

6 December 2023

Department Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)
Future Drought Fund Public Consultation

To Whom It May Concern

FUTURE DROUGHT FUND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Landscape Boards of South Australia (The Boards) include nine independent statutory authorities that exist under the Landscape Act SA 2019 (the Act). Each board has a specified region under the Act and have broadly engaged in a range of activities and projects associated with the advent of the Future Drought Fund (FDF).

To date, the SA Landscape Boards, across a diverse range of regions and to varying degrees have been involved in a range of the initiatives/program streams of the FDF and as such, the Boards welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the next phase of the FDF.

At a high level the SA Landscape Boards are broadly supportive of the proposed features of the next suite of FDF programs, in particular in the area of better integration of programs noting it has been the experience in SA that the FDF has crowded the 'space' somewhat and duplicated the effort of other entities, including the NRM sector, peak industry bodies, RDCs and other government entities.

In terms of the suite of programs the Boards are supportive of having less programs, the 16 foundational programs under the four key areas - Better Planning, Better Climate Information, Better Practices and Better Prepared Communities in the first phase of the FDF is considered unnecessarily complex and a challenge to understand and hence fewer and longer term programs are supported.

Integration of programs funded outside of the FDF Investment Strategy is also considered vitally important with a particular emphasis on the integration of the new DAFF funded Climate Smart Agriculture program that Landscape Boards will be actively involved in the management and delivery of across South Australia. With both of these programs administered by DAFF it is hoped that effective integration and coordination can be facilitated and enabled by DAFF to ensure the complementarity of these investment programs.

The Boards are also very supportive of placed based applied research noting some of the challenges that have existed with the specific role of the drought hubs and regional nodes to date. Some of the complexity with the hubs is that they were created to fill a space that did not fully, or necessarily exist, and as a result, there has been confusion and competition at the service delivery level and the consumer, industry, academic and land manager level. This point also speaks to the importance of the integration point raised above.

The Boards are supportive of the FDF prioritising natural capital management projects through discrete programs but while ensuring they complement other investments in this area e.g. Climate Smart Agriculture.

With respect to First Nations communities all SA Landscape Boards already have well established Aboriginal Partnerships Programs that aim to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in managing landscapes, improve awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture and protect Aboriginal heritage. It is considered that these existing networks and programs can be better utilised through the next phase of the FDF to ensure that local First Nations knowledge, practices, and community connection to the land during drought cycles is incorporated into FDF program delivery.

In the shaping of the next round of funding of the FDF, consideration should be given to the multiple 'hands' funding comes through before it reaches the community, or delivery point of projects and programs. The 'layers' funding goes through when first landing with state agencies only to create a separate bureaucratic process through which funding must be devolved again, works against the notion of subsidiarity and erodes the funding while administrative processes absorb financial resources unnecessarily.

Having the funding land directly with the sector partners, the delivery agents and the community – as close to possible to where the intended practice change, innovation, adaptive management and applied research occurs would be advisable to maximise the resource further and ensure greater transparency with the funding that reaches each state or territory.

Each region in SA has a different level of connection with the FDF at this stage. However, partnerships continue to develop both through the statewide strategic and industry networks, in addition to the hub and nodes.

Continued and improved co-design of programs, services and projects between the Hub and Landscape Boards will eventually improve the integrated delivery, reducing the 'overcrowding' of the space within communities that struggle to recognise the points of difference between the offerings between boards and hubs. It should be easily distinguishable between the core business of the hubs and the boards and resources should be directed accordingly.

Funding for 'partners' through the FDF network can become a bit 'hazy' when those who are involved in the strategic oversight of FDF projects are also often the beneficiaries of the funding. Clearer probity and procurement should be assured to reduce the perceived, or actual conflict where proponents of funding are also responsible for shaping the criteria and resourcing, or directing resourcing within the agencies, or entities who are in receipt of the funding.

The NRM Sector in SA welcomes the continuation of the FDF Grants programs where place based projects can be delivered to support the integrated land management underpinned by Climate Smart Agriculture. Across South Australia, several cutting edge projects have been delivered in the first iteration of the FDF with a range of initiatives newly underway, or being finalised. These include cross-state, cross-regional and cross-sector initiatives that collectively increase capacity of land managers and community and improve resilience of both industry and the environment.

The Landscape Boards are embedded within communities and have long standing relationships to both identify appropriate needs and gaps, in addition to mobilising resources in a timely and prioritised manner. The regional resilience planning has created a valuable pathway for ensuring the appropriate investment and prioritisation continues, with several other plans still to be developed, should this aspect of the FDF be retained in the next tranche of investments.

Notably some of the FRRR funding that has been distributed through the FDF programs have also been labour intensive and resulted in duplicated processes from application to contract execution which would benefit from some fine tuning to reduce financial inefficiencies and a loss of time in seeing the resourcing hitting the ground.

Boards recognise the value of funding that cuts across the social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects of the FDF and where possible in an integrated way, rather than in 'themes', or target areas to maximise the holistic and integrated approach that most land managers and communities have to protecting, managing and sustaining the natural environment alongside nature dependent economies such as agriculture, carbon and other natural capital economies that are looming through the Nature Repair market.

Strong alignment of the FDF to the Nature Positive Plan will see strong alignment with the strategies and investment of Landscape Boards. Boards are committed to seeing the improvement and protection of nature, carbon neutrality, through offsetting and insetting and are well positioned to deliver and facilitate this work through partnerships with hubs and leveraging funding through the streams of grants and funding through the FDF.

Additionally as panellists under NHT, each Landscape Board is poised to develop projects and programs in accordance with the objectives of the FDF Principles and Investment Priorities, and can do so at a particular local, or region depending on identified needs and priorities.

Should the NRM sector be seen as a consistent delivery partner, direct funding could be a means to see more funding hitting the regions in a timely fashion and in a way that maximises existing relationships, networks and strategic priorities that are aligned with the regional priorities identified through the FDF program, while reducing the multiple stages the funding has typically gone through further reducing the on-ground impact or investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation process and assist with shaping the next phase of FDF investments. The SA Landscape Boards remain available to support future planning and review in accordance with the Future Drought Fund and the Act.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Meddle', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Meddle
Chair, General Managers Forum