

RMCG

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Evaluation of the Victorian Government Drought Response Package 2015 – 2017

Final Report

Agriculture Victoria; Department of Economic Development, Jobs,
Transport and Resources

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List of Abbreviations

Ag Vic	Agriculture Victoria
ALERT	Awareness, Links, Enable, Resilient, Teams
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
CaLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CBR	Cost benefit ratio
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CSEF	Camps Schools and Excursions Fund
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DEP	Drought Employment Program
DES	Drought Extension Services
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
EYM	Early Year Manager
FRMG	Farm Risk Management Grants
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GWMWater	Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
HALT	Hope Assisted Local Tradies
KEQ	Key evaluation question
KFS	Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
LGA	Local Government Area
LOFG	Look Over the Farm Gate
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid
NCFH	National Centre for Farmer Health
NW	North West branch of RFCS
OLM	Outcomes Logic Model
PCP	Primary Care Partnerships
RCC	Rural City Council
RDC	Regional Drought Coordinator
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
RFCS	Rural Financial Counselling Service

RJIF	Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund
SACES	South Australian Centre for Economic Studies
SBV	Small Business Victoria
SC	Shire Council
SCA	Stock Containment Areas
SCC	Seasonal Conditions Committee
SFF	Sustainable Farming Families
SRV	Sport and Recreation Victoria
VFF	Victorian Farmers Federation
WDA	Wimmera Development Association
WSW	Wimmera South West branch of RFCS

Summary A: Overview of Findings

The Drought Response Package

During 2014-2015, much of Victoria received below average rainfall. Over this period, the 24-month rainfall deficiencies were the lowest on record for large parts of the state. In November 2015, the Victorian Government announced a \$17 million Drought Response Package, followed up with an additional \$10 million in funding in March 2016.

The package was based on the Victorian Government’s Drought Preparedness and Response Framework. This framework includes a set of principles that are used to guide drought support. An early step in developing the package was to seek advice from the relevant government agencies on how existing initiatives or programs could be used to support drought affected communities and businesses. This step generated most of the programs that eventually formed the package. In most cases existing programs were expanded or adjusted to ensure they could be readily accessed by the drought affected communities. There were also new programs that were developed specifically to address particular needs of the community, while still complementing the existing programs. The package was also shaped by the government’s direct consultation with drought affected communities. They were invited to provide direct input on the \$10 million Drought Support Fund – part of the overall Drought Response Package.

The package aimed to provide appropriate, timely and targeted support for communities who were affected by drought. It ultimately comprised 21 programs across six support areas, shown in Table i.

Table i: Support areas and programs in the Drought Response Package

Long term outcome 3+ years Communities and businesses have improved skills, infrastructure and capacity to manage future drought events					
1. Farm business support	2. Small business support	3. Individual & family support	4. Community & regional development support	5. Support for water security	6. Local employment support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extension services to farmers Stock Containment Areas Program Additional Rural Financial Counsellors (RFC) Farm Risk Management Grants Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated Small Business services (RFC) Small Business Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement Mental Health First Aid Training National Centre for Farmer Health activities Back to school Supporting kindergartens’ participation Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Drought Coordinator Local Drought Response Program Fast-tracking regional development projects Road rehabilitation works Sporting club grants program Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants Foodbank project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water infrastructure projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CMA Drought Employment Program Agricultural Traineeships
\$5.1M 19%	\$0.38M 1%	\$7M 26%	\$6M 22%	\$4.1M 15%	\$4.6M 17%
\$27.3M Total package					

Evaluation findings – support areas

This evaluation found that the programs delivered through the six support areas were delivered well and were regarded positively by the target audiences. The decision to deliver a broad-based package (beyond just farm businesses) was particularly noted by program delivery partners and members of communities in the drought affected areas of the state. Almost all of the activities and short-term outcomes across the six support areas were delivered as planned, though the long-term impacts of some of the programs are, at this stage, unclear. A summary of our findings for each of the six support areas is provided here.

- **Farm business support** – the four programs in this support area were delivered well, based on the number and variety of activities completed, and the strong levels of farmer participation. There is good evidence that programs like the Stock Containment Area Grants and Rural Financial Counselling Service have had positive impacts, but the level of long-term impacts are less clear and should be the focus of additional analyses.
- **Small business support** – the two programs in this area were delivered efficiently and were well received by businesses. Using the Rural Financial Counselling Service for small non-farm business support was particularly successful and an efficient and effective way to offer services to non-farm businesses affected by the drought.
- **Individual and family support** – programs that addressed the acute needs of individuals and families were delivered efficiently and were well received. Enabling easy access to assistance – like kindergarten fee support – was highly commended by those involved in these programs. The programs aimed at improving resilience of individuals and families have potential for long lasting benefits, but given the impacts of drought often last longer than the drought itself, these benefits may be lost if the programs end immediately once the drought has officially ended.
- **Community and regional development support** – the impacts of the different programs in this area varied. Overall, there were very high numbers of participants in events – approximately 44,000 participants in over 150 events held in all 11 local government areas. These events, and the infrastructure investments, appeared to stimulate local economic activity at a time when it was needed. There were some communication and delivery challenges among the programs, with some delivery partners reporting staff stress due to the demands of planning, organising and running so many activities in their communities.
- **Support for water security** – the water infrastructure improvement projects were very well planned, managed and delivered. They delivered clear economic, social and environmental benefits both in the short and long-term. This efficiency and high level of benefit reflects a large amount of groundwork that had already been completed (in non-drought periods) by Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water (GMMWater), Councils and state government.
- **Local employment support** – this support area delivered two quite different programs, with good results from both. The drought employment program, based on previous similar programs, was delivered quickly and efficiently with good rates of participation. The second program, agricultural traineeships, successfully built skills and capacity among young people in drought affected areas. The program placed 20 trainees, when it was predicted by the local traineeship provider that without the program, there would have been only two placements that year due to the drought.

Evaluation findings – overall package

The evaluation found that it is very likely that the overall Drought Response Package resulted in significant progress towards the long-term outcomes, namely ‘improvements in skills, infrastructure and capacity in communities that will help them manage future droughts’. This finding is based on the body of evidence across all 21 programs and the assumptions that underpin the package. The ability to report on progress towards the long-term outcome is limited because there was little specific data collected or reported-on for the long-term outcome and some of the intermediate outcomes, in particular communities or individuals ‘feeling supported’,

are difficult to measure. Even so, there is a substantial body of evidence on activities as well as short-term and intermediate outcomes that all point to positive progress. This includes the following highlights:

- The programs in the package reached the target audiences and numbers participating were strong.
- Basing the package on existing activities and previous similar work was both an efficient and effective approach.
- The infrastructure projects included in the package were particularly successful. The key to this success was that the managers of these projects had already completed planning and design work (in non-drought times), so these projects were ready to be implemented immediately.
- The package was a balanced mix of acute support for individuals, communities and businesses, along with programs that aimed to improve the ability of individuals and communities to manage future droughts.
- Many of the programs that aimed to provide acute support were deployed quickly, which was vital to their success.
- Streamlining the application process (e.g. removing eligibility tests) for some of the short-term grants was a positive feature that enabled rapid access to this support without significant risk of resources being wasted.
- The regional drought coordinator role was a critical part of the success of the package due, at least in part, to the connections made across all of the major components of the program.
- The package actively excluded support that subsidised normal business costs (e.g. water rate relief), many of which had been used in previous drought packages.

Some programs have particular on-going significance in ensuring that the long-term benefits from the package flow to the participating communities. This includes financial counselling, mental health training and farmer drought support (the coordinator role as well as extension services). Because of their significance for the long-term benefits of the package, support for these programs beyond the end of the drought period is warranted.

Drought policy principles

An important task for this evaluation was to consider whether the Drought Response Package was consistent with the principles that underpin the Victorian Government's '*Drought Preparedness and Response Framework*'. This framework is intended to assist government to make 'informed and measured decisions about how best to support Victorian farmers, businesses and communities manage and recover from the impacts of drought'. These principles were provided to RMCG by Agriculture Victoria.

The evaluation found that the package was consistent with the government's framework. Comments on the degree to which the overall package has been consistent with each specific principle are provided below:

i. Drought should be treated as a legitimate business risk that farmers and other businesses should prepare for.

The programs under the Farm Business Support and Small Business Support areas all reinforced this message to farmers and other businesses. They addressed immediate needs but used this engagement to raise the longer-term issues with participating farmers and other businesses. This generally took two forms-creating infrastructure that would help farmers better manage future drought (e.g. stock containment areas and farm water infrastructure), and secondly, focussing on provision of information and support for business and financial planning.

Importantly, the package specifically excluded some types of support. There were cases where support that was offered as part of previous drought packages was excluded from this package, and there were some cases where suggestions made in the consultation phase for this package were not taken on-board. For

instance, subsidies or rebates for business expenses like municipal rates, water rates, or water tanks were excluded because they were considered to be normal business input costs.

ii. Drought policy should aim to support the long-term structural adjustment directions.

The Farm Business Support programs were directly focussed on long-term structural adjustment. The services delivered by these programs included financial planning and farm infrastructure grants (e.g. Stock Containment Area Grants). The financial planning services (e.g. Rural Financial Counselling Service) facilitated discussions with farmers on the long-term directions for their farm businesses, and considered options as varied as expansion through to withdrawal from the industry. The infrastructure grants were focussed on (small) improvements on the farm that would help the business to better manage future droughts and other challenging conditions.

Explicit in these programs was the goal that they should not impede structural adjustments in agricultural industries in the drought affected areas. The evaluation found that the design and delivery of these programs was consistent with this principle and they are unlikely to have impeded current or future structural adjustments.

iii. Drought assistance will be considered in the context of the national drought reform principles and on-going assistance that is provided by the national farmer preparedness package.

The evaluation did not identify any cases where the package was inconsistent with or duplicated on-going services provided by the Commonwealth Government. This was a key focus of the governance group that was coordinating the package across the Victorian Government. The Rural Financial Counselling Service was a very positive example of coordination with Commonwealth Government services.

iv. Drought assistance will be considered in the context of on-going Victorian Government services that assist communities, farmers and businesses prepare for drought.

The evaluation did not identify any cases where the package was inconsistent with on-going Victorian Government programs. There were several examples where the programs drew heavily on existing or previous similar work to ensure consistency and efficient delivery. For example, a particular strength of the package was the large number of programs that were essentially extensions of existing programs. These included Rural Financial Counselling Service, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, Water Infrastructure projects, the road rehabilitation works and many other regional development projects.

v. Drought related assistance should target household welfare and communities through support for social and economic infrastructure.

The explicit creation of five support areas in addition to the more conventional Farm Business Support is a clear example of this principle in action. The most prominent of these additional support areas were the six programs in Individual and Family Support area, and the seven programs in Community and Regional Development Support area. The programs focussed on social and economic support and used a mix of approaches to ensure support reached the target audience. For example, families were supported through their local school, through local medical services and through many infrastructure projects within the communities.

This was also exemplified by the inclusion of social and recreational water projects in the Water Security Support area; rather than being solely focused on improving water availability and reliability for emergency response, livestock farm businesses and town water supplies.

vi. Drought assistance should focus on maintaining and increasing the efficient use of natural resources.

The main programs that addressed this principle were the stock containment areas and the water infrastructure programs. Stock containment areas have been widely used in previous droughts and there is good anecdotal evidence that they are effective at reducing stress on livestock and natural resources during drought. The program was very popular which led to it being over-subscribed. The approach taken to manage access to stock containment areas saw farms with higher stock numbers prioritised. This did raise some concerns but was sound, given the aim was for long-term protection of the land and natural resource base.

The water infrastructure projects have directly increased the efficient use of water resources in targeted regions. Extensions to existing pipelines were completed, construction of the new South West Loddon pipeline commenced, and several other technical feasibility studies and business cases were prepared for future rural water supply pipelines in parts of western Victoria. Environmental benefits are also expected in the longer term through reduced reliance on catchment dams and opportunities for watering drought refuge areas with pipelines. Projects resulting in reduced potable water use on sport and recreation facilities have also led to more efficient water use.

Lessons from previous drought responses

The Victorian Government's previous drought response package, for the so-called 'millennium drought' drought, was evaluated by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies (SACES). Many of the findings from that evaluation influenced this package. Notable from that evaluation is that the previous program was much larger (over \$300 million) and there were many more programs (around 40 compared to 21 in this package).

One of the key findings of the previous evaluation was that 'legitimate business costs such as rates, fees and charges, should not be subsidised by government' since this was considered to interfere with appropriate structural adjustment and business transitions. Consistency with this principle is demonstrated by some of the programs that were not included in this most recent package. Water rate rebates and shire rate rebates were the most expensive of the programs in the previous package. The SACES evaluation explicitly singled these out as being legitimate and predictable business costs that should not be subsidised. Business costs were not directly subsidised in the most recent drought package and we did not identify any disquiet about the exclusion of these rebates.

Another finding from the previous evaluation was that emergency relief was delivered into 'the hands of those families with the greatest financial need' and in an 'appropriately speedy and compassionate manner'. Our evaluation found that the funding was adequately targeted (while sometimes not means tested) and this was a key success factor in the individual, family and community support delivered through the package.

Finally, our evaluation reached a similar conclusion to this previous assessment in relation to the long-term impacts of some programs. Similar to the findings reported by SACES, we found that the impact of programs on community resilience (as a long-term outcome) is uncertain. However, the fact that many programs have now been used several times over many years, means that a specific focus on investigating whether they are delivering the long-term impacts as anticipated is possible. Among the programs that could be assessed further are the Stock Containment Area Grants, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Mental Health First Aid training, kindergarten and school funding support programs and the Drought Employment Program.

