



11 July 2023

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Commissioner Malcolm Roberts  
Future Drought Fund  
Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Lodged online via PC [website](#)

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Dear Commissioners,

FRRR welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the effectiveness of Part 3 of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019: Interim Report 13 June 2023.

Our submission aims to provide the Inquiry with:

1. Summary of key points and recommendations
2. FRRR's response to initial findings and recommendations
3. A summary of FRRR's experience with the Future Drought Fund (FDF) (Appendix A)
4. An overview of FRRR's role and experience building social capital in regional communities in the context of drought, (Appendix A)
5. Effectiveness of FDF grants to date.

We look forward to the Productivity Commission's final report and how this helps to evolve FDF programming with accurate assumptions and strong evidence base of decision making for future investment.

## 1) Summary of key points

- a) Evidence of Year 1 outcomes in the Networks program relating to social capital investment are very promising and provide a strong foundational evidence base for the value of this work, however the timeframes were too short and program stages disjointed across all FDF programs to enable a thorough evidence base to be established at this current juncture. Significant MEL investment is currently underway to strengthen the approach to measuring impact.
- b) Social resilience requires dedicated investment and will not be achieved through 'trickle down' methods such as proposed by the report.
- c) Australian Government has a unique and important role in investing in social resilience to compliment state and local investment, but also to provide a nationally coherent approach.
- d) Measuring resilience is inherently difficult and requires a long-term commitment.
- e) Social resilience should be seen as the critical enabler of other streams and for sustaining effort beyond funding cycles.



## 2) FRRR's Response to initial findings.

### Interim finding 1

The intent of the Future Drought Fund is sound, but it is too early to assess its impact.

#### FRRR Response:

- FRRR's experience is that many communities, especially smaller and less populated ones, have limited capacity to compete for resourcing and experience inequitable investment in their preparedness priorities. Initiatives like the FDF Networks and Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought make considerable inroads to mitigating this inequity and to achieving national level preparedness, and outcome that is in the national interest.
- Evidence of Year 1 outcomes relating to [social capital investment](#) are very promising and provide a strong evidence base for the value of this work. The program timelines have been too limited to further establish the evidence base for this stream of the program.
- The ongoing investment in social capital remains critical given the disparity of investment depth and reach at a local and state level and is not better delivered via other avenues. The Federal Government should play an active role in resourcing both the pre-conditions (specific socially focussed programs), as well the specific activities relating to building social capital.

### Interim Finding 2:

Future Drought Fund design and delivery problems will continue to constrain progress unless addressed. While the suite of Future Drought Fund (FDF) programs will likely improve drought resilience, problems with the design and delivery of the FDF and its programs will continue to constrain progress.

#### FRRR Response:

- When implementing a major national initiative via many national and state delivery partners and levels of government, the sequencing, is best described as challenging and ambitious. FRRR has and remains highly committed to working collaboratively, but this requires sufficient time and resourcing to do so. Reciprocal collaboration and information sharing in a sustained way from other delivery partners also remains varied, particularly from Drought Hubs and Regional Drought Resilience Planning partners. Further time and resourcing will enable this to occur.
- While FRRR remains committed to working in collaboration with the Regional Drought Resilience Planning process, the varied timing, delivery method, funding for activation, thematic focus and geographical reach across each state has proved very challenging to



work alongside in a meaningful way that generates practical outcomes for communities. The co-dependencies designed into the program were well-intentioned however success relied on uninterrupted delivery. Disjointed delivery was in many cases a result of the effects of disruptions such as floods, human resource recruitment and retention, political cycles, to name a few, and was significantly influenced by unrealistic timelines imposed on the programs.

- As recommended in the original submission; FRRR suggest improving information sharing between FDF programs, noting that this has improved in the course of the FDF rollout to date. A key opportunity is to create a regular state by state information sharing mechanism, including clear contact lists of representatives for easy sharing of information, and possible date coordination on a region-by-region basis where possible. A simple version of this is already underway in Tasmania and is effective. However, there must also be continued investment to support such information sharing and collaboration, in order to not further strain organisations delivering outcomes for the Future Drought Fund.

### Interim finding 3

The Funding Plan does not provide clear guidance on planning, strategic sequencing, and prioritisation of programs.

#### FRRR Response:

- Drought preparedness is fundamentally related to a region's social, economic, cultural, and climatic profile and the different forms of local capital it can build and capitalise on in readying for future periods in which human, economic, and environmental assets are depleted. Diversity and flexibility are essential to enabling local systems to adapt and good programming would allow for and encourage this. What might appear as ambiguous may also be creating room for adaptation and for local expertise to guide decisions. What is needed however is clarity on the focus, complementarity, and leverage points that can be created across the different streams and outcome areas in order to maximise the investment.
- While FRRR FDF program design and intent have always been very strategically clear about delivering upon social outcomes, other FDF delivery partners and programs remain ambiguous in regard to their high-level goal of achieving economic, environmental, or social outcomes (disparity even within the one program). It is notable that some Hubs for instance, work to deliver to the 'triple-bottom-line' while others focus on just economic and environmental outcomes which creates confusion for communities at a local level.
- Anecdotally, much focus is placed upon environmental outcomes, less on economic, and even less on social outcomes. Broadly, a balance of investment is critical to achieve the triple bottom line the Fund was designed to deliver. Significant opportunity exists for



greater community level social/economic initiatives that have broad and community wide benefits, particularly in more remote locations.

## Interim recommendation 1

Building resilience to climate change should be more explicitly recognised as an objective.

### Information request 1:

Explicitly recognising climate change resilience as a priority for the Future Drought Fund could increase the types of activities eligible for funding.

#### FRRR Response:

- A broadening of scope regarding climate change resilience activities may include things like heat, and small-scale community water saving infrastructure (e.g.: tanks on local community meeting places) but would need to be clearly articulated to avoid further widening of scope or duplication that could dilute or confuse specific drought outcomes sought by the Fund.
- Making clear linkages between activities and policies being undertaken in the Climate Change portfolio may assist in improving whole of system outcomes and leveraging multiple outcomes from single investments. However retaining a separation between drought and the wider climate change is recommended.
- While the current governance arrangements are considered sound, knowledge sharing could be mandated for delivery partners if resourced accordingly and coordinated by DAFF staff. FRRR would welcome the opportunity to participate in fund-wide communication sharing beyond the annual Science to Practise forum.

### Information request 2

The Commission is seeking views on whether and how the Future Drought Fund can achieve greater environmental and economic resilience through more investment in natural resource management activities.

#### FRRR Response:

- Anecdotally, much focus is placed upon environmental outcomes, far less on economic, and even less on social outcomes. Whilst healthy environments are essential to prosperous agricultural industries (and sustainability overall), the success of maintaining healthy soils and eco-systems that produce quality food and fibre and support thriving communities is dependent on social and economic inputs. More investment in environmental programs will not equate to more resilient communities, industries, or economies. We call for a balanced



approach that recognises the interplay between the enabling conditions for industries, communities, and environments to thrive and be sustained during dry times.

### Information Request 3:

The Commission is seeking views on how the Future Drought Fund can best support social resilience, considering the roles that state, territory and local governments play.

