



**CANBERRA REGION
JOINT ORGANISATION**

Regional Drought Resilience Plan

HILLTOPS AND UPPER LACHLAN COMMUNITIES



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry



Future
Drought
Fund

Supported by





We acknowledge Country and pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters across these lands and waters. We recognise and honour their ancient cultures and their spiritual, cultural and physical connections with land, waters and community.

CONTENTS

Hilltops and Upper Lachlan Communities	1
Glossary of key terms	4
Key Abbreviations	6
01/ About this Plan	8
1.1 A Plan for Drought Resilience	8
1.2 Purpose of the Plan	10
1.3 The South East NSW Resilience Blueprint	10
1.4 The Process	12
1.5 Engagement	14
02/ Setting the Context	16
2.1 Our Region	16
03/ Our Drought Story	20
3.1 What is Drought?	20
3.2 Our History of Drought Impacts	22
3.3 Drought in the Future	28
04/ Challenges and Opportunities	30
4.1 Drought Resilience Challenges	30
4.2 Drought Resilience Opportunities	32
05/ Action Pathway	34
5.1 Our Vision of Drought Resilience	34
5.2 Investment Logic	36
5.3 Strategic Alignment	37
06/ Actions	40
07/ Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	64
7.1 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Scope	65
7.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Roles and Responsibilities	66
7.3 Evaluation	66
7.4 Tools to support Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	69
7.5 Assumptions	69
08/ In the Future	70

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Adaptation Adjustment or modification in natural and/or human systems in response to actual or expected shocks and stresses to moderate harm, reduce vulnerability and/or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Adaptive capacity The ability of individuals and groups to adjust and respond to environmental and socioeconomic changes.

Adaptive governance Coordinating iterative, flexible and responsive interactions between systems when designing interventions and for their implementation and evaluation.

Co-design The process of partnership to develop and formulate project delivery and agreed objectives and needs, using participatory methods. A process of working together utilising generative and explorative processes.

Community-led An approach where the local and regional community work together to identify goals that are important to them, develop and implement plans to achieve those goals, and create collaborative relationships internally and with external actors - all while building on community strengths and local leadership.

Drought Drought in general means acute water shortage. Drought is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet our normal use.

Economic resilience The ability of the economy to absorb the economic impact of shocks and stressors without changing the economic status or outcomes.

Environmental resilience The ability of the natural environment to cope with a diverse range of shocks and stressors while maintaining natural processes and ecosystem services.

Exposure The presence of people; livelihoods; species or ecosystems; environmental functions, services, and resources; infrastructure; or economic, social, or cultural assets in places and settings that could be adversely affected.

Governance Governance is the structures and processes by which individuals, groups and agencies in a society share power and make decisions. It can be formally institutionalised, or informal.

Intervention options Alternative or complementary actions, projects, programs, policies, initiatives and investments that are planned to bring about change in the system.

Local knowledge Local knowledge and First Nations knowledge incorporates elements of lived experience within a landscape, bearing witness to the operation of systems. It includes aspects of people, landscape, culture – how people interact with surroundings and as part of communities and processes.

Resilience The ability of a system to absorb a disturbance and reorganise so as to maintain the existing functions, structure and feedbacks.

Risk The potential for adverse consequences for human or ecological systems, recognising the diversity of values and objectives associated with such systems.

Shock Sudden, short-term events that threaten a city (or region). Examples include: major storms, floods, bushfires, heatwaves, disease outbreaks, terrorism and cyber-attacks'.

Social resilience The ability of the human society to cope with a diverse range of shocks and stressors while maintaining existing social and community functions.

Stressor An event that occurs gradually over a timeframe that causes an adverse effect, e.g., drought.

Systems The interaction of processes, networks and inter-dependencies across a complex 'whole'.

Theory of change Refers to theories, causal mechanisms and assumptions that explain how and why outcomes and impacts will be achieved through use, implementation and production of proposed inputs, activities, and outputs.

Trends Major global or regional influences that have driven change in the past and are expected to shape change into the future.

Threshold The point at which a change in a level or amount a controlling variable causes a system to shift to a qualitatively different regime. Also referred to as a tipping point.

Transform The process of radically changing or building a new system with different structure, functions, feedbacks and identity.

Trigger point A pre-agreed situation or event, that when met, activates a management intervention. Trigger points are usually defined in the planning phase.

Triple Bottom Line An approach which seeks to equally focus on economic, social and environmental outcomes.

KEY ABBREVIATIONS

CDI	Combined Drought Indicator
CRJO	Canberra Regional Joint Organisation
DDI	Drought Direction Index
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
DRNSW	Department of Regional NSW
EDIS	Enhanced Drought Information System
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KBDI	Keetch Byram Drought Index
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGA	Local Government Area
LLS	Local Land Services
NSW	New South Wales
PCG	Project Control Group
RAMHP	Rural Adversity Mental Health Program
RCP	Representative Concentration Pathway
RDA	Regional Development Australia
RDRP	Regional Drought Resilience Planning
REDS	Regional Economic Development Strategies
RFQ	Request for Quote
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals



01/ ABOUT THIS PLAN

1.1 A Plan for Drought Resilience

Of all the climate and weather-related conditions that affect Australia, drought is often the most challenging. New South Wales (NSW) is prone to periods of persistent drought with downward trends in rainfall and streamflow documented.

Drought is a defining feature of the climatic cycle of the Australian landscape. In large part this owes to our geography. Our continent spans the latitudes of the subtropical high-pressure belt. This is an area of sinking, dry, stable air, and usually clear skies. Over most of the country rainfall is low and erratic. As such, droughts will come again, and they are anticipated to get worse in parts of the country as a result of a changing climate. Droughts are challenging times, not just at the farm gate but for entire communities and regions. The costs of drought are spread across economic, social, and environmental factors. The toll taken on regions and their communities has been enormous and the impacts often linger for decades.

The most effective response to rising uncertainty is to plan for greater drought resilience. This can be achieved by building sustainable and diverse regional economies, reducing the vulnerability of communities to changing economic conditions and accelerating recovery, as well as enhancing thriving natural environments.

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP) program is one of the five focus areas of the Commonwealth Government's Future Drought Fund. These plans focus on innovative ways to build regional drought resilience, taking steps to plan now to stem the impact of future drought on our region. The NSW RDRP program is jointly funded through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the NSW Government, supporting local governments to work together regionally to plan for drought resilience proactively and pragmatically. This Plan is one of three pilot programs.



Strategic Alignment

The Future Drought Fund seeks to enhance the public good by building drought resilience in Australia's agricultural sector, the agricultural landscape, and communities. The intent of its eight interrelated foundational programs is to have an innovative and profitable farming sector, a sustainable natural environment, and adaptable rural, regional, and remote communities, all with increased resilience to the impacts of drought and climate change.

The Future Drought Fund is intended to deliver against three inter-connected strategic priorities:

- economic resilience for an innovative and profitable agricultural sector.
- environmental resilience for sustainable and improved functioning of farming landscapes.
- social resilience for resourceful and adaptable communities.

The RDRP's focus on the community as a system, where economic, built, environmental, and social capacity to endure, respond and evolve through drought, are enhanced.

The 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW, released in 2018 and refreshed in 2021, sets out the NSW Government's priorities and plans to achieve long-term social and economic success for regional communities across the state. Other key strategies with strong linkages and relationships to matters of drought resilience include the Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) and NSW State and Regional Water Strategies.

Key tools which support the delivery of the NSW Government's vision for drought ready regions include:

- the Australian Government's Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs (including Charles Sturt University) in southern NSW.
- NSW Government Department of Primary Industries DroughtHub, an online drought assistance and information portal for NSW primary producers.

- NSW Government AdaptNSW website, to inform and empower communities, businesses, households, and government to adapt to climate change.

Objectives

Consistent with the strategic priorities and objectives of the Future Drought Fund Agreement, the objectives of the RDRP process are to:

- grow self-reliance and performance of the agricultural sector.
- improve the natural capital of agricultural landscapes for better environmental outcomes.
- strengthen the wellbeing and social capital of rural, regional, and remote communities.

Strong community and diverse regional economies are core objectives of the NSW Government, providing both short- and long-term opportunities to strengthen drought resilience.

Expected Benefits

The RDRP provides specific projects to help primary producers and communities become more prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of drought. Benefits may come from 'absorbing, adapting or transforming' to deal with the stresses of drought.

Implementation funding will be available across Australia under the Commonwealth Government's Future Drought Fund.

1.2 Purpose of the Plan

The Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council RDRP provides support to help our region better plan for and become more resilient to the impacts of drought over time. It has been developed in a collaborative, partnership approach, drawing on locally led inputs drawn from those who live and work in the region.

The purpose of this plan is to:

- create stronger connectedness and greater social capital within communities, contributing to wellbeing and security.
- empower communities to implement transformative activities that improve their resilience to drought.
- support more primary producers to adopt whole-of-system approaches to natural resource management to improve the natural resource base, for long-term productivity, and landscape health.

The aims of this plan are to:

- increase the understanding of the region's current and future drought resilience, considering the region's unique economic, environmental, and social characteristics.
- form stronger connections, relationships, and networks within regions.
- combine First Nations' and local knowledge on resilience and risk data information to make informed decisions.
- identify actions, pathways, and opportunities to improve regional drought resilience, mitigate risks, and adapt to change.
- help councils be in a stronger position to implement strategic actions and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.
- develop concrete actions to address and mitigate short- and long-term drought impacts.

1.3 The South East NSW Resilience Blueprint

The South East NSW Resilience Blueprint is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the NSW Government through grants awarded under the Bushfire Community Recovery and Resilience Fund, the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund, and delivered by the Canberra Regional Joint Organisation (CRJO). The Resilience Blueprint project is a partnership of 11 local governments, who are committed to adapting to a changing climate, including Hilltops Council and the Upper Lachlan Shire Council.

This involves local councils working with government agencies, emergency services, researchers, businesses, and communities, embedding resilience in everything we do. It considers the foundational aspects of resilience from a multi-hazard perspective, which compliments the drought-specific focus of this RDRP. The South East NSW Resilience Blueprint identifies five (5) system environments or pillars which contribute toward resilience outcomes.



Governance and Leadership



Community



Economy



Natural Environment



Built Environment and Infrastructure

These pillars have been adopted for the actions identified in this RDRP



"It's about the ability to adapt and thrive. Not just 'in case' and 'just in time'. Being prepared well enough in advance to be able to make effective choices that allow you to adapt."

– Hilltops resident

"It means not asking more from your land than it can provide."

– Hilltops resident

"Having the courage to work through adversity, making the most out of whatever situation you are put into with determination and perseverance."

– Hilltops resident, aged 16 years

1.4 The Process

Phase Name	Overview	Activities	Outcome
<p>Project Inception</p> 	<p>This project was one of three Pilots conducted in NSW and was jointly funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the NSW government.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of the Project Control Group (PCG) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional NSW Canberra Region Joint Organisation Hilltops Council Upper Lachlan Shire Council Engage Consultants 	<p>The project was a joint endeavour with input from the Councils, the Joint Organisation and contracted consultants.</p>
<p>Drought Resilience Assessment</p> 	<p>This phase focused on defining the problem:- how does drought affect our region, our people, our businesses and our environment?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Context History of Drought Impacts Drought in the Future Drought Resilience Challenges and Opportunities 	<p>The Resilience Assessment identified impacts on community and mental wellbeing, the regional economy, the environment, and governance structures. Water security was seen as key.</p>
<p>Stakeholder and Community Engagement</p> 	<p>Engagement activities leveraged the Resilience Blueprint project which was carried out concurrently by the Canberra Region Joint Organisation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crookwell Young Boorowa Surveys 	<p>The engagement highlighted key factors which compound the effects of drought, and identified a long list of ideas which could address these challenges.</p>
<p>Project Prioritisation Process</p> 	<p>The member Councils identified water infrastructure as their number one priority.</p> <p>Projects were also identified which responded to the community and stakeholder feedback across the spheres of Community, Economy, Natural Environment, Governance & Leadership</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure Project Prioritisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-criteria assessment to identify priority projects (Harden to Boorowa Pipeline, Harden Wastewater Reuse, Taralga Water Security, Upper Lachlan Groundwater and Water Resource Information System) Draft RDRP submitted to CSIRO for Review Action Prioritisation by CRJO and Regional NSW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of stakeholder ideas to create action shortlist Review and selection of actions by Councils Action detailing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rationale, implementation steps, and KPIs 	<p>This Plan reflects and belongs to our region. Ten priority actions have been included, along with seven actions where advocacy is needed. The actions span our five pillars, and seek to achieve economic, social and environmental drought resilience dividends.</p>
<p>Action Implementation</p> 	<p>Actions identified in this Plan require external funding to proceed. Actions in this RDRP should align and build on the Councils' priorities in their Community Strategic Plans.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify Funding Sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RDRP implementation funding Other funding opportunities Future funding from State and Federal government for water infrastructure 2. Prioritise actions for implementation 	<p>The RDRPs are designed to be a living document, with actions implemented as funding becomes available, and new actions added in response to future community feedback, fresh challenges or as part of the natural progression of drought resilient actions.</p>

1.5 Engagement

Upper Lachlan and Hilltops RDRP was developed through inclusive and effective engagement with, and active participation of key regional, community, and industry stakeholders.

The engagement process sought to:

- provide a setting and environment of inclusion where all community members and stakeholders feel comfortable to offer comments and opinions.
- empower communities to identify the impacts of drought.
- facilitate increased community understanding of drought resilience including by encouraging communities to share their learnings with each other.
- support communities to consider the incremental, transitional, and transformational opportunities needed to strengthen drought resilience and encourage innovative initiatives at the regional level.
- three engagement workshops were undertaken in mid-2022.



Figure 1: Hilltops and Upper Lachlan Council and Community Workshop in Young, June 2022. *Source: CRJO*



Figure 3: Upper Lachlan Council and Community Workshop in Crookwell, May 2022. *Source: CRJO*



Figure 2: Hilltops and Upper Lachlan Council and Community Workshop in Young, June 2022. *Source: CRJO*



Figure 4: Hilltops Council and Community Workshop in Boorowa, in July 2022. *Source: CRJO*



Workshops

3 workshops

83 participants

3 locations



Crookwell, Young and Boorowa

Stakeholders

- Canberra Region Joint Organisation
- Hilltops Council
- Upper Lachlan Shire Council
- Regional NSW
- Resilience NSW (now NSW Reconstruction Authority)
- NSW Department of Planning and Environment (Water)
- Rural Financial Counselling Service
- South East Local Land Services
- Boorowa Community Landcare Group
- Upper Lachlan Landcare
- Yass Area Network Landcare Group
- Charles Sturt University NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub
- NSW Rural Fire Service
- Fire and Rescue NSW
- Red Cross
- Risk Frontiers
- Local Business Chambers
- Regional Employers and Business Owners
- Regional and Rural Community Leaders
- Community Groups and Not-for-profits
- Historical Societies
- Farmers
- Residents
- Health Care Provider
- Agricultural Service Providers

Topics Canvassed:

- Priority drought impacts
- Other contributing stressors
- Drought in the future
- What drought resilience looks like
- Our pathways to drought resilience

Outputs:

- Desired outcomes of the RDRP
- Identification of areas for improvement
- High-level ideas across social, economic, and environmental spheres



Surveys

29 participants

02/ SETTING THE CONTEXT

2.1 Our Region

The Hilltops and Upper Lachlan region is part of the Lachlan River catchment which forms the eastern headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin. On the eastern side of the Great Dividing Range, to the east of Crookwell, the region falls within the southern headwaters of the Hawksbury Nepean catchment. This flows north.

The region is part of the traditional lands and waters of the Wiradjuri, Gundungurra, and Ngunnawal people, whose physical, spiritual, and cultural connection with Country extends over many tens of thousands of years and continues to this day. Following European colonisation, land in the area was subject to pastoral expansion from the early 1800's. Today, the fertile soils and variable climate conditions of the region support thriving and diversified agricultural industries which support a number of villages and centres. Approximately two thirds of the region's economic productivity is associated with primary production. Mining is also a key economic activity.

