

5 December 2023

Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Via online Submission [Future Drought Fund | Have Your Say - Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry](#)

Dear DAFF,

**Re: Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (CMA) submission to the Drought Resilience Plan 2024-2028 and Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024-2028 consultation**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Drought Resilience Funding Plan and the Future Drought Fund (FDF) Investment Strategy 2024-2028

The FDF provides a rarely seen opportunity for long-term, strategic investment that is adaptive to learnings. The Goulburn Broken CMA and other CMAs across Victoria have a strong interest in the approach and success of this large program given our 25-year history of bringing community, industry and government stakeholders together to ensure we are having the greatest impact on informed investment and decision making for regional, community and individual land manager resilience .

We lead the delivery of place-based approaches through our responsibility for Integrated Catchment Management and provide the central facilitation of many regional forums and partnerships to achieve seamless, whole of system approaches at the ground level. We coordinate regional and local scale partnership agreements, and this year drew commitment from 38 key catchment stakeholders to work together to achieve the agricultural and environmental goals of the catchment. We deliver place-based land management plans that have guided hundreds of millions of dollars of government and private investment from regional to farm scale. Our experienced staff deliver programs that address whole of system, and industry specific, approaches to drought, climate change and agricultural adaptation and resilience.

We have community engagement staff that support and connect community action through the full footprint of Landcare and farming systems groups, to, regional, industry and government initiatives

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We have extensive experience in the delivery of grants programs, including the systems and contractual arrangements that enable accountability, transparency and informed and evidence-based investment decision making, aligned to regional priorities.

In our experience a place-based approach needs to be based on a comprehensive understanding of the entire region including groups and capacity, be reflective of existing regional plans for land, water and community (e.g. Regional Catchment Strategies/NRM Plans, Regional Drought Plans and Land and Water Management Plans) and add value to existing delivery programs in the regions.

The mix of programs in the FDF, as it has been refined, could be effective at addressing the complexity of building agriculture's resilience to drought and adapting to climate change. However, there is significant opportunity for enhanced coordination and collaboration for place-based implementation that achieves the collective outcome for business, landscapes and community. Greater utilisation of the platform of opportunity NRM Regions offer the Future Drought Fund, to link research into the place-based needs would capitalise on the successful regional model for the 'development and extension' components of RD & E.

While the hub and node model that has been established in Victoria has great intent, it has had challenges as a delivery model for place-based collaboration and coordination due to a number of key factors. These include

- Extension experience– the skillsets, experience and established systems for delivery are very different and the time and consistency of effort to build trust and connection with land managers is in many multiples of years
- An over reliance on individual farming systems groups, linked to the research hubs, for full regional knowledge and coverage – resulting in a patchwork of engagement
- FDF initiatives not linked into whole of system approaches across regions, including multiple industry and landscape considerations connecting the challenge at a farm scale.
- FDF approaches not linked to the footprint of existing regional coverage of RD & E activity

We appreciate the challenge of designing new programs to achieve multiple objectives and recognise the commitment of the Future Drought Fund to review and adaptation. There are many great initiatives in the program, and we consider there are opportunities for achieving greater outcomes from the investment.

Please refer to our submission below relating to each of the consultation questions.

Sincerely,



Chris Cumming  
**CEO, Goulburn Broken CMA**



## **Future Drought Fund Draft Plan and Investment Strategy Specific Questions** **Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority**

### **1) Does the draft funding plan provide an appropriate framework to guide spending on drought resilience initiatives?**

**Vision** – the vision could better integrate the FDF themes by reading, for example, ‘An innovative, profitable and sustainable agriculture sector underpinned by the natural environment, rural, regional and remote communities through increasing resilience to the impacts of drought and climate change’.

**Aim** - suggestion for Aim: ‘To build drought and climate resilience of the Australian agriculture sector, landscapes and communities for the public good of all Australians.’

**Strategic objective 1** - To meet the environmental objectives of the Plan – a sustainable natural environment supporting agriculture – and always deliver public good, it is challenging to separate economic resilience as an individual objective, it lends itself to private good, potentially at the expense of environmental resilience, as evidenced by the note that funding may not be equal across the three areas. The triple-bottom line needs to be explicit in all spending decisions.

