

7 July 2023

Commissioners
Productivity Commission
Submitted on line

Dear Commissioners

Re: Interim report findings on the Future Drought Fund

Thank you for your interim report on the Future Drought Fund. We are writing to suggest a reconsideration of the sections on the Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP). We have been engaged in a number of them in Queensland and we believe the RDRPs have a multitude of benefits which greatly offset any risks identified.

Achievement and benefits of the RDRPs include:

- Coherent regional focus on what drought means in the region or place.
- Bringing together diverse, cross-sector stakeholders with a focus on drought.
- Taking an evidence-based approach in relation to addressing drought in the region (a more granular approach).
- A regional co-design approach to drought with key regional priorities for action in the short, medium and long term.
- Alignment of the RDR Plans with other supporting regional initiatives for greater impact and outcome.

The RDRP Program Framework requires the project “partner, collaborate and consult widely with relevant regional, community and industry stakeholders, and organisations who undertake relevant planning processes”. The Queensland RDRP project has involved planning at all levels, covering the ‘elements of resilience’. This is a term developed by the project to explain the process of adaptation to transformation to drought resilience – the ‘elements of resilience’ as: people, culture and community; infrastructure and built environment; economy; landscape and natural environment.

The Monitoring Evaluation and Learning consultants (Coutts J&R), interviews from round 1 of RDRPs in Queensland concluded “*external stakeholders were satisfied with their overall engagement. It was felt that there had been ample opportunity and time for regional input and they had the ability to communicate community needs*”. Throughout the project, external stakeholders were interviewed with MEL consultants reporting they were “*generally satisfied with the draft plans, their usefulness, ease of understanding and relevance in terms of potentially contributing to a coordinated response to drought resilience*” concluding “*stakeholders in some regions gained a new understanding of drought related impacts*”.

A number of challenges were addressed by the Commission. However, this does not warrant cessation of the RDRPs as these issues raised can be addressed as follows:

- Integration issues: Ensure that the Drought Fund framework is integrative.
- Consultation fatigue: The RDRPs are owned (via a Memorandum of Understanding) with key regional bodies. As such, the consultation fatigue occurs due to multiple short term funded projects. This can be rectified by addressing how different sub-programs under the FDF are integrated. This action does not require the RDRP project to cease.

- Implementation: The initial RDRP funding did not consider implementation funding. This has been a central shortcoming in the design of the program which can be addressed.

We believe that adequate weight has not been given to the benefits of the RDRPs. Regional planning benefits and coordination outcomes are critical and cannot be undertaken by the Drought Hubs or other FDF programs. It cannot be understated how beneficial this process and the outcome (a regional drought resilience plan) has been for the communities.

We urge for reconsideration of supporting the RDRPs with suggestions for improvements to any perceived shortcomings being addressed via the overall Future Drought Fund design. Suitable governance mechanisms to address drought as part of disaster resilience and provide timely funding for delivery and implementation of the plans are a critical factor for progressing effectively with the implementation stage.

Yours sincerely

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