

Have Your Say on the consultation draft of the Australian Government Drought Plan

We are inviting stakeholders to provide their feedback on the Australian Government Drought Plan: consultation draft. This feedback will inform the new plan, due to be released in 2024, which will replace the 2019 Australian Government Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan.

What has informed the draft plan

The draft plan has drawn on previous rounds of stakeholder consultation as well as past drought response reviews and inquiries to which stakeholders have provided input. Most recently, this has included panel discussions and policy workshops at the 2023 National Drought Forum.

The centrepiece of our engagement to inform the draft plan has been the <u>review of the 2019</u>
<u>Australian Government Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan</u>. The review, released in May 2023, consulted 108 stakeholders from industry, unions, not-for-profit organisations, conservation groups, all levels of government, and key Australian Government drought support networks.

What we heard and how we responded

The review made 18 recommendations. We accepted all of these and have used them to inform and shape the draft plan. The majority of these recommendations have been addressed in the draft plan. The remaining will be implemented over the life of the final plan or are outside the scope of the plan.

What we have done in the draft plan

We want to ensure that we have provided sufficient and clear detail in response to the more complex recommendations of the review; particularly where this detail has been articulated in a new, and more direct way, than the current plan. To do this, questions 1 to 4 are focused on review recommendations 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13 and 14. A full list of the review's recommendations and how we are responding to them is available at <u>Appendix A</u>.

Australian Government's drought policy

The review highlighted the need for the Australian Government's drought policy to be more clearly explained. The review recommended that the new plan be developed to act as a guiding document for Australian Government drought policy and programs, and better explain what drought policy aims to achieve across the drought cycle (Recommendations 1 and 6).

The draft plan states the Australian Government's drought policy in the *Forward-looking drought* policy chapter. The 4 pillars of the draft plan demonstrate what that policy means in practice.

Question 1: Is the Australian Government's approach to drought across the drought cycle clear in the draft plan?

Drought response and disaster response

The Australian Government's approach to drought policy has evolved to reflect learnings from past responses. This includes drought no longer being classified as a natural disaster. The review recommended the new plan explain the distinction in government policy between drought and disaster response (Recommendation 7).

The draft plan captures the distinction between Australian Government drought and disaster response in the *Forward-looking drought policy* chapter. Despite the different approaches, the draft plan acknowledges that there are opportunities to promote learning across the two subjects. This is covered in the *Links to other government policy* chapter.

Question 2: Is the draft plan clear as to why the Australian Government's drought policy and response is different to that for natural disasters?

Australian Government support across the drought cycle

The review recommended the new plan emphasise the Australian Government's role and activities to promote preparedness, without losing sight of the importance of in-drought support (Recommendation 10). It also recommended closer consideration of the current and potential approach to drought recovery (Recommendation 11).

Greater clarity about how the Australian Government may intervene, how decisions about additional support are made, and what support the government will not provide was also recommended by the review (Recommendations 13 and 14).

The draft plan provides detail about how the Australian Government will prepare, plan and respond to drought in the *Drought response framework* section of *Pillar 1 – Evidence based decision-making*, and in *Pillar 2 – Strategic drought support*. *Pillar 2* also lists what type of support will not be provided.

Question 3: Does *Pillar 1 – Evidence based decision-making* provide greater clarity about when, why, how and what the government will consider when determining its response to drought?

Question 4: Does *Pillar 2 – Strategic drought support* provide greater clarity about how the Australian Government will respond across the drought cycle, including what support it will not provide?

What we will progress over the life of the final plan

The draft plan will not be set and forget. Throughout the life of the final plan, we will continue to progress and refine our drought policy.

Some recommendations from the review cannot be addressed through providing more detail in the draft plan. They require longer consideration and further consultation to understand the complexities and identify best way forward. Other recommendations identified important work that sits outside the scope of the plan. We are progressing this work alongside the plan.

The summary of the review recommendations and how we are responding at <u>Appendix A</u> provides further details.

Work underway includes:

- acknowledging the diverse impacts of drought on a wider range of cohorts (Recommendation 3)
- considering how incident management approaches across government can be applied to drought (Recommendation 16)
- options for how to assess and report on the effectiveness of drought policy as a whole (Recommendation 18).

Question 5: Have you identified any gaps in how we have responded to any of the review recommendations in the draft plan?

Question 6: Do you have any comments on the work underway for us to consider as we progress it?

Help shape the next drought plan

This discussion paper has been designed to facilitate feedback on the draft plan. Consultation is focused on how we have addressed the recommendations of the review, and ensuring our messaging is clear in the final plan.

Consultation is open for 6 weeks and we invite you to Have Your Say.

Out of scope

Matters that are considered out of scope for consultation on the draft plan include:

- the National Drought Agreement, which governs the Australian Government's relationship with states and territories on drought issues
- the Future Drought Fund *Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024 to 2028* that outlines the high-level vision, aim and strategic objectives of the Future Drought Fund
- the Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028 that will provide information about the operation of the Future Drought Fund and proposed priority areas of investment over its 4year funding cycle
- the content of specific drought programs, including their eligibility, delivery arrangements, governance, and monitoring, evaluation and learning arrangements
- the development of, and science behind, the Australian Agricultural Drought Indicators
- related government policies and consultation.

Appendix A: How the Australian Government Drought Plan consultation draft is implementing recommendations from the review

Figure 1 Each recommendation from the review and its associated progress

Recommendation 1

The government publish a new dedicated Drought Plan, to act as a guiding document for drought policy and programs at the Australian Government level.