Summary B: Recommendations

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The Regional Drought Coordinator (RDC) role was a key to the success of the whole package. This coordination function helped to ensure the wide variety of programs on offer functioned as a package. The prompt creation of this position (with a skilled staff member filling the role) and the fact that it was regionally based, was critical for the success of the role.</p>	<p>1. The Regional Drought Coordinator role should be converted to an ongoing 'Regional Climate Response Coordinator' role that would be proactive and focussed on preparedness rather than response and recovery¹.</p>
<p>The evaluation found that some programs that aimed to deliver short-term support along with a long-term change had mixed success and it is unlikely that both needs were well served. Focussing on long-term change can be very difficult if the more immediate and urgent concerns are not addressed adequately. If programs stop once the official end of the drought has been declared, then progress towards achieving sustained change can stall and even revert. Long-term change may require support beyond the end date of the drought.</p>	<p>2. Programs that support long-term planning and drought preparedness should continue beyond the official 'end' of the drought period when people's capacity to look at long-term planning increases. Examples of the programs that fit this model are financial counselling and business planning (for farms and small business), mental health services and farm drought support (the coordinator role as well as extension services).</p>
<p>As part of this package the Rural Financial Counselling Service offered its counselling services to small non-farm businesses in drought affected rural communities (the 'Dedicated Small Business Services' program). In addition to increasing availability of the service outside of crisis times, this extended scope was very positive and recognised the wider impacts of drought.</p>	<p>3. Extend the scope (and potentially resources) of the Rural Financial Counselling Service to provide on-going access for all small businesses (farm and non-farm) in rural communities affected by drought.</p>
<p>Many, but not all, of the programs included in the drought package were available relatively quickly after the announcement of the package. However, not all programs were equally time critical. Those with a longer-term focus and few immediate benefits, were not as time sensitive as those addressing acute needs of the community. The programs that addressed the most acute needs should have been prioritised ahead of others. It is not clear that this always occurred although some of the factors that affected timing were beyond the control of the programs (e.g. later funding announcements).</p>	<p>4. In future packages, the planning phase should consider grouping actions into those addressing the acute or immediate needs of a community, versus those focussed on the longer term (after this drought and in preparation for the next). Ensure the programs focussed on the acute or immediate needs are given priority for immediate roll-out. The programs that are more strongly focussed on future preparedness can be commenced slightly later.</p>

¹ This recommendation aligns with a similar previous recommendation made in the 2017 Evaluation of the Drought Extension Program by First Person Consulting.

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The majority of programs were either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ activities that were already planned for delivery in the near future that could be brought forward (e.g. water, 'fast tracked' infrastructure and road projects), or ▪ existing activities or support that could be expanded (e.g. financial counselling). <p>This was an effective approach because it usually meant delivery of the programs fell to organisations or agencies that had previous experience. All of the programs examined could be expanded, but this would depend on the local conditions and demand, as well as the capacity of those responsible for their delivery.</p>	<p>5. Future drought packages should continue to leverage existing services and activities that have already been planned, as their core offerings. Based on the local needs, any or all of these programs could be expanded. New activities can be included but they should be explicitly designed to fill a known gap.</p> <p>6. Future drought packages should look at whether programs that were effective parts of this package can be expanded to operate at a larger scale (e.g. the agricultural traineeships for school leavers).</p>
<p>While programs generally engaged regional staff who had good knowledge of their local community, there were examples where there this local consultation did not occur.</p>	<p>7. Ensure delivery teams include local staff from the earliest possible stages in the process to enable delivery to be tailored to local communities.</p>
<p>While basing the program on existing activities has been a positive, it does rely on the delivery partner rapidly ramping up their activity in order to deliver the drought support programs. The evaluation found that some local governments reported that they had difficulty meeting the added demands on their staff that came with the drought support programs.</p>	<p>8. Work with delivery partners to identify whether they require additional assistance to deliver the services they are responsible for.</p>
<p>Many of the programs, particularly those focussed on individuals and families, changed or removed elements like means testing to determine eligibility to access services or support. As part of the response package, this requirement was waived and fee support was available to anyone in the drought affected local government areas. This approach appears to have been a very effective way to achieve one of the main intermediate outcomes of the package – to help communities feel supported as they manage the drought.</p>	<p>9. As part of the acute phase of responding to drought, continue to use approaches that minimise the demands placed on those seeking assistance, particularly relating to family and individual support. Where possible and reasonable, reduce or waive eligibility tests in order to be responsive to immediate needs of communities in stress. It should be made clear to all that this is a temporary change due to the extreme circumstances.</p>
<p>The program to bring forward regional development projects in drought-affected communities was welcomed and highly valued by local councils. However, there was a feeling that guidelines on the co-contribution and reporting requirements, could have been relaxed given that it was a drought response package.</p>	<p>10. Always include regional delivery staff in the development of eligibility guidelines and co-contribution requirements associated with response programs to ensure these parts of the programs are sensitive to local conditions.</p>
<p>The Drought Interdepartmental Coordination Group provided effective and efficient governance and coordination for the package. The group generally functioned well with all of the agencies represented and actively participating. They provided valuable advice and feedback from their departmental staff and their delivery partners in the regions.</p>	<p>11. In future drought response packages, continue to use a governance model that features a coordinating body with representation from all of the agencies involved. Continue to emphasise the importance of strong communication between this group and the delivery partners, support agencies and stakeholder organisations.</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The Seasonal Conditions Committee hosted by Horsham Rural City Council appears to have evolved into a key regional advisory group. The Committee had broad representation from government agencies and they appeared to make a significant contribution to coordination and communication of the package within their region.</p>	<p>12. Future drought response packages should actively support regional level coordination groups (like the Seasonal Conditions Committee that operated in this drought), aiming to ensure all regional delivery partners are connected with at least one of these regional groups. This should not extend to requiring the formation of these groups but should focus on supporting them when and if they are initiated in the regions.</p>
<p>The quality of information provided in the regular progress reports was inconsistent and sometimes lacked details. Some programs lacked clear indicators that would demonstrate their impact and progress.</p>	<p>13. As part of routine reporting, programs must include data on what proportion of the potential recipients have been reached. This measure of the potential reach of the program must be identified during the planning phase for the response package (or as part of the first progress report) so that reporting expectations are clear from the beginning.</p>
<p>The evaluation found that few programs had recorded baseline data, against which changes driven by the program could be measured.</p>	<p>14. To improve routine reporting, each program must identify at least one baseline measure during the program planning phase (or as part of the first progress report). This baseline should be either a direct measure, or an indicator, of progress towards the program's outcome. It must be a measure that is expected to respond to the actions being delivered through the program. Changes due to the program will then be measured relative to this baseline.</p>
<p>The impact assessment completed through this evaluation found that it is likely that drought affected communities, businesses and individuals will have 'improved skills, infrastructure, and capacity to manage future drought events' as a result of this program. However, we are not able to assess whether these changes are sufficiently widespread to have had a major impact across the affected communities. Given that this region was affected by the millennium drought and received similar support, there is an opportunity to analyse whether those that received support from the previous package were better prepared for this most recent drought.</p>	<p>15. Conduct a longitudinal analysis of the impacts of drought support programs by re-visiting people who received support during previous droughts in this region. Analyse whether they were better prepared for this most recent drought. An example of this would be to assess whether stock containment areas established during the millennium drought were effective in the most recent drought. Other candidates for this type of review are the farm business planning services, mental health services and water infrastructure projects. The Rural Financial Counselling Service should be considered for this type of review however, this should be incorporated into the Australian Government's review program for the service.</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Successful marketing of opportunities to access support can result in demand for support that exceeds the resources of the program. For example, the Farm Risk Management Grant program had around 400 unsuccessful applicants (and 108 successful). This means that it had the potential to generate significant dissatisfaction among the target community. If over-subscription is identified early, it is possible to make adjustments like reducing maximum grant sizes, increasing the budget available or re-directing a category of applications to an alternative program.</p>	<p>16. Continue the practice of identifying the risks of over-subscriptions to programs (during planning phases and once the program is running) in order to identify these risks as early as possible. If there is a risk of major over-subscription (e.g. the number of unsuccessful applicants is larger than the number successful), review the program design and, when possible, implement appropriate actions to avoid creating a large number of unsuccessful applicants.</p>
<p>Because budgets were (and are always) limited, several programs that involved applications for support used priority setting processes. The methods used were not always transparent (particularly to applicants) and they were not consistent with the goals of the program (e.g. preference given to the first applications received rather than those with greatest need).</p>	<p>17. Build the following priority-setting principles into programs where there are grants involved. Priority-setting techniques must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ be consistent with the goals of that program ▪ favour those options that offer the best combination of benefits (maximum) and costs (least) ▪ make sure applicants are aware of selection criteria that will be used ▪ guard against unintentionally favouring unrelated attributes of applicants (e.g. applicants who are skilled at completing an application form are favoured).

1 Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW

During 2014-2015, much of Victoria received below average rainfall. The 24-month rainfall deficiencies were the lowest on record for large parts of the state. In November 2015, the Victorian Government announced a \$17 million Drought Response Package, followed up with an additional \$10 million in funding in March 2016.

An early step in developing the package was to seek advice from the relevant government agencies on how existing initiatives or programs could be used to support drought affected communities and businesses. This step generated most of the programs that eventually formed the package. In most cases these existing programs were expanded or adjusted to ensure they were available and could be readily accessed by the drought affected communities. There were also a few programs that were developed specifically to address particular needs of the community, while still complementing the existing programs.

The package was based on the Victorian Government's Drought Preparedness and Response Framework. This framework was developed after the 'millennium drought' in the early 2000s and includes a set of principles that are used to guide drought support. Principles aim to ensure that assistance provided does not discourage drought preparedness, and that support should extend beyond the farm because the impacts of drought are far-reaching in rural communities.

The package aimed to provide appropriate, timely and targeted support for communities who were affected by drought. This is reflected in the breadth and depth of the package – 21 programs that used a range of delivery partners, and covered:

1. Farm business support
2. Small business support
3. Individual and family support
4. Community and regional development support
5. Water security support
6. Local employment support.

The package was principally delivered by four government departments:

- Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR)
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Department of Education and Training (DET).

Programs were targeted to those areas most affected by drought which were in the north and west of Victoria (Figure 1-1). However, unlike previous droughts, there was no specific boundary used to define eligibility for accessing services. This meant that some services were available statewide (e.g. farm extension services) while others were delivered through agencies like local governments. While this approach added some complexity to delivery of the package, it avoided what was historically considered to be the arbitrary exclusion of some of those in need of support or assistance because their property was located on



Figure 1-1: Drought affected communities where much of the package was targeted

the 'wrong side of a line on the map'. Instead of relying on a mapped extent of the drought (referred to in previous droughts as drought declared areas or Exceptional Circumstances declarations) the program was able to focus on need and could be targeted to meet the needs of a particular region.

One of the key delivery channels for the program was local government. The eleven local government areas (LGAs) that were heavily engaged in the program were:

- Ararat Rural City
- Buloke Shire
- Central Goldfields Shire
- Gannawarra Shire
- Hindmarsh Shire
- Horsham Rural City
- Loddon Shire
- Northern Grampians Shire
- Pyrenees Shire
- Yarriambiack Shire
- West Wimmera Shire.

1.2 PACKAGE FUNDING

A detailed breakdown of the announced Drought Response Package funding between each of the component programs within the six support areas is shown in Table 1-1. Noting that two of the component programs had internal funding released for the response and another program's budget was increased to fund additional projects.

Table 1-1: Support areas and programs in the Drought Response Package

SUPPORT AREA & LEAD	COMPONENT PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ANNOUNCED FUNDING	% PACKAGE
1. Farm business support				
DEDJTR: Agriculture Victoria	Extension services to farmers	Accelerate delivery of additional farm information and advisory services to support farmers during drought and dry seasons.	\$2,195,000	8%
DEDJTR: Agriculture Victoria	Stock Containment Areas Program	Eligible farmers provided with grants of up to \$2,000 and technical support to implement areas.	\$1,120,500	4%
DEDJTR: Agriculture Victoria	Additional Rural Financial Counsellors	Additional counselling services based on service level need.	\$270,000	1%
DEDJTR: Agriculture Victoria	Farm Risk Management Grants Program	Provided eligible farm businesses with grants up to \$10,000 to develop a business plan and then implement improvement measures to improve risk management practices.	\$1,500,000	5%
Subtotal			\$5,085,500	19%

SUPPORT AREA & LEAD	COMPONENT PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ANNOUNCED FUNDING	% PACKAGE
2. Small business support				
DEDJTR: Agriculture Victoria	Dedicated Small Business services provided by the Rural Financial Counselling Service	Small business counsellors appointed in north and west Victoria.	\$320,000	1%
DEDJTR: Small Business Victoria	Small Business Workshops	Crisis Business planning workshops.	\$60,000	<1%
Subtotal			\$380,000	1%
3. Individual and family support				
DHHS	Community engagement and support package and Mental Health First Aid training	Funding for Primary Care Partnerships and Mental Health First Aid training.	\$220,000	1%
NCFH	National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) activities	Activities to support farmers in drought impacted areas, includes Sustainable Farm Families programs.	\$0*	0%
DET	Back to school	Disadvantaged families attending Victorian Government Schools provided with uniforms, shoes and other essential items.	\$0*	0%
DET	Supporting kindergartens participation in drought affected communities	Drought Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, where eligible kindergartens can apply for a one-off grant to support their continued operation.	\$960,000	4%
DET	Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund	Extended to students affected by drought but whose families do not hold a health care card.	\$5,800,000	21%
Subtotal			\$6,980,000	26%
4. Community and regional development support				
DEDJTR: Agriculture Victoria	Regional Drought Coordinator	Located in Horsham to work with the most drought affected shires.	\$200,000	1%
DEDJTR: Regional Development Victoria	Local Council Drought Response Program	Grants of up to \$40,000 available to Local Councils in the 10 most drought affected areas.	\$400,000	1%

SUPPORT AREA & LEAD	COMPONENT PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ANNOUNCED FUNDING	% PACKAGE
DEDJTR: Regional Development Victoria	Fast tracking the consideration of regional development projects in identified drought impacted areas	Projects fast tracked through the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund (RJIF) in Buloke, Loddon, Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians, Horsham, Hindmarsh, Gannawarra, Pyrenees, Central Goldfields, West Wimmera and Ararat local government areas.	\$1,020,000**	4%
DEDJTR: Transport	Prioritising rehabilitation road works to projects in drought affected areas	Three projects in north west Victoria.	\$1,200,000	4%
Sport and Recreation Victoria	Sporting club grants program	\$100,000 to the Sporting club grants program in drought affected areas.	\$100,000	<1%
DELWP	Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants	Grants provided to allow drought affected councils to complete priority sport and recreational water infrastructure projects.	\$2,980,000	11%
DHHS	Foodbank	Implement cold storage units.	\$80,000	<1%
Subtotal			\$5,980,000	22%
5. Support for water security				
DELWP	Water infrastructure projects	To increase water supply to remote towns not connected to secure water supply. Includes stage 1 construction for South West Loddon Rural Water Supply Project.	\$4,130,000	15%
Subtotal			\$4,130,000	15%
6. Local employment support				
DELWP	CMA Drought Employment Program	Employ farmers, farm workers and individuals affected by drought to undertake environmental projects.	\$4,150,000	15%
DET	Agricultural Traineeships for School Leavers in Drought affected North West Victoria	Support for local employment and training for school leavers in drought-affected communities.	\$574,500	2%
Subtotal			\$4,724,500	17%
TOTAL			\$27.28 million	100%

Notes: *Internal budget reallocated; ** Funding increased to \$5.2 million.

1.3 THIS EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess effectiveness and efficiency of the Drought Response Package, and to inform the Victorian Government's current and future decision-making. The evaluation is timely given that the majority of the support programs were completed June 2017. It also positions Victoria well for the review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Drought Program Reform in late 2017. The evaluation has been guided by the Department of Treasury and Finance's (DTF) minimum standards for lapsing programs of greater than \$5 million.

