



Supporting women to lead sustainable land management and drought resilience: Future Drought Fund, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Drought is an enduring feature of the Australian landscape that is predicted to become more frequent and severe as the climate continues to change. The Australian Government's Future Drought Fund recognises that drought has significant economic, social, and environmental impacts and, often, these factors are interconnected. The "Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative" (HRCPI) aims to build resilience in relation to the social impacts of drought. Significant evidence suggests that social capital is beneficial in adapting to drought and the impacts of a changing climate. People in agriculture-dependent communities with higher social resilience will have access to more resourcing, knowledge, and a broader network when drought occurs.

Building a sense of community is critical in preparing and responding to drought as events that bring people together decrease social isolation and increase the capacity to cope. Events and community spaces also provide an environment for locals to gather with others who have similar lived experiences. Ensuring these spaces and routines are well established early is important in supporting a community when drought hits.



Initiative overview

The HRCPI is an AUD\$29.6 million investment that offers an integrated package of support for communities preparing for drought. The initiative began in August 2022 and will be delivered until June 2025, in partnership between the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF).

The HRCPI consists of five programme elements:

Community Impact Program: Targeting 35 regions nationally, up to AUD\$500,000 will be granted per region. A lead organisation in each region will partner with other local organisations and community members through a co-design process to create local projects (delivered by FRRR). A suite of leadership training workshops will also be offered to community members in each region (delivered by ARLF).

Small Network Grants: Grants of up to AUD\$50,000 will support community organisations to build stronger connections and networks (delivered by FRRR).

National Mentoring Program: The 12-month learning programme connects mentors to individuals who want to contribute to their community's drought resilience (delivered by ARLF).

National Learning Network: This network connects individuals and organisations participating in the HRCPI or previous foundational year programmes, enabling them to continue learning from each other and sharing experiences in building drought preparedness (delivered by ARLF).

National Expertise Pool: This online platform allows community organisations to access specialist expertise to activate drought resilience activities. Experts with specific skills advertise through the platform, and grantees can access it (delivered by FRRR).

Women's involvement

The HRCPDI has funded a raft of activities to support women in SLM practices and build drought resilience.

Examples include:

Over 20 projects have been supported, and more than AUD\$730,000 in grants have been allocated to activities across Australia, supporting women in drought-prone communities with a focus on increasing leadership skills.

Of the 250 participants in the National Mentoring Program under the HRCPDI, 159 have been women (63.6%). This programme pairs a mentor with a mentee to build resilience and develop leadership capacity in drought-prone areas.



Women champions

HRCPDI has supported the work and ongoing capacity building of women leaders via its grant programmes, including a project delivered by Mallee Sustainable Farming, which is creating a network of confident, capable rural female leaders through personal development and leadership training opportunities.

Challenges

As a relatively new programme, challenges and gaps are emerging. Evaluation of the HRCPDI is currently underway and will provide insight into challenges and gaps concerning the focus of the evaluation report. Learnings from the evaluation will help streamline and improve the programme in its second phase which is scheduled to commence in 2025-26.



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