#### FRRR Response:

- FRRR considers the notion of achieving better flow on benefits for social resilience through other programs to be misguided. At best, ancillary social resilience benefits may be realised however the underlying conditions for building social resilience are not inherent to the other program streams. This includes designing for diversity, inclusion, formal and informal communication mechanisms, mental health and wellbeing, and leadership development. Whilst these may be designed-in to other programs, the very nature of the other programs having a focus on either environment or innovation, would likely result in social resilience being a superficial bi-product, and potentially in their core focus being diluted. Currently some Hubs and RDRP's have a limited or ambiguous remit to build social resilience. The triple bottom line remit should be consistent across all streams of investment, to different variances, provided they do not duplicate existing funded activities within the Better Prepared Communities (BPC) stream.
- A significant MEL Framework and Plan with clearly articulated Social Resilience measures is currently being set within BPC stream, so could be transferable across partners as they map back against the overall FDF MEL, and high-level outcomes sought.
- The ongoing investment in social capital remains critical given the disparity of investment depth and reach at a local and state level and is not better delivered via other avenues. Funding disparity of social capital at a state and local level is particularly amplified the more remote or very remote communities are, thus highlighting the federal role to meet this need. The Federal Government should play an active role in resourcing both the pre-conditions (specific socially focussed programs), as well as the specific blended (triple bottom-line) activities relating to building social capital.

### Information Request 4:

The Commission is seeking views on:

- the extent to which the suite of programs, as well as individual program design and program monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans, align with the theory of change and program logic.



- how the program theory, and its use, can be improved to better guide investment, prioritisation, program design and monitoring, evaluation and learning in the next Funding Plan period.

#### FRRR Response:

- The FDF Networks Program was designed against the overall FDF MEL, Theory of Change and Program Logic which was mapped against Year 1 outcomes, and contribution towards 2–4-year outcomes. The final report provided quantitative and qualitative information in relation to this.
- No specific resourcing was provided in Stage 1 budget for MEL (\$375k was the maximum allowed for staffing, comms, travel etc) so MEL was done in-house by FRRR. A program MEL was a foundational document supplied to DAFF before program commenced (mapped against overall FDF MEL) and was always considered important in the overall delivery of the program. All 87 projects completed final reports that articulated outcomes mapped against agreed Year 1 MEL outcomes.
- For Stage 2 (HRCPD) FRRR, in partnership with ARLF are [investing nearly \\$1.3 million](#) in an extensive multiyear MEL Framework, Plan, Theory of Change and Program Logic, that will capture outcomes, and develop a very strong evidence base for the investment in social capital. This is closely aligned with the overall FDF MEL, has been developed in partnership with the DAFF MEL staff, and is being delivered by Nous Group who played a pivotal role in developing other FDF MEL plans. Once fully developed, this may be shared amongst other delivery partners, and may be supplied upon request to PC as evidence of development in this area. The draft Framework is due for completion to FRRR on 14 July 2023.

## Interim recommendation 2

Establishing a drought and climate change resilience knowledge management system.

#### FRRR Response:

- FRRR agree this would be very useful and welcome the opportunity to share community level stories of social resilience.

## Information request 5

The Commission is seeking views on its suggestions for the next Funding Plan.

#### FRRR Response:

- FRRR agrees with the alignment of FDF programs to the NDA, specifically in relation to the NDA review, noting the existing strong alignment of the current FRRR FDF HRCPD program design to:



- Recommendation 3: The next agreement should retain its focus on delivering benefit for farm businesses, farming families and farming communities affected by drought,
- Recommendation 6: The next agreement should continue to promote collaboration and coordination across all phases of the drought cycle (preparedness, response, and recovery),
- Recommendation 7: The next agreement should strengthen its focus on collaboration and coordination,
- Recommendation 10: The project board should consider options for a mechanism to facilitate regular dialogue between the parties and non-party stakeholders, including local governments, industry, the non-profit sector, and the financial sector.
- Recommendation 14: The new agreement should recognise that the economic impacts of drought are felt beyond the farm gate, and that farming communities need to prepare for, respond to, and recover from drought alongside farming businesses,
- Recommendation 15: The new agreement should explicitly recognise that health and wellbeing include mental health, and that a positive approach to mental health needs to be fostered across the drought cycle,
- Recommendation 20: The next agreement should include a principle for drought related program and policy development to consider First Nations interests, and
- Recommendation 25: Government policies and programs should support farming businesses, farming families and farming communities to prepare for drought and climate variability and enhance their long-term sustainability and resilience.
- FRRR agree the objectives and strategic priorities could be further strengthened in relation to asserting the value of building social capital, and strengthening social resilience through dedicated resourcing to communities, not just individuals, particularly in remote, regional, or rural context where the reach of other programs may remain limited.

## Interim Recommendation 3 and 4

No comment is put forward in this regard.

### Monitoring Reporting and Evaluation

## Interim finding 4

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities have not adequately tracked performance.

The development and implementation of a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system was hampered by the quick roll-out of programs, and a lack of dedicated resource capability.



## Information request 6

The Commission has identified challenges with the implementation of Fund and program monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).

### FRRR Response:

- FRRR's overall view is that measuring outcomes and impact requires a long-term commitment of five+ years of continuous evaluation. Programming for 12 months, and then 2-3 years does not create conditions for learning, understanding, and evidencing change and the drivers of that change, beyond input and outputs. Building and delivering multiple streams of evaluation in a short-term and disjointed environment is likely to have influenced any lack of clarity being experienced or observed.
- General Clarity: While the FDF NBDR Program implemented a program level MEL mapped against the whole of FDF MEL and had clear 1 year and 2-4-year outcomes, the general clarity of MEL requirements for, and guidance provided to, program implementers evolved over time given the rapid scale up of programs and their delivery during Stage 1.
- Mechanisms for better integration: The MEL approach and investment in Stage 2; the Better Prepared Communities stream through the FDF HRCPD program, has taken learnings from the FDF FRRR NBDR Program and FDF ARLF DRL Program, and incorporated them into one combined MEL for both Stage 1 and 2. This extensive \$1.3 million investment in the MEL Framework by Nous group is due for completion in mid-July 2023, and will guide data collection and articulation of outcomes and impact through written and multimedia reports throughout 2024 and 2025. The DAFF MEL team have been closely involved in the development of this MEL Plan, and pending approval, can be shared, and form the basis of a framework for use across 'social' focused areas of the FDF.
- Specific, practical changes to improve how MEL is conducted. FRRR would welcome clarity, consistency, and guidance on demographic participation data collection to assist an appropriate depth of data collection with communities, and across all FDF investment streams.

## Information request 7

While there have been challenges with implementing monitoring, evaluation and learning, the Commission is interested in examples of monitoring, evaluation and learning being conducted effectively to track and improve Fund and program performance and outcomes.

### FRRR Response:

- Overall, there are indicators of positive change occurring as a result of the investment however it is too early to report on full outcomes or degrees of attribution vs contribution. We can note however that evaluation practices that generate relevant learning within



communities are of most value. This includes community-based conversations and interviews, network mapping, and methods that build the skills of local people to facilitate and guide evaluations. These processes themselves build social resilience. It is important to note though that fatigue and overwhelm are real factors that need to be supported in order for communities to engage meaningfully in evaluation processes. There are limited people and limited time, and so value-adding processes are vital.

