

2 March 2023

Future Drought Fund
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra ACT 2601

Re: Productivity Commission's inquiry into the effectiveness of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019

GrainGrowers welcomes this opportunity to provide input into the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the effectiveness of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund (FDF) Act 2019.

GrainGrowers represents Australian grain farmers with individual grower members across the country. We work to build a more profitable and sustainable grains industry for the benefit of Australian grain farmers, through our focus areas of policy and advocacy, grower engagement, thought leadership and active investment in future focused activities for all growers. Australian growers are at the heart of all that we do and the focus of our work.

GrainGrowers is a member of the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and supports their submission. Regarding the specific questions posed by the Productivity Commission GrainGrowers would also offer the following:

Are the funding principles, vision, aim, strategic priorities, and objectives of the Funding Plan appropriate and effective?

GrainGrowers believes the funding principles, vision, aim, strategic priorities, and objectives of the Funding Plan are broadly appropriate and effective, except for Principle 2.

This principle should be amended to ensure that individual regions can receive specific funding suitable for them. This funding though must still provide a significant and widespread contribution to the public good and growers in a region.

In some circumstances the interpretation and application of this principle is prohibiting valuable industry projects from being funded by the FDF.

An example of how this change to principle 2 could help effect the delivery of programs would be through funding provided to farming systems groups to invest in infrastructure or technology which improves forecast, planning and resilience practices in a particular farming region.

Do the programs, arrangements and grants focus on the right priorities to support drought resilience? If not, what should the programs, arrangements and grants focus on and why?

With the FDF operating in its third year, after an initial 2-year program establishment period, it is crucial that current programs and programs being considered are assessed in a quantitative manner to ensure deliverables are met, or in the case of new projects are rigorously assessed to ensure high probability deliverables will be met. These should provide a sufficient contribution to drought resilience building and broader benefit to the public good.

Regarding specific monitoring, evaluation learning and reporting on programs, arrangements, and grants, GrainGrowers supports recommendations 26-31 of the Review of the National Drought Agreement (the review) conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The recommendations refer to the need for joint co-operation between “jurisdictions to undertake appropriate monitoring and evaluation for all relevant initiatives, and to make the replicable learnings from these public.” The report also states “future efforts should not seek to measure or evaluate the collective impact of drought initiatives”.

While well intentioned, such efforts would prove difficult and costly to undertake and would be unlikely to realise proportionate benefits. The importance of evaluation is key to continuous improvement, but more targeted and effective efforts should be prioritised.

Should the scope of the Fund be broadened to support resilience to climate change? Why or why not?

GrainGrowers supports expanding the funding principles to support resilience to climate change more broadly, on the proviso this expansion is facilitated by additional funding on top of the current allocation. It would be determinantal if current funding was split between several purposes and the value to industry diminished as a result.

Additionally, GrainGrowers supports the essence of recommendations 4,5, 21 and 22 of the review. These define climate change as the presumption of less rainfall in future (rather than an arbitrary measure) along with the inclusion of drought policies covering climate change, water, soils and biodiversity initiatives.

How could the Fund enhance engagement with and benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

GrainGrowers supports recommendations 19 and 20 of the review, which should be considered when consulting and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

Recommendations include acknowledging “First Nations people as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community, and recognise that their social, cultural, environmental and economic interests intersect with drought in Australia” and “include a principle for drought related program and policy development to consider First Nations interests.”

What opportunities are there to enhance collaboration in planning and delivering drought resilience initiatives, including with state and territory governments?

GrainGrowers supports a proactive approach whereby a “specified mechanism for interjurisdictional coordination, and... mechanism should be used to identify and pursue collaborative priorities on an ongoing basis” between federal, state, and local government.

GrainGrowers welcomes and thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide a submission. To discuss the recommendations outlined in this submission, please contact Sean Cole – Advocacy and Rural Affairs Manager.

Yours Sincerely,

General Manager - Policy and Advocacy
GrainGrowers