Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program Stream 2 - Sector Recovery and Resilience Grant

Process Evaluation Report

December 2023

Executive Summary

The Program

The $80 million Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program (SFIRP) forms a part of a larger $790 million commitment by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to support community, economic, and environmental recovery of February and March 2021 floods and storms impacted communities. SFIRP is aimed to support medium-term and longer-term economic recovery and resilience in the 2021 storm and flood impacted regions. The primary objectives of SFIRP are:

1. to support the medium-longer term recovery of storm and flood highly impacted primary producers; and
2. to increase preparedness for and resilience to future disasters across primary production industries.

SFIRP is delivered in two streams.

Stream 1 Supply Chain Support Grants (SCSG) is managed by Rural Assistance Authority (RAA) and uses a different delivery mechanism to that used for Stream 2. For that reason, Stream 1 is not covered in this Process Evaluation.

Stream 2 - Sector Recovery and Resilience Grants (SRRG) - approximately $30 million. Stream 2 is the focus of this Report.

Stream 2 (SRRG) is aimed to align with the second primary objectives of SFIRP – to increase preparedness for and resilience to future disasters across primary production industries, with a particular focus on sector-wide resilience capacity building. Stream 2 is delivered by DRNSW.

SFIRP Stream 2 was fully subscribed: $29.3 million out of the (approximately) $30 million were made available through the program. By September 2023 all $29.3 million were allocated to the 23 approved projects.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the evaluation found the program to be appropriate to its objectives, and program design and processes efficient and effective in facilitating the delivery of the program objectives with the focus on sector-wide resilience and disaster preparedness.

The program facilitated a good application uptake, through invitation. Twenty-three approved projects provided full coverage of all 78 eligible, disaster affected LGAs. All 23 projects are anticipated to benefit at least one eligible industry and three out of 23 projects aim to benefit more than one industry: two projects are designed to support Horticulture (berries, vegetables) and Dairy, and one further project is aimed to support all eligible industry sectors. Project categories included Research and Development (11 projects), Emergency Planning and Preparedness (5 projects), Education (4 projects), and Extension – industry engagement and support (3 projects).

The design of SFIRP Stream 2 was driven by experiences with a predecessor program (Bushfire Industry Recovery Package (BIRP)) with similar objectives. That earlier program resulted in providing funding for projects that, in some instances, led to individual business betterment rather than sector-wide resilience building. SFIRP Stream 2 was intentionally set up to avoid that earlier consequence.

As such, as part of preparation for program development and design, DRNSW conducted a thorough assessment of industry needs and disaster impact and obtained insights and resilience innovation solutions from industry representatives. An Industry Engagement Working Group was formed to facilitate and oversee identification of sector-wide benefitting projects. The Working Group also identified and invited potential applicants to design and implement the projects. Partnerships for project design and delivery were encouraged as part of SFIRP Stream 2 program design. The partnerships included Government and private organisations and industry bodies.

The program design model included several key aspects that contributed to the program being appropriate to its objectives:

Needs identification involved extensive industry impact and needs assessment and provided a strong foundation for program development and program design. The needs and impact assessment results established the most affected industry sectors and informed grant allocation amounts for eligible industries.

Solution generation involved stakeholder consultation, including direct engagement with industry representatives. The consultation yielded the resilience-building solutions and innovation suggestions that are most appropriate for the program's objectives to increase industry-wide preparedness for future disasters.

Project partnerships enabled synergetic benefits for project design and implementation, capitalising on the expertise of the project partners. The partnerships lessened the burden on individual applicants during the application process and expanded the partners' capacities, allowing them to design and deliver projects with broad, sector-wide scope.

Non-competitive approach to funding allowed the applicants to exchange project design ideas in a collaborative atmosphere and reduced the pressure, comparing to competitive funding model, during the application process.

Strategic Recommendation

The summary of Program Evaluation findings is listed in Table 1. In addition, this report identified one key strategic recommendation:

Prioritise the use of an evidence-based, non-competitive, consultative model when designing industry support programs with sector-wide resilience building objectives.

The consultative, non-competitive program design model was found beneficial for the delivery of complex, sector-wide oriented projects and superior to the alternative open, competitive grants, particularly in the context of recovery and resilience building.

For future programs with broad sector-wide objectives, it is recommended that an intentional, evidence-based program design is implemented, which should include:

- Needs assessment and an analysis of improvements based on previous insights.
- Research on and collection of solutions based on stakeholder consultation and co-design.
- Partnership model of project development and delivery - to facilitate the synergetic fusion of expertise and benefits brought by partners for project design and delivery.
- Non-competitive funding model - to enable collaboration and exchange during development of project design ideas.

Table 1: SFIRP Stream 2 - Program Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

EVALUATION FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Program development

F1.2 The program was developed based on extensive stakeholder consultation, industry needs assessment, and lessons learned from a previous program with resilience objectives. This allowed the program objectives to be well aligned with industry recovery and resilience needs.

Program design

F2.1 The program design was strongly aligned with the program's objectives. Comparison of the designs of SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2 demonstrates the key design features and improvements in SFIRP Stream 2 that better enabled sector-wide resilience capacity building.

F2.2 The consultative design model benefitted individual applicants as well as industry sectors by offering the synergetic benefits arising from the combined expertise of the partners. The non-competitive aspect of the program design was effective in facilitating collaborations in project design and development, which is beneficial to applicants and industry at large.

F2.3 The funding commitments for industry sectors were set appropriately, with no application requests for amounts outside the funding range. Voluntary co-contribution attracted significant funds from participants.

Program administration

F3.1 The program was effectively promoted to the target audience, successfully attracted applicants, and encourage the formation of capable partnerships to deliver projects.

F3.2 The program guidelines were clear and supported the applicants in preparing their applications.

F3.3 Applicants received sufficient support from DRNSW staff and external sources (KPMG).

Program application and contracting process

F4.1 Applicants were generally satisfied with the timeliness of notification of application outcomes. Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with delays during the application and contracting stages impacted perceptions of timeliness of the whole process.

F.4.2 The application and contracting processes both need to be clearly communicated to applicants. Lack of clear, upfront, information, including an overview of all steps and requirements involved in application and funding processes, caused applicant dissatisfaction.

Action recommended:

Identify upfront, in the guidelines and application form, all the information that will be required from applicants across the entire application and funding process. This will allow applicants to plan and prepare in advance for the workloads associated with each step in the application/funding deed process.

