



Grower Group Alliance and South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (SW WA Hub) submission to the Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy consultation 2024-28

6 December 2023

Grower Group Alliance (GGA) and the South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (SW WA Hub) offer the following commentary regarding the Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028 (Funding Plan). The SW WA Hub supports the principles of the Funding Plan and offers the following comments.

More information or clarification is required on some aspects of the Funding Plan

It is essential that drought resilience remains the priority of the Future Drought Fund (FDF). Expansion of the overall content to include climate resilience will allow flexibility in engaging with related topics that would otherwise be excluded. There is an opportunity for the Funding Plan to be clear around inclusions and exclusions from the 'broader climatic risks' identified in the Plan. Clarity will ensure that funding is utilised consistently with the program objectives.

The increase in focus on natural capital and transformation is a priority throughout the Funding Plan. The SW WA Hub suggests that while natural capital and environmental outcomes are essential components of drought resilience and preparedness activities, it is essential that programs:

- Are clear and specific in WHAT issue(s) are being addressed, while being scoped appropriately.
- Are sequenced appropriately, as noted in the Productivity Commission report.
- Balance transformational outcomes with the transitional nature of agricultural and regional businesses.

The transition of farmers and farm businesses over time has developed production systems based on several factors, including climate, soil and rainfall, current best practice management, research and technology, and economic or financial situation of the business. Farmers are looking for, and willing to experiment with, ideas and technologies that can complement their current business, with an eye to the future scenarios relevant to them (e.g. climate, market drivers, business structure). Understanding this is essential for the successful extension and adoption of drought or climate resilient practices by farm businesses.

There is huge opportunity to utilise the Hubs to deliver on regional priorities and support additional FDF programs in delivery and collaboration. The SW WA Hub undertook a co-design process in the development of the [situational analyses](#) and [priorities](#) for drought resilience and preparedness activities. During previous FDF grant rounds, the SW WA Hub worked with applicants to develop consortia partnerships, ensuring grant applications would meet regional priorities, delivering on outcomes for the sector, while meeting the grant guidelines.

Future Opportunities

A recent transformational pilot grant round co-ordinated by the SW WA Hub was highly oversubscribed with \$5.9M worth of project applications received, with \$1M funding available. All projects received were relevant, timely and transformational in improving drought resilience in the regional areas. The program could be expanded and administered by the Hubs within existing governance arrangements, using partnerships and consortia members and Hub regional expertise.

There are also opportunities to further utilise the Hubs in program delivery of existing and future FDF programs. There is extension and knowledge sharing expertise within the SW WA Hub that could be utilised to expand the reach of funded projects.



GGA response to discussion questions

Proposed key features – Qu's 1 to 3

Climate resilience and preparedness shift – Qu 1

The scale of climate resilience and preparedness activities must be understood and communicated. The shift from drought preparedness to climate resilience should be applied consistently across all FDF programs. It is important that FDF programs do not duplicate existing programs funded through alternative state or federal programs, like the Natural Heritage Trust.

There needs to be clarity regarding what a more explicit focus on climate change means for the currently funded FDF programs, including the Hubs. Programs would benefit from clearly articulated and understood expectations to ensure outcomes that address government, community, and industry expectations.

Current programs – Qu 2 & 3

The current Adoption Officers program has not been highlighted within the Funding Plan. The SW WA Hub notes that the Adoption Officers program are essential for the future outcomes and extension of drought and climate resilient practices in WA and Australia. The SW WA Hub Adoption Officers continue to address and extend the results of more than 140 projects of the Drought Hubs and other FDF programs.

The SW WA Hub has also delivered significant extension and adoption training to Hub consortia and GGA network partners to improve capacity for the future adoption of FDF program outcomes. This includes six extension and adoption capacity building workshops (176 total registrations from 59 individual participants) with some participants already adopting some of the learnings into their grower group and natural resource management events, extension and practices. There has also been adoption and extension training provided to Murdoch University, Regional Soil Coordinators and Node Leads by the SW WA Hub adoption team.

Place based action & partnerships – Qu's 4 & 5

Place-based approach and Drought Hub program – Qu 4

It is essential that FDF programs continue to drive economic benefits in local settings – utilising place-based actions and partnerships. The Drought Hubs work in a place-based approach and there is opportunity to utilise them in a more 'Hub' like role, communicating and facilitating outcomes from regionally relevant FDF programs. The SW WA Hub has a good connection with its place-based Nodes and supports the strengthening of these partnerships. The SW WA Hub is aware of the regional differences that are displayed in each Node sub-region, and work with the Node representatives in a flexible approach to ensure that local needs are met.

The SW WA Hub supports the actions undertaken by DAFF/FDF in the extension of funds to the Hub program and the DAFF commitment to deliver a statement of expectations for Drought Hubs.

The Productivity Commission has acknowledged it is too early to determine impact from some programs. As programs mature and outcomes from more than 140 projects that have been stood up in the first two and a half years of the FDF are known, it will be possible to identify improvements. GGA and SW WA Hub projects cover a raft of areas including, and not limited to, capacity building, natural resource management and risk management.



Regional Drought Resilience Plan – Qu 5

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program (RDRPP) needs funding, and clear ownership and governance on the implementation of the plans. It is essential that the RDRPP have a State-based/regional implementation plan that has is appropriately resourced and funded.

In WA, Development Commissions are the appropriate groups to implement regional plans. The Commissions have existing expertise and networks for the delivery of regional priorities. There are opportunities where agriculture-relevant priorities have been identified, to work with regional Hubs to incorporate priorities and avoid the development of multiple regional priority lists.

A cooperative State and regional approach is essential for the seamless implementation of the plan outcomes, building social, economic, and environmental resilience, where identified in the community. There is an opportunity for the Hubs to engage as part of a steering committee or implementation plan process, where there are aligned outcomes and priorities for the region.

