



Future Drought Fund - Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Grant opportunity webinar

On 14 December 2021, the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment presented a webinar on the Future Drought Fund's Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Program and grant opportunity.

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[Webinar begins]

Andrew Bell: Hello there. I'm Andrew Bell, and I'm your facilitator for today's Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Webinar, brought to you under the umbrella, if that's the right word, of the Future Drought Fund, which of course is under the Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment (DAWE). Now, before we get onto the webinar, let us start, as we always should, by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet here in the studio in Canberra today. We pay our respects to the elders past, present, and emerging and around the country. We also acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who are watching today and their elders past, present, and emerging. Wherever you are, welcome. Yumalundi. Now, together with the FDF team, I'd like to welcome you to the latest in a suite of online sessions.

Andrew Bell: And today we're talking about drought resilient soils and landscape. Now, this is a new grant opportunity, and the webinar is here to help unpack what this is all about and that all-important framework within which you can apply for those grants. So, a little bit of housekeeping before we kick-off. We'll start with an overview of the FDF, the Future Drought Fund, providing a bit more context to those out there who might not know the ins and outs of the fund. How it works, what it's all about and how the programs work together towards building drought resilience. Then we'll get to the number of the matter. We'll explore the drought resilient soils and landscapes program, and those grants covering the basics like, how much is on offer? who can apply? And the all-important, how to apply. You'll also hear some insights about what makes a good project, and therefore a good application.

Andrew Bell: Now, before we go any further, let's make it absolutely clear why you're here today is to help you better understand this grant opportunity. It might help you think about how you can connect with others and how to structure the best application you can. This is a competitive grant process, so there are some key criteria your project must be able to deliver first and foremost. More of that a little bit later on. Rest assured, there's plenty of time for Q&As during this hour. We welcome your questions throughout. We will have a session towards the end, but if questions arise, we need to get to straight away, fear not, we will get to them. We'll get to as many as we can in the



60 minutes or, so we are together. But the team from the FDF, we'll be looking at each and every one of them to help inform how they approach this process.

Andrew Bell: Also, about questions. We want questions that are general in nature. We can't go into the specifics of any kind of grant application. This is not the place for it. The team here won't be able to give you specific critiques of the merits or otherwise of any ideas or projects you've got. So, there we go with the housekeeping. Let's get right on with the matter at hand. And I'll say good morning to the two gentleman and who are with me at the table. Travis Bover, who's the Assistant Secretary for the Future Drought Fund branch from DAWE. Hello, Travis. And Dave Johnson is Director of the Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Program at DAWE. Hello there. Right, Travis let's get underway. And as we said, we're going to have an overview of the FDF. So set us up. The Future Drought Fund, what do you think people out there need to know?

Travis Bover: Thanks, Andy. Good morning, everyone. So, I thought I'd start with a bit of context on the Future Drought Fund, because it is a pretty broad ranging initiative. And then we'll dive into the details of the Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Program. So, the Future Drought Fund provides a sustainable source of funding to help Australia's farmers and agricultural dependent communities and businesses become more prepared for and resilient to the impacts of drought. There's a hundred million dollars a year available for this work and we're now into our second year. The work we're doing falls under five themes, and they're around the wagon wheel that you can see on your screen at the moment. I'll talk through each of those in turn, to give a bit of a sense of what we're doing. Under the harnessing innovation theme, what we're trying to do there is drive a step change in the uptake of drought resilient technologies and practices.

Travis Bover: A keyway in which we're doing that is by establishing eight Drought Resilient Adoption and Innovation Hubs around the country and their roles to deliver originally responsive extension and adoption services to drive that uptake of better practices. Also, have an innovation grants process currently underway, and that's focused on supporting novel ideas. Under the better risk management theme, what we're doing there is building the capability of farmers and regional stakeholders to plan for drought risks. We want farmers to develop and use farm business plans that include consideration of drought risks and strategies to manage those risks. And we want regions, local councils, regional development authorities, and so forth to come together and develop regional drought resilience plans that provide blueprints for how to improve drought resilience in the context to that region. Under our third theme, better climate information, we're trying to make it easier for people to access and use climate information so that farmers and communities can understand the drought risks that they face and their resilience to those risks and identify adaptation pathways to improve their resilience and preparedness.

Travis Bover: We're doing that by building an accessible online platform of climate data and information, as well as a decision support tool that farmers can use to assess their climate risks and their resilience. Under our fourth theme of more resilient communities, we're building community leaders, mentors, networks, and organisations to lead conversations and actions in their community to prepare for droughts. And then finally under our better land management theme, we're supporting the trial and adoption of land management practices that can help agricultural lands stay more productive during and coming out of drought. The program we're talking about today falls



under this theme. And finally, I just note that part of the reason why we like to talk through the five themes in these webinars is one of the things we look for in good applications is an awareness of all the other work that we're doing under the Future Drought Fund, not duplicating and ideally leveraging off of what we're doing. So, I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the other program and themes, as well as the specific program we're talking about today.

Andrew Bell: Thanks, Travis. It is all connected, and we are going to be looking at the fifth of those five themes today, the better land management. So, after Travis, let's go to Dave who is the Director at the Future Drought Fund heading up the team that manages the Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Program, which focuses on, you've guessed it, better land management. So, we've seen the big overview of the FDF. Let's come down from 10,000 feet and down to a couple hundred feet above the land. What can you tell us about your particular program to set us up for our conversation?

