

Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program 2023-2025

Round 2

Program Guidelines

September 2023

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Minister's Foreword

Drought is a reality of living and working on the land but the people who make regional NSW their home are extremely resilient.

The NSW Government will stand by these communities to ensure they are equipped to face the difficulties posed by future weather conditions.

Empowering regional communities to plan and act early to drought risks is the key principle of the Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program.

The program is co-funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the NSW Government, and enables regional communities to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from drought.

There are multiple factors that need to be considered when preparing for drought.

Communities need to be positioned to identify opportunities, improve natural capital and resource management, as well as support social resilience and wellbeing.

When building each plan, communities are encouraged to think about drought and self-resilience beyond just the agricultural sector. Drought preparedness is more than just water issues.

Each plan seeks to present a holistic approach to prepare communities for future droughts, with a focus on building economic, environmental, and social resilience.

Round 2 of the program will ensure more regional communities are given the best support to manage future drought risks.

I look forward to working closely with regional councils and their communities.

The Hon. Tara Moriarty, MLC MP

Minister for Regional NSW



The Hon. Tara Moriarty, MLC MP

Fund Overview

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program was established as a pilot in 2021, and pilot participants will start implementing their plans this year.

The NSW and Australian Governments have expanded the program to additional NSW regions so that more Regional Drought Resilience Plans can be developed and begin to be implemented by councils and their communities to manage future drought risks. Funding was allocated across 2 rounds, with Round 1 commencing earlier in 2023. Funding will now be available for Round 2 (2023-25) to support selected eligible NSW councils to work in consortia to develop their own Regional Drought Resilience Plans.

Councils have been grouped into consortia primarily based on their Functional Economic Region (FER) boundaries. They have been deemed eligible because they have been identified as being vulnerable to drought, with a strong reliance on agriculture. Other multicriteria community resilience indicators have been used to inform the groupings and the staging of implementation ([Appendix A](#)).

The criteria which determined council eligibility included:

- drought vulnerability – based on the economic contribution of water-dependant industries within Local Government Areas (LGA)
- percentage of workforce employed in agriculture
- strategic alignment with neighbouring LGAs such as shared water catchments and water strategies
- population size within an LGA and capacity to deliver.

The purpose of grouping councils into consortia is to ensure the program reaches multiple regions while identifying local drought preparedness needs. Applying a regional approach to drought planning is a core element of the Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program. The program is also sequenced to allow for lessons learnt to be shared across regions as planning occurs.

The objectives and structure of the program outlined below are intended to be flexible to reflect and inform the design of individual plans by local stakeholders.

The development of each Regional Drought Resilience Plan will be led by a council consortium (who may choose to use funding to resource experts to support design and delivery of the plan). The plan should be informed by local technical studies and co-designed with local stakeholders to ensure it is relevant and actionable for the regions involved.

The planning will need to:

- be project managed by the lead council or Joint Organisation, who can work with regional organisations, consultants, community groups, and industry groups to complete the plan
- think about a broad range of drought impacts which extend beyond water security
- identify actions to prepare for future droughts, with a sharp focus on the agricultural sector and allied industries
- bring people together to share their local knowledge and perspectives
- recognise that no two regions are the same.

Regional communities will benefit from the plans by:

- being able to identify and plan for the impacts of drought
- being in a stronger position to adapt to changes and take advantage of opportunities as they arise
- building their economic, environmental, and social resilience to future droughts
- learning from each other and sharing what's working and not working
- forming even stronger connections within and between regions
- having access to best-practice data to make better decisions
- improving natural resource management across regions.

The plans will be independently reviewed by CSIRO. The council consortia must incorporate CSIRO feedback into their plan for it to be approved. All plans will need to be approved by the NSW Government and the Australian Government and then be made publicly available. This is a requirement of the Future Drought Fund.

Program Purpose and Objectives

The program aims to build capability and empower regional communities to plan and act early to reduce and respond to drought risks.

The program objectives are designed to support the following:

- growing the self-reliance and drought resilience of regional communities including the agricultural sector
- improving natural capital of agricultural landscapes for better environmental outcomes
- strengthening the wellbeing and social capital of rural, regional, and remote communities.

The program will provide funding for consortia to:

1. develop a Regional Drought Resilience Plan following a partnership and co-design process with communities, and
2. begin implementation activities identified within the Regional Drought Resilience Plan with seed funding (if the Regional Drought Resilience Plan and an Implementation Plan are approved).

The program will enable councils to work in consortia of between 2 and 6 LGAs. The council consortia are designed to relate to FER boundaries. This is to ensure that the project considers local drought factors and solutions that align with the economic strengths and vulnerabilities of the FER, which could support implementation across the region.