The SW WA Hub is well placed to deliver strong outcomes through its existing and trusted network of 65 grower groups with 4,000 mainstream farming businesses and 24 associated partners. This network, unparalleled in Australia, has been developed over 20 years and is a major asset to be used for FDF implementation or adoption pathways into the future.

Information, skills and capacity building – Qu's 6-9

Farm Business Resilience Program – Qu 6 & 7

There is opportunity for the SW WA Hub to participate in the co-design or support the delivery of the Farm Business Resilience Program (FBRP).

There is a strong connection between planning for farm business resilience and extension of good business practices. There must be strong collaboration between the Hubs and FBRP to realise mutual benefits. Proven natural resource management (NRM) and transformative aspects can be included in an overall business risk management approach that should be the overriding principle of FBRP. The FBRP is also part of a suite of FDF programs and should remain as part of the overall program.

It is essential that learnings regarding public and private good from previous farm business programs, like the WA Drought Pilot, are considered. While the private benefit of the program to farm businesses is clearly understood, there are significant public benefits to having strong businesses in regional communities.

Agriculture and land management – Qu's 10-11

Natural capital and resource management - Qu 10

The SW WA Hub would suggest this section requires clarity. There are comments in the Funding Plan about embedding natural capital management in investment streams. This requires clarification from the FDF on the reasons why this is under consideration, compared to the current set up with clear NRM based programs.

It is also worth noting that there are state and federally funded programs working on natural resource management systems and activities. It is essential that the FDF program supports the extension of outcomes for drought and climate resilience, while minimising duplication across multiple programs.



First Nations – Qu 11

There are opportunities to develop a First Nations funding round under the FDF programs, allowing Hubs or First Nations organisations flexibility to deliver knowledge and practices on caring for country, the community and the environment. A key requirement would be flexibility in delivery of outcomes to meet local needs, while still meeting broader drought or climate resilience initiatives. It is also essential to understand at depth how First Nations knowledge is applied, as these differences may be nuanced in some activities. An allowance for capital equipment to be purchased as part of First Nations grants is important, and it is important that First Nations focused programs cover social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Innovation & transformation – Qu's 12, 13, 14

FDF funding innovation and extension – Qu 12 & 13

The FDF should continue to deliver programs in innovation and the extension and adoption of practices. Programs need to be broad in scope and clear in objectives to deliver change and outcomes.

In the draft Funding Plan, there are comments regarding prioritising transformational practices and natural resource management. The SW WA Hub suggests that while natural resource management and transformational practices are important opportunities for the FDF to fund in the future, they should not be prioritised over transitional and incremental gains, as well as a balanced approach to social, economic, and environmental outcomes. A shift away from a balance of activities/outcomes has the potential to undermine FDF objectives.

Challenge based innovation - Qu 14

There are significant opportunities in utilising challenge-based innovation. The SW WA Hub has invested in this space in several ways. This includes the development of a challenge-based open innovation business case and implementation plan, the piloting of three small-scale projects, the [transformational projects grants recently released](#) by the SW WA Hub, and the investment in the regional situational analyses and priorities.

The challenge-based innovations should be focused on the delivery of regional-based challenges, based on the priorities of the region. There are huge opportunities for fast-tracking co-design of future challenge-based innovation programs with the SW WA Hub and its network and consortia partners.

Enabling activities – Qu 15

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Enabling activities of FDF could further utilise the expertise of the Hubs program – such as with MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning), Adoption Officers and Knowledge Brokers to further develop the community of practice and maximise efficiency in spend of the FDF program.



Introduction of the SW WA Hub

The Grower Group Alliance (GGA) and the South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (SW WA Hub) was announced in April 2021. In this relatively short period, the GGA has contributed significantly to the effectiveness of Part 3 of the *Future Drought Fund Act 2019* (the Act) through its delivery of successful and collaborative SW WA Hub activities. This has been facilitated through the Hub's leveraging of the GGA's unique grower group network structure and strong governance framework.

During its initial stages, GGA/SW WA Hub resources were directed to onboarding new staff and establishing operating infrastructure. This includes the appointment of Regional Advisory Committees and Regional Node Leads. The GGA/SW WA Hub also applied for FDF funding opportunities including funding for the 'innovation expansion' of the Hub (enabling it to expand its remit to include important areas such as biosecurity); 'combined Hub' projects; Adoption Officers; 'Innovation Broker role' funding (with investment from AgriFutures and the Hub's 'innovation expansion'); and a Regional Soil Coordinator.

The GGA/SW WA Hub assisted multiple stakeholders with their applications to FDF grant rounds including the Drought Resilience Innovation Grants program; Soil and Landscapes grants; the Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices Grants Program; and the Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices. This significantly strengthened applications.

Overview of GGA and Hub structure

The South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (SW WA Hub) works collaboratively to enhance drought resilient practices and accelerate innovation and adoption.

Funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund, the SW WA Hub is utilising and leveraging the power of the GGA grower group network 'hub and spoke' model to facilitate greater innovation from 'the ground up'.

Grower groups are among the Hub's more than 50 consortia partners, which represent all sectors of the WA agricultural supply chain and are providing cash and in-kind co-contributions.

The SW WA Hub is linked to end users, including farmers, through eight Regional Node Leads aligned with Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development office locations.

The Hub is guided by four Regional Advisory Committees which comprise skills-based representatives of agricultural industries for each of four agro-ecological zones covered by the Hub.

A steering committee, comprising two GGA representatives and two industry representatives, oversees the SW WA Hub governance.

More information about the SW WA Hub is available at <https://www.gga.org.au/activity/drought-hub>.