



# Drought Policy Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan: summary

## Introduction

The Australian Government's approach to drought policy has evolved over the last 40 years. However, improvements to drought policy have been made following ad-hoc reviews, rather than through a planned or structured approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). The continued evolution of Australian Government drought policy is reliant on strong MEL practices. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has identified the need for stronger MEL arrangements that consider the broader drought policy environment, beyond MEL arrangements that already exist for individual programs.

We have developed the Drought Policy MEL Plan to support continual improvement and accountability in drought policy and ensure drought policy continues to meet the needs of those impacted by drought.

The plan also responds to requests from stakeholders for government to examine the wider impact of drought policy, and to ensure drought measures represent value for money and are appropriate, targeted and effective.

## Drought policy

The Australian Government's approach to drought policy is explained through a vision statement and 3 objectives. It is implemented through policy instruments (programs, agreements, engagement and other drought-related work) that contribute to the delivery of one or more of the objectives. This approach aligns with *The Australian Policy Handbook*, which describes policy as 'a statement of government intent, and its implementation through the use of policy instruments' (Althaus et al. 2013).

## Vision

The Australian Government operates in a broad Australian agricultural system where multiple initiatives collectively contribute to an overarching vision. The vision for this system is:

a thriving, sustainable agricultural sector that, in the face of increased and more extreme droughts and broader climate impacts, continues to play its vital role in Australia's food and fibre production and as a foundation of strong and cohesive rural communities (DAFF 2025).

## Objectives

The *Australian Government Drought Plan* (DAFF 2024a) outlines 3 objectives of drought policy:

- 1) Build resilience to drought by enabling preparedness, risk management and financial self-reliance
- 2) Ensure an appropriate safety net is always available to support those experiencing hardship
- 3) Encourage stakeholders to work together to address the challenges of drought.

The first objective acknowledges that farming is a business, and drought is one of many business risks that farmers plan for and manage across the drought cycle. It also recognises that building drought resilience is key to the agricultural industry adapting to climate change.

The second objective refers to activities of government aimed at reducing hardship and supporting those in need. This recognises there can be times when even the most prepared and resilient may need support. Past approaches have demonstrated that this safety net should not be triggered by localised drought declarations and must not disincentivise preparedness or undermine the efficiency or growth prospects of the agricultural sector.

The third objective recognises that drought affects a range of stakeholder groups – it is not just an issue for farmers and their communities to deal with. Governments, industry groups, First Nations peoples, the financial and professional services sector, research and natural resource management (NRM) organisations, charities and the not-for-profit sector also have a role across the drought cycle.

These objectives are delivered through policy instruments such as the Farm Household Allowance, Regional Investment Corporation, Rural Financial Counselling Service and Future Drought Fund.

## Alignment with other drought activities

The Drought Policy MEL Plan has been developed to align with the MEL and reporting activities of other key drought policy work, specifically the National Drought Agreement (NDA), the Australian Government Drought Plan and the Future Drought Fund (FDF).

## National Drought Agreement

The *National Drought Agreement 2024 – 2029* is a 5-year intergovernmental agreement that explains how the Australian, state and territory governments are working together to help Australian agriculture better withstand drought (DAFF 2024c).

The Drought Policy MEL Plan will support the Australian Government's delivery of specific NDA principles:

- **Principle 2** – Development and delivery of drought policies and programs should be evidenced based and occur where this is a clear role for government and deliver a public benefit.
- **Principle 9** – Drought policies and programs should be flexible, streamlined and efficient to deliver timely assistance that best serves end-users in the agricultural sector, regions and rural communities across the drought cycle of preparedness, response and recovery.

Drought policy monitoring activities will also be used to support the Commonwealth reporting obligations for the NDA annual report. This will ensure efficiency and consistency in data collection and reporting.

## Australian Government Drought Plan

The *Australian Government Drought Plan* covers the period from 2024 to 2029. In addition to the 3 objectives of drought policy, the Drought Plan outlines the government's commitment to delivering against 4 pillars:

- 1) Evidence-based decision-making
- 2) Strategic drought support
- 3) Working together
- 4) Learning and improving.