The Hilltops and Upper Lachlan region is fortunate to be home to a diverse breadth of agricultural activities, buoyed by good soils and generally favourable climatic conditions. Livestock grazing, lamb, sheep, and beef production are commonplace economic land uses in the region, in addition to wool. Horticulture and viticulture activities are also in operation, with a growing cropping industry. In particular, the region is well-known for its cherry and seed potato production, with 38 per cent of NSW cherry production generated from the Hilltops Local Government Area (LGA). Overall, nearly 70% of the land area is devoted to agricultural activities in Hilltops LGA and nearly 50% in the Upper Lachlan.

Principal centres in the region include Young, Boorowa, Harden-Murrumburrah, Crookwell, Gunning, Collector, Taralga, Jugiong, and Breadalbane which are supported by a network of villages. Centres, townships, and villages across the region provide important access to social and economic services, retail, medical services, and infrastructure. They are destinations for residents and day trippers, workers, and visitors. They are also home to the majority of the region's non-agricultural enterprises. The main street character of each town is unique and highly dependent on functional, flourishing trade and business activity.

The region has a naturally variable temperate climate that includes periods dominated by either wet or dry conditions year-on-year. Summer temperatures range from mild to hot, with average maximum temperatures around 27°C. Winters are generally cool to mild, with average temperatures between 10 and 16°C. Frosts are common. Long-term records indicate that temperatures in the region have been increasing since the 1970s.

Rainfall across the region is variable, with an average of approximately 600 millimetres per year. However, as locals know, there is no such thing as 'average' conditions in this part of the world. For example, in 2003 the region received less than half the rainfall of 2011. Total annual rainfall for Hilltops and Upper Lachlan is generally lower than other LGAs in South East NSW. Historical records indicate LGAs in the north and west of the region are typically more drought prone than LGAs to the south and east. Drought conditions are often accompanied by more frequent and intense heat extremes and bushfire weather as was experienced in 2019/2020.

Location



Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council combined area:

14.268sq km

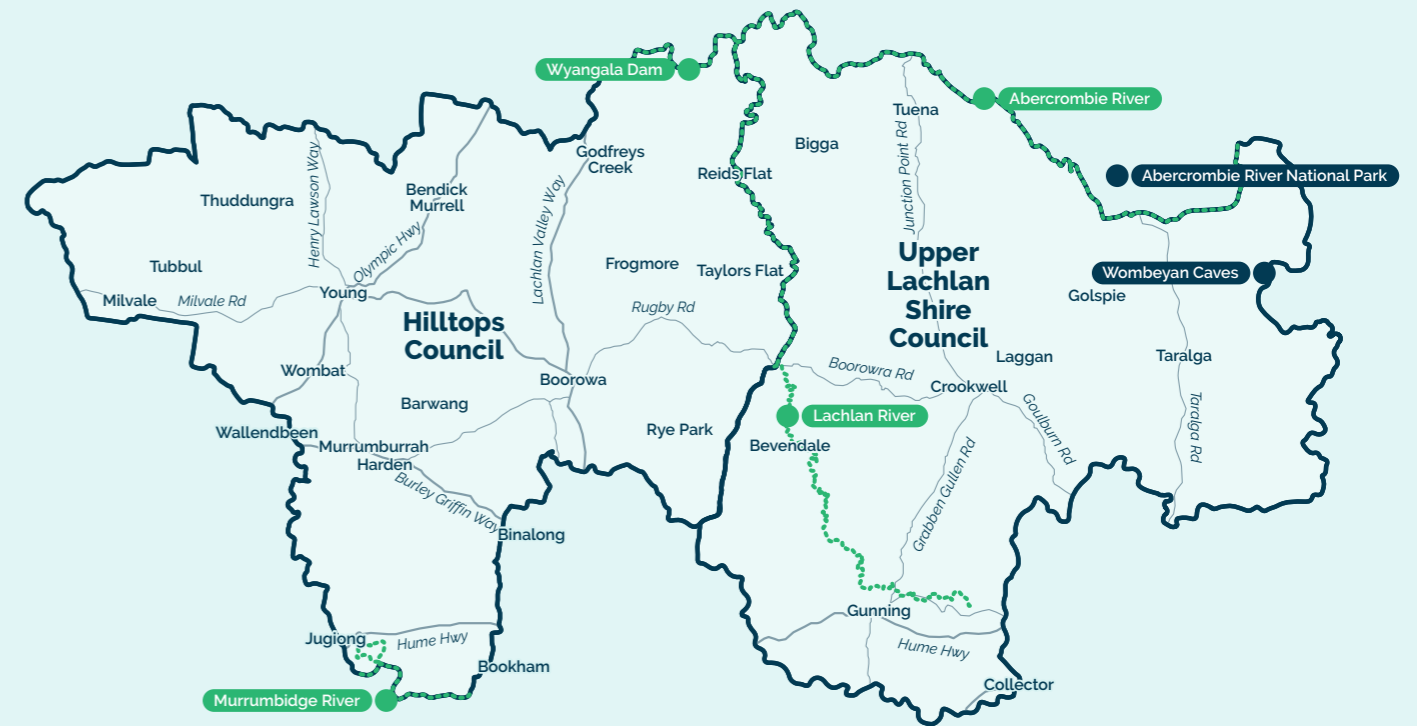
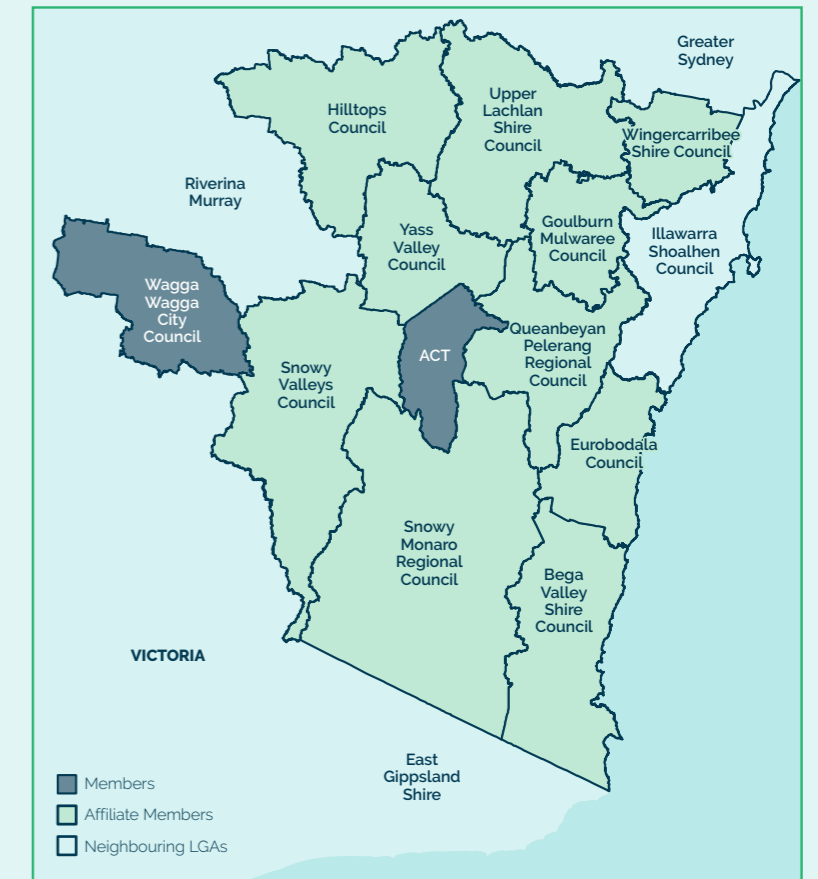


The Lachlan River is the

4th longest river

in Australia

Our Region including members of the Canberra Region Joint Organisation



Hilltops and Upper Lachlan council areas, main townships and localities.

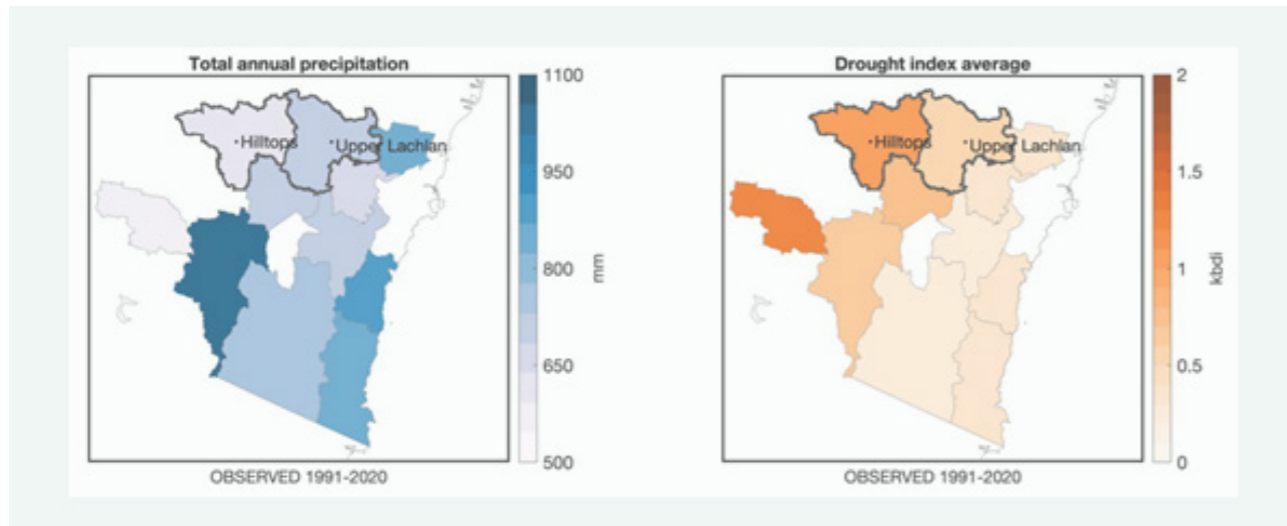


Figure 5: Total annual rainfall (left) and average annual drought index values (right) for Hilltops and Upper Lachlan (Source: Risk Frontiers, 2022).

Some parts of the region have access to groundwater, however, this is limited or generally unknown. Most communities in the region are connected to reticulated water supply networks, with the exception of Boorowa where a treated water supply scheme is in place.



Our Region

	Demographic	Region	NSW Average
	Population (2022)	27,768 people	
	Projected population (2041)	28,885 people	
	Population aged 65+	24.4%	17.7%
	Population aged under 5 years	5.8%	5.8%
	First Nations population	5.8%	3.4%
	Persons with a disability	6.8%	5.8%
	Gross Regional Product (2022)	\$1.34 billion	
	Gross Value Production	\$458.3 million	

Largest industries (by employment)

Hilltops:

- 1 Agriculture, forestry, and fishing
- 2 Health Care
- 3 Retail
- 4 Construction
- 5 Education and Training

Upper Lachlan:

- 1 Agriculture, forestry, and fishing
- 2 Health Care
- 3 Construction
- 4 Education and Training
- 5 Public Administration

Key agricultural land uses and commodities

Broadacre crops
(cherries, seed, potatoes)

Grazing
(wool, sheep, lamb and beef)

Viticulture

Mixed Farming
(including canola and triticale)

03/ OUR DROUGHT STORY

3.1 What is Drought?

Drought is regarded as one of the most expensive recurring disasters in Australia, with profound consequences for individuals, the community, the environment, and the local and regional economy.

Drought as a natural hazard is pervasive, recurring, and distressing. It is difficult to determine a start and end, or when the landscape has recovered. Drought in general means acute water shortage. Drought is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet our normal use.

Drought is difficult to predict, and each drought is unique with differences in seasonality, extent, duration, severity, among other variables.

Four definitions of drought are commonly used, which are meteorological, agricultural, hydrological, and socio-economic, as shown in Figure 6.

Types of droughts and their definitions





Type of drought	Description
 Meteorological	<p>Period of months or years with a no precipitation or climatological water balance rain. It is often accompanied by above average temperatures and precedes and causes other types of droughts. The climate change projections for droughts in Australia are based on a measure of meteorological drought – the Standardised Precipitation Index.</p> <p>Meteorological drought is caused by persistent changes in weather patterns, often triggered by irregular sea surface temperatures. Localised conditions such as reduced evaporation and low humidity due to dry soils and high air temperatures often enhance atmospheric conditions.</p>
 Soil Moisture (agriculture)	<p>A period of reduced soil moisture resulting from below average rainfall, less frequent rain events or above normal evaporation, impacting particularly on agriculture systems.</p>
 Hydrological	<p>When river flows and water storages in aquifers, lakes or reservoirs fall below long term levels. Hydrological drought develops more slowly because it involves stored water that is depleted but not replenished.</p>
 Socio-economic	<p>A measure of drought that considers the supply and demand of economic goods (e.g. water, lucerne hay) with elements of meteorological, hydrological, and agricultural drought. This is different from the three other drought types as it measures the implications of drought on the supply and demand of goods and the associated impacts to society.</p>

Figure 6: Types of drought and their definitions.

Drought Monitoring in NSW

The Enhanced Drought Information System (EDIS) is a publicly available drought monitoring tool that monitors seasonal conditions across NSW. EDIS was launched in March 2018 and is used across government and farming stakeholders to build drought risk awareness, emphasise drought preparedness and improve confidence in drought monitoring and early warning. A key feature of EDIS is the development of the NSW DPI Combined Drought Indicator (CDI).

The CDI integrates a range of data and model outputs in a framework that is useful for decision makers. It combines meteorological, hydrological, and agronomic definitions of drought (Figure 6) using indexes for rainfall, soil, water, and plant growth. From these, a fourth index, drought direction (DDI), is developed. EDIS is undergoing redevelopment to provide farmers with world-leading weather and climate data to enable better business decisions.

Stages of Drought

Used together, the indexes of the EDIS indicate the stage of drought.

The six stages progress from a Non-Drought category where all indicators suggest good conditions for production to Recovery, through to a Drought Affected (weakening or intensifying) category, a Drought category, and Intense Drought (See Figure 7).

Complementing the stages is detailed information on:

1. A technical and on-the-ground description of typical field conditions.
2. A suggested on-farm response.
3. A suggested advisory or policy response.

Stages of Drought in NSW

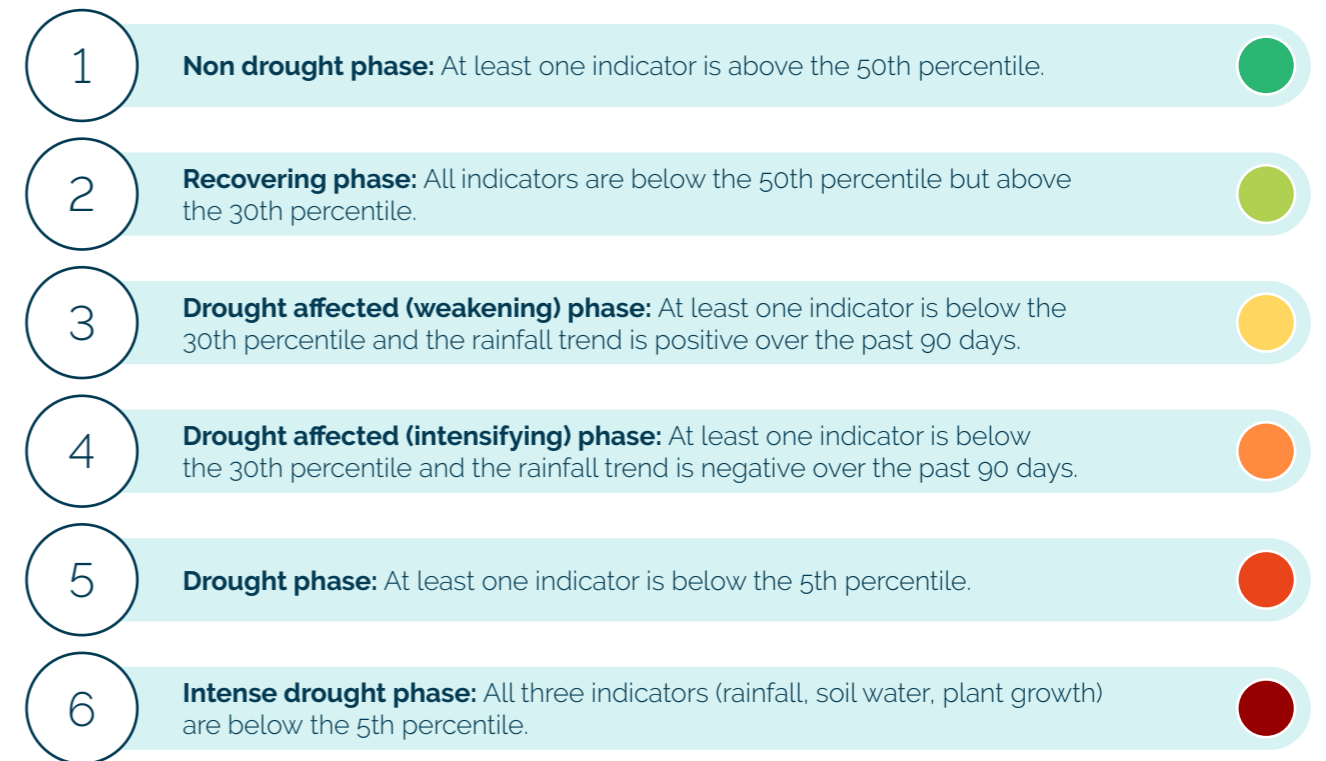


Figure 7: Stages of drought in NSW (Source: EDIS)

3.2 Our History of Drought Impacts

Some of the most impactful droughts in Australian history have affected our region. These events were characterised by protracted periods of low rainfall, leading to low soil moisture, with a strong relationship with heatwave and adverse fire weather conditions. Drought impacts have been assessed against the five key pillars being community, economy, natural environment, governance and built environment and infrastructure.