Monitoring and evaluation

F5.1 Program documentation and project reports are up to date, available, and appropriate for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Contents

Overview

About this report

This report is the Process Evaluation of the Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program (SFIRP) Stream 2 funding. The report was prepared by DRNSW Regional Programs Evaluation Team in September 2023.

Prior to this complete Process Evaluation, a stakeholder consultation process reviewed stakeholder perceptions of the appropriateness, efficiency, and effectiveness of SFIRP Stream 2 and summarised those findings in a preliminary Stakeholder Review[1]. Relevant stakeholder consultation findings are included as part of this Process Evaluation report.

Evaluation Approach

The two streams of SFIRP have been evaluated separately because of the significant differences between their objectives, design, delivery, and management. This document reports on the Process Evaluation findings of the SFIRP Stream 2 - Sector Recovery and Resilience Grants.

This Process Evaluation report is focused on examining how appropriate the 'consultative' design model used for SFIRP Stream 2 was in terms of achieving the program's objectives (p. 1).

The key evaluation question (KEQ) covered in this report is:

- **Was the consultative model of program design introduced in SFIRP Stream 2 effective, efficient, and appropriate for delivering the program objectives?**

As part of the analysis, the SFIRP Stream 2 model is compared to BIRP Stream 2. BIRP is a predecessor program to SFIRP with a similar broader objectives of sector recovery and resilience, but with a different approach to achieving the resilience-building goal. Unlike SFIRP, BIRP Stream 2 was rolled out as an open competitive grant program and focused on the projects that will build industry sustainability, increase value-add production, support supply-chain efficiencies, product diversification and market expansion – which was anticipated to contribute to the resilience-building goal. Comparison of the two approaches provides an opportunity to understand which is better suited to facilitate the program objectives.

Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed-method approach where the document review, stakeholder engagement, program data and quantitative stakeholder data analysis (including previously completed stakeholder engagement analysis – see Stakeholder Engagement Report) were triangulated to answer the key evaluation question. The data sources used for the evaluation are listed below.

Stakeholder interviews

- Individual interviews with the relevant Director, Program Manager and Floods Strategic Coordinator
- Interviews with representatives from seven grantee organisations
- Interviews with representatives from the Grants Management Office

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[1] RDOC23/205786

Document review

- Review of relevant program documents, guided by the Key Evaluation Question
- Review of application forms data submitted by grantees

Data analysis

- Analyses of SmartyGrants project data, including application volume, project type, project location, application and notification dates
- Analysis of grantee survey data (n=15), including both quantitative and qualitative responses

Grantee interview selection

A sample of grantees (n=8) was approached to participate in interviews and seven out of eight were interviewed (the remaining grantee did not respond to the invitation). Considering a relatively small overall grantees number (n=23), the sample of seven (30%) included all grantees who volunteered for an interview following the prompt in the grantee survey. Despite the limited participant pool, the interviewed grantees' characteristics varied by:

- Geographical location of the proposed projects
- Anticipated geographic location of the project benefits
- Grantee industry sector
- Industry sector(s) anticipated to benefit from project
- Project category
- Experience with grants

Interview questions aimed to explore detailed qualitative information on the program application and assessment processes and the grantees' perception of the program design.

Limitations

Grantee interviews were conducted while the application assessment was still ongoing. The grantees' perception of the program processes (particularly the assessment timeline) was likely impacted by the timing of the interviews.

Limited information was available relating to the communication and marketing strategy for SFIRP. The relevant Media Manager was unavailable for an interview. Although no communication issues were discovered through the stakeholder consultation, it remains unclear whether the communication strategy for SFIRP stream 2 was followed as designed.

Program Overview

Background and funding package

The $80 million Storms and Floods Industry Recovery Program (SFIRP) is one of eight recovery programs announced in June 2021 by both the NSW and Australian Governments under Phase Three of the NSW Storm and Flood Recovery Package (NSW SFR Package). Funding was made available to the areas and industry sectors most impacted by the February and March 2021 storms and floods.

Out of the $80 million of SFIRP funding package, $50 million were available for Stream 1 - Supply Chain Support Grants and $30 million were allocated for Stream 2 - Sector Recovery and Resilience Grants.

Objectives

The overall objectives of SFIRP are to support the medium to longer-term recovery needs of impacted primary producers by supporting job retention, and the future resilience and preparedness efforts of targeted agricultural, horticultural and aquacultural industries. As such, these objectives are comprised of two parts:

> 1. to support the medium-longer term recovery of storm and flood highly impacted primary producers; and
> 2. to increase preparedness for and resilience to future disasters across primary production industries.

Stream 1 (SCSG) and Stream 2 (SRRG) were designed to align with the respective parts of the primary objectives. Specifically, Stream 2 (SRRG) was aimed to increase preparedness for and resilience to future disasters across primary production industries, with a focus on sector-wide resilience capacity building.

SFIRP Stream 2 Program Design

The program was rolled out in a consultative, five step process, as described below in Figure 1

Engagement - Industry engagement was undertaken to better understand the unique impacts of the storms and floods, and to highlight the key recovery needs of each industry. Engagement was led through a Working Group consisting of representatives from key industry organisations and relevant NSW and Australian government agencies.

Identification - Projects were identified and co-designed by industry and government through the Working Group. Projects targeted sector-wide recovery, resilience, and innovation, including industry investment guidance. Additional industries and organisations could be included in this process upon approval by the Working Group, but no recommendations were made.

Business Cases - Eligible organisations (those confirmed by the Working Group) were invited to develop and submit a Business Case for the identified project(s). Business Cases had to demonstrate comprehensive industry consultation on the proposed project(s) and had to align, strongly, with the SFIRP Framework Criteria.

Assessment - DRNSW reviewed all submitted applications to confirm proposals meet the eligibility requirements as outlined in the SFIRP Framework. The Assessment Panel, including independent members and with advice from subject matter experts, assessed each application based on alignment to the Framework Criteria and broader factors to support industry recovery and resilience.

