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Mr. Brett Finlay- Committee Chair

Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee

Australian Government- Department of Agriculture

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Dear Committee Chair,

CWAA submission – Future Drought Fund – Draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Committee's Draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan. The CWAA's objective is to advance the rights and equity of women, families and communities in Australia through advocacy and empowerment, especially for those living in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The policy and advocacy efforts of the CWA of Australia are largely centered around equity of access to services in rural, regional and remote (RRR) areas. Currently, a large portion of our work in both advocacy and charity is drought support. Our state and territory CWA organisations are distributing drought relief to farming families in the form of both assistance with household expenses (donated funds) and CWA branches providing local "on-the-ground" support, from compiling and distributing household hampers and drinking water, to fundraising and providing a network of support for country people.

The CWA of Australia supports the work of the Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee, and supports the notion that Australian farmers and rural communities must evolve and adapt and become increasingly resilient to a changing climate in order to maintain viability. Whilst future drought resilience is absolutely crucial, we believe that supporting people suffering through the current drought, is equally crucial. The CWAA makes the strong recommendation that a portion of the FDF scheduled to be released in July 2020 at least, be allocated to in-drought support. The community; private individuals, corporations, and banks, are donating. Members of organisations like the CWA are providing countless hours of volunteering.

Hindsight would indicate that perhaps a drought resilience plan should have been designed and rolled out in the years prior to the current drought. The fact that the Australian Government has been caught in a drought, without a national drought plan let alone any sort of future drought resilience strategy, is an indication of both a policy failure and the nature of drought - it is insidious and unpredictable. We believe that the allocation of

hundreds of millions of dollars to a “future drought”, without adequately supporting those currently in the midst of the worst and most widespread drought on record, could be considered inappropriate and somewhat opportunistic. Everyone, including the leadership team of the Australian Government have been caught unprepared, despite innumerable reviews, reports, recommendations and pilot programs that should have, at the very least, seen government ready to act.

The CWAA is a strong advocate for drought preparedness as much as is actually possible, and we are therefore overall supportive of the direction of the FDF and what it proposes to do. We are aware and wish to flag the unfortunate history of business structures that have “rorted” the system, whereby large amounts of funding has been made available to the agricultural sector through various programs, and where some have been able to circumvent or manipulate due process, without making any significant or genuine change to their business model or farm practices. We are hopeful that this is not the case in the roll out of the FDF.

The below statements are recommendations and comments on the Committee’s draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan. The CWAA welcomes the opportunity to discuss any and all of our recommendations at any time.

- **Audit and review:** The CWAA recommend that the Committee review the existing farm, regional and national drought resilience and/or support programs currently available, in order to minimize and eliminate duplication with FDF funding.
- **Delivery of actual outcomes:** The CWAA supports the requirement to ensure that programs funded by FDF deliver outcomes to farming businesses and communities (funding principle 18), and suggest that this requirement be given a higher priority.
- **Strategic priority: environmental resilience for sustainable farming landscapes:** The CWAA supports in particular the incorporation of end users to co-design local NRM research and development, including adoption.
- **Water security:** needs to be a standalone section within the NRM considerations. Water management, particularly in the scenario of the Murray Darling Basin, is a most challenging aspect of drought management, and the FDF could be an important platform to use data, technology, and innovation for better water management outcomes.
- **Delivery of in-drought support:** Funding principle 3 states that a criterion for FDF programs is that the project does not deliver in-drought support. As stated above, we do not support this criterion. At the very least, this could be amended to state that in-drought support shall not be the primary or dominant objective of the proposed program. In-drought support should not be precluded as this could result in perverse outcomes.
- **Economic resilience for an innovative and profitable agricultural sector.** Funding for agricultural research and development needs to be increased (separate to FDF funding). The Draft plan notes that recent studies show that agriculture in Australia is the lowest performing industry in both digital management capability and overall management capability.
 - Rural, regional and Remote Australia needs equitable access to reliable and affordable telecommunications.
 - Lack of reliable internet and mobile service is curbing the potential development of regional Australian businesses and economies. According to the ABS, there is a higher proportion of business owners in regional Australia than in Metro Australia¹. Furthermore, according to the Regional Australia Institute rural and remote regions may be negatively impacted by the technological changes facing Australia’s workforce because they often do not have the same level of infrastructure and technological readiness as other regions². Rural, regional and

¹[https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1380.0.55.008~2011~Media%20Release~High%20proportion%20of%20business%20owners%20in%20regional%20areas%20\(Media%20Release\)~161](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1380.0.55.008~2011~Media%20Release~High%20proportion%20of%20business%20owners%20in%20regional%20areas%20(Media%20Release)~161)

² Houghton K., 2019, The future of regional jobs, The Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.

remote regions therefore may not see the same level of growth in digital jobs or be able to react as quickly to changes in the nature of work as other regions.

- Allocating large sums of money to upskilling and building capacity must go with improved access.
- **Social resilience for resourceful and adaptable communities:** The liveability of rural communities will have a significant impact on the diversity and capacity within them. Where the FDF seeks to improve the resilience, social fabric, well-being and human capital of rural communities, improvements to government funded services (health, education, transport, infrastructure etc.) need serious and significant improvement.

Our state and territory CWA members are farmers, community members, small business owners, and volunteers assisting with the current drought and are invested in rural living and way of life. We therefore believe we have a strong and balanced position from which to make these recommendations for what is a very important and welcome initiative. Again, we welcome further discussion.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tanya Cameron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tanya Cameron
National President