### **2) Which current FDF programs should be retained?**

We think that the following FDF programs should be retained:

- Regional Drought Resilience Planning
- Climate Services for Agriculture Tool
- Farm Business Resilience Program
- Drought Resilience Innovation Grants
- Drought Resilience Long-Term Trials
- Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices Grants
- Drought Resilience Scholarships

### **3) Which current FDF programs could be integrated with existing programs or built upon to drive efficiency or to maximise impact?**

Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative (HRCPI) could be integrated into Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP).

Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub investment should be split to reflect research and innovation spending, e.g. they could lead the Innovation or Long-term Trials programs, however separate this from the extension. Universities are not best placed to lead extension – this is not their experience or focus.

Extension should focus on enhancing the existing regional collaboration and delivery model including grant funding expertise, supported by a national learning network, e.g. through the Extension and Adoption of Drought Resilience Farming Practices grants program.

A mechanism to share experiences and build on learnings is essential for efficient investment.

Sustainable agriculture work such as drought, soils, adaptation, climate change and resilience should be delivered together regionally to maximise effectiveness. There has been a history of creating too many new, disconnected and siloed bodies that are getting little traction. The basic model needs to reflect the reality of how it works on the ground.

Further to this there could be a role of integration with NHT Climate Smart Agriculture and DCCEEW funding.

**4) How should the Hubs' role be better defined to deliver more impact for their regions? Are the proposed funding options for the Hubs appropriate?**

The proposed funding option for the Hubs are not appropriate. A clear, public statement of expectations is required as it is apparent, as a stakeholder in the Vic Hub, that the model is not as effective as it could be. Extending funding to the Hubs for two years before making this statement clear risks a further delay in achieving the objectives of the FDF.

The role of the Hubs needs to change. Research should sit with universities to create the evidence base for new, innovative, and transformational practices. Universities are excellent at research. They are not set up to engage with other stakeholders and farmers, as has been demonstrated. Placing extension programs with universities has been consistently shown to be ineffective. Running and administering grant projects requires systems and experience in grant delivery and legal arrangements for established contracts which NRM Regions have.

Stakeholder engagement and extension needs to sit with regional networks with demonstrated outcomes. The role of engagement and extension needs to be separated to a consistent national extension platform, utilising NRM regions who then work with key industry and community networks in their regions (where they exist). These networks would include the Hubs/universities in a feedback loop, whereby research priorities are highlighted and developed with end-users. The RDRP could inform the regional stakeholder/model/plan.

Some Farming systems groups are good however there are not enough of them to get the geographical coverage, as was learnt 20 years ago. This is why the NRM regional model was developed. NRM regions work with and empower farming systems and Landcare groups and fill all the gaps where they don't have coverage.

There needs to be investment in consistent and long-term implementation which helps to build drought resilience and increase protection of natural capital (plan, don't panic) rather than one-off grants programs. The ad hoc timing of rounds, inconsistent and lack of feedback to applicants, and lack of clear priorities of grant opportunities, creates a very large resource burden on organisations, and the partners they are co-designing with. This also creates increased competition amongst organisations rather than effective collaboration.

Milestone payments must be linked to performance to comply with the FDF Act, the Commonwealth Procurement Rules, the Federal Finance Relations Act 2009 and the Commonwealth Financial Management Framework and is required to meet the funding principles of the Plan.

**5) What implementation pathways and governance options are the most appropriate ways of actioning regional plans?**

Utilising existing NRM regional bodies such as CMAs (and Regional Catchment Strategies) connected with the breadth of stakeholders, would be an efficient and coordinated approach, reducing competition and siloing.

The governance model should be consistent across the plans. Implementation investment should be directed through the plans. The plans offer a direct, place-based strategy for delivering drought resilience, where and through the mechanisms determined most effective by those communities. All partners have been engaged in the development of the plans – they represent and opportunity to

coordinate and collaborate on regional project development and effective fund investment that overwhelming the majority of feedback has noted is an opportunity to improve.

**6) Should a future iteration of the FBR program be more focussed on specific learning areas or target particular cohorts of farmers (e.g., young farmers, remotely located farmers, smaller landholders and/or those operating on marginal land)?**

FBR should be targeted to deliver specific learning areas in local and regional communities, as determined through the RDRPs and coordinated and consolidated through a national learning and extension network. This needs to focus on a range of farmers depending on the plan and its communities/industries. The aim should be to build resilience to drought learning content and changing management practices, rather than targeting specific users.