Signs of persistent drought are exposed in slowly declining primary and secondary business prosperity which has compounding and flow-on economic effects far beyond the farm gate. Symptoms start with primary producers who must manage planting and stocking rates,

costs of feed and water, becoming more prudent with spending, therefore leading to reduced local small business income which ripples across communities. This can lead to job losses and population decline as people relocate to find work. The loss of professionals and skilled workers then impacts the range of services available.

Loss of population in smaller communities is acutely felt, leading to the erosion of lifestyle, amenity, and liveability, culminating in the potential weakening of the social fabric. This happens gradually, over protracted periods and may not be immediately visible. Further hidden impacts of mental and financial stress can have devastating consequences.

Farm income declined but farmers still needed to meet operating expenses and pay debts. Some were faced with the difficult choice to sell their land or subdivide. Though financial relief was available, some found it difficult to navigate or meet the eligibility criteria for grants. Farming families searched for off-farm income to stay afloat. Rural Financial Councillors were praised for their support.

As farmers cut their expenditure, impacts flowed into local economies, with conditions resulting in broader economic uncertainty for local businesses. For example, rural merchandise firms experienced lower demand and needed to diversify their product offerings to meet the changing demands of farmers. Economic output of the regional economy slowed, and employment fell. Financial stresses on households meant some could not pay bills including council rates.

Towns faced harsh water restrictions and those that were reliant on tank water were particularly vulnerable. Towns and landholders became reliant on water carters that were

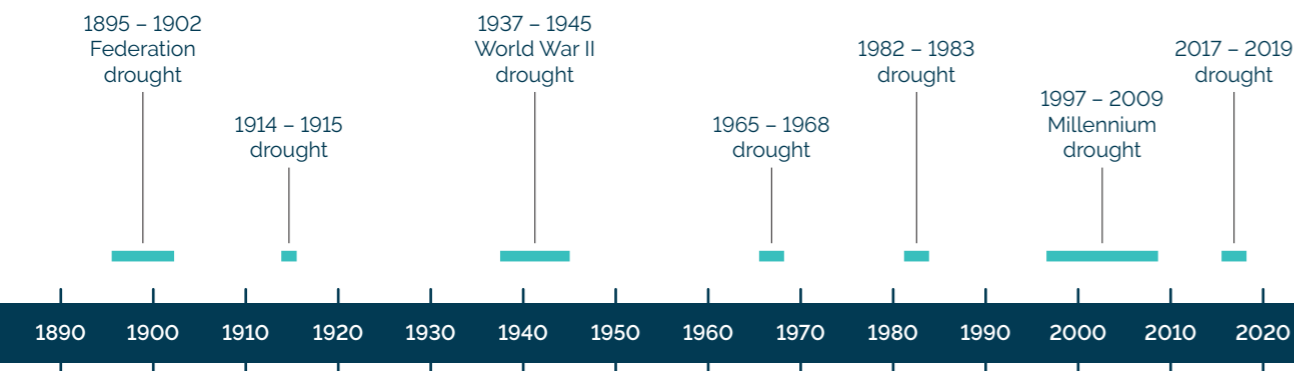
difficult to source. Dry clay soils resulted in cracking, damaging some buildings. Town residents struggled to maintain gardens.

Improved conservation-based management approaches which maintained ground cover were credited with protecting soils. However, exposed paddocks lost soil through wind erosion and dust storms reduced air quality. Weeds were problematic and tree deaths were widespread.

The stresses of the drought caused increased demand on community services including mental health support. Some were reluctant to seek assistance, found the process difficult, or overwhelming. Stresses were compounded by the isolation of some properties with limited access to social networks.

Local communities stepped up with volunteers offering their assistance. Local events brought the community together to connect and raise money for those worse off. Other events provided an opportunity for farmers to obtain advice on how best to manage ongoing conditions. Tourists were encouraged to visit the region to see iconic rural events such as the Boorowa Woolfest.

Major drought timeline



Crop production fell with below average harvests. As pastures declined, farmers were forced to sell or relocate livestock. As livestock prices were high, few were destroyed, unlike during previous droughts. Farmers were faced with uncertainty as to how long they would have to feed livestock. As the drought continued, prices of feeding animals increased, and costs accumulated. Some farmers cut crops to feed their livestock.



Community Impacts, Physical, and Mental Wellbeing

There are many direct and indirect health impacts of droughts. Air quality changes such as increased concentrations of particulates and toxins can irritate the eyes and lungs, particularly of those with chronic respiratory problems. The concentration of pathogens in shrinking rivers and creeks becomes abnormally high, which can create challenges for drinking water supplies. Heatwaves are commonly associated with protracted dry periods and can greatly affect human health and lead to loss of life. This is particularly true for those who are more vulnerable such as the elderly, the ill, and young children.

Drought has a significant impact on community mental health, leading to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide, with a recurring theme being the reluctance to reach out for assistance. Key issues identified include:

- **Financial stress:** Drought can lead to financial hardship, which can put a strain on relationships and increase stress levels. Costs not only include managing drought from a farming perspective, but also the high cost of water to fill tanks and reduced income in the towns because of reduced spending.
- **Social isolation:** Drought can lead to social isolation, as people may be less likely to socialise or participate in community activities when they are struggling financially or emotionally. One common theme was the impact drought has on community facilities, such as sporting fields, bowls clubs, golf courses etc which take away the ability of the community to meet and connect. Anecdotal evidence indicated that this had a direct correlation to mental health decline in the region.
- **Feelings of helplessness:** Drought can make people feel helpless and hopeless, as they may feel like they have no control over the situation. Recurring themes included the stress around parents not having enough water to wash children's clothes or nappies, not being able to have a shower at the end of a day at work, degradation of water quality impacting family drinking water and livestock water, having to manage stock dying of drought, and the uncertainty of being able to source water

- **Increased risk of suicide:** Drought has been linked to an increased risk of suicide, particularly among farmers and other people who are directly affected by drought. Depression has become increasingly common in the bush, and research shows that farmers are among the highest risk groups for suicide. The average suicide rate in farmers is almost 59% higher than non-farmers. This is a difficult issue to discuss, but one that must demand our attention. The Canberra University regional wellbeing survey, one of Australia's largest annual surveys, shows a decline in wellbeing indicators during periods of persistent drought in recent years.

A number of resources were mentioned during the consultations, including the National Drought Hotline, the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP), and Beyond Blue. The Red Cross has a drought resilience program which aims to support communities, organisations, services, and leaders to manage the psychological impacts of living with dryness. Other important local support programs are offered through community groups like the Country Women's Association, Rotary, Mens sheds, and sporting clubs. With 83% of our survey respondents supportive of a variety of mental health support offerings, there is scope to improve and expand on these existing support services.



Economic Impacts

In 2018 the NSW Business Chamber surveyed its members on drought impacts. 67% of businesses identified their local economy had been weakened due to drought, with 84% of respondents indicating they were impacted. The decreased community-wide economic productivity and prosperity is felt across businesses including retail, hospitality, and service trades. Very few businesses are immune from drought impacts. Four out of five affected businesses indicated cash flow had been impacted with many also identifying the potential need to reduce staffing levels by 1.5 employees. The increase in business operating costs and/or reduction in revenue can be experienced for prolonged periods. Approximately one in three affected businesses indicated the viability of their business was at risk due to the persistent drought conditions.

Over the years, the region's industries have adapted to the highly variable climate by adopting a conservative approach to water use and obtaining water entitlements from a range of water sources to meet their water needs and mitigate supply side risks. However, there is a point at which the ability to irrigate crops becomes too costly or insufficient water is available for effective production. For graziers, fodder availability declines and costs escalate for fodder and water. This leads to tough choices about stock retention. Total or partial de-stocking can limit over-grazing and the subsequent loss of groundcover and topsoil. These actions have flow-on impacts on income, herd genetics, and mental well-being, with it taking months or years to re-stock and recover financially, if this occurs at all.

Environmental Impacts

Regional communities are dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, with ecosystems providing important services to agricultural production, biodiversity, and public amenity. The environmental impacts of drought can be widespread and long-lasting. Drought conditions increase the natural environment's vulnerability to bushfires, extreme heat, and dust storms. Soil can be eroded, and valuable nutrients and groundcovers lost. Stream-flows reduce, and groundwater can be depleted. With insufficient water, the ability to care for Country is compromised.

Drought conditions have significant impacts on natural resources, including irreversible damage to water quality, soil, and vegetation, leading in turn to dust storms and a loss of topsoil, soil nutrients, organic matter, and soil carbon. The effects of drought on the environment persist and are detectable in environmental condition scores for several years after the event.

Healthy ecosystems build resilience to drought, and nature-based solutions can offer cost-effective protections while delivering co-benefits such as carbon capture and storage, and improved food and water security. Sustainable natural resource management, including of soil, water, and biodiversity, which must be prioritised.

Built Environment and Infrastructure Impacts

The cost, quality, and availability of water has wide-reaching impacts. Road construction and maintenance rely on water. When supplies are limited, the cost of delivering this infrastructure increases, or activities must be delayed. This leads to backlogs or infrastructure which doesn't meet the expectations of the community. Town parklands, recreational facilities, and landscaping can be particularly impacted, leading to the decline or death of vegetation and a loss of amenity. Other Council, community, and industrial assets can degrade or have maintenance delayed when water supplies are low, or water quality is poor. When water supplies reach critical levels, this often creates an urgent need for new or upgraded infrastructure, improved water efficiency, or the implementation of water recycling. This typically incurs a higher cost than if these infrastructure items had been planned and delivered prior to a drought crisis. Considerable pressure also arises from community, industry, Local Government, and others seeking augmented water storage and supply alternatives during times of water scarcity.

Governance and Leadership

The Australian Government's Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan states that the Australian, state, and local governments, industry and individual farmers, and communities' businesses all have a role in responding to the current drought as well as preparing for future droughts and building resilience.

The Commonwealth, states and local governments are responsible for:

- developing, designing, implementing and funding drought preparedness, response and recovery programs, encourage robust risk management and seek to avoid market distortions.
- developing capability-building programs, tools and technologies to inform and improve farming businesses' decision-making and promote resilience.

- provision of rural financial counselling services.
- support to mitigate the effects of drought on the health and wellbeing of farming families and farming communities.
- sharing, coordinating, collaborating and communicating information on drought preparedness, response and recovery policies and programs being developed and implemented.
- ensuring information on assistance for drought preparedness, response and recovery is accessible and readily available.
- ensuring consistency of drought policy and reform objectives and complementarity of drought preparedness, response and recovery programs.
- contributing to the development of quality, publicly available data, including but not limited to:
 - weather, seasonal and climate forecasts,
 - regional and local predictive real-time drought indicator information,
 - a consistent early warning system for drought,
 - an improved understanding of fodder crops and holdings across Australia.

There is a desire for proactive effort and investment ahead of drought periods, with decision-making processes backed by evidence. One-third of our survey respondents noted an increased demand on community services and roughly one-in-two see the need for enduring economic and community programs. As drought conditions develop and intensify, the demand for information, support, and assistance grows. 43% of our survey respondents indicated a lack of clarity on assistance available.

Communities are closely connected to farmers and their fortunes. As a result, prolonged periods of drought present a significant challenge to those communities where agriculture is a dominant sector. Community resilience is about making a community stronger, in both good times and bad, for the benefit of all.



3.3 Drought in the Future

Climate Projections

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), under all emissions scenarios global surface temperatures will continue to increase until at least the mid-century. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st Century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades. It is virtually certain that increasing temperatures and energy within the climate system will result in widespread changes to weather and climate patterns including hydroclimate and drought.

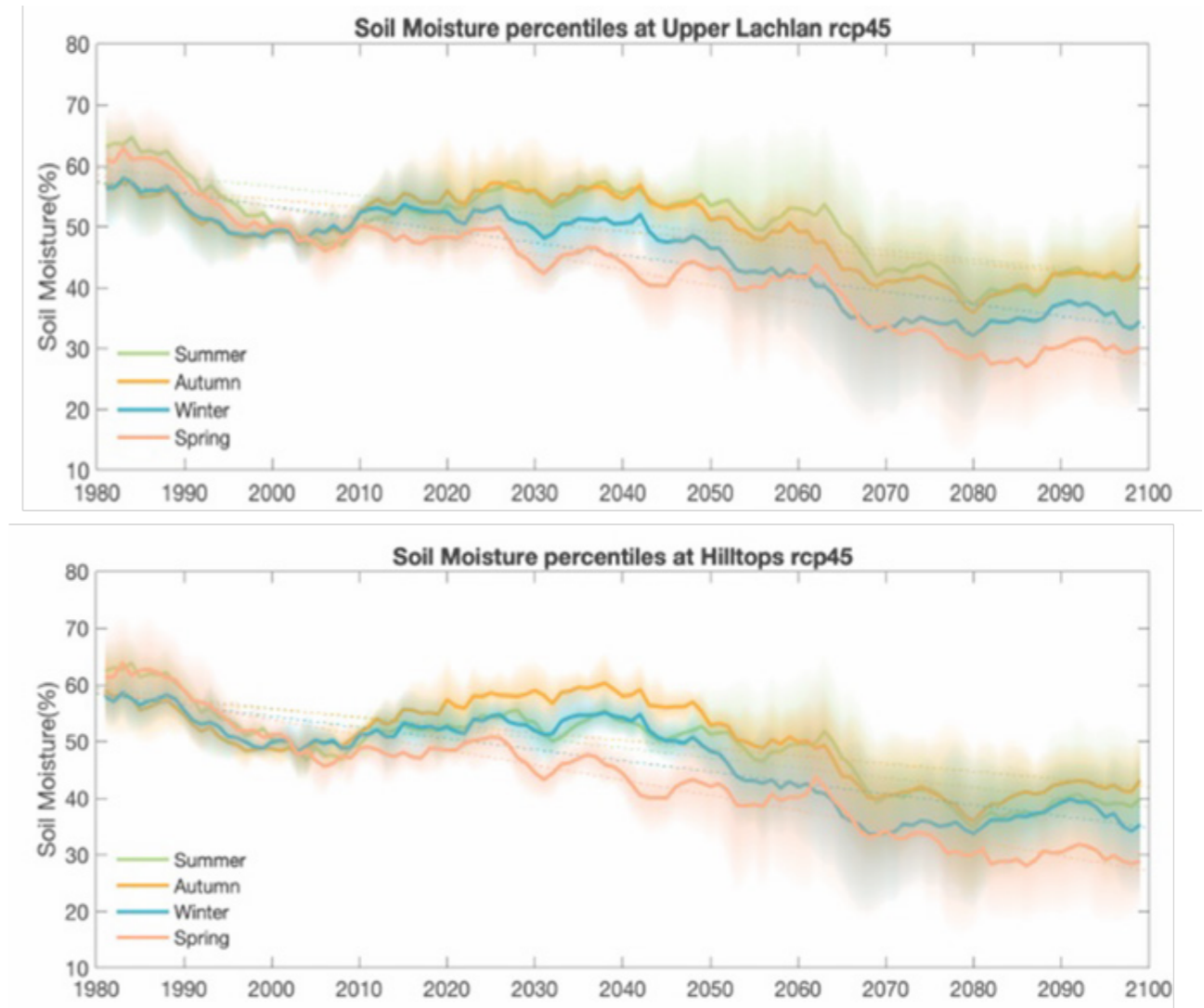
In the future, rainfall variability is projected to increase with an increase in extreme rainfall events and a decline in winter and spring rainfall. Overall, when rainfall projections (taken from multiple climate models) for a twenty-year time period are averaged, the results indicate the average rainfall will decline by 20-30mm by 2070. These modest rainfall changes will be exacerbated by substantial increases in the number of hot days. Depending on global future emissions, the Upper Lachlan is projected to experience an average of 16 to 19 days over 35°C per year by 2070 compared to the current average of 9. Reflecting the hotter conditions further west, the Hilltops region is

projected to experience an average of 33 to 40 days over 35°C per year by 2070, compared to the current average of 22. At the same time, the number of very high fire danger days is projected to increase from 17 and 34 days per year currently, to 25 to 46 days per year by 2070 for Upper Lachlan and Hilltops respectively.

