

KEY POINTS INFOR – RESPOND TO THESE THROUGH REPORTA focused Future Drought Fund for a changing climate

The Future Drought Fund can play an important role in assisting the Australian agricultural sector to prepare for the effects of drought and a changing climate.

The Productivity Commission today released an interim report – Review of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act. The report invites further views on the Commission’s initial findings and recommendations on ways to improve the operation and design of the Future Drought Fund (FDF).

“We think the FDF can build on its first four years to deliver on its ambition, with some changes to design and strategy,” said Commissioner Joanne Chong.

While it is too early to fully assess the impact of the first round of fund programs, the report notes long-term improvements are unlikely because the initial suite of FDF programs were stood up quickly, supported short-term initiatives and could have been better integrated with each other.

“The Future Drought Fund aims to build resilience to drought but short-term programs operating in isolation will struggle to deliver this,” said Commissioner Chong.

The Fund is more likely to generate lasting, impactful change through programs that are better integrated and targeted at addressing longer-term challenges.

Re-focusing the fund on long-term resilience also means acknowledging that climate change is worsening adverse weather events.

“The fund should explicitly recognise that drought is one part of the broader challenge to communities and agriculture that climate change represents. We cannot effectively build drought resilience in isolation from the other consequences of a changing climate,” said Commissioner Malcolm Roberts.

The Commission is now seeking further feedback and submissions to inform its final report. You can make a brief comment here, and explain how your FDF project has:

Upper Mooki Landcare Inc

11/7/23

Dear Sir/Madam,

Upper Mooki Landcare Inc Committee appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the Future Drought Fund regarding the development of social capital as part of drought resilience funding in 2022.

Upper Mooki Landcare Inc (UMLC) is a small Landcare group situated in the Upper Mooki Catchment in the south eastern corner of the Liverpool Plains, northwest NSW. We have a strong emphasis on building community strength through education. Over the past 12 years we have provided education, and supported farmers to implement a range of individualised regenerative strategies, which have a positive impact on drought prevention through livestock and land management.

The 2018-19 drought further increased our awareness that traditional land management practices have resulted in a decreasing ability of the landscape to hold water in the soil. This is presenting as an increasing risk to sustainable agriculture and the environment, and a rapid collapse of many farm businesses when affected by drought.

In 2021 Upper Mooki Landcare members, responsible for 13 properties in the Mooki River catchment supported by North West Local Land Services, created an ambitious project to rehydrate the Upper Mooki Catchment, facilitating drought recovery and laying a path for future sustainable landuse. (This project was funded from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and Catchment Action NSW with 1:1 co-funding from individual participants)

We have been recognised by Landcare NSW for our actions, winning a range of awards, the most auspicious being the 2021 Australian Community Media Landcare Community Group Award.

In 2022 UMLC was successful in application for FRRR funding to provide "Regenerative Practices on the Liverpool Plains: Learning & Working Together to Build Drought Resilience" - a series of 3 workshops and a mentoring program. The funding was auspiced by Tamworth Regional Landcare, and program development directly supported by the Regional Agricultural Landcare Facilitator.

Each day focused on different strategies for drought preparation: "Get In Touch" Landscape Rehydration In Practice (12th May 2022); "Keep In Touch" Land Management Strategies (15 June 2022); and Earthworks for Rehydration (12th August). The report to FRRR is attached for specific details.

145 people attended in total, and came from the Mid North Coast, Lower and Upper Hunter Valley, the Liverpool Plains, North West Slopes and Plains, New England, Southern Highlands and Central Slopes regions of NSW. Funding allowed for payment of workshop leaders and catering costs, and also provided for 8 mentors to be paid for their time to work with 8 mentees, all of whom had attended at least one of the workshops. Funding was adequate, and a small unspent amount was refunded to FRRR.

These workshop reports indicated that attendees were interested to maintain contact, and to seek further information on a group basis. The individual mentoring program was very successful, with

a strong benefit identified that the mentoring developed as a two-way process over time. Continuation of this program on a formal funded basis was requested.

There is clear recognition within our group that ongoing preparation for drought brings positive financial and mental health benefits for the individual farming business and the families and employees involved. It was interesting to see this expand, through the range of community members who attended the workshops sharing their experiences, histories and questions in “safe” places, bringing community together and helped us to be better prepared for the next drought.

An additional benefit of the FRRR workshops has been that UMLC has been included in a new community initiative – the Upper Namoi Water In the Landscape Initiative (WILI). This community led group was launched in May 2023, with the agreed intention of the participating organisations to collaborate in projects to support the water and landscape interests of stakeholders in the Upper Namoi catchment. It is anticipated that this community initiative will increase social resilience in our community and the wider region, as education programs are rolled out through funded projects.

Nicola Chirlan

Joint Chair, UMLC