- Longer term monitoring is contingent on funding.
- Program Outcomes: The FDF's NBDR Program was designed in alignment with the overall FDF MEL which was mapped against Year 1 outcomes, and contribution towards 2–4-year outcomes. All 87 FRRR NBDR projects captured quantitative and qualitative outcomes in relation the agreed outcomes sought, and that informed the final overall program report. An example of these project level reports has been provided to Commission staff during the initial consultation. Stage 2 will see data captured by both Nous Group, ARLF and FRRR through a wide variety of mechanisms such as surveys, interviews, most significant change stories, individual and group interviews, and onsite observations.
- Longer term monitoring: No specific financial resourcing was provided in Stage 1 budget for dedicated MEL other than within general FRRR program administration (\$375,000 was the maximum allowed for all program administration including staffing, comms, travel, and reporting). A program MEL was one of eight foundational documents supplied to DAFF before the program commenced by FRRR (mapped against the overall FDF MEL) and was always considered important, but a 'work in progress' in the overall delivery of the program given the short-term nature of the program (18 months) and concurrent launch and delivery of all FDF programs.
- For Stage 2 FRRR, in partnership with ARLF are investing nearly \$1.3 million in an extensive multiyear MEL Framework and plan, Theory of Change and Program Logic, that will capture outcomes, and develop a very strong evidence base for the investment in social capital. This is closely aligned with the overall FDF MEL, has been developed in partnership with the DAFF MEL staff, and is being delivered by Nous Group who played a pivotal role in developing other FDF MEL plans. This will include capturing a second part capture of longer-term outcomes from a selection of stage 1 participants. (ARLF DRL and FRRR NBDR). As this has only been developed recently, it is not possible to provide further insights on outcomes.
- Learning Activities: The Stage 1 iterative program delivery learning was captured through regular reporting to DAFF, delivery partner collaboration, information sharing, and feedback from communities, and then strongly informed aspects of the design and delivery of the Stage 2 program including the longer time frame, building agency in local decision making (use of co-design), depth of investment via region and mechanism, geographic region need, and gaps identified in other FDF program streams at a local level.
- M&E of Social Resilience Outcomes: Once fully developed, [the Stage 2 MEL Approach](#) may be shared amongst other delivery partners and be supplied upon request to PC as evidence



of development in this area. This specific and dedicated resourcing will improve the ability of delivery partners and the FDF to clarify the scope and nature of short- and medium-term outcomes, and capture progress against these domains in a consistent way.

## Interim finding 5

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had limited participation in the Future Drought Fund.

## Information request 8

The Commission is seeking views about its suggested options to improve engagement with, and benefits for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are interested in whether these options should be implemented, and if so, what would be needed to ensure their success in practice.

FRRR Response:

- FRRR is supportive of all recommendations above, particularly providing specific funding and resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-governed organisations, and other relevant organisations to advise on and undertake engagement, and inclusion in decision making and advisory mechanisms.
- During Stage 1, FRRR achieved a First Nations program participation rate of 3.48% (1317 people) notably just over parity with the national population of 3.2% (1 July 2022 abs.gov.au), and broadly considered successful during COVID impacted operating conditions which reduced first nations activity participation given specific health restrictions to many Aboriginal communities. COVID related travel limitations and border closures also reduced the preferred depth and style of community engagement by FRRR which builds awareness and encourages involvement.
- The Stage 2 iteration of the FDF NBDR program guidelines have also mandated the inclusion of First Nations people in co-design and funded project delivery. While 16 of the 35 total regions have been funded to date, this approach has proved very fruitful in increasing the dedicated resourcing to First Nations organisations and projects.
- A notable [First nations Led project](#) delivered in Stage 1 of the FDF NBDR program includes: 'Strengthening Drought Resilience Through Collaborative Aboriginal Networks and Connected Regenerative Farming Hubs' by the Outback Academy. (See Case Study on page 40 of PDF). This project was recently profiled via a dedicated video at the 2023 FDF Science to Practise Forum which FRRR brokered introductions to.



## Interim finding 6

Investing in climate information services is appropriate, but funding two overlapping tools may be unnecessary.

## Information request 9

The Commission is seeking views on the future of both Better Climate Information programs.

- Should the Future Drought Fund continue funding both Climate Services for Agriculture (CSA) and the Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool (DR.SAT)? If so, what information should they provide to whom?
- Should DR.SAT be integrated with CSA? If so, what elements of DR.SAT should be incorporated into the consolidated tool?

### FRRR Response:

While early communication and collaboration from CSA and DR SAT was undertaken, further follow-up was not evident other than basic promotion of further iterations of both tools which FRRR shared to our subscriber base. It is evident that 'social resilience' is differently described to the FDF HRCPD approach and alignment would improve clarity and simplicity for the average community member. For example: Use of FDF HRCPD video case studies may be helpful in providing up to date examples on the DR SAT website (Personal/Social Goals) and help to align language and intent across FDF investment streams.

## Interim finding 7

The Farm Business Resilience program has untapped potential for delivering public benefits.

## Information Request 10

Healthy landscapes support productive farms and contribute to greater drought resilience. The Commission is considering options to enhance the Farm Business Resilience (FBR) program to better support farmers' natural resource management.

### FRRR Response:

To date, FBR delivery partners have undertaken limited communication with FRRR. This is indicative of FRRR's original response recommendation to improve information sharing between FDF programs, noting that while this has gradually improved throughout the course of the FDF rollout to date, there is strong opportunity for improvement, and be led by DAFF.



A key opportunity is to create a regular state by state information sharing mechanism, including clear contact lists of representatives for easy sharing of information, and possible date coordination on a region-by-region basis where possible. A simple locally driven version of this is already underway in Tasmania, and by where FRRR participate, and is effective. However, there must also be continued investment to support such information sharing and collaboration, in order to not further strain organisations delivering outcomes for the Future Drought Fund.

## Interim Findings 8

Regional Drought Resilience Plans could be improved.

## Information request 11

The Commission is seeking views on how the Regional Drought Resilience Planning program can be improved, including through better integration with other Future Drought Fund (FDF) programs, stronger governance, and public reporting.

### FRRR Response:

While FRRR remain supportive of the concept of the RDRP's and have ensured inclusion in FDF HRCPD guidelines, they were implemented at very different timescales, geographic focus areas and thematic intent across state jurisdictions to practically work in a 'joined-up' way in relation to HRCPD delivery timelines. For example:

- Some plans included social outcomes and were clearly articulated, some didn't, and some did but were vague in intent. Some regions have no RDRP's at all.
- Some states did not include financial resourcing to implement the plans, and in some instances resulted in vague or little commitment to specific actions. Where dedicated resourcing was included in the program delivery design, albeit at different depths in each state, the stated outcomes were much clearer.
- In most instances RDRP's were not available for use during HRCPD program delivery co-design processes due to delays in acceptance, and then not able to be utilised in FRRR assessment to ensure alignment, and to avoid known duplication given they were not yet formally adopted or were not in existence at all.
- Some states had very limited geographic coverage in year 1 (6 x LGA's only in NSW), with lengthy timelines for delivery for future stages, and with potential duplication of social related outcomes in 'implementation' resourcing.
- Where adopted RDRP's were in existence, the delivery partners were collaborative, thematic intent was clear, and the implementation resourcing was clear, they were a very useful planning tool to inform community level activation of social focused initiatives (Qld).
- National, state by state coordination of communication between RDRP delivery partners, FRRR and ARLF would be welcome.



## Interim finding 9

There is scope to improve the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs.

