

Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020 to 2024 – Consultation draft FEEDBACK

The Department for Environment and Water has reviewed the draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan and strongly supports the approach promoted by the draft Plan. Drought resilience is a national issue that needs to be shared by everyone. As well as focussing equally on the Strategic Priorities of economic, environmental and social resilience, the complex and inter-related nature of the Strategic Priorities also needs to be considered with the development and implementation of the Plan. A Plan that builds resilience will also support rural and regional areas in other times of stress, for example fires, significant disease outbreak, floods and other events that significantly impact a community. A co designed, community led strategy will improve buy-in from the community and completing a stocktake and evaluation of drought resilience research extension is vital to highlight any gaps that need to be filled.

Comments and suggestions regarding specific sections of the draft Plan are provided in the table below.

Plan section	Comments	Suggested Changes or Additions
General Comments	<p>Delivery of programs</p> <p>It is desirable to maintain flexibility in the distribution of funds, as specified in the Future Drought Fund Act 2019. Where possible, minimising the ‘number of hands’ the funding must pass through before it can be utilised for meaningful and rapid use.</p> <p>NRM Boards, as preferred providers of the Australian Government (Regional Land Partnerships (RLP)), are already engaged in projects and programs that seek to support resilience for communities, in a social, economic, cultural and environmental context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There may be some efficiencies through using Additional Services Works Orders or similar, for delivery of activities that are complementary (but not duplicative) of projects funded under the RLP.
	<p>While the Future Drought Fund may not be able to influence a great deal in the setting of market drivers, it would be useful for the Department of Agriculture to consider potential impacts of State or Federal Government policy changes on the operating context for land managers. The fund should also require project deliverers to identify risks or potential barriers to the success of the initiatives being funded.</p>	

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	<p>Cultural considerations Aboriginal landholders are a significant part of the rangelands pastoral country of Australia. Funding provided under the plan needs to be culturally considerate of Indigenous landholders that run agricultural enterprises.</p> <p>The South Australian Arid Lands community does not relate to some of the language within the plan and given this fund seeks to support multiple outcomes language that is more inclusive and fosters ideas and collaboration across communities will achieve maximum benefit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how the plan promotes access to information (language appropriate), different decision making processes, longer timeframes for consultation etc with Indigenous communities. • Recommend the use of the word farm/farmers be interchanged with property/land managers, or primary producers. The main primary production in the arid lands is referred to as ‘pastoralism’.
Purpose of the Fund	The scope of the fund is stated to include farm level, regional and national projects and programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider clarifying that the scope to also include state level projects and programs.
Monitoring, evaluation and learning framework	<p>There is limited detail around the MEL framework and as is often the case, it describes quite aspirational goals around measuring impact through defined indicators. A similar approach was taken during the development of the RLP Services Agreement and this has caused some challenges, in terms of designing the MEL or MEL framework. The requirements around data collection were unknown at the time of signing the contract and there are no additional fund releases to resource the time and effort MEL requirements may take.</p> <p>As part of the implementation of the Plan, criteria to guide how the assessment of benefits and public good will be undertaken, should be developed – these criteria should be available for all potential applicants to review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a learning and improvement from the RLP Services Agreement process, it is important that the Department of Agriculture carefully consider key evaluation questions, expected outcomes and indicators. • Applicants should be allowed to factor in the costs associated with undertaking the monitoring & evaluation against these, into their applications for funding. If this aspect is not resourced adequately, it will be difficult to demonstrate outcomes and impact in a meaningful way. • There may be some learnings (both good and bad) from the assessment of benefits of water efficiency measures in the Murray-Darling Basin that could be helpful to consider in setting the criteria.
Operating Environment	<p>The Environment Managing abundant native species is a key issue for regions building drought resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add additional text to dot point under ‘controlling feral animals’ on pg 9 “and abundance native species”