It also outlines 8 actions to ensure the government's drought policy continues to evolve. The Drought Policy MEL Plan responds to Drought Plan Action 8, which requires that the department develop and implement a MEL framework for drought policy to ensure our policy approach, and its delivery, remains appropriate, effective and efficient.

The activities described in the Drought Policy MEL Plan may result in changes for drought policy, which will be reflected in the next Australian Government Drought Plan.

## Future Drought Fund

The FDF Drought Resilience Funding Plan (2024 to 2028) includes its own MEL framework (DAFF 2024b). The FDF MEL activities will be included in the Drought Policy MEL Plan.

Implementation of the MEL Plan and the FDF MEL framework should be aligned and create efficiencies where possible – for example, sharing information for respective annual reporting processes.

## Monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches

The Drought Policy MEL Plan includes 3 chapters that describe approaches for monitoring, evaluation and learning in drought policy.

### Monitoring

Regular monitoring of how drought instruments are contributing to the delivery of drought policy objectives is crucial for understanding progress and identifying opportunities for improvement.

A drought policy monitoring report will be produced annually. A monitoring report will be an important resource for recording the effectiveness of drought policy at a point in time, which will be critical for informing future iterations of the NDA and Australian Government Drought Plan.

### Evaluation

An evaluation is vital for reflecting on and making improvements to drought policy and its implementation. An evaluation of drought policy will be a significant undertaking, and the timing and approach for such an evaluation should be a decision of government, rather than set through the

Drought Policy MEL Plan. Instead, the plan provides a guide for the department to consider when preparing for an evaluation.

The plan does not prescribe specific timing of an evaluation. However, it recommends that an evaluation of drought policy occurs every 5 to 10 years. This timing:

- ensures regular, timely evaluations contribute to continued improvement and the evolution of drought policy
- provides enough time for evidence to be gained from drought-related instruments to inform an evaluation
- reflects that policy is a longer-term proposition than the delivery of programs.

Stakeholders have identified that the best time to make material changes to drought policy is when you are not in the grips of drought, as it allows a more objective process (Tobin 2025). The plan recommends that an evaluation should consider any recent drought events. These events provide an opportunity to reflect and take stock of drought response. The plan also recommends that the timing of an evaluation aligns with reviews and development of key policy documents, including the NDA, Drought Plan, FDF Drought Resilience Funding Plan, and FDF Investment Strategy.

## Learning

Findings from monitoring and evaluation need to be shared with stakeholders and incorporated into Australian Government drought policy to ensure policy evolves and remains fit for purpose for Australian farmers and communities.

The Drought Policy MEL Plan provides 3 principles for guiding learning in drought policy:

- 1) Drought policy monitoring and evaluation activities should be used to generate findings and recommendations.
- 2) Drought policy findings and recommendations should be shared with relevant internal and external stakeholders, as appropriate.
- 3) Drought policy findings and recommendations should guide evidence-based decisions to ensure continued improvement.

## References

Althaus, C, Ball, S, Bridgman, P, Davis, G, & Threlfall, D 2022, *The Australian Policy Handbook*, Routledge Publishing.

DAFF 2024a, [Australian Government Drought Plan](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, December, accessed 13 January 2025.

—2024b, [Drought Resilience Funding Plan](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, February, accessed 21 January 2025.

—2024c, [National Drought Agreement 2024 – 2029](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, December, accessed 16 January 2025.

DAFF 2025, [Future Drought Fund Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework 2024 to 2028](#), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, July, accessed 30 October 2025.

Tobin, T 2025, [Data needed to assess value of drought support programs](#), *Stock Journal*, 1 February, accessed 5 May 2025.

### Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2026

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to as the Commonwealth).

All material in this publication is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](#) except content supplied by third parties, logos and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

The Australian Government acting through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has exercised due care and skill in preparing and compiling the information and data in this publication. Notwithstanding, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, its employees and advisers disclaim all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying on any of the information or data in this publication to the maximum extent permitted by law.