

6 December 2023

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

GPO Box 858

CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via web portal: Future Drought Fund | Have Your Say - Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

To whom it may concern,

Re: Draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024 to 2028 and consultation draft of the Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028

GrainGrowers welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024 to 2028 and consultation draft of the Future Drought Fund (FDF) Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028.

GrainGrowers has participated in multiple forums held by the Department, namely the Rockhampton Drought Forum and other round tables in Canberra. We thank the Department for the level of engagement offered to GrainGrowers as an organisation.

Drought is one of the most difficult challenges facing farm businesses. Drought is felt most at the farm gate, with a ripple effect then impacting business, schools, and communities in which growers live and work. An effective drought policy is one that prepares growers and communities well before the lead up to drought and is tailored to the specific needs of regions, recognising the diversity of farming systems across Australia.

Regarding the draft Funding Plan

The draft Funding Plan provides an adequate framework that is sufficiently broad enough to guide spending on drought resilience initiatives. The final Funding Plan could be further improved by elaborating on the roles of key participants in the plan and the timing of funding.

Place Based partnerships

Place-based action and partnerships (i.e., working with on the ground stakeholders to facilitate regional engagement, collaboration and action that is locally relevant) is supported by GrainGrowers with the proviso that government support should not create market distortions or create inequality with any payments to projects to be thoroughly scrutinized.

Information, Skills, and Capacity Building

In regard to supporting the development, trial, demonstration, extension and adoption of better land management practices to build natural capital, GrainGrowers sees this as of paramount importance in regard to building a deep level of drought resilience that endures climate cycles.

Innovation and Transformation – supporting new ideas to transform the agriculture sector's resilience and preparedness for drought

All growers face uncertainties related to weather patterns and market conditions. The fear of potential negative impacts on yield or income can act as a barrier for adoption of new practices. It is important to have a suite of initiatives that focus on not only on incremental improvements but also on innovation in order to ensure both a combination of 'tried and true' methods and 'innovative' solutions are available to growers before, during and after drought, as to ensure initiatives are adopted over the large spectrum and risk profiles of the grain growing community.

Enabling Activities – supporting knowledge sharing and measuring the impact of the Future Drought Fund

GrainGrowers is supportive of the recommendation that the FDF's monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system be strengthened. An additional high level mechanism for coordinated information sharing between hubs regarding regionally based programs should be developed. This need for coordination is noted in the draft plan.

Performance of the Hubs

It is evident that the Hubs require more structure in relation to overarching high level nationally consistent key performance indications (KPIs) that set tangible targets and measure outcomes in a quantifiable manner, with future funding of any individual Hub activities being contingent on the demonstration of adequate performance and governance against such criteria.

GrainGrowers does however note in the Draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan there is an overarching requirement that arrangements and grants must "ensure planned monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities are robust and in alignment with fund level monitoring, evaluation and learning expectations."

A more explicit focus on climate change within the context of drought resilience

GrainGrowers sees the Future Drought Fund and the Hubs as an important source of information and extension as grain growers manage the nuances of carbon accounting in the next drought cycle. Work performed by the FDF could potentially assist government sectorial plans regarding carbon emissions reductions from arable farmland. For many growers the next drought cycle will be the first time that they may be required to approach and manage drought in a different way due to the possible need to account for carbon during a drought (either due to government policy or market forces).

This should be a further step and consideration in the broader conversation around how the Future Drought Fund may add additional value to the natural capital of Australia's arable land base. GrainGrowers does note it is proposed in the draft Funding Plan that in the next suite of FDF programs a "more explicit focus on climate change within the context of drought resilience, with climate resilience outcomes supported as co-benefits from drought resilience projects". GrainGrowers supports this more explicit focus.

Should we be able to provide further assistance or if there are any enquiries relating to this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me via sean.cole@graingrowers.com.au or on 0435 991 370.

Yours sincerely,

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