### FRRR Response:

- FRRR welcomes an increased level of communication from Hubs to clarify their role, ensure awareness of Hub priorities and activities, and engender collaboration. While FRRR have attended, had regular communication with, and undertaken guest speaking opportunities at various hub events, initiatives or meetings in WA, Victoria and Tasmania, ongoing invitations to further events have been sporadic or inconsistent. Follow up, and ongoing dialogue from 'think tank' events have not occurred and would be useful in ongoing information sharing.
- While FRRR and ARLF presented twice by invitation at gatherings of the Drought Hub Knowledge Broker Networks and welcomed ongoing dialogue, this has not been sustained, and look forward to the reestablishment of this useful information sharing process.
- FRRR welcome the opportunity to align the HRCPPD MEL outcomes with proposed Hubs MEL outcomes and activities to avoid duplication of investment and effort.
- Of note is that many of the Drought Hub Node locations are very valuable delivery partners involved in the HRCPPD program, most connected to the community, and are working in a very effective and 'joined up' way across FDF investment streams.

## Interim recommendation 5

Improving the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs.

Funding for the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs should be extended in the next Funding Plan.

FRRR agree with this recommendation with suggested improvements for clarity on remit and evaluation.

## Interim finding 10

The role of Drought Resilience Innovation Grants.

## Information request 12

The Commission is seeking views on whether the Future Drought Fund should be supporting agriculture innovation and if so, what types of innovation it should fund.

### FRRR Response:

- In some instances, FDF Innovation grants appear to duplicate program elements of FDF HRCPPD program intent (e.g.: leadership and mentoring). Opportunity exists to refine the scope of these Innovation grants to avoid duplication.



- Opportunity also exists to ensure that funded projects have a clearly identified need, demonstrated support by local people and communities, and ideally deliver investment to the communities to where they intend to benefit. Some feedback has occurred from the Burnett region in Queensland in relation to a 'top-down approach' by one project whereby local need for the project was queried by local delivery partners.
- Based on community feedback; one 'Challenge-Oriented' approach for consideration may include inviting singular commodity drought sensitive communities to develop economic diversification initiatives in regional, remote, or very remote locations that involve elements of social enterprise, or a collective business approach that yields broad community benefits, increases employment beyond single commodity local economies, and diversifies employment beyond a singular business or enterprise, particularly for women and other demographic sub-groups that are more often called upon to support household income during time of drought. Many successful models exist in remote and very remote locations that could be leveraged, and learnings shared across communities. Given the HRCPD program had a strong social outcome focus, some proposals relating to concept were not strongly pursued given this was slightly outside of the HRCPD program criteria, but the concept remains a very strong one for both research (role of women leading economic renewal and diversification in regional Australia) and resourcing for activation of actual 'incubator' type collective business models, particularly in remote locations.

## Interim finding 11

There are issues with relevance, overlap and measurement of the Better Prepared Communities (BPC) programs. While social resilience is important, the Future Drought Fund (FDF) may not be best placed to support all community resilience activities.

### FRRR Response:

- FRRR disagrees with the assertion of issues with relevance, overlap and measurement of the Better Prepared Communities programs. See information request 6 that articulates the approach to measuring and defining agreed social resilience outcomes.
- Through more than two decades of supporting remote, rural, and regional communities, FRRR has a clear evidence base for social resilience being a key driver for regions surviving and, in some cases, thriving following prolonged disruption and distress, such as drought. We see the Future Drought Fund as being one of the few national schemes that has the requisite scale, breadth, and depth to enable social resilience to be built in concert and coordination with other levers, which together drive healthy systems and sustainable industries when times get tough.
- Whilst there may be a superficial similarity between the networking and information sharing activities between the social resilience stream and others, there are usually distinct differences in purpose and outcome, which in most cases add value to other streams rather than duplicate or overlap. They are focussed on the connection of people, mental health, and wellbeing as well as general health and wellbeing, sharing of experience and knowledge – generational as well as



technical, breaking down barriers for younger generations and First Nations people, and translating complex information into lay terms in a safe learning environment. Without these conditions, technical innovation and adoption may well be hindered. Improved clarity on strategic intent and timing of program delivery by both Hubs and RDRP's would assist the BPC stream's ability to collaborate and work in a genuine joined up way.

- The HRCPD Initiative is only partially implemented and has been affected by short-term funding cycles and exacerbated by the occurrence of natural disasters and the Pandemic. It would be unfair to make conclusive judgements about the level of integration with other streams. It is important to note that the HRCPD stream was dependent on other streams being progressed, and in many cases, this was not the case.
- A focus on longer-term outcomes would be enabled by a longer-term funding and delivery timeframe; a two year window is insufficient to design for long-term outcomes to be measured and is beyond the capacity of communities who are experiencing the pressures of a short-term program with unreasonably bold ambitions. The extensive [\\$1.3 million MEL Framework](#) and multi-year plan as articulated below, is intended to build a longer-term picture, however, is still a short-term evaluation due to the program constraints. Nonetheless it is a solid framework through which to assess effectiveness, outcomes, and impact of the initiative. A full page overview diagram is provided in Appendix A (final page if submission).

## Information request 13

The Commission is seeking views on the appropriateness of programs delivered under the Better Prepared Communities programs (Networks to Build Drought Resilience, Drought Resilience Leaders, and Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought).

The Commission is considering ways to better target the role of the Future Drought Fund (FDF). The Commission is seeking views on the following three options:

- maintain current arrangements and improve integration with other areas of the Fund.
- explicitly tie community grants to regional drought development plans
- focus the FDF on economic and environmental programs with social capital developed within these programs.

### FRRR Response:

Of the three options proposed, FRRR endorse Option One as a positive way forward.

To invest in economic and environmental outcomes alone is a short-sighted, short-term, and rationalist approach to understanding the elements required to genuinely strengthen individual and community-level resilience to drought.

FRRR strongly encourage the Commission to continue a 'triple-bottom-line approach to the Funding Plan, in line with the agreed strategic priorities and vision of the Funding Plan to recognise the importance of supporting a balance of social, environmental, and economic outcomes. Prioritising



funding towards economic and environmental resilience, and less on its suite of social resilience activities will fail to realise the vision of the Fund, an innovative and profitable farming sector, a sustainable natural environment, and adaptable rural, regional, and remote communities.

While FRRR remain supportive of the purpose of other FDF investment streams, a strong, enduring, and dedicated focus on building social resilience is critical and must not be tied to other programs that target economic and environmental resilience alone.

FRRR wishes to reinforce to the Commission that assessing the lasting value of activities supported by these programs is a valid, reasonable, and feasible objective. Equally, identifying the gaps in existing programs delivered at other levels, which the FDF can fill is feasible and needed to ensure national and tailored approaches are adopted.

FRRR remain highly committed to collaborating with other FDF delivery partners and welcome the time and support required to improve integration with other areas of the Fund where possible. FRRR welcome the leadership of DAFF to broker stronger connections, share information, and cross-check program duplication across delivery partners at a federal level to ensure a clear approach is undertaken to resourcing dedicated social outcomes.

While often silent, assumed, and under-resourced in past droughts, the ongoing Future Drought Fund investment in social outcomes will proactively enable an emphasis on the importance of social connectedness, community networks, deep social bonds, and the practical skills, knowledge and community-wide awareness required to be better prepared for drought into the future. This approach is consistent with and well-understood in other fields including natural disaster recovery and resilience, and as previously found by the Productivity Commission in earlier [2015 report](#).

