



# 2025 National Drought Forum

## Event Summary

On 8–9 September 2025, leaders and stakeholders in drought policy from across Australia came together in Gawler, South Australia for the National Drought Forum — held over two days for the first time. The event, held every two years, provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on current drought policy and reform, explore emerging challenges, and discuss Australia’s future approach to drought.

The forum was jointly hosted by the Australian Government and the National Farmers’ Federation. With parts of southern Australia experiencing drought, the event was a key opportunity to discuss how we manage Australia’s drought response.

Delegates included representatives from all levels of government, farming industry organisations, banks, natural resource managers, charities, finance sector and a range of others who contribute to strengthening our drought response and resilience. Together, they explored how to better work together to support rural Australia through tough times, help communities bounce back, and enhance the sector’s long-term drought resilience.

Key next steps include providing feedback captured during the forum to the Agriculture Ministers Meeting for review and consideration under the National Drought Agreement. In delivering key outcomes from the Forum, insights will be shared at the next National Drought Network meeting and considered in future drought policy development. Continued engagement through the National Farmers’ Federation and with other stakeholders will help ensure the Forum informs practical decisions and drives progress across the drought policy landscape.

### Day 1: Drought in Context

Key challenges and emerging priorities noted throughout the plenary addresses were:

- the shift in national drought policy toward a more flexible, inclusive, and resilience-focused approach —supporting flexible, inclusive, whole-of-system responses through programs like the Future Drought Fund (FDF), Regional Investment Corporation (RIC), and Farm Household Allowance (FHA).
- that farmers are facing tough conditions, especially in southern Australia. Farmers’ lived experience—financial stress, fodder shortages, and mental health pressures—must be acknowledged. Support programs help, but gaps remain when feed and funds run dry.
- that it’s not just about preparing for drought but managing through it and bouncing back. Policy and practice must be better connected between levels of government and, with farmers and communities.

- strong networks, early planning and tailored support are key. Drought can drive learning—what worked, what didn't, and what to do differently next time.

The afternoon featured a workshop focused on Australia's drought policy framework. Key themes and emerging issues raised were:

- dialogue must lead to outcomes. Genuine participation empowers farmers and communities to shape drought responses with lived experience at the core.
- clear messaging matters. National frameworks help, but support must be flexible and responsive to local needs.
- drought policy is shifting toward proactive, resilience-building approaches. Progress is clear, but ongoing refinement and better coordination are essential.

## Day 2: Drought engagement

Day 2 consisted of panels and workshops to address current or future priorities impacting the sector across the drought cycle.

Sessions focussed on:

- the mental health impacts of drought and the importance of early intervention to prevent suicide in rural communities. Key insights from the workshop were:
  - there was strong consensus around the need for long-term investment in services – from community networks to specialists – that are available throughout the drought cycle, which ensures that communities have what they need to address the challenges that come their way.
  - better understanding and clarity of who does what and coordinating services is critical.
- the complex challenges Australian farmers face when navigating farm business transitions and family succession planning, particularly under the pressure of prolonged drought. Primary conclusions from the panel were:
  - succession planning isn't a one-off event—it's a long-term process that needs early thinking, business review, and regular adjustment.
  - it's a managed transition of decision making, financial responsibility, and ownership.
  - a good succession plan should challenge everyone. If one person walks away feeling great and others feel overlooked, the balance may not be right. It should reflect honest conversations where all voices are heard.
- how drought can prompt valuable reflection on what worked, what didn't, and what could be done differently next time. Critical takeaways from the panel included:
  - there is a short window when farmers are ready to turn drought into a driver for change. It needs to be recent, and they need to be ready—emotionally and practically.
  - confident decision-making is key. Farmers need timely, trusted information to plan and respond effectively.
  - we need to support farmers to think long-term—10, 20, 30 years ahead—to keep farms productive and resilient.

- how we can best support recovery from drought, recognising that the pathway out is different for every community and farm business. Workshop discussions emphasised that:
  - recovery is complex and varied – it depends on weather, industry, preparedness efforts and decisions made in the lead up, and during drought.
  - everyone has a role to play in recovery, and there is a broad range of indicators, however it is hard to pin-point when recovery starts, as it is a moving target.
  - through adversity comes opportunity – recovery efforts provide opportunity to reflect on strengths and weaknesses, and what could be improved upon for the next drought.
- drought resilient communities, with participants sharing insights on practical pathways to strengthen resilience and discussing how governments can best support communities through targeted, place-based approaches. Key points raised by the panel were:
  - resilience is not about avoiding hardship. It can be measured, but only with detailed, local data on things like healthcare, social networks and economic opportunity.
  - building resilience requires consistent, long-term policy that is adaptable to local needs.
  - the Future Drought Fund (FDF) offers a chance to scale inclusive initiatives and genuinely engage communities, including learning from First Nations knowledge and connection to Country.
- The impact of drought on food security in a future shaped by climate extremes. Insights from the workshop were:
  - the Group broadened their thinking and understanding of food systems from across the whole of supply chain.
  - the Group identified that food security is more than food. It is about the environment, trade, infrastructure, biosecurity and more.
  - the need to think about food, its production and consumption differently. Need to embrace innovation in this space.
- current drought policies and how these are working across government and industry, especially in light of ongoing dry conditions and future climate projections. Key points raised by the panel were:
  - agriculture in drought needs to get out of crisis mode and have political courage with an emphasis on long-term planning. It's the time to be brave and bold. Triage the short-term responses but maintain the long-term focus.
  - we need to find ways to speed up recovery, particularly as well-being diminishes if you cannot see a future.
  - there needs to be data sharing to improve program outcomes.

On behalf of the Department and the National Farmers Federation, thank you for you for joining us at the 2025 National Drought Forum. Your time, insights and collaboration are deeply appreciated—we're grateful for your commitment to supporting our farmers and their communities.

For more information, visit [agriculture.gov.au/drought-policy](https://agriculture.gov.au/drought-policy).