2 Evaluation Method

2.1 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The evaluation examined both the 21 individual programs in the six areas of support, and the larger scale objectives of the package (Figure 2-1). This particularly included examining its alignment with the government's Drought Preparedness and Response Framework and the associated principles.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to allow an examination of the program outputs, and progress towards the intermediate and longer-term outcomes and goals, guided by the Outcomes Logic Model (OLM) developed by DEDJTR, shown in Appendix 1. The data collection framework for each of the six areas of support is shown in Appendix 2.

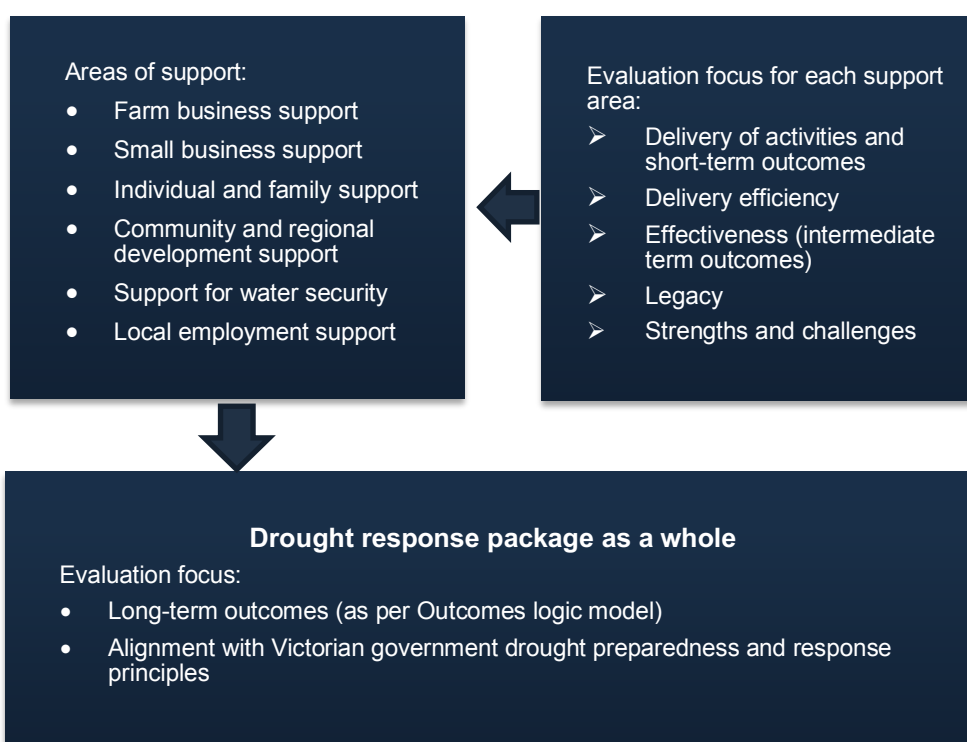


Figure 2-1: Illustration of the evaluation framework

2.2 KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Key evaluation questions (KEQs) were developed to guide the overall collection of evidence of the program's progress towards its stated objectives and outcomes. The questions were organised into two categories:

A. DELIVERY OUTPUTS AND EFFICIENCY

1. Have the component programs been delivered as planned?
 - Activities and outputs delivered
 - Within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level)
 - In line with appropriate governance and risk management practices?

2. Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs?
3. What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?

B. OUTCOMES AND EFFECTIVENESS

1. To what extent have the short and medium-term outcomes been achieved?
2. What is the evidence of progress toward these short and medium-term outcomes?
3. What worked well? What could have been improved? What lessons were learnt for future government response packages?

A set of interview questions were devised to guide interviews with personnel involved in the management and delivery of the component programs. The questions are shown in Appendix 3.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION

With the evaluation framework finalised, the process of data collection commenced. The first step in this process was to review the data already available. The focus of this review was to understand the extent to which the data already available would provide information on the different levels of results set out in the evaluation framework (and OLM for the package), namely:

- Activities
- Short-term outcomes
- Intermediate outcomes, and
- Long-term outcomes.

The gap analysis highlighted that most of the program areas had recorded data on the delivery of their activities and short-term outcomes, but there was far less information on intermediate and long-term outcomes (see Appendix 4). This data was typically in the form of progress reports provided to the package management group, but it also included evaluations that had already been completed for some programs.

This analysis was used to shape the subsequent data collection, mainly via one-on-one interviews, for this evaluation. Because of the variation across the programs (in the data available, the program goals and the structure of the program) the data collection was tailored to each program. The one consistency was that the program managers for all programs were interviewed. After this, the approach used varied widely, though the general focus was to gather data that described progress towards intermediate and long-term outcomes.

For the programs that had already been the subjects of detailed evaluations, we believed that this program manager interview was all that was required. For example, this was the case for the Stock Containment Area Grants and the Drought Extension Services Program.

Direct participants in the programs were not interviewed as part of this evaluation. In some cases this was because privacy and confidentiality considerations meant that contacting participants was not appropriate. In other cases, participants had already been contacted as part of other evaluations. For instance, 235 farmers who participated in the Stock Containment Area Grants and the Drought Extension Services program were surveyed as part of the 2017 evaluation of those programs and it was not necessary for them to be contacted again for this evaluation.

Drawing on the findings in the gap analysis, more effort was invested in the support areas where the data was incomplete or did not provide insights into the achievement of intermediate outcomes. In these cases, service deliverers, other partners or funding recipients were interviewed (in addition to the program manager). We

were also able to engage the Seasonal Conditions Committee convened by the Horsham Rural City Council in a workshop that gathered information and feedback on the programs.

The most important example of this approach can be seen in the two support areas where the data on intermediate outcomes was rated as poorest – the five programs in the individual and family support area and the seven programs in the community and regional development support areas. In these cases, interviews were conducted with partner organisations (e.g. State Schools Relief) and an organisation involved in delivery of the programs (Donald Primary School). Similarly, the majority of local governments in the drought affected area were contacted and interviewed as part of the review of the community and regional development support area.

Ultimately, a total of 53 one-on-one interviews were conducted during data collection (Appendix 5 shows the list of interviewees). In addition to these interviews (and the workshop with the Seasonal Conditions Committee), in many cases additional reports or other documents were also provided.

3 Structure of this Report

The results for each of the six support areas have been described in Sections 4 to 9 of the report. The analysis has focussed on the stated aim and intended outcomes of each support area and reflects our assessments of each of the 21 component programs.

The assessment of each support area is presented in the following way:

- Description of the programs in the support area
- Delivery of activities (assessment)
- Delivery efficiency (assessment)
- Effectiveness analysis (focussed mainly on short-term outcomes)
- Strengths and challenges faced by the programs
- A summary of progress towards the outcomes, particularly the intermediate outcomes
- The legacy of the support area, and
- A case study for each support area

The report has been prepared with two particular audiences in mind. The first group consists of those involved in delivering the support programs. We expect that they will be particularly interested in the analysis of the support area and each individual program. The second target audience is the people involved in the design of this and future support programs. The key findings section of the report (Section 10) is particularly targeted at this group with its focus on lessons and recommendations for future support packages.

4 Farm Business Support

KEY MESSAGES:

1. The four programs delivered under Farm Business Support reached a large number of people and were well regarded by participants.
2. They capitalised on the strong history of previous delivery of extension services, stock containment areas and financial counselling.
3. These programs aimed to address both the immediate needs of drought affected farmers, and to improve their ability to manage future droughts. All programs in this support area have evidence (at different levels of detail) that they made progress towards both of these aims. Activities that required farmers to work on longer term preparedness while they were managing the immediate impacts of the drought, did create additional tension for some, despite the possibility of long term benefits.

4.1 DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Farm Business Support area was:

To facilitate decision making, provide information, provide grants to incentivise practices, to manage conditions and prepare for future droughts.

Support was available through **four** component programs:

- A. Stock Containment Areas Grants (SCA)
- B. Farm Risk Management Grants (FRMG)
- C. Drought Extension Services (DES)
- D. Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)

These four programs are described further below.

A. STOCK CONTAINMENT AREAS PROGRAM (SCA)

The aim of this program was to support farmers to establish stock containment areas – enclosed areas to intensively hold, feed and water livestock in order to protect soil and pasture resources during adverse seasons, in this case drought. The SCA program was administered by Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), with applications assessed and prioritised by Agriculture Victoria (Ag Vic) field technical staff. Site assessments, site prioritisation, technical support and advice was provided by Ag Vic Extension Services staff.

B. FARM RISK MANAGEMENT GRANTS (FRMG)

Farm Risk Management Grants were available to farm businesses located in the 11 drought affected LGAs. They were administered by Rural Finance and involved grants of up to \$10,000 to build drought management capacity and knowledge in the farm business. The grant could be used for on-farm infrastructure or for skills and training, that had been identified in the farm business plan. If the farm did not have a current business plan, applicants could use up to \$3,000 (from the maximum of \$10,000 available) for the development of an approved business plan. The aim of FRMG was to:

- Increase farmers' business planning climate preparedness and risk management skills and general market knowledge

- Increase the number of farm businesses with business and risk management plans to operate in a challenging environmental and economic environment and take advantage of available opportunities
- Assist farmers to complete training or infrastructure improvements that would enhance the preparedness and longer-term viability of the farm
- Assist farmers identify skill needs through a skills audit and then receive targeted training
- Assist farm businesses in accessing new and expanding markets.

C. DROUGHT EXTENSION SERVICES TO FARMERS (DES)

The Drought Extension Services program delivered statewide farm information and advisory services to support farmers during the drought. In broad terms, the DES aimed to provide farmers with practical knowledge, advice and support. It was designed to provide extension support for several other programs, including technical advice and oversight for the SCA program. Online tools, social media and media sources were all used to increase awareness of extension support services available and to improve accessibility for all affected farmers. This complemented the range of printed materials (e.g. Drought Services Guide, Sheep and Beef Drought Feeding books, information sheets) that were circulated through meetings, field days, farmer organisations, DEDJTR offices.

The services were delivered via face to face technical workshops, field days and events that covered topics as diverse as financial and farm management, farmer health and animal health and welfare. Existing farmer networks such as Better Beef and Best Wool/Best Lamb were utilised. The program also included specialised workshops on financial literacy and farm risk management.

A focus on farmer health led to the DES funding and being involved in implementing the Look Over the Farm Gate (LOFG) campaign, and supporting the National Centre for Farmer Health in the delivery of the Sustainable Farm Families program. For example, the DES assisted with a range of LOFG community events such as the family fishing day events organised with Fisheries Victoria, CMAs and local groups.

D. RURAL FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICE (RFCS)

The aim of this program was to provide farmers with the skills, knowledge, information and support to manage the added financial pressures brought about by drought. The RFCS provides specialist, free and independent advice for farm businesses. This program aimed to boost the services already provided by the RFCS in drought affected regions. The funds were directed towards the RFCS's north west and north east regions, which covered, but was not limited to, the drought affected local government areas.

4.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.2.1 DELIVERY OF ACTIVITIES

The data available (Table 4-1) indicates that the programs under the Farm Business Support area were generally delivered as anticipated. There were some delays to the Stock Containment Areas Grants, mainly caused by the high demand and the need to conduct site visits. Even so, the programs have been delivered well and the perceptions of participants were generally positive (as reported in First Person Consulting, 2017²).

² First Person Consulting 2017. Evaluation of the Drought Extension Program – Final Report for Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

Table 4-1: Overview data on the four programs delivered under Farm Business Support

COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
Drought Extension Services (DES)	<p>275 events and workshops directly delivered by Ag Vic.</p> <p>Development and provision of a large collection of information resources (e.g. managing stock during drought, drought support guide).</p> <p>Ag Vic DES staff assisted other organisations to deliver a large number of other drought support events and activities (e.g. with Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and local governments).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,670 farmers participated in DES activities directly coordinated by Ag Vic. Technical information workshops delivered by Ag Vic and other service providers engaged 3,506 farmers. All events associated with drought extension activities (including LOFG and community events) engaged approximately 5,318 farmers and 750 service providers. 	Complete	\$2,195,000
Stock Containment Area Grants (SCA)	Two rounds of SCA grants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 324 farms received 547 grants (some farms received more than one grant). 	Complete	\$1,120,500
Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)	Funding was directed towards extending access to the RFCS in the drought affected LGAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding over the 18 month period was equivalent of providing support for 1.7 FTE (based on one FTE costing \$160,000 including all on costs). Clients per FTE for the two services varied from 44 to 60 and therefore the funding provided access to 75 to 100 additional clients. 	Complete	\$270,000
Farm Risk Management Grants (FRMG)	Grants for training or on-farm infrastructure. Where needed, grants were also available to prepare farm business plans. The program was over-subscribed within 6 weeks of commencement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a total of 108 farm businesses took part in the program. 102 (94 per cent of those participating) of those business required development and or an update of an approved business plan to participate in the project. All grant applications were for infrastructure. There were no applications for skills and training assistance. 	Complete	\$1,500,000
Total announced funding				\$5,085,500

4.2.2 DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Indicators that the SCA and DES were delivered efficiently were:

- **Collaboration** – Ag Vic worked in close collaboration with a range of agencies and regional partners for the delivery of the SCA and DES. This included the North Central, Wimmera, Mallee and Goulburn Broken CMAs, as well as some local government areas. The Regional Drought Coordinator³ (RDC) and SCA regional coordinators played key roles in this collaboration. The collaborative regional delivery approach used was cited by First Person Consulting (2017⁴) as a key success of these programs. However, feedback on the collaboration was not uniformly positive. In the evaluation of the SCA and DES by First Person Consulting, six of the 29 delivery staff and stakeholders interviewed noted that there were cases where program-level decisions had not been clearly communicated to regional level staff and organisations. In additional interviews conducted as part of this review, one CMA participant reflected on their involvement in the SCA process and queried whether their participation had added any value.
- **Coordination** – There was strong evidence of effective coordination between Ag Vic and others involved in the delivery of the SCA and DES. The RDC and SCA regional coordinators were highlighted in the evaluation by First Person Consulting (2017⁴), based on their interviews, for example:

“We work very closely with regional extension committees and regional services to deliver our services. Working out who delivers and who supports. [For example, with] grazing management, we tailored sessions to how much fodder was produced, and were very flexible with matching needs for farmers. We don’t run the activities in isolation.” (Ag Vic staff, interviewee – from First Person Consulting, 2017⁴.)

The RDC’s active participation in the Seasonal Conditions Committee, hosted by the Horsham Rural City Council, was a strong example of this.

- **Coordination** – A booklet of information about support services and resources was developed, covering catchment-based and shire-based information, as well as state-wide services. This was a valuable guide that helped support Ag Vic staff and extension officers to act as the conduit to information for farmers. However, First Person Consulting (2017⁴) reported that not all staff were aware of this resource or did not actively distribute it during their engagements with farmers.