The Keetch Byram Drought Index (KBDI) provides an estimate of soil moisture and water availability with higher values indicative of more severe water deficiencies. Projections for both Upper Lachlan and Hilltops show a substantial 20 to 50 per cent increase in the average and maximum KBDI by 2070, likely driven by increased evaporation associated with increasing temperatures. The decline in soil moisture, as shown in Figure 8 is evident across all seasons. Interannual variability and differences in projections across climate models, adds to the level of uncertainty which farmers and rural communities will face in the future.

Overall, the projections indicated a future where drought remains a substantial risk for the region, exacerbated by hazards such as heatwaves and bushfires which may occur concurrently and, or compound the impacts.

Figure 8: Soil Moisture Projections for Upper Lachlan and Hilltops for a 'stabilisation' or mid-range emission scenario, being RCP4.5 (Source: Risk Frontiers)



04/ CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Drought Resilience Challenges

Our river system - The Lachlan catchment forms part of the eastern headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin. Water flows westerly through the region's tributaries and waterways providing essential environmental benefits. However, **high evaporation** rates and **seepage to groundwater** mean that large volumes of water are needed to provide benefits to environmental processes that rely on surface water. The Murray-Darling Basin is highly regulated, with access to water rights highly contested amongst different users. The region's extreme dry and wet periods lead to **erratic flows**. The combination of declining rainfall towards the west and the length of the Lachlan River system can make it difficult to deliver water to towns, industries, and environmental assets at the end of the system in western NSW.

From an **Indigenous perspective**, the health of waterways in the region impacts the wellbeing of Traditional Owners and custodians. Whilst some provision for accessing water for cultural purposes exists, it currently does not meet the needs and obligations of Traditional Owners to care for Country, or achieve the cultural water flows and water management aspirations set out in the 2007 Echuca Declaration.

Droughts do not recognise governance boundaries, creating a need for collaboration and multi-stakeholder involvement, rather than individual organisations working in isolation. Whilst there is a multitude of assistance and support available in times of drought, it can often be overwhelming and **complex to navigate**. Often the service provision lacks the co-ordination end-user's desire.

The region is exposed to **other natural hazards** which can reduce economic, social, and environmental resilience. The Hilltops LGA has a high to extremely high relative exposure to

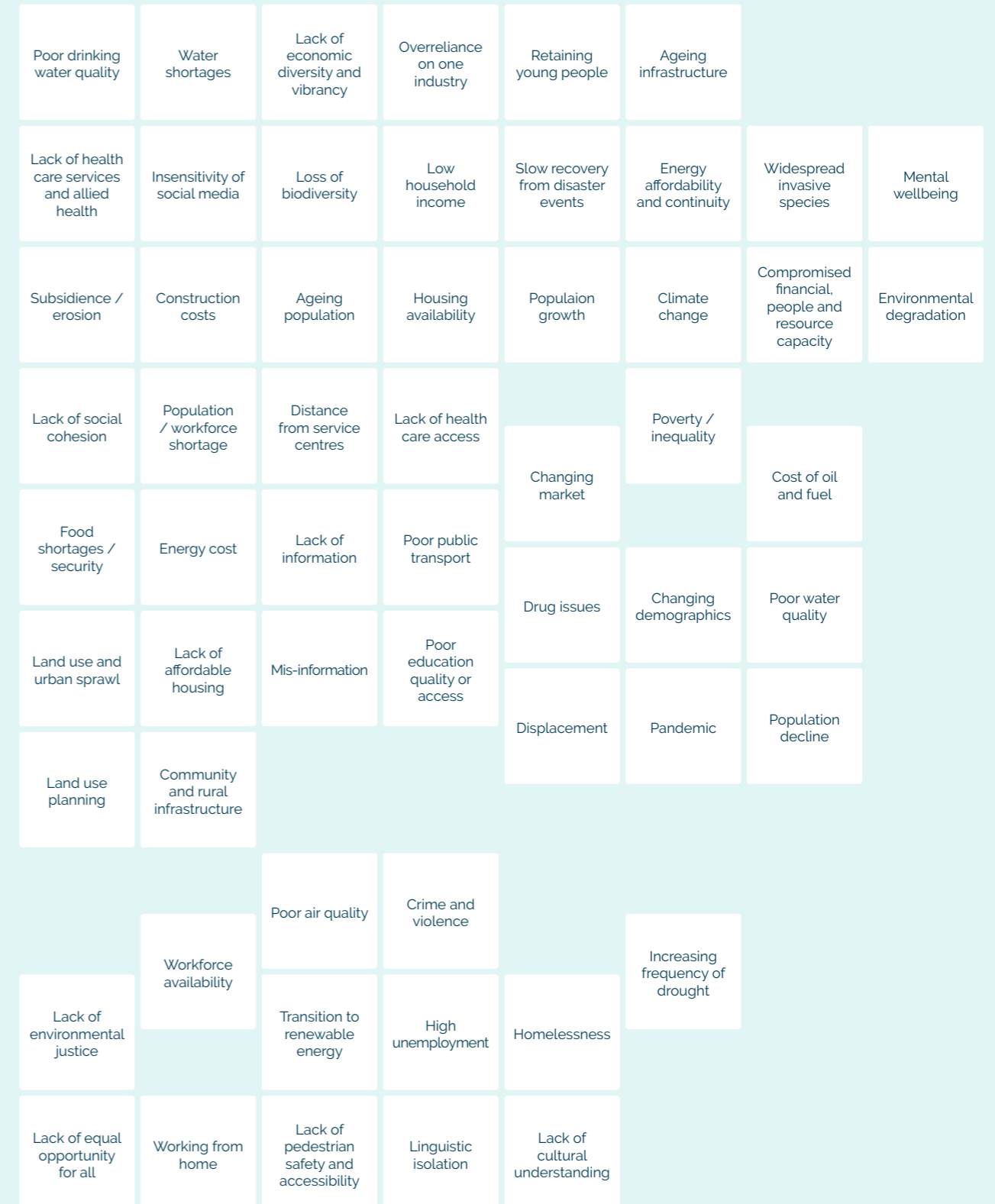
bushfires and floods, whilst the Upper Lachlan LGA has an average relative exposure to bush and grass fires, but an extremely high exposure for flooding. Similarly, our region's agricultural productivity is affected by factors beyond drought. Commodity prices, and costs associated with farm inputs such as fuel and fertiliser can vary substantially from one season to the next. At the same time, biological threats, and invasive species, such as the varroa mite and serrated tussock further erode farm profitability and viability.

Like many regional and rural areas, the **retention of young people** is an ongoing concern. The resilience of our community is further challenged by declining populations in particular towns and villages, which affects the community fabric and social structures. This leads to a decline in services available to the community. Issues such as mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence can further erode the resilience of individuals, families, and local communities.

Whilst our residents love where they live, **distance** to major service centres comes at a cost. There is limited access to education, and health care, particularly allied health. Travel to large centres takes time, involves outlay on fuel, and can be particularly problematic for those too young, too infirm, or who otherwise don't own a car and hold a driver's licence. Our region is not immune from the rising cost of living and running a business, limited housing availability and affordability, and an ageing population.

There is a strong desire for enhanced water security: 74% of our survey respondents see this is a drought resilient opportunity for our region. The challenge is **securing the funds** and the required support for implementation.

How other stressors interplay with drought



4.2 Drought Resilience Opportunities

1. Recognising linkages - Connecting plans, strategies, and actions ensuring they have a resilience lens is integral to improving drought resilience and reflects the broad array of ways in which different systems processes can both directly and indirectly bolster enduring resilience to natural hazards, including drought. Opportunities exist to strengthen or establish new collaborations and partnerships to face common challenges. These linkages can allow skills, knowledge, and resources to be shared and combined. There is a plethora of local knowledge and problem-solving skills which can be leveraged through inclusion of a diverse range of stakeholders in planning and resilience building activities.

2. Community - Community-wide drought resilience builds on our strong social fabric, where citizens play an active role and are risk-aware. At the heart of this is ensuring community connectedness. Our region exhibits lower levels of community vulnerability and moderate levels of community capacity. This speaks to an existing ability to withstand events, which can be built upon. Socially focused programs and services are essential, as are our valuable community groups and events, including sports. These opportunities are occasions to look forward to, they strengthen our interpersonal connections, and provide a positive focus through shared interests across our communities. 65% of our survey respondents indicated support for community events to keep people connected.

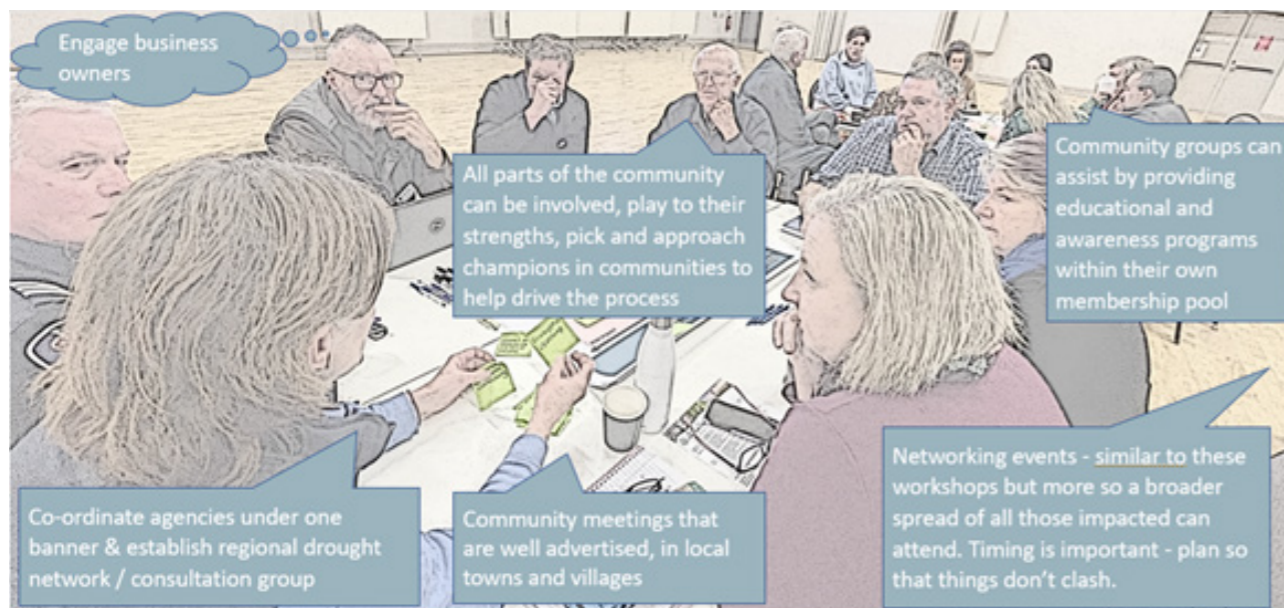


Figure 9: Drought Resilience Opportunities Identified in Consultation (Source: CRJO)



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“It's about education and experience, supplemented by the shared experience of others and their stories. Peer-supported decision-making helps”

– Hilltops grazier



3. Economy - A drought resilient local and regional economy is one that is diversified. This is relevant across scales from individual enterprises, through to the regional mix of income-generating activities. Sound land management practices are equally relevant coupled with defined trigger points for proactive decision making in response to changing conditions. The Rural Financial Counselling Service provides a strong linkage for farmers and small businesses with advice to support a more sustainable, resilient, and profitable primary production sector. With 52% of our survey respondents keen to see more support for property and business continuity planning, and 39% supportive of property and business-level income diversification, there is scope and desire for activities which provide these enterprises with ideas, knowledge, and support.

Diversified economic development opportunities exist across allied activities including tourism, service industries such as health and aged care, and waste management. Regional Economic Development Strategies can be leveraged with their localised approach to economic growth in regional communities via their 'engine industry' and 'candidate projects.' On farms, there is a strong desire for mechanisms which can allow land management enhancements, such as weed management, to be carried out when droughts have triggered reduced stock levels.

4. Environment - It is essential that we read and understand the landscape, adapting our land management in response to changing conditions. This will ensure the longevity of ground covers and the retention of top soil. In turn, this will maintain the productive capacity of grazing and growing enterprises.

Beyond the farm gate, biodiversity conservation provides broad ecosystem benefits, contributes toward healthy Country, and supports cultural values. Providing drought refuge for fauna and flora is vital. Travelling stock reserves provide immense cultural and conservation values, for example. Opportunities exist to conserve, protect, and enhance natural ecosystems, through the provision of drought refuge for our flora and fauna, and maintenance of travelling stock routes, amongst others. At the same time, these environmental, climate, and farming partnerships, such as Landcare, bring locals together to socialise, share knowledge, and explore new opportunities.

5. Infrastructure - Realising the outcomes of the Regional Water Strategy is crucial to meeting the region's future water needs.

05/ ACTION PATHWAY



5.1 Our Vision of Drought Resilience

Our Aim

Support the Hilltops and Upper Lachlan region to better plan for and become more resilient to the impacts of drought.

Our Principles



Adaptive

Learning and continuous improvement

Innovate

We foster new ideas, approaches, practices and technologies

Collaborate

We work together to leverage and share knowledge, skills and insights

Integrate

We harness opportunities to embed drought resilience across sectors and communities

Our Action Pillars



Governance and Leadership

Provide processes that focus on proactive management rather than reactive response



Community

Enhancing community stability to changing circumstances



Economy

Grow economic diversity and broaden the economic base and enhance preparedness



Natural Environment

Enhance natural processes and focus on sustainability



Built Environment and Infrastructure

Continuity of access to infrastructure and services that underpin social and economic vitality

A Continual Process



Before

Ahead of drought times and when we are receiving regular rainfall, we plan ahead. We participate and educate, for we know times of drought lay ahead. We are connected via strong networks and relationships. We invest in the community, environment, and infrastructure to support diversified local economies. We maintain a focus on building financial reserves to support long-term stability and inevitable changes in circumstance. We protect and steward landscapes, pasture, waterways and collectively contribute to healthy Country.

During

We communicate and connect with one another. We share knowledge, insights, and learnings. We look out for and care for one another. We seek help when we need it, from coordinated drought assistance and mental health services. We pivot with drought signals, we know the state of the environment and take action which anticipates changes in conditions. We manage stocking levels to adapt to changes in water and fodder availability. We enact business continuity plans which include drought preparations and responses, and we alter planting regimes. Inherent to this are our abilities to maintain ground cover, avoid landscape degradation and conserve water.

