Review of the Australian Government’s Drought Plan: Summary of what we heard

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry conducted targeted consultation on the review of the Australian Government’s Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan for 6 weeks across August to October 2022. The following pages are a summary of what we heard during that consultation – this summary is not exhaustive, it recounts the main recurring themes and views expressed by stakeholders through the consultation.

# Drought does not just impact farmers

* Processors, feedlots, distilleries, freight companies, tourism
* Workers outside agriculture
* Plan needs to include the wider drought picture e.g. communities, Indigenous Australians
* Shops and retail workers
* Triple bottom line (economic, environmental, social) impacts
* Wider impacts on communities e.g. loss of people and skills
* Drought responses shouldn’t be ‘one size fits all’
* Government must listen to local voices.

# We need to understand how drought links to other policies

* Mental health
* Infrastructure and regional development
* Research, development and extension
* Climate and Natural Resource Management should be priorities
* Government must plan for longer, more frequent and more severe droughts in future
* Natural capital and biodiversity
* Sustainable agriculture
* Farmers are stewards of the land – Plan must include Natural Resource Management
* Water.

# People should be able to pick up plan at any time not just in drought

* Farmers will get their information from other places – write the Plan for industry
* Keep it high level and provide weblinks to further information
* Good to have everything in one place
* People need to know what programs are out there
* Use graphics, not just text
* Plain English.

# Decisions should be transparent

* Transparency gives people something they can depend on and plan around
* Need to know what programs may be rolled out and when
* Government should stick to the Plan, even when things get tough
* Unexpected extra support can throw off farmers’ plans
* When will government step in?
* What are the trigger points for extra support?
* What are the triggers for ending support?

# Drought response needs to be better coordinated

* Responses work better when everyone knows their role
* Bringing people together quickly as droughts evolve is important
* Drought could be managed within existing emergency management frameworks
* Mechanism to feed information back to government
* Involve industry, charities and all levels of government.

# We all have a role in drought

* Want to align the Plan with previous work on Shared Responsibilities
* The current Plan gives the right level of detail on roles but should include more stakeholders
* Knowing our role would help our long-term planning
* Need to be clearer about people’s obligations at different stages of the cycle
* Must avoid confusion about who is delivering what support.

# Stakeholders also said

* It is not clear why drought is not considered a natural disaster
* States, territories and the Commonwealth all define drought differently
* Data needs to be more than just rainfall deficiency
* More work needed to define useful metrics for success
* Hard to measure some benefits of programs
* Need to be clear about eligibility criteria.