Dave Johnson: Thank you, Andy. And welcome everybody that's joining us today. It's a real pleasure to talk about the program and we hope you get some really good info to help you put in the best application that you can. It is a really exciting opportunity, grant opportunity. This program, it's a \$23 million investment by the Australian Government to support better land management, but particularly with the focus on enhancing drought resilience. It's a competitive grant process. So, in your application, you really need to keep that in mind and demonstrate the land management practices that you are proposing. We really support drought resilience. Our projects need to be between \$500,000 and \$1 million each, and they need to operate over the next three years. This program is building on the foundational NRM or Natural Resource Management Drought Resilience, two programs that we've already established. There's a landscape stream and a grants stream under there. And both of those programs look at smaller scale initiatives and smaller scale projects than what we're looking for here, which is going beyond the local level.

Andrew Bell: So that's a snapshot of the program. Now, as we get closer and closer to the meat and potatoes of today, the grant application process. So, what about that? What do people need to know before starting out on this journey to filling out that form?

Dave Johnson: Yeah. Thanks, Andy. And look a really good application. It really does start with the project itself. So, I would encourage you to think about that. And there are four main things that we'd like you to keep in mind about what makes a really good project. They're up on the screen at the moment. The first one is that the project must deliberately and very explicitly target drought resilience. It can touch on a number of other things, but that has to be the central focus of the project.

Dave Johnson: The second point is it needs to demonstrate land management practices. So, this isn't about tools or theories or anything else it's about actually demonstrating land management practices. And the third thing is we're looking for projects that can demonstrate those practices and serve as a case study, if you like, and be an example to other people that can help the broader uptake of those activities and to do it at scale. And the last thing is that the projects must be at scale. So, we're not looking for small projects on a part of an individual small property. We're after something big that is at scale.



Andrew Bell: So, let's just hold. We're 10 minutes in here and we've had a couple of bits of terminology there. So, before we go any further, I hear drought resilience and scale. Can you give us just a little bit more of an idea what those mean? Perhaps people understand the individual words, but in the case of this, what does it really mean in a practical sense?

Dave Johnson: Yeah, you're right, Andy. And there is a bit of terminology around and I'd encourage people to have a look at the Community Grants website, which is showing on the screen at the moment. The guidelines and there's a number of associated documents there that have really good definitions about the terminology that we're using and all the sorts of things that you need to take into account in putting a good application. That should really be your reference point for getting an application together for this program.

Dave Johnson: The guidelines, they contain details and at length about the terms. It covers what sort of a project is able to be funded, what you can spend the money on, what you can't spend the money on. There's a bit of information about monitoring and reporting. And of course, there's a fair bit about probity being a competitive process. But we'd also encourage you to think about it. You don't have to go it alone in this process. You can form together with other people to form a consortium. And in fact, we'd really encourage that kind of approach. There's some further information on the website about how to do that and how to get a consortium application together, but we'd really encourage you to do that. And one of the good places to start actually might have a chat to the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub in your local area as a bit of a starting point.

Andrew Bell: So, the starting point really is those guidelines. That's probably the next place you should go after listening to this webinar, I guess.

Dave Johnson: Yeah, absolutely, Andy. Having a close look at those guidelines and some of the associated documents on there, that's what really lays out the whole process for what we are looking for an application, how they'll be treated and information about the application process. And there is also a link there you'll see through the Community Grants Hub website, where if you do have some questions that come up and you read through the guidelines and something doesn't seem clear to you, you can submit a question through to the Community Grants Hub up until 5:00 PM Eastern Time on the 22nd of December. And what the Community Grants Hub will do will then post a response or an answer to that question on the website. And so, it'll be there for everybody to see. We're very clear that we want everybody to have the same information about the program and that's the way to do it. The other thing I'll just mentioned there is the closing date for applications. It is a strict closing date of the 11th of January and at 9:00 PM on Eastern Standard Time on the 11th of January.

Andrew Bell: So, a couple of deadlines there to try and be aware of there. And that gets us now to the real crux of today's webinar, applications, what makes a good application? Now, how long is a piece of string? But let's try and measure that piece of string. What are you looking for? How do people out there know if their project is good to go, ready, and it's worth them to meet that deadline and get that application in? What should they be thinking about?

Dave Johnson: Yeah. Well, as we said, Andy, it starts with the project itself and we'd like to share with you now, just a few things, a few aspects of what makes a really good application, what will be



an application that's goes through the assessment process that's deemed suitable and also meets the objectives of the program, which is what we're really after.

Andrew Bell: This question asked, does pastoral or rangelands agriculture fit within this program? So already people are thinking about categories.

Dave Johnson: Yes. And absolutely, Andy. It's a national program and we are looking for all kinds of farming systems, rangelands included, whether it's horticulture, whatever farming system people are interested in. It's about trying to help agriculture become more drought resilient.

Andrew Bell: Okay. Now we're entering that portion of today's webinar on what makes a good application and projects. So, let's just remind people again, that the Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes Grant opportunity is a competitive process. The details we're about to cover is all about helping you put together the best application you can. But of course, there's no guarantee of grant funding. But we do guarantee it will give you further insight into what is being looked for in a soils and landscape grant application. Dave and Travis, over to you to provide your insights. Firstly, on that tricky term, let's start with you, Travis. Drought resilience. We hear a lot of that R word these days. Drought resilience, what does it mean from your point of view?