Recommendation 2

The new plan show how the government is delivering on its commitments under the National Drought Agreement.

Recommendation 3

The new plan acknowledge the diverse impacts of drought on a wider range of cohorts. This includes farmers, regional communities, families, young people, women, community organisations, First Nations peoples, and businesses and workers throughout the agricultural supply chain and across agriculture dependent regions.

Recommendation 4

While acknowledging the impacts of drought are felt widely, the new plan should maintain the current focus on drought's impacts on farmers, farming families and farming communities.

Recommendation 5

The new plan be written in plain English and make use of graphics to help convey information in an engaging way.

Actioned

The new plan will be published in 2024.

Actioned

The draft plan outlines the programs and activities that deliver on the Australian Government's responsibilities under the National Drought Agreement.

Actioned

Throughout the draft plan the diverse impacts of drought on a wide range of cohorts is acknowledged. The range of cohorts is listed in *Pillar 3 - Forward-looking drought policy*.

Underway

Work will continue during the life of the final plan. A focus will be working in partnership with First Nations peoples to determine the opportunities they see for themselves in drought policy and identify an approach for how these can be pursued.

Actioned

In addition to addressing Recommendation 3, the draft plan states its focus on farming businesses and communities in its *Introduction* chapter.

Actioned

The draft plan has been written in plain English. It is an accessible document for all audiences and uses graphics effectively.

Recommendation 6

The new plan state the government's drought policy and explain what it means in practice across the drought cycle.

Recommendation 7

The new plan explain the distinction in government policy between drought and disaster response.

Recommendation 8

The new plan explain, at a high level, links to related policy areas, including but not limited to, climate resilience and adaptation, water, natural resource management and mental health in line with the government's current agenda.

Recommendation 9

The new plan avoid detailed point-in-time descriptions of assistance programs, and instead describe key streams of support at a high level and provide web links to detailed program information held on appropriate government websites such as Recovery Connect, drought.gov.au or agriculture.gov.au.

Recommendation 10

The new plan give greater weight to the government's role and activities to promote preparedness, without losing sight of the importance of in-drought response.

Actioned

The draft plan states the Australian Government's drought policy in the Forward-looking drought policy chapter. The 4 pillars of the draft plan demonstrate what that policy means in practice.

Actioned

The draft plan explains the distinction between drought and disaster response in the Forward-looking drought policy chapter. It also acknowledges there are opportunities to promote learnings across the two subjects in the Links to other government policy chapter.

Actioned

The draft plan explains links to a range of related policy areas in the *Links to other* government policy chapter.

Actioned

The draft plan describes the range of Australian Government support that is available across the drought cycle under Pillar 2 - Strategic drought support. Website links are provided for further detail about the programs and initiatives described.

Actioned

The draft plan outlines how the Australian Government is promoting preparedness as well as its role to respond to drought under Pillar 2 – Strategic drought support.

Recommendation 11

The department assess the government's current and potential approach to drought recovery policy and consider how this could be reflected in the new plan.

Recommendation 12

The new plan recognise the roles and contributions of farmers; industry bodies; the Australian, state, territory and local governments; banking and professional service sectors; charities and not-for-profits. This should draw on the draft shared responsibilities framework previously developed with stakeholders, be non-binding and consistent with the National Drought Agreement.

Recommendation 13

The new plan give greater transparency and clarity about how government may intervene with additional drought support, and how decisions about additional support will be made. Consideration should be given to including a public-facing version of the Drought Decision-Making Framework in the new plan.

Recommendation 14

The new plan describe, at a high level, the key types of additional support the government may provide in the event of a drought, and the types of support the government will not provide.

Actioned

The draft plan outlines the Australian Government's approach to drought recovery under Pillar 2 - Strategic drought support.

Actioned

The broad range of stakeholders that have a role to play across the drought cycle is noted in the Forward-looking drought policy chapter.

The individual and shared responsibilities of these stakeholders is detailed under Pillar 3 – Working together.

Actioned

The draft plan provides detail about what the Australian Government will consider when making decisions about its response under Pillar 1 – Evidence-based decision-making.

Actioned

Under Pillar 2 – Strategic drought support, the draft plan describes what support the Australian Government will provide across the drought cycle. It provides detail about how additional support will be considered and states what type of support will not be provided.

Recommendation 15

The department consider if and how a set of high-level guiding principles for drought support program eligibility can be included in the new plan.

Recommendation 16

The department continue to explore how incident management approaches across government can be applied to drought, and how such arrangements can be explained in the new plan.

Recommendation 17

The new plan include mechanisms on how government and non-government players can improve the sharing of information about drought impacts and responses, taking into account relevant work flowing from the review of the National Drought Agreement.

Recommendation 18

The department explore options for how to assess and report on the effectiveness of drought policy as a whole.

Actioned

The department has developed some highlevel guiding principles for drought support program eligibility. Over the life of the final plan we will consider these to ensure any programs developed in response to drought are as simple and consistent as practical. The principles will not be included in the final plan as this level of detail has been determined as beyond its scope.

Underway

Learning from cross-government approaches to incident management, the department is putting in place arrangements to coordinate whole-of-Australian Government responses to drought. These arrangements will not be included in the final plan as this level of detail has been determined as beyond its scope.

Actioned

The draft plan provides detail about how government and non-government players can share information about drought impacts and responses under *Pillar 3 – Working together*.

Underway

Work to continue throughout the life of the final plan.

Under Pillar 4 – Learning and improving, the draft plan includes high-level detail about the Australian Government's approach to drought policy monitoring, evaluation and learning. This work will continue during the life of the final plan.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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