Further to this, research findings through FDF programs need to be shared nationally, where relevant, and this content integrated into learning programs such as FBR and long-term trials, to ensure change is being adopted and farmers are exposed to the latest information.

We have no understanding of the National Learning Network – who is in it, how it is rolled out and how it is coordinated with other programs? It needs to be a regional approach integrated with all pillars of the FDF and not siloed.

**7) How should public and private good be balanced in a future iteration of the FBR program? Should the program require farmer co-contributions?**

Ensuring the environment and natural capital are a fundamental component of all programs and grant decisions will help to maintain the public-private good balance of the FDF.

Building agriculture's resilience to and recovery from drought through the FDF supports economic resilience of agriculture-dependent communities and reduces in-drought support spending.

Where productivity, and therefore private gain is explicitly the only outcome, farmer co-contributions to, for example training or grants, should be in place. Equally, when farmers deliver public benefits there should be a contribution by governments based on appropriate cost sharing principles.

**8) Should the FDF provide training on how best to use and interpret information from existing climate tools, including but not limited to 'My Climate View'? If so, who could benefit most from such training?**

Climate literacy is important and should be delivered with support to use the tools. The beneficiaries should be the intended end-users.

There needs to be determination including:

- Whether farmers are using My Climate View and DR SAT, if not, why not?
- Have the tools filled a gap? If they fill the gap, but are not being used, then training is most likely required for their successful adoption and integration into farm and business planning.

**9) Should the long-term goal for Climate Services for Agriculture be providing adaptation information to better support practice change in response to climate projections?**

Yes, the long-term goal for CSA should be providing adaptation information to better support practice change in response to climate projections because provision of reliable information is crucial to better decision making and changes on the ground.

Clearly a multitude of tools exist and without extension or direct support these are adding to the confusion and therefore not being used. Research on more granularity of information sounds excellent but like many things, if we had 80% of farmers using better information that exists then the shift in drought resilience would be significant. Time and cost of effort to achieve the last percentile of accuracy is a challenge too far. The basics of climate scenarios are well described in our area, more hotter and dry periods intermingled with more extreme events. How much of each is the level of accuracy we will never get correct despite the efforts in modelling. Meanwhile we need change supported via actions.

**10) *Should the FDF prioritise natural capital management projects through discrete programs (such as a new Drought Resilience Soils and Landscapes program) or should NRM continue to be embedded throughout most streams of investment? Or both?***

Natural capital management projects/NRM needs to be an embedded outcome in all investment to provide an integrated catchment management approach. To have a sustainable agriculture sector we need to ensure that natural capital is maintained and enhanced through our farming systems. Building our agricultural natural capital contributes to the resilience of the sector. The Goulburn Broken Regional Catchment Strategy is a resilience-based strategy focussing on how we as a collective group of partners can increase the capacity of the catchment to cope with change and evolve positively. The resilience approach recognises the importance of identifying drivers of change and planning how to adapt to the risks and opportunities and involved:

- Increasing buy-in and collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders
- Understanding system components and connections, including community values and sustainability challenges
- Identifying system tipping points and possible future trajectories
- Developing and prioritising actions for change.

Drought resilience soils and Landscapes programs have to sit within the context of current approaches to farm and regional planning and informed land management decision making. There are many existing extension programs supporting farmers to consider soil management and whole farm decision making. FDF funding should utilise existing regional plans, knowledge and extension platforms to value add to what is happening. The silos are duplicating and confusing land managers.

**11) *How can First Nations communities be supported so that their knowledge and practices to care for country can be maintained for the benefit of their communities and land?***

NRM Regions have deep and meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owner organisations bringing Traditional knowledge and cultural practices to regional plans and area specific land management and ensuring co- design and delivery. The Goulburn Broken Regional Catchment Strategy links to Traditional Owners (Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation and Taungurung Land and Waters Council) strategic plans, such as Country Plans and Country Strategies, to:

- build community understanding, respect and support of Traditional Owner knowledge, culture and values
- promote opportunities for traditional ecological knowledge to guide NRM
- strengthen Traditional Owner influence in decision making
- grow Traditional Owner opportunities to deliver NRM
- promote opportunities to develop farm businesses.