The program will foster partnerships with local farmers, communities, and industries to identify actions to become more self-reliant and resilient against the effects of drought and other challenges.

The program will support each consortium to design and deliver a Regional Drought Resilience Plan and begin implementation of priority actions to achieve the objectives of the plan.

Project Delivery Approach

Applications open	Monday 4 September 2023
Applications close	Monday 25 September 2023, 5pm (AEDT)
Assessment	Assessment/approval will be within 20 business days of the application closing date.
Application outcome	Monday 20 November 2023, 5pm (AEDT) Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified within 10 days of the assessment process being completed.
Funding Agreements contracted	The lead council (or consortium lead) will be required to execute a funding deed with the Department of Regional NSW prior to any payment being released.

In extenuating circumstances, late applications may be accepted at the discretion of the Department of Regional NSW.

Program Funding

The program will allocate funding of up to \$580,000 to successful applicants (eligible consortia are listed in **Appendix A**).

The funding must be applied in the following way:

Regional Drought Resilience Plan Development

Funding for the development of a drought plan that covers the drought resilience needs of the consortium.

The plan must focus on how it will support the consortium to meet the program's objectives.

Regional Drought Resilience Plan Implementation

When the Regional Drought Resilience Plan is approved by the NSW Government and the Australian Government, the consortium lead must submit an Implementation Plan for approval by Department of Regional NSW. The Implementation Plan must detail proposed implementation activities from the Regional Drought Resilience Plan, as well as their expected costs, timing, and other key details.

All funding will be released in instalments when milestones have been delivered per an executed funding deed between the Department of Regional NSW and the lead LGA for the consortium.

Where the funding allocation is not fully used, it will be returned to the Department of Regional NSW.

Grant Amounts

Regional Drought Resilience Plan Development

Maximum Amount available

\$200,000*

*For consortia comprised of more than 3 councils an additional \$10,000 will be available per additional council, to a maximum amount of \$230,000 for up to 6 councils.

Regional Drought Resilience Plan Implementation

(action, business case or project plan
for actions)

Maximum Amount available

\$250,000**

**For consortia comprising of more than 3 councils an additional \$100,000 will be available for implementation, subject to approval of activities by DRNSW. The maximum total amount available for these consortia will be \$350,000.

GST exclusive

Barry Way South, Snowy Mountains 2023, courtesy of DRNSW



Eligibility Criteria

Applications are required to meet the program eligibility and assessment criteria to be considered for funding.

Mundi Mundi Plains, Broken Hill 2023, courtesy of DRNSW



Eligible Consortia

Eligible applicants are those councils in identified consortia listed in [Appendix A](#).

To be eligible, council consortia must consist of 2 to 6 LGAs in alignment. The consortia should develop and submit one application for the project, nominating a single council as the lead applicant. The consortia can nominate a Joint Organisation to be the lead applicant, provided that an eligible LGA in the consortium is a member of the Joint Organisation. The lead applicant should provide a letter of support from all participating councils in the consortium as evidence of their support for the lead applicant and the contents of the application.

The consortium can engage external providers to assist with planning only when the funding deed is executed with the department and relevant approvals have been secured.

External providers are defined as legal entities that undertake planning at a regional scale and include the Regional Development Australia Network, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples organisations, Natural Resources Management Regions Australia organisations, statutory authorities or other entities as deemed relevant by the Department of Regional NSW.

Where possible councils should be the project lead with support of other entities to assist with development of the Regional Drought Resilience Plan. In extenuating circumstances, other entities may be considered to lead the project, subject to approval by the Department. Project leads will coordinate and chair project control groups for their consortium. Consortium members will participate in all project control groups. Project support materials and resources will be provided to each consortium by the Department of Regional NSW.

Eligible Planning Types

The funds must be used to develop a Regional Drought Resilience Plan and to support its implementation. These activities must be consistent with the program objectives.

All applications need to demonstrate that the project can start immediately once notified and that the applicant can meet the completion delivery date of 24 October 2024 for the Regional Drought Resilience Plan.

Eligible Project Locations

The Regional Drought Resilience Plans and implementation activities must relate to the LGAs making the application.

If specific projects are identified in the plan, the projects must be located in a participating LGA in the consortium.

The project must be designed to benefit the LGAs within the consortium.

In extenuating circumstances where councils cannot partner per the proposed consortium groups outlined in [Appendix A](#), a council partnership may be formed with another neighbouring consortium if reasonably justified and accepted at the discretion of Department of Regional NSW.

