

Future Drought Fund – Review by the Productivity Commission

The Landscape Boards of South Australia (The Boards) include nine independent statutory authorities that exist under the Landscape Act SA 2019 (the Act). Each board has a specified region under the Act and have broadly engaged in a range of initiatives and projects associated with the advent of the Future Drought Fund. As such, each welcomes the opportunity to provide this collective response to this scheduled enquiry by the Productivity Commission.

The Boards are also members of NRM Regions Australia, and have contributed to a response submitted on behalf of the NRM sector at a national level, in relation to their experience and observations in relation to the Future Drought Fund.

Value of the FDF

Given the role of the NRM Sector, and in this instance the South Australian Landscape Boards is to support communities across social, environmental, cultural and economic aspects of sustainable land management and protection, the principles of the FDF are well aligned with the coal face and community embedded practice that regional boards have undertaken for decades.

The NRM Sector has the unique privilege of being local and therefore a connector between communities, policy makers, industry and the environment and conservation sector, to see local impacts that (broadly) result in environmental management and protection for all land users and industries types dependent on our natural resources. The FDF provides a resource for further support across all of the streams it caters to, recognising that no single focus area of the FDF, is mutually exclusive to the other issues/themes as they apply to supporting future resilience. It makes sense in that regard, that NRM entities based in regions, are well positioned to identify needs and facilitate responses and outcomes that result in resilience of the environment, the economy and the communities. The capability for the local application and success of FDF programs is founded upon local and regional relationships that can assist in the direction of resources to as close as possible to the issues warranting investment and support.

To date, the SA Landscape Boards across a diverse range of regions and at varying degrees have been involved in a range of the initiatives/program streams of the FDF.

Drought Hubs – The intent to this model and the way it has rolled out in SA have not always aligned.

Some of the complexity of the hubs is that they were created to fill a space that doesn't fully or necessarily exist, and as a result, there has been confusion and competition, at the service delivery level and the consumer, industry, academic and land manager level. The model in South Australia was developed in close consultation with stakeholders, yet did not necessarily materialise into something that reflected the inputs and recommendations of the stakeholder groups.

Unfortunately, as it relates to range of successful partnership projects, it is felt in SA that this has crowded the 'space' somewhat and duplicated effort of other entities, including the NRM sector, peak industry bodies, RDCs, government entities.

The administration of the model has resulted in double and triple handling and burdensome administrative processes, tying up people and funding in many layers of bureaucracy, leading to partners needing to carry costs as the promised programs or projects commenced and delays in projects commencing, despite the collaborators having done nearly all of the planning and leg work

to shape local initiatives. This has been a recurring frustration, and notably one felt by those working in the hub.

There are many strong and well-meaning relationships that exist between the hubs and the Boards, given most of the people who work within the hub originated from the NRM sector or similar and have relocated to similar work under a different guise. The end outcomes may be the same in some instances but the time and complexity in achieving them has become somewhat more convoluted.

Potential considerations to improvements may be for future iterations of the model to maximise the capital, relationships, networks, trust and presence in communities that already exists, rather than overlaying them.

Some of the challenges are thought to relate to the competition for funding between academia and the government in overseeing or managing the model, which meant different ideologies and aspirations informed the shaping of the model and this confusion flows to the delivery or 'alignment' with those seeking to benefit from the role or resourcing of the hubs.

Future Drought Fund Grants (across the suite of criteria and themes)

The Boards and many partners have valued and supported and been proponents for the development and delivery of programs in SA that promote best practice land management, applied adoption and research in the field, capacity building, innovative technological discoveries and application resulting in the improved resilience of environment, industry and people/communities. The Boards consider this is a highly valued aspect within the FDF and the range of criteria and focus areas being broad enough that most land managers, communities or key sectors and partners can contribute to enduring impact, or ongoing learning benefit to promote regional resilience beyond the life of any said project.

Resilience Planning – is considered a valuable inclusion to the model, in that it creates a single true source of the issues and opportunities at a local/regional scale, that guides investment and opportunities across the range of streams of investment, both from the FDF and beyond.

Community Resilience Funding (FRRR) – as previously mentioned, given the integrated and holistic nature of natural resource management and the trust that the sector holds in communities, some boards have been approached to apply to deliver projects under this stream – where community wellbeing and resilience and its intrinsic link to healthy environments and livelihoods can be rolled into a program that caters more holistically to a 'resilience' outcome.

Scope of the Fund

Notably, the use of the word "drought" has been so over used in recent years and associated with despair that some will disengage given the broad number of services, funding streams, response and recovery initiatives and continual reference through news media. This has desensitised people as to the underlying issue and opportunity the FDF is seeking to generate – that is looking forward with capability and capacity, not looking back and bracing for the next time.

Considering the fire and flood impacts also brought about by climate change, in the very same way droughts come and go, could there not be a review of the name of the fund/Act to be more broadly associated with *climate resilience*, as opposed to *drought* resilience alone? The confusion that has

created whole industries based upon recovery and response as it applies to drought has saturated the key people who would benefit from participation or engagement with programs from the fund. If this is only to assist in seeing beyond recovery and into future proofing their livelihoods, communities or adapting with the best support and options as the fund intends, it is well worth considering.

The NRM sector is positioned to guide a change in thinking at the appropriate level and reframe the adages that lead to the 'fatigue' associated with the notion of *drought*, to a more optimistic future based on support and strengths based approaches to resilience building. The Boards strongly recommend a review of the name of the fund and a nuancing of its intent accordingly.

In closing, the Boards in South Australia, work with State and local government in the course of their daily business. They are locally situated and have the trust and relationships with local communities to advise upwards based on local need and opportunities at the face of the issues. As such, considering subsidiarity as a way to devolve funding, rather than see many thousands of dollars retained and controlled within agencies at the expense of customised on-ground impacts is a further point for consideration in how this funding is divested.

The sector at a State and National level, strongly support the existence of the fund, and do not take for granted the sizeable impact this long term commitment can have, with smart and timely investment of the resourcing, alongside the appropriate governance as it is dispersed.

The key issues and emerging opportunities include; sustaining how our country can adapt to future climate threats and challenges, as well as slow them down; adapt, innovate and diversify within some of the more marginal agriculture industries to remain sustainable; harness the opportunities and learning alongside emerging natural capital based economies.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review. The SA Landscape Boards remain available to support future planning and review in accordance with the Future Drought Fund and the Act.