculture on a new path to drought preparedness and resilience as we face more frequent and severe droughts. As National Soils Advocate, I am encouraged by the initiatives outlined in the Plan and take particular interest in its progress.

The Plan describes a multi-pronged approach of investing in a wide range of programs, addressing and drawing together the economic, environmental and social issues needed to improve resilience in Australian agriculture, which is appropriate. It is also good to see that proposed investment in programs is at several levels including farm, regional and national. I was also very glad to see that the Plan recognises that strategies to build resilience need to consider incremental, transitional and transformational changes, and should include exploiting favourable conditions when they occur.

Maintaining soil health is achieved by managing the soil, water, vegetation and animals in an integrated way. This is central to the success of building resilience in the agricultural landscape. My role is to progress the national objective to protect, restore and maintain the health of the agricultural landscape and meet global challenges including food security and climate change (Attachment A). There are therefore, very clear linkages between my work and the ambition of the Plan.

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Generally, I suggest that the Plan could be strengthened by the following considerations:

- Building soil health in good seasons and maintaining it during times of drought will improve resilience, this needs further emphasis.
- The natural resource management practices aimed at building resilience and sustainability should be reframed to recognise the need for integrated management of the soil, water, vegetation and animals. This includes the control of feral animals and the overabundance of some native animals.
- Demonstration of resilient management on a catchment scale should be supported in the Plan. At this scale, demonstration is especially useful, because this is the scale at which management practices impact the landscape, rather than the farm or paddock scale, which is commonly too small.
- Incentivising change is complex. It goes far beyond the provision of information and needs to recognise that a willingness to change starts with the self-realisation that there is a need to change. The Plan needs to recognise this to a greater degree and identify and address barriers to adoption to incentivise meaningful change where it is required.
- Key influencers in the knowledge system should be included as part of the target audience in the practice change element of the Plan, including farm advisers and consultants.
- The use of the excellent seasonal forecasting tools that the Bureau of Meteorology produces is under represented. Many farmers and graziers could improve their decision making, through better use of these tools, especially in times of drought.
- Farmers and graziers would benefit from understanding the climate projections in their area/property. Including this education in the Plan will improve resilience and preparedness of property managers.

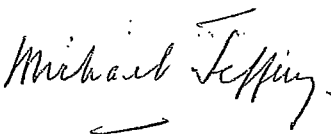
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- In places, the Plan includes level of bureaucracy befitting government, but this may not be a realistic expectation of how farmers and graziers operate. For example, land managers are good at managing daily, weekly and longer term risks but in reality are unlikely to have a documented risk management strategy. Further, they are unlikely to hold an interest in developing a detailed, documented drought plan as the Plan suggests. So it may be more realistic to educate and demonstrate to farmers how to manage their assets in a sustainable way and build resilience at the same time. Such education builds knowledge and ultimately leads to personal drive for change where required.
- The value of educating youth in the sustainable management of the agricultural landscape is under represented in the Plan. Today's youth will be managing the land and making policy decisions across the economy in the future, their education will be an excellent investment into future resilience.
- Drought means different things to different people in different contexts and there are different types of drought. The Plan would benefit from a more thorough description of drought.

Soils play an essential role in sustainable productivity and improving the resilience of Australia's farms and regional communities so emphasis must be placed on their long term health in this Plan. I look forward to the next iteration of this Plan and the roll out of the initiatives it describes.

Managing drought into the future is such an important issue for Australia. I thank you again for enabling my input into the Plan. It is my intention to continue this dialogue to the benefit of the long term health of the agricultural landscape.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Jeffery". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

(Michael Jeffery)
National Soils Advocate

Attch A: National Soils Advocate – Terms of Reference