*“Research suggests that social capital — adherence to social norms, well-developed networks and associated levels of trust — can generate benefits in several ways: • by reducing the costs of conducting day-to-day affairs and of doing business;*

- *by facilitating the spread of knowledge and innovation;*
- *by promoting cooperative and/or socially-minded behaviour in situations where narrow self-interest alone does not generate good outcomes for society;*
- *through individual benefits — people with good access to social capital tend to be more ‘hired, housed, healthy and happy’ than those without; and*
- *through associated social spill-overs, such as lower health and welfare expenditures, and higher tax receipts.*

*Conversely, a lack of social capital may encumber daily life, limit social and economic opportunities, and cause markets to work less efficiently. Low social capital in depressed communities can reinforce existing inequalities.”*

In particular, the investment in the Future Drought Fund’s Networks to Build Drought Resilience Program, Drought Resilience Leaders Program (Stage 1) and, now the ‘joined-up’ approach of Helping



Regional Communities Prepare for Drought (Stage 2) is enabling two critical changes to occur within grassroots communities across Australia.

- o It has provided accessible, locally driven, and tangible opportunities for communities to come together and strengthen networks, build skills, and increase knowledge and awareness, as they proactively focus on conversations of 'future drought' and how their community can be better prepared with solutions that are driven from the 'bottom-up', not 'top-down' across the vast breadth of Australia, often in small and remote locations where other FDF investment may not reach, and
- o Secondly, it will provide a strong evidence base to strengthen the understanding of the importance of investing in social capital at a federal level, in a consistent, broad reaching, sustained and informed manner, when seeking to support communities to adapt to a drying and unpredictable climatic future.

The federal government plays a unique role to effectively resource and support the dedicated building of social capital with genuine equity to remote, rural, and regional Australia.

If left to a small number of investment partners, support for local social resilience will be geographically inconsistent, hard to measure, without coordination or the genuine voice of local communities at the heart of defining local priorities.

## Closing comment

FRRR would once again like to thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide a response to this Inquiry. The Future Drought Fund is a significant initiative for Australia, and for ensuring the continued prosperity of remote, rural, and regional Australia. We appreciate our part in its delivery, and the enormous effort by all others involved, especially the communities across Australia living the actual experience of climate change and droughts.

Should you require additional detail regarding our submission, we would welcome the opportunity for further discussion. Please contact us on 03 5430 2399 or email [ceo@frrr.org.au](mailto:ceo@frrr.org.au).

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Egleton  
Chief Executive Officer



### Source Articles:

1. [Critical Dimensions in Community Disaster Resilience](#) Howard, A., Rawsthorne, M. and Joseph, P. (2022), University of Sydney for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal
2. [The effect of social capital in mitigating drought impacts and improving liveability of Iranian rural households](#). Moslem Savari a, Hamed Eskandari Damaneh b, Hadi Eskandari Damaneh b. 2023
3. [The Influence of Social Capital on Drought-Caused Climate Change: Low-Income Farmer Adaptation](#). Alex Chapman Seattle University 2022
4. [Social Capital](#): Reviewing the concept and its policy implications, Productivity Commission Research Paper 2003
5. [Productivity Commission Report](#) Disaster Funding Arrangements 2015.

## Appendix A:

### 3) FRRR's involvement with the Future Drought Fund

FRRR has been involved in program design and delivery for the Future Drought Fund since making a tender submission in September 2020. This involvement has been as a delivery partner on one of the foundational programs - *Networks to Build Drought Resilience* - \$4.5 million (referenced as Stage 1) and more recently the *Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative* (referenced as Stage 2, and by contract variation), delivering \$19.6M in a joined-up approach with the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, totalling \$23,393,570 (GST excl) of investment from the commencement of the Future Drought Fund in early 2022. FRRR also acted as a consortia partner to ARLF to deliver the Community Extension Grant component of the Drought Resilience Leaders Program.

The Networks to Build Drought Resilience (NBDR) program was designed to build community capacity by strengthening social and community networking, support, engagement, and wellbeing. The program offered three tiers of grants (up to \$20,000; \$20,001-\$50,000; and \$50,001-\$150,000) to not-for-profit organisations totalling \$4.5 million over an 18-month period. Key outputs across four areas of funding are detailed in the infographic and a more comprehensive report this is now [available here](#):

A brief snapshot of the program income, targets and inputs include:



Our continued involvement with the FDF through the HRCPD Initiative is currently underway, having commenced in August 2022. Consisting of five key elements, the initiative is being delivered in a 'joined-up' way with ARLF until end June 2025. The primary investment within the initiative will see approximately \$12.1 million invested into 35 regions at a local level through a co-designed approach to building drought resilience and preparedness, with a primary focus of social drought resilience building capacity and capability, primarily through local not-for-profit organisations.

#### 4) FRRR's experience building social capital in regional communities in the context of drought.

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) is the only national foundation specifically focused on ensuring the social and economic wellbeing of remote, rural, and regional communities.

Established in 2000 with the Australian Government and the Sidney Myer Fund as members, FRRR connects common purposes and funding from government, business, and philanthropy with the genuine local needs of rural people and places. FRRR provides funding and capacity building support at the hyper-local level; aligning funding, big and small, to community-led solutions that build resilience and long-term viability and vitality of smaller remote, rural, and regional communities across Australia.

Since its establishment in 2000, FRRR has delivered in excess of \$155 million to more than 13,000 local projects.

FRRR commends the Australian Government on the recognition of the importance of social capital within the Future Drought Fund Funding Plan. One of three of the Fund's objectives was to "enhance the public good by building drought resilience through programs that will strengthen the wellbeing and social capital of rural, regional and remote communities."



Over its 23 years of operation; FRRR has built a strong evidence base of effectively supporting remote, rural, and regional communities to build social capital. Across all FRRR programs, the vast depth of investment focuses on the change that is created when funding volunteers and locally based not-for-profit organisations who provide vital support across the social fabric of communities. This includes:

- Of the \$19.8 million FRRR distributed during 2021/2022, \$14.5 million (73%) related to building organisational capacity, developing awareness, skills, and knowledge, or providing access to services or activities. The remaining \$5.2 million related to the indirect, but equally critical, investment in infrastructure and equipment.
- Additionally, FRRR has invested \$26 million over the past three years, in activities relating to the building of community level resilience, and developing organisational resilience and capacity, representing 52% of all FRRR investment.
- In relation to broader climate related impacts and disruptions, FRRR's track record of supporting communities to build resilience has seen us distribute more than \$58 million to communities specifically for disaster recovery and preparedness. During 2021-2022 alone, FRRR supported 475 grants (62% of all grants) in recovery and preparedness (including drought).

In the specific context of drought, FRRR has always supported communities to manage the impacts of, and increasingly, enhance preparedness for drought. This has occurred through a wide variety of multi-year programs with three specific mechanisms building social capital:

- 1) FRRR's 'in-drought support' program, Tackling Tough Times Together, supported 430 projects across Australia investing \$13,950,000 in philanthropic and federal funds while leveraging an additional \$17,000,000 from other donors and community level investment, since 2014. Focus areas indicate a significant weighting (approximate average of 48% of all grants) of communities seeking support for projects that aimed to build the capacity, capability, and sustainability of local not-for profit organisations to provide support to their communities, particularly where they are playing an increased role during the drought; or support to engage the community in leadership development and skills training. While this program is yet to be formally evaluated (due to commence in September 2023), the locally driven requests, final project reports to date and anecdotal evidence gathered so far from communities indicates a very strong need for and importance of long-term investment in social capital to offset the impacts and challenges that drought presents in communities.
- 2) With the eventual abatement of drought across most parts of Australia during 2020, FRRR welcomed the Government's policy shift to drought preparedness, and in early 2021, were pleased to successfully tender to deliver the Future Drought Fund's Networks to Build Drought Resilience (FDF's NBDR) program (referenced as Stage 1). This program has recently finished, resulting in the support of 87 projects and \$3,160,545 in Government investment in communities that leveraged a further 55% investment of cash and in-kind investment in social



capital.