After

As the grip of drought lessens and rains arrive, we continue to plan ahead, taking stock of lessons learned so as to make our task of drought adaptation easier the next time around. To do this, we lead from the front as a community. We de-brief, evaluate, research and monitor. We run variable enterprises to respond to an unpredictable environment. We look for and draw from advantages and opportunities that stem from drought. We innovate, collaborate, and integrate. We are drought ready.

5.2 Investment Logic

When deciding which ideas would progress to actions to be included within this Plan multiple factors were considered as shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Action selection process

The Upper Lachlan Shire Council and Hilltops Council are no different to any other local government within New South Wales. They have a limited pool of resources, and rely heavily on grants to fund projects, improvements, and infrastructure. Like our farmers and business owners, there is no spare hours in the day to commence new projects unless additional resources can be provided. We know that our local Business Chambers and community organisations are staffed by committed volunteers, who would love to do more, if only they had the time, the money, and a few more helping hands. This is why you will notice that most of our actions require the recruitment of a project officer or contractor.

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program provides for a fixed amount of grant funding to support the implementation of projects. This means that proposed actions need to fit the eligibility criteria. As with most grant funds, the actions must be packaged into standalone projects, which can be delivered within one or two years or occasionally over longer periods. The implementation funding is unlikely to cover the costs associated with every project listed in the following pages. However, we will continue to seek other grant funding opportunities to

deliver these projects. It is also why we have some smaller projects to maximise the breadth of activities. These will provide flexibility in which bundle of projects can be funded through the RDRP Program.

Another key requirement for projects under the RDRP Program is that they are locally-led. This is why, the project owners are organisations based in our region, such as the Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Hilltops Council, Canberra Region Joint Organisation, and Destination Southern NSW.

The engagement activities identified several key additional actions which are beyond the remit of our local organisations. These actions are likely to require extensive involvement or leadership from other entities, such as State government agencies, industry bodies, research and educational institutions or the community itself. Many of these actions also require long-term or ongoing commitments. The intention of including these proposed activities under the 'Advocate' section on page 60 is to reflect the community feedback and needs of our region. Their inclusion also contributes to the evidence base to influence and support these entities in taking the lead in delivering change.

5.3 Strategic Alignment

In 2015 the United Nations adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which provide a shared blueprint for the peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The SDGs recognise the collective effort required across strategies to improve health and education, reduce inequality, foster

economic growth, whilst also addressing climate change and working to preserve our waterways and life on land. The Upper Lachlan Community Strategic Plan uses the SDGs to map their themes and strategic objectives, and this approach has been carried over into this Plan, with each action mapped against the SDGs.



Figure 10: Sustainable Development Goals

The South East and Tablelands Regional Plan 2036 recognises that Hilltops and Upper Lachlan, as part of the broader South East and Tablelands region, has an exciting future. It outlines the NSW Government's land use planning priorities for the region, and will guide decision-making over the next 20 years. Key to this is economic and community prosperity, promoting agricultural innovation and sustainability, as well as biodiversity. This includes in the face of the uncertainties of drought.

The South East NSW Resilience Blueprint provides the opportunity to embed and implement the pathways and actions identified by the Hilltops and Upper Lachlan RDRP over time. Recognising that drought is one of the primary natural hazards the Hilltops and Upper Lachlan region is exposed to, the broader Resilience Blueprint provides a broad foundation for resilience effort which complements the drought focus of this RDRP. It also provides the opportunity

for knowledge sharing with the rest of the South East NSW region.

At the local level, the Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council's plans and strategies, including respective Community Strategic Plans, Local Strategic Planning Statements, asset management plans, economic strategies and other documents, detail the aspirations, needs and risks that have been strategically identified and developed alongside community.

Drought conditions are identified by both Councils as not only a risk but an opportunity to plan for long-term productivity and sustainability of agricultural land, as well as sustainable towns and villages to support the local economy, desired quality of life and long-term prosperity in the face of climate change and drought.

The Hilltops and Upper Lachlan RDRP builds upon this aspiration.

Strategic Alignment of Proposed Actions

	Federal	State			Regional				Local	
	Future Drought Fund	NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2022 - 2042	NSW Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, 2022	NSW Government 20-year Economic Vision for Regional NSW	Southern Inland Regional Development Australia Strategic Focus	South West Slopes Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022	Mid-Lachlan Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022	Canberra Region Joint Organisation South East NSW Resilience Blueprint	Hilltops Council Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032	Upper Lachlan Community Strategic Plan
Regional Drought Communications Plan with Drought Support Map	✓							✓	✓	✓
Coordinating Access to Mental Health 'First-aid' Training	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓
Small Business Drought Resilience Planning	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Host Roundtable Events to Foster Collaboration	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leverage Health and Wellbeing Surveys to Inform Future Action	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓
Develop and Promote Locally Relevant Agritourism Tools	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Mapping a Pathway for Improved Water Security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Drought Resilience Case Studies	✓							✓	✓	✓
Integrating Drought Resilience Across Council Processes	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Optimise Water Saving Campaign Materials and Processes	✓		✓						✓	✓

Table 6.1: Strategic Alignment of Proposed Actions



Regional Drought Communications Plan with Drought Support Map

Spheres



Governance and Leadership

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Feedback received from the community indicates a strong desire for more drought-related information, relating to both impacts and measures people can take to be more prepared. Participants in our engagement workshops noted that they were sometimes unaware of events, such as community information sessions or training activities. Many indicated they were unaware of available support and services. Others talked of the need to improve the awareness of drought indicators as part of an early warning system, and to trigger adaptive management. A Drought Communications Plan was seen as a way to respond to this need for timely information, and to encourage people to take action in a balanced and considered manner.

An effective Drought Management Plan should be easy to understand and primarily focus on solutions rather than impacts. The Plan should cover all stages of the drought cycle, to encourage people to be prepared, aware of declining conditions, and finally what actions, support and services are available during drought. Messaging needs to be tailored to the different audiences present in our region: from farmers to town residents, businesses, and community organisations, and address the values which are important to them. Considerations of culturally and linguistically diverse members of the community is required, in addition to those with poor literacy or limited skills or access to computers and reliable internet.

The use of stories is a highly effective communication strategy, and the Drought Resilience Case Study Action will provide complimentary material to this action.

A key component of the Drought Communications Plan is a map of available drought support and links to resources. This includes:

- Information portals such as the Southern NSW Innovation Hub portal and the NSW Drought Hub,
- Service providers like the Rural Financial Counselling Service, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, and the Service NSW Business Concierge,
- Providers of training such as mental health, farm, and business management,
- Information resources on income diversification, such as agritourism, carbon farming and biodiversity credits as well as drought resilient farming methods, such as NSW DPI, the Mulloon Institute and Landcare, and
- Community groups and regional cultural, community and sporting events to encourage people to get out and about and reduce social isolation.

To respond to different audiences, the drought support map may need to take multiple forms from a printed brochure to a poster, or a web-landing page. The creation of a local events page should be considered, to provide a centralised location to promote relevant activities. This would address community feedback relating to poor visibility of upcoming community events and gatherings, and the difficulties noted by service providers in promoting their training courses or information sessions to potential participants.

This drought support map would be complemented by a resource library of communication collateral, such as posters, key

messages and social media tile. This would allow Council staff and others to push out information quickly and efficiently.

Timeframe

6 months

Estimated Costs

\$50,000 - \$100,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Canberra Region Joint Organisation

Suggested Stakeholders

- Upper Lachlan Shire Council
- Hilltops Council

Steps for Implementation:

1. Develop and issue a request for quote (RFQ) for a contractor to deliver this action.
2. Review existing Communications Plans of Upper Lachlan Shire Council and Hilltops Council to identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities.
3. Establish goals and objectives of the Drought Communications Plan.
4. Map key stakeholders and contacts, including formal and informal trusted networks and organisations.
5. Map the needs and intended audiences for drought communication messaging.
6. Develop the Drought Support Map.
7. Map locally available communication and distribution channels, e.g. social media, print, TV, radio, and trusted organisations.
8. Conduct a targeted survey, focus group or other engagement to test and validate the effectiveness and reach of selected channels, preferred messaging formats, timing of messages, message sources and content of the Drought Support Map.
9. Develop a schedule, including trigger points to reflect the different messaging required throughout the drought cycle.

10. Identify who will share the drought messaging by allocating roles and responsibilities.
11. Develop communications collateral such as key messages, infographics, landing pages, email and social media templates, and flyers.
12. Review Drought Communications Plan on a one to two yearly basis to ensure methodology, channels, and messaging remains current.

KPIs

- Communication channels and trigger points identified.
- Number and nature of engagement activities held with Council, stakeholders, and community.
- Nature and type of collateral produced.
- Roles and responsibilities allocated.

Resilience Dividend

Social

- Effective communication will assist the community in being well-informed so they can improve their preparation, awareness, and response to changing drought conditions.



Coordinating Access to Mental Health 'First-aid' Training

Spheres



Social

SDG Alignment



Rationale

The Canberra University regional wellbeing survey identified a decline in wellbeing indicators during periods of persistent drought. These findings were consistent with our stakeholder engagement, with 91% of respondents flagging mental health as a significant drought impact. We heard that drought impacts mental health via multiple routes. For example, it may be due to financial stress, from social isolation or feelings of helplessness. The result can be social withdrawal, depression, or even suicide, each of which can have devastating consequences for families, friends, and communities.

Farmers and farming communities are known for their stoicism and may be reluctant to reach out for help. Even when they would appreciate assistance, we heard that people find it hard to know where to go for help or what support is available, not just in mental health, but in all facets of drought assistance. At the same time, farming communities look out for one and other, and may recognise when a neighbour, a colleague or a customer is not their usual self. Often people just don't know how to start the conversation or are worried about saying the wrong thing. People want to know what they can do to help - and want to build the capability within their own communities, rather than having to rely on outsiders. In addition, there is an overwhelming desire (83% of respondents) to see a variety of mental health support offerings.

Mental Health First Aid Training can address these challenges, by providing a pool of people who can have those initial conversations. This demonstrates that people care and can help people find the assistance they need.

There are multiple providers of mental health training, including the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, the Red Cross, and the NSW Primary Health Network. Training packages vary, with some focusing on mental health support in the workplace, whilst others are targeted for those in the community or volunteer space. As people participate and develop their skills, some may want to progress to more in-depth or advanced topics. The challenge is that many people aren't aware of these courses, or when and where they are being offered. At the same time, service providers are keen to maximise participation but may have to demonstrate there is a need before offering a particular course to a particular audience or location. This action will seek to maintain the ecosystem of service providers offering mental health training given it is such a valuable resource. We also want to modify our approaches to improve the efficiency and reach of service delivery.

Coordination is therefore key to ensuring participants are aware of courses and providers have visibility of, and have the evidence base, to address the demand. The centralised coordinator role envisaged for this project will also seek to achieve efficiencies. For example, whilst multiple entities may wish to secure training for their staff, they may not be able to meet the minimum numbers required to deliver a course. The coordinator may be able to put these entities in contact, so a joint training program can be delivered. For the providers, it can often be difficult to know the best avenues to promote courses. Again, the coordinator can assist, leveraging their local knowledge and networks.

Timeframe

6 – 9 months

Estimated Costs

<\$25,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Canberra Region Joint Organisation

Suggested Stakeholders

- Rural Adversity Mental Health Program
- Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network
- Red Cross
- Farmer-facing businesses and organisations

Steps for Implementation:

1. Secure funding and recruit a project officer for the duration of the Project.
2. Identify service providers offering in-person and online training, with a particular focus on programs tailored to rural and regional audiences.
3. Canvas locally-based entities who interface with farmers (e.g. agricultural service providers, banks, schools, sporting teams, Council, community groups) to identify need and desire to undertake training.
4. Communicate training needs with service providers to advocate for and coordinate the provision of training courses.
5. Collate training course dates, times, cost, and target audience, leveraging existing networks and event portals to promote wider visibility and uptake of available courses.
6. Consider producing a written, audio and/or video case study to assist in future promotion of mental health first-aid training.
7. Consider creating a landing page for the CRJO website, which provides a list of training providers, contact details and frequently asked questions to provide a lasting project legacy.

KPIs

- Number of entities engaged to canvas training needs.
- Number of courses promoted and attended, including geographical coverage and participant numbers.
- Production of project collateral (e.g. case study, web-page, contact list etc).

Resilience Dividend

Social

- Improved knowledge, access, and utilisation of mental health support.
- Reduced stigma associated with depression and other mental health challenges.
- Improved utilisation of other drought-related support services, such as the Rural Financial Counselling Service.



Small Business Drought Resilience Planning

Spheres



Economy

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Our small businesses are the backbone of the main streets in our towns. They provide employment, places to socialise with friends and family, and encourage tourists to stop and linger. They allow people to buy everything from clothes to sporting equipment, from homewares to haircuts in their local town. When a drought occurs, and landholders reduce or stop their discretionary spending altogether, this can place additional pressure on local businesses. Even when a single business closes, a negative feedback loop can occur, whereby local people travel to regional centres to buy items not available locally. This leads to a loss of money spent locally, further undermining the profitability of the remaining local businesses. This is compounded by the loss of major retailers, banks and others who are shrinking their service offerings in the smaller regional towns and centres, even in the absence of drought conditions.

Once a town loses a few flagship entities or accumulates a few too many empty shopfronts it can be difficult to recover, even when the rain, and agricultural spending returns. This can reinforce a decline in prosperity for the town and its community, exacerbating the loss of young people and leading to further declines in services. It is therefore imperative to keep our local main streets thriving and the businesses at peak performance in the good times. This can then provide a buffer to cushion the impacts when a drought inevitably occurs. We also need our businesses to be well prepared, with plans in place on how they will adapt and cope when spending declines.

We know that the owners and managers of our local businesses work long hours, with little time

to focus beyond the day-to-day operations. Feedback from our engagement activities identified the need to support our businesses in a variety of ways. These include:

- Building the financial skills of our business owners and managers, particularly around debt and cash flow management,
- Raising awareness of the timing and quantum of spending changes associated with drought on our retail, hospitality, and trade businesses,
- Encouraging the development and implementation of tailored business continuity and succession plans.

We have a variety of local and regional organisations who can provide support to our local businesses. These include the Economic Development Managers from the Department for Regional NSW, the Small Business Commission, Service NSW's Business Concierge, and Southern Inland Regional Development Australia. Whilst these support mechanisms exist, we believe there is scope to improve the awareness and utilisation.

This project will seek to establish a baseline of the drought preparedness and financial resilience of our businesses. It will link businesses to existing materials and support mechanisms and develop additional material where necessary. The project will also leverage existing networks and events, such as the Small Business Month, to raise the profile and adoption of drought impacts and financial resilience. In essence, we want to maintain the viability of individual businesses and hence the vitality of our main streets to help foster a shift towards more resilient business practices.

Timeframe

6 months

Estimated Costs

\$25,000 – \$50,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Southern Inland Regional Development Australia

Suggested Stakeholders

- Upper Lachlan Shire Council and Hilltops Council
- Rural Financial Counselling Service
- Service NSW Business Concierge
- Department of Regional NSW Economic Development Managers

Steps for Implementation:

1. Organise a round-table meeting of project stakeholders and identify the entity best placed to lead the project.
2. Develop a resource map including tools, resources, and links to existing support services, noting this step has synergies with Step 6 in the Regional Drought Communications Plan with Drought Support Map.
3. Survey local small businesses to:
 - a. establish the baseline of their consideration of, and preparation for potential drought impacts.
 - b. Level of maturity in implementation of drought resilient practices such as cash flow management and business continuity planning.
 - c. Level of awareness and utilisation of available business planning support.
 - d. Barriers and opportunities to improve their drought resilience planning.
4. Based on the outcomes of steps 2 and 3, develop additional resource material, such as business readiness checklists, on-demand resources, and webinars.

