



SUBMISSION

6 December 2023

Brent Findlay

Chair

Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Via email: <https://haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/future-drought-fund/surveys/future-directions>

Dear Brent

Re: Consultation draft: Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028

Livestock SA is the peak industry organisation for South Australia's red meat and wool industries. There are over 5,200 sheep producers and more than 2,700 beef cattle producers in the state. With a membership of over 3,500 sheep, beef cattle and goat production businesses, we work to secure a strong and sustainable livestock sector in South Australia.

South Australia's \$4.3 billion livestock industry is a key economic contributor to the state which supports 21,000 South Australian jobs across the red meat and wool industries.

Livestock SA is a member of four national peak industry councils: Sheep Producers Australia, WoolProducers Australia, Cattle Australia and Goat Industry Council of Australia. Livestock SA is also a member of Primary Producers SA (PPSA) and through PPSA and the Peak Councils, the organisation is an indirect member of the National Farmers' Federation.

Livestock SA is a recipient of the Future Drought Fund (FDF) and has worked collaboratively with the SA Drought Hub through the South Australian Sheep and Beef Industry Blueprints. Staff have attended consultation sessions and provided feedback during those meetings. We provide this submission with additional feedback via the questions outlined in the 'Consultation draft: Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028'. Where a question is not included, we have no further comment.

Background

The Future Drought Fund Investment Strategy 2024 to 2028 is a supporting policy document which identifies the strategic priorities for investment across the next 4-year funding period and will facilitate better planning, sequencing and coordination of programs. It will also demonstrate links to the broader landscape of drought and climate resilience initiatives.

Does the draft funding plan provide an appropriate framework to guide spending on drought resilience initiatives?

We consider the funding plan provides clarity but there are points where more is needed. The strategic objectives include reflecting diversity of opportunities, and we consider this needs to be expanded to make it clear the truly diverse systems producers operate in. Producers work within a natural cycle that can delay timing outcomes, while also being beholdent to a rapidly changing regulatory, social and climatic environment and this must be considered during project development.

Livestock SA support the strategic objectives listed with some changes:

- Objective 1 includes productivity but should also include profit as producers need to remain profitable to invest in drought resilience.
- Objective 2 is difficult to understand and appears to be referencing environment management, but this is not clear enough and rewording of this objective is needed.
- Objective 3 could be augmented by including 'supporting', as simply strengthening may limit what is required for agricultural communities.

Livestock SA support the funding principles, however the objective for incremental and transitional change is difficult to understand and we suggest rewording is needed. We also question the point 'to ensure there are no unnecessary ongoing operational maintenance dependencies from investments', as there may be occasions where a transitional approach is needed to ensure ongoing adoption of targeted activities.

Which current FDF programs should be retained?

Livestock SA is not intimately familiar with all the programs and cannot recommend the removal of any programs. However, we suggest that programs include the ability for greater jurisdictional socialisation so state learnings and collaborations occur where possible to reduce concerns with duplication.

Livestock SA support investigation into other options for program delivery including models beyond using current producer and farming systems groups. These groups are very effective at delivering information to producers in the groups; however, not all producers are members of them. Options for programs to reach other producers beyond these groups is needed to improve adoption rates across the sector.

Which current FDF programs could be integrated with existing programs or built upon to drive efficiency or to maximise impact?

Carbon farming and emissions reduction is complex with many different programs under development. Understandably, this has created confusion amongst producers and risks project duplications and does not maximise investment outcomes. FDF programs should work to integrate with any existing carbon and emission reduction programs, particularly in the livestock sector which faces increasing pressure to reduce methane and carbon emissions. Programs will also maximise impacts by better articulating the link how improvements in production and land management can also lead to reduced carbon and methane emissions through improved production efficiency.

How should the Hubs' role be better defined to deliver more impact for their regions? Are the proposed funding options for the Hubs appropriate?

The role of the Hubs could be made clearer through future work programs that extend beyond just drought resilience to broader climate resilience. For example, other climate impacts such as floods, fires and changes in natural seasonal conditions.

Livestock SA support funding for cross regional projects where possible. Climatic conditions are not bound by state lines and projects should be encouraged to collaborate with other similar regions wherever possible to maximise outcomes. For example, South Australia has 17 bioregions¹ and shares a border with 4 states and a territory. Bioregions within the state are more like regions in other states than within SA, so collaboration between bioregions is logical and would deliver better regional scale outcomes.

Livestock SA also support improving milestone requirements to demonstrate progress towards adoption through project work. Adoption remains an ongoing issue in the agricultural sector and FDF funding should be provided to programs able to demonstrate a path to adoption by producers leading to incremental, transitional or translational changes.

Should a future iteration of the FBR program be more focussed on specific learning areas or target particular cohorts of farmers (e.g., young farmers, remotely located farmers, smaller landholders and/or those operating on marginal land)?