Travis Bover: Thanks, Andy. And look really important focus for the discussion so I can't emphasise enough how important it is that your application talks very directly about how your idea, how your project supports drought resilience. So, we know that the term drought resilience is somewhat amorphous. It's an imprecise term. In the guidelines, what we've talked about when we talk about drought resilience is land management practices that can support agricultural productivity during times of drought and can help agricultural productivity recover quicker from times of drought, coming out of drought. We know that there are many examples of farmers who are able to stay productive during drought and recover quicker, coming out of drought because of the way they manage their land and their natural resources. That includes, for example, practices that focus on managing ground cover, water flow, soil carbon, soil moisture. That's not an exclusive list by any stretch.

Travis Bover: What we're trying to achieve through this program is to help bring such practices into the mainstream. So again, in that context, I really can't emphasise enough. Your application must be explicitly focused on drought resilience. I'm going to be really blunt. I'm going to point out some elephants in the room. So, we know that land management practices are typically thought about and address a range of objectives. As well as drought resilience, there's obviously carbon markets and ecosystem services. Markets are a big focus for people working on land management at the moment. There's obviously biodiversity, which is a very important objective. And of course, there's productivity as well. We also know that there are many organisations working on land management practices from some or all of these different perspectives. And to be really blunt, I've got no doubt that several of you already have some great project ideas that have been sitting on a shelf waiting for a funding opportunity and you're hoping this might be the one.

Travis Bover: All of that's fine. Look, it's important to recognise that land management has multiple objectives, not just drought resilience. And it's important to recognise that there are organisations



who their mandate, their role is to support land management practice and natural resource management in the broad and over time. But you still need to provide a very clear explanation of how your idea supports drought resilience. Please don't just infer it or assert to contribution, explain it. Please don't just re-badge a project as a drought resilience activity. Please explain to us how drought resilience is the central focus of your project. It can support other objectives, carbon sequestration, ecosystem services, etc. But drought resilience really does need to be front and centre. Convince us that what you are proposing to do will make a meaningful contribution to drought resilience.

Travis Bover: I know I'm being very direct and very blunt about this. And the reason I'm doing that is because we want this program to be successful and we want your applications to be successful. We have some experience under our belt now with the Future Drought Fund running program. And this is actually the number one reason why applications under multiple programs now have been unsuccessful. They simply don't provide a convincing explanation of how the activity supports drought resilience. To be really frank, some applications don't even use the term drought resilience or perhaps maybe just in the title with that. And look, we know that drought resilience is a new lens for people to look through. And it's one that sits alongside other lenses. We know that practices that are focused on things like carbon and ecosystem services also support drought resilience, but you need to draw out those connections for us please. Make sure that drought resilience is the primary focus of your application and make sure that we're able to see that in your application.

Andrew Bell: So, let's call this rule one and we'll tell it, tell it and tell it again. You need to explain and what you don't need to do is to cross out a pre-existing title on a document and just put drought resilience in it. That's not going to fly.

Travis Bover: Now look, and we know that there are good ideas out there. So, this isn't about saying that you shouldn't take your existing idea and put it forward, but make sure it's got a drought resilience focus, draw out that drought resilience focus for us. We know that those ideas don't come from nowhere. You have them because you know that there's a genuine need for that, but our program is focused on drought resilience, and you need to come through that lens and convince us that it will contribute to drought resilience as well as all the other objectives that your project is seeking to support.

Andrew Bell: So, rule number one. Make sure your application clearly explains how it will support drought resilience. While we're going on rules, what would be rule number two for a prospective applicant?

Travis Bover: Yeah. So, rule number two is that projects must be focused on land management practices. We have other programs that focus on other aspects. So, this isn't a program that's focused on broader agricultural practices and technologies. It's not a program that's focused on things like irrigation technologies, more efficient water use. Those things are really important, but it's not what this specific program is focused on. So, we're focused on practices that manage the land and its natural capital. And through that, they support agricultural production during and coming out of drought.



Andrew Bell: So, rule number two then. Projects must be focused on land management practices. Okay. Any more rules? Is there a third rule?

Travis Bover: Yeah. Third rule. And really think of these as key messages. These are things that we really want to see shine in your application. And if they do, then you stand a good chance of getting through. So, number three is this program is on demonstration. So, it's not about research. It's not about early-stage development of new practices. It's not about developing new tools. It's not about planning processes. It's not about capacity building or extension. It's about demonstration, demonstrating the effectiveness of land management practices to contribute to drought resilience. Of course, we do understand that demonstration involves elements of research, development, extension and so forth. And that's okay. That can be in your project, but your project has to be primarily focused on demonstration of practices.

Andrew Bell: So, demonstrate, show and tell. That's rule number three. If you've got any questions around these guidelines, what we've called rules, keep them coming in and you can write in the Q&A box, and we'd love to hear from you. Right three, what we call rules. Anymore?

Travis Bover: Yeah. So, rule number four or fourth bit of friendly guidance is that what we're looking for are projects that are at scale. And I appreciate that that term is a bit vague and that provides you flexibility to convince us that something is at scale. So, what we're looking for are projects that can demonstrate the effectiveness of land management practices at scale. We're doing this again because we think that there are land management practices out there that can support drought resilience, but they're a relatively small scale or isolated in their application. And what we're trying to achieve is to bring those practices into the mainstream. So, to do that, what we want to do is to take those practices, which have shown potential at a smaller scale or an isolated scale and support some projects that can roll them out and test them and demonstrate them at a larger scale. We want to demonstrate that they work at that level.

Travis Bover: And we want to do that in a way that can inspire and inform others beyond the project to trial and adopt the practices. So, beyond the immediate boundaries of the project, they provide a demonstration that can drive broader adoption. So, we're looking at scale from those perspectives. It's the capacity of the project to support bringing drought resilient practices, land management practices, into the mainstream. In that context, it's really important that your project has robust monitoring and evaluation arrangements. And it's really important that the knowledge and data that's associated with your project is captured and shared in a way that can support broader adoption and scaling out. And as well as supporting the program's objectives, that's quite important because the Future Drought Fund, now funding is focused on delivering public good. And this is a keyway in which you can support public good is by talking about how your project will inspire, inform, and support others to trial and adopt practices.

Andrew Bell: And I know, Dave. You've got a couple of case studies you can tell us about, which are already inspiring and informing.

Dave Johnson: Yeah, absolutely. So, Andy, we've got two programs underway at the moment. The under the Future Drought Fund, the Future Drought Fund Natural Resource Management Drought



Resilience Landscapes, and then a grants program. And both of those programs have some really great examples of initiative and projects, activities that people are trying at the moment. That was only a one-year program and considerably less funding for individual projects. So, it's at a much more localised scale than what we are looking for under this program. But there are some really great examples there of what people can see are the sorts of activities that would be useful to think about for this program. And I'll draw your attention to one of them. Over in Western Australia, the Northern Agricultural Catchment Councils have got a great project there. It's called Beyond Reasonable Drought. A great title.

Dave Johnson: And that project is tying together a number of different activities. They're trialling with different farmers in different areas. They're adjusting the tillage season to go from winter to autumn and planning different types of ground covers to do things like reduce soil moisture loss, to reduce erosion and soil loss itself, as well as other activities like planting strategic shelter belts in conjunction with those other activities to promote a bit of biodiversity and help retain soil moisture. A range of activities in that project. That's a really good one to have a look at. And there are a couple of others. For example, if you manage to have a look at our Annual Report for the Future Drought Fund or have a look at the webinar from there, there are two really great examples that were showcased there. The first one, Maria Cameron from the Hunter Local Land Services talked about the project that they've got going up there, a Paddock Between the Years, which is a great initiative touching on a range of different practices that they're trialling there in conjunction with a range of different farmers.

Dave Johnson: And then we also heard in that process about Jason Whitehead from Rockpool Land and Water down in Tasmania. And Jason's leading a team there that are trialling some different grazing regimes on the east coast, up near Triabunna and doing a range of different activities there that are really looking at new ways of producing drought resilience. So, we know people have got lots of ideas out there and their existing programs have got some great examples, but you may well have some completely different ideas and things out there. And we're not worried about the labels that people may attribute to different practices. The focus as Travis and Andy have said, it's about drought resilience and preparing for future drought resilience.

Andrew Bell: And if I may say having been involved with the video version of the Annual Report, that the example certainly from the Hunter and Tassie, it's not just the actual thing that they're doing. It's the sort of way they're thinking, which is really thinking outside the box or stepping back and having a bit of a think, which is really inspiring to be honest. So right. Get your questions coming in. We've got some already, but before all that, let's just go over those four golden rules of a good application. So, needs to be about drought resilience. It needs to involve on the ground land management practices. You must be focused on demonstration. Demonstrate what it'll do and also support demonstration and talk about how it can be taken up at scale. That phrase, at scale, we might talk a bit more about that phrase. So, four more points. Any other hot tips and tricks for an application? Is it a never-ending story there, Dave?

Dave Johnson: So, it's not never ending, and the 11th of January is the date you need to keep in mind for when applications close. But look, a couple of really key things I'd also stress about putting it a good application. And the first one is to make sure that your project is actually eligible. We said it



starts with the basics about your project, and we've gone through the four sort of key elements that you need to make sure you cover. So yeah, please, when you're getting your application together, that's the first thing to make sure your project addresses those four key criteria. The second one would be to make sure that the funding that you are looking for and that you need to run your project if you're successful is between \$500,000 and a million dollars. It's got to be in that range and operate over three years is the timeframe.

Dave Johnson: And we'd also encourage you to make sure that if you or the person, if you're part of a consortium that's leading this project, is an eligible applicant and is clear guidance in the guidelines about who an eligible applicant is. And the last thing we'd suggest is to make sure that your application is written in plain English. We might be sitting in Canberra looking at the applications when they come through, but the clearer and more direct you are in writing your application, the better it will be able to demonstrate drought resilience aspects of your project.

Dave Johnson: And the one last thing I'd suggest is with that 11th of January deadline for applications, I'd really encourage you to plan to submit a little bit earlier than that. Don't leave it to the last minute. We all know things can go wrong with technology that is way out of your control and not your fault. But at the end of the day, it is a very strict deadline. So, I'd really encourage people to think about getting planned to get your application in well in advance of that final date of 9:00 PM Eastern Standard Time on the 11th of January.

Andrew Bell: And I guess as well, if you make an application, sort of close the document, don't send it, sleep on it, look at it again, and that's how you see how clear the language is and how focused you are and what you are requesting.

Dave Johnson: Absolutely, Andy. And I think, yeah, certainly encourage people to have a re-read over their application before they submit it and make sure you give yourself that plenty of time. Don't wait until getting close to the deadline to hit that submit button just in case something goes wrong. Because if you've got a great idea out there, we'd really love to hear it and make sure your application's as good as it can be in the mix for getting funding.

Andrew Bell: And 21:00, 9:00 PM, Australian Eastern Daylight-Saving Time, January the 11th, the deadline. Right. We've heard from on the FDF team, they've been putting out their story. We now want to hear from you and already we're hearing from you, but we want to hear questions. If you want to ask about what you've already heard just to get clarification, please ask that. If you have a question, just put it in that Q&A box.

Andrew Bell: Another reminder, we can't go into the nitty gritty of a specific application, but what we can do is talk in general terms, help you clear in your mind how you should go about this, and also what pitfalls that might lay out there, because nobody wants you to be falling into those. It's all about helping. So, if you do ask us a question, we've already had a couple which are anonymous, but if you feel like it, tell us where you are asking the question from and give your name. There are scores of you out there, get those questions coming in. But we've already got a few here. Travis let's start with you. Someone here asking if I've got other grant applications in with DAWE for consideration, can I still apply for this? Can they?



Travis Bover: Yeah, absolutely, you can apply under both programs. Our guidelines certainly make it clear that you can't be funded twice for the same activity. And I dare say that whatever other program you're looking at has the same thing. It's a very common and understandable provision in these sorts of grant processes. So, one of the things you can do is to acknowledge that in your application, that you've also put it in through another process. It might be the case that you're looking to put in through both programs, because the activities are in some way related.

Travis Bover: So, they're not duplicative, but they build on one another and that's fine. It's helpful for you to identify that. We can't take that into consideration as part of our process. It's relevant context. It's helpful for us to understand. We do our own due diligence, so we'll be looking for duplication and those risk of double-dipping, so to speak. So, if you're proactive in explaining why an application you put in through another process is different to the application, you're putting in here, then that certainly helps us to make sure that it's appropriate for us to consider your application through.

Andrew Bell: So be as transparent as you possibly can. There's no penalty for being transparent.

Travis Bover: No, no, not at all.

Andrew Bell: And another question in the same area here, do you need financial or in-kind contributions for the project? Can these come from other FDF projects/programs, Travis? So, can you sort of have almost take money from all over the place?

Travis Bover: Yeah, it's a good question. So, we haven't required a co-contribution. What we've said in the guidelines is that one of the things we look at in assessing applications is the value for money, for public money. So, we want the government's money, the taxpayers' dollars, to go as far as they can. In that context, it would be a consideration for us of if your co-funding or your co-contribution is from another FDF program, then on the one hand, that's sort of not getting as much further ahead in terms of bang for buck. But on the other hand, if it's a leverage opportunity and you are getting a gain through that, then it would be a consideration. So, you can absolutely identify sources of co-funding from any source. It's not a mandated thing. We're not requiring people to reach a quota or anything like that.

Andrew Bell: Dave, coming to you, you mentioned the hubs there. Someone's asking, do you need an endorsement for the hub? Does a project need to be linked to a hub? Or is it formal, informal, or mixture of both? How do the hubs come into this, I guess?

Dave Johnson: Yeah. It's very informal, Andy. And while we would certainly encourage those connections, because as Travis mentioned before, there's a number of programs that are underway in the Future Drought Fund, and we're looking for them to complement each other and build and leverage on each other. So, we would certainly encourage you to have a chat to your local Innovation and Adoption Hub, under the FDF program and getting their endorsement would be really good, engaging. And having the hub as a partner or a leader would also be a really terrific thing to do, but there's no requirement that if you don't have that ticked that box that you're ineligible. It's not an eligibility criteria.



Andrew Bell: A little bit of questioning about deadlines and stuff. So, let's start with the current deadline, 11th of January, 9:00 PM Eastern. Travis, is that set-in stone?

Travis Bover: Yeah. Look, Andy, unfortunately it is. And I will acknowledge upfront that it's not great timing to run a grant process and I apologise to everyone for that. You know, over Christmas. It is open for I think six or seven weeks, but it is of course, Christmas season. I know that there are other processes open at this point in time. To be really frank, the reason we've set that deadline is because there's obviously going to be a federal election in the first part of next year.

Travis Bover: We don't know when it's going to be. Like everyone else, we're speculating based on when the government said it'll hand down a budget and so forth. We'd really like to wrap this program up before we get into that election period and the caretaker period where we can't enter into grant agreements. Even if we've done 90% of the work, assessed applications, even announced which projects are successful, if a caretaker period election is called, then we can't proceed with contracts. So, in the very least, there's going to be a delay and a loss of momentum in what we're doing. So, look, that's the driver behind it. It is just wanting to get this wrapped up, not lose the momentum behind what we're doing, recognising that there's a federal election coming up.

Andrew Bell: And between now, that election and moving forward. Dave, if someone misses out for whatever reason this time or can't get that application in, will there be another chance next year?

Dave Johnson: Well, that's a decision for future government, Andy. At the moment, there's 23 million on the table for this program for the next three years. And that's what we're running the process for. What happens after that, whether there are future rounds, whether there's further funding for this, or other programs is a matter for government to decide down the track.

Andrew Bell: Now, I've mentioned lengths of string earlier on. Here's another what's the length of string. Travis, how many projects are you expecting to fund, or do you need to have a look at what comes across your desks first?

Travis Bover: Yeah, I mean, there's a certain amount of mass to it. We've got \$23 million that's on the table. The minimum project size is half a million dollars. So, what's that? 46 projects. But then maximum size is a million dollars. So somewhere less than 46.

Andrew Bell: Yeah. Yeah, you're keeping an eye on that. Right. This is another anonymous question. Would a project that scales out land management practices across the state be considered equally as a national project? Is that for you, Travis? I'm guessing if you can demonstrate something in one place, it might be applicable elsewhere. Is it that sort of that question?

Travis Bover: Yeah. Yes. I'm not quite sure what the national dimension of that question is, but maybe it's not important. So again, what we are looking for are projects that can demonstrate and drive. And through that, drive adoption at scale. And so, something that's about driving adoption at the scale in terms of across the state. That's prospectively the sort of thing that we would be interested in seeing.



Andrew Bell: Use of funding for research, Dave. Can funding be used for research about a land management practice or practices, a question asked, that could improve drought resilience? Can that be a part of this?

Dave Johnson: Yeah. So, Andy, this clearly isn't a research program. It's a land management practice program that we are looking for really good projects of examples of on the ground activity that are making a difference in demonstrating how those land practices can affect drought resilience. That's what it's about. It's not a research program. So, if you've got some great ideas for doing research in this area, by all means, follow those up with a different program. Now, having said that, we do recognise that in implementing these kinds of programs, you're trying something new, you will collect information about that, you will monitor it, you will be looking at how it goes. And in that sense, you could call some of that research. But it's not core research project. It's about implementing those management practices at scale and doing that in a robust, demonstrable way that can provide information that's useful to other people. So, I'd describe it that way, rather than as being research.

Andrew Bell: So, Travis, another question asking here. How is this program different to any other government soil landscape grants? I mean, what differentiates it from the other kinds of grants that might be on offer?

Travis Bover: So, the biggest differentiating figure is that first rule that I spoke about at length is that we are very focused on drought resilience. And again, we recognise that there's overlap between drought resilience and management of natural resources in the broad and biodiversity and ecosystem services and soils and so forth. But our primary focus is on drought resilience. We've also, in crafting this program, looked at some of the other programs that are on offer at the moment or prospectively on offer. Ours is very directly focused on demonstration, as we've just talked about a few times now. Other programs that are in the market at the moment in terms of open for applications are focused more on the research end of the spectrum or are focused more on the extension side of things. So, we're focusing drought resilience, demonstration, and specifically demonstration at scale to do drive broader adoption and uptake.

Andrew Bell: And I think it'd be really clear about that focus. It sort of builds from that focus out. Someone asking about case studies. Is there a number that need to be provided? How often? What evidence needs to be given? I think that's for you, Dave. I mean, is there a rule of thumb or is it project to project?

Dave Johnson: Yeah, definitely project to project, Andy. We're really open about that. Somebody may put in a project which the entire project could be considered to be a case study applied at scale, or there could be a number of different elements of activities that they're trying in that project, which could be considered case studies in their own right, or it may involve a project that's being delivered across different properties in different areas, different regions. And each of those could be considered a case study. So, no fixed rules about what it is, but the key point we're looking for is that the activities that we are going to fund under successful projects can be seen as a good case study at scale that's demonstrating these practices to other people beyond the life and the area that's covered by the project itself.



Andrew Bell: Here's a real nitty gritty question for you, Dave. We're talking about innovation here. So, someone's asking who owns the intellectual property, or the IP, for a project under this program?

Dave Johnson: Yeah, it's a good question. Like all most projects that the government funds of this nature, the intellectual property actually resides with the project proponent, the applicant. They actually own it. But in undertaking the project, you agree to give unfettered access to the commonwealth to use that intellectual property for the purposes of the program. So, it's making sure that we get that public good from the projects that people are undertaking. But by all means, if there's an element of that activity that's got some intellectual property associated with it, then the person that's putting in the application is the owner of that intellectual property.

Andrew Bell: And I guess overarching the FDF, Travis. I don't really want to get too Pollyannaish about this, but part of the FDF approach is we are all in this together, and I know there's money involved in all the rest of it. But this is a cooperative interlocked connected process.

Travis Bover: Yeah, it absolutely is. And if you're thinking about in the context of this program, we're not going to drive change on the scale that's required to support Australian agriculture to become more drought resilience by funding project by project, by project, by project. So, we need to get a multiplier effect going here. And so that's why we want to support not just good projects that will do good things in and of themselves on the site or location that they're being done, but that will help to drive broader adoption beyond the project. And that's why we're looking for case studies. And I guess to add to Dave's earlier response, when we say case studies, we don't necessarily mean sort of nice glossy documents. We're looking at case studies from that context of what we want to achieve is driving broader uptake. So be thinking about it from the perspective of what sorts of information and products would support other farmers and other farming system groups and so forth to look at your project and go, "That might be worth a shot, in my neck of the woods."

Andrew Bell: I don't know if I'm out of order, but I'll ask this question. This demonstrating, is it a numbers game? Or is it we started like, is it a descriptive thing or is it a mixture depending on the project? Because demonstrable might frighten a few people. Because they might think, "Oh, here we go. spreadsheets." How do you do that? Or is again, it's a project-by-project thing?

Dave Johnson: Yeah. Well certainly, Andy. I don't think about spreadsheets when I think about being demonstrable, but there probably is a numbers element to it. If I just give example for some of the projects that are underway under our existing NRM Drought Resilience Program, a lot of those have built in field days, for example. So, in those projects, they'll set up a site where they're doing some drought resilience activities, and then they'll have deliberate strategic field days inviting other local farmers, people of from local agricultural groups to come in and have a look at what they're doing, to talk about what they're doing, to add ideas, take away some of the lessons and follow through the life of the program to share that journey together. And that really is an important way of demonstrating what you're doing.

Andrew Bell: Now, I talked about a numbers game. Here's a couple for you, Travis, which are about numbers in a sort of way, I think. First one, "Are you likely be more successful if you're part of a consortium?" asked a questioner.



Travis Bover: Look, it really depends so much on context. So, one of the things that we do want to encourage through the FDF and abroad, but also this program, is collaboration around the topic of drought resilience. That's an important objective in its own right and obviously consortia are a part of that. Consortia also bring in organisations with different capabilities and strengths and in the sorts of activities that we are talking about that may well, depending on the context of replication, be an advantage if you're demonstrating that you are bringing in someone who's well-placed to do that real sort of on the ground delivery. But also, someone else who's can bring that sort of scientific rigour. Someone who can bring sort of the data and monitoring and evaluation rigour and so forth. So, we're not saying you need a consortia to do that. It might be an advantage in that context, but there's no special points awarded if you like for whether your application is a consortium application or not.

Andrew Bell: And still with things of numerical importance, can people submit more than one application? I guess by that we're meaning clearly demonstrably different project applications and proposals. Can they do that?

Travis Bover: Yeah. Absolutely, they can submit as many proposals as you'd like. It's hard for us in that context to understand what your relative priorities are, but you are welcome to put in as many as you'd like to.

Andrew Bell: And finally on this sort of numbers thing and cluster thing, can a grant recipient pass on the funding as a devolved grant to a third party? Or does it live and die with the process that has a deadline of the 11th of January at nine o'clock?

Dave Johnson: Well, I'd look at it, frame it a little bit differently, Andy. So, while we want to consortium, we want people that come together to deliver the program and that as a joint activity. I would certainly envisage giving money to somebody who then takes it and says, "Oh, we are now going to completely hand it onto somebody independent as a devolved grant for them to do it." That's certainly not the model that we're picturing for this program. It is about people coming together.

Dave Johnson: And look, a really good example I can give I've spoken to a couple of people after our last NRM grants program. And there were some people there that had some really great ideas, but what they were doing was just proposing that project on their own farm, their own property, basically, at a very local scale. And while they were great ideas, it was hard to see the public benefit. The broader public benefit from those activities. And if there are people in that situation, if they get together with a couple of other landholders in different areas, the combination of that activity spread across different sites that can pick up different examples in a connected way is a really good example of the sort of consortium I think that we are looking under this program.

Andrew Bell: What about if this is sort of, I'm rewording a question that's just come in here. What if somebody has seen something elsewhere in another area of region, even beyond Australia, who knows? Could they apply for money for a project that replicates or somewhat copies a pre-existing but hasn't been tested where your particular project would be initially located?



Travis Bover: Yeah, absolutely and that is very much within scope. It's finding those practices that have worked in one context and testing them. You know, I mentioned earlier, scale. But testing them in a different context is also a very appropriate thing to do. We'd still be looking for scale, but certainly one of the things we want to do is people learning from what's worked in other places and trialling and demonstrating that it can work in other farming systems.

Andrew Bell: So, I guess the warning there is, don't just take something from elsewhere, cross out Gippsland and put in WA Wheatbelt or Riverina or whatever, whatever. It's got to stand on its own two feet.

Travis Bover: Absolutely.

Andrew Bell: Travis. Someone is asking if soils and landscapes aren't an option for me, are there other opportunities under FDF?

Travis Bover: So, there's always opportunities. So, as I mentioned in the introduction, the Future Drought Fund's quite unique in the sense of it's a hundred million dollars a year. There's lots of information on our website about the range of programs that we've got underway. In terms of opportunities coming up, we're just about sort of at the end of rolling out the programs that the government committed to last budget process. The government, through every budget process, thinks about future programs, and so there will be further announcements. We can't really tell you what those programs will be because we don't know. And ultimately, it's for the government to decide.

Travis Bover: One thing you can do is to talk to your local Adoption and Innovation Hub. Part of their role is to work with stakeholders in their region to support extension and adoption of drought resilient practices. So, there might be opportunities from talking to them. They might not thank me for sending you away, but that's worth the shot. And you can sign up to our Have Your Say list. And I think we've got some details coming at the end of this webinar where you can make sure that you receive an email whenever there's a new program or funding opportunity announced, so that you are one of the first to know that there's an opportunity.

Andrew Bell: And just to emphasise, often people say tellers, contactors, Have Your Say, etc. Your ears are really open because we're in, not the early days, but this is a fairly new process we're involved with here.

Travis Bover: Yeah, that's right. We're always keen to here and learn. So, the Future Drought Fund, it's a significant undertaking. It's a long-term undertaking. We're one and a half years into it. And we don't presume to have all the answers so we're learning as we go. And we're always keen to get feedback and insights onto what we can do, should do, etc., to support drought resilience.

Andrew Bell: So, Dave, someone's asking here, and it speaks also to what Travis has just said about the hubs. Do you need a letter of formal support from a hub or NRM group to support application, and does that sort of boost an application?



Dave Johnson: Yeah, that would certainly be helpful. It'd be great if the hub or the local NRM group was a party to an application, if it's a sort of consortium type application and there are multiple people involved. It would be great to have them directly involved. Otherwise, yeah, certainly having a letter of endorsement or support, from either your NRM body or your Adoption and Innovation Hub would be really valuable.

Andrew Bell: Another one, which is a bit more specific. Can the funding on offer be used for water projects or an On-Farm Water Infrastructure Project?

Dave Johnson: Yeah. No. The answer is clearly no, not from this program. There are a number of other initiatives where people can improve the water efficiency on their farm with things like new irrigation systems and more efficient drainage and water supply and all those kinds of things. And they're great things to be doing and we'd certainly encourage people to continue thinking about them, but not funded through this program. It may be that your activity has an element of how you use water differently as an element, and that's okay as long as we come back to the main point that Travis talked about. It's all about practices that demonstrate drought resilience at scale.

Andrew Bell: Yeah. 'Drought Resilient Soils and Landscapes' is the title of this webinar. We've got a little, not much time left, but get any remaining questions in. We do look at all of them that come in by the way. Dave, this is a good one. Say you do press that button early and then suddenly have a light bulb moment. "Can I.", asks the questioner, "Change information prior to that deadline? Can you actually override the application or just submit an updated application?".

Dave Johnson: Yeah. You'll find on the Community Grants hub website. There are clear instructions about submitting an application and there are opportunities to refine or resubmit your application, as long as you've got plenty of time before that deadline to do it all. Once you hit the deadline, whatever's in the system is in the system. And if somebody did, for example, submit an application, came up with some changes, and then resubmitted it as a second application, it's the most recent one in the system that would be taken through and be assessed.

Andrew Bell: And I'm guessing that the deadline passes and then you press a button or something, and up they come, and you start your work of assessing those applications.

Dave Johnson: Yep. And we've got a very tight timeframe for doing that, but very keen to get on it as soon as we can after the 11th.

Andrew Bell: As Travis alluded to earlier. Travis, someone is asking, "Are rural research and development corporations eligible to apply?".

Travis Bover: No, they're not eligible to apply directly, but we certainly see a lot of value in RDCs working with others to support the demonstration of research that RDCs have been doing. So RDCs cannot lead an application, but they can certainly form part of a consortium with, for example, a hub or a local farming systems group, or a NRM regional body, and so forth. Same with the CSIRO and other commonwealth and state entities. You can be part of an application that's led by someone else that is eligible, but you can't lead it yourself.



Andrew Bell: And sort of going back to a previous topic here, Dave. When will people be able to start their project after finding out if they've got it or not? I mean, will it be almost instantaneous? I guess they're asking. And another length of string question, when will people know the outcome? I guess Travis has already said, "Well, we'll try and get this done as quickly but efficiently and in the public interest as we can."

Dave Johnson: Yeah. Absolutely. Two really good questions. And we've got on the screen at the moment that we expect the outcome from the application process to be sort of known around late March, perhaps early April. So that's when you should expect to hear something about the success or otherwise of your application. And I guess we'd be looking to then jump into funding agreements with the successful applicants straight away, and then projects can commence straight after that. So, if you're thinking about the timing, sort of April/May onwards would be the time to think about when to commence your program. And being for three years, we're really aware that people will be thinking about the seasonal cycles and how they can fit in over that period to maximise what they're trying to demonstrate is drought resilience over the seasons of the three years.

Andrew Bell: Of course, this is a big country, therefore the seasonal cycles vary from place to place, state to state, region to region. Travis, another water questions, not a dry argument today. Do stream rehabilitation projects fit into this program?

Travis Bover: Yes, they could potentially fit into this program, noting that we are very focused on agricultural outcomes. So, drought resilience, as I mentioned earlier, we're looking at it in the context of the ability to support agricultural productivity during drought and recovering out of drought. Stream rehabilitation can obviously have a role. It obviously also has biodiversity and other co-benefits. We'd want to see drought resilience as the central focus of any such application.

Andrew Bell: Okay. We're getting very close to deadline times. So lucky last question and it'll go to you, Travis. We've talked about people partnering with a hub, but can a hub actually propose something, be lead in a proposal?

Travis Bover: Yeah, absolutely. And look, the hubs are ultimately led by a particular entity. In most cases, it's a regional university. And so those entities, whether it's a university or otherwise can submit an application just as anyone else. They can do it in their own right or they can do it on behalf of the hub as a collective, so yes.

Andrew Bell: Thank you very much, Travis. Well, there we are. The clock has almost beaten us. Thank you for your questions and rest assured that any questions we didn't get to, the Q&As will be available after this webinar goes out live, along with the video. There's also the Community Grants Hub available should you have any questions about your grant application. They're a great one stop shop. And there we go, I guess, in the countdown to Christmas, can I just, briefly, gentlemen, ask you each for one final thought, message, whatever, as this application deadline of the 11th of January is over the horizon? Dave let's start with you. One last message for those watching today about this process.



Dave Johnson: Yeah. So, I guess my message is we know farmers out there, they're very intuitive in the way they operate, very creative. There are lots of some great ideas out there that we probably haven't thought about here in the Department that others haven't thought about. And if you've got a great idea that you believe fits the criteria for this program, we'd really encourage you to put it your best application forward and wish you all the best.

Andrew Bell: And Travis, how are you feeling about all of this?

Travis Bover: I've laboured the point, I know, but I'm going to continue. Again, drought resilience. It's the focus of the Future Drought Fund. It's the focus of this program. It needs to be the very clear focus of your proposal. So please, please, please, if you do nothing else, explain your idea in terms of what it means for drought resilience for Australian agriculture. Thank you.

Andrew Bell: Travis, Dave, thank you so much for coming to the table today and thank you for coming to this table, wherever you are across Australia. Thanks to the team here in the studio in Canberra, the FDF team and the technical team. And thank you for spending an hour with us. Now, some key dates on your screen, websites to visit. If the Drought Resilient Soils and Landscape sounds the grant opportunity for you, just remember, make sure you read the grant guidelines available from the Community Grants Hub website. And think about what you've heard today and incorporate it in how you go ahead. And I know we've mentioned it 103 times. Let's make it 104. Get your application in by 21:00, 9:00 PM Australian Eastern Daylight-Saving Time on January the 11th, 2022. Best of luck. Good grant application filling to you all. Season's greetings. And until the next time the Future Drought Fund comes to you with information about what it's up to and where it's going. From the studio here in Canberra, I'm Andy Bell. Thank you for your company. Have a good day.

[Webinar ends]