5. Based on the outcomes of step 3, link surveyed businesses to available one-on-one support, such as the Rural Financial Counselling Service and Service NSW's Business Concierge.
6. Where funding permits, provide mentoring and one-on-one support to local businesses.
7. Where project timelines permit, incorporate drought resilient themed activities within the Small Business Month event schedule.

KPIs

- Numbers of businesses engaged.
- Number of businesses referred for support.
- Feedback from businesses on the suitability and effectiveness of support provided.

Resilience Dividend

Economic

- Thriving local businesses who have processes in place to weather altered spending patterns during a drought, can help maintain local employment, a vibrant main street, and maintain local access to goods and services for the community.

Social

- Jobs, skillsets, and families are the building blocks upon which our community services, sporting groups, organisations and social circles rely upon.

Host Roundtable Events to Foster Collaboration

Spheres



Governance and Leadership



Economy



Natural Environment

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Drought resilience requires an 'all hands-on deck' approach. Every individual, community organisation, government agency or industry body has a role. This includes sharing resources and information within their network, promoting the services offered by others, responding to feedback, and modifying their approach, or delivering individual elements as part of a collective effort. Bringing stakeholders together creates an opportunity for different voices to be heard and for a better understanding of the system to evolve. These joint discussions can shift the thinking from individual roles and responsibilities to understanding the root causes of shared challenges. The diversity of thought can allow new and innovative approaches to be explored. Often, the simple act of getting everyone in the one room can achieve substantial gains, allowing business cards to be swapped, synergies identified between different programs, and opportunities and benefits to be realised from sharing of resources.

There is also a strong desire from the community to see more collaboration, summed up by the statement: A resilient community works together. Many of the ideas proposed during the Council and community workshops, necessitate a collective approach. Collaboration requires a catalyst and during the initial stages, can be time intensive. For example, stakeholders need to be identified, a mailing list created, a venue

organised, a suitable date and time negotiated, and invitations sent. A successful event then requires a drawcard or hook to encourage people to make time in their busy calendars to attend. With a diversity of people from across organisations with various remits, there is benefit in the presence of a skilled facilitator who can guide these initial discussions. This includes identifying common ground amongst participants, shared challenges, and potential benefits from future collaboration. Follow-up events will then be used to build momentum, share interim progress, and opportunities for quick wins. Whilst a project officer would be initially responsible for organising and facilitating perhaps three events per collaborative cohort, it is hoped this will allow participants to establish the systems and processes to enable the groups to continue on an ongoing basis.

The engagement activities provide guidance on priority areas for collaboration, being:

- Agricultural land management practices, resources, research, and development to identify pathways to adapt to a changing climate and improve the preparedness and resilience to drought,
- Community health and wellbeing focusing on coordination of services, referral pathways, service continuity, self-help options and training, social infrastructure and community activities and events,

- Economic and workforce development, diversification, training, and awareness of available assistance programs, and
- Environmental stewardship relating to local waterways and riparian corridors, remnant vegetation, indigenous land management practices and catchment- or landscape-scale activities.

For this project's governance it is envisaged that the Canberra Region Joint Organisation would coordinate and organise the activities, which would then be hosted by the respective Councils.

Timeframe

6 months

Estimated Costs

<\$20,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Canberra Region Joint Organisation
- Upper Lachlan Shire Council
- Hilltops Council

Suggested Stakeholders

- Agricultural – Industry bodies, NSW DPI, NSW LLS, Landcare, Mulloon Institute, and others.
- Community – Federal and State Health agencies, community service providers, not-for-profits, and volunteer groups.
- Economic – Local business chambers, tourism bodies, Southern Inland RDA, DRNSW, Service NSW Business Concierge, and others.
- Environment – Landcare, First Nations Groups, NSW DPI (biosecurity), local conservation, climate action and sustainability groups.

Steps for Implementation:

1. Recruit a project officer to deliver this project.
2. Review RDRP documents to identify priority actions proposed during the engagement activities.
3. Identify local and regional stakeholders for each collaborative cohort, cognisant of diversity and equity.

4. Create an event schedule, secure venues, and catering, and manage invitations and RSVPs.
5. Facilitate events with a focus on feedback received during the RDRP.
6. Organise second and subsequent events,
7. Survey participants to identify what actions they have taken because of the round-table events. This could be expanded to capture the understanding, engagement, and actions they have taken stemming from this RDRP (refer to the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning section for further information).
8. Establish mailing lists, a schedule of events and other processes to facilitate the events becoming self-managed on a long-term basis.

KPIs

- Number of events hosted.
- Number and diversity of attendees.
- Percentage of attendees or organisations participating in second or subsequent events.
- Percentage of participants who express intention to collaborate on an ongoing basis.
- Initiatives established as a result of the events.

Resilience Dividend

Economic

- Improved skills, diversification, and planning by local and regional businesses.

Social

- Optimisation of available health and wellbeing resources, at the individual, entity, and community level.

Environmental

- Greater adoption of sustainable land management practices on agricultural, public and private land.

Leverage Health and Wellbeing Surveys to Inform Future Action

Spheres



Governance and Leadership



Community

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Drought has substantial impacts on community health and wellbeing. These impacts vary during and post drought, and from one drought event to the next. Community surveys are an effective tool in monitoring changes in the wellbeing of people living in the region. Whilst the focus is on drought impacts, it is also important to capture other events or factors which either contribute to, or erode, the resilience of individuals and their communities. Survey results can help to provide insights on the effectiveness of existing actions, services, and support. This information is key to understanding what parts of the system need to be maintained, modified, or transformed. The data obtained can be used to inform future iterations of this Plan, and provide an evidence base to support grant applications or direct investment.

This is particularly the case for social infrastructure, such as sporting fields, recreational

spaces, cultural activities, and social events. These are important in maintaining social connections, reducing isolation, and bolstering the coping capacity. However, the level of influence these items play in supporting drought resilience is often not quantified. Our reliance on anecdotal evidence can hamper our ability to secure or justify spending in these areas.

This project will complement the action to coordinate access to mental health 'first-aid' training. The project will provide the resources necessary to design specific questions to explore drought impacts on health and wellbeing, promote the survey to maximise the reach and demographics engaged, analyse the results, and finally make recommendations on actions to maintain, modify or transform our approaches to drought resilience.



Timeframe

3 – 6 months

Estimated Costs

<\$25,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Canberra Region Joint Organisation or Hilltops / Upper Lachlan Councils

Suggested Stakeholders

- Research bodies
- Financial and mental health service providers
- Community organisations and not-for-profits

Steps for Implementation:

1. Recruit a project officer to deliver this action.
2. Canvas existing mental health and wellbeing surveys to identify partnership opportunities.
3. Engage with stakeholders to develop the objectives and desired data points to be obtained from the survey.
4. Co-design survey questions with relevant stakeholders.
5. Promote the survey using Council websites, social media, local newspapers, radio, and other communication channels.
6. Analyse survey data and share insights with relevant stakeholders, particularly where the data identifies actions which are within the remit of other government bodies, industry groups, service providers or other entities.
7. Develop recommendations to inform future iterations of this RDRP and other Council processes.

KPIs

- Number of drought-related survey questions adopted.
- Demographic, industry, and employment diversity of survey participants.
- Trends and insights identified.
- Activities undertaken to share data insights.
- Recommendations made and shared.
- Number of policy or planning changes stemming from survey data.

Resilience Dividend

Social

- Increased wellbeing is associated with improved adaptive capacity, and therefore an individuals' and community's capacity to cope with adversity such as drought.

Develop and Promote Locally Relevant Agritourism Tools

Spheres



Economy

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Drought periods often result in substantial losses in income and periods of zero or negative cash flow, which can threaten a farm's short and long-term viability. This financial strain has diverse impacts, such as limiting the ability of farming families to purchase everyday necessities or reducing the participation in recreational and social activities. These combined impacts often lead to declining mental health. One option to reduce the risks associated with drought is to increase the diversity of on-farm income. By supporting our agricultural enterprises to modify their approach, by expanding their income sources, we can improve the resilience of individual farms and our local towns, as well as those businesses who rely on spend generated on-farm.

Agritourism ventures can provide additional cash-flow during good years and, depending on the activity, a continued source of income during drought. The region is well positioned to attract agri-tourists, being situated on the main road route between Melbourne and Sydney combined with its close proximity to Canberra. Additionally, the region supports a diversity of agricultural activities such as cherries, wine grapes and grazing which can act as drawcards for tourists looking for authentic rural or food experiences.

In 2022 and 2023, the NSW State Government made substantial changes to planning rules to address the growing adoption of agritourism. This was supported by multiple projects, including the Australian Regional Tourism's National Agritourism Project, which produced a guide called Enabling Agritourism: Paving the Way for Successful Development Applications. This made a number of recommendations relating to local government which form the basis for this project. An equally important driver for this project, is the community's desire for reduced 'red tape' and for 'what we can do ourselves and not rely on others.'

Key components of this action include upskilling Council staff, ensuring alignment between agritourism objectives and local council planning processes, and providing potential applicants with relevant tools and guidance to capitalise on the opportunities whilst minimising some of the challenges associated with agritourism planning applications. These activities respond to the complexities of the planning approval process and the need to ensure agritourism occurs in a sustainable manner, reflective of community values. Where 'red tape' cannot be reduced, this project will seek to clearly articulate the approval pathway, reduce points of friction, and provide support where appropriate.

Timeframe

6 months

Estimated Costs

<\$50,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Destination Southern NSW

Suggested Stakeholders

- Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council
- Local Advisors (e.g. financial planners, solicitors)
- Landholders and existing tourism enterprises

Steps for Implementation:

1. Recruit a project officer or issue a request for quote (RFQ) for a contractor to deliver this action.
2. Canvas the need to establish a Working Group within each Council to support the management of agritourism planning approvals and associated activities, noting this decision will be influenced by the outcomes of steps 3 through 7.
3. Conduct capacity building activities with Council staff to develop an understanding of agritourism, the benefits and potential challenges.
4. Define the goals and objectives of supporting agritourism, from the perspective of landholders, the wider Community and Council.
5. Review local strategy and statutory planning requirements at Upper Lachlan Shire Council and Hilltops Council to ensure they align with the goals and objectives identified in Step 4 and make recommendations for any amendments as required.
6. Identify local advisors, such as financial planners, solicitors, and others, and support them with information which allows them to canvas with landholders, the diversification choice afforded by agritourism.
7. Develop flowcharts, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and other support materials to guide applicants and Council staff through

the planning process, noting these may be different for internal and external stakeholders.

8. Test and validate material developed in Step 7 to ensure fit for purpose and update as required.
9. Host an information session to launch the materials and consider the need for an ongoing follow-up survey to monitor the effectiveness of project materials and identify remaining points or friction, and opportunities, to allow for ongoing adaptive management.
10. Develop supporting maps, brochures, and webpages to create an ecosystem of visitor experiences and support both existing and proposed ventures.

KPIs

- Number of engagement and capacity building events held with stakeholders.
- Flowcharts, FAQs, and support materials developed for use by applicants and each Council.
- Feedback received from internal and external stakeholders on the materials developed.
- Number of people attending the launch information session.
- Feedback received from launch survey (if implemented).

Resilience Dividend

Economic

- Diversifying farm income provides landholders with alternative sources of revenue, thereby improving their economic resilience.
- By increasing the number and type of tourism offerings in the region, tourism numbers can be increased, attracting additional revenue for local town businesses.

Social

- Exposing a wider audience to agriculture facilitates a greater understanding of where our food and fibres come from, and the challenges faced by our farming community.

Environmental

- Improved revenue can provide landholders with additional capital to adopt more sustainable land management practices.

Mapping a Pathway for Improved Water Security

Spheres



Governance and Leadership



Natural Environment



Built Environment and Infrastructure

SDG Alignment



Rationale

The Hilltops and Upper Lachlan region have some inherent water-related challenges. The Murray-Darling Basin, of which the Lachlan River forms part, is the most highly regulated river system in Australia. Whilst our Councils continue to advocate for our communities, we are just one of many voices who seek to influence how this system is managed. The Lachlan Regional Water provides some clarity on the future direction for our region, and we will continue to work collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders to further its implementation.

Water security is a key element for drought resilient towns and communities in our region. Reduced water availability or quality can be economically damaging and extracts an emotional toll on our communities who are reliant on this surface water. Both our local Councils recognise the need for robust, well-maintained infrastructure to deliver water in appropriate quantities and qualities to allow our people, our businesses, our organisations, and our communities to thrive every day.

The Integrated Water Cycle Management Plan identified that elements of our water supply infrastructure, such as weirs, bores, treatment, and storage may not meet security of supply targets. A long list of potential infrastructure projects were evaluated for their strategic alignment, drought resilience benefit, cost, availability of funding, and implementation. The following priority projects were shortlisted:

- Harden to Boorowa pipeline.
- Harden wastewater reuse.
- Taralga water security.
- Upper Lachlan groundwater.
- Water resource information system.

A pathway to implementation for each project has been outlined. This includes where supporting technical studies and approval processes are required as well as potential project investment funding sources.

Timeframe

Ongoing

Estimated Costs

\$50,000 - \$100,000+.

Suggested Action Lead

- Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council

Suggested Stakeholders

- WaterNSW
- NSW DPIE - Water
- NSW Farmers Association
- Dam Safety NSW

Steps for Implementation:

1. Identify opportunities to advocate for these projects, including the Regional Leadership Executive, Local, State, and Federal members and local government forums.
2. Continuously scan the NSW Safe and Secure Water Program, the NSW Regional Growth Fund, the Australian Government National Water Grid and other new or emerging funding programs to identify funding opportunities.
3. Incorporate messaging related to these projects, their objectives and community support into the Regional Drought Communications Plan action, where relevant.
4. Advocate for inclusion of these projects into the policies and plans of the Southern Inland Regional Development Australia, the Regional Economic Development Strategies for the Southern Tablelands and South Western Slopes, the NSW Regional Water Strategies and other Federal and State strategies where relevant.
5. Incorporate these projects and their objectives into existing Council planning documents, including, but not limited to the Community Strategic Plan.
6. Identify opportunities to gather additional data to utilise in the business case for each project, such as level of community support, lost opportunity costs, and economic benefits which may arise from reducing the economic

impacts arising from constrained water quality or quantity.

KPIs

- Number of projects progressing to the next stage of their implementation pathway.
- Breadth of advocacy activities undertaken to further individual projects.
- Number of submissions made advocating for these projects, or their objectives, to be incorporated into regional, State and Federal planning processes.

Resilience Dividend

Social

- Reliable access to clean water underpins the functioning of our residences, institutions, and public spaces.

Economic

- Secure water access is a key enabler of economic diversification and employment opportunities.



Drought Resilience Case Studies

Spheres



Economy



Community



Natural Environment

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Personal stories are naturally relatable and provide insights into shared experiences. Storytelling involving local people improves the trust and credibility of the information and can make the content more compelling by creating an emotional connection. This not only helps people to understand the information but allows us to take the lessons they have learned and apply it to our own circumstances. We also know that farmers prefer to learn from other farmers, and the same is true of our small business owners and residents. When emotions, fears and hopes are presented as part of a personal story, they can build a connection. This recognition that we all share the same hopes and dreams can reduce the isolation people can feel during a drought and provide the foundation of building a stronger community.

This project will harness the personal stories of people living and working in our local area to improve the knowledge and implementation of drought resilient activities. No one person has all the answers and not every solution will be equally effective for others. However, we hope to showcase some of the options which exist, to get people thinking about what will work best for them in their situation, to prompt the modification of behaviour and approaches. A combination of written, oral, photographic, and video case studies will be produced. It is envisaged the case studies will be short in length, in the order

of one to two minutes for videos, and one to two A4 pages for printed content, coupled with multiple high-definition photographs, with links to further resources. This will allow the stories to be shared via the communication channels identified in the Drought Communications Plan. The materials produced will provide a ready pool of resources to allow Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Hilltops Councils, local business chambers and community groups, to keep drought resilience on the radar. This is to encourage people to take action during the good times, when money, rain or resources are available, so they are more prepared when a drought inevitably rolls around.