We are exploring together concepts for co management of water landscapes and cultural landscapes.

**12) *Should the FDF focus on innovation, or broader extension and adoption of tried and tested practices to enable change at scale in Australia? Or both?***

The FDF needs to focus on both. In the past, innovation has been prioritised for innovations sake, which has not necessarily created effective outcomes. The basics need to be done well as well as uptake of new learning. As conditions and technology change, practices need to change, so innovation is critical to addressing new and emerging challenges.

Only a small per cent of farmers are innovators and so we need to support this innovation while improving broader resilience to drought and climate change, with large scale adoption of tried and tested practices.

Innovation and tried and tested practices aren't necessarily exclusive, different regions have different levels of exposure and adoption of new and best practices. The evidence base of tried and tested practices is required to support adoption of new practices, in some instances these will be better practices than the status quo (see comments under question 9).

**13) *Should transformational change, and partnerships that facilitate it, be prioritised by the FDF? What incentives or programs would best support transformational change?***

The FDF needs a mixture of transformational change and pathways to get there, as well as supporting existing practices that are needed.

Regional strategies and plans have identified agreed transformational change opportunities and we are investing in farming systems and landcare group projects that explore innovation and transformational initiatives.

Alternatively, should the FDF continue to also build incremental change? Change that eventually will lead to transformation and focus on the preconditions (knowledge, skills and support etc) that enable individuals and communities to make transformational changes?

**14) *What Drought Resilience Innovation Challenges could be targeted in the proposed innovation pilot program?***

Drought Resilience Innovation Challenges should be based on existing strategies such as Climate, Regional Catchment Strategies, Regional Drought Resilience Plans and Land and Water Management Plans. This will guide place-based activities targeting climate-smart agriculture and drought-based innovation needs identified through extensive community and partner consultation. There are examples and great successes in each NRM Region.

The Goulburn Broken Regional Catchment Strategy provides excellent guidance for priorities under four themes, Water, Land, Biodiversity and People. This then describes the challenges and key focus areas to support resilience of the catchment as a system. Importantly the framework is there to build a collective agreement and support from all stakeholders, including the community, on priorities, actions and integrated responses. This is well established and supported.

The innovation suggested for the future, that is aside for the well documented challenges and opportunities put forward in the drought resilience plans, is the investment in a 'Land' specific planning that cascades to whole of property planning supported by regional extension and delivery programs with investment coordination including grants for research, innovation, practice change and action at the farm scale. .

Providing the link between the drought resilience plans and action on the ground in the **land management stream** through investing in development of regionally specific land plans in non irrigated areas that actually create the pathway for investment in real and meaningful action aligned to priorities. Land and water management plans exist in irrigated areas and priorities cascade to investment in regional extension programs, targeted regional works and grant programs, best practice extension and individual or bespoke whole farm plans that support decision making considering risk, vulnerabilities, opportunities, industry sustainability and can build in response to net zero and nature positive initiatives.

We can demonstrate the success of the process first hand in the irrigated area with the recently completed report on the recently completed and nationally recognised 30 year Shepparton Irrigation Region Land and Water Management Plan. The Link is here <https://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/downloads/SIRLWMP/30-years-done.pdf> and it documents the collective on ground and strategic efforts of many stakeholders , community and government agencies to support the resilience of the region.

Success of these long-term initiatives is based on their direct link with community and the agencies that are on the ground with an intimate knowledge of the landscape and farming systems if the region, working with farmers and delivering major projects and investment in a strategic way for state and federal government.

**15) What enabling activities are essential to the success of the FDF and should be directly funded to support FDF programs?**

There are a range of enabling activities that are essential to the success of the FDF such as:

- National extension platform (maybe the National Learning Network) for shared learning
- Research into innovative practices and technologies
- Regional direction and implementation of priorities
- Direct extension support to farmers – they must see the value of \$100M p/a investment on their farm and be able to access this value.
- Consistency of effort and an adoption focus rather than seeming new and exciting activities at the expense of all tried and true methods.
- mapping of land and water use across the landscape (completed in the irrigated areas) Link is here [Land and Water Use Mapping - GB CMA - Goulburn Broken CMA](#)
- Mapping water availability and importantly future needs and limitations.
- Regional land planning process as noted under Question 14
- Identifying regional and industry vulnerabilities and risk exposure with these groups
-