Ineligible Projects and Costs

Ineligible project types include those that:

- use the planning funding for anything other than drought planning, unless the Department of Regional NSW approves using planning underspend for implementation activities
- are not located in the applicant LGAs or do not provide direct benefit to applicant LGAs
- are for the day-to-day delivery of essential or core local council services, and/or
- duplicate grant funding from another NSW or Australian Government grant program for the same project.

Ineligible project costs include:

- financing, including debt financing, insurance, or rental costs
- non-project related staff training and development costs
- ongoing or recurrent funding that is required beyond the stated timeframe of the project
- infrastructure projects or funding for any ongoing staff or operational costs, and/or
- retrospective funding to cover any project component that is already commenced or complete before the funding deed is executed.

Dalgety Bridge, Snowy Mountains 2023,
courtesy of DRNSW



Assessment Criteria

All applications that meet the eligibility criteria must also meet the relevant assessment criteria to receive funding.

Eligible applications will be assessed against deliverability, the program objectives, and local benefits.

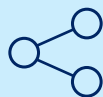
Deliverability

All applications should demonstrate:

- A clear design and delivery method to achieve a Regional Drought Resilience Plan that is community led and owned by:
 - facilitating co-design of the plan where councils partner together and with their community members, to harness the diverse region-specific knowledge and skills required to address economic, environmental, and social objectives
 - applying or developing an evidence base to inform actions and upskilling community members to support implementation
 - using best-practice resilience planning principles including consideration of adaptation pathways and scenario testing, and
 - building on or complementing existing strategic plans, such as the Regional Economic Development Strategies.
- Demonstrated resourcing capacity and capability to deliver the project on time and within budget (by council and/or with other supported entities).



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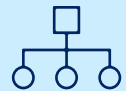
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Research

and best practice

Sharing

and reviewing existing learnings and plans

Identify

community needs, ideas

Test

assess priorities, approaches, concepts

Agree

priorities, actions and implementation pathways

= Regional Drought Resilience Plan

Program Objectives

Applications must demonstrate the project aligns with the program purpose and objectives outlined in these Guidelines.

The program objectives are designed to support the following:

- growing the self-reliance and drought resilience of regional communities including the agricultural sector
- improving natural capital of agricultural landscapes for better environmental outcomes
- strengthening the wellbeing and social capital of rural, regional, and remote communities.

From left: Cootamundra 2022, courtesy of DRNSW.
Sheep farm, Armidale 2022, courtesy of DRNSW.



Local Benefits

Applications should address how their regional communities will benefit from:

- understanding the broader impacts of drought specific to their local region
- being able to identify and plan for the impacts of drought
- being in a stronger position to adapt to changes and take advantage of opportunities as they arise
- building their economic, environmental, and social resilience to future droughts
- learning from each other and sharing what's working and not working
- forming even stronger partnerships within and between regions and having local drought engagement strategies
- having access to best-practice data to make better decisions, and
- improving natural resource management across the regions.

Projects will be assessed as a 'Yes/No' against the Assessment Criteria. Projects will not be competitively assessed across eligible LGAs.



Application Process

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program is a single stage application process.

These Guidelines are for applications to Round 2 for projects delivered between 2023–25.

What needs to be included in an application?

- a clear scope and timeline for the development and delivery of a plan
- information and evidence detailing how the application meets the program's eligibility and assessment criteria
- basic organisation details including a Public Liability Insurance certificate
- proposed project costs
- response to the assessment criteria, and
- support letters from consortium council members outlining agreement with the nominated project lead and support for the application.

The Department of Regional NSW will invite councils identified in **Appendix A** (for Round 2) to form their consortium and submit an application for the program. The program requires one application per consortium which is prepared and agreed by all consortium members.

Prior to applying, councils will need to agree on the lead applicant, which will submit the application and enter into a funding deed with the Department of Regional NSW. The project lead will be responsible for ensuring the project is delivered in accordance with the funding deed, including managing project expenditure. Councils working as a consortium should indicate their support for the lead applicant and the contents of the application in their letter. Councils may choose to submit their application through an agreed Joint Organisation. Where the consortium agrees to engage a Joint Organisation as the lead, this should also be evidenced in a letter by each participating council.

In extenuating circumstances where a council cannot participate in the relevant consortium as proposed in **Appendix A**, that council may propose alternative arrangements for consideration by the Department of Regional NSW.

How to apply

Applicants are required to submit their application and documents online via **Smartygrants**.

It should be noted that:

- only one application is allowed per consortium. Applicants are to specify how their entire funding allocation will be expended in one application
- applicants are asked to submit the online form as soon as possible
- applications close on 25 September 2023
- expenses are eligible from the date the funding deed is executed, and
- the plan and all project milestones must be completed by 24 October 2024.