The agricultural sector is complicated, and the Farm Business Resilience program funding will need to reflect this. Targeting specific cohorts of producers – first by industry sector and then by regional production system – will help address this complexity and deliver effective programs. Livestock producers have particular needs and funding is needed to support these needs. This includes increasing pressure on methane and emission reductions and likely future requirements to account for and prove emissions reductions and they will require support to do this.

More effective outcomes will be realised if the FBR program were tailored in this way. State level industry organisations like Livestock SA can play an important role in helping develop and coordinate such programs.

How should public and private good be balanced in a future iteration of the FBR program? Should the program require farmer co-contributions?

Investment into the program should be balanced and fair and include co-contributions where appropriate. Producer contributions provide a level of personal awareness and ownership in a program they choose to complete. That said, it is also well known that the most successful programs from a producer participation perspective are those provide incentives to implement the learning, such as through grants. This factor is important during periods of industry downturn, as it is during these times that producers are most likely to need such training but will be in a worse position to contribute towards the cost of the program and potentially implement their learnings. Therefore, a balance needs to be found.

Should the FDF provide training on how best to use and interpret information from existing climate tools, including but not limited to ‘My Climate View’? If so, who could benefit most from such training?

The FDF should include training on how to use and gain the most information from climate tools. One of the biggest challenges faced by producers is managing their properties through a changing

¹ South Australian Bioregions: <https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/landscape/docs/hf/south-australia-bioregions-bio-region-fact.pdf>

and more varied climate and training for producers to use any tools available to them to encourage uptake and adoption is important.

This should include investment into training producers on using carbon tools to measure their carbon baseline and ongoing emissions reductions, such as carbon calculators. This training should also be available to advisors and consultants working with producers to ensure they can provide the correct advice and support.

Should the FDF focus on innovation, or broader extension and adoption of tried and tested practices to enable change at scale in Australia? Or both?

The FDF should continue to focus on innovation to drive forward industry resilience to climate events. However, investment into extension and adoption currently is extremely restricted and this continues to limit the uptake and change needed for industry improvement.

Livestock SA supports increased investment into extension methods that are known to lead to effective adoption and practice change by producers. However, the design of any increased extension and adoption expenditure needs to be carefully considered and properly implemented. Such spending must leverage and bolster existing networks, not look duplicate or compete with current producer engagement structures.

Should transformational change, and partnerships that facilitate it, be prioritised by the FDF? What incentives or programs would best support transformational change?

Or should the FDF continue to also build incremental change – that eventually lead to transformation – and focus on the preconditions (knowledge, skills, and support etc) that enable individuals and communities to make transformational changes?

The key to improving producer and farm resilience to drought and other climate events is transitional and incremental changes leading to transformation change. Investment into programs should be balanced to support programs that do lead to incremental changes as well as supporting programs to lead to transformation changes.

The mechanisms of how a program can develop from leading to transitional to transformational change should also be investigated and program applicants encouraged to consider methods to do this. Emphasis on effective extension techniques to lead to change among larger and more diverse groups of producers to drive industry transformational change should be encouraged and supported by the program.

What Drought Resilience Innovation Challenges could be targeted in the proposed new innovation pilot program?

There is a real need for livestock producers to accurately measure, understand and demonstrate their carbon footprint and their pathway to methane and carbon emissions reductions.

The livestock industry is considerably more impacted by social pressures around emission reductions than other agricultural industries. Livestock producers, particularly beef producers, face ongoing scrutiny and pressure to reduce their emissions and need support to do so. This needs to include support for emission reductions during times of drought and how improvements in effect to livestock and land management lead to reduced emissions and improvement in carbon footprints on farm.

What enabling activities are essential to the success of the FDF and should be directly funded to support FDF programs?

Effectively measuring the success of programs through the FDF Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework has been an important component of the FDF programs. However, our experience with this process was that it was convoluted, complex and not necessarily delivering effective monitoring and evaluation information on the program.

The surveys provided to producer participants were too extensive and at times, it was difficult to encourage producers to complete the forms. A more effective method of collecting feedback from participants is needed and measures of short, medium and longer term adoption of practices important to effectively evaluate the program.

The reporting process on completion of the program was repetitive and complex. While it was an extensive reporting process which is valuable, the reporting requirements could be reduced and still provide an effective evaluation.

The FDF has created alignment with state and national strategic directions and collaboration across industry and research institutions. However, there are still areas that can be improved such as investment into livestock production and support for livestock producers meeting demands to reduce methane and carbon emissions.

Investment into improving extension methods, monitoring and evaluation and adoption is also needed to support producers with the necessary practice change to drive the agricultural sector forward.

Please contact the Livestock SA office on (08) 8297 2299 or via email at admin@livestocksa.org.au if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely

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