Local people will be featured from a cross section of backgrounds and demographics, including farmers, business owners, volunteers, and our youth. A diversity of topics will be canvassed, such as:

- Emerging opportunities in agritourism, agroforestry, carbon, and biodiversity markets which can diversify income sources,
- Drought resilient land management practices (where these are not already covered by existing material),
- Small business operations including cash flow management, and responding to a decline in turnover,
- Approaches to minimising water usage and adapting to periods of low or no rainfall at home,

in the school, or in the community's parks and gardens,

- Positive stories of personal and collective resilience, and actions to improve physical and mental wellbeing.

The release or promotion of the case studies can be timed to leverage existing events such as Small Business Month or R U Ok Day. Promotion can be tied to times when people are most receptive to new ideas, which can be when circumstances change, such as the introduction of tighter water restrictions, at the end of the financial year, or perhaps when a particular topic is in the media or political spotlight.

Rapid advances in video and graphic design tools are increasingly placing these skills within reach of everyday staff. In the long term, it is hoped this project will demonstrate the value and return on investment of developing case studies, prompting local and regional staff to produce their own content, as a business-as-usual activity.

Timeframe

3 – 6 months

Estimated Costs

<\$25,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Canberra Region Joint Organisation or Hilltops / Upper Lachlan Councils

Suggested Stakeholders

- Community, Business, Agricultural, Education, Council and Environmental representatives

Steps for Implementation:

1. Develop and issue a request for quote (RFQ) for a contractor to deliver this action.
2. Develop a memorandum of understanding, or similar, which establishes the copyright, usage and acknowledgement of materials arising from the project, noting the intent is for content which is shared and available for use by a wide group of regional stakeholders.
3. Collate existing case study resources into a centralised library for future use,

to avoid duplication and to identify gaps and opportunities.

4. Conduct a survey, targeted interviews, or other engagement method to test, validate and prioritise case study topics and seek recommendations for case study participants.
5. Identify potential case study participants, ensuring a mix of demographics, topics, and approaches.
6. Develop written, photographic, oral, and video case studies.
7. In conjunction with the Drought Communication Plan, develop a schedule, including triggers, for the progressive release of developed case studies.
8. Share material with local and regional stakeholders.

KPIs

- Number of case studies developed.
- Spread of demographics, industries and backgrounds featured.
- Number of stakeholders provided access to case studies.

Resilience Dividend

Economic

- Increased diversification of agricultural enterprises. Increased adoption of financial-resilient approaches within small businesses.

Social

- Improved awareness of shared experiences which can strengthen the sense of community. Improved capacity of individuals to undertake positive steps which reduce their vulnerability or improve their adaptive capacity.

Environmental

- Improved adoption of sustainable land management and water efficient practices in agriculture and residential settings.

Integrating Drought Resilience Across Council Processes

Spheres



Governance and Leadership

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Several governance themes emerged from the stakeholder engagement. The community expressed a need for drought resilience to be embedded in Council strategies, plans, and processes. Such an approach can deliver win-win situations, with many drought resilience actions capable of delivering co-benefits. For example, a more diverse local economy, greater community connection, or improved environmental stewardship. Similarly, staff from the respective Councils recognised the opportunities of incorporating drought resilience into business-as-usual activities. This allows drought resilience objectives to be considered throughout local Council planning cycles, across the short, medium, and long-term.

This project will seek to identify which Council processes can be leveraged to include drought resilience objectives, targets, and projects. These include:

- The Community Strategic Plan, the Delivery Program, the Operation Plan, and strategies relating to, but not limited to, community engagement, asset management, economic development, and environmental management.
- Criteria used to guide Council decisions, so there is explicit consideration of, and a heightened importance attached to activities which decrease economic, social, or environmental vulnerability or improve the coping capacity of these systems.
- Priorities attached to funding, so that return-on-investment calculations take into consideration tangible and intangible returns. For example, the function social, cultural, and sporting facilities play in reducing social isolation, promoting social connectedness, and facilitating physical and mental wellbeing.

- Community engagement activities, such as surveys, community forums and information sessions so they include the topic of drought resilience and capture metrics which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of activities in delivering drought resilience co-benefits.

This integration will allow us to identify where our existing actions and Council activities are already contributing to drought resilience. By recognising these benefits, we can ensure that these supportive systems are maintained. Where our approach is leading to sub-optimal drought resilience outcomes, we want to know this, so we can modify and adapt to achieve better outcomes.

Ultimately the objective of integration across Council processes is to transform the system:- initially to recognise drought resilience as a priority, then to provide the evidence-base to support the implementation of resilience-focused initiatives, and finally, for project successes to reinforce the adoption of these actions as standard behaviour.

Timeframe

3 – 6 months

Estimated Costs

<\$25,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council

Suggested Stakeholders

- Internal Council teams and elected representatives
- Existing Council community interfaces

Steps for Implementation:

1. Recruit a project officer to deliver this action, noting their time would be shared between the two Councils.
2. Review Council plans, strategies, community engagement and decision-making processes, roles, and responsibilities.
3. Review, map and establish a baseline for each Council's approach to drought resilience within the sphere of economic, social, environmental and infrastructure.
4. Scan other regional Councils within NSW, to identify exemplar approaches to provide a benchmark and case studies to support recommendations.
5. Conduct capacity building events related to drought resilience co-benefits across economic, social, environmental, and infrastructure-related actions of Council.
6. Identify and make recommendations where drought resilience, or elements of drought resilience can be included as an objective, target, decision-making criteria, role, or responsibility.
7. Articulate the pathway for adoption of these recommendations, including the timing and responsibility for implementation.

KPIs

- Engagement targets a range of internal and external stakeholders to provide appropriate advice, test and validate proposed changes.
- Number of internal stakeholders who express support for the proposed changes.
- Number of recommendations carried through for adoption.

Resilience Dividend

Economic/Social/Environment

- Increased awareness, alignment and support for Council processes which deliver drought resilience co-benefits. Greater ability to capture and utilise drought resilience outcomes in the evidence-base used to determine Council's investment decisions.

Optimise Water Saving Campaign Materials and Processes

Spheres



Governance and Leadership



Natural Environment



Community

SDG Alignment



Rationale

Water security is a key concern for the community and requires a dual approach addressing demand and supply. This action focuses on the demand-side by reducing water consumption in our homes, gardens, schools, and community spaces. A variety of actions are needed, such as increasing the use of rainwater tanks in our towns, shifting to low- or no-water use gardens, improving the water efficiency of our appliances, reducing leaks and wastage, and changing our behaviour.

Both Councils have established Drought Management Plans and water restriction policies and this project will focus on optimising these. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of behavioural change studies which have identified where the opportunities exist, which actions have the highest likelihood of being adopted, and those with the greatest impact. Often a mix of policy responses are required, from incentives and awareness campaigns to changing social norms, such as letting lawns go brown.

Water savings span Council activities, such as how we prioritise water usage and green areas within our parks and gardens and the use of

smart meters, leak detection systems and efficient irrigation, to activities suitable for large establishments, such as our schools and aged care homes. Finally, there are opportunities for individuals, particularly those who are connected to town water. Building public awareness through a water saving campaign will foster a sense of community around water conservation. It will encourage individuals and organisations to identify daily habits that may be contributing to excess water consumption, and how or what they can change to conserve water.

This project will review Council's existing policies and procedures and compare them with the latest research on demand management options. To avoid duplication of effort, the project will also review the approaches taken by other regional Councils, to identify exemplar approaches which would transfer well to our community. To demonstrate a shared commitment to the challenge of water conservation, the project will have a triple-focus - Council operations, our large community, institutions, and businesses and at the individual level within the home.

Timeframe

3 – 6 months

Estimated Costs

<\$25,000

Suggested Action Lead

- Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council

Suggested Stakeholders

- Residents

Steps for Implementation:

1. Recruit a project officer to deliver this action, noting their time would be shared between the two Councils.
2. Review both Council's existing water saving campaign approaches, materials and interface with the respective Drought Management Plans.
3. Review approaches taken by other regional Councils to identify best-practice water-saving campaign materials which could be adopted by Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council.
4. Review latest research on influencing domestic water use behaviour.
5. Develop preliminary recommendations and engage with internal Council stakeholders and the community to test and validate.
6. Develop a water-saving campaign including support materials, messaging, and triggers for adoption.
7. Implement water-saving campaign.

KPIs

- Number of internal and external stakeholders who express support for proposed measures.
- Number of exemplar water-saving campaign materials carried through for adoption.

Resilience Dividend

Social

- Decreasing per capita water consumption can help ensure a more reliable water supply for communities, reducing the risk of water shortages during droughts and allowing public health and wellbeing to be maintained.

Environmental

- Reducing water consumption helps to maintain the quality and quantity of local and regional during drought conditions.



Advocate

The engagement carried out to develop this Plan identified a number of activities which are beyond the remit of local government to lead or deliver. Our role in the following activities is one of advocacy, to encourage entities, large and small, to contribute to improving the drought resilience of our region.

Individual Resilience Skill Building

The resilience of our community is underpinned by strong community networks and achieving individual physical and mental wellbeing. The community engagement identified the need to bolster intergenerational resilience from youth to the older generations. Improving individual resilience can start at the home, in the school, our workplaces or in our community groups. A variety of formal and informal programs exist. The challenge is to select the resources or programs which provide the best fit and to identify people or organisations who can champion their adoption in our community. Relevant stakeholders include State, Catholic and Independent schools and community organisations.

Action synergies:

Mental Health First Responder Training Promotion

Adapting to Changing Market, Climate, Societal and Regulatory Forces

The expectations placed on our farming community are increasing from a diversity of sources whether it is government regulations, the demands of large corporations, consumer preferences or international events to name a few. These pressures include carbon emissions, ground and river water consumption, fertiliser and pesticide inputs, and on-farm biodiversity. Changing farm practices may create opportunities to diversify farm income, reduce input costs or create new markets. Change can be difficult and requires more than just knowledge, time, or resources to create awareness, intention and finally implementation. Every farm and farming family is unique, and we need to ensure that policies and programs are tailored to the needs of our farmers and address their particular suite of challenges. What works in the context of a cropping enterprise may not be appropriate on a mixed-use enterprise, or for a cherry or wine grower. By researching the motivations and barriers faced by our farming community, and seeking their input, we can identify solutions which will be practical and effective. Relevant stakeholders include the Department of Primary Industries, Local Land Services, philanthropic and university-based research organisations, farming industry groups and environmental land management organisations.

Action synergies:

Round Table Collaboration Events

Future Scenario Planning

As our climate changes and droughts become more frequent or severe, we are likely to see a shift in agricultural activities undertaken in our region such as cropping, grazing, horticulture, and mixed enterprises. Whilst we cannot predict the future, we can think ahead to anticipate these future changes and the downstream impacts on our community, our economy, and our environment. From this, we can identify flexible strategies which can overcome or cope with potential changes, risks, and uncertainty. This future scenario planning can also involve back-casting:- a process which identifies desirable futures for our community, and involves working backwards to determine what needs to happen to make that a reality. For example, what do we need to maintain, where do we need to innovate, and what elements do we need to transform? The answers to these questions can then prompt discussions on how to fund the necessary changes, and what training or skills development are needed. Such a process requires collaboration and participation from farmers, industry groups, agricultural service providers, decision-makers at all levels of government and members of our community. These discussions can further improve community interest in drought resilience activities, economic diversification, and business continuity planning. Relevant stakeholders include local farming industry groups and representatives, local Business Chambers and the Regional Leadership Executive.

Action synergies:

Mapping a Pathway for Improved Water Security, and Small Business Drought Resilience Planning

Skills Diversification Training

Redundancy is a key principle of resilience. We know that when drought conditions impact our region some agricultural-related work can decline. Similarly, our main street businesses are likely to see a reduction in trade as farmers and others restrict their spending in the face of declining or zero income. This can lead to some staff seeing their hours cut or in the worst case, let go from their job. Diversifying the skillset of our workforce allows people to seek alternative employment during a drought or improve their employment opportunities when times are good. The engagement carried out for the RDRP indicated strong support for diversifying skills and obtaining micro-credentials. The preference is for skills training to occur locally:- not everyone has access to a driver's licence, or the time and money to travel to distant centres to participate in training. Collaboration is needed to realise synergies in securing participants from diverse backgrounds and groups and to achieve minimum numbers where necessary. We heard in the engagement of the need for training and education for people over 50, not just those leaving school. The training provided needs to match the skills needed within the region, such as aged care, or to take advantage of new projects, such as renewable energy. Promotion of training events is also critical to ensure those who would benefit most from the training are aware of upcoming courses and are in a position to participate. Relevant stakeholders include TafeNSW, local employment service providers, and Southern Inland Regional Development Australia

Action synergies:

Round Table Collaboration Events + Regional Drought Communication Plan

Integrate Drought as a Standing Topic within Existing Networks

When times are good, there is a tendency for the challenges of drought to slip off the radar. Yet the 'rainy-day' is the perfect time to be planning for and improving preparedness for the next drought. An opportunity exists to leverage the existing networks in our region to maintain the momentum required to plan and prepare for drought. What this looks like will differ between networks. For our business community, drought can be woven into business continuity or diversification planning as well as small business month activities. For agricultural groups, this may mean addressing other stressors such as succession planning or financial skill development and exploring diversification opportunities. Relevant stakeholders include the Regional Leadership Executive, local Chambers of Commerce, and local chapters of farming industry groups.

Action synergies:

Round Table Collaboration Events

Establishment of a Young Professional's Network

Young people are crucial to the ongoing prosperity of our region and are often absent from decision-making processes. Young people are less constrained by historical precedents or business as usual approaches. From a drought resilience perspective this means they may be more willing to change their land management or business practices, diversify their enterprise, or embrace emerging technology or markets. Young Professional Networks are recognised as an effective means to support personal and professional development, primarily through arranging events and networking opportunities. It remains to be determined which organisation would be best placed to host such a network, what actions and resources would be needed to establish one and what kind of model would work best in the region. Potential stakeholders include the NSW Office for Regional Youth and their Regional Youth Taskforce, Hilltops Council's Youth Development Officer, and the Southern Inland Regional Development Australia.

Action synergies:

Round Table Collaboration Events

Cross-Promotion of Drought Related Information, Events and Resources

A key theme which emerged from the engagement undertaken, was the need to optimise how information and events were promoted. Often people weren't aware of available support or were unaware that a community meeting or event was coming up. Sometimes groups would organise events not realising theirs clashed with another event. Similarly, when community groups, businesses or agencies conduct events, they often find it hard to reach their intended audience. Different mediums are needed to reach our diverse community. Everyone in our community can play a role in linking people to available support. Whether it is sharing upcoming events via your business emailing list, State government agencies cross promoting events hosted by other agencies or re-posting an event flyer on your social media account. Each point of connection helps to build a stronger network and a stronger community. Relevant stakeholders include Canberra Region Joint Organisation, Department of Primary Industries, Local Land Services, Rural Financial Counselling Services, agricultural service providers, farming and business industry group and community organisations.