Recommendation - Recommendations made by the Assessment Panel were submitted to the Deputy Premier for consideration and approval. Once approved, projects were announced by the governments of NSW and Australian. Successful projects were managed through a funding deed that included a requirement that successful applicants participate in regular reporting and program evaluation
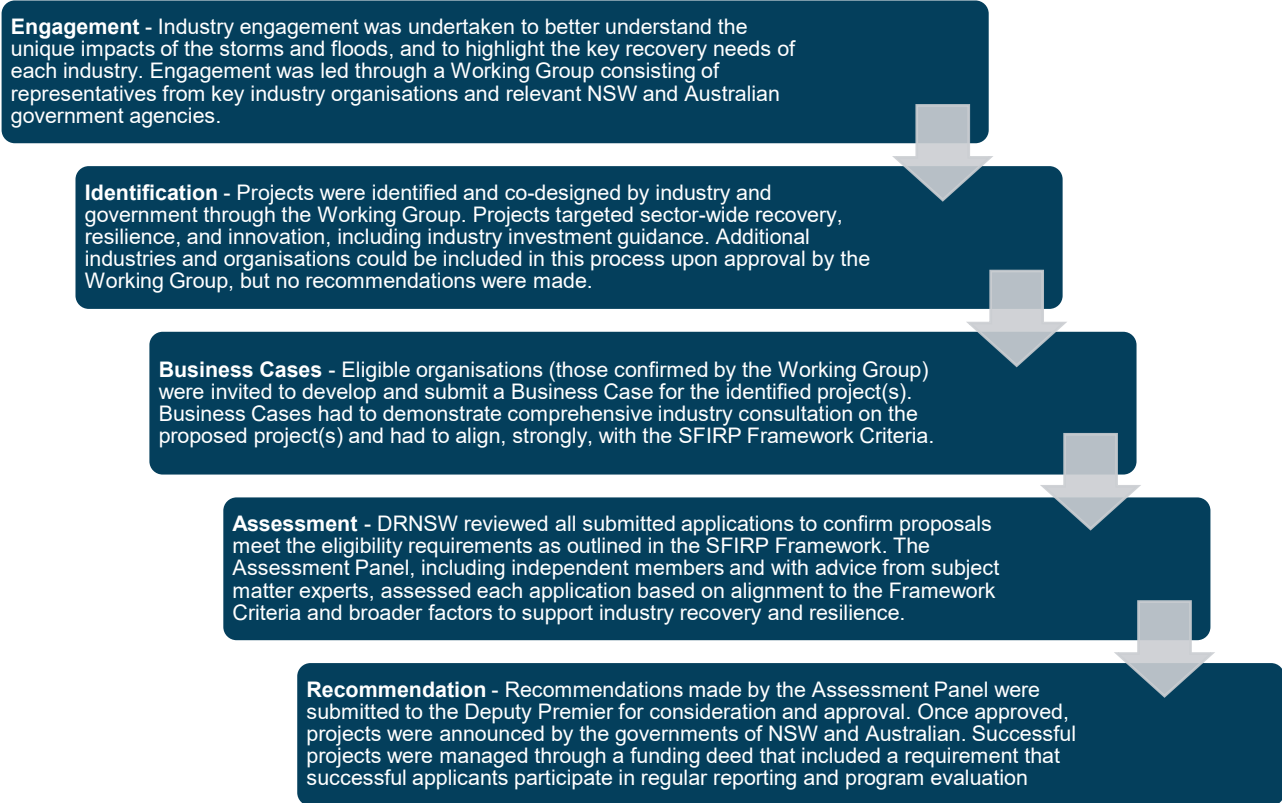
Figure 1: Program design process

The first stage of the program, 'Engagement', provided the mechanism for identifying potential partners and projects. For this purpose, an Industry Engagement Working Group (henceforth referred to as 'the Working Group') was formed, consisting of members of Public Works Advisory and Regional Development (PWARD), and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Agriculture. The Working Group identified the projects most beneficial to each industry's recovery and resilience needs and engaged with the key industry bodies and organisations most capable and willing to deliver the identified projects. Partnerships for project delivery between industry bodies and research groups were encouraged as part of this design.

Eligible participants, confirmed by the Working Group, were invited to develop and submit a Concept Plan, followed by a Business Case for the identified project(s).

DRNSW reviewed all submitted applications to confirm proposals meet the eligibility requirements as outlined in the SFIRP Framework. The Assessment Panel, including independent members and with advice from subject matter experts, assessed each application based on alignment to the assessment Framework Criteria (Attachment 1) and broader factors contributing to industry recovery and resilience. Business Cases had to demonstrate comprehensive industry consultation on the proposed project(s) and strong alignment with the SFIRP Framework Criteria.

Recommendations made by the Assessment Panel were submitted to the Deputy Premier for consideration and approval. Once approved, projects were announced by the NSW and Commonwealth governments. Successful projects were managed through a funding deed that included a requirement that successful applicants participate in regular reporting and program evaluation.

Following the announcement of projects, grantees negotiated and signed their funding deed.

Key dates

Industry engagement and project identification – From October 2021.

Business Case development and submission – From February to March 2022.

The Department's assessment and consideration by Assessment Panel – was planned for April 2022 and completed in May 2022.

Projects announced - From May 2022.

Project(s) and expenditure completion – Due 30 May 2024

Program snapshot to-date

The Working Group initially identified 42 projects for review, with 22 projects progressing to submission of a business case. Of those 22, one project required restructuring and eventually was rewritten as three separate projects, resulting in a total of 24 projects going forward to assessment. Of the final 24 projects, one was unsuccessful[2], with the remaining 23 projects being funded.

The 23 approved projects accounted for a total of $29.3 million out of the available (approximately) $30 million, making Stream 2 a fully subscribed program. At the time of writing this report, total allocated amount of funding was $29.3 million, of which:

- $22.1m - allocated in 2022-23 financial year and
- $7.2m - allocated in 2023-24 financial year.

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[2] The unsuccessful project was one of the three arising from the project that required rewriting.

Evaluation Findings

Evaluation domain 1: Program development

> **F1.1 The program was intentionally developed based on extensive stakeholder consultation, industry needs assessment, and lessons learned from previous programs with resilience objectives. This allowed the program objectives to be well aligned with industry recovery and resilience needs.**

1.1 Intentional program development based on needs assessment and consultation

The rationale for the design of SFIRP Stream 2 was based on the Industry Impact Assessment Report (IIAR), conducted by Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW), NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI), Local Land Services (LLS), Resilience NSW, Rural Assistance Authority (RAA) and the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA – now NEMA).