Indicators that the FRMG was implemented efficiently were:

- **Communication** – The rapid response to the grant becoming available (over-subscribed within 6 weeks) suggests that it was effectively marketed, and that farmers were aware of the opportunity. From the more than 100 applications received, only one was rejected, which indicates that the eligibility information and application form provided was well understood and communicated.
- **Project management** – Rural Finance’s experience managing similar projects meant they had the systems and processes already in place to manage the applications efficiently. Their experience also meant they had the ability to review farm business plans to ensure they were meeting the objectives of the project. Engaging Rural Finance in this management role avoided using resources to create a management system to handle this new grant.

Indicators that the RFCS was implemented efficiently were:

- **Collaboration** – Rather than create a new service, the funding supported expansion of the existing RFCS. This meant that business and management systems for the service were already in place, so the additional resources could be solely dedicated to increasing farmer access to counselling services.

³ The Regional Drought Coordinator, an employee of Agriculture Victoria, is discussed in detail in Section 7 of this report.

⁴ First Person Consulting, 2017. Evaluation of the Drought Extension Program – Final Report, prepared for Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

- **Capitalising on previous work** – Awareness of the RFCS was already high in rural communities. The staff of the RFCS are well networked within the communities and therefore were in a good position to respond quickly and directly to those in need. Because of the established ‘brand’ of the RFCS, no resources had to be diverted to raising awareness of the service.

4.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes by component program

In this section, we examine the data and information available that describes how each component program contributed to the short and intermediate outcomes noted against each support area (in this case Farm Business Support). We also look at the extent to which the outputs and results have addressed the problems identified for each support area.

1. Drought Extension Services to Farmers (DES), and 2. Stock Containment Area Grants (SCA)

A description of the evidence on short and intermediate term outcomes of the DES and SCA component programs is shown Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: Evidence on outcomes of the DES and SCA component programs (Sources: interviews and First Person Consulting, 2017)

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farm businesses know about support and access services 	<p>The majority of farmers who required information about stock management practices in drought conditions were able to access it (e.g. 1670 individual/unique farmers, stakeholders and community members were reached through the Extension Services Program). However, not all farmers who requested financial assistance were able to access it through SCA program (due to over-subscription).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farm businesses take on information to make timely decisions and have improved knowledge, skills and confidence to manage the season 	<p>Number of SCA exceeded target; new practices were adopted by those who took up SCA.</p> <p>One quarter of the DES and SCA program participants surveyed reported that they accessed additional drought support services.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farmers improve on farm infrastructure to manage the season 	<p>324 farms established stock containment areas.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key soil and land assets are protected from over-grazing 	<p>Opinion of participants was that they were better placed to protect soil and land assets because of stock containment areas and advice on things like rotational grazing.</p> <p>52 per cent stated that their funded SCA had improved their soil and pasture management practices.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Livestock management is improved during drought 	<p>70 per cent of survey respondents stated that their funded SCA had improved their stock management practices.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farm businesses feel supported 	<p>90 per cent of responding SCA grant recipients reported that they felt very supported, had enough support or knew where to access support if they needed it for management of drought on their farm. Only 10 per cent of recipients required additional support at the time of completing First Person Consulting’s survey (during 2016 and early 2017).</p>

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses manage the impacts of drought by making timely decisions or implementing new practices 	<p>Participation in DES contributed to accelerated adoption of new farming practices to manage drought risks and prepare for future dry seasons.</p> <p>Of the DES participants surveyed as part of First Person Consulting's evaluation, 73 per cent reported that they had made changes to their farm practices to better manage the impacts of drought as a result of attending an Ag Vic workshop or event.</p> <p>72 per cent reported that they intend to make additional changes.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses have increased knowledge, infrastructure and access to resources to assist with planning for future seasonal challenges 	<p>89 per cent reported that overall Ag Vic's DES was either very successful or moderately successful in assisting farmers to manage through the drought and prepare for the risks of future drought.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soil and environmental assets are protected 	<p>46 farmers (52 per cent) stated that their stock containment area (funded through the grants program) had improved the management and/or condition of their soil and pastures through reduced erosion and increased ground cover.</p>

3. Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)

A description of the evidence on short-term and intermediate outcomes of the RFCS is shown in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: Evidence on outcomes for the RFCS component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses know about support and access services 	<p>Counsellors were fully utilised during the period of the funding.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses take on information to make timely decisions and have improved knowledge, skills and confidence to manage the season 	<p>No formal evaluation has occurred during the funding period. However, the RFCS has a track record of providing effective support to farmers during hardship.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses feel supported 	<p>The ability to meet demand by being able to continue the service with the additional funds. Surveys of RFCS clients show a high level of service satisfaction (86 per cent highly satisfied).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses have increased knowledge, infrastructure and access to resources to assist with planning for future seasonal challenges 	<p>The service is all about providing assistance to farms experiencing financial hardship to either assist them with an exit plan or to get through to a point when they can recover and be in a stronger position to cope for the next difficult period.</p>

4. Farm Risk Management Grants (FRMG)

A description of the evidence on short-term and intermediate outcomes of the FRMG component program is shown in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4: Evidence on outcomes for the FRMG component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses know about support and access services 	Available funds being fully committed in 6 weeks is indicative that farmers were aware of the support available.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses take on information to make timely decisions and have improved knowledge, skills and confidence to manage the season 	No evaluation of the project but the need to have an approved business plan before access to the development grant is likely to increase the likelihood that farmers involved are making more effective decisions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farmers improve on farm infrastructure to manage the season 	108 development grants approved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Livestock management is improved during drought 	63 of the 108 funded projects had some potential to improve livestock management and therefore it could be concluded that the funding has met some of the short-term outcomes.
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses feel supported 	Direct funding of farm developments would send a direct message that farms are supported. No evaluation of the program means that this is only an assumption rather than having any direct evidence from farmers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses manage the impacts of drought by making timely decisions or implementing new practices 	No direct evaluation and therefore limited ability to conclude if future capacity to manage impacts of drought has changed. However, the requirement for business planning would support the argument that the program has improved decision making on farm.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm businesses have increased knowledge, infrastructure and access to resources to assist with planning for future seasonal challenges 	Business plans linked to development opportunities would support farms that have increased their knowledge and infrastructure to assist with planning for future challenges. Implemented a review process to ensure the business plans were to a certain standard. It was estimated 10 per cent to 15 per cent of submitted plans required some further work and was primarily around the risk management strategies within the plan.

4.2.4 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Tried and tested programs

Three of the four programs delivered under this support area (the SCA, DES and RFCS), have been used in previous drought support programs. This provided several positives. They could be launched rapidly; the processes (e.g. administration, grant management, record keeping) used on previous occasions were readily available; staff were already familiar with the programs so could get services ‘into the field’ quickly; these programs had been subject to reviews previously so many problems could be avoided, and the service improved.

Addressing acute and long-term needs

All four programs in this support area aimed to address short-term drought issues, but also improve the long-term management of drought among the affected farming communities. This is very consistent with the State Government’s drought management principles and is strongly reflected in the intermediate outcomes of this

support area. This evaluation found that the achievement of these dual goals was mixed. The evidence for the long-term impacts of activities like farm business planning, financial counselling and the effective use of drought related farm infrastructure is lacking.

The programs that have been previously used, the SCA, DES and RFCS, have been the subject of previous evaluations. These reviews found them to have been well planned, managed and delivered, and this evaluation has reached similar conclusions. However, this evaluation has also found that there is little data available that points to the long-term impacts of these programs. This is a challenging area to assess since it requires follow-up contact with participants in the programs to explore whether their past participation affected their ability to manage later droughts. This type of assessment is focussed on testing the assumptions that underpin these actions (e.g. that as a result of installing a stock containment area, farmers are better able to manage their stock and their farm during the next dry period). While these assumptions are reasonable, they do warrant periodic testing, particularly for long-running programs like the SCA and RFCS. Given the administrative arrangements for these two programs, it would be appropriate for the Australian Government to conduct the long-term impact analysis of the RFCS and for Agriculture Victoria to do same for the SCA.

Managing over-subscription

The SCA and FRMG were both over-subscribed. This required that priority-setting processes be used, which presented challenges for both programs. For the SCA, the process prioritised farms with high stock numbers. This was perceived as penalising farmers who had been prepared for drought and acted early and de-stocked their properties. The rationale for this priority-setting was sound (based on the underlying purpose of the SCA) but the perception that well-prepared farmers were disadvantaged could have been anticipated and addressed more explicitly.

The FRMG program was very heavily over-subscribed and the priority-setting process used in the FRMG did not strongly align with the underlying objectives of that program. This meant that for every successful applicant, there were four unsuccessful. This created reputational risk for both this program and the broader package. This evaluation did not identify any explicit evidence that this risk eventuated, but it was not specifically investigated.

4.2.5 OUTCOMES SUMMARY

The delivery data available on the four programs in this support area suggests that farm businesses in the drought affected areas were aware of the services and active in utilising them. The data available suggests that the programs were generally delivered well and reached the target audience. Farm infrastructure improvements have occurred on the 324 farms that installed stock containment areas, and 108 properties that used risk management grants for some form of 'preparedness infrastructure'.

The intermediate outcomes for this support area are largely based on assumptions of the effectiveness of the programs. Given the finding that the DES, SCA, RFCS, and FRMG were all delivered well, and reached the target audience, it is fair to conclude that there has been progress towards the intermediate outcomes. That is, program participants were better able to manage at the time and after the drought and will now be more prepared for future challenges.

For instance, one farmer's reflection on the SCA and the DES, was:

"There was good accessible information. [The stock feeding event I went to] was well attended so it was a good social event too. People would get all the information and from a mental health point of view, we realised we weren't alone and that there was support. It was a very tangible form of support for regional Victorian communities." (Farmer, interviewee from First Person Consulting's Evaluation of the Drought Extension Program.)

This participant felt that they benefitted from the farm management information, but also felt more supported; one of the primary intermediate outcomes of the whole program.

The RFCS is a long running and highly regarded approach to assisting farmers and farm businesses. The service was extended to farmers in drought affected areas and there appears to have been good up-take. Based on this program's strong history, it is also reasonable to conclude that this service contributed to farm businesses feeling supported and better able to manage the impacts of drought.

The fourth program, the FRMG, was new. The structure of the program aimed to address both the short-term issues (via funded actions) and the long-term risk (via the requirement for a farm business plan). While this was consistent with the principles of drought management, it did encounter some practical problems. Namely that getting farmers to prepare a business plan, with a long-term view, when they are in the midst of a crisis can be extremely difficult. There was feedback that some participants appeared to have rushed their plan, in order to access the grants. This concern remains even though the process included a review of the business plans to ensure they met a reasonable minimum standard.

In conclusion, the FRMG do appear to have resulted in improved infrastructure on farms, however the contribution that the associated farm business plans have made to 'planning for future seasonal challenges' is much less clear.

An assessment of the amount of evaluation evidence and level of impact of component programs within the Farm Business Support area is provided in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5: Summary of the amount of evidence and level of impact of component programs

NO.	SUPPORT AREA & COMPONENT PROGRAM	AMOUNT & QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ⁵		LEVEL OF IMPACT
		SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	
1	Drought Extension Services	Good	Good	High
2	Stock Containment Area Grants	Good	Good	High
3	Rural Financial Counselling Service	Good	Adequate	High
4	Farm Risk Management Grants	Good	Adequate	Medium

Explanation of the ratings

RATING	AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF EVIDENCE	RATING	LEVEL OF IMPACT
Good	Previous dedicated evaluation, extensive reporting on outputs, achievements and outcomes	High	Large number of participants, broad and extensive reach into communities
Adequate	Basic reporting information provided, few gaps	Medium	Moderate number of participants, moderate reach into communities
Poor	Little reporting other than activities, incomplete	Low	Small number of participants, limited reach into communities

⁵ This includes both the reporting provided by the project delivery teams and additional information gathered during this evaluation.

4.2.6 LEGACY

Two of the programs in the Farm Business Support area have resulted in farm infrastructure investments – the SCA and the FRMG. Both programs were administered well, and steps were taken to ensure the infrastructure met reasonable standards, so would be durable over time. However, the quality of the installation is only one factor that influences whether these actions are actually effective at improving preparedness for drought. How that infrastructure is incorporated into the future operation of the farm is a second critical factor. There is some anecdotal evidence that skills and knowledge were improved through the DES program, but this was not explicitly linked to utilisation of the funded infrastructure. This means that at present it is difficult to confidently conclude that an increase in long-term preparedness has been achieved because there is no data or information (from this or previous drought response programs) to give insights into how effectively this infrastructure has been and will be used over time.

The legacy of the counselling and business planning delivered through this support area is uncertain. The RFCS and the business planning included in the FRMG aimed to turn people's attention to long-term planning. While the long and positive track record of the RFCS suggests that this service would have long-term impacts on its clients, the indicators regarding the FRMG business planning are less clear.

CASE STUDY: STOCK CONTAINMENT AREAS

Message: Stock containment areas are an example of a drought support measure that has been continuously refined and improved over decades of use.

Situation

Stock containment areas (SCA) have been used for over 20 years as a means of managing the risk to soils, pastures and the welfare of livestock that arises during drought. They are a valuable and effective option during drought because they help to manage stock feeding, enable better monitoring and management of stock health, and prevent long-term damage to pastures and soils that can be over-grazed. The SCA is intended to become part of the long-term management of the farm, which should position the farm to better manage future droughts.

An adaptive approach

The form and details of the various grant programs associated with SCAs have evolved over many years. With each phase of SCA grants, risks and issues have been identified and addressed. Examples of these issues are:

- Balancing private and public benefit
- Ensuring there is no repeat funding of the SCAs on the same properties
- Preventing the SCA grant from funding a feedlot
- Growing community focus on animal welfare, particularly in drought
- Ensuring the SCA is maintained and usable in later droughts

In recognition of these challenges, and the risks they could present to the future use of SCAs, each generation of SCA program has seen refined and improved approaches. This most recent program reflects the next generation of these improvements. Some of the most important changes are described here:

Funding available to farmers has changed – In the most recent program, grants of \$2,000 per SCA were available (to a maximum of \$6,000 per landholder) which was considered to cover approximately half of the total costs. While this amount has been adjusted over the years of the program (e.g. in 2008 grants were \$1,600 per SCA with a maximum of \$5,300), the key influence has been the need to ensure the landholder has significant co-investment. This cost-sharing model has been an effective way to balance public and private benefits, and to increase the likelihood that the grant recipients will consider the SCA to be part of their long-term farm management.

