



13 December 2019

Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee

Re: Public submission on the *Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020-2024*

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation draft of the *Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020-2024*. We appreciated the opportunity to engage in the consultation sessions in Launceston earlier this month and are pleased to provide the following submission as well as responding via the online survey.

The Northern Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Association Inc., (trading as NRM North) is one of three formally recognised natural resource management organisations in Tasmania and one of 54 in Australia. NRM North is a not for profit organisation undertaking natural resource management in the northern region of Tasmania.

As an approved service provider to the Australian Government with strong networks with farmers and other key rural stakeholders, we are ideally placed to progress the objectives of the Plan. We have the demonstrated capacity to design and implement innovative projects, including drought management and planning, achieving high levels of rural practice change. NRM North is an active member of Tasmania's Forum of Rural Stakeholders, seeking to ensure strategic, collaborative delivery of support to farmers and rural communities through droughts, fires, floods and market shocks.

As an organisation working in partnership with rural landholders and communities, NRM North strongly supports the Plan's vision, aim, funding principles, strategic priorities and objectives. We consider the Future Drought Fund to be a well-considered, innovative government initiative; we are especially pleased to note the focus of the Fund is on building resilience, as this will be critical in Australia's ability to cope with future droughts. NRM North would like to suggest the following recommendations:

- While Australia is a country of diverse climates and weather systems, the impacts of droughts largely reflect decreases in rainfall from local long-term averages. Therefore, we recommend that reductions from average conditions rather than total rainfall should be used when assessing baseline drought resilience across Australia. Differences in average property sizes, enterprise mixes and typical stocking rates should also be considered as part of this assessment.
- Facilitating change in communities, natural resources and farm management is a long-term process. As such it will be critical that any funding models under the Plan allow for longer term, multi-year projects in order to achieve enduring resilience improvements across communities and regions.
- NRM North endorses the inclusion of environmental resilience as one of the Plan's three strategic priorities. Natural resource management on farms can play a major role in drought resilience, for example by increasing soil water holding capacity and therefore crop, pasture and fodder production

p: 03 6333 7777
f: 03 6334 2822
PO Box 1224
Level 2, 63 Cameron Street
Launceston TAS 7250

www.nrmnorth.org.au
admin@nrmnorth.org.au

Natural Resource Management
in Northern Tasmania

in future dry seasons. We therefore recommend that the Plan reflects a balanced, regionally-specific approach to distributing investment across the three strategic priorities.

- We endorse your funding principles that support a community-led or co-design approach and propose that where possible use or collaborate with existing community networks, Indigenous organisations and communities, industry and natural resource management organisations, and farmer groups. Australia's national network of NRM regions, which includes NRM North, is built upon community-based planning that relies heavily on developing strong partnerships, but more importantly it is a network that has and will continue to assist with tailoring drought resilience efforts to regional industry/landscape/community needs.
- We believe funding should be balanced between research into high-priority knowledge-gaps and action on immediately implementable on-ground activities. This will enable early improvements in resilience while better informing future activities.

While NRM North is still in the initial stages of collaboration and investigation into potential project proposals under the Fund, early internal discussions have highlighted several areas that will be important for building drought resilience in Tasmania.

- Education, coaching, and support for diversification alternatives for commercial farmers. Unlike some areas on the mainland, Tasmania typically has a greater range of options for enterprise diversification, including commodity and enterprise alternatives, vertical integration and non-production farming alternatives (off-farm income or farm-based tourism etc.).
- Property (Farm) Management planning has been shown to be highly effective in providing farmers with the information and process required to enable them to consider and address the complex trade-offs between climate forecasts, market signals, financial goals and farm business goals, aimed at ultimately improving their resilience. Projects that further develop, extend, innovate and deliver property and business management planning should be encouraged and supported.
- The ability of farmers to manage drought conditions (and respond post-drought) can be constrained by feral and game animals and weeds that come to the fore in drought conditions. Addressing these issues before a drought will help build resilience to drought.
- Irrigation has been a key driver of Tasmania's agricultural productivity gains over the last ten years, but ongoing dry conditions have strongly limited water availability. Projects improving irrigation efficiency should also be supported, to help give farmers and rural communities the greatest benefits from limited resources.

NRM North looks forward to hearing further details about the Plan, including how baseline drought resilience will be assessed, funding model/s, and program milestones. Once again thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultations.

Yours sincerely,



Rosanna Coombes
Chief Executive Officer