Through that program, a total of 791 activities engaged 37,841 people across regional Australia, of which 97% of participants were involved in capacity building, training or events relating to strengthening social capital. As a result of the funded activities, an average of 89% of participants rated they were satisfied, very, or extremely satisfied their networks had grown as a result of the activities, with connections ranging from 1 to 6 different sectors engaged per project.

Data indicators in the program's Measurement, Evaluation and Learnings (MEL) framework indicate a strong achievement of Year 1 outcomes relating to the building of social capital and include 43% of projects reporting a marked increase in network participation (as one of several outcomes sought) ranging from double to triple, quadrupled, or all new.

61% of funded activities involved intergenerational interaction, 34% involved people with a diverse cultural background, and 32% of activities involved First Nations people, indicating a high community appetite for social connection and network strengthening — an FDF MEL Program Logic and Data Indicator of success ('The number of, and participation in, local networks and programs to enhance drought resilience increases; Increased diversity of event network participation').

A rich evidence base has emerged through data and anecdotal feedback in final project reports that reiterate the importance of the investment in social capital building activities. In relation to the Year 2-4 FDF NBDR MEL Program Logic Outcome sought in relation to training ('Communities learn from and share innovative ways to build drought resilience'), a key project outcome is evidenced by one participant reporting:

*"It was crucial to begin workshops by breaking down walls and uniting the group to understand they are all in this together and their experiences are not singular. This vulnerability was an attitude shift that proved significantly influential in describing the role social connectedness plays in drought resilience".*

The Agricultural Collective Ltd, WA, Opportunity 1, Tier 2; FDF NBDR Program

- 3) Through the **FDF's Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought (FDF 's HRCPD) Initiative, referenced as Stage 2**, and the nearly \$30 million investment to June 2025, FRRR has commenced ongoing social capital building and drought preparedness via a locally driven program design process in 35 regions. The aims of the program are to strengthen and improve the ability of agriculture-dependent communities to adapt, reorganise or transform in response to changing temperature, increasing variability and scarcity of rainfall, and changing seasons, for improved economic, environmental, and social wellbeing.

It will do this by investing in projects that seek to strengthen social and community networking, support, engagement, and wellbeing. There are five parts to the program, including grants, activities to strengthen leadership, access to expertise to support community-led activities,



mentoring support, and networking opportunities. It is being delivered by FRRR and the [Australian Rural Leadership Foundation \(ARLF\)](#) through a joined-up approach, and each of whom are each taking the lead on different program components.

A significant investment has been made in the evaluation of the program, and the effectiveness of the investment mechanism that will provide further evidence of the benefits of social capital investment, with the interim report due in August 2024, and final report due in August 2025. The FDF staff and MEL team have played an active role in the procurement, content, and alignment of the updated MEL for the Stronger Communities stream of FDF investment. The MEL will result in multiple written reports, and other multimedia product that are co-designed by both DAFF, FRRR and ARLF staff, as well the communities themselves whereby they are able to articulate the measures by which social drought resilience is built at a local level, that will align with high level FDF outcomes.

To date, 16 of 35 regions have been activated, with 89 projects funded across all states of Australia. The remaining balance will be delivered by end November 2023, with an estimated investment of \$12.1 million delivered via approximately 170 projects.

Additionally, Small Networks Grants are also estimated to deliver a further 60 projects (\$1.2 million investment) to build socially focussed drought preparedness activities throughout the first half of 2024.

The recent FDF progress at a community level, and ongoing feedback from communities across the vast expanse of Australia, continues to strengthen the evidence base to assert the need for sustained and locally determined investment in people and grassroots, not-for-profit organisations to meet the future challenges of a changing and less predictable climate, overlaid disasters, and other disruptions.

[Recent research](#) from the University of Western Australia (UWA), and the Centre for Social Impact *Understanding the social impact of drought* (June 2022) points to aligned recommendations such as the importance of infrastructure, good governance, population retention, increased support service networks, strengthened community social networks and social capital, effective responses to supporting mental health, and alignment of resilience frameworks with the noted importance of locally defined data indicators.



A strong synergy exists between the evidence base gleaned from TTTT and FDF's NBDR program outcomes, and this simple diagram on page 8 of the UWA report 'What can be done' to build drought social drought resilience:

- Social Capacity.
- Community Capacity.
- Information and Communications; and to a lesser extent,
- Economic development.



The international evidence supporting the benefits of specific investment in social capital in the context of drought also continues to grow in [Iran, Africa, China, Indonesia, and Bangladesh](#).

Notably, and as identified in previous [Product Commission Investigations](#) relating to the value of social capital, the report (page 66) highlights the views of The Saguaro Group — a US think tank of policy makers and academics convened by Robert Putnam which argues:

*'It is becoming increasingly clear that social capital has an enormous array of practical benefits to individuals and to communities. What is more, social capital has what economists call 'positive externalities. That is, networks of trust and reciprocity not only benefit those within them, but also those outside them. Consequently, when social capital is depleted, people suffer in clear and measurable ways, and there is a ripple effect beyond a scattering of lonely individuals. Shoring up our stocks of social capital, therefore, represents one of the most promising approaches for remedying all sorts of social ills. (Saguaro 2000, 4)*

Cox (1995) (Page 89) also asserts "that government could play an important role in creating social capital directly, or in fostering an environment in which it can grow."

FRRR also actively work to strengthen the evidence base of social outcomes and impact. Apart from anecdotal written feedback from approximately 1000 grant recipients per year, FRRR's long term involvement with, and work alongside, disaster impacted communities has also led to the development of the [Critical Dimensions for Community-Led Resilience Building, led by the University of Sydney and supported by multiple literature reviews that provide an evidence base](#) that offer check in points over time and across different aspects of community life (environment, cultural, social and economic) for anyone interested in effectively working on local resilience building.



*“Communities are vital to finding local solutions to local issues. When communities lead and drive resilience building efforts (whether it is focused on natural disasters such as cyclones, bushfires, floods, or storms or community shocks including major services or industry leaving town, accidents, or conflict) these efforts are sustained for longer, have ongoing positive impacts across the community and build local strengths which can adapt to a range of challenges.*

*“There is an increasing focus across communities in Australia and the world on building disaster resilience which will become more urgent as climate change impacts become more widespread. A strong body of research evidence as well as extensive community knowledge on the ground demonstrates that local community-led disaster resilience building enhances more general resilience building and vice versa. We also know from research that resilience building is a dynamic process, not a static state. In other words, resilience is not a goal for communities to achieve, but rather a community’s resilience might develop in a bumpy, messy way, with setbacks and challenges as well as times of thriving.”<sup>1</sup>*

Critical Dimensions for consideration include strengthening Inclusion, Networks, Communication, Information, Self-organising systems, Decision-making, and Resources, tools, and support.