Action synergies:

Round Table Collaboration Events +
Regional Drought Communication Plan

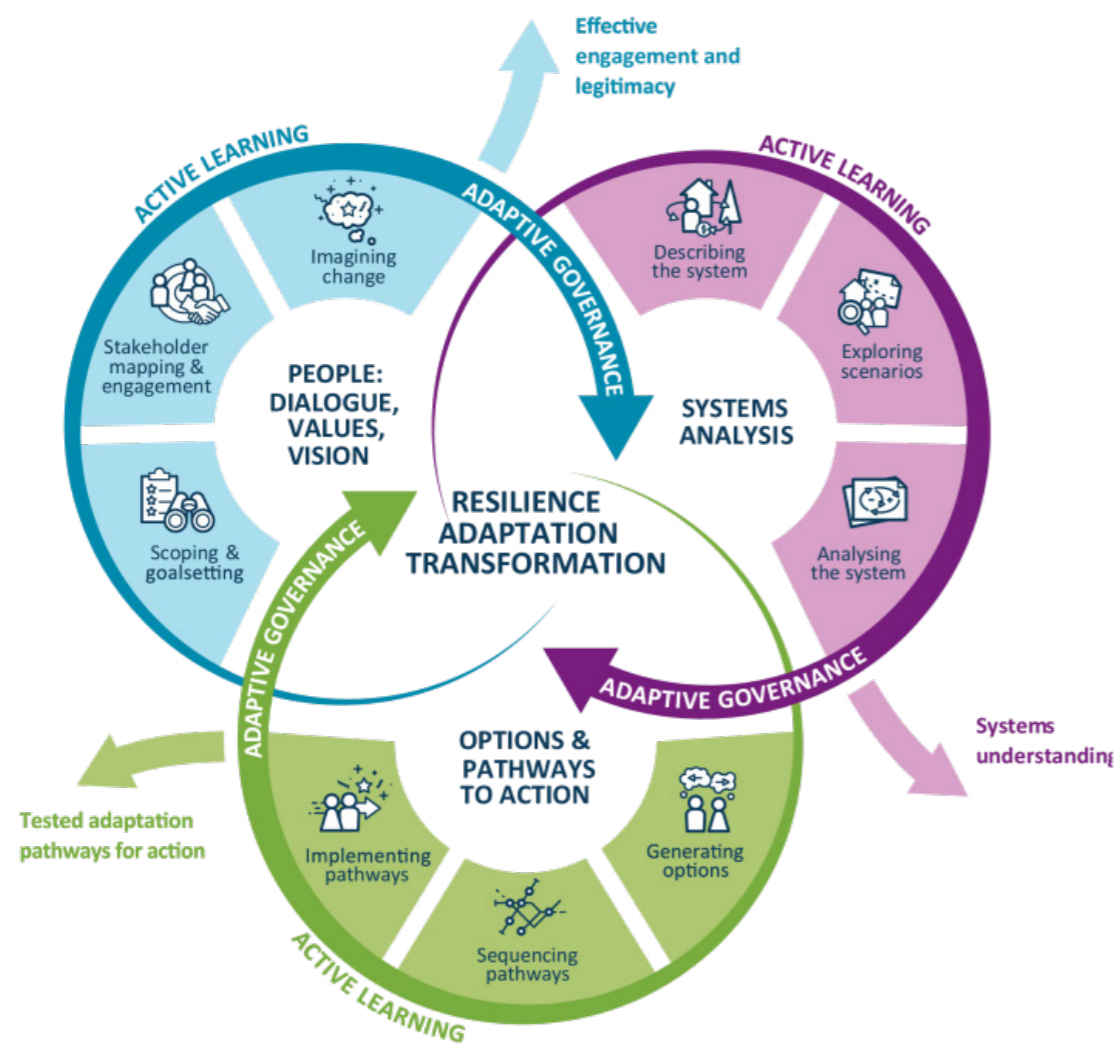


07/ MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is core to the implementation of the RDRP, maximising effective program delivery, transparency, adaptive management, and long-term sustainability. The intention is for MEL activities to be embedded into the design and implementation of both the individual actions and the Plan as a whole. This includes regular reviews and updates by the consortium

members to reflect that the Plan is a living document and the continually changing conditions which influence our communities' susceptibility, adaptability, and resilience to drought. This constant process of active learning, and adaptive governance is outlined in the CSIRO's Resilience, Adaptive Pathways and Transformation Approach or RAPTA model (See Figure 11).

Figure 11: Resilience, Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Approach (RAPTA). Source: CSIRO



7.1 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Scope

The scope of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is illustrated in Figure 12. Each segment of the circle represents the MEL activities that will be explored through the guiding questions presented outside of the circle. These questions

can form the basis of tailored questions, indicators, and data collection from the working group, key project, and Plan stakeholders as well as the community of Hilltops and Upper Lachlan more broadly.

Figure 12: Scope of enquiry for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (Source: Future Drought Fund)

Impact

What signs are there towards long-term drought resilience?

What priorities and opportunities do the programs reveal for drought resilience, future Funding Plans and programs?

Appropriateness

To what extent are the programs aligned with the strategic objectives of the Funding Plan, and targeted at important needs?

What can be done to improve the appropriateness of the investments?

Effectiveness

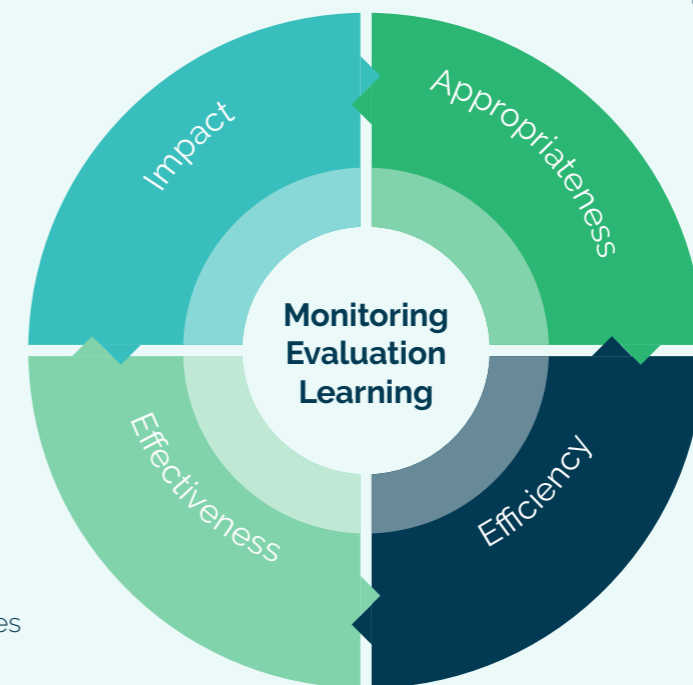
To what extent are programs achieving their intended outcomes (and any unintended outcomes)?

What could be done to improve the outcomes of the investments?

Efficiency

To what extent are the program outputs being administered and delivered efficiently, and to the expected quality?

What can be done to improve efficiency of the investments?



7.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Roles and Responsibilities

The achievement of Plan outcomes will rely on ongoing collaboration between Hilltops Council, Upper Lachlan Shire Council and the Canberra Regional Joint Organisation, in addition to the suggested project leads and stakeholders outlined under each proposed action.

The proposed approach is for the Councils to utilise their existing internal Executive meetings

to act as a Working Group, with a standing agenda item to include this RDRP. Delegates from Hilltops and Upper Lachlan will meet quarterly to discuss the Plan, prioritise actions, identify funding pathways and monitor the implementation of individual actions and the overall Plan. This will be documented by meeting minutes and action items.



7.3 Evaluation

The following key evaluation questions are high level questions designed to frame the analysis of progress and performance of the Hilltops and Upper Lachlan RDRP against the above framework. These key evaluation questions may help to structure regular tracking and reporting.

- Have any barriers or challenges been identified throughout the implementation of plan, and what solutions to address these have been identified?

7.3.1 Effectiveness:

- What is the level of understanding, capacity and capability of stakeholders to lead, contribute or support to actions or objectives identified in the Plan?
- What have been the outcomes (intended, unintended, positive, and negative) of the plan implementation process and progress?
- To what extent has progress contributed to or furthered the systems objectives and drought resilience priorities?
- Has the plan been used for or otherwise supported successful funding and grant applications?

7.3.2 Drought resilience maturation:

To what extent has efforts in implementing the plan contributed to:

- Creating stronger connectedness and greater social capital within our communities, contributing to well-being and security?
- Empowering our communities and businesses to implement activities that improve their resilience to drought?
- Supporting more primary producers and land managers to adopt whole-of-system approaches to natural resource management and/or income diversification activities.

Table 7.1 provides specific indicators for regular monitoring of the overall Plan. These are to be used in tandem with the specific KPIs listed under each action.

FDF High-level indicators	Specific RDR Plan Indicators	Evaluation Approach
Intermediate outcomes of the Plan (1-4 years)		
Agricultural businesses are self-reliant, productive, and profitable (economic resilience).	<p>Improving the diversity of farm incomes provides landholders with alternative revenue streams, enhancing their economic resilience.</p> <p>Increasing tourism offerings within the Region to increase tourism visitation and local spending.</p> <p>Skill development initiatives associated with agritourism enhance community and landholder adaptability to changing economic landscapes and provide new avenues for employment.</p> <p>Supplementary income can help finance complementary sustainability practices on-farm to maintain the successful operation of the venture, building capacity for environmental stewardship.</p> <p>Reduced disruptions of business operations and therefore reduced economic losses.</p> <p>Business owners actively pursue opportunities to adopt better financial planning, income diversification and utilisation of available grants, rebates, and financial support to increase financial security of their business pre-, during, and post-drought.</p> <p>Reduced water consumption in households (potentially leading to reduced water bills).</p> <p>Delayed Capital Expenditure by Councils to install rainfall independent water supply infrastructure such as recycled water plants and desalination plants, including treatment, piping, and pumping.</p>	<p>Monitor ongoing business cash flow, with learning from previous droughts implemented into management plans.</p> <p>Economic metrics reported quarterly or annually.</p> <p>Annual reporting on agritourism activities.</p> <p>Annual reporting on employment rate.</p> <p>Bi-annual business surveys.</p> <p>Council's annual budget tracking report.</p> <p>Evaluation of previous lessons learned.</p> <p>Stakeholder/landholder/business owner interviews and surveys.</p>
Agricultural landscapes are functional and sustainable, with healthy natural capital (environmental resilience)	<p>Promotion of responsible water use and conservation to help preserve and protect local ecosystems during drought conditions, maintain water quality, and reduce stress on water resources during drought.</p> <p>Improved uptake of sustainable land management practices through awareness of available rebates, programs, and support.</p> <p>Instils a sense of environmental responsibility and stewardship through drought education for school children, which can lead to a lasting positive impact on local ecosystems.</p> <p>Improved natural flow of rivers and catchments and overall waterway health through biodiversity indicators such as population ecology of fish species.</p> <p>Portable water consumption has reduced as a result on implementing water saving measures.</p>	<p>Monitor ongoing water usage, annual reporting, and tracking.</p> <p>Local Government State of the Environment Reporting metrics.</p> <p>ABS metrics on land cover.</p> <p>Rebate & Program tracking reports.</p> <p>Stakeholder interviews and surveys.</p>

Table 7.1 provides specific indicators for regular monitoring of the overall Plan. These are to be used in tandem with the specific KPIs listed under each action.

FDF High-level indicators	Specific RDR Plan Indicators	Evaluation Approach
<p>Agricultural communities are resourceful, adaptable, and thriving (social resilience)</p>	<p>Agritourism has contributed to the preservation of cultural identity.</p> <p>Improved water management practices, which can help ensure a more reliable water supply for communities, reducing the risk of water shortages during droughts and enhancing public health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Improved social connections across the community, with greater uptake and awareness of available support services offered across the region (both physical health, mental, and financial supports). Build a strong sense of community, encouraging mutual support and shared experiences.</p> <p>Improved awareness and transparency of support available, leading to more empowered communities and individuals during times of distress.</p> <p>Networking through exchange of ideas, contributing to ongoing learning and development.</p> <p>Empowering decision-making of landholders by providing appropriate tools and strategies can result in positive mental health outcomes.</p>	<p>Annual reporting and review of RDRP implementation, barriers, and opportunities, making changes to the RDRP as necessary to meet the regional needs of communities.</p> <p>Support service feedback reports.</p> <p>Stakeholder and community interviews and surveys.</p> <p>Key questions to ask include:</p> <p>How confident are the community's necessary skills and resources to face drought and make necessary changes?</p> <p>How invested are they in implementing the RDRP?</p> <p>What actions or decisions have been directly initiated as a result of the RDRP?</p>
Long-term outcomes (4+ years)		
<p>Stronger connectedness and greater social capital within communities, contributing to wellbeing and security.</p> <p>Communities implement transformative activities that improve their resilience to drought.</p> <p>More primary producers preserve natural capital while also improving productivity and profitability.</p>	<p>There is a common understanding and shared vision in the region to manage drought risks and build community drought resilience.</p> <p>The region works collectively and in partnerships to build drought resilience across three main pillars.</p> <p>Measures are implemented to limit impacts of drought and better respond to drought.</p> <p>Stakeholders and communities actively share knowledge and take actions contributing towards drought resilience.</p>	<p>Monitoring and reporting of regional level indicators that are captured as part of Local Government surveillance, surveys, and annual reporting.</p> <p>ABS census data on volunteering, mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Records of case studies demonstrate changes as a result of actions taken from the implementation of the Plan.</p>

7.4 Tools to support Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

A range of tools can be used as part of the reporting:

- Program Evaluation – At the end of each project or action, request feedback from stakeholders, implementation partners and project participants.
- Meeting and Event Data – Record data related to attendance, event outcomes, or attendee satisfaction via post-event surveys.
- Media Monitoring – Capture stories profiled in the media related to drought resilience activities undertaken by individuals, groups, or businesses in the Region.

- Media Analytics - Capture insights from social media, including reach, engagement, reactions and audience demographics.
- Community Surveys – Capture feedback on project effectiveness, explore system changes and inform options for future action.
- Case studies – Record case studies of changes made and benefits realised as a result of projects implemented as part of this Plan.

Opportunities exist to inform and align the MEL process with the Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework and their Community Strategic Plans. This will enable efficiencies and optimisation of time and efforts.

7.5 Assumptions

There are several key assumptions underpinning the effective implementation of the Plan:

- There is sufficient support, resources and capacity to establish a governance structure which is effective in coordination and implementation.
- The suggested action owners have the capacity and capability to lead and support actions.
- Suggested action owners and stakeholders are willing to work together to achieve the actions as outlined.
- The regional community is motivated to take ownership of the completed plan and actively participant in its implementation.
- Sufficient funding can be secured via the RDRP program or other sources.
- The region can continue to review, update, and implement their Plan.

To mitigate these assumptions, several elements have been deliberately embedded in the program

logic. Most actions include provision for the recruitment of a project officer or contracting of actions to an external provider. A specific action to promote collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders has been included, via the Roundtable Collaboration Event action. This action creates an opportunity to monitor and evaluate the overall program leveraging the project officer or resource(s) employed utilising the implementation funds. This will assist in overcoming the resourcing constraints highlighted by the program participants, particularly, Canberra Regional Joint Organisation, Hilltops Council and Upper Lachlan Shire Council. Similarly, the inclusion of an action to monitor mental health and wellbeing, allows an opportunity to detect any changes in the community's level of resilience, and identify where additional effort may be required. In a similar manner, the action to integrate drought resilience across Council processes, is designed in part, to embed ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

08 / IN THE FUTURE

Drought resilience planning is an iterative process. As we progress with the implementation of the actions listed above, we hope these will reduce the vulnerability, or improve the coping capacity of our community. However, things will still be changing, including the climate, our population dynamics, agricultural markets, to name a few. A continual process of adaptive management is needed. The questions below are designed to act as a guide for future work.

- What uncertainties exist and how can we overcome or mitigate these?
- What changes have we observed in our climate and agricultural enterprises and what future scenarios are possible?
- What have we learnt from recent drought events, in terms of direct drought impacts, exposed sectors and supply chains and downstream effects on our communities, services, businesses and environment?
- What other trends, shocks and stressors are influencing our Region and our future?
- What does resilience look like for our people, our communities, our environment, our economy and our infrastructure?

- What are our community strengths and what are we doing well so we can maintain these approaches? What do we need to change or modify to improve outcomes? Where is wholesale transformational change required?
- Key elements of future updates to this plan include:
 1. Continued community and stakeholder engagement to obtain diverse perspectives on drought impacts and risks and the cause-effect relationships which exist. This engagement is crucial in informing priority themes, goals, and objectives.
 2. Quantifying the reliance of our businesses and regional economy on water availability, so we can distinguish between those sectors which are heavily, partially, or minimally reliant. This will allow our interventions to be tailored and identify where transformational change may be required.
 3. Developing our understanding of, and evidence-base, of our natural environment's two-way interaction with drought. Opportunities exist to adopt more sustainable land management practices which deliver win-win outcomes for biodiversity, our physical and mental wellbeing and farm profitability.





**CANBERRA REGION
JOINT ORGANISATION**

Regional Drought Resilience Plan

HILLTOPS AND UPPER LACHLAN COMMUNITIES