Importance of information and advice – From the earliest use of SCA grants, information provision has been seen as vital. The installation of the physical structures is only part of the process. This holistic view has seen a growing body of extension material developed that now covers a wide range of topics – among them pasture management, soil management, drought feeding and animal welfare. In addition to this SCA related information, there has also been a growing understanding that the extension staff who are working with farmers on their SCA are often those farmers' key point of contact with government. These staff members therefore play an important role in providing farmers with contacts for other support they may need. Most notably in the recent drought, the 2016 Drought Support Services in Victoria publication was a vital resource for extension officers. This advisory and networking function was not recognised as a specific objective of the program but has emerged as an extremely valuable contribution from the extension staff.

Evolution of the guidelines for SCAs – The provision of a grant to landholders for an SCA has provided government with a key opportunity to address related matters like animal welfare. The guidelines used for the grants have allowed these matters to be a condition of the grant. This has been a very effective way to respond to new standards/expectations that can evolve, like animal welfare matters (siting and shade).

Ensuring the long-term impacts of public investment in SCAs – If landholders were found to be seeking repeated investment in their SCAs (i.e. they are not maintained between droughts), then future support for the program would be at risk. This risk has been addressed over the generations of the grants programs by focussing on ways to incorporate the SCA into the long-term management of the farm. In the most recent program this includes farmers being encouraged to use the SCA for things like quarantining new stock, as holding pens for when stock need to be handled, and even for managing stock during and after bushfires. This approach is a shift from earlier methods that tended to discourage other uses of the SCAs because of concerns about them being used as feedlots.

Impacts

SCAs have proven to be a very popular measure among drought affected farmers. The approach taken to delivering support for the construction of SCAs exemplifies a strong adaptive management approach. Over time, each SCA grants program has improved on the last by acting on both formal and informal feedback and reviews. This approach shows the clear benefits of continuity of these support programs, and of taking a systematic approach to improving their effectiveness.

5 Small Business Support

KEY MESSAGES:

1. Counselling provided direct support to small non-farm business owners and appears to have helped prevent some businesses from closing.
2. The workshops were hosted in small towns and were strongly appreciated by participants. Workshops tended to attract more established businesses seeking general business planning advice.
3. The individual counselling service was offered widely and those who used the service tended to be newer businesses.
4. The services offered were complementary – they catered for businesses in distress as well as more stable businesses seeking guidance on managing the impacts of drought.
5. These programs are important because of the flow-on effects on the town economy from small businesses closing.

5.1 DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Small Business Support area was:

To provide information, increase skills and knowledge and facilitate decision making.

Support was available through **two** component programs:

A. DEDICATED SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES (PROVIDED BY RFCS)

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide small non-farm businesses with the skills, knowledge, information and support to manage the added complexity brought about by drought.

B. SMALL BUSINESS WORKSHOPS

The aim of this component program was to:

- Improve business operations, and help non-farm businesses cope with the impact of drought
- Better equip businesses to maintain business continuity throughout and following a crisis or disaster.

5.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

5.2.1 DELIVERY OF ACTIVITIES

Under the Drought Response Package, small business financial counselling was provided through two branches of the RFCS: the North West (NW) and the Wimmera South West (WSW) branches. Ordinarily, the RFCS provides financial counselling to farm businesses in financial distress. Under this program, that counselling was expanded to small non-farm businesses.

The inclusion of this program in the overall package was a recognition that drought has impacts on non-farm businesses. Advice from the RFCS strongly emphasised that non-farm businesses were affected by drought and needed assistance.

The service was provided free of charge to eligible small businesses. Businesses were assisted with: understanding their financial position, record keeping, debt management, pricing and costing, human resources, taxation, and referral to other services. There was no similar service in existence at the time of the drought.

In addition, Small Business Victoria (SBV) ran workshops for small businesses. There were three elements to each workshop:

1. Visits to each township: the workshops were preceded by an in-person visit from the presenter to the businesses in the town. The purpose of this visit was to advertise the workshop and to understand the issues that local businesses were having.
2. The workshop itself: topics covered were 'financial health check' and 'crisis planning'.
3. One-on-one mentoring sessions: after the workshop with the workshops presenter.

The activities delivered aimed to help small businesses identify the key risks for their business and develop strategies to minimise these risks to build business resilience in the face of natural disasters. A summary of the delivered activities is provided in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Summary of delivered activities in the Small Business Support area

NO.	COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
1	Dedicated small business services	Funding for one FTE counsellor in the NW and WSW. In the NW one additional counsellor was employed. In the WSW, 2 part-time counsellors were employed, based in different locations. Delivered on-budget. The NW branch also delivered forums to groups of small businesses.	108 clients (28 in the NW and 80 in the WSW). Program had eligibility criteria (adopted from the 'standard' counselling provided to farm businesses by the Rural Financial Counselling Service). This ensured that participants were from the target audience.	Complete	\$320,000
2	Small business workshops	7 workshops on 'building a business beyond drought'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 7 workshop presenters ▪ 7 workshops ▪ 42 attendees ▪ 133 businesses visited by workshop presenters prior to workshops being held ▪ 14 business owners received mentoring 	Complete	\$60,000
Total funding announced					\$380,000

5.2.2 DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Indicators or evidence that the Small Business Support area was delivered efficiently for each component program follows:

Dedicated small business services delivered by RFCS

- To enable the service to be delivered quickly, the program managers decided to avoid a competitive tendering process. The contract was awarded directly to the RFCS, as an organisation that was already delivering similar services and was trusted in the target communities. On this basis, the choice to not run a competitive tender did prove to be an efficient option.
- The amount provided to the two RFCS (\$160,000 each) was determined by a Commonwealth Government schedule. Evidence suggests that this amount was generous, as the RFCS were able to provide more services than they were contracted for. For instance, the NW RFCS extended the time period that the counsellor was employed for. The WSW RFCS was able to employ two part-time counsellors (a more expensive option than employing one full-time counsellor). The WSW Service also extended the availability of the counselling using its own funds. These findings all point to the RFCS having a strong capacity to maximise the use of the funds and extend the availability of their services.

Small business workshops delivered by SBV

- Workshops were a cost-effective way of reaching a large number of businesses.
- However, seven different presenters ran one workshop each, which introduced inefficiencies. For example, each workshop leader needed to be trained. Having just one or two workshop presenters would have been more efficient.
- Using Small Business Victoria materials for the workshops was an efficient use of existing materials.

5.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes by component program

In this section, we examine the data and information available that describes how each component program contributed to the short and intermediate outcomes noted against each support area (in this case, Small Business Support). We also look at the extent to which the outputs and results have addressed the problems identified for each support area.

1. Dedicated small business services

The evaluation found evidence relating to how well the program delivered on its intended short-term and intermediate outcomes. A description of this evidence is shown in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2: Evidence on outcomes from the dedicated small business services component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Small businesses know about support and access services	<p>Both the NW and WSW raised awareness of the program through public means (i.e. radio, and face-to-face).</p> <p>There is no direct evidence on general awareness of the program. In any event, general awareness is not a useful indicator as businesses are unwilling to participate in a program unless referred by a trusted contact. Broad-scale advertising is not an effective means of attracting clients.</p> <p>A better indicator is participation in the program compared with the overall level of need. The financial counselling services were not able to estimate demand ahead of the program rollout, due to no prior experience of the need for counselling for non-farm businesses. However, the Executive Officers report that the resource provided was sufficient to service the clients that asked for help. Over time, the demand for the service would grow, but the Executive Officer of the WSW Rural</p>

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
	<p>Financial Counselling Service estimated that only 0.5 FTE (a total of 1.5 FTE) would be required to service the ongoing demand.</p> <p>It is unlikely that, for a program that relies heavily on word-of-mouth promotion, all businesses that could access the service will do so.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small businesses make timely decisions 	<p>Participating businesses will be surveyed by the Rural Financial Counselling Services. Results should be available in early 2018.</p> <p>Anecdotally, the businesses that participated in the program were satisfied with the service provided.</p> <p>The service offered to farm businesses has been reviewed and proven in the past.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small businesses feel supported and manage the impacts of drought 	<p>Little direct evidence found.</p> <p>Comprehensive survey data from clients will be available late 2017 or early 2018.</p>

2. Small business workshops

The evaluation found evidence relating to how well the small business workshops delivered on the intended short-term and intermediate outcomes. A description of this evidence is found in Table 5-3.

Table 5-3: Evidence on outcomes from the small business workshops component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small businesses know about support and access services 	<p>The workshops were promoted through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic development officers in the participating shire councils Business organisations in Horsham Face-to-face contact with businesses prior to the workshop. <p>Thus, evidence suggests that the workshops were widely promoted and that businesses would know about them. In Hopetoun, for instance, the workshop presenter visited 35 businesses prior to the workshop.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small businesses make timely decisions 	<p>There is no data on the behaviour of businesses as a result of the workshops. Data from Small Business Victoria's ongoing program of business workshops (collected immediately after the workshop) shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 96 per cent of businesses rate the program as 'excellent' or 'good' 50 per cent of businesses say that attending the workshop will affect their decision making
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small businesses feel supported and manage the impacts of drought 	<p>No direct evidence. However, generally speaking, the SBV workshops help businesses to improve their business, which will help them manage drought.</p>

5.2.4 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

The Small Business Support area enabled government to provide direct support to small non-farm businesses in drought affected townships. The two programs complemented each other well, attracting participants with different needs:

- Financial counselling targeted businesses in financial distress
- The workshops were generally attended by more stable businesses seeking to make incremental improvements.

Challenges encountered with the small business financial counselling included:

- The program started slowly, as it was a new service that relied on word-of-mouth promotion. Time was spent recruiting businesses to the program, which was necessary, but not ideal. WSW RFCS were reasonably successful in attracting clients through their formal internal networks
- The program was not long enough to satisfy the needs of some clients.
- The program would run more efficiently if it were ongoing, without the inefficiencies caused by ramping up and ceasing within 12 months.
- The Rural Financial Counselling Service regions are too large for one person to cover.

5.2.5 OUTCOMES SUMMARY

The intended short-term outcomes of small businesses knowing about the services on offer and accessing them to help them make timely decision were met.

The goal of the workshops was to improve the operations of small businesses that attend. Data was not collected from the workshops, although general results from the similar workshops run by SBV suggest that businesses do improve their operations as a result of these types of workshops.

Interviewees from the RFCS reported that the counselling being provided aimed to help businesses achieve financial self-sufficiency, improve the mental health of small business owners by improving their financial situation and maintain a diverse range of businesses in small towns. Data on the success of the program, via survey, is currently being collected from participants and not available for this report.

An assessment of the amount of evaluation evidence and level of impact of component programs within the Small Business Support area is provided in Table 5-4.

Table 5-4: Summary of the amount of evidence and level of impact of component programs

NO.	SUPPORT AREA & COMPONENT PROGRAM	AMOUNT & QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ⁶		LEVEL OF IMPACT
		SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	
1	Dedicated small business services	Adequate	Adequate	High
2	Small business workshops	Good	Poor	Low

RATING	AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF EVIDENCE	RATING	LEVEL OF IMPACT
Good	Previous dedicated evaluation, extensive reporting on outputs, achievements and outcomes	High	Large number of participants, broad and extensive reach into communities
Adequate	Basic reporting information provided, few gaps	Medium	Moderate number of participants, moderate reach into communities
Poor	Little reporting other than activities, incomplete	Low	Small number of participants, limited reach into communities

5.2.6 LEGACY

There are two potential long-term impacts from the program:

- Individual businesses achieve financial sustainability and continue to operate
- Town economies are sustained.

Generally, the businesses that were in financial distress during the drought tended to be newer businesses. Sixty per cent of the RFCS client's businesses were less than five years old. This is expected because newer businesses are more likely to have challenges, particularly in areas like cash flow. This also means that, given the timing of droughts, when the next drought occurs, there will be a fresh cohort of new small businesses that will be the most likely to need assistance.

However, the main legacy of the program is to maintain viable economies in small towns. Sometimes, if a business closes due to financial distress, it will not reopen under a new owner. The closure of a business can have knock-on impacts to other small businesses and a deleterious effect on the economy of a town or region.

Farm business clients of the RFCS can receive counselling for up to three years and are then reassessed to determine if they require further help. In the words of one Executive Officer "you can't solve major issues in one year". This means that some clients taken up by the small business financial counselling will require assistance beyond the end of the program. RFCS is not accustomed to terminating cases unless the client is financially self-sufficient. Both RFCS branches involved in this program chose to continue to assist small business clients from non-drought related funding sources for a short period of time after the formal cessation of the program.

⁶ This includes both the reporting provided by the project delivery teams and additional information gathered during this evaluation.

CASE STUDY: SMALL BUSINESS FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

Key message: Financial counselling helped to improve the financial viability and mental health of small non-farm businesses.

Situation

The impact of drought on farmers is well known. Drought also affects non-farm businesses that essentially depend on farmers spending money in town. During a drought, farmers have less money to spend, and the impact flows through to non-farm businesses.

This can create financial and mental stress for small business owners. One example is a shop owner in a large regional city who experienced a 20 per cent decline in sales, and as a result was finding it more and more difficult to pay bills and Australian Taxation Office (ATO) commitments. The owner was feeling isolated and quite negative about the prospects of doing business in a drought-affected community.

Approach

This small business owner received one-on-one financial counselling as part of the Victorian Government's drought response package. The counselling was delivered by the Rural Financial Counselling Service to small non-farm businesses in financial distress.

The counsellor helped the business owner gain a better understanding of the costs within the business and be able to make better decisions about future spending and plan for months with lower sales. The counselling also helped the owner to look at new opportunities for income. Together, the counsellor and the business owner negotiated new payment plans with the ATO and her bank.

Results

The business owner was able to cut costs and pay her liabilities on time and incur fewer fees and charges. Now that she has been able to manage cash flow better, she has been able to see a more positive outlook about her business.

This case study draws heavily on a case study created by the WSW Rural Financial Counselling Service. We have added findings from the evaluation to their original material.

Acknowledgement: Rural Financial Counselling Service Victoria Wimmera South West (2017) *Small Business Financial Counselling: progress report as at 30 June 2017*.

6 Individual and Family Support

KEY MESSAGES:

1. Programs that responded to acute needs were delivered efficiently and very well received by communities.
2. Programs aimed at social resilience have had lasting benefits.
3. The choice to streamline application processes and remove eligibility rules for some grants was very well received and helped improve access to support for many individuals and organisations.

6.1 DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Individual and Family Support area was:

To increase identification of stress in individuals, improve community engagement, and provide financial support to ensure children can participate in kindergarten and school activities.

Support was available through five component programs:

A. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUPPORT PACKAGE & MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

The aim of this component program was to:

- Increase community resilience to manage the mental health impacts of drought through Primary Care Partnerships (PCP).

B. NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FARMER HEALTH ACTIVITIES

The aim of this component program was to:

- Continue to support the National Centre for Farmer Health's (NCFH) important and ongoing work to increase the knowledge of farmers and farm workers regarding health, safety and wellbeing in farming life.

C. BACK TO SCHOOL

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide children from disadvantaged families attending Victorian Government Schools in drought affected areas with uniforms, shoes and other essential items, thereby assisting these children to participate in their education career and school life.

D. SUPPORTING KINDERGARTENS

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide support to kindergartens and families, through fee subsidies and grants respectively, to ensure that children in drought affected communities had continued access to early childhood education.

E. CAMPS, SPORTS & EXCURSIONS FUND

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide education support for families and communities in drought affected regions
- More specifically to enable students to participate in the learning opportunities that exist beyond the classroom through the provision of payments to fund excursions, outdoor camps and sports.

6.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

6.2.1 DELIVERY OF ACTIVITIES

The Individual and Family Support area of the package was made up of the programs that supported participation in early childhood education, school activities and mental health and wellbeing education for the whole community. The programs were delivered by DHHS, Department of Education and Training (DET), the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) and the VFF.

A summary of the activities delivered is provided in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1: Summary of delivered activities in the Individual and Family Support area

COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
Community engagement and support package & Mental Health First Aid training	Support for PCP coordination and service access - \$150,000 Mental Health First Aid training - \$70,000	354 participants (51 training sessions) ⁷	Complete	\$220,000
National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) activities*	LOFG and Sustainable Farming Families (SFF) Workshops and other events were held in drought affected areas to help support rural families and communities	LOFG – 296 participants (21 workshops) Wimmera Field Days – not measurable SFF in the Wimmera Mallee workshops – 71 people for 2-day workshops as part of the SFF three workshop program	LOFG complete SFF is ongoing with these programs due for completion in 2018	\$0**
Back to school	Drought affected Victorian Government School students provided with uniforms, shoes and other essential items.	514 students	Complete	\$0***

⁷ This was the number reported at September 2016, DHHS did not have the final numbers from all PCPs

COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
Supporting kindergartens	Drought Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) of \$1,386 per child provided to families Financial hardship grants for kindergarten services	Drought Kindergarten Fee Subsidy provided to 647 families 41 services received the financial subsidy grant.	Complete	\$960,000
Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund	\$375 per student residing in all 11 LGAs	15,617 students	Complete	\$5,800,000
Total funding announced				\$6,980,000

Notes: *These activities were delivered in partnership with the VFF, the Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria, Country Women's Association Victoria and Country Fire Authority.

**Existing funds from Victorian Government were used for the centre's SFF program and LOFG.

***Funding from existing budget was allocated to drought affected communities

6.2.2 DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Indicators or evidence that the Individual and Family Support area was delivered efficiently for each component program follows:

Use of existing organisations increased efficiency

The primary means of efficiency gains for these programs were that they were delivered by existing organisations and were either existing programs (NCFH, PCP) or existing programs broadened to include support for drought affected communities (Kindergarten fee subsidy, Camps, Schools and Excursions Fund (CSEF), Back to School). Using existing channels allowed funds to be dispersed quickly to families and individuals. The lack of means-testing for the programs remarkably reduced the administrative burden on deliverers and stakeholders such as schools and kindergartens.

Efficient systems developed and used

While the DET was concerned that the CSEF process would be a burden on schools because it relied on schools to collate and summarise student lists and spending, the schools themselves reported that the program actually reduced their administrative burden over the whole year because they didn't have to chase payments.

The CSEF team at DET developed a system to process the drought CSEF, as it couldn't be administered through Centrelink. Notably, the system and associated policies worked so well the same approach was used for the Dairy Recovery Package⁸. Similarly, DET were able to supply the Drought Kindergarten Fee Subsidy directly through their existing online funding system.

⁸ During the 2016 milk price reduction crisis, the Victorian Government developed a \$13.5m Dairy Response Package to assist dairy farmers and communities. This funding used the same key areas of support as the Drought Response Package.

Programs ongoing as a result of package

The funding and/or extension of scope for programs such as the National Centre for Farmer Health and the Mental Health First Aid training allowed these organisations to work out better ways to build the program into their ongoing delivery.

“The funding allowed things to happen and gave us time to work out strategies to make it sustainable so we can keep doing it. It also allowed us some time to prove it to the community – thereby increasing demand.”
~ PCP Manager

Future packages that use existing channels and build on already successful approaches designed by delivery agencies and program managers, will be the most efficient.

6.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes by component programs

In this section, we examine the data and information available that describes how each component program contributed to the short and intermediate outcomes noted against each support area (in this case Individual and Family Support). We also look at the extent to which the outputs and results have addressed the problems identified for each support area.

1. Community Engagement Support Package and Mental Health First Aid training

Funds were allocated to PCPs to facilitate better access and pathways to services and across service providers to improve coordination of responses. Specifically, PCPs organised events and activities across the drought affected areas to address the health and wellbeing impacts of drought. PCPs also played a role in coordinating the rollout of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training, another initiative under the package. Funds were allocated across the 11 most drought affected LGAs, based on the equivalent of \$15,000 per LGA as follows:

- Wimmera PCP (Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Horsham) \$60,000
- Southern Mallee PCP (Buloke and Gannawarra) \$30,000
- Bendigo Loddon PCP (Loddon) \$15,000
- Grampians Pyrenees PCP (Northern Grampians and Pyrenees) \$30,000
- Central Victorian PCP (Central Goldfields) \$15,000.

Evidence of the short-term and intermediate outcomes of the Community Engagement Support Package and Mental Health First Aid Training component program is described in Table 6-2.

Table 6-2: Evidence on outcomes of the Community Engagement Support package and Mental Health First Aid training component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community members are aware of services and support available ▪ Increase in the number of community members who can recognise signs of stress and refer people to help ▪ Participation in social, education and community activities is maintained 	<p>The conclusion of the Southern Mallee PCP MHFA training evaluation⁹ was that:</p> <p>“The Drought Community Engagement and Support funding has enabled a collaboration and strengthened connection with health and community agencies and business, community members and community groups across the LGAs of Buloke and Gannawarra. The project has enabled increased mental health awareness and connection to local health services. The evaluation of Hope Assisted Local Tradies (HALT) and Awareness, Links, Enable, Resilient, Teams (ALERT) events has demonstrated the value of engaging in the work and community settings about mental health and wellbeing.”</p> <p>Evaluation of the Mental Health First Aid courses by individual PCPs indicated that participants reported a better understanding of mental health following the event (74 per cent in Southern Mallee PCP):</p> <p>“I’m so glad to hear that I’m not the only one who has ever felt like this. I’m so glad you organised this to happen at the footy club. I didn’t know what to do and I definitely didn’t know where to go.” <i>18yo male - Local Participant – HALT event held within Southern Mallee June 2016.</i></p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families feel supported and manage the impacts of drought ▪ The escalation of the social impacts of drought are minimised 	<p>PCPs indicated that the program increased communities’ capacity to manage the mental health and well-being impacts of drought, thereby reduced the escalation of social impacts.</p> <p>There was increased awareness within the community about Mental Health First Aid training, evidenced by ongoing demand for the program from schools and community groups reported by PCP Managers.</p> <p>PCPs were able to use the Mental Health First Aid funding to work out how to make the program sustainable in the longer term.</p>

The Regional Drought Coordinator position started after the package had been launched and this reportedly lead to some confusion and inefficiency in both the design and early delivery of the package. However, existing networks, such as the PCP network, helped to overcome the early coordination gap.

“Early on our PCP got more information from the Seasonal Conditions Committee meeting than we did from government departments. Other PCPs got their info from us. The politicians made their decision admirably quickly, but it took a while for The Department to kick in. There is a lot of overlap and inefficiency in the package that could have been avoided.” ~ PCP Manager

The Mental Health First Aid training had been designed and delivered during the previous drought and was again successful with improvements made in the efficiency of delivery. This program has resonance anytime, not only during drought periods, and the deliverers have found a redirected funding source to keep it going.

⁹ Southern Mallee PCP (2016) *Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership Drought Community Engagement and Support, Final Report, 28 February 2017*

2. National Centre for Farmer Health Activities

The National Centre for Farmer Health's key objective is to increase the knowledge of farmers and farm workers regarding health, safety and wellbeing in farming life.

The Drought Response Package saw the Centre draw from its \$4 million state government funding base to deliver activities, workshops and events in drought affected areas to help support rural families and communities. These included:

- Delivery of the Sustainable Farm Families program¹⁰ and train the trainer sessions
- Farmer Health and Lifestyle assessments at the Sungold Field Days and Wimmera Field Days in conjunction with bowel screening to reduce bowel cancer in farmers
- Women on Farms Hopetoun Gathering including Farmer Health and Lifestyle assessments
- Ripple Effect Steering Group Meetings¹¹
- Drought support page on farmer health website <http://www.farmerhealth.org.au/support>
- A delivery partner of LOFG with VFF and others.

Look Over the Farm Gate (LOFG)

The VFF partnered with the NCFH as well as the Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria, Country Women's Association Victoria and Country Fire Authority to deliver the state government funded LOFG rural community wellbeing program between January and July 2016. In the practical implementation of the program, Agriculture Victoria and the Victorian Government were also significant partners of the project and assisted in promotion of the key messages and themes of the program.

Evidence of the short-term and intermediate terms outcomes of the National Centre for Farmer Health Activities component program is described in Table 6-3.

Table 6-3: Evidence on outcomes of the National Centre for Farmer Health Activities component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community members are aware of services and support available ▪ Increase in the number of community members who can recognise signs of stress and refer people to help ▪ Participation in social, education and community activities is maintained 	<p>The SFF program partnered with local Health Services and local farmer groups (e.g. Landcare, Best Wool/Best Lamb), which brings farmers into contact with health or other services, increasing awareness of services available.</p> <p>All participants at the workshops completed a health action plan before the end of the first workshop, including how to manage stress and improve their wellbeing.</p> <p>Participants feel they now know how to manage stress, eat healthier and improve their wellbeing.</p> <p>The Centre's programs are evidence based and well known to help community members recognise signs of stress and increase participation in social and community activities.</p>
	<p>LOFG (primarily delivered by VFF in partnership with NCFH and others)</p> <p>Achieved a high level of community support exceeding all targets for community training and engagement¹²: 48 events were held engaging with almost 6,000 participants, 180 members of the community were trained in</p>

¹⁰ The SFF is a health promotion program which addresses farmer health, wellbeing and safety issues. The core message of SFF is that the most important aspect of a healthy Australian farm is a healthy farm family

¹¹ The Ripple Effect is an online intervention designed to investigate what works to reduce the stigma associated with suicide, among males from the farming community, aged 30-64 years.

¹² Final report – Look Over the Farm Gate, Tranche One funding. Victorian Farmers Federation August 2016

	<p>recognising distress and supporting those suffering, distributed letters and fridge magnets to almost 10,000 people in rural and regional Victoria.</p> <p>The 'tea bag resources' were also successful (x 2 foil wrapped teabags affixed to a double-sided post card on the Look Over the Farm Gate program) in encouraging recipients to touch base with their neighbour.</p> <p>Even coordinator feedback forms provided very positive responses.</p> <p>12 social and emotional wellbeing workshops were delivered by NCFH and were well received by participants. Data collected by the NCFH reflects this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Over 95 per cent of participants at the Look Over the Farm Gate workshops felt they were more able to find information about available support ▪ Over 95 per cent of participants felt they were confident in understanding the factors contributing to rural stress and how tough times affect wellbeing ▪ Over 92 per cent felt they were more confident in recognising a person in distress. ▪ Participants felt that it was effective in encouraging people to have a conversation and help stressed farmers.
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families feel supported and manage the impacts of drought ▪ The escalation of the social impacts of drought are minimised. 	<p>Evaluation from the current Sustainable Farm Families program¹³ showed that there were positive lifestyle changes following the implementation of the action plan. Participants have committed to healthier food choices, better weight management, family holidays and other stress reduction activities.</p> <p>LOFG (primarily delivered by VFF in partnership with NCFH and others)</p> <p>The LOFG workshops led to 17,300 "Managing stress on the farm" books printed and distributed. Participants described the sessions as very valuable for information and links to other services. Many participants have maintained networks as a result of the sessions.</p>

Overall the program was well received. The LOFG workshop evaluation conducted by NCFH¹⁴ showed that participants believed it was a valuable program and that participants now understand a lot more about their health, wellbeing and managing stress.

"Great well done, should be rolled out on a wider basis" ~ workshop participant, LOFG evaluation

Participants felt that the sessions provided the opportunity to network with each other (farmer to farmer) but also to meet and connect with others such as rural financial counsellors and Centrelink staff. Participants highly valued connecting with other people, and they reported that the National Centre for Farmer Health provided a safe place for discussions about health and wellbeing.

"The workshop content and delivery was very effective and encouraging conversation seemed to be very helpful for stressed farmers in the room" ~ workshop participant, LOFG evaluation

¹³ Hatherell, T. (2017) *Sustainable Farm Families 2016/17 Draft report*, National Centre for Farmer Health 20 October 2017

¹⁴ Hatherell, T. (2017) *Look Over the Farm Gate 2015-17 Report*, National Centre for Farmer Health 14 February 2017. [A report from NCFH summarising evaluation data collected from the Look Over the Farm Gate – Understanding and Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of Farming Communities during Tough Times by Drought workshops funded by the Victorian Government and delivered by the NCFH between December 2015 and February 2017.]

Sustainable Farm Families program

The SFF program involves three workshops to a local farmer group and is held over 18-24 months. It has previously been rolled out to over 2,300 farmers and is well evidenced in peer reviewed research (<http://www.farmerhealth.org.au/page/research-centre#peerreview>). SFF enables participants to discuss attitudes to health, wellbeing and safety, and to take action. Participants felt these discussions helped them to make some changes to their lifestyles.

“I like the fact that this program has given us the opportunity to be aware of what is going on at the right time in our life, and if we use this to the best of our ability we will benefit etc. and this program helps, a big plus of the program.” ~ workshop participant, SFF evaluation

“Program has frank discussion and thought-provoking topics. It helps make positive changes at work and family life.” ~ workshop participant, SFF evaluation

All participants had developed an action plan by the end of the first workshop. It was effective in assisting them to commit to better health choices, weight management, holidays and activities that improved their wellbeing. Awareness of health and wellbeing has increased amongst participants and provided valuable resources.

“Achieved beyond my expectation –SFF provided quality reinforcement for us and the kids to try and do something daily – focus on something positive that we/they have done.” ~ workshop participant, SFF evaluation

3. Back to school

The back to school period in late summer is costly for families with children at school. This was a particular problem for families in drought affected areas. The Back to School program, administered by not-for-profit organisation State Schools Relief, provided children from disadvantaged families attending Victorian Government Schools with uniforms, shoes and other essential items, thereby assisting disadvantaged children to participate in their education career and school life.