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	<p>Social licence Social licence is an emerging topic of increasing importance and perhaps warrants a greater attention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider including the latest research from Deanna Lush’s Churchill scholarship work into the section on social licence.
References	The underpinning evidence used to develop the draft plan are largely about farming and management. Evidence about resilience and its value in the planned approach is lacking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include evidence from resilience research to support and add rigor to the resilience building approach promoted in the plan.
Funding Principles	The suggested Funding Principles are generally supported and provide a wide scope of activity to be considered by the Fund including encouraging information sharing and collaboration within and across agricultural sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider adding principle(s) about the decision making framework where conflicts occur between the Strategic Priorities in proposed projects or activities’
	The principles promote and encourage innovation and innovative approaches to building drought resilience at all levels including on farm, regional, state and national. However no direct reference to innovation is made.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider adding principle(s) about the need to be enterprising and innovative in seeking to adapt and transform Consider adding a principle to encourage investment in different approaches and taking more risks.
Aim	Suggest that the stated ‘Aim’ of the fund (p. 13) incorporate an environment/NRM component for consistency, noting that the Vision, Strategic Priorities and Objectives do this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider modifying the Aim of the fund (p.13) to: <i>“The fund aims to enhance the public good by building drought resilience in Australia’s agricultural sector and, rural communities and natural landscapes”</i> Could use ‘farming landscapes’ [from the priorities], or ‘agricultural landscapes’ [from the objectives] as alternatives to ‘natural landscapes’, if required.
Economic resilience Objectives and actions	<p>One of the purposes of the fund is to support transformational change, however the actions do not seem to have a strong focus on relevant enablers.</p> <p>Given the increasing impacts of climate variability, many landholders are considering alternative (and) buffering industries and income streams such as tourism, carbon farming, conservation stewardship and alternative production methods that increase profit margins and ensure adaptation to climate and market needs.</p>	<p>Consider adding an actions that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support market development strategies for climate resilient crops. Provide education and training to farmers in the adoption and use of new technologies, including: how these benefit the farm business, how these can be integrated into farm business, operational planning and decision making.

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	<p>Recent reports by ACIL Allen for AgMin noted that substantive and transformative responses would need to consider consolidation of enterprises, movement to other commodities or markets, movement of enterprises to different climatic locations, diversification and capital investment.</p> <p>Page 15 - Collaboration and building capability – first dot point</p> <p>The objective and actions listed are great examples of the opportunity to include Indigenous knowledge of landscapes, plants and animals, and previous adaptation methods as a form of drought resilience and preparedness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commonwealth could consider whether there is a role for the Fund in supporting these types of actions. • climate <u>and weather</u> data – both are important • Include reference to indigenous knowledge sharing through innovative methods such as ‘traditional knowledge consultants’ akin to an ag consultant that provides paid service, to read landscapes and assist farmers.
<p>Environmental resilience Strategic priority</p>	<p>Food, fibre and fuel production goes hand in hand with managing biodiversity and ecology. It is important that these things are done at the same time using an integrated approach</p>	
<p>Environmental resilience Objectives and actions</p>	<p>Each of the actions listed are integral parts to the plan and form a good base to guide well rounded and successful projects under this program.</p> <p>While enhancing biodiversity supports farm resilience during dry times in many situations, native wildlife conflicts can also present a major challenge (rising kangaroo impacts on</p>	<p>Some additional suggestions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine, promote, and support management practices that Improve natural capital and the natural resource base. • Implement key natural capital improvement projects at a landscape scale to maximise effectiveness and return on investment. • Promote and incentivise the adoption of resource utilisation saving practices and measures, particularly water efficiency measures, fuel use efficiency measures and soil management efficiency measures. • Explore new markets and develop market access for drought resilient crops such as native food and fodder production systems and products. • This section would benefit from a brief mention of ‘abundant native species’ and/or managing wildlife conflicts.

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	<p>pasture/crops being a common example). This is a critical area for government support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In relation to Macropod management, the above point can be rolled into a broader discussion around managing livestock in the context of wild large herbivores (including pests like feral goats, feral deer and feral pigs) through the terminology of “total grazing pressure”
<p>Social Resilience Strategic priority</p>	<p>Adaptation pathways developed through community level planning will ensure that communities and industries in the rangelands are adapting optimally.</p>	
<p>Social Resilience Objectives and actions</p>	<p>Providing communities with the personal skills to plan and prepare for drought will in turn increase the community’s overall social resilience. Within the activities outlined, we must insure that there are components that build individuals’ resilience as well as broader social resilience. Experience has shown that peer to peer teachings and learnings is an excellent way to impart knowledge and skills</p> <p>Natural resource management staff and activities have shown to play an important role in providing opportunities for social engagement, both individually between staff and farmers, and through group capacity building activities like field days and workshops and with industry and agriculture networks. Our social resilience building experience, training, and science shows us that the largest impact is through established groups. It also tells us that the largest impact we have in supporting farmers in tough conditions is when we have established relationships with them.</p> <p><i>Collaboration and building capacity</i> Page 18 first dot point – amend slightly as this would expand the intent to address multiple communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List organisations that are Nation- wide be more tangible and specific, e.g. service clubs (Apex, Rotary, Lions, Zonta etc.), agricultural bureaus / farming systems groups, country shows, sporting clubs. Ensure local communities play a key role in project development and delivery within their local communities. Ensure local knowledge is incorporated into project development, planning and delivery. Ensure projects contribute positively towards community well being and health outcomes It is recommended that this approach is included in the Plan. “Increase communities’ understanding of their drought resilience...”.