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## **National Landcare Network Submission**

### ***Future Drought Fund Inquiry***

The [National Landcare Network](http://www.nln.org.au) (NLN) appreciates this opportunity from the Productivity Commission to make a submission to the Future Drought Fund Inquiry. The National Landcare Network is the peak representative body for community Landcare groups across Australia. Our vision is for communities acting to improve and sustain healthy productive landscapes. The National Landcare Network [gives a voice for Community Landcare](#) across the country with over 2000 active State and Territory Landcare Organisation members representing 6000 plus individual Landcare groups and over 160,000 Landcarers across Australia.

#### **Summary**

The NLN strongly supports policy that results in significant investment in knowledge sharing and the adoption of innovation, to build the climate resilience of communities, particularly farming communities across Australia. Landcare in Australia is a well-established, trusted approach to land stewardship that has long recognised the value of building the social capital that underpins community resilience. Landcare is known to be a significant determinant on the behavioural norms of agricultural communities. Landcare's core business is building adaptive capacity and resilience that results in better agricultural productivity and profitability, ecosystem services and in turn, the health of communities. There is an opportunity for Landcare groups, networks and State and Territory peak landcare organisations to be directly, and more effectively engaged. If the Landcare network were better supported to collaborate with Drought Hubs, Landcare would no doubt play a more significant role in achieving the outcomes of the Future Drought Fund to which it is so well aligned.

Currently, the understanding and awareness of the work of the Drought Hubs across the Landcare network is patchy at best. No doubt this is partly due to the infancy of the Fund and the Drought Hubs themselves. There is a need for portal to collate and synthesis existing Hubs, programs, and initiatives so that awareness of existing Drought Hub initiatives are more visible to the broader community. The current structure of websites means that regional plans and projects and priorities are hard to find, often buried in websites of node partners.

The release of \$100 million annually is a significant investment and opportunity to drive drought and climate resilience. There is an opportunity to further evolve the program logic of the FDF and the funding plans, with an emphasis on more deeply involving existing community-based networks with a track record in knowledge exchange and driving adoption diffusion from the farm level up, especially those with a long history, deep existing trust and relationships with farmers driving knowledge exchange for practice change, like Landcare. Landcare at all scales looks forward to collaborating more fully with the FDF and Drought Hubs as the program matures to ensure the ambitious and long-term drought and climate resilience outcomes for farmers and communities are achieved.

The remainder of our submission considers the Productivity Commissions terms of reference from the perspective of the Landcare movement's considerable track record and expertise in designing, implementing and monitoring onground projects for drought resilience across agricultural landscapes in Australia over the past forty years.

**Consider the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Funding Plan in guiding progress towards the objective of drought resilience.**

*“the purpose of the Fund is to **enhance the public good by building drought resilience**. This means the benefits generated by the funding must be able to be accessed and/or shared by many (public benefits)”*

- Landcare networks could be better engaged to ensure successful outcomes in foundational programs such as the development and adoption of better practices.
- Landcare networks have existing relationships with farming and regional communities, more can be done by FDF Drought Hubs to co-design with Landcare groups and networks at all scales to better ensure knowledge sharing and long-term outcomes in the adoption of best practice.

**Consider the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the programs, arrangements and grants in delivering against the Funding Plan and objective of drought resilience.**

- Drought Resilience Plans should all be placed on one repository/website so they are easier to find and a public register of plans, and outcomes somewhere.
- Whilst allowing for flexibility and regional contexts there does need to be some synthesis of common themes across the numerous Drought Resilience Plans to facilitate monitoring and evaluation.

**Consider the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of Part 3 of the Act, including its administration through the systems and processes established to develop, deliver, govern, monitor and evaluate programs, arrangements and grants.**

It is hard to gauge effectiveness of the current program from information available on Drought Hub websites, which in themselves are often hard to find. A Drought Hub program information and engagement portal is needed.

**Provide specific and practical advice to inform the development of a new Funding Plan; the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of future programs, arrangements and grants; and the processes and systems to administer the Fund.**

Synthesised website/Drought Hub portal, with Drought Hub information and regional principles to be brought together in one place to allow for awareness raising and improved engagement.

Wider more systematic and effective engagement of Landcare networks through the State and Territory Landcare Organisations.

**Opportunities to enhance proactive collaboration in planning and delivering drought resilience initiatives, including with state and territory governments.**

Building drought resilience needs collective action across catchment or regional scales. Whilst there has been some engagement at node, hub and grant level, there is a significant opportunity for the Community Landcare network to have much wider, systematic engagement at local, regional, state and national scales to ensure outcomes across the following Drought Hub priority areas: information provision and access; farm planning and decision-making to manage climate and operational risks; strategies for soil, livestock, crop, pasture, native vegetation, biodiversity and pest management; adoption of best-practice agriculture and preparation for drought, and enhancing sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience, among others.

Our members have expressed a desire for more effective engagement of the landcare community. Examples of the feedback we have received:

- Despite early approaches to the Drought Hub at the time of its development, the Hub seems to have given a low priority to engaging with landcare and has failed to recognise the opportunities landcare provides in reaching the agricultural community.
- There are some positive examples of engagement with the Landcare network in NSW and Victoria, but the opportunity to coordinate and focus effort has not been pursued.
- Drought Hub have the resources for engagement and Landcare networks need resourcing and support to engage effectively at all scales of the Future Drought Fund program.

