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New National Drought Agreement Review: FRRR Submission

FRRR welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the Australian Government regarding the National Drought Agreement (NDA) [Review](#) as a next step from earlier public consultation in mid-2022.

Further to the experience of FRRR delivering the Tackling Tough Times (TTTT) Grant Program, and more recently two Future Drought Fund Programs, we particularly welcome the specific consideration in the Key Issues Document that more clearly define the intention, and or inclusion of:

- Clarity on beneficiaries of the National Drought Agreement, noting drought impacts in the wider community, and triple bottom line approach.
- Policy underpinnings of the National Drought Agreement, particularly the preparedness focus and linkage across all aspects of the drought cycle.
- Coordination and Collaboration. This was a key learning from the TTTT program.
- Roles and Responsibilities, specifically with regard to capacity building and community infrastructure required to support drought impacted communities.
- Drought Impacts past the farm gate, specifically in relation to the social and economic impacts beyond the farm gate and the limited lens of heightened wellbeing support in drought.
- Recognition of non-party stakeholders, and commitment of governments to working with them to maximise effectiveness of programs at a community level.
- Specific inclusion of First Nations people.
- Intersecting Policy Areas where practicable and reasonable.
- Refreshed principles, and central to the body of the agreement, not as an attachment.
- Monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting, to better understand outcomes and impact and reach of programs, and
- Readability.

FRRR also support the recognition of and collaboration with community organisations in Goal 3 of the NDA: The agricultural sector, industry service providers, agri-finance, community organisations and all levels of government work together to support drought preparedness, response, and recovery.



Our submission aims to provide further clarity on the wording as detailed in the [Draft](#) for consultation, specifically relating to strengthening the language and intent relating to the important role that communities and not-for-profit organisations play in drought response and recovery.

1) Do you feel the proposed new NDA text adequately addresses recommendations of the NDA review, and guides how governments will collaborate on drought related activities?

While FRRR are in broad agreement, and we note the specific inclusion and recognition of non-party stakeholders, we wish to highlight the previous review did not capture the importance of, and specific articulation of the role that locally based not-for-profit organisations play throughout the drought cycle.

2) Would you like to see further improvements to the proposed new National Drought Agreement text. If so, what.

FRRR recommend improvements to the proposed new National Drought Agreement text as follows:

Principle 8: (Original)

Drought policies and programs should recognise that health and wellbeing include mental health, social cohesion, and safety, and these are issues that can be exacerbated by drought. Opportunities to improve health and wellbeing should be actively fostered across the drought cycle.

Principle 8: (Suggestion)

Drought policies and programs should recognise that community-based health and wellbeing includes mental health, social cohesion, and safety, and these are issues that can be exacerbated by drought. Opportunities to improve both individual and community wide health, wellbeing, and community connectedness should be actively fostered across the drought cycle. Programs should specifically recognise and support the important role that locally based not-for-profit organisations play in strengthening community wellbeing and connection.

Additionally, FRRR welcomes the new inclusion and specific recognition of NDA non-party stakeholders in the NDA Definitions, and affirms the important role that philanthropy, intermediaries/relationship brokers such as FRRR, and as well the many small, grassroots not for profit organisations play as a critical role in sustaining communities throughout the drought cycle.

Definition: (Original)

NDA non-party stakeholders – stakeholders of the NDA that are not signatories of the agreement but have intersecting interests across the drought cycle. Including but not limited to, local governments, industry groups, the non-profit sector, and the financial sector.



Definition: (Suggestion)

NDA non-party stakeholders – stakeholders of the NDA that are not signatories of the agreement but have intersecting interests across the drought cycle. Including but not limited to, local governments, industry groups, the non-profit sector, philanthropy, local community organisations and the financial sector.

3) Would you like to see further improvements to the draft monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework?

Yes. The draft MEL is a sound start in better understanding and being able to capture the outcomes, impact and learning from programs, but greater detail is required to ensure consistency and detail is understood across all tiers of government and community.

The [current program MEL](#) being undertaken for the FRRR led [FDF's Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought](#) Initiative may be useful reference point.

About the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR)

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal 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.

Why investment in Communities is important.

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) The 'in-drought support' investment mechanism of FRRR's Tackling Tough Times Together program supported 430 projects across Australia investing \$13,950,000 in 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 July 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 program. 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.



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, and communities more broadly.

- 3) Our continued involvement with the FDF through the \$30 million Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative is currently underway, having commenced in July 2022. Consisting of five key elements, the initiative is being delivered in a 'joined-up' way with ARLF until January 2025. The primary investment within the initiative will see approximately \$12 million invested into 35 regions across Australia 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. Additionally, \$1.2 million will be directed into small grants to diversify geographical reach, as well as an expertise pool, mentoring, leadership, national learning network and evaluation.

Closing comment

FRRR extend our sincere thanks for opportunity to provide feedback. The National Drought Agreement is a significant policy piece for Australia, and through its successful delivery, will ensure 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.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Egleton
Chief Executive Officer