FRRR strongly endorses the importance and continuation of investment relating to social capital building across communities, strengthening the social networks ahead of disruption, and recommends that a significant focus remains on building social capital in future programs, arrangements and grants made through the FDF.

## 5) The effectiveness of grants made to communities through FDF.

FRRR believes that the FDF has worked well to deliver on-ground benefits for communities and that, to date, the programs FRRR has been involved with, have led to increased social resilience, and strengthened the wellbeing of remote, rural, and regional communities. The foundational years of delivery have been rich with learnings both as a delivery partner, and for communities themselves as they philosophically move from the experience of in-drought support to a forward thinking / resilience building approach for the future.

### Community outcomes from the Networks to Build Drought Resilience program.

While the *Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative* is in the early delivery stages, recently appointing an evaluation partner, the Stage 1 work is now completed with clear evidence of short-term outcomes and impact demonstrated.

Since the initial PC submission, the [Final Program report](#) has now been published.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard, A., Rawsthorne, M. and Joseph, P. (2022) Critical Dimensions in Community Disaster Resilience [Fact Sheet], University of Sydney for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal



The overall program report, all 87 final project reports, and 12 case studies articulated 'outcomes' in alignment with both 1 year, and progress towards 2–4-year social outcomes of the DAFF approved program level MEL. This has created a very strong outcomes focussed evidence base so far, noting the constrained 18-month program delivery timing.

Four video case studies, and eight written case studies can be found at page 34-42 of the PDF which practically provide the lived experience for participants.

Page 25-32 of the PDF articulates in detail the social capital outcomes of the program, with examples mapped against program opportunity type and outcomes, derived from the agreed program level MEL, which contributes upwards to the overall FDF MEL creating a strong and consistent evidence base of outcomes for the intended social outcomes of the program.

**In brief, Program Outcomes included:**

### **Network Capacity, Capability or Coordination**

These projects were designed to strengthen the capacity, capability, and coordination of professional, social or community networks in agriculture-dependent communities to build drought resilience. They resulted in:

- Increased social connection in local networks.
- Increased community engagement, a shared sense of purpose and community belonging.
- Increased access, participation, and diversity in network participation; and/or
- Improved coordination and collaboration between social networks, other community organisations and sectors in local communities.

### **Events**

These projects were designed to provide events that facilitated professional, social and community connection and build understanding of risks posed by drought and climate change in agriculture-dependent communities throughout Australia. They resulted in:

- Increased opportunities for diverse people and communities to participate in networking events such as field days, conferences, forums, summits, and seminars.
- Building knowledge and understanding of the risks posed by drought and climate change.
- Contributing to building a positive community culture and providing people and communities with an opportunity to work collaboratively to solve problems.
- Fostering higher rates of innovation in the local economy and agricultural sector; and/or
- Improved regional branding and recognition of local agri-food systems.



## Training

These projects were designed to provide training opportunities to improve the skills understanding and capacity of community network members to participate in community risk management, planning and community driven projects that build drought Resilience. They resulted in:

- Increased access to information and training to build drought resilience in their communities.
- Building knowledge and understanding of the risks posed by drought and climate change; and/or
- An increase in the role and profile of professional, social and community

## Infrastructure

These projects provided small-scale community infrastructure activities to foster connectedness, improve wellbeing and make community facilities resilient to the impacts of drought. They resulted in:

- New and improved existing meeting places so they can be used year-round to support community wellbeing, improve connectivity, increase knowledge sharing; and/or
- Increased access to, broadened and increased community usage of the facility.

A more detailed report on the implementation, outcomes and case studies of the program is now available but to summarise the initial community outcomes and insights that were seen across the 87 completed projects:

- **Networks and Training are a very effective way to build skills, knowledge, and awareness of droughts, and have a lasting impact of shared sense of purpose and community belonging (social bonds) beyond a one-off opportunity to connect.** Feedback from grantees highlighted that while many people in communities have lived experience of the impacts of drought and are aware of the need for drought preparation, there was a recognition that taking a proactive approach when not in drought has built their capacity and readiness for the next drought event. Workshops provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on experiences from previous droughts and formulate strategies to better respond to future droughts. In particular, Opportunity Type 1 projects (those that strengthen the capacity, capability, and coordination of professional, social or community networks in agriculture-dependent communities to build drought resilience) have built greater awareness and helped communities and networks to identify gaps so they can move forward to the adoption and action stage of drought preparedness. In terms of broadening their reach, **55% reporting their network membership had doubled**, and two projects resulted in all new network membership. Eighty-one percent of respondents reported there had been a shift in diversity of their networks, with higher representation of female participants. Across the Opportunity Type 1 projects, 29% of grantees engaged participants who had a disability and 45% engaged First Nations community members.



Across these projects there was a greater representation of younger community members engaging in activities, with 34% under the age of 45 years.

- **Events are effective ways to increase diversity, reach, coordination, and collaboration in communities.** Grantees provided feedback that there was a significant growth in collaborative practices across communities and networks as a result of these grants, creating a shared sense of purpose and community belonging, with 87% reporting that they were more than satisfied by the growth of the network. Grantees also reported on the growth of their networks with 32 grantees now linking with an additional 207 groups across their respective regions.
- **Training is a very effective way to build a shared sense of purpose and community belonging.** Grantees provided feedback that there was significant growth in collaborative practices across communities and networks, creating a shared sense of purpose and community belonging, with 100% reporting that they were satisfied by the growth of their network. In addition to increasing the diversity and reach, projects sought to improve coordination and collaboration between social networks, other community organisations and sectors in local communities. The 11 grantees that delivered training reported they are now linking with an additional 114 groups across their respective regions as a direct result of the Networks to Build Drought Resilience program.
- **Community infrastructure is critical aspect to building a thriving, connected community and strengthens capability to respond to the challenges of drought.** Grantees delivering Opportunity Type 4 – Infrastructure projects, reported that there has been an increase in access, participation, and the size of their network, with 40% reporting their network membership had doubled (at a minimum) and three projects identifying that they had all new network membership. Eighty-one percent of respondents reported there had been a growth in diversity of their networks through higher representation of both male and female participants. Across the Opportunity Type 4 projects, there was strong engagement with participants from diverse backgrounds, with 35% of the projects engaging with people with disabilities and 35% engaging with First Nations community members. Grantees indicated that they had increased access, participation, and diversity in network participation, with 85% of projects reporting that their network had grown as a result of the project delivery. Recipients provided feedback on the growth of their networks with 20 grantees now linking with an additional 82 groups across their respective regions and 100% of grantees reporting that they were more than satisfied by the growth of the network.
- By sharing insights and learnings on drought preparedness within communities and between sectors, there has been a significant increase in connectedness and collaborative practices. In addition, sharing stories, knowledge and experiences in these settings has validated the social impacts of drought for community members, and highlighted the importance of seeking support and providing support to one another.



- Through the broad range of projects there has been a significant increase in skill development, an increased understanding of technology and how it can support drought preparedness and the importance of mental health strategies, and approaches for both individuals and communities.

