



Drought

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 170
24 February 2021

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The long-term objective of government drought policy should be to prioritise drought preparedness, sustainability, resilience and risk management for farming businesses and communities in order to reduce the need and dependency on short-term government programs and assistance.
2. The VFF supports a nationally consistent approach to drought policy, underpinned by an intergovernmental agreement that specifies objectives and clearly defines roles and responsibilities for each level of government.

Government Programs and schemes

3. Immediate drought assistance should prioritise animal welfare and land management issues, as well as providing personal assistance to farmers (e.g. mental health services)..
4. Government drought assistance programs must be flexible to ensure all drought-impacted farmers, irrespective of their location, are able to access support.
5. Government must work to reduce confusion among farmers and rural and regional communities about their eligibility for drought assistance.
6. Government should avoid implementing programs and schemes that may have the effect of distorting existing markets, especially in the areas of farm inputs such as feed, chemicals and water.
7. Government should streamline the administrative processes for obtaining drought assistance to reduce the cost of administering programs and the administrative burden on those seeking to access assistance.
8. Government must establish industry consultative mechanisms to enable farmers to contribute to program development and performance monitoring.
9. Government must develop clear service standards for drought program delivery, both in relation to program administration and the processing of individual applications, coupled with a nationally consistent data collection and reporting framework.
10. The VFF supports the establishment and operation of the Future Drought Fund to enhance drought preparedness and resilience.

Farm business assistance

11. The VFF supports the delivery of capacity building programs, tools and technologies to improve farming business skills and promote preparedness and resilience, thereby helping to reduce dependency on on-going government programs and assistance.

12. The VFF supports incentives that support farming businesses' risk management including taxation concessions, Farm Management Deposits Scheme and concessional loans.

13. The VFF supports programs that provide drought impacted farm businesses relief from government imposed rates and charges (e.g. local government rates) via absolution, concessions or deferred payment schemes.

14. The VFF supports programs that enable farmers to invest in infrastructure specifically for the purpose of drought preparedness and resilience.

Personal and family assistance

15. The VFF supports a time limited household support payment (such as the Farm Household Allowance) based on individual and farming family needs. Government should require farmers in receipt of this assistance to undertake mutual obligations that develop long-term resilience in their business.

16. The VFF supports government assistance for Rural Financial Counselling services and believes government should provide long term funding certainty to guarantee the ongoing provision of these services.

17. The VFF supports the provision of health and well-being services that mitigate the effects of drought for farming families and farming communities.

Non-farm business support and Regional Development

18. The VFF supports government assistance for farming communities impacted by drought and dry conditions that are specifically targeted for the purposes of community support and regional development.

19. The VFF supports dedicated assistance to rural and regional businesses with a direct link to agriculture suffering hardship due to drought (e.g. contractors, machinery sales and servicing).

20. Government assistance for industries other than agriculture and those directly linked to agriculture should not be supported by any program that also supports farmers and farm businesses. Rural communities suffering from economic downturn caused by drought-induced decline in the agriculture sector should be supported through regional development programs, not dedicated drought assistance programs.

21. Funding provided to Local Government Authorities or non-government organisations for drought assistance programs should only be used for the direct benefit of farmers and farm businesses. The VFF does not support discretionary spending on non-farm related community projects by program managers.