



10 July 2023

Commissioner Joanne Chong  
Commissioner Malcolm Roberts  
[future.drought.fund@pc.gov.au](mailto:future.drought.fund@pc.gov.au)

Dear Commissioners,

Farmers for Climate Action thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide feedback to the interim Future Drought Fund report.

### **About Farmers for Climate Action**

Farmers for Climate Action is a movement of farmers, agricultural leaders and rural Australians working to have Australia adopt strong climate policies by growing the number of farmers, farming communities and elected representatives championing ambitious action. We represent 8000 farmers across Australia, and our supporter base includes more than 30,000 Australians committed to climate action for agriculture.

### **More explicit recognition of climate change**

Climate change is bringing a range of challenges to agriculture, of which drought is one. As such, Farmers for Climate Action strongly supports the expansion of the Future Drought Fund to cover the many climate change impacts that impact landholders, including drought.

Farmers for Climate Action has previously advocated for the need for the Future Drought Fund to be expanded to cover climate change and in particular be used to help farmers build resilience to climate change. Drought is just one of the impacts from an increasingly variable climate.

We recommend that the Future Drought Fund be renamed to reflect this broader remit, i.e. to include the word 'climate'.

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Farmers for Climate Action is a movement of farmers, agricultural leaders and rural Australians working to ensure farmers are a key part of the solution to climate change.

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### **Retain investment in social resilience**

As the interim paper notes, *“social resilience is an important objective for building drought-resilient communities. Improving social capital and connectivity can help communities withstand the negative impacts of drought”*.

Farmers for Climate Action stresses the critical role that social resilience and cohesive communities have in communities’ ability to adapt to climate change. While the Future Drought Fund cannot solely enhance social resilience across farming and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, programs funded under the program should always demonstrate how they will leverage or assist to build social resilience. This investment in social resilience will have a legacy beyond project investment.

Investment in social resilience helps to strengthen the social capital of communities called upon in times of challenge by bringing communities together, strengthening networks and personal connections. Further, it builds capability in grassroots organisations, decreases social isolation, and strengthens the mental wellbeing of farming and regional communities.

Investment in social resilience and understanding social resilience is historically neglected. Funding through the Future Drought Fund is critical because funding is otherwise not provided by local or state governments.

A national approach to measure and track community resilience is a necessary piece of work to be undertaken in order to understand why some communities are resilient, while others are not. Farmers for Climate Action understands that some work on quantifying social resilience is being undertaken by the University of Canberra and within the MDBA which could be investigated.

### **Understand and minimise overlap and duplication**

As noted throughout the interim report there are known and likely unknown areas of duplication of investment with other federal and state schemes. There are also clear areas of overlap between Future Drought Fund investments.

The interim report notes that investment in innovation is duplicating the role of Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) and Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs). Farmers for Climate Action would prefer to see the Future Drought Fund invest in research adoption, which is critically underinvested in for climate adaptation.

A gap assessment of the Future Drought Fund and investments should be undertaken when developing the Future Drought Fund strategy. Farmers for Climate Action supports a clear strategy being developed which outlines clear investment guidelines. The current funding principles are not clear, making it hard to assess program suitability under the fund.



The Productivity Commission asked how the Future Drought Fund activities should interact with the National Landcare Program and other natural resource management programs. Farmers for Climate Action would also like to understand how the program interacts with the NRM Regions network and explore duplication and opportunities for better coordination, especially with the drought hubs.

### **Drought hubs**

Greater transparency and a clear outline of the role of the drought hubs is required to adequately assess their necessity.

Farmers for Climate Action receives feedback from our farmers that it is hard to connect with the drought hubs. It is also our experience that there is little transparency and access to the hubs. As noted above, duplication is a concern.

We recommend the scope of drought hubs be broadened to reflect the expanded remit of the Future Drought Fund, and that the performance of the hubs is clearly evaluated and reported on. Based on the outcome of this evaluation, we would support a better integration, or even amalgamation with, existing farmer outreach networks, including NRM Regions.

### **Improving outcomes and access for all landholders**

Farmers for Climate Action is supportive of the recommendation for enhanced outcomes and access to the Future Drought Fund for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As noted above, farmers in our networks have reported repeated difficulty in contacting the hubs. We believe there is an accessibility issue that needs to be addressed to ensure that all landholders can access the benefits of the fund.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this response, please don't hesitate to contact me for further information.

Yours sincerely,

Kitty Walker  
Strategy Director, Farmers for Climate Action