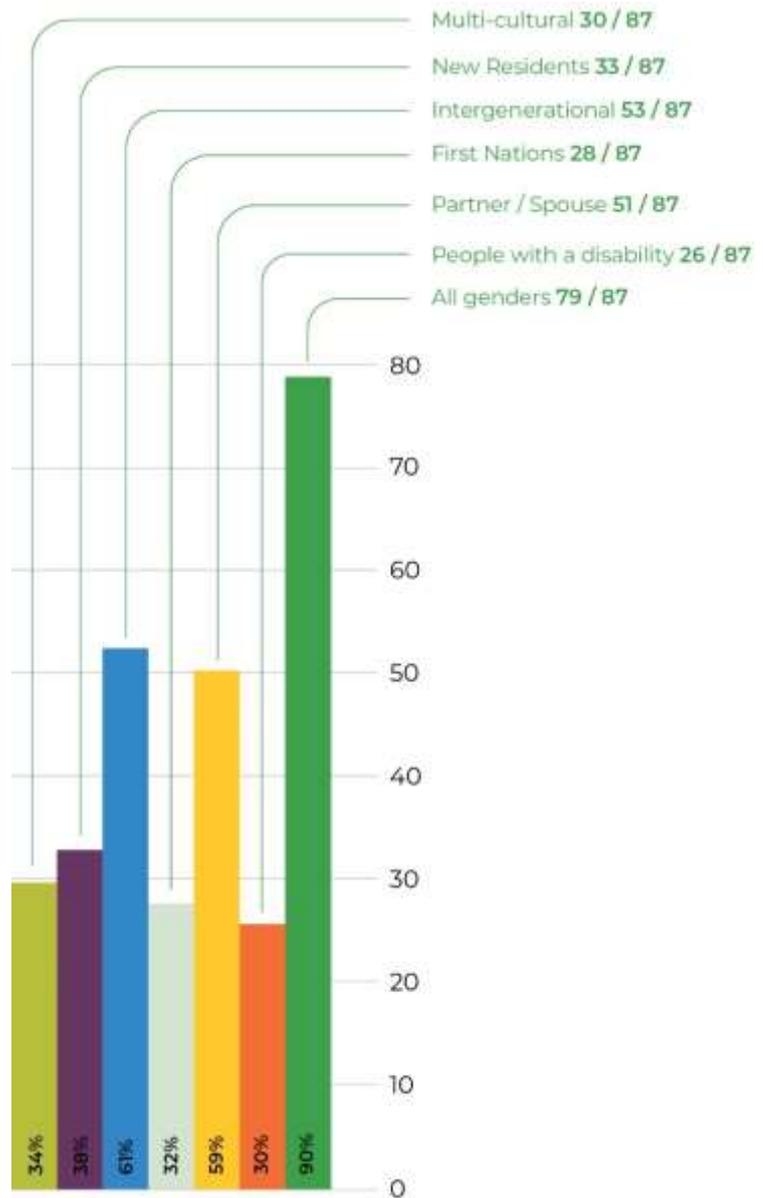
On the ground, outcomes are also highly localised and individual to the context of the community and the project. The video project profiles highlight the diversity and individual project outcomes across Australia:

- [Young Livestock Exporters Network: Future proofing the Livestock Industry](#) (NT)
- [Strengthening wellbeing and deepening social support](#) (SA)
- [Improving Young Farmer Mental Resilience](#) (NSW)
- [Country Halls connected for farming community resilience](#) (Vic)

Together, these local outcomes and the broader changes we have seen across all the projects clearly demonstrate the positive impact being felt at community level where FDF grants are being implemented.



A summary snapshot of the program outputs and reach is detailed in the infographics below.





# FDf's Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought – Evaluation Overview 2023-2025

## Future Drought Fund's Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought (HRCPD) Initiative Evaluation

**WHAT IS THE FUTURE DROUGHT FUND?**  
 The Future Drought Fund (FDf) helps to build drought resilience in Australia's agriculture sector, landscapes and communities. The FDf aims to create an innovative and profitable farming sector, a sustainable natural environment, and adaptable rural, regional and remote communities - all with greater resilience to the impacts of drought and climate change.  
 The FDf is an initiative of the Australian Government, managed by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

**WHAT IS THE HRCPD INITIATIVE?**  
 As part of the Fund, the HRCPD initiative aims to build enduring resilience to the impacts of climate change and drought, and to enhance the public good in agriculture-dependent communities. It is designed to build community capacity by strengthening social and community networking, support, engagement and wellbeing.

**WHO IS DELIVERING THE HRCPD INITIATIVE?**  
 Support package delivering grants and leadership activities to enhance and improve drought preparedness for community.

**Program that allows experts to provide advice to communities that want to activate drought resilience initiatives.**

**Program that connects mentors with mentees who want to build leadership capacity and resilience in rural Australia.**

**Program that pairs mentors with mentees who want to build leadership capacity and resilience in rural Australia.**

**WHAT WILL THE EVALUATION FOCUS ON?**  
 The evaluation will provide insights on the extent to which and how the HRCPD Initiative has enabled rural, regional and remote communities to prepare for future droughts through strengthened social resilience, local capacity and capability building.

**WHO ARE THE MAIN GROUPS INVOLVED...**

<b>Evaluator - News Group</b>	<b>Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR)</b>	<b>Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF)</b>	<b>Program participants</b>
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**...AND HOW?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with other stakeholders to develop the evaluation plan</li> <li>Update the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan Report on evaluation findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support delivery of and manage HRCPD Initiative elements</li> <li>Provide oversight of relevant HRCPD Initiative elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support delivery of and manage HRCPD Initiative elements</li> <li>Provide oversight of relevant HRCPD Initiative elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and deliver projects funded through HRCPD Initiative</li> <li>Collect and provide data for the evaluation</li> <li>Contribute to evaluation working sessions</li> </ul>
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**THE EVALUATION TAKES A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH...**  
 We will actively involve local leaders and community to provide input on the evaluation approach and be involved in decision-making.

**HOW MIGHT YOU BE INVOLVED?**

<p><b>Working sessions and engagements</b></p> <p>Virtual and face-to-face engagements to co-design the evaluation approach, define success and to collect insights for the evaluation.</p> <p><b>Project data collection and analysis</b></p> <p>Collection and synthesis of information from sources such as macro and regional data, program data and engagements.</p>	<p><b>Surveys</b></p> <p>Short virtual questionnaires to gain information about community and stakeholder experiences.</p> <p><b>HRCPD Initiative Summits</b></p> <p>Workshops that bring together community and stakeholders to make sense of and interpret evaluation findings.</p>	<p><b>Regional deep dives</b></p> <p>A series of engagements with community members to better understand and obtain insights on relevant HRCPD Initiative elements.</p> <p><b>Evaluation capacity building</b></p> <p>Workshops to build the capacity of communities and stakeholders to engage with and participate in the evaluation.</p>
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**THE EVALUATION WILL TAKE PLACE OVER TWO AND A HALF YEARS**

**PHASE 1: EVALUATION PLANNING** (Jun 2023 - Apr 2023)

**PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS** (Apr 2023 - Jul 2024)

**PHASE 3: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS** (Jul 2024 - Sep 2025)

Key milestones: Jun 2023, Mar 2023, Apr 2023, Jun 2024, Jul 2024, Aug 2025, Sept 2025.

**THE TOTAL FUND IS WORTH \$5 BILLION**  
 of which the HRCPD Initiative consists **\$29.65 MILLION**

**Key delivery partners:** Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR), Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF), Program participants.

**Program participants:** Participate in HRCPD Initiative-related programs, Contribute to and provide input on decision-making.