The intended outcome of the program was to ensure that disadvantaged children, including those in drought affected areas, had equitable access to education and were able to continue to participate in their school community.

Evidence of the short-term and intermediate outcomes of the Back to School component program is described in Table 6-4.

Table 6-4: Evidence on outcomes of the Back to School component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Community members are aware of services and support availableIncrease in the number of community members who can recognise signs of stress and refer people to helpParticipation in social, education and community activities is maintained	In the short-term, this program supported 514 drought affected families to participate in education by supplying uniforms. Although the delivery agency has not provided supporting evidence, they indicated that schools consistently reported that families appreciated the assistance.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families feel supported and manage the impacts of drought The escalation of the social impacts of drought are minimised 	<p>The program deliverers said that school feedback was positive and supportive. No other evidence was provided to indicate that the program supported the achievement of intermediate outcomes.</p>

The program deliverers (DET) observed that there was some inequity in accessing funding between schools. Those who delivered the Back to School program were concerned about disparate requests from schools across the region.

“Some schools over requested items once they knew they were eligible, whereas other schools asked for the bare minimum or nothing at all.” ~ State Schools Relief

By funding staffing at State Schools’ Relief, this could have provided application support and coordination to schools, thereby improving implementation efficiency and equity. Future programs may also benefit from more consistent consideration of allocation or cap per student/organisation.

4. Supporting Kindergartens

The aim of this component program, delivered by DET, was to support the learning, development and wellbeing of children in drought affected communities by enabling their continued access to early childhood education through:

- Drought Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS):** This part of the program expanded the eligibility criteria of the pre-existing KFS making it available to families in drought affected communities who have with children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program. Payments were made automatically from DET to service providers without an application process.
- Financial hardship grant:** The financial hardship grant was made up to \$10,000 available to kindergarten services within 11 LGAs.

The intended drought response outcome was to maintain kindergarten participation in drought affected communities through a direct grant and subsidy.

Evidence of the short-term and intermediate outcomes of the Supporting Kindergartens component program is described in Table 6-5.

Table 6-5: Evidence on outcomes of the Supporting Kindergartens component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members are aware of services and support available Increase in the number of community members who can recognise signs of stress and refer people to help Participation in social, education and community activities is maintained 	<p>This program supported 647 families to participate in education activities by providing free or low-cost kindergarten for 2016.</p> <p>The final DET report indicated that Kindergarten participation rates in the 11-drought affected LGAs (measured collectively) increased in 2016. This is a strong indicator that the program supported continued participation in education for pre-school children.</p> <p>Significantly, all services in the 11 drought affected LGAs continued to operate and deliver a quality 15-hour kindergarten program. Given that kindergartens viability is an ongoing issue in rural towns, maintaining services during a drought is a significant achievement.</p>

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families feel supported and manage the impacts of drought ▪ The escalation of the social impacts of drought are minimised 	<p>As reported in the short-term outcomes, kindergarten participation rates in the 11 drought affected LGAs increased in 2016 and all services continued to operate and deliver a quality 15-hour kindergarten program. These are significant achievements and are evidence of minimisation of the social impacts of drought.</p> <p>The increased participation rates achieved during this period will have ongoing benefits to those individuals and their families from their early childhood and into the future.</p>

Kindergartens were funded over two years. The fee subsidy for children was universal and the Hardship Grants were 'opt in' so organisations had to apply for a one-off grant of up to \$10,000.

The Kindergarten Hardship Grants were taken up by 41 kindergarten providers, and all applicants were successful in gaining funding. Only two non-Early Year Manager (non-EYM) providers in the drought affected local government areas were eligible for this grant, and both were managed by the same committee. While these non-EYM providers applied and were successful in gaining funding, they applied for and received less (\$7,000 each) than the other 39 kindergartens (who all applied for the full \$10,000).

“The non-EYM providers did get less money, possibly as they were less sophisticated than the EYM providers at understanding the financial impacts of drought.” ~ DET

The hardship grants were designed with the knowledge that fundraising is necessary in community kindergartens and drought compromises rural communities' ability to fundraise. While DET made attempts to communicate the grant to all service providers, non-EYM providers were possibly disadvantaged by their lower capacity.

5. Camps, Sports & Excursions Fund

Usually, the CSEF is only available to support students who hold a means tested concession card, administered through Centrelink. For the Drought Response Package, the CSEF was expanded to give a “one off” payment of \$375 to all 15,617 students enrolled in schools in 11 drought affected LGAs, regardless of means. Those students already eligible for CSEF were also entitled to the additional payment.

This program was administered by the Department of Education and Training (DET) through the schools' administration teams. It supported all children to participate in excursions, outdoor camps and sports. If the \$375 exceeded the cost of camps, sports and excursions, DET allowed schools to retain funds and use towards alternative school-based costs.

The intended drought response outcome was to provide education support for families and communities in drought affected regions.

Evidence of the short and intermediate term outcomes of the Camp, Sports and Excursions Fund component program is described in Table 6-6.

Table 6-6: Evidence on outcomes of the Camp, Sports and Excursions Fund component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community members are aware of services and support available ▪ Increase in the number of community members who can recognise signs of stress and refer people to help ▪ Participation in social, education and community activities is maintained 	<p>There is evidence that the Drought CSEF contributed to the short-term outcomes of the Drought Response Package.</p> <p><i>“The [drought CSEF program] made an enormous difference to our families, particularly enabling them to go on camp at a time when everyone was really feeling the squeeze. I had parents coming in saying that there was no way known they would have been able to send their children without the funding. Camps were looked upon as a luxury for a lot of those families.” ~ School Business Manager</i></p> <p>Through conversations with school principals and business managers, DET learned that take up was comprehensive.</p> <p>DET conducted a compliance audit of the overall CSEF program and included some Drought CSEF schools. That report found that, “Overall feedback from the schools on the CSEF and the drought response package process was positive.”¹⁵</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families feel supported and manage the impacts of drought ▪ The escalation of the social impacts of drought are minimised 	<p>The CSEF contribution to intermediate outcomes was less clear than its contribution to short-term outcomes. For example, programs like CSEF and the fees subsidy were one off payments, and did not address the impacts of drought, beyond the drought years. While many families would have been in a better position by 2017, the CSEF program had a short-term focus.</p>

6.2.4 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Short-term funding does not lead to intermediate outcomes

The socio-economic impacts of drought are not only felt during the drought, they linger within communities, often for several years after the drought breaks.

“The thing is that the drought doesn’t just affect that year. The fallout is that people have had to borrow money to keep going and they’re still struggling to cope with the aftermath.” ~ School Business Manager

While fee and equipment subsidies and kindergarten grant programs can provide short-term relief to families, achieving longer term relief from the social impacts of drought will require a longer-term response.

Inequitable funding delivery

Some programs did not deliver funding equitably across schools and kindergartens. This was seen in the Back to School program, where higher capacity schools supported their families at a higher funding rate than other schools. Another example is seen in the Kindergarten program where full \$10,000 Kindergarten Hardship Grants were awarded to 39 kindergartens that had Early Years Managers (EYM), while the two community-based service providers only managed to apply for \$7,000 each.

¹⁵ Internal Audit – Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF), Victorian State Government

While the drought program managers made attempts to communicate across the whole region, the variable uptake of some programs showed that an alternative is required in the future to ensure providers with lower internal capacity do not miss out. These programs may benefit from consideration of allocation or cap per student approaches.

Universal funding is administratively efficient

Perceptions of unfairness were avoided in the CSEF and Kindergarten Fee Subsidy programs where a standard amount of funding was made available to all children enrolled in school or kindergarten. This approach is popular within the community and, on balance, is administratively efficient. However, it raises questions of equity. Future drought or emergency responses must consider the pros and cons of universal funding.

Coordination across this support area

Coordination was needed for efficient delivery of this diverse package. The programs with the highest levels of coordination and support for families and individuals were the most highly subscribed and equitably administered. Program coordination was crucial, particularly because not all schools, kindergartens and families were on a level playing field.

As noted earlier, with the Regional Drought Coordinator starting after the package had been launched, there was reportedly some confusion and inefficiency. While existing networks, such as the PCP network, did respond to these issues, this early lack of coordination may still have reduced program delivery efficiency, particularly for organisations that were less connected to these existing networks, such as kindergartens.

Future packages would benefit from cross departmental coordination and engagement with deliverers from the design stage through to the completion of delivery.

6.2.5 OUTCOMES SUMMARY

While there is little evidence to suggest that the short-term funding provided through this support area will prevent longer-term escalation of the social impacts that follow a drought, it did provide immediate relief to all families with school aged children during the funded period. To address ongoing social impact, very targeted support to those still requiring assistance is the preferred and usual mechanism.

All the short-term outcomes were addressed

The Individual and Family Support area programs addressed all of the short-term outcomes. From the evidence presented, it appears that the Back-to-School, Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and CSEF programs provided wide-ranging short-term benefits to individual and families. On the whole, widespread awareness of services and support was reported by delivery agencies. There has been an increase in community members trained to recognise signs of stress and there is evidence that participation in social, education and community activities was maintained during the drought and the year following.

Difficulty measuring intermediate outcomes, but some progress

Evidence of progress towards intermediate outcomes was mixed. There is some evidence that the escalation of the social impacts of drought was minimised, but the short-term nature of the assistance provided to individuals and families presents a significant challenge to achieving (and measuring) progress towards that outcome.

The Kindergarten and PCP Mental Health and First Aid training do appear to have made progress towards their intermediate outcomes. For example, the increased kindergarten participation rates and the continuation of the Mental Health First Aid training outside of drought times are positive indicators of this progress.

However, without a widespread survey of families and individuals in the 11 LGAs, it is difficult to provide empirical evidence that all the intermediate outcomes of the Individual and Family Support area were achieved. An assessment of the amount of evidence available for this evaluation, and level of impact of component programs is provided in Table 6-7 and Table 6-8.

Table 6-7: Summary of the amount of evidence and level of impact of component programs

NO.	SUPPORT AREA & COMPONENT PROGRAM	AMOUNT & QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ¹⁶		LEVEL OF IMPACT
		SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	
1	Community engagement and support package & Mental Health First Aid training	Adequate	Adequate	High
2	National Centre for Farmer Health activities	Good	Adequate	High
3	Back to school	Poor	Poor	Medium
4	Supporting kindergartens	Good	Adequate	High
5	Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund	Good	Poor	High

Table 6-8: Rating of the evidence for the component program

RATING	AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF EVIDENCE	RATING	LEVEL OF IMPACT
Good	Previous dedicated evaluation, extensive reporting on outputs, achievements and outcomes	High	Large number of participants, broad and extensive reach into communities
Adequate	Basic reporting information provided, few gaps	Medium	Moderate number of participants, moderate reach into communities
Poor	Little reporting other than activities, incomplete	Low	Small number of participants, limited reach into communities

6.2.6 LEGACY

The legacy of the Individual and Family Support program is that individuals and families were directly supported during and immediately following a drought period which reduced hardship and improved well-being which will have some enduring positive impacts on those people who were assisted.

More explicitly, there is now an increase in community members trained to recognise signs of stress and this will have ongoing benefits and improve readiness for the next response. The increased kindergarten participation rates achieved during this period will have lifelong benefits to those individuals and their families – from their early childhood years and into the future.

¹⁶ This includes both the reporting provided by the project delivery teams and additional information gathered during this evaluation.

CASE STUDY: MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING, WIMMERA PRIMARY CARE PARTNERSHIP

Key message: Support community initiatives that have a purpose beyond times of drought. This increases the sustainability of the initiative and provides a resource that can be expanded during drought.

Situation

The Wimmera Primary Care Partnership delivered the mental health first aid training component of the Victorian Government's Drought Response Package. They were one of five partnerships working across the drought affected local government areas. The Partnership received \$10,000 from DHHS to coordinate the rollout of the mental health first aid training sessions. This small investment was supplemented by investments from other health alliances, councils, and regional organisations.

Approach

The sessions were conducted by trained local service providers who have been an on-going resource for delivering mental health first aid training post drought. Training sessions were designed to teach mental health management skills to adults to assist those experiencing mental health problems, mental health crisis situations and the early stages of mental illness. The focus was on helping people experiencing problems including: depression, anxiety, psychosis, substance use, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, non-suicidal self-injury, panic attacks and aggression.

Mental Health First Aid training was open to:

- Front line service providers such as: health, education and social support services
- Commercial sectors such as: banks, agribusinesses, stock agents, small business and rural supplies
- Other service providers such as: local government staff and the water authorities
- Community members.

Results

The training sessions had many benefits for the community, immediately and long-term, including:

- Increased awareness of mental health issues and how to provide assistance to someone in need
- Strengthened connections between farmers and local health services
- Provided people with the skills to assist neighbours and help them to access services
- Enabled rural communities to become more resilient.

This initiative has empowered the community to work together and care for each other. The investment has established connections between service providers and the partnership and training sessions have continued post drought. The feedback from participants showed that training was valuable, helpful and had increased the level of confidence of community members to recognise mental health issues early and provide assistance to those in need.

This is a clear example of how short-term funding opportunities continue to have a purpose post drought. These communities now have trained people who can recognise mental health issues early, provide initial assistance to someone in need and connect them with services. Using local service providers to provide the initial training has strengthened connections between the mental health services and the community.

7 Community and Regional Development Support

KEY MESSAGES:

1. A far-reaching package of programs with high impact across all drought affected areas.
2. A lot of funding agreements were executed quickly and efficiently to get support to where it was needed.
3. The investment into infrastructure and wellbeing and promotional events led to increased economic activity and most likely jobs.
4. Very high levels of community involvement and participation in events and people felt supported.
5. Good cross departmental engagement between agencies and deliverers on the ground; from design to delivery and financial acquittal.

7.1 DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Community and Regional Development Support area was:

To facilitate economic growth by investing in infrastructure, facilitate community events, ensure local coordination.

Support was available through **seven** component programs (A-G).

A. REGIONAL DROUGHT COORDINATOR

The aim of this component program was to employ a Regional Drought Coordinator whose role was to (Clear Horizons 2017¹⁷):

- Ensure that stakeholders were aware of support that was available
- Work with local councils to facilitate activities being delivered as part of the Local Council Drought Response initiative
- Build networks and create linkages between service providers to prevent duplication of effort
- Support the implementation of agriculture focussed state drought policy
- Act as a conduit between regional farming communities and the State Government about emerging issues on farms, in primary industries and within farming communities associated with drought
- Create good working relationships with an extensive network of stakeholders to achieve successful outcomes.

B. LOCAL COUNCIL DROUGHT RESPONSE PROGRAM

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide increased support for community activities that will support communities affected by drought to improve social connectedness

¹⁷ Clear Horizons 2017 Regional Drought Coordinator Project Key Stakeholder Interviews. Report prepared for DEDJTR.