The IIAR found the disaster impact on primary production industries across 78 disaster-affected LGAs to be uneven and recommended to tailor recovery funding to support sectors according to the severity of damage they experienced. Based on the IIAR recommendations, the DPI collected resilience-building innovation suggestions and insights from industry representatives and the research organisations working in the primary industry fields. The stakeholder consultation yielded the types of innovation activities that were potentially most beneficial, for the relevant sectors, to lessen the impact of future disasters. Preference was given to projected activities that had potential to benefit primary industry resilience and support medium to longer-term recovery on the sector-wide scope. Those activities included:

- Construction of additional flood protection
- Development of tailored preparedness and response tools and training
- Research and design of improved processes and products
- Implementation of monitoring programs for contamination, food safety, animal welfare and product viability:
- Implementation of management programs for improved land management and supply chain management
- Development of preparedness and resilience systems, tools and training
- Additional initiatives are currently being determined in consultation with industry.

Evaluation domain 2: Program design

> F2.1 The program design was highly aligned with the program objectives and its particular focus on sector-wide resilience building. Design model comparison of SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2 demonstrates the key design features and improvements in SFIRP Stream 2 that better enabled sector-wide resilience capacity building.

> F2.2 Consultative design model benefitted individual applicants as well as industry sectors by offering synergetic benefits of combined expertise of the partners. The non-competitive aspect of the program design was effective in providing collaboration in project design and development, which is beneficial to applicants and industry at large.

F2.3 The funding commitments for industry sectors were set appropriately, with no application requests for amounts outside the funding range. Voluntary co-contribution attracted significant funds from participants

2.1 Program design alignment with objectives: Design model comparison of SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2

SFIRP Stream 2 design incorporated insights from the previously designed recovery and resilience focused program, BIRP Stream 2.

While both programs aimed to support broad sector recovery and resilience, BIRP Stream 2 was designed to include a mixture of projects that supported recovery and resilience building of individual businesses as well as projects supporting the primary industry sectors more broadly. As noted above, the resilience-building program objectives were to be achieved indirectly, as the aggregate outcomes of individual businesses' betterment contribute to the increased sector resilience.

Comparison of the design of SFIRP Stream 2 to BIRP Stream 2 is useful in demonstrating program design alignment with program objectives. Table 2 summarises key points of difference in program design of SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2.

Table 2: Key design features comparison – SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2.

SFIRP Stream 2	BIRP Stream 2
Panel-identified, sector-wide resilience focused projects and delivery partnerships; projects identified to contribute to sector-wide resilience capacity building	Applications included a combination of individual businesses and sector-wide oriented organisations and projects
Non-competitive grant	Open competitive grant
Clear direct alignment with sector-wide resilience-building focus; industry-focused projects	Indirect alignment with sector-wide resilience focus; aggregated strength of individual businesses, supported by the grant, is anticipated to contribute to the overall sector resilience
Program Logic and Theory of Change available, ensuring close alignment of the program design and implementation to the program objectives	Program Logic and Theory of Change not available, resulting in the program focus deviating from its sector-wide support objectives

From implementation of BIRP Stream 2 it became evident that (i) the competitive grant strategy made it difficult to assess applications because the scope and nature of projects varied widely between individual projects, and between projects aimed at individual betterment and those aimed at broader sector-oriented betterment, and (ii) there was an under-representation of sector-focused projects among approved projects. As consequence, BIRP Stream 2 was less effective in supporting its sector-wide resilience-building objectives.

During stakeholder consultation, program stakeholders compared the processes and rationale behind the design of SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2. The program managers highlighted the support of extensive stakeholder consultation (the IIAR) in designing SFIRP Stream 2, and the role of the Working Group in identifying the most beneficial innovative projects as particularly beneficial.

As a result of this preliminary work, the focus on building resilience as a program objective was more clearly defined than it had been for BIRP Stream 2.

On the whole, BIRP Stream 2 and SFIRP Stream 2 design comparison demonstrates that the industry-based consultative model used in SFIRP Stream 2 better enabled sector-wide resilience capacity building.

2.2 Consultative design model

The SFIRP Stream 2 consultative design model, that encouraged partnerships, demonstrated a range of benefits comparing to competitive grant model and is worth considering for wider implementation by the Department. The model was found to benefit both individual applicants and industries.

Non-competitive funding environment allowed grantees to develop and deliver their projects easier and with full benefits of professional collaboration. Grantees from the research and development sector explained the benefits of the model in terms of being able to openly share and discuss innovations:

> **"It's easy to share your ideas, rather than feeling like if you put your idea up someone else's gonna pinch it and run away with it and develop it. So, from that perspective, [the partnership model] was good." - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee**

The main benefit of the consultative, partnership-based model for the industries is its ability to facilitate collaborative work on solutions to the whole-sector recovery and resilience issues. Projects designed by partnerships benefitted from synergy between the industry representatives' first-hand knowledge of the industry needs and the non-industry partners' expertise. As expressed by one of the research and development grantees:

> **"So, in the same sense that they [industry body partner] help us focus on what's important to the industry, we can say: well, look, to do this rigorously, you have to do this and that. That's a nice meeting of the two" - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee**

The project development process also benefitted from the program design. Having relative certainty that they would receive funding, compared to the typical competitive process, meant grantees could start preparing for project delivery before being notified of their funding.

> **"It's really good because we're gonna actually realistically start allocating staff and people to those projects and plan for that ahead of the projects starting. Whereas if you're putting in an expression of interest in a normal funding round, and then a full application, then there's no certainty until the contracts are just about signed." - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee**

Partnerships also enabled the program to stay aligned to its objectives by enabling delivery of projects that benefitted multiple target industries and LGAs.

In line with the program's guidelines, 20 funded projects identified at least one target industry that would benefit from the projects. Two projects identified multiple industries that would benefit, and one project identified all industries as benefitting. Consistent with those broad impacts, projects nominated as being Research and Development were cited as, potentially, having the broadest impacts.

In terms of geographical impacts, three of the 11 Research and Development projects aimed to benefit all eligible LGAs, and one targeted 55 of the 78 eligible LGAs. Two more projects, both Education, also intended to benefit all LGAs.