Snowy Mountains 2023, courtesy of DRNSW



Assessment Process

Following receipt of applications, Department of Regional NSW staff will assess the applications to ensure:

- the applicant is an eligible entity
- all required documentation is complete and submitted, and
- proposed projects align with the fund objectives and assessment criteria.

Probity Advice

Independent probity advisors will provide guidance to the Department of Regional NSW throughout the application, assessment, and decision-making process. This will ensure decisions are made with integrity, fairness and accountability, while delivering value for money for NSW.

Decision Maker

The NSW Government’s Minister for Regional NSW has approved these Guidelines including **Appendix A**, taking into account the Department of Regional NSW’s assessment advice and recommendations.

The Minister for Regional NSW has delegated financial management of the program to the Department of Regional NSW.

Other factors may be taken into consideration when determining final projects to receive funding.

The Department of Regional NSW at its sole discretion, can take other factors into account that may make an application ineligible for funding such as any activity that could cause reputational or other risk to the NSW Government.

Round 2



Successful Applications

The Department of Regional NSW will advise councils of their success in writing.

The lead council for the consortium will be required to enter into a legally binding funding deed with the Department of Regional NSW prior to receiving funding.

Important information applicants should note:

- there is no commitment to funding until both parties execute a funding deed
- costs should not be incurred until a funding deed has been executed
- successful applicants must not make financial commitments for funded activities until funding deeds have been executed by both parties
- grants will be paid via milestone payments set out in the funding deed for the development of the drought plan, and then if approved, funding to support starting implementation activities. Timing and requirements will vary at the NSW Government's discretion
- the first instalment will be paid upon signing of a funding deed by both parties and provision of an invoice
- the applicant is responsible for any costs beyond those agreed with the Department of Regional NSW within the funding deed
- project spend will need to align with the funding deed and in accordance with the Future Drought Fund Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program requirements and be reported to the Department of Regional NSW
- evidence will be required in order for projects to be closed, for example, a completed final plan and report and financial evidence of grant expenditure
- plans will be shared with the Department of Regional NSW, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and CSIRO for review and this should be accounted for in project planning

- successful applicants may be required to submit progress reports to the Department of Regional NSW as outlined in the funding deed. The reports will be used by the Department of Regional NSW for acquittal purposes at the completion of the project milestones. This includes evidence of project expenditure that will need to be provided via the SmartyGrants portal within 30 days of project completion
- plans and any lessons learnt about drought will be shared across regions (once finalised)
- applicants will be required to participate in evaluation activities conducted by the Department of Regional NSW and/or third-party evaluators contracted by the Department of Regional NSW and/or Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and
- unspent funds will need to be repaid to the Department of Regional NSW before the project is finalised, within 30 days of the final milestone and report.

Unsuccessful Applications:

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing.



Terms and conditions

The Department of Regional NSW and Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry may choose to publicly announce funding for individual applications. They may also publish the plans and use information provided in the grant program to develop case studies.

Successful applicants will be published on the Department of Regional NSW website.

All awarded grants will be GST exclusive. If you are registered for GST, this will be applied on top of the agreed grant value when payment is made, except for local councils or other government agencies. Grants are assessable for income tax purposes, unless exempt under taxation law. It is recommended that applicants seek independent advice about tax obligations or seek assistance from the Australian Taxation Office. The NSW Government does not provide advice on individual tax circumstances.

The Department of Regional NSW reserves the right to undertake an audit of grant funding within 7 years.

There is no promise of funding unless the condition of a funding deed being executed by both parties is met.

Funding assistance provided through the program is subject to funds being available. The Department of Regional NSW reserves the right to make changes to the program to ensure it meets the objectives outlined in these Guidelines and provides equitable funding support to applicants.

In extenuating circumstances, applications submitted after the deadline may be accepted at the sole discretion of the Department of Regional NSW.

Confidentiality on the outcome of grant applications must be maintained until the NSW Government has made a public announcement.

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

Applicants should be aware that information submitted in applications and all related correspondence, attachments and other documents may be made publicly available under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. Information deemed to be commercially sensitive will be withheld.

Complaints

Any concerns about the program or individual applications should be submitted in writing to drought@regional.nsw.gov.au. If applicants do not agree with the way the Department of Regional NSW handled the issue, they may wish to contact the NSW Ombudsman via ombo.nsw.gov.au.

Ethical Conduct

Applicants must not participate in any anti-competitive conduct. It is a condition of the grant program application process that no gifts, benefits or hospitality are to be given to any Department of Regional NSW employee at any time. Any inducement in contravention of this condition may result in an applicant's proposal not being considered.

