

12 July 2023

Attn: Commissioners Joanne Chong and Malcolm Roberts

Respondent: James Cook University

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Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Review of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019 Interim Report.

James Cook University (JCU) hosts the Tropical North Queensland Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (TNQ Hub) on behalf of a consortium of stakeholders, key amongst whom are regional natural resource management groups (acting as nodes and delivery partners), Indigenous, local government, industry and community groups.

JCU endorses the submission to this Interim Report by the TNQ Hub. Rather than replicating that submission, we will focus here on additional matters more specific to our role as a regional university in achieving the objectives of the Future Drought Fund (FDF).

Interim recommendation 1. Building resilience to climate change should be explicitly recognised as an objective

JCU strongly endorses this recommendation. A wider climate resilience is a necessity for agriculture and agricultural communities, and resilience initiatives often mitigating across the various manifestations of climate change.

In relation to the associated information requests:

- IR 1. Universities support climate and drought resilience through direct employment and expenditure, the provision of education, research, innovation and knowledge translation services, and by fostering public dialogue and debate. While longer-term investment through the FDF (for Drought Resilience Hubs in particular) will enable JCU and other regional universities to expand their contributions to climate and drought resilience, the FDF is not the only source of funding relevant to our activities. Clarification of which activities ought to be resourced through the FDF should be undertaken in concert with development of a strengthened theory of change and program logic as foreshadowed in the text accompanying Interim recommendation 1 and through consideration of the wider array of Government support mechanisms. As argued in our response to Information request 4 (see below) this will maximise opportunities to leverage other sources of financial support.
- IR 2. Noting existing public expenditure on environmental management and the private benefits that accrue to individuals from ecosystem service provision, we suggest FDF expenditure focus on the development and translation of innovations in natural resource management that both boost business and landscape resilience relative to future climate states and which demonstrate potential to scale.

- IR 3. Social resilience should be addressed in the FDF theory of change and program logic in order to ensure consideration is given through all funding streams to opportunities for positive social benefits or co-benefits. A robust program logic will help to ensure that claims regarding the provision of social benefits/co-benefits are defensible even where disaggregating the role of FDF-funded activities from other drivers of social and economic change is difficult. That said, JCU researchers have made numerous contributions to the conceptualisation and measurement of social resilience.¹
- IR 4. Drought Resilience Hub participants need to be deeply involved in revision of the program theory to ensure roles designated to them within the FDF align with their own missions, priorities and capacities. The greater the alignment of the FDF with participants' own strategic plans and, in the case of universities, accords currently under negotiation with the Commonwealth, the more resources will be leveraged in addition to FDF funding. This will complement an investment plan for the FDF (as foreshadowed on Pages 67-68) by focusing participants on longer-term investment in capacity to address drought and climate resilience.

Interim finding 5. Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Recognition of First Peoples' rights to autonomy and self-determination should be explicitly recognised within the FDF theory of change and program logic. JCU notes extensive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the TNQ Hub, the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the TNQ Hub Steering Committee, and leveraging of TNQ Hub partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to secure additional resources for collaborative planning and research.

In relation to the Information request 8:

- IR 8. The establishment of working groups and dedicated funding streams has been used successfully elsewhere (the Reef Trust Partnership for example) to provide more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. We strongly support the inclusion of a dedicated funding stream in the FDF with flexibility around co-investment requirements. At the same time, however, all FDF programs should be accountable for the provision of opportunities and benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Hubs, in particular, should focus on the development of meaningful partnerships with Indigenous organisations and be held accountable for their efforts through explicit MELS criteria. The involvement of universities in drought resilience hubs opens opportunity for MELS criteria inclusive of culturally appropriate education pathways, research co-design and knowledge translation.

Interim recommendation 5. Improving the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs

JCU strongly supports continuity of the Drought Resilience Hubs and the recommended clarity regarding expectations, performance and monitoring. Leadership of the TNQ Hub has provided an invaluable opportunity for JCU to focus its capacity in research and innovation on matters related to

¹ Dale, A., Vella, K. & Cottrell, A. (2015) Can social resilience inform SA/SIA for adaptive planning for climate change in vulnerable regions? *Journal of Natural Resources Policy Research* 7(1): 93-104, DOI: [10.1080/19390459.2014.963371](https://doi.org/10.1080/19390459.2014.963371).

Dana, K. & Phelps, D. (2019) Looking beyond the D.U.S.T. – building resilient rangeland communities. *The Rangeland Journal* 41: 233-250, DOI: [10.1071/RJ18047](https://doi.org/10.1071/RJ18047).

climate and drought resilience and to build partnerships necessary for improved knowledge translation and commercialisation. Building partnerships to facilitate these changes takes time and short-term funding limits both outcomes and return on investment. Hence, continuity of the Hubs is critical to realisation of their potential and we advocate strongly for longer term investment planning horizons as foreshadowed on Pages 67 and 68 for the FDF as a whole.

Interim finding 10. The role of Drought Resilience Innovation Grants

IR 12. While we agree there is a need for greater clarity regarding the role of Innovation Grants in the FDF, and their relationship with other innovation programs, we note that JCU has co-invested significant resources in innovation through the TNQ Hub. Universities often have a strong innovation agenda but the possibilities for continued co-investment in innovation are challenged by the funding models. We welcome vehicles such as Drought Resilience Hubs as a focus for innovation providing funding that allows for strengthening of regional ecosystems of research, innovation, education and business development, including supporting the role of regional universities in innovation and extension for the benefit of agricultural regions.

Yours sincerely,

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