Looking at categories of the funded projects, presented in Figure 2 below, 11 out of 23 projects (48%) were the 'Research and Development' type.
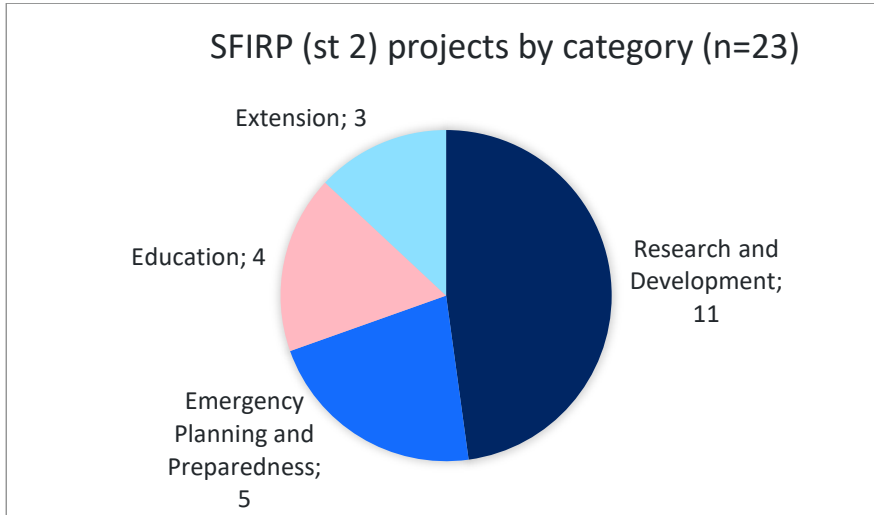
Figure 2: Number of funded SFIRP (Stream 2) projects by project category

The complex nature of the resilience-building projects under SFIRP Stream 2 brought forward some challenges in project design and application process.

In the stakeholder consultation, grantees revealed that in some instances it was difficult to identify which or how many LGAs their projects can potentially benefit. It was particularly unclear for the projects of the 'Education/Career' and 'Research and Development' categories to determine the geographic area which they will potentially benefit. As expressed by one of the grantees:

> **"There were so many local government areas that it [the project] could apply to. And so it was, you know, which ones do you pick? Which ones?" - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee**

Providing clear definitions of what is meant by 'direct' and 'indirect' industry and location benefits would help applicants to identify with more accuracy what their anticipated project benefits are in terms of geographic area and sector impact.

Overall, despite some confusion among grantees when nominating LGAs, SFIRP Stream 2 projects were designed to enable sector-wide benefits and contribute to the program objectives.

2.3 The funding commitments for industry sectors were set appropriately. Voluntary co-contribution attracted significant funds from participants.

The amount of funding for eligible primary industry sectors ranged from $200,000 to $5 million per project. The amount each sector was eligible to receive was based on the Industry Impact Assessment Report[3]. The distribution of the requested grant amounts, by volume, is presented in Figure 3 below.

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[3] The full Report is available on CM9 (RDOC21/20438)
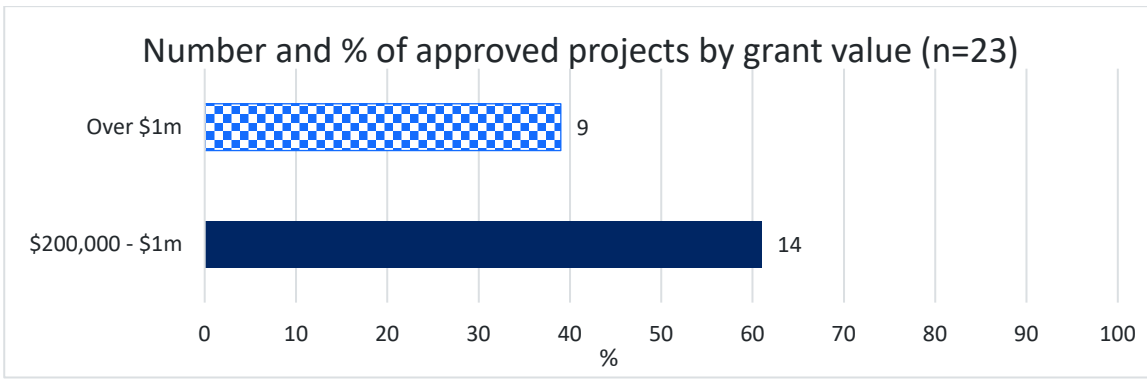
Figure 3: Distribution of projects by grant amount ($1m and under, over $1m)

Sixty-one per cent of grants were valued between $200,000 and $1 million (inclusive) and the remaining 39% were over $1 million. The largest grant was valued at $4 million. No applications were received for the maximum available grant amount of $5 million. The data suggests that the grant amount limits were set appropriately to attract the projects with the intended industry-wide scope.

Co-contribution for this program was encouraged but voluntary. The total co-contribution value across grantees reached $6.3 million, which added an extra 21% to the $30m program, for a total commitment of $35.5million to be invested in primary industry sector resilience. Figure 4 shows the project cost composition across the 23 projects, including requested grant amounts and co-contribution for each application.
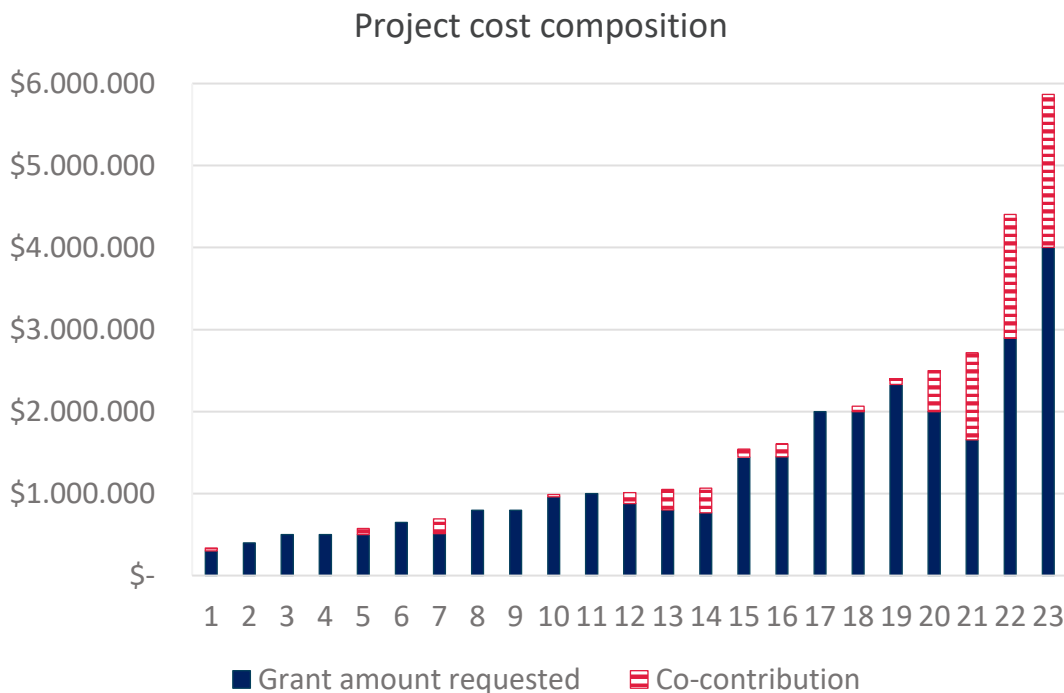
Figure 4: Project cost composition (n=23)