Conflicts of Interest

A conflict-of-interest declaration must be submitted with each application or included in the application form. Where a conflict of interest detrimental to the assessment process has been identified, mitigation measures must be put in place, or a program person may be asked not to participate in the grant application, assessment or delivery component of the process.

Confidentiality

Any information identified by the applicant as being confidential and agreed to be deemed as commercial in confidence will only be shared within Department of Regional NSW government employees and contractors, the Minister's office, and appropriate bodies for the purposes of assessment and funding agreement management, review and endorsement or when responding to information requests required by law.

Upon entering into an agreement, details about the agreement may be made publicly available (subject to the redaction of information which Department of Regional NSW deems to be commercial in confidence).

The applicant agrees not to disclose any confidential information pertaining to the grant program application or funding agreement without prior written consent.

Available Support

More information about the program can be found at **Regional Drought Resilience Planning**.

For help preparing applications, information and resources are available from **nsw.gov.au/RDRP**

Or contact Department of Regional NSW Drought Mailbox **drought@regional.nsw.gov.au**

Disclaimer

The Department of Regional NSW does not guarantee or warrant, and accepts no legal liability whatsoever arising from or connected to, the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any material contained in this publication. Information in this publication is provided as general information only and is not intended as a substitute for advice from a qualified professional.

The Department of Regional NSW recommends that users exercise care and use their own skill and judgement in using information from this publication and that users carefully evaluate the accuracy, currency, completeness, and relevance of such information. Users should take steps to independently verify the information in this publication and, where appropriate, seek professional advice.

These Guidelines are subject to change at any time at the sole discretion of the Department.

© State of New South Wales through Regional NSW 2023 The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing September, 2023. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Regional NSW or the user's independent adviser.

Appendix A – Eligible Local Government Area Councils in Regional NSW

Round 2			
Consortium Group	Local Government Area	Functional Economic Region	Department of Regional NSW Region
1	Glen Innes-Severn Council Tenterfield Shire Council	Northern New England High Country Northern New England High Country	New England North West New England North West
2	Gunnedah Shire Council Liverpool Plains Shire Council	Lower North West Lower North West	New England & North West New England & North West
3	Parkes Shire Council Forbes Shire Council Lachlan Shire Council	Mid-Lachlan Mid-Lachlan Mid-Lachlan	Central West Central West Central West
4	Snowy Valleys Council Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council	Snowy Valleys South West Slopes	Riverina Murray Riverina Murray
5	Armidale Regional Council Uralla Shire Council	Southern New England High Country Southern New England High Country	New England North West New England North West
6	Orange City Council Cabonne Council Cowra Shire Council Blayney Shire Council Weddin Shire Council	Orange, Blayney and Cabonne Orange, Blayney and Cabonne Cowra Orange, Blayney and Cabonne South West Slopes	Central West Central West Central West Central West Central West
7	Dubbo Regional Council Narromine Shire Council	Central Orana Central Orana	Central West Central West
8	Broken Hill City Council Central Darling Shire Council Unincorporated NSW (Far West area)	Far West Far West Far West	Orana Far West Orana Far West Orana Far West

9	Wagga Wagga City Council Lockhart Shire Council	Eastern Riverina Eastern Riverina	Riverina Murray Riverina Murray
10	Griffith City Council Leeton Shire Council Narrandera Shire Council Murrumbidgee Shire Council	Western Riverina Western Riverina Western Riverina Western Riverina	Riverina Murray Riverina Murray Riverina Murray Riverina Murray
11	Albury City Council Greater Hume Shire	Albury-Wodonga Albury-Wodonga	Riverina Murray Riverina Murray
12	Richmond Valley Council Kyogle Council	Northern Rivers Northern Rivers	North Coast North Coast
13	Muswellbrook Shire Council Upper Hunter Shire Council	Hunter Hunter	Hunter and Central Coast Hunter and Central Coast
14	Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council Snowy Monaro Regional Council Yass Valley Council	Queanbeyan-Palerang Snowy-Monaro Southern Tablelands	South East South East South East
15	Cessnock City Council Singleton Council	Hunter Hunter	Hunter and Central Coast Hunter and Central Coast
16	Wingecarribee Shire Council Goulburn Mulwaree Council	Wingecarribee Southern Tablelands	South East South East
17	Hay Shire Council Carrathool Shire Council	Western Murray Western Riverina	Riverina Murray Riverina Murray



From left: Grenfell 2021, courtesy of Weddin Shire Council. Glen Innes 2022, courtesy of DRNSW.

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W nsw.gov.au/RDRP

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