



December 6, 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Drought Resilience Funding Plan and Consultation Draft: Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024-2028

I am pleased to provide this submission in response to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's call for feedback on the draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024 to 2028 and the consultation draft of the Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028. The National Feral Pig Action Plan 2021-2031 (NFPAP) is a key deliverable from the National Feral Pig Management Coordinator Program funded by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in January 2020 and managed by Australian Pork Limited. The Plan was endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee in October 2021.

The NFPAP aims to reduce the impacts caused by feral pigs to Australia's environmental, agricultural, cultural and social assets through sustained, coordinated and collaborative actions by land managers on a landscape scale, cross tenure basis.

Feral pig management is most effective when conducted on a landscape scale, nil tenure basis by groups of land managers using combinations of the most appropriate best practice management methods at the right time and at the right scale.

How the Future Drought Fund could improve incorporation of invasive pest management, including feral pigs

Discussion question 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?

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

The optimum time to effectively, efficiently and strategically reduce feral animal populations is during periods of drought, when animals are drawn to dwindling permanent water sources and are attracted to free-feed and bait. However, available time, money, resourcing and competing priorities of primary producers, coupled with heightened mental stress, are often in conflict with undertaking invasive pest management activities. This problem needs to be looked at differently, including opportunities to set up a multi-jurisdictional managed fund, using the Australian Plague Locust Commission as an example, that land managers are able to access during times of drought (potentially through co-investment) to bolster on-ground management efforts, and more effectively remove feral pig populations from the landscape.

The control of feral pig populations by agricultural land managers is most often reactive, *ad hoc*, fragmented and short term in nature. This means that feral pig management actions by land managers, on the whole, are completely ineffective in achieving, and then maintaining, significant reductions in feral pig populations over time. Longevity in resourcing and stakeholder involvement in coordinated community-led feral pig management programs is critically needed to empower land managers to work more proactively together, unify efforts of all land managers at a regional level, strengthen programs and importantly, enable significant and lasting benefits to be delivered. There are currently no mechanisms in place to achieve this.

Affected land managers do come together to address feral pig impacts when they feel that they are being supported, including through the provision of financial inputs, group facilitation and/or resourcing. However, there are currently no mechanisms in place to incentivise community-led on-ground management programs so that they can become self-sustained and self-driven. This is sorely needed so that land manager involvement and participation in local management programs can be attained and maintained, as well as motivating them to remain actively involved in community-led activities over the long term. Addressing this gap would go a very long way to

shift feral pig management to being more proactive, prioritised and strategically timed to optimise outcomes (i.e. achieve impact and/or population reduction targets).

Regional coordination to bring communities together and ensure that they are better supported and connected during drought periods to remove feral pig populations (with a view to achieve localised eradication) are needed. However, such studies are exempt from the FDF due to funding principle (3). Not provide in-drought assistance.

This area is another where support from the Future Drought Fund would be greatly welcomed.

Whilst it is complex, difficult and challenging, invasive pest management must be incorporated as part of agricultural production systems to deliver agricultural, environmental and community resilience objectives of the Future Drought Fund. On review of the suite of current projects funded through Future Drought Fund grants, invasive pest management *per se*, including feral pigs, is not being addressed and is therefore a significant gap. In many instances, feral pig management is not prioritised by primary producers, and conducted when they have time or when impacts are being realised (not when the feral pig is at its weakest when resources required for its survival are limited). Feral pig management is largely treated as an 'add-on' by land managers and not included in farm management plans, in contrast to weed management. There is therefore a strong need for invasive pest management to be incorporated and integrated into on-farm management planning for drought resilience. This situation also needs to change if we are truly serious about reducing feral pig impacts across Australia over the long term and opportunities for this to be addressed through the Future Drought Fund must be prioritised.

Innovations in how current feral pig best practice management practices are applied to improve their effectiveness and efficiency are also needed. There is no one size fits all with how best practice feral pig management should be conducted across Australia as every community and landscape is different - i.e. which methods should be used, in what order, by whom and when. Gains from working closely with local communities in co-designed and targeted extension activities to identify what best practice management of feral pigs truly involves in their regions to achieve sustained outcomes in terms of population and/or impact reductions and then implementing these practices remain unrealised.

APL recommendation: That the Future Drought Fund provide a mechanism(s) through which funding for invasive species control can be considered, particularly as it relates to feral pig management.

Increased engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

There is potential for local Indigenous Ranger organisations across Australia, who hold local knowledge of managing Country, to be contracted to deliver integrated best practice pest management services to support primary producers. Whilst it is acknowledged that sources of funding to lever such programs is a key issue, this is not insurmountable. Initiatives to implement funding mechanisms that incentivise all land managers to work in coordinated ways together at a regional scale to undertake control are needed, but remain out of scope for the current Future Drought Fund.

APL recommendation: That the Future Drought Fund provide a mechanism through which the National Feral Pig Management Coordinator program is supported in its work with Indigenous communities.

Please do not hesitate to contact us via the details listed below if you have any questions in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely

