Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Future Drought Fund Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework 2024 to 2028

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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.

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Introduction

This document presents the Future Drought Fund (FDF) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework for the Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024–2028) Determination 2024.

The framework was developed in early 2025 using a participatory and user-focused approach involving the FDF Program Evaluation and Support (PES) team and FDF program leads. This framework replaces and builds on the 2020 FDF MEL Framework and was informed by FDF program evaluation findings and the 2023 Productivity Commission Inquiry report. The framework also builds on lessons learned by FDF from MEL implementation during the first funding plan. This framework aligns with the MEL principles established by the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy.

The framework presents the following components:

- **MEL scope** – outlines the purpose, boundaries and primary audiences for FDF MEL, and the MEL principles guiding the framework
- **Theory of Change (ToC)** – outlines how the FDF expects to achieve its intended outcomes and vision, presented as a model and supporting narrative articulating the underpinning approaches
- **FDF MEL approach**, which includes
  - **Monitoring** – approach to routine monitoring at both FDF and program levels to inform progress reporting, annual learning cycles and point-in-time evaluations
  - **Evaluation** – approach to conducting evaluation studies to assess the results, process and design of the FDF and individual programs, guided by FDF and program-level key evaluation questions (KEQs). Evaluation studies will be informed by routine monitoring and progress reporting, annual learnings and additional point-in-time data collection activities, and will also seek expert opinion where appropriate
  - **Learning** – includes both learning (and sharing knowledge) from point-in-time evaluations as well as routine strategic learning processes at both the FDF and program levels. The latter present good opportunity for reflections on key learning questions (KLQs) aiming to surface insights from monitoring and evaluation activities to date. These insights will inform cycles of adaptive learning and improvement in program and FDF delivery.
- **MEL implementation** – guidance on the roles and responsibilities for MEL activities and program MEL plans development. Also outlines an implementation schedule for key MEL activities at the FDF and program level as the final elements of the FDF MEL approach.

The framework takes a nested approach to MEL, and guides MEL activities at the FDF and program level. A third tier of 'project' MEL activities will be established, to be undertaken by delivery partners (e.g. grantees, states and territories), with support from program teams and PES. Each chapter of this framework explains how it is to be understood at the FDF and program levels, with guidance for project MEL provided where relevant. Detailed guidance for project MEL will be in individual program MEL plans.

FDF overview

The FDF is the Australian Government's major investment into drought preparedness. The Future Drought Fund Act 2019 (FDF Act) makes available $100 million each year to enhance the public good by building drought and climate resilience in Australia's agricultural sector, landscapes and communities.

In early 2024, the Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024–2028) Determination 2024 came into effect, superseding the Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2020 to 2024. Through the current funding plan, the Australian Government has committed $519.1 million over 8 years. The FDF Investment Strategy details the priorities and programs under the current funding plan (Table 1). Many of these programs build on those established under the 2020 funding plan, and were designed to capitalise on the learnings that emerged during that funding plan, including those surfaced through the 2023 Productivity Commission Inquiry as well as the stakeholder consultations and program evaluations undertaken in 2023 and 2024.

Table 1 FDF Investment Strategy priorities

FDF investment priorities	FDF programs
Partnering for local solutions	• Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs (Hubs): $132 million over 8 years from 2024–25 • Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP): $67 million over 4 years from 2025–26 • Communities: $36 million over 4 years from 2024–25
Partnering for First Nations initiatives	• Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country (SDRC): $12 million over 3 years from 2025–26 • First Nations Supporting Participation Activities: $3M
Building knowledge, skills and capability	• Farm Business Resilience (FBR): $83.2 million over 5 years from 2024–25 • Climate Services for Agriculture (CSA): $17.2 million over 4 years from 2024–25 • Scaling for Success (SS): $37 million over 3 years from 2025–26
Innovating for transformation	• Long-term Trials (LTT) 2: $60.3 million over 6 years from 2024–25 • Resilient Landscapes (RL): $40 million over 6 years from 2024–25 • Innovation Challenges Pilot (ICP): $20 million over 3 years from 2025–26
Measuring progress and knowledge sharing	• Evaluation and Support: $3.25 million over 4 years from 2024–25 • Knowledge Management: $7.3 million over 4 years from 2024–25 • Science to Practice 2.0: $800,000 over 4 years from 2024–25

FDF programs are managed by the department with various delivery partners, including state and territory agencies, universities, natural resource management (NRM) regional bodies, First Nations partners and statutory authorities such as CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology.

The FDF is part of the government's drought policy landscape and includes the National Drought Agreement (2024 to 2029) and the Australian Government Drought Plan (2024 to 2029). This landscape also includes targeted and complementary investments through the Climate Smart Agriculture Program (2023 to 2028) funded under the National Heritage Trust, and the Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan (2024 to 2034).

These plans and programs aim to accelerate Australia's transition to a resilient, sustainable and low-emissions future for farmers and their communities. FDF programs also complement a range of programs and projects delivered by state and territory governments, regional and industry bodies and research institutions.

1 MEL scope

1.1 Purpose and principles

This framework provides guidance to establish and implement MEL activities primarily through FDF programs and their delivery partners. The framework enables us to assess the:

- relevance of the design of the FDF and its programs to the problem context
- effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the FDF and its programs
- appropriateness and effectiveness of the FDF and its programs, and the progress made toward intended outcomes
- opportunities to improve the design and delivery of the FDF and its programs into the future
- contribution of the FDF and its programs to the public good through building drought and climate resilience in Australia.

The framework:

- applies to all programs and initiatives funded under the funding plan, including program and delivery partners' management and administration of projects and programs
- adopts a long-term view of the achievement of resilience outcomes, with the intention that the performance of programs implemented during each funding plan is demonstrated, and built on, within a broader long-term investment in drought and climate resilience
- is designed to meet the needs of its primary audiences (Table 2) – those that will use the MEL data and analysis, and knowledge generated, to inform decisions about the FDF and its programs.

Table 2 Audience use of MEL information

Audience	Uses of MEL information
FDF PES and program teams and their delivery partners	Information is used to: • assess program progress implementation and outcomes • inform improvements to program design and delivery within the program (during delivery) • inform improvements to design and delivery of future programs.
FDF executives, FDF governance committee, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Information is used to: • assess the contribution of the Fund and its programs to public good through building drought and climate resilience in Australia • assess the relevance of the FDF and its programs within the broader problem context • inform improvements to future program design • inform improvements to future FDF funding design and direction and subsequent investment • inform future Productivity Commission inquiries and demonstrate implementation of recommendations from the 2023 inquiry • inform policy on drought and climate resilience.

The principles set out in Table 3 describe what 'good' MEL looks like for the FDF and its programs. These principles align with those established in the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and have been adopted in the design of the framework.

Table 3 Principles of good MEL

Principle	Description
A systems-based MEL approach	As FDF is a complex system of programs dealing with complex issues – climate change and drought – this framework outlines a systems-based Theory of Change and MEL approach that is proportionate to these complexities.
Contribution over attribution	The FDF works in a complex context, or ecosystem of programs and initiatives contributing to resilience and sustainability, where many external factors are at play. It is therefore not possible or feasible to attribute drought resilience outcomes at whole-of-system level to FDF only – nor to measure these contextual shared outcomes by FDF alone. Rather, it is more logical to focus on contribution of FDF in the broader context and maintain networks with other players to collaborate on system-wide outcomes. The framework thus enables FDF to make claims about how it is contributing to resilience and sustainability outcomes that are bigger than the FDF itself, supported by evidence and reputable expertise.
MEL activities driven by purpose	All MEL activities guided by this framework must have an explicit purpose – there is no MEL for MEL's sake. This includes ensuring no data is collected that does not have a specific use, and all data collected is done so ethically, in a culturally safe way and in accordance with the standards of the Privacy Act 1988.
Progress over perfection	MEL is an iterative process and FDF staff will continue to learn and adapt based on implementation experience.
MEL is commensurate with the available resources and capability	A plan is only as good as its implementation. This framework and associated Program MEL plans are designed to ensure that what is planned is achievable within the time, money and expertise available. Also, some subprograms and activities (e.g. enabling areas, advisory committees or small, short subprograms) may not require a program MEL plan. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
MEL is culturally informed and safe	This includes alignment with the Australian Evaluation Society First Nations Cultural Safety Framework (Gollan and Stacey 2021) and the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (Productivity Commission 2020) to guide MEL activities. Key principles for culturally safe MEL include (among others): obtaining free, prior and informed consent; ensuring data has a defined use and that participating communities and organisations benefit from the evaluation; protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and honouring Indigenous data sovereignty.

1.2 Program MEL scope

The scope of program MEL plans is nested within this framework, reflecting the nestedness of programs within FDF. The development and implementation of MEL plans at the program (and project) level should be guided by the scope.

Program MEL activities need to enable the assessment of:

- the relevance of the design of the program to the problem context (design)
- the effectiveness and efficiency of program implementation (processes)
- the effectiveness of the program, including the progress being made toward intended outcomes and the program's contribution to public good through building drought and climate resilience in Australia (results)
- opportunities to improve the design and delivery of the program into the future.

The primary audiences and guiding principles are as described for the FDF in section 2.1.

2 FDF Theory of Change

2.1 Underpinning systems-based theory

Drought and climate change are complex and have multifaceted impacts on social–ecological systems, which in turn are complex and adaptive by nature. The FDF can also be considered as a complex system whose complexity arises from interactions among its different actors, programs and the broader context of resilience and sustainability initiatives. Systems thinking therefore provides a valuable lens to understand and address these complexities, and design and implement commensurate MEL.

The FDF adopts a holistic approach to building resilience of current and future generations to drought and broader climate impacts. This approach is founded on robust principles of social–ecological resilience theory – one of many systems-based approaches. The FDF supports and prioritises mutually reinforcing outcomes through interconnected drought and climate resilience activities. Specifically, it works to enhance the preparedness and system-wide resilience – economic, environmental and social – of the agriculture sector, landscapes and communities to the increased frequency and severity of drought, and to more extreme climate variability.

This approach acknowledges the range of actors in the system – including the FDF, farmers, government, industry representatives, farming systems groups, First Nations peoples, natural resource management organisations, professional advisers, universities and other research organisations, the private and not-for-profit sectors and rural, regional and remote communities.

The FDF approach intends to amplify benefits for these stakeholders and achieve public good in an efficient and effective way. The FDF will achieve efficiency through systems-informed coordination of different programs to use resources well, minimise duplication and increase synergy to achieve outcomes, and effectiveness through in producing collective outcomes that matter.

The FDF aims at enabling change, from incremental to transformational. This includes behavioural change and a shift in paradigms and narratives around drought and climate resilience. Paradigms and behaviours are the most powerful leverage points in social-ecological systems. The FDF does that by generating knowledge from its programs, promoting networks and connectedness and supporting safe-fail experimentation and collective learning across the 3 types of resilience. Through this, the FDF contributes to nudging change at systemic scale.

2.1.1 Key systems-based elements of this framework

Key resilience and systems thinking principles informed the development of the framework and the proposed ToC. The key elements of this approach are:

- Nestedness of MEL at FDF, program and project level. This nestedness ensures that program ToCs, and logic models at program and project levels are in turn tailored to address their specific contribution to FDF outcomes (section 2.5) and the spheres of control, influence and interests (section 2.2).
- Reflecting social-ecological resilience theory, for example by
  - targeting building and/or improvement of the 5 capitals (natural, physical, financial, human and social) that constitute reserves that are critical for sustainability and resilience
  - monitoring of critical thresholds or tipping points in these capitals beyond which systems become untenable, and resilience is lost
  - aiming to monitor and evaluate the capacity of farmers, land managers, and communities to build and use these capitals to respond in times of drought and climate events. The capitals underpin the capacity of these actors to anticipate for, absorb and adapt and/or transform in response to drought and climate shocks (see Glossary for absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities)
  - introducing the concept of 'levers for change' in the ToC – and identifying 4 of them - as the mechanisms to deliver desired outcomes and achieve change. More levers may emerge as programs are designed and rolled out, and interlinkages between various programs are built and leveraged.
- Monitoring the emergence of outcomes of the inter-dependencies or linkages between FDF programs and evaluating these outcomes alongside those listed in the Theory of Change.
- Recognising that the FDF is one contributor in the broader context of resilience and sustainability, and distinguishing between its spheres ('control',' 'influence', and 'interest') (section 2.2).
- Introducing MEL principles that are purpose-driven and learning-oriented, including iterative adaptive learning processes to match the dynamic nature of complex systems (section 3.2).
- An approach to embrace failure as an opportunity for learning and adaptation. This is commensurate with the key resilience principle of safe-fail experimentation, where failure is accepted as a possibility. Learning from both success and failure can equally inform adaptative management of FDF and its programs, and the design of new programs.

2.2 Introduction to FDF Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) is an illustrated conceptual model accompanied by a narrative that shows a series of expected consequences, or a change in a context of interest as a result of an initiative or set of initiatives. The FDF ToC consists of an illustration and description of why and how the FDF contributes to desirable change in drought and climate resilience.

Figure 1 shows the FDF ToC and its associated spheres (interest, influence and control):

- **Sphere of interest –** relates to a) the FDF's strategic objectives, aims and vision, and b) the broad context of the Australian agriculture system. It is about the broader 'why' behind FDF's work, where FDF activities contribute to achieving these objectives, aims and vision, and in turn to the broader agricultural context, but cannot be held solely accountable for achieving them, as other initiatives and influences also contribute.
- **Sphere of influence –** relates to the intermediate and end-of-program (which is end-of-funding plan for FDF) outcomes that the FDF can feasibly achieve, demonstrate progress towards (signals of impact) or significantly influence within its lifespan.
- **Sphere of control –** relates to the activities and outputs which can be directly attributed to the FDF and its programs (and projects), which draw on a variety of levers for change. This is about how the FDF contributes to change.

Figure 1 FDF Theory of Change and spheres of influence concepts

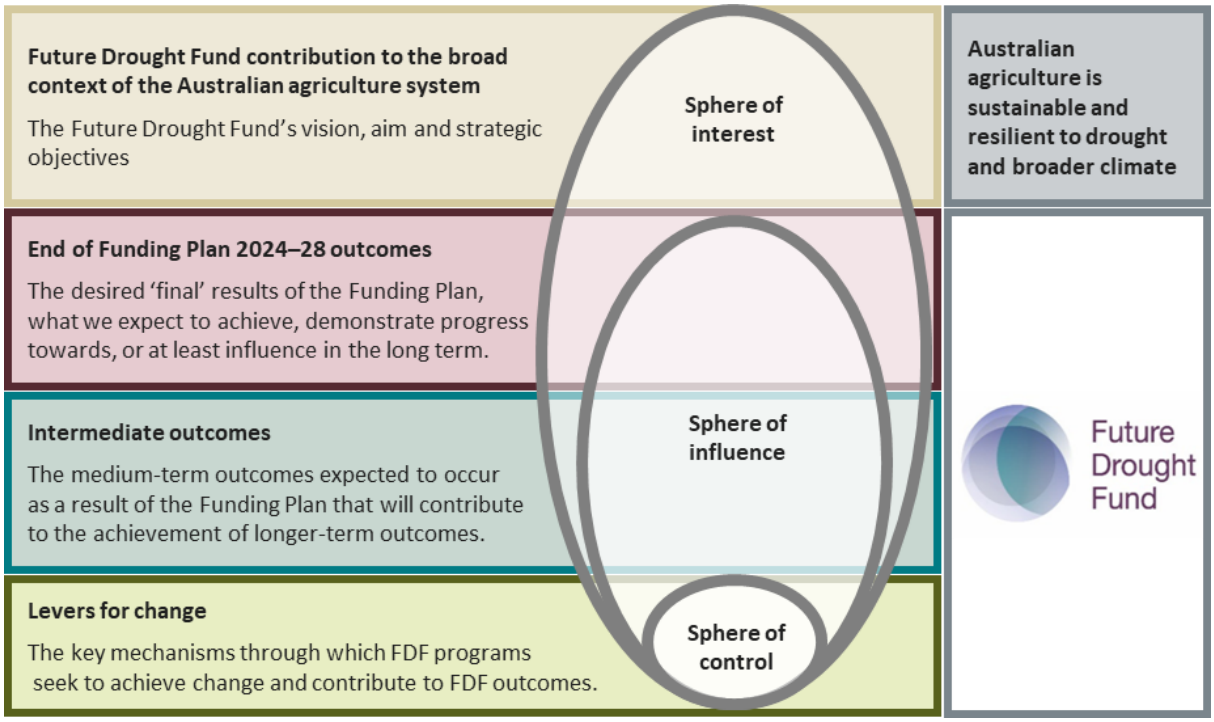
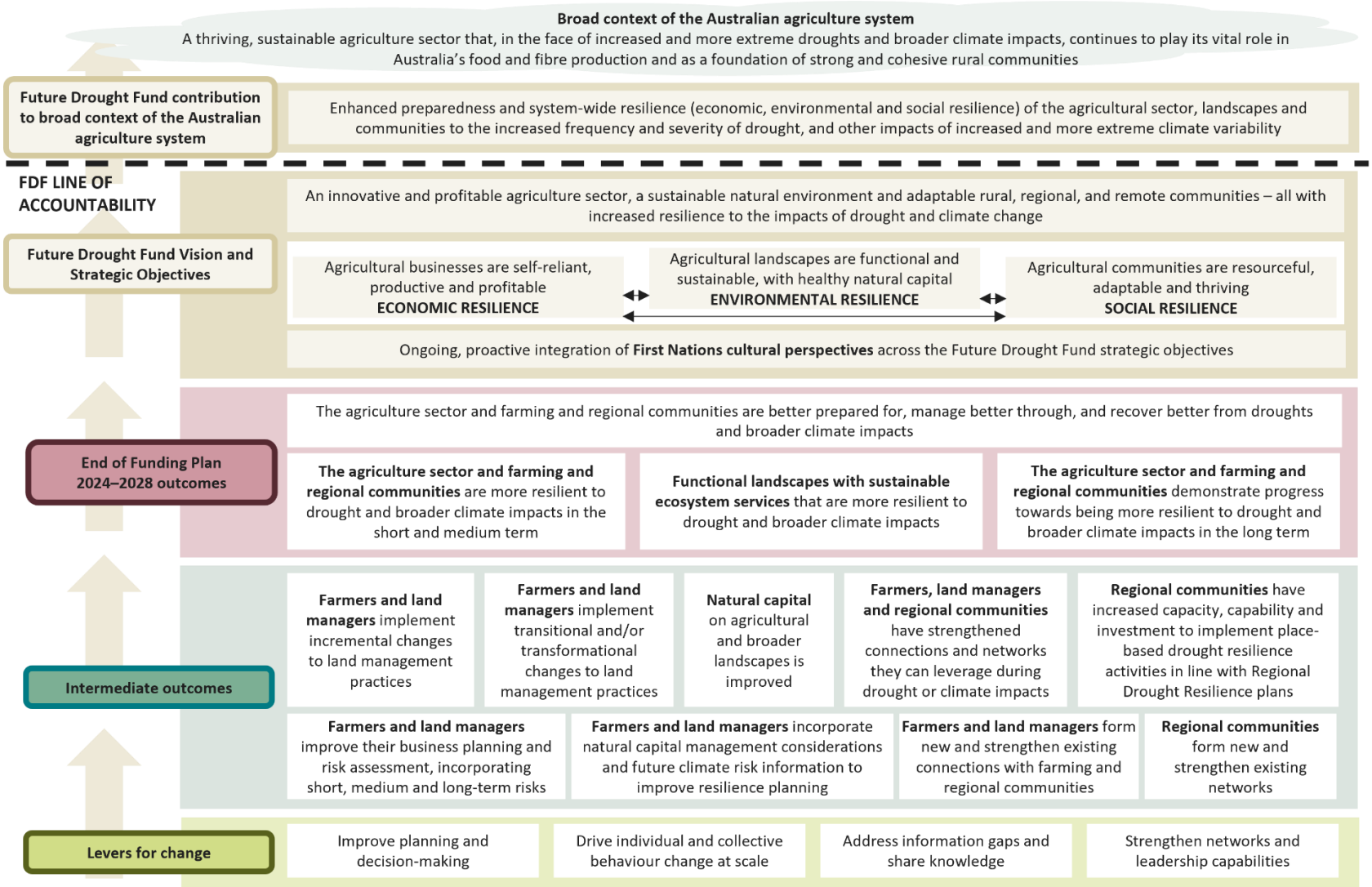


Figure 2 presents the FDF ToC for the current funding plan as a model, followed by a narrative. These 2 components describe how the FDF utilises specific levers for change through which its programs contribute to and influence a cascade of causally linked outcomes. This ultimately contributes to the inter-connected economic, environmental and social resilience strategic objectives, aim, vision, and the broad context of the Australian agriculture system. The ToC includes a set of effectiveness

principles which inform the ‘ways of working’ and guide program implementation. These principles include details of the collaborations facilitated across FDF programs and with other government initiatives. The causal assumptions underpinning the ToC are outlined in section 2.4.5.

2.3 Theory of Change model

Figure 2 FDF Theory of Change, 2024 to 2028 funding plan



2.4 Theory of Change narrative

2.4.1 Broad context of Australian agriculture system

The FDF is one initiative in a broader context – an ecosystem of resilience and sustainability initiatives in the department and elsewhere that collectively contribute to 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.

As part of this broad context, the FDF aligns with the department's purpose, outcomes and objectives, specifically the objective of sector resilience and sustainability – increase the contribution agriculture, fisheries and forestry make to a healthy, sustainable and low-emissions environment (Corporate Plan 2025–26).

The FDF contributes to the broad context through its own funding plan vision, aim and 3 inter-connected strategic objectives to build:

- economic resilience – growing the productivity and self-reliance of the agricultural sector
- environmental resilience – improving the function of agricultural landscapes through effective management of the natural resource base
- social resilience – strengthening the social capital, wellbeing, and connectedness of rural, regional, and remote agricultural communities.

The dashed line in the ToC model directly under the 'Future Drought Fund Contribution to the Broad Context' indicates the boundary of the FDF system, and its direct line of accountability. It is a key requirement in a systems approach to clearly identify the boundary of a system, and the 'cloud' on top of the model indicates that FDF contributes to a bigger, similarly complex whole.

2.4.2 Contribution of current funding plan

The FDF expects that programs and initiatives implemented during the current funding plan (2024 to 2028) will contribute to the FDF vision, aim and strategic objectives through achievement of, or demonstrating progress towards achieving the following outcomes by the end of the funding plan:

- the agricultural sector and farming and regional communities are better prepared for, manage better through, and recover better from droughts and broader climate impacts
- the agricultural sector and farming and regional communities are more resilient to drought and broader climate impacts in the short and medium term
- the agricultural sector and farming and regional communities show signals of progress towards being more resilient to drought and broader climate impacts in the long term
- functional landscapes with sustainable ecosystem services are more resilient to drought and broader climate impacts.

The funding plan and accompanying investment strategy distinguishes between resilience to drought and broader climate impacts in the short, medium and long term, beyond the 4 years of the current funding plan. This distinction recognises that while incremental changes may help farmers and regional communities in the short term, more significant and potentially transformational change

may be required over the long term. Some types of transformational changes necessarily take longer than the funding plan timeframe to achieve or manifest (e.g. ecological processes). Further, some programs will extend beyond 2028. Consideration will therefore be given to how the FDF and its longer programs demonstrate 'signals of impact' – that is, progress towards achieving long-term outcomes during the period of this funding plan.

2.4.3 End-of-funding plan outcomes

The investment strategy outlines investment in 10 programs as well as the high-level intentions for measuring progress and knowledge sharing. Programs will use at least one of the 4 'levers for change' – the key mechanisms identified by which the FDF seeks to achieve change – and contribute to the intermediate and end-of-funding plan outcomes or demonstrate progress (signals of impact) toward achieving these outcomes in the long term. The terminology of 'levers for change' was developed though the Theory of Change workshop development process with FDF program staff. Individual programs do not have to use all 4 levers, nor contribute towards all outcomes. The 4 levers for change are to:

1) **Improve planning and decision making –** to support for farmers and land managers, Traditional Custodians, and regional and agriculture-dependent communities to plan for drought and other climate related risks, across the short, medium and long terms (e.g. CSA, FBR, RDRP)
2) **Drive individual and collective behaviour change at scale –** to support farmers and land managers to adopt new and proven resilience-building agricultural and natural resource management practices (e.g. RL, LTT, Hubs)
3) **Address information gaps and share knowledge –** to generate and share information about drought and climate resilience practices in agricultural and broader landscapes, and about climate information tools (e.g. CSA, Hubs, SS)
4) **Strengthen networks and leadership capabilities –** to support farming and regional communities, including First Nations communities, to build social capital resources to draw on when needed (e.g. FBR, RDRP, RL).

FDF programs propose 3 interlinking pathways to affect the levers of change and contribute towards the FDF aims and objectives outlined in the ToC:

1) **Individual change pathway –** Improved access to information and decision-making tools is expected to lead to farmers and land managers improving their business planning and risk assessment, incorporating short, medium and long-term risks. By addressing information gaps, and improving skills and knowledge of risk management, as well as agricultural and natural resource management practices, farmers and land managers will be able to incorporate more accurate future climate risk information. This improves resilience planning, decision making, and ultimately adaptive management. To maximise these impacts, the FDF and its programs will not only foster collective learning amongst its stakeholders, but also maintain ongoing learning and adaptation internally, and be open to behavioural, institutional and other changes, all facilitated through building and maintaining an evaluative culture. All this should lead to farmers and land managers implementing incremental, transitional, or transformational changes to on-farm land management practices, which in turn should lead to:

a) Improved resilience of natural capital, which leads to functional landscapes with sustainable ecosystem services

b) Improved performance of farming businesses and improved self-reliance of the agricultural sector

c) Improved health and wellbeing of farming and regional communities

d) Farming and regional communities that are more resilient to drought and broader climate impacts in the short and medium terms and demonstrate progress (signals of impact) towards being more resilient in the long-term.

2) **Regional community pathway** – Improving regional planning and decision-making and addressing information gaps contributes to regional communities having increased capacity, capability and investment to implement place-based drought resilience activities in line with shared plans. There will be multiple forms of planning under different programs, with programs aiming to support regional community capacity and capability to design and implement locally led plans (Regional Drought Resilience Plans) and ensure that FDF programs align with these plans. Improvements in community capacity and capability – and the investments made in implementing plans – should strengthen social infrastructure and cohesion and provide more opportunities for innovation and collaboration, which should lead to farming and regional communities being more resilient to drought and other climate risks in the short, medium and long term.

3) **Networks pathway –** Strengthening networks and leadership capabilities will contribute to farmers, land managers and agriculture-dependent communities strengthening existing, and forming new connections within and between farming and regional communities. It is expected that these strengthened connections and networks can be leveraged to respond to drought or climate events, which will lead to farming and regional communities being more resilient to drought and broader climate impacts in the short, medium and long term.

2.4.4 Effectiveness principles

A set of effectiveness principles or 'ways of working' that guide program implementation underpins the ToC. While some may look similar to the funding plan's funding principles, effectiveness principles are distinct from them and serve a different purpose. The funding principles broadly guide decisions about the mix of FDF programs and grant arrangements. The effectiveness principles are statements that provide guidance about how to think about desired results, based on norms, values, beliefs, experience and knowledge. Adhering to the funding principles is a necessary, but not sufficient, part of FDF effectiveness, hence the need for these effectiveness principles.

The effectiveness principles underpinning the FDF ToC are to:

- Recognise and accommodate the co-benefits that drought resilience efforts also provide to broader climate resilience.
- Support preparedness and resilience (including during drought) rather than directly providing in-drought assistance to address hardship.
- Ensure the benefits generated from funding drought resilience provide public good benefits and are not captured wholly by individual businesses or industries for commercial gain (private benefits).

- Ensure that activities under different FDF programs complement each other and work together, where possible, to strengthen the building of economic, environmental and social resilience (so individual programs do not need to directly address each of these types of resilience). The programs are effectively interconnected parts of a broader system – the FDF – and therefore will indirectly contribute to all types of resilience through their linkages with each other.
- Identify and leverage synergies between FDF programs and with other government initiatives to maximise effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The inter-connectedness of programs may lead to the emergence of additional drought resilience outcomes, leading to further efficiencies of both FDF and its programs. Monitoring the emergence of these efficiencies and outcomes will be a key part of FDF MEL activities during this funding plan.
- Establish partnerships led by First Nations peoples, businesses, organisations, communities and land managers to address the challenges of drought and other climate-related impacts, and to facilitate improved economic and community self-determination, caring for Country outcomes, co-learning and stronger connections to mob.
- Take a place-based approach to provide tailored and practical support that reflects the unique circumstances driving the drought resilience of those in the agricultural sector, communities and landscapes, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.
- Actively seek genuine partnerships with the wide range of actors in the resilience and sustainability ecosystem who have a shared responsibility for enhancing drought and climate resilience and contribute to sustainability of Australian agriculture.

2.4.5 Assumptions

The FDF causal assumptions describe how initial and intermediate changes will bring about longer-term changes. These assumptions are that:

- The adaptive capacity or resilience of the agricultural sector and rural communities depends in large part on access to the resources, or 'reserves' that influence or confer resilience (that is financial, human, social, physical and natural capital). The FDF helps strengthen these capitals both directly and indirectly, and build the capacity of its stakeholders to use them to absorb, adapt and/or transform their systems in response to drought and climate impacts.
- Economic resilience: has strong public benefits in terms of reduced requirements for government to provide in-drought financial assistance. Being economically resilient provides the financial means to invest in transformational NRM and other practices and can drive change at scale with spill over benefits for the broader agricultural sector. It also has important flow on effects for rural, regional and remote communities, who are relying on a thriving agricultural sector to support regional economies.
- Environmental resilience: while NRM practices and programs are generally designed to have environmental and sustainable agricultural outcomes, there are also farm productivity and profitability benefits created through the protection and enhancement of the natural resource base and associated ecosystem services. This strengthens the capacity of farmers, land managers and farming systems to withstand and recover from drought conditions.

- Social resilience: strengthening social connections and networks lessen the personal and family stress created by drought and enable collective response in times of drought or other climate impacts.

This framework has not been designed as one to test assumptions; however, both the KEQs and KLQs include specific reference to these assumptions. Programs will address their program-specific assumptions as part of evaluation and annual learning processes (section 4.2, section 4.3).

2.4.6 Program collaboration

There are many opportunities for FDF programs to collectively build and share knowledge as parts of a cohesive system – thus making the whole of FDF more than the sum of its parts. FDF must implement mechanisms for programs to interact in a co-ordinated way. Table 4 provides an overview of how each program intends to do so (and will be periodically updated, as needed). Greater detail about these collaborations is articulated in Programs' and FDF MEL plans.

Table 4 Collaboration of FDF programs in the current funding plan

Program	Interconnected programs	How programs collaborate
Climate Services for Agriculture	• Farm Business Resilience • Regional Drought Resilience Planning	Program planning incorporates long-term climate risk information.
	• Resilient Landscapes • Long Term Trials • Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	Programs encourage farmers and land managers to use climate risk information.
	FDF Communities Program	Program ensures that regional community organisations and leaders understand their long-term climate risks.
	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	Program uses and promotes the use of the My Climate View digital tool.
	Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country	Programs share climate data and support community co-design of projects to create culturally appropriate and scientifically sound climate resilience strategies and actions.
Farm Business Resilience	Climate Services for Agriculture	Program encourages participants to use Climate Services for Agriculture to ensure farm business planning incorporates climate risk information.
	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs promote Farm Business Resilience opportunities. FDF encourages programs to work together when delivering similar learning content or delivering to the same farmers to avoid duplication and capitalise on FDF investment.
	• Resilient Landscapes • Long Term Trials • Scaling Success	To implement natural resource management practices identified during the program, the Program makes participants aware of opportunities to apply for other interconnected FDF programs.

Program	Interconnected programs	How programs collaborate
	• FDF Communities Program	Program encourages participants to form new connections with community leaders and mentors.
	• Drought Resilience Scholarships	Drought Resilience Scholars share learnings and research outcomes with program participants.
Regional Drought Resilience Planning	• Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs • Long Term Trials • Resilient Landscapes • FDF Communities Program • Innovation Challenges Pilot • Scaling Success • Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country	Program plans inform: • policy development, FDF program design and investments • local farmers and regional level investments, including in some instances communities, where appropriate • relevant policy development, program design and investments external to the FDF, including other Commonwealth departments, state and territory governments and the private sector, where appropriate.
	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs can support the development and implementation of Regional Drought Resilience plans.
	Climate Services for Agriculture	Long-term climate risk information informs Regional Drought Resilience plans.
Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	FDF programs	Hubs support farmers and communities to prepare for drought by connecting them to regional experts, innovations, and new practices, which includes facilitating engagement among farmers, land managers and agricultural advisors across FDF programs.
Long Term Trials	Farm Business Resilience	Program learning and development opportunities may include new Natural Resource Management practices trialled under the program.
	Regional Drought Resilience Planning	Program trials align with priorities and challenges identified in Regional Drought Resilience plans.
	• Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs • Resilient Landscapes • Scaling Success	Programs support and inform trials.
	Climate Services for Agriculture	Program encourages farmers to use the climate risk information.
Resilient Landscapes	Climate Services for Agriculture	Program encourages farmers and land managers to use the climate risk information

Program	Interconnected programs	How programs collaborate
	• Farm Business Resilience • Regional Drought Resilience Planning	• Farmers and land managers access these programs and align projects, including under other FDF programs, with Regional Drought Resilience plans. • Farm Business Resilience program participants learning and development may include new NRM practices trialled under the program.
	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	Program connects farmers and land managers to Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs and promote program activities.
	• Long Term Trials • Scaling Success	Program informs new trials and scaled solutions.
FDF Communities	Regional Drought Resilience Planning	Program addresses social resilience priorities and challenges identified in Regional Drought Resilience plans.
	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	Promotion between the programs.
	Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country	Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country supports shared learning of First Nations leaders through training and development programs that benefit agricultural projects. Programs combine community development with on-ground agricultural resilience, to support holistic growth and sustainability.
	Farm Business Resilience	Program encourages participants to connect with Community leaders and mentors.
Innovation Challenges Pilot	Regional Drought Resilience Planning	Program addresses challenges relevant to common priorities, as identified in Regional Drought Resilience plans.
	• Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs • Resilient Landscapes • Long Term Trials	Program identifies new challenges based on experiences of these programs.
	FDF First Nations Advisory Group	Program considers challenges based on the experiences and expertise of the advisory group.
Scaling Success	• Resilient Landscapes • Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country • Long Term Trials	Program scales selected practices that other programs demonstrate.

Program	Interconnected programs	How programs collaborate
	• Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs	
	Farm Business Resilience	Farm Business Resilience plans incorporate successful practices.
	Regional Drought Resilience Planning	Program provides solutions aligned with common priorities and challenges that Regional Drought Resilience plans identify.
	Drought Resilience Commercialisation Initiative	A second round of the program is planned for 2026-27. Further detail of the second round is subject to review of the Drought Resilience Commercialisation Initiative in mid-2026.
First Nations initiatives	Whole-of-FDF, including • the First Nations Advisory Group • the Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country grant program • supporting participation activities.	• FDF First Nations Advisory Group provides strategic policy advice to inform the design and implementation of FDF programs and activities, focused on ensuring programs are inclusive of First Nations people and support capability and delivery reform within the FDF to embed First Nations perspectives for long-term outcomes. • Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country supports FDF programs to strengthen First Nations engagement and participation through shared program learnings. • Support participation activities to address barriers that impede First Nations access to, and participation in, opportunities offered under the FDF, while also enhancing the FDF's cultural capabilities.

2.5 Linking programs to FDF Theory of Change

The links between the FDF ToC and the programs are made explicit through 2 steps. First, each program will develop a nested ToC, which will show how each will help achieve the outcomes of the funding plan. Second, each program will develop its own Program Logic. This will identify program-specific outcomes (with more specificity than those outlined in the FDF ToC), and unpack the causal pathways between each program's activities and outputs and these outcomes, as well as between program outcomes and the different elements of the FDF ToC, through one or more Lever for Change. The nested ToC and program logic will be documented in each program's MEL plan. Program logics may go into further detail for project plans being delivered under programs by delivery partners, grantees and states and territories.

In light of this approach, a detailed program logic for the whole of FDF is considered redundant and counterproductive in the framework. Program logics do have their places at individual program level and represent excellent program management and MEL tools in that context. However, it is impossible and undesirable to integrate all inputs, activities, outputs and program specific outcomes, from all FDF programs, into one comprehensive FDF-wide logic model or diagram.

Also, given the complexity of FDF, the linear nature of a Program Logic cannot demonstrate the dynamic inter-dependencies between FDF programs and outcomes – that is the parts of the broader system, especially given that complex systems are continuously changing, which means linear approaches to understand and manage them do not work. A linear Program Logic may in fact lead to oversimplification of the context in which FDF programs operate (that is the whole-of-FDF and beyond).

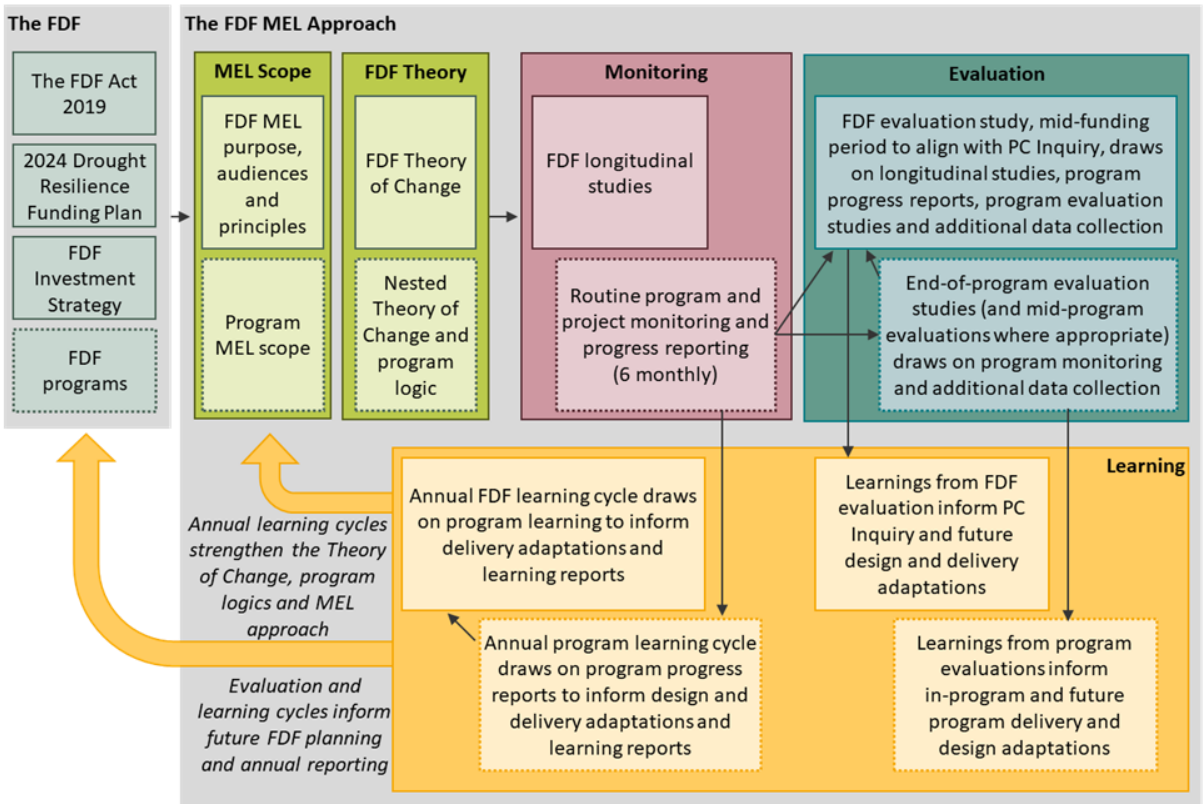
A detailed program logic for FDF therefore does not fit with its systems-based ToC. However, the PES team will develop a MEL plan that includes a program logic outlining the monitoring activities it will undertake at FDF-level.

3 FDF MEL approach

The FDF MEL approach (Figure 3) has been designed to respond to the MEL scope and ToC presented. The MEL approach is relevant both for the FDF and individual programs (including projects) and involves:

- **Routine monitoring –** a standardised approach aligned with the FDF ToC
- **Evaluation studies –** a standardised approach for programs and the 4-yearly FDF evaluation study and set of KEQs
- **Learning –** from evaluations as well as through a standardised annual learning cycle approach and set of KLQs.

Figure 3 FDF MEL approach



The MEL approach is structured using the levels used in the FDF ToC, with program-level MEL plans similarly aligned to their program logic levels.

Table 5 Theory of Change levels – FDF monitoring and evaluation

Theory of Change level	Routine monitoring	Evaluation studies	Learning cycles
FDF contribution to the broad Australian agriculture system	No routine monitoring (section 3.2.2)	Assessment of the FDF's relevance and coherence (design)	Annual reflection on changes in the problem context, drawing on monitoring data and insights synthesised through FDF-level longitudinal studies and program learning and evaluation activities
End-of-funding plan 2024 to 2028 outcomes	Longitudinal studies and other point-in-time studies run by PES (section 3.2.2)	Assessment of FDF outcome effectiveness (results)	Annual reflection on program progress, results and implementation, drawing on program monitoring data and evaluation insights
Intermediate outcomes	Program outcomes monitoring and reporting	Program assessments of outcome effectiveness (results) and relevance (design)	Annual reflection on program progress, results and implementation, drawing on program monitoring data and evaluation insights
Levers for change	Program activity, output and engagement monitoring and reporting	FDF assessment of implementation quality (process)	–
Program assessments of implementation quality (process)	Annual reflection on program progress, results and implementation, drawing on program monitoring data and evaluation insights	–	–

3.1 Routine monitoring

This section presents the standardised approach to monitoring for the FDF and its programs. These approaches are linked to the ToC and program logic categories. Most routine monitoring occurs at the project level. Program progress reporting incorporates results of this monitoring. and is incorporated in program progress reporting.

3.1.1 Program monitoring and progress reporting

Programs use a standardised approach to routine monitoring to ensure that not only can output, short term and intermediate outcome data collected inform program decision making, but that it can also be aggregated across programs to inform FDF-level learning and evaluation.

The basis for routine monitoring and reporting at the program level is the data collection undertaken at the project level and submitted in project progress reports. These activities are outlined in project MEL plans. Each program team should facilitate collaboration between delivery partners to ensure consistency in data collection and analysis methods, and reporting against common indicators. As many programs are collecting similar types of data, they should also seek to collaborate to ensure consistency, and to leverage and improve existing data collection tools.

The program team facilitates program monitoring with support that the PES team provides. For each program, routine monitoring and progress reporting involves the following steps and timing:

- January to June progress report summary: program teams prepare these reports (based on project progress reports) and submit to the PES team in November
- July to December progress report summary: program teams prepare these reports (based on project progress reports) and submit to the PES team in April.

Programs will use these progress report summaries (and their delivery partners) to inform program learning cycles, which in turn inform the FDF learning cycle (as detailed in sections section 4.2.1 and section 4.2.2). However, not all programs may be able to report meaningfully against outcomes in the early stages of program delivery.

3.1.2 FDF monitoring

FDF MEL plan

FDF is effectively a 'program of programs', or a mega-program. Similar to the approach taken with its individual programs, the PES team will develop an FDF MEL plan that builds on this framework. The FDF MEL plan will outline FDF's evaluation and learning activities and describe any additional monitoring and data collection necessary to assess how and to what extent the FDF is making progress toward, and achieving, its end-of-funding plan outcomes. This data collection will include, longitudinal studies, the most significant change and other methods.

Context level

The FDF MEL plan will include a standardised approach to putting insights gained through the FDF evaluation and learning activities into context, and to understand the contribution of the FDF and its programs to building drought and climate resilience of the Australian agriculture system. This will ensure the understanding of these issues is built across the whole of the FDF. For this contextualisation, it is important to understand what other programs, initiatives and factors are contributing (alongside the FDF) to both its strategic objectives and to the broad context of the Australian agriculture system. This type of analysis is best incorporated in the FDF evaluation study, and therefore no routine monitoring of the kind undertaken by projects and programs will take place at this 'context' level, as it sits above the FDF line of accountability (refer to Figure 2 above the dotted line). Rather, insights about the context can be obtained through multiple sources, including knowledge generated from networks and collaborations with other contributors.

Whole-of-FDF level

The achievement of FDF outcomes (refer to Figure 2 below the dotted line) will be understood primarily, but not exclusively, through data collected against program indicators. However, the PES team, as the custodians of whole-of-FDF MEL, will be responsible for doing additional monitoring and data collection deemed necessary to supplement those done by programs (for example, longitudinal studies). These activities will focus on assessing how and to what extent the FDF is contributing to drought and climate resilience. In addition, the PES team will be facilitating program inter-linkages and encouraging programs to collaborate. This will include ongoing monitoring of the emergence of efficiencies and synergies from these inter-linkages (details of which will be outlined in the FDF MEL plan).

This whole-of-FDF monitoring will be in addition to that done at program level (and aggregated through progress report summaries and annual learning processes). To ensure a streamlined and steady input of data from programs, the PES team will provide support to program teams monitoring and reporting activities and detailed in program MEL plans.

When the framework is complete, the PES team will determine broad themes for the FDF end-of-funding plan outcomes, under which whole-of-FDF indicators can be identified. The PES team will develop these themes, indicators and data collection methods (for PES monitoring activities) for inclusion in the FDF MEL plan. The whole-of-FDF indicators will align with, and complement programs' indicators, though the latter are more focused on the specific changes that programs aim to achieve in relation to the FDF intermediate outcomes. The PES team will update the framework with these FDF-level themes and indicators once the FDF MEL plan is complete, and as part of the broad adaptive management of MEL within the FDF.

3.2 Annual learning

This section presents the approach to annual learning, adaptation and reporting. As for routine monitoring, the process builds upwards, from project through program and then to the FDF.

3.2.1 Program annual learning cycle

The program annual learning cycle involves each program collaboratively reflecting on data and insights the program monitoring and reporting collects. The cycle not only informs program design and delivery adaptations but also the FDF learning cycle.

The program annual learning cycle is the responsibility of the program teams, with PES team support. The PES team will develop a standard agenda, facilitation plan and reporting template to guide this process, which may be tailored each year in response to priorities. For each program, the annual cycle involves the following steps and timing:

- collating all program monitoring data for the previous calendar year (including any program or FDF evaluation study findings, where relevant) (March)
- conducting a program reflection session (facilitated by the PES team), bringing data and insights to help answer the program KLQs (March). Program teams may wish to involve their delivery partners in this process who may be required to conduct an internal reflection session or add their reflections in annual reporting (if applicable) to inform the program learning activities, as specified in each program and project MEL plan
- preparing the Program Annual Learning Report (April)
- implementing any adjustments to program delivery (including to project or program MEL plans).

The KLQs in Table 6 guide the program learning activities.

Table 6 Program key learning questions

Domain	Learning focus	Key learning questions
Results	Outcome effectiveness	1) What does the indicator data show about progress towards program outcomes? Are there particular barriers or enablers? 2) What unanticipated outcomes, if any, are emerging, and what appears to be the cause?
Process	Implementation quality	3) How well is the Program collaborating with related FDF programs? What opportunities are there for efficiencies or better leveraging each program's work? 4) Have the actions identified in the last learning cycle been implemented and what difference is this making?
Design	Relevance	5) What is the indicator data suggesting about whether the Program is meeting priority needs of program stakeholders? Are there particular barriers or enablers?
Learning	n/a	6) Overall, what is being learned about the support requirements of the programs, and what might be done differently (more of, less of, change) as a result? 7) What is being learned about the assumptions underpinning the Program?

Program teams will be expected to contribute to the FDF annual learning cycle.

3.2.2 FDF annual learning cycle

The FDF annual learning cycle involves the PES team reflecting on data and insights collected in the program Annual Learning Reports to inform FDF and program level design and delivery adaptations. Insights from monitoring activities done by PES, such as longitudinal studies, also inform the FDF annual learning.

The PES team is responsible for the FDF learning cycle. The team will circulate findings to program teams for comments. The PES team will then facilitate an annual reflection and sense-making session and include program leads to encourage identifying and building program inter-linkages and collaborations. The FDF learning cycle involves the following steps and timing:

1) Collating program annual learning reports from the previous calendar year including any program or FDF evaluation study findings, where relevant (May).
2) Undergoing a reflection session (PES) bringing data and insights from program learning reports, and FDF longitudinal studies to answer the FDF KLQs (May).
3) Preparing the FDF Annual Learning Report (June).
4) Circulating the report to program teams for comments and organising a reflection and sense-making session with program leads to facilitate sharing and collaboration (June).
5) Implementing any adjustments to the FDF or program delivery, including any adjustments to the FDF ToC or program and PES MEL plans.
6) Contributing to the FDF annual reporting (June to July).

The FDF KLQs in Table 7 guide the FDF learning cycle – in particular the annual reflection session. The midpoint learning activities for the year of FDF evaluation can be somewhat more complicated because the evaluation findings will be a significant input in the learning activities. This will then inform both the PC Inquiry and the design of future FDF programs.

Table 7 FDF key learning questions

Domain	Learning focus	Key learning questions
Results	Outcome effectiveness	1) What does the indicator data show about progress towards FDF outcomes? Are there particular barriers or enablers? 2) What unanticipated outcomes, if any, are emerging, and what appears to be the cause?
Process	Implementation quality	3) Are there common barriers and opportunities being identified by programs that could be addressed or supported (as appropriate) at the Fund-level? 4) How well are programs collaborating with each other? Are there opportunities for efficiencies or better leveraging a program's work? 5) Have the actions identified in the last learning cycle been implemented and what difference is this making?
Design	Relevance	6) What is the indicator data suggesting about whether programs are meeting priority needs of stakeholders? Are there emerging trends or themes across the programs? 7) What key contextual shifts have occurred that require a response, if any?
Learning	n/a	8) Overall, what is being learned about the support requirements of the programs, and what might be done differently (more of, less of, change) as a result? 9) What is being learned from the programs and longitudinal studies about the assumptions underpinning the FDF Theory of Change?

3.3 Evaluation studies

This section presents the approach to evaluation studies for the FDF and its programs.

3.3.1 FDF evaluation

The FDF evaluation study is an important part of learning and sharing knowledge about how and to what extent the whole-of-FDF is contributing to building drought and climate resilience. The FDF evaluation study has been designed to align with, and inform, the 4-yearly Productivity Commission Inquiry. The timing of this inquiry is set out in the FDF Act and is expected to fall around the mid-point (2026 to 2027) of the current funding plan. The findings will also be a key input to the learning and improvement cycles for the FDF and its programs.

The scope of the FDF evaluation will include the outcomes achieved under the 2020 funding plan, and will consider, cumulatively, progress made under the current funding plan. The FDF evaluation will be conducted by an independent external evaluator. The evaluation will draw on program learning and progress reports (and the underlying monitoring data), FDF learning reports, program evaluation studies (both mid-term and end-of-program evaluations conducted since 2020) and other documents as required. It may also draw on expert opinion (e.g. in resilience, sustainability) to enhance the rigour and robustness of the study.

The purpose of utilising expert opinion is to support a defensible narrative about the contribution of the investments made (Results) to the intended end-of-funding plan (2024 to 2028) outcomes and the broad context of Australia's agriculture system. Expert opinion may also be relevant to evaluating the Fund and its programs (Design), and its coherence and fit within the broader programmatic ecosystem at the commencement of the funding plan, at the time of the evaluation, and with regard to the anticipated future contextual shifts. FDF anticipates that this analysis would draw on expert knowledge and other available information, including about the achievement of outcomes.

The KEQs in Table 8 inform assessments of FDF results, process and design.

Table 8 FDF key evaluation questions

Domain	Criteria	Key evaluation questions
Results	Outcome effectiveness	1) To what extent have the programs collectively contributed to the outcomes expected at the end of the funding plan? 2) To what extent have the programs delivered in this funding plan contributed to the broader public good through building drought and climate resilience in Australia? 3) What trends or themes in unintended outcomes (positive and negative) are arising from the programs, if any? What are their implications?
Process	Implementation quality	4) To what extent has Fund-level management enabled adherence to the FDF effectiveness principles? 5) To what extent has the FDF MEL function supported ongoing improvement of program-level MEL design and implementation?
Design	Coherence	6) How well does the mix of programs under the funding plan cohere with existing knowledge about drought and climate resilience? 7) How well does the mix of programs under the funding plan complement other programs (FDF or non-FDF) already in place?
	Relevance	8) What has shifted in the context (e.g., geopolitical, economic, climate) and what are the implications for the design of the next funding cycle?
Learning	n/a	9) What are the key lessons from implementation for future drought and climate resilience efforts in Australia? 10) What is being learned about the assumptions made about drought and climate resilience?

The PES team will be responsible for commissioning and managing all external evaluations, notwithstanding that the team may also undertake some internal evaluation studies if needed (e.g. mid-program evaluations). The PES team will aim for selection criteria for external evaluators to include the incorporation of cultural expertise (e.g. through cultural advisors, cultural brokers, and locally based evaluators, interviewers and/or facilitators).

Consistent with the MEL principles of this framework (Table 3), where relevant, all evaluation studies and any associated additional data collection will be conducted in a culturally safe way, respect Indigenous data sovereignty, and not place undue pressure on delivery partners.

3.3.2 Program evaluations

The approach to program evaluations focuses on the delivery of primarily summative evaluations conducted by the end of the current funding plan (2028 to 2029). The PES team will scope timing of allocated evaluations in collaboration with program teams. While all programs may undertake mid-program evaluations, and seek to align them with the FDF evaluation, this is not a mandatory requirement (in part because the FDF evaluation will draw on program progress and annual learning reports).

The final stage of the evaluation process will utilise a collaborative reflection and sense-making workshop to collectively identify key insights and learnings, and identify opportunities and linkages to inform improvements to the program design and delivery in subsequent phases and funding plans.

The KEQs in Table 9 have been developed to inform assessments of program results, process and design. Program evaluations are to utilise these KEQs, with a recommendation that each program

develops specific sub-questions as needed to ensure their relevance, with support from the PES team. Answering the KEQs will draw on project and program monitoring and learning activities, and data collected as part of the evaluation process.

Table 9 Program key evaluation questions

Domain	Criteria	Key evaluation questions
Results	Outcome effectiveness	1) To what extent has the program made progress towards its intended outcomes? 2) What were the unintended outcomes (positive and negative) arising from the program?
Process	Implementation quality	3) To what extent are the program activities being administered and delivered efficiently and to the expected quality? 4) How well has the program collaborated and leveraged synergies with other programs to maximise effectiveness and efficiency?
Design	Relevance	5) To what extent does the program design and expected outcomes respond to the priority needs of the target stakeholders?
Learning	n/a	6) How has the program adapted to changing needs, if any? 7) What has been learned about the assumptions underpinning the program?

The PES team will be responsible for commissioning and managing external evaluations and consistent with the principles of this framework. All evaluation studies and any associated additional data collection will be conducted in a culturally safe way and respect Indigenous data sovereignty.

4 MEL implementation

4.1 Roles and responsibilities

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities for the implementation of MEL activities described in, and governed by, this framework.

4.1.1 PES team

The PES team is responsible for:

- development and oversight of the implementation of the FDF MEL framework, including
  - managing expenditure of funding that has been allocated for the implementation of the framework (independent evaluations and longitudinal studies)
  - commissioning and managing external evaluations to undertake independent FDF or program evaluation studies
  - commissioning and managing longitudinal studies
  - conducting internal evaluation studies if needed (e.g. program mid-term evaluations)
  - coordination and delivery of FDF and program learning activities
  - collaborating with other FDF enabling teams, as needed, to implement the framework
  - updating the framework and program MEL plans as required.
- developing and implementing a PES team MEL plan
- providing support and advice to program teams to
  - apply this framework, including the development, implementation and update of program and project MEL plans and associated data collection, analysis and reporting
  - ensure MEL activities are culturally safe in both process and product, by aligning with relevant guidance including the AES Cultural Safety Framework, Indigenous Evaluation Strategy and linking with the FDF First Nations Partnerships team
  - facilitate program annual reflection sessions and support delivery of program annual learning cycle activities
  - oversee program evaluation studies
  - facilitate collaboration between programs and help in identifying and leveraging synergies between them.

4.1.2 Program teams

Program teams are responsible for developing and implementing a program MEL plan (nested within the FDF MEL framework) with support from PES. This includes:

- using templates provided by PES
- developing a nested theory of change
- developing a program logic
- identifying program evaluation sub-questions and learning sub-questions (if necessary)

- co-developing a monitoring plan and appropriate data collection tools with delivery partners to capture data against the identified indicators
- coordinating and delivering program learning activities
- preparing and submitting program progress and learning reports
- participating in annual FDF reflections and sense-making sessions
- collaborative scoping of, participating in and contributing to program evaluation studies
- ensuring the program MEL plan is kept up to date
- collection and management of any other data requested by the PES team to support Fund-level learning and evaluation activities (as per project MEL plans co-designed with grantees and delivery partners)
- providing support to project teams (e.g. grantees and consortia members), as outlined in the program MEL plans.

4.1.3 Project teams

Project teams are responsible for developing and implementing a project MEL plan (nested within the program MEL plan), including:

- developing a nested program logic for their projects
- contributing project evaluation sub-questions and learning sub-questions (if requested by program)
- working with the program team to develop a monitoring plan, and appropriate data collection tools, to capture data against the identified indicators, in collaboration with the program and PES teams
- drafting and submitting project progress reports
- participating in or contributing to program learning activities, as requested by the program team
- participating in or contributing to program evaluation studies, as required
- arranging and contributing to project evaluation studies (if requested by FDF)
- ensuring the project MEL plan is kept up to date.

4.1.4 FDF Knowledge Systems and Strategy team

The FDF Knowledge Systems and Strategy team is responsible for:

- development and implementation of an FDF knowledge strategy
- design, rollout, management, and improvement of an FDF knowledge management solution – which will provide modernised, integrated and user-centred access to program and project information and data, information & data solution
- building data, information, and knowledge management capability and capacity across the FDF policy and program teams, and FDF service providers

- analysing data and information from program delivery to inform program management and future program design.

The team will provide advice to the PES and program teams in relation to data collection arrangements, tools and parameters. This includes about standardised tagging and categorisations of core data and knowledge products generated across programs. Updates will be included in this framework in due time.

4.2 Guide to program MEL

4.2.1 Program MEL development and implementation

Table 10 provides an overview for program teams on the stages of developing and implementing a program MEL plan, ideally to be conducted alongside program development and implementation. Program-level MEL is nested within the components of this framework. Program MEL plans will in turn provide details relevant to the development of each project MEL plan nested within.

Table 10 Guide to developing program monitoring, evaluation and learning

Program stage	MEL stage	Description
Program design and planning	MEL purpose, scope and audiences	Nest the program's MEL scope within the FDF MEL Framework by clearly guiding its purpose, primary audiences and principles by the framework
	Program logic development	Develop a program logic model that demonstrates a clear causal pathway between activities, outputs and outcomes in alignment with the nested program Theory of Change
	Monitoring planning	• Identify indicators for the elements of the program logic and develop a program monitoring plan to track changes in these indicators over time • Plan the methods and timing of data collection, analysis and synthesis • Align the timing of progress reporting with FDF requirements
	Evaluation design and planning	• Work with PES on identifying KEQ sub-questions relevant to the program • Work with PES on identifying the evaluation(s) to be undertaken (mid-program and end-of-program evaluations) and their timeframes
	Learning planning	• Identify the KLQ sub-questions relevant to the program, and who should be involved in learning activities • Align the timing of learning reporting with FDF requirements
Program implementation	• Monitoring activities • Learning and improvement • Progress reporting	• Ensure routine monitoring data is being captured in line with the program monitoring plan (via project progress reports) • Prepare and submit program progress reports summaries • Undertake annual learning activities • Prepare and submit learning reports, and action learnings • Facilitate and contribute to mid-program evaluation (if necessary)
Program completion	• End-of-program evaluation • Learning and improvement • Evaluation reporting	• Facilitate and contribute to an end of program evaluation (if necessary) • Undertake a program completion reflection workshop • Action learnings (e.g. in design of next program phases)

4.2.2 Data collection and storage

Any agency, organisation or individual collecting primary data for the FDF – whether for routine monitoring, for an evaluation or for any other purpose – has an obligation to do so ethically and in accordance with the standards of the Privacy Act 1988. All data must be stored securely, maintaining privacy and confidentiality. All primary data collection must be conducted in a culturally safe way and respect Indigenous data sovereignty.

All participants in FDF MEL data collection activities will be asked to provide informed consent before providing their responses, which requires informing participants:

- of the purpose of data collection
- of their right to choose not to participate, and to withdraw at any stage
- that names will not be used in reporting the results of data analysis
- that respondents will not be identified unless this is explicit and agreed to by the respondent.

All data collection tools and analysis frameworks will be developed in line with Australasian Evaluation Society Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations or other relevant professional standards.

Delivery partners are responsible for deploying the data collection instruments, and are the custodians of the data collected, responsible for collection, storage, and safeguarding of the data. The department will be responsible for data storage and safeguarding of any data provided.

4.3 Implementation schedule

Table 11 outlines the proposed implementation schedule for key MEL activities at the project, program and FDF level. Dates in this schedule are indicative and will be updated regularly. Some programs may have different reporting frequencies, as described in their program MEL plan.

Table 11 FDF MEL implementation schedule

Category	Month/year (TBC)	MEL activities	Led by	Supported by
PES team, Program and delivery partner MEL plan preparation	Jul 2025	Finalise program MEL plans	Program team	PES team
	Jul 2025	Update Activity Work Plan (AWP)/MEL reporting templates	Program team	PES team
	Aug 2025	AWP/project MEL plan development workshops	Program team	Project teams, PES team
	Sep 2025	Finalise data collection tools	Program team	PES and Knowledge Systems and Strategy KM teams
	Sep to Oct 2025	AWP/project MEL plans submitted	Project teams	Program team
	Oct 2025	Support delivery partners to update data collection tools and/or identify processes to implement data collection tools	Program team	Project teams, PES and Knowledge Systems and Strategy teams
	TBC	Finalise PES Team MEL plan	PES team	n/a
Annual reporting and learning cycle (NB: Repeat the outlined progress reporting and learning cycles annually until end-of-program)	Jan to Feb 2026	Delivery partner 6 monthly progress report submitted	Project teams	n/a
	Mar to Apr 2026	Program 6 monthly progress report summary submitted	Program team	n/a
	Mar to Apr 2026	Program annual reflection sessions	Program team	PES team, Project teams
	Apr 2026	Program Annual Learning Reports submitted	Program team	PES team, Project teams
	Apr 2026	Program teams make adjustments to program and projects as necessary (e.g. to MEL plans,	Program team	Project teams, PES team

Category	Month/year (TBC)	MEL activities	Led by	Supported by
		reporting templates, data collection tools, management)		
	May 2026	FDF Annual Reflection Sessions	PES team	Program teams
	Jun 2026	FDF Annual Learning Report completed	PES team	n/a
	Jun to Jul 2026	Implement any necessary adjustments arising from FDF learnings (e.g. to framework, program MEL plans)	PES team	Program teams
	Jul to Aug 2026	Delivery partner 6 monthly progress report submitted	Project teams	n/a
	Sep to Oct 2026	Program 6 monthly progress reports summary submitted	Program team	n/a
	Nov 2026	Program teams make adjustments to program and projects as necessary (e.g. to MEL plans, reporting templates, data collection tools, management)	Program team	PES team, project teams
	Jan to Feb 2026	Delivery partner 6 monthly progress report submitted	Project teams	n/a
Internal mid program evaluations (if needed; dates to be identified for each program, as relevant)	TBC	Scoping exercise for formative mid-term evaluation	PES team	Program teams
	TBC	Draft formative mid-term evaluation Request for Quote (RFQ) for clearance	PES team	Program teams
	+ 1 month	Formative mid-term evaluation RFQ to market	PES team	n/a
	+2 months	Prepare data package and stakeholder contact list for external evaluation consultant	PES team	Program teams
	+3 months	External evaluation consultant engaged	PES team	n/a

Category	Month/year (TBC)	MEL activities	Led by	Supported by
	+3–6 months	Undergo formative/mid-program evaluation	PES team	Program and project teams (contributors)
	+7 months	Final formative/mid-program evaluation report received	PES team	n/a
	+7/8 months	Collaborative reflection and sense-making workshop	PES team	n/a
FDF evaluation – Expected 2026–2027 before PC inquiry. Dates TBC once evaluation scoped	TBC	Draft evaluation Request for Quote (RFQ) for clearance	PES team	n/a
	TBC	Evaluation RFQ to market	PES team	n/a
	TBC	External evaluation consultant engaged	PES team	n/a
	TBC	Contribute to the evaluation	PES team	Program teams
	TBC	Final evaluation report received	PES team	n/a
FDF input to the PC Inquiry (dates TBC)	TBC	Prepare data package and stakeholder contact list for PC	PES team	Program teams
	TBC	Contribute to PC Inquiry	PES team	Program teams
	TBC	Provide comments on PC draft inquiry report	PES team	Program teams
End-of-program evaluation (dates to be identified per program once evaluations scoped)	TBC	Scoping exercise for summative end-of-program evaluation	PES team	Program team
	TBC	Summative end-of-program evaluation RFQ for clearance	PES team	n/a
	TBC	Summative end-of-program evaluation RFQ to market	PES team	n/a
	TBC	Prepare data package and stakeholder contact list for external evaluation consultant	Program team	Project teams
	TBC	External evaluation consultant engaged	PES team	n/a

Category	Month/year (TBC)	MEL activities	Led by	Supported by
	TBC	Contribute to summative end-of-program evaluation	Program and Project teams	PES team
	TBC	Final summative end-of-program evaluation report received	PES team	n/a

Glossary

Term	Definition
absorptive capacity	The ability of a system to absorb and cope with the impacts of shocks and stresses through quick and effective ways to respond e.g. insurance reserves (in many forms) access to services and support network.
adaptive capacity	The ability of a system to modify processes and functions to respond to shocks and stresses e.g. State and trend of the 5 capitals response diversity and pathways, appropriate connectivity and capacity for system and cross-scale thinking and practice.
anticipatory capacity	The ability of a system to foresee threats and shocks and prepare for or mitigate ahead of time e.g. access to early warning information, putting in place new and better ways to deal with significant adverse and disaster events.
appropriateness	The consideration of the degree to which an intervention's design, implementation and initial results are adequate to respond to the needs of a range of stakeholders. Appropriateness is one of the 4 lines of enquiry framing FDF MEL activities and deals with the extent to which FDF programs are aligned with the strategic objectives of the Drought Resilience Funding Plan.
assumptions	Hypotheses about the factors or risks which could affect the progress or success of an intervention. Intervention results depend on whether the assumptions made prove to be correct.
attribution	Attribution is the ascription of a causal link between observed (or expected to be observed) changes and a specific intervention. It is understood as the extent to which changes were caused by the intervention, that would not have occurred without it. Changes in drought resilience will rarely be attributable to FDF programs, given that other factors (e.g. climatic conditions business or social drivers or other government policies) will also influence drought resilience. See also 'Contribution'.
AWP	Activity Work Plan
contribution	The contribution of an intervention is any change that is generated jointly by the intervention, when it is one of a number of interventions that helped to generate or produce that change. It is expected that all FDF programs will contribute to strengthening drought resilience, and its determinants, even if the size of the contribution is hard to measure. See also 'Attribution'.
CSA	Climate Services for Agriculture program
data collection tools	The methods and instruments used to collect information of interest, including (but not limited to) participant surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, participatory tools (e.g. mapping, ranking, timelines).
drought resilience	The object of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019 is to enhance the public good by building drought resilience. A key aspect of drought resilience is 'the ability to adapt, reorganise or transform in response to changing temperature, increasing variability and scarcity of rainfall and/or changed seasonality of rainfall, for improved economic, environmental and social wellbeing.' While drought resilience remains the key focus of the FDF, the Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024–2028) Determination 2024 considers a broader range of climate impacts. The FDF Investment Strategy notes that 'drought and climate resilience activities are often interconnected – building resilience in one area can improve the ability to manage other risks'. The investment strategy also recognises that resilience does not have a singular meaning or measure – it depends on context and can mean something different to each person, farming business and community. Building drought resilience is a complex and long-term endeavour. There is unlikely to be an end point as continued adaptation is required to meet changing circumstances over time and build resilience.
DRCI	Drought Resilience Commercialisation Initiative program

Term	Definition
general resilience (systemic resilience)	Defined as the capacity of the system as a whole (e.g. landscape) to absorb disturbances of all kinds (including climate shocks) so that all parts maintain function. General resilience is a factor of a multiple of determinants, including connectedness (networks), diversity, complex systems thinking and reserves.
economic resilience	Refers to the FDF strategic objective of growing the productivity and self-reliance of the agricultural sector. Enabling farmers to make informed decisions and adapt quickly to reduce the impacts of future droughts on their business viability is essential. Business management planning has been associated with greater practice change as well as financial performance. Economic resilience has strong public benefits in terms of reduced requirements for government in-drought financial assistance, providing the financial means to invest in natural resource management and transformational practices and can drive change at scale with spill over benefits for the broader agriculture sector. It also has important flow on effects for rural, regional and remote communities, who rely on a thriving agriculture sector to support regional economies.
ecosystem services	The services (and goods) that an ecosystem provides for human wellbeing. These include provisioning (e.g. crops, meat), regulating (e.g. climate regulation, water regulation), cultural (e.g. recreation, aesthetic, spiritual values) and supporting (e.g. nutrient cycling, soil formation) services. Ecosystem services provided by natural capital enhance drought resilience on farm and may extend to general resilience across the broader landscape. A resilient landscape increases the capacity of farmers and their businesses to prepare for and recover quickly from drought.
effectiveness	A measure of the extent to which program objectives were achieved or are expected to be achieved, considering their relative importance. Assessing effectiveness includes examining which outcomes were achieved, who benefited from those outcomes, and identifying unintended outcomes. Effectiveness is one of the 4 lines of enquiry framing FDF MEL activities. It reveals the extent to which programs are achieving their intended outcomes, and what could be done to improve them.
efficiency	A measure of program delivery, of how economically resources or inputs such as funds, expertise or time are converted into results. Efficiency is one of the 4 lines of enquiry framing FDF MEL activities. It reveals the extent to which programs are administered and delivered efficiently, to the expected quality, and means of improving efficiency.
environmental resilience	Refers to the FDF strategic objective of improving the function of agricultural landscapes through effective management of the natural resource base. Management of natural resources is an important contributor to drought and climate resilience of farms and farm businesses and the long-term sustainability and productivity of Australia's agricultural landscapes. While natural resource management practices and programs are generally designed to have environmental and sustainable agriculture outcomes, there are also farm productivity and profitability benefits created through the protection and enhancement of the natural resource base and associated ecological services. This strengthens the capacity of primary producers and of farming systems to withstand and recover from drought and climate impacts.
FBR	Farm Business Resilience program
farmers, land managers and regional communities	Refers to farmers, primary producers, land managers, Traditional custodians and the broader communities they are part of. These broader communities include First Nations peoples, regional townships, and community organisations, including those who are not engaged directly in agriculture. This definition has been drafted based on advice from Clear Horizon, workshops with program teams and review of other program MEL frameworks in the department, and advice from the FDF First Nations Advisory Group. The definition is intended to flow through to the remainder of this framework.
FDF	Future Drought Fund

Term	Definition
FDF Communities	FDF Communities (Program)
funding plan	The Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024–2028) Determination 2024 (the Funding Plan) is a legislative instrument. Its purpose is to ensure a coherent and consistent approach is adopted in making arrangements with, or grants to, a person or body under section 21 of the Future Drought Fund Act 2019 and for entering into agreements under section 22 of the Act setting out the terms and conditions of such grants. It provides principles-based framework to guide relevant decision-making. Applicants must demonstrate how a proposed project would meet the requirements and considerations set out in these funding principles.
Hubs	Drought Resilience Innovation and Adoption Hubs (Program)
ICP	Innovation Challenges Pilot (Program)
incremental change	The ability to preserve or restore a system (including its basic structures and functions) by preventing, preparing for, or mitigating the impacts of an event or risk. An example could include diversifying income with off-farm employment, or minor changes to farm operations.
indicators	The quantitative or qualitative factors or variables that provide a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, assess performance or reflect the changes connected to an intervention. Specific, relevant and appropriate indicators must be identified for outputs, outcomes and impacts, and data collected on these as part of monitoring activities, so that changes over time can be measured.
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KLQ	Key Learning Question
landscape	A bioregion (or part of a bioregion) that shares common characteristics, such as landform patterns and natural resources such as soils, water, animals and plants (e.g. mallee, mulga, grasslands, rangelands, savannah woodlands). A landscape is also a coherent area that people relate to (for example a catchment or sub-catchment). It may include a dominant type of farming systems (e.g. grazing, broadacre cropping, irrigated cropping, horticulture), or a diverse mix of these.
landscape function	The various roles and benefits that landscapes provide, including economic production, ecological regulation, and social functions (Whitford and Duval 2020). Functional landscapes have healthy processes of transporting, retaining or cycling critical resources such as nutrients and water, and the provision of food, fibre, biodiversity and habitat, and cultural and spiritual needs.
LTT	Long Term Trials (Program)
measuring resilience	The FDF will use a capitals framework to assess resilience as a range of resources or capitals that act as reserves that can be drawn on and influence adapting and coping responses. This can be applied at both the individual farm and regional community level. Having reserves is one of the key determinants of general resilience of social-ecological systems. The capitals are: • financial capital – for example, income or savings at business or household level • natural capital – for example, the environment, soil, vegetation • human capital – for example, knowledge, skills, wellbeing, health and confidence • social capital – for example, networks, linkages and cohesion • physical (or manufactured) capital – for example, infrastructure
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)	Monitoring refers to continuous and systematic observation of how programs are implemented, situational change in the problems that they are intended to address and early indicators of outcomes. Evaluation refers to evidence-based assessment of the appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of programs. Learning is the

Term	Definition
	generation and sharing of insights and information within and beyond FDF to improve program delivery and inform future policy and program design.
natural capital	Stocks of natural assets which include soil, air, geology, water and all living things, from which humans derive a wide range of ecosystem goods and services, including food, water and fuel.
NRM	Natural Resource Management
objective	The intended physical, financial, institutional, social, environmental, or other results to which an intervention is expected to contribute. Objectives can be set at many different levels, from broad strategic objectives to very specific project objectives, and range from simple deliverables in a project to long-term goals which may be dependent on many different factors. The Drought Resilience Funding Plan identifies 3 objectives to achieve the strategic priorities which will enhance the public good by building drought resilience through programs that will: 1) to build economic resilience – growing the self-reliance and performance of the agricultural sector 2) to build environmental resilience – improving the function of agricultural landscapes through effective management of the natural resource base; and 3) to build social resilience – strengthening the social capital, wellbeing, and connectedness of rural, regional and remote agricultural communities.
outcomes	The likely or achieved short- and medium-term effects, intended consequences or benefits, of an intervention's outputs. Outcomes can include changes in condition, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, behaviour and relationships as a result of an intervention. If the intervention is well designed, outputs should lead logically to outcomes, because they are within the sphere of influence of the intervention, though unlike outputs, they are not within direct control.
outputs	The tangible products and services of an intervention, that result from implemented activities and that are necessary to achieve the intervention's outcomes and objectives. Outputs relate to the completion rather than the conduct of activities and are the type of results which interventions have direct control over.
PES	Program Evaluation and Support team
program logic	A tool that explains how program objectives are to be achieved, demonstrating the anticipated causal links between inputs, activities and outputs, followed by outcomes and impacts. The program logic should also include the underlying assumptions that are thought to affect the achievement of program objectives.
public good	The objective of the Future Drought Fund is to enhance the public good by building drought resilience. Consistent with this, the benefits generated from the funding under the FDF should be able to be accessed and or shared by many (that is, provide public benefits), rather than be captured solely by individual businesses or industries for private commercial gain (that is, private benefits). The benefits achievable from the funding should also outweigh the costs. Public good may be established where there are significant spill over benefits for society and the economy, well beyond those derived by private beneficiaries. Wherever activities could deliver both public and private benefits, relevant decisions should seek to leverage private or industry co-contributions (financial or in kind) to offset private gains, where appropriate, and maximise outcomes. Examples of activities that enhance the public good by building drought and climate resilience may include those that: • Address information gaps • Drive collective behavioural change or change at scale • Maximise the value of research and development • Enhance the natural resource base • Build human capital through improved decision-making

Term	Definition
	• Build social capital through strengthening networks • Sharing of knowledge • Improving overall well-being.
RDRP	Regional Drought Resilience Planning (Program)
RFQ	Request for quote
RL	Resilient Landscapes (Program)
SDRC	Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country (Program)
social–ecological system	An intertwined system of humans and nature, e.g. farmers, their businesses and the land.
social resilience	Refers to the FDF strategic objective of strengthening the social capital, wellbeing, and connectedness of rural, regional, and remote agricultural communities. Drought can cause strain on maintaining the social fabric or social capital of rural, regional, and remote Australia, which may threaten the viability of some communities. Despite sometimes sharing similar challenges, Australia's rural, regional, and remote communities differ greatly. Social capital is built on social networks of trust, mutual support and understanding. When people are part of social networks, they are more involved in community life and can be better supported through challenging times. Drought can reduce people's ability to work together for the benefit of the whole community, for example, a reduced capacity to engage in social and business networks, community projects and sporting activities. Maintaining positive mental health is also an important aspect of personal resilience. Drought can undoubtably cause personal and family stress which can be lessened when social connections, networks are strengthened.
specified resilience	The resilience of a specified part of the system to a specified shock (e.g. natural resources or communities to drought)
SS	Scaling Success (Program)
TBC	To be confirmed
ToC	Theory of Change
transformational change	The ability to undertake wholescale change of a system when adverse events or risks make the current system untenable, that is, changes to the fundamental attributes of a socioecological system. It is a way of doing things differently and innovatively when it is clear that the current system is untenable and losing its resilience – for example transforming from irrigated to dry crop production when water becomes irreversibly scarce. Transformational change is context dependent. While change at a large spatial scale may be transformational, it can also be achieved at smaller scales, including within a business. Transformational changes at smaller scale (farm/business) are often required to maintain resilience at larger scale (for example broad landscape). The level of change that counts as 'transformational' is subjective and relative — considering the difference between a deliberate change (above and beyond what would typically occur) versus a background change. The requirements for transformational change can be outlined in 3 broad processes: understanding risks and solutions (information and understanding); vision development including impact pathways (analysis, collaboration, and planning); and the implementation of actions by stakeholders (action).Transformational change is a change from the current system to a different one – for example from irrigated cropping to grazing or even other non-agricultural land uses. However, the FDF recognises that there are competing perspectives on what transformational change is. Further, the level of change that is recognised as 'transformational' is subjective and relative. Sometimes, incremental adaptation can accrue to result in transformational adaptation. While transformational change of a system at a large scale may sometimes be possible, it often starts at smaller scales – e.g. multiple farms across a catchment transform, to maintain the resilience of the whole catchment.

Term	Definition
	Transformational change is a key feature of the Future Drought Fund (Drought Resilience Funding Plan 2024–2028) Determination 2024, consistent with PC Inquiry recommendation 3.1. However, in line with stakeholder feedback, DAFF recognises that such change should not be forced on those who are not ready, and that there should be greater consideration given to the unique circumstances and contexts of farmers and regions.
transitional change	The ability to maintain the essential functions and structures of a system by modifying or changing some of its characteristics in response to future adverse events or risk. An example could include changing aspects of a production system (such as seed varieties or agronomic practices) to continue the production of certain commodities in a region.
transformative capacity	The ability to radically change the core functions and structures of the system or build a new system if absorptive and adaptive capacity are not sufficient e.g. Capacity for collective reflection and deep learning (triple loop learning); Agency to self-organise and change; capacity for technical innovation; capacity for Institutional change

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