- Increase the capability of local governments to respond to drought in their communities to better support community health and well-being.

C. FAST TRACKED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The aim of this component program was to:

- Bring forward delivery of key regional development projects from the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund to generate job creation and retention and leverage investment in drought impacted areas, as well as support events that promote the impacted regions.

D. ROAD REHABILITATION WORKS

The aim of this component program was to:

- Invest in road rehabilitation projects in drought affected shires to meet performance standards and improve safety on key freight routes.

E. SPORTING CLUB GRANTS PROGRAM

The aim of this component program was to:

- Augment the existing Sporting Club Grants Program, so clubs and community organisations delivering sport and active recreation programs located in drought affected local government areas could maintain existing levels of participation in current competitions and programs.

F. SPORT AND RECREATION WATER INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS

The aim of this component program was to:

- Maintain useability of sports grounds and recreation facilities during drought conditions
- Improve water use efficiency at priority sport and recreation facilities
- Increase access to secure water supplies at priority sport and recreation facilities.

G. FOODBANK PROJECT

The aim of this component program was to:

- Purchase and install a new cool room to store donations of fresh food through Foodbank in conjunction with community charity, Charlton Lions Club.

7.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

7.2.1 DELIVERY OF ACTIVITIES

The Community and Regional Development support area comprised a far-reaching package of component programs which enabled government to respond to the drought in a timely way. The programs provided essential coordination support and a multi-dimensional grants program that was a driver of a lot of activities and infrastructure works that stimulated local economies in drought affected regions.

A summary of the projects funded in the Community and Regional Development Support area, and their status, is shown in Table 7-1.

Table 7-1: Summary of Community and Regional Development Support area programs

COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
Regional Drought Coordinator [DEDJTR]	Stakeholder engagement. Communicating Drought Response Package materials and information.	<i>Drought and About</i> newsletter distributed to 200 stakeholders every three weeks. Although not quantified – major conduit between regional communities and State government.	Complete.	\$200,000
Local Council Drought Response Program [Regional Development Victoria (RDV)]	A broad mix of types of events were held in each shire. The number of events held varied between 8 and 22 in each LGA. Events were categorised into five types; Agriculture (16 per cent), Health and wellbeing (24 per cent), Arts (12 per cent), Sports and recreation (10 per cent), and Community (38 per cent).	Approx. 44,000 people participated in at least 157 events conducted in 10 LGAs. Around 635 people were directly involved in the delivery of these events.	Complete.	\$400,000
Fast Tracked Regional Development projects [RDV]	32 funded projects fast tracked through the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund: upgrades to council facilities and infrastructure, streetscape and precincts, new recreational trails, business cases for agriculture infrastructure and community events.	All 11 LGAs had projects funded. There was a spread of investment ranging from 3 per cent (Buloke SC) up to 26 per cent (Horsham RCC) of the funds going into each municipality.	Final milestone reports were provided for 21 out of the 32 projects. Evidence of completion for the remaining projects was not provided but it is expected that the majority are either completed or near completion at the time of writing.	\$1,020,000*
Road rehabilitation works [VicRoads]	Three road projects delivered by Western Region and Northern Region, VicRoads.	Works were undertaken in Yarriambiack, Buloke and Loddon shires.	Complete.	\$1,200,000

COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
Sporting Club Grants Program [Sport and Recreation Victoria SRV]	36 grants funded in total, each of \$500 in value to fund social or community events at existing sporting clubs in affected LGAs. The grants covered 23 different sports or types of clubs.	Program reporting indicated that 3,471 club members would benefit from the grant, including 28 indigenous, 42 from the CaLD ¹⁸ community, 10 people who are refugees, and 929 who are socio-economically disadvantaged.	Complete.	\$100,000
Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure grants [DELWP]	25 projects approved for funding. All grant recipients were councils, schools or community sport organisations in drought affected LGAs.	Data on number of participants reached through the funded programs was unavailable.	13 projects completed. Remaining projects due for completion by December 2017.	\$2,980,000
Foodbank project [DHHS]	1 cold storage unit installed in Charlton to service surrounding district, preventing volunteers having to drive to Bendigo to pick up fresh food	147 people identified as in need for food support, and received box of food monthly, with four areas on a weekly delivery cycle. Younger farmers more impacted than older famers (90 were younger people), then people in town expressed interest and needed help 8-10 community volunteers through the Charlton Lions Club involved in monthly deliveries, aged 63-82.	Complete.	\$80,000
Total funding announced				\$5,980,000

Notes: *Funding for the fast-tracked regional development projects increased to \$5,200,000.

¹⁸ Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

7.2.2 DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Indicators or evidence that the Community and Regional Development Support area was delivered efficiently for each component program follows:

Regional Drought Coordinator

The decision to fund this role early on in the response was in itself a sound efficiency measure that paid off. A previous evaluation of this role (Clear Horizons 2017) found that the coordination role was successful and that efficiencies were realised. The person in this position was very active in building partnerships between delivery personnel and organisations, had a strong presence on the Seasonal Conditions Committee, convened by the Horsham RCC, and provided a regular newsletter to those in the front line of delivery.

Local Council Drought Response Program

- RDV were responsible for the coordination and governance of this program. There was a central administrator who worked closely with regional staff and was in this role for the duration of the drought and subsequent delivery and evaluation of the program. This provided good continuity and therefore efficiencies.
- In the letter of offer to Councils grants of \$40,000 grants were obtainable *to support community resilience and well-being and increase social connectedness*. Some examples of the types of activities that could and could not be funded were provided. However, little additional guidance was provided, and interview respondents reported some confusion about what activities were most appropriate to meet the criteria, especially when trying to differentiate between the \$40,000 grants and the \$15,000 'economic events' grants provided under the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund.

Fast tracked regional development projects

- Again, each Council was assigned a local RDV contact which streamlined delivery and was found to have worked well. RDV officers worked with Councils one-on-one to identify eligible projects and assist with making applications. Over 40 applications were submitted to a value of around \$11 million.
- Existing grant management frameworks from the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund were used which provided documentation and application templates. This inbuilt alignment with existing programs made the 'fast tracking' easier.
- Funding agreements were generally executed within three months of the announcement which indicated that Councils were ready and willing to respond with the required information and co-contribution to the project. Especially given the funding announcement was in November 2015 heading into the summer holiday period.
- There was a close and strong relationship with participating Councils, with at least one RDV jurisdiction holding regular meetings (weekly/fortnightly as needed) with the main project contacts. In this region, RDV also met with the CEO and Executive in their Councils to discuss any issues and go through milestone reports of each of the funded drought response projects.

Road rehabilitation works

- The roadworks projects were executed using VicRoads standard procurement policies and contractual guidelines i.e. competitively tendered as part of a package of a number of road rehabilitation jobs.

Sporting Club Grants Program

- The Sporting Club Grants Program used existing process (i.e. application form), administration (i.e. modified guidelines), systems (i.e. GEMS, a grant management system used by local governments) and grant round timelines, which assisted community sporting clubs' awareness and participation in the program.
- The drought response provided additional resources to an existing grants program. Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) staff reviewed and approved applications based on assessment against criteria outlined in the *Sporting Club Grants Program: Additional Guidelines for Drought Affected Areas* document, which was a transparent and well-structured approach.

Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants

- An assessment panel prioritised successful projects. These were ranked on alignment to objectives outlined in the program guidelines. The panel also took into account the quality of the application, what infrastructure was included, pre-planning, quotes for works (e.g. artificial turf for lawn bowls to inform estimates).
- The Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants program worked with local governments, SRV and water corporations in the regions to make sure there was far reach, and good projects were developed.
- According to milestone reports, extensions were granted to some projects based on climatic conditions (e.g. not reseeding during a frost and new turf not taking), as well as community factors (e.g. use of footy ovals during seasons and not being able to undertake before winter).
- 20 per cent of project fee was withheld until the successful completion of the project and final report was received.

Foodbank Project

- Foodbank used its existing Victoria-wide purchasing power and logistics capacity to acquire and deliver a high-quality commercial-grade fridge directly to the targeted community, minimising the cost and maximising benefit in that region.
- The fresh storage capacity created at the Charlton food-relief agency enabled them to receive and store food donations from local producers. This reduced the travel and freight costs associated with food donations being collected from the region compared with from the central Melbourne based warehouse.
- Charlton Lions Club were able to leverage support from the concurrent Drought Employment Program (DEP) run by the North Central CMA in conjunction with DELWP. This provided additional resources of the DEP Drought Crew to support social outcomes in a separate component program.

7.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes by component program

In this section, we examine the data and information available that describes how each component program contributed to the short-term and intermediate outcomes noted against each support area (in this case Community and Regional Development Support). We also look at the extent to which the outputs and results have addressed the problems identified for each support area.

1. Regional Drought Coordinator position

The Regional Drought Coordinator (RDC) role operated from December 2015 to 31 December 2016, was based at Horsham and worked with all affected drought communities. Her work supported councils, businesses and individuals and played a key role in communicating and coordinating all drought response activities.

An evaluation of the RDC role was conducted during early 2017. A comprehensive outline of the evidence gathered is provided in the appendices of the full evaluation report (Clear Horizons 2017), prepared for DEDJTR.

Findings of previous evaluation

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the RDC component of the Regional Drought Response Package found that:

- This role provided a flexible and targeted approach to communicating and coordinating drought response support for those charged with delivering support initiatives and reaching affected communities
- The approach taken in locating the role in the region was critical for the success of the role
- The objectives identified for the role clearly align with the Victorian Government's approach to drought response
- The RDC was effective in delivering improved outcomes to the communities affected by the drought.

Lessons identified

The evaluation concluded that the large geographical area and the complexities of the issues to be addressed across the 21 component programs meant that there were challenges for the RDC. The RDC's regular participation on the Seasonal Conditions Committee, hosted by the Horsham Rural City Council (RCC), enabled strengthening of links between agencies and other drought package delivery partners.

The stakeholders interviewed as part of the previous evaluation made an important suggestion for future responses:

- An ongoing Regional Climate Response Coordinator role would be proactive and valuable, rather than focussing on response and recovery.

The Regional Drought Coordinator position aimed to coordinate the drought response in all jurisdictions across the whole package. The overall contribution of this role is evidenced by how well all of the component programs delivered on their intended short-term and intermediate outcomes. The evidence gathered for each of the remaining six component programs within the Community and Regional Development Support area follows.

2. Local Council Drought Response

The Local Council Drought Response provided \$40,000 grants to every Council *to support community resilience and well-being and increase social connectedness*. A separate \$15,000 'economic events' grant was provided to councils under the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund to support additional community events with a regional development and promotional focus.

Across the two programs, over 44,000 people participated in 157 events funded across 10 LGAs. Around 635 people were directly involved in the delivery of these events. The type of events held have been categorised as: Agriculture (16 per cent), Health and wellbeing (24 per cent), Arts (12 per cent), Sports and recreation (10 per cent), and Community (38 per cent).

In most jurisdictions, there was a wide range of events held throughout 2016. The types of events held and their timing is illustrated in Figure 7-1, and Figure 7-2 for the Yarriambiack Shire Council and Horsham RCC. These reflect how both small and large local jurisdictions alike held up to 20 events, indicating that despite relatively fewer Council staff resources in Yarriambiack, their community clearly embraced the opportunity afforded by the grants and made the most of it.

The evaluation found extensive evidence relating to how well the program delivered on the intended short-term outcomes but there was little direct evidence relating to how well the program delivered on the intended intermediate outcome of communities feeling supported; however anecdotally the grants and funded activities were highly appreciated by regional communities. A description of this evidence is found in Table 7-2.

Table 7-2: Evidence on short-term and intermediate outcomes from the Local Council Drought Response component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community members participate in events. 	<p>Evidence was robust.</p> <p>Milestone reporting from Councils was comprehensive and included numbers of participants at community events; these totalled over 44,000 people participating in at least 157 events.</p> <p>The number of events held within each LGA varied between 8 and 22.</p> <p>A broad mix of types of events were held in each shire and these were all documented.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities feel supported. 	<p>The program reporting did not collect any direct evidence through survey or evaluation that communities felt supported. However, from interviews with a range of people in the front line of delivering the grants it is strongly evident that in the main the grants were welcomed by community groups and achieved very high reach in terms of participation which had an immediate impact on increasing social contact in 10 LGAs.</p> <p>Again, while no explicit data was collected it is a reasonable assumption that the events scheduled over a 12-month period in each jurisdiction had some mental health and wellbeing benefits through increasing social contact between people within their communities and reducing the stress and burden of drought. This is assumed to have directly contributed to communities feeling supported.</p>

Councils welcomed this funding, however some interviewees felt that there was too little guidance provided on what types of activities should be targeted for funding. There was reportedly an air of urgency relayed to Councils that the funding needed to be delivered during the first half of 2016. Some Councils wanted and felt that they needed more time to plan how the funding should be allocated and to what activities, to be able to achieve the most effective outcomes.

There was also a sense of a level of congestion felt by some Councils due to the number of events being funded at once. Most Councils distributed the funding over the 12-month period during 2016. A combination of new and regular community events was funded by the program. Some Councils concentrated on adding value to already planned community events.

The justification for the grants program was founded in the recognition that during times of drought, local government resources can be stretched as their workload and support role increases. The rationale being that rural shires have limited operating resources for community-led activities and had previously expressed the need for increased levels of support for local activities.

However, some of the smaller councils felt that while they appreciated the grant money to run local events, their limited resources were already stretched and to some extent the grants placed an additional burden on existing staff with little capacity to take on the organisation of additional events within the shire and within a short time frame.

To combat this, several Councils used existing town committees or set up community committees to effectively plan and prioritise grant monies towards local activities; this seemed to work well for them and could be considered as a model for delivery of this type of support in the future.

“It is time intensive to develop up these smaller projects, so some Councils were torn between not wanting to knock back funding and yet having to put in a lot of effort to get community groups mobilised to plan and hold events in a short period of time.” ~ Regional Development Victoria (RDV) Officer 1

“There was a little bit of resentment heard in some places ... why spend all this money on ‘feel good’ activities when it would be better to go towards those directly affected by drought.” ~ RDV Officer 2

“We felt a bit barbequed out.” ~ Council staff member 1

“The second lot of money was kind of foisted on us – we had to manufacture events.” ~ Council staff member 2

“The support came and then the rain came but the events were welcomed just the same.” ~ Council staff member 3

The activities and events funding came and went and was overall, very much welcomed by councils and their communities. They were very well attended (in the order of 44,000 participants) and would have contributed to communities feeling supported at the time.

Several councils commented that it might have been better to spend less funds on one off activities and events and more on tangible small infrastructure projects that would have a greater legacy in these communities, such as BBQ shelters or street furniture, acknowledging that these types of projects had been funded under a separate fund.

