

NDA Review Secretariat
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
By email: AMM-WGDROUGHT@awe.gov.au

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Dear Secretariat,

RE: Submission to the National Drought Agreement review

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Government's review of the National Drought Agreement (NDA).

Please note that ALCA is happy for this submission to be published in full.

About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia. Our eleven members are:

- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW
- Bush Heritage Australia
- Greening Australia
- Landcare Australia
- Nature Foundation
- Queensland Trust for Nature
- South Endeavour Trust
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy Australia
- Trust for Nature (Victoria)

ALCA land conservation efforts stretch across over 3 million square kilometres with more than 3,000 landholders. We have over 50,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$200 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance and funding and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Through their active land management, ALCA member organisations are deeply embedded in regional communities and economies, providing jobs, securing significant regional investment, and safeguarding remaining native habitat, with its many positive spillover effects for community, wellbeing and food security. We seek to demonstrate the role and value of private land conservation as a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

Some ALCA members are statutory entities; the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent the views of the Government administering those statutory entities.

Summary

ALCA recognises that the NDA was originally framed in accordance with a policy preference for direct support for farmers and we understand the Agreement's intended focus on supporting farming communities suffering from drought rather than seeking to address every problem that drought can bring.

However, the NDA does not clearly acknowledge or address the fundamentally indivisible role of conserving biodiversity and building environmental resilience in underpinning the long-term viability and sustainability of all agriculture. ALCA's view is, therefore, not to recommend that the NDA be revised to encompass all environmental issues into the ambit of the Agreement, but rather that **the NDA should clearly allow for and encourage active support for environmental management, and environmental programs or activities that directly underpin sustainable agricultural production.** This is especially important at the landscape level.

In practice at a programmatic level, the NDA needs to be fine-tuned to allow support for more effective environmental management of watercourses and water supply (whether above or below ground), the maintenance and improvement of soil quality; efforts to avoid soil erosion; effective invasive species control; environmental support for pollinating animals; and other, similar activities that directly support sustainable agriculture.

Recommendations

The language in the Agreement should reflect the foundational importance of environmental resilience to sustainable agriculture, specifically as follows:

Objective 6.b.

enable farming businesses, farming families and farming communities to manage and prepare for drought, climate change and variability, by supporting their long-term sustainability and resilience, the adoption of robust risk management practices and sound natural resource **and environmental** management.

Attachment A, Principles for reform

8. support will be based on a willingness by farming businesses to prepare for the impacts of increased climate variability, ~~and~~ climate change, **and biodiversity decline.**

10. policies and programs should recognise the importance of maintaining and supporting the **environment and** natural resource base during drought, **and** climate change, **and biodiversity decline.**

Attachment B, Principles and process for in-drought support

8. recognise the importance of maintaining the **environmental and** natural resource base and safeguarding animal welfare.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Government's review of the National Drought Agreement. ALCA looks forward to ongoing engagement with the Government to ensure that the agreement more accurately reflects the diversity of rural land managers – including land managed in part or wholly for conservation, often by farmers – and drives investment and attention to these broader issues.

Australian Land Conservation Alliance