**Opportunities to enhance engagement with, and benefits for, First Nations peoples.**

- Funding support for Ranger groups to learn more about the business of Agriculture and developing new agricultural industries run by First Nations People would be innovative and well received.
- In terms of First Nations enhanced engagement, programs need a separate properly funded line to support relationship building and engagement, recognising that this takes time and represents a resourcing issue for organisations and projects if not properly funded. It therefore remains tokenistic.
- The current process of settling the Noongar Land Claim in SW Western Australia provides a future opportunity for the SW Hub in WA to identify and directly support Aboriginal enterprises with new ownership of land to undertake works to enhance drought resilience. Landcare groups in WA could assist in this.

**The merits of longer planning and program timeframes in building resilience.**

- Short-term program funding 12-month funding for activities reduces the capacity for community-based networks like grassroots Landcare to engage with Drought Resilience Hub initiatives.
- Community-based networks like Landcare, need support and resources to be able to engage.
- Investment over time and continuity is required in projects to build resilience, and in fact short term projects achieve the exact opposite perverse outcome, submit that program periods should be 3 - 5 years.

**The merits of broadening the scope of the Fund to support resilience to climate change for the agriculture sector and communities dependent on agriculture.**

Whilst each regional context may be unique, when viewing the regional principles across all Drought Hubs (see Table 1 below), themes across the priorities clearly emerge. These themes are not only relevant to drought resilience, but climate resilience and sustainable agricultural practice in general. These regional priorities clearly align with the long history of knowledge exchange, practice change priorities of Landcare networks.

The NLN supports a broadening of the scope from drought resilience to climate resilience, but only with a revised program logic, including the funding plan, to enable better engagement with existing established community-based Landcare and regional NRM networks. It is neither efficient nor effective to create an entirely separate hub and spoke model without better engaging with the hubs, nodes and networks that already exist in regional communities across Australia.

**Conclusion**

The National Landcare Network, its peak body State and Territory Landcare Organisations and their members have the community connection, social licence and large-scale reach needed to ensure the knowledge exchange and adoption of innovation needed for drought and climate resilience. If better supported to engage across Hubs, the Landcare network would be able to bring the Landcare methodology that focuses on peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchange for practice change, partnerships, ground-up, regionally relevant drought responses, taking the Drought Hub findings/message to the communities through field days and workshops, and then targeted on-farm assistance/advice. Whilst we can continue to engage in an ad hoc, opportunity by opportunity manner through the existing funding plan and grant model this limits the potential for large-scale, widespread and timely adoption that could be facilitated through a designed and programmed program of engagement and collaboration.

Table - Regional Priorities across Drought Hubs

DROUGHT HUB	PRIORITY AREA
Victoria Drought and Innovation Hub <a href="https://vicdroughthub.org.au/resources/stockholder-priority-areas">https://vicdroughthub.org.au/resources/stockholder-priority-areas</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve farm management</li> <li>• Improve information provision and access</li> <li>• Improve business management</li> <li>• Promote indigenous knowledge and culture</li> <li>• Improve advisory services</li> <li>• Improve understanding the severity and impact of drought, especially in the face of climate projections</li> </ul>
South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub <a href="https://www.gga.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20221109_SW-WA-Hub_Priority_Project_Lists.pdf">https://www.gga.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20221109_SW-WA-Hub_Priority_Project_Lists.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural Practices – Livestock</li> <li>• Digital Agriculture</li> <li>• Environmental footprint</li> <li>• Water Management</li> </ul>
Southern NSW Innovation Hub <a href="https://cdn.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/4083097/Hub-priorities-graphic.pdf">https://cdn.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/4083097/Hub-priorities-graphic.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Management</li> <li>• Regional Communities</li> <li>• Planning and Preparedness</li> <li>• Agricultural Practices</li> <li>• Landscape Management</li> </ul>
SA Drought Hub <a href="https://sadroughthub.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SA-Drought-Hub-Priorities-List.pdf">https://sadroughthub.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SA-Drought-Hub-Priorities-List.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm planning and decision making to manage climate and operational risk</li> <li>• Soil and land management strategies, technologies, and innovations</li> <li>• Livestock and fodder management strategies, technologies, and innovations</li> <li>• Crop and pasture management strategies, technologies, and innovations</li> <li>• Native vegetation, biodiversity, pest management strategies, technologies, and innovations</li> <li>• Water security and management strategies, technologies, and innovations</li> <li>• Irrigated agriculture management strategies, technologies, and innovations</li> <li>• Upskilling advisers, researchers, and key influencers</li> </ul>
TASAg Innovation Hub <a href="https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1612618/220812_TAS-HUB-Regional-Priorities.pdf">https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1612618/220812_TAS-HUB-Regional-Priorities.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm Planning and Preparedness</li> <li>• Water</li> <li>• Landscapes</li> <li>• Climate</li> <li>• Communities</li> </ul>
Tropical North Queensland <a href="https://www.tnqdroughthub.com.au/hub-priorities/">https://www.tnqdroughthub.com.au/hub-priorities/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drought and climate change adaptation</li> <li>• Land and soil management</li> <li>• Innovation and technology</li> <li>• Enhancing skills and human capacity</li> <li>• Enhancing Sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Resilience</li> </ul>
Southern QLD and Northern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub <a href="https://www.unisq.edu.au/research/sqnns-w-hub/priorities">https://www.unisq.edu.au/research/sqnns-w-hub/priorities</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data and decision-making</li> <li>• Wellbeing and employability</li> <li>• Environmental commodities</li> <li>• Best practice agriculture and preparing for drought</li> </ul>
NORTHERN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY DROUGHT RESILIENCE ADOPTION AND INNOVATION HUB <a href="https://nwanthub.org.au/index.php/priority-funding-areas/">https://nwanthub.org.au/index.php/priority-funding-areas/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to knowledge</li> <li>• Improve management</li> <li>• Enhance forage production and utilisation</li> <li>• Improve use of water sources</li> <li>• Increase human capacity</li> </ul>