The data shows that, even though co-contribution was not a compulsory requirement, more than half of the applicants contributed to their projects (15 projects or 65%) and only 8 projects (35%) did not contribute. Across the projects, co-contribution amounts ranged between 3% and 40% of the total grant value. The instances and value of co-contribution were higher among higher value

projects (over $1 million), suggesting that targeting larger grant amounts encourages applicants to support their own projects with co-contributions.

In terms of the type of co-contribution, 10 grantees (out of 15) made in-kind co-contributions. Three used a combination of in-kind and cash co-contributions, and 2 made cash-only co-contributions.

The substantial total amount of co-contribution and clear preference for the in-kind co-contribution type suggest that, in the context of recovery and resilience-building, the voluntary multiple-type (cash, mixed, and in-kind) co-contribution is an appropriate program design feature.

Evaluation domain 3: Program administration

F3.1 The program objectives were effectively promoted to the target audience, which enabled the Working Group to successfully attract a sufficient number of applicants and encourage formation of capable partnerships to deliver projects.

F3.2 The program guidelines were clear and supported the applicants in preparing their applications.

F3.3 Applicants received sufficient support from DRNSW staff and external sources (consultants).

3.1 Program objectives clarity

As shown in Figure 5, stakeholder consultation confirmed that program objectives were well communicated to grantees. Importantly, none of the surveyed grantees found the program objectives difficult to understand. These findings demonstrate that the program was effective in guiding grantees to design projects in a way that was well-aligned with the state-wide resilience building objectives.
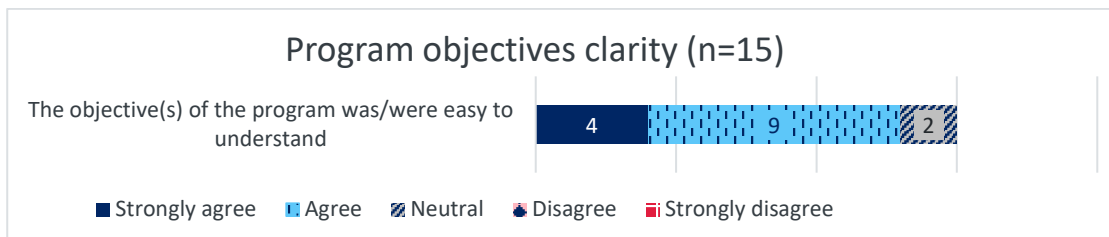

Program objectives clarity (n=15)

The objective(s) of the program was/were easy to understand: 4 | 9 | 2

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ▨ Neutral ● Disagree ▦ Strongly disagree

Figure 5: Program objectives clarity

Program document review confirms that the program objectives were clearly stated in program documents and consistently communicated to the grantees in the Concept Plan, Business Case, and Funding Deed agreements. Additionally, all surveyed grantees found the objectives of the program relevant to their industry and community needs and all interviewed grantees indicated they would apply for a similar grant in the future.

3.2 Program guidelines

Stakeholder consultation confirmed that all grantees accessed program guidelines and most found them useful, as shown in Figure 6.
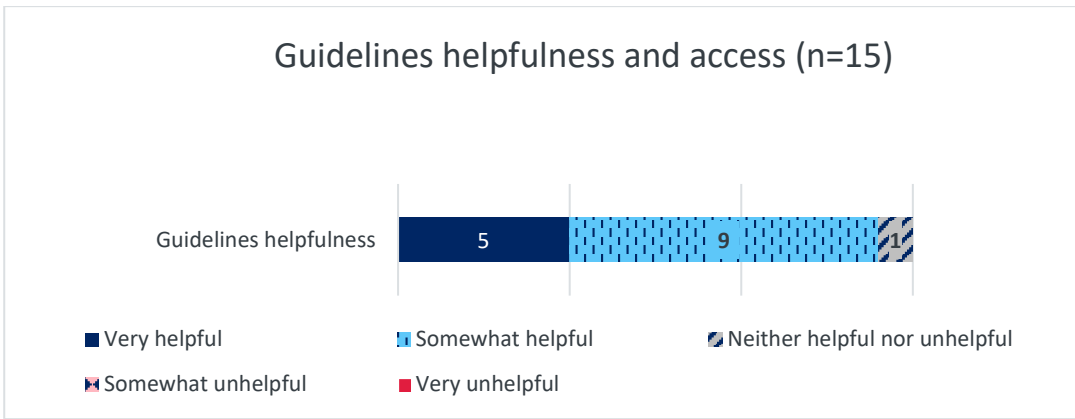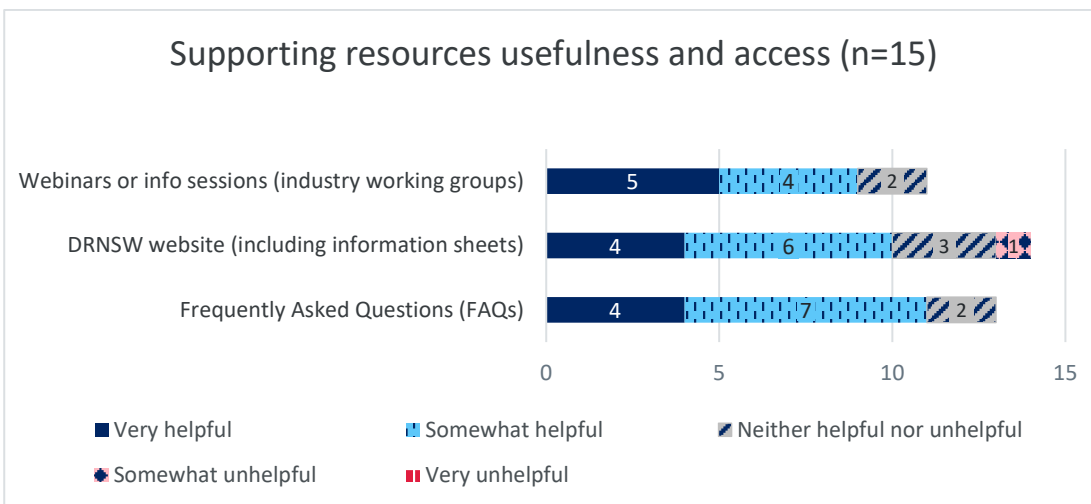
	I did not access this resource
Program guidelines	0

Figure 6: Guidelines helpfulness and access. The total number (n=15) is comprised of grantees who assessed the usefulness of supporting resource (top panel) and those who did not access the resources (bottom panel)

3.3 Applicant support

Generally, grantees were satisfied with the amount and clarity of support and guidance provided during preparing their applications. Stakeholder interviews confirmed that the individual points of contact in the DRNSW and DPI were of great assistance to the applicants during the application process. Figure 7 (top panel) illustrates grantees' perception of usefulness of the supporting resources. Consistent with findings reported for other programs, the webinar was the least accessed resource, as shown in Figure 7 (bottom panel). Nonetheless, those who did attend the webinar, generally found it helpful.

	I did not access this resource
Webinars or info sessions (industry working groups)	4
DRNSW website (including information sheets)	1
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)	1

Figure 7: Access and usefulness of the supporting resources (n=15).

One common point of dissatisfaction among interviewed grantees was the lack of consistent on-going communication throughout the application and assessment processes. Over the course of the process, applicants had to track the progress of their application by working with a number of different DRNSW contacts (including addressing their queries to a generic mailbox). Such 'handing on' makes the communication feel impersonal and makes it harder for applicants to identify the right point of contact to seek advice or updates on the progress of their application. One possible solution to this, echoed by applicants both inexperienced and those who had a lot of grant applications experience, is to have a single point of contact responsible for all general communication and application updates.

> ''I think it would be really valuable to have like a case manager or somebody that could hold your hand through this process, that had an understanding of your projects." - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee

Grantees who accessed help from the external consultant (KPMG) provided generally positive feedback on the service. The grantees found the help with preparing and structuring documents very helpful, especially regarding the business case preparation. At the same time, some of the feedback signals that the three tiers of support, offered by KPMG, were not always accurately assigned according to the applicants' needs. One grantee noted that KPMG was too slow to help with business case development, delays that negatively impacted the grantee's efforts to hit the tight submission deadline. As a result, that grantee did most of work on their own. Another grantee shared that while they had a large KPMG team available for support, they were themselves well experienced and their feedback from KMPG consisted only of minor editing. These different experiences made it difficult for grantees to understand how KMPG allocated support to their applications.

Evaluation domain 4: Program application and contracting process

F4.1 Framework Criteria for Business Case assessment was strongly aligned to the program objectives.

F4.2 Applicants were generally satisfied with the timeliness of application outcomes communication. Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with delays within the application process impacted perceptions of timeliness of the whole process.

F4.3 Application and contracting process as a whole needs to be clearly communicated to applicants. Lack of clear, upfront, information including an overview of all steps and requirements involved in application and funding processes caused applicant dissatisfaction.

Action recommended:

R4.1 Identify upfront, in a communication plan, all the information that will be required from applicants across the entire application and funding process. This will allow applicants to plan and prepare in advance for the workloads associated with each step in the application/funding deed process.

4.1 Framework Criteria for Business Case assessment was strongly aligned to the program objectives

Examination of the assessment process documentation confirms alignment of the program design processes with the program objectives. There were 5 Framework Criteria against which all the proposed projects were assessed: Resilience building, Collaboration, Alignment, Viability and deliverability, Job retention and creation.

Three of the Criteria listed below in Table 3 – Resilience building, Collaboration, and Alignment – are directly aligned to the program objectives of sector-wide resilience building:
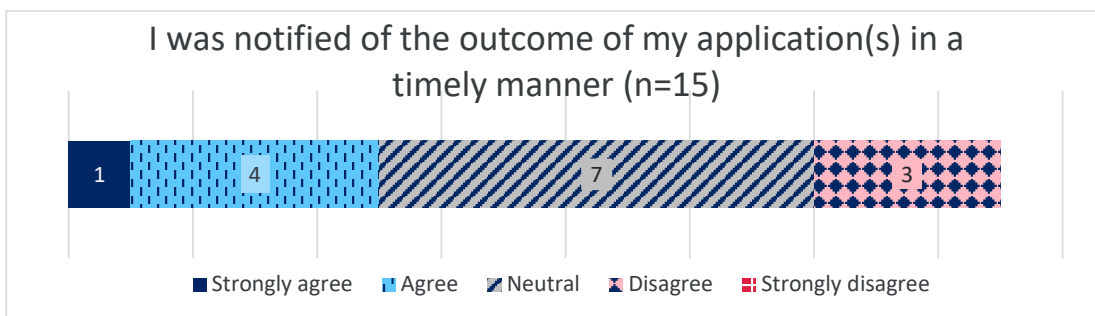
Table 3: SFIRP Stream 2 detailed framework criteria (selected criteria)

Framework Criteria Category	Detail
Resilience building	Supporting measurable outcomes that show how the project supports the productivity, sustainability, preparedness and resilience of the impacted sector.
Collaboration	Demonstrated linkages of the project to broad, industry-wide recovery, multiple primary production enterprises and resilience building outcomes and complementary benefits for that and similar industries.
Alignment	Strong alignment of the project to overall industry recovery and current recovery activities following the storms and floods. Avoids duplication with other recovery initiatives already funded or underway.

This demonstrates that the focus on the objectives was well incorporated in project assessment processes.

F4.2 Applicants were generally satisfied with the timeliness of application outcomes communication. Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with delays within the application process impacted perceptions of timeliness of the whole process.

As shown in Figure 8, five of 15 surveyed grantees agreed that the application outcomes were communicated in a timely manner. Three applicants disagreed with this statement, while majority refrained from giving a definitive answer.

I was notified of the outcome of my application(s) in a timely manner (n=15)

| 1 | 4 | 7 | 3 |

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ▨ Neutral ▨ Disagree ▦ Strongly disagree

Figure 8: Outcome notification timeliness (n=15)

During the interviews with program grantees, it was notable that there had been increasing dissatisfaction with the length of the funding process as time passed. All the interviewees noted the significant delays between business case submission, notification, and the length of the funding deed process. The absence of clear timelines for the assessment and delays in the process were

identified by the grantees as one of the major factors contributing to concerns for the project delivery and dissatisfaction with the application process.

> ''What we never had clarity was on the timelines. And when eventually those timelines appeared, they were never respected, there was always delays. We were meant to start this project in June. We still don't have a contract with the Department of Regional New South Wales. So, we are in November… so that's delaying kind of a lot of the things in the delivery and hiring and everything in the project. So, timelines were extremely delayed." - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee

Some of the related issues for grantees arising from notification delays were shortened timeframes required to meet the project implementation deadlines and financial risks and losses associated with the delays. In some cases, these delays compromised the perception of the entire grant application process. For example:

> ''While there was a lot of information provided regarding the criteria and objectives of the program, there were very rigid time frames that didn't take into consideration industry hardships (e.g. severe state wide flooding) that made it difficult to gather the required information, which was a bit ironic considering the program itself was intended for industry recovery and resilience." - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee

Even though some applicants expressed positivity regarding the timeliness of initiation of the program in response to the flood events, others expressed their frustration with the time it took the application process to be finalised and called for improvements in the application process:

> "Most people don't even remember the flood that this is actually linked to, which was in February 2021. To be delivering support a year and a half later, I think you gotta have a look at your processes a bit" - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee

The Program Team commented on the timing of the program delivery, explaining that the perceived delay in rolling out the program was partially explained by the comprehensive preparation process, and was in line with the program objectives of medium- to longer-term industry resilience building, rather than immediate recovery.

F4.3 Application process as a whole: lack of clear, upfront, overview of all steps and requirements involved in application and funding processes caused applicant dissatisfaction.

The application process was moderately well received with some grantees expressing dissatisfaction: Figure 9.
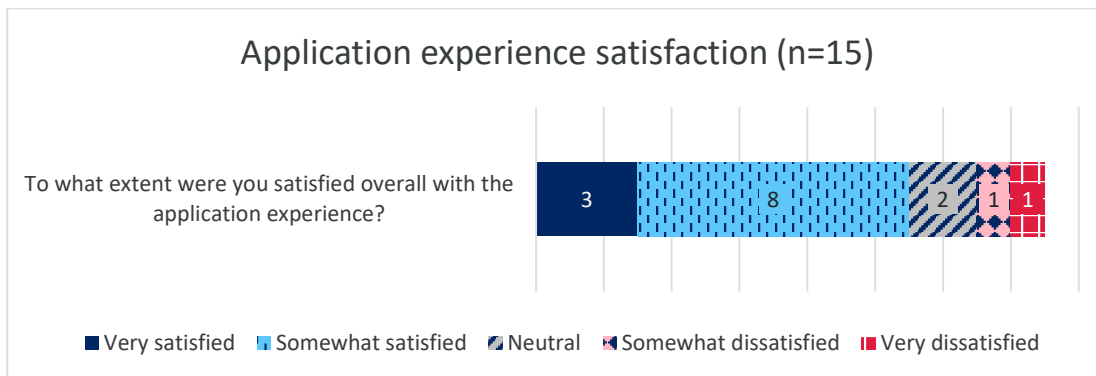
Figure 9: Application experience satisfaction (n=15)

Eleven respondents indicated they were somewhat or very satisfied with the application experience, two were slightly or very dissatisfied, and two were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Those data are explained by grantees' observations on the entire application process.

Most applicants indicated, strongly, that having a clearer overview of the entire application process, with all steps and required documents laid out upfront, would have allowed them to better plan and prepare for each next step of the application.

The need to have a clear 'roadmap' of the entire application process, with indications of timeframes and requirements on each step, was echoed by majority of the interviewed grantees:

> **"'The application itself was clear, probably the steps and the timing were not as clear as the application itself. So, there could be improvements in clarity in the steps and the timing of it. And by timing I mean, they told us it was gonna be at certain point in time and things got delayed and pushed. And then there was a very short time frame to submit, basically one month, and that coincided with the floods in March this year. So, for us it was an insane period." - SFIRP Stream 2 Grantee**

Action recommended: Identify upfront, in a communication plan, all the information that will be required from applicants across the entire application and funding process. This will allow applicants to plan and prepare in advance for the workloads associated with each step in the application/funding deed process.

Concluding remarks

This Process Evaluation demonstrates benefits of the consultative approach to providing industry support in the post-disaster recovery and resilience-building space.

SFIRP Stream 2 targeted industry recovery and resilience needs as identified by IIAR, and encouraged partnerships between industry and non-industry organisations. This allowed the program to capitalise on the expertise of grantees and more directly facilitate increasing sector-wide resilience. The comparison of the design models of SFIRP Stream 2 and BIRP Stream 2 demonstrates the key design features and improvements in SFIRP Stream 2 consultative design model, which better enabled sector-wide resilience capacity building. Although consultative process may be more time and labour-intensive in preparation, it is more effective in delivering collaborative projects tailored to increase industry resilience.

This evaluation concludes that the design of SFIRP Stream 2 was closely aligned with the identified industry needs. The program development, design, and implementation processes were comprehensive and appropriate. The high level of grantees' satisfaction with working in partnerships and their confidence in their ability to deliver the projects as intended suggests that SFIRP Stream 2 is on track for delivery of the program objectives.

Attachment 1: SFIRP Stream 2 Assessment Framework Criteria

CATEGORY	DETAIL
Resilience building	Supporting measurable outcomes that show how the project supports the productivity, sustainability, preparedness and resilience of the impacted sector.
Collaboration	Demonstrated linkages of the project to broad, industry-wide recovery, multiple primary production enterprises and resilience building outcomes and complementary benefits for that and similar industries.
Alignment	Strong alignment of the project to overall industry recovery and current recovery activities following the storms and floods. Avoids duplication with other recovery initiatives already funded or underway.
Viability and deliverability	The project is assessed as viable, affordable and deliverable, with an appropriate organisation with relevant experience selected to undertake the project delivery.
Job retention and creation	The project will support the retention and creation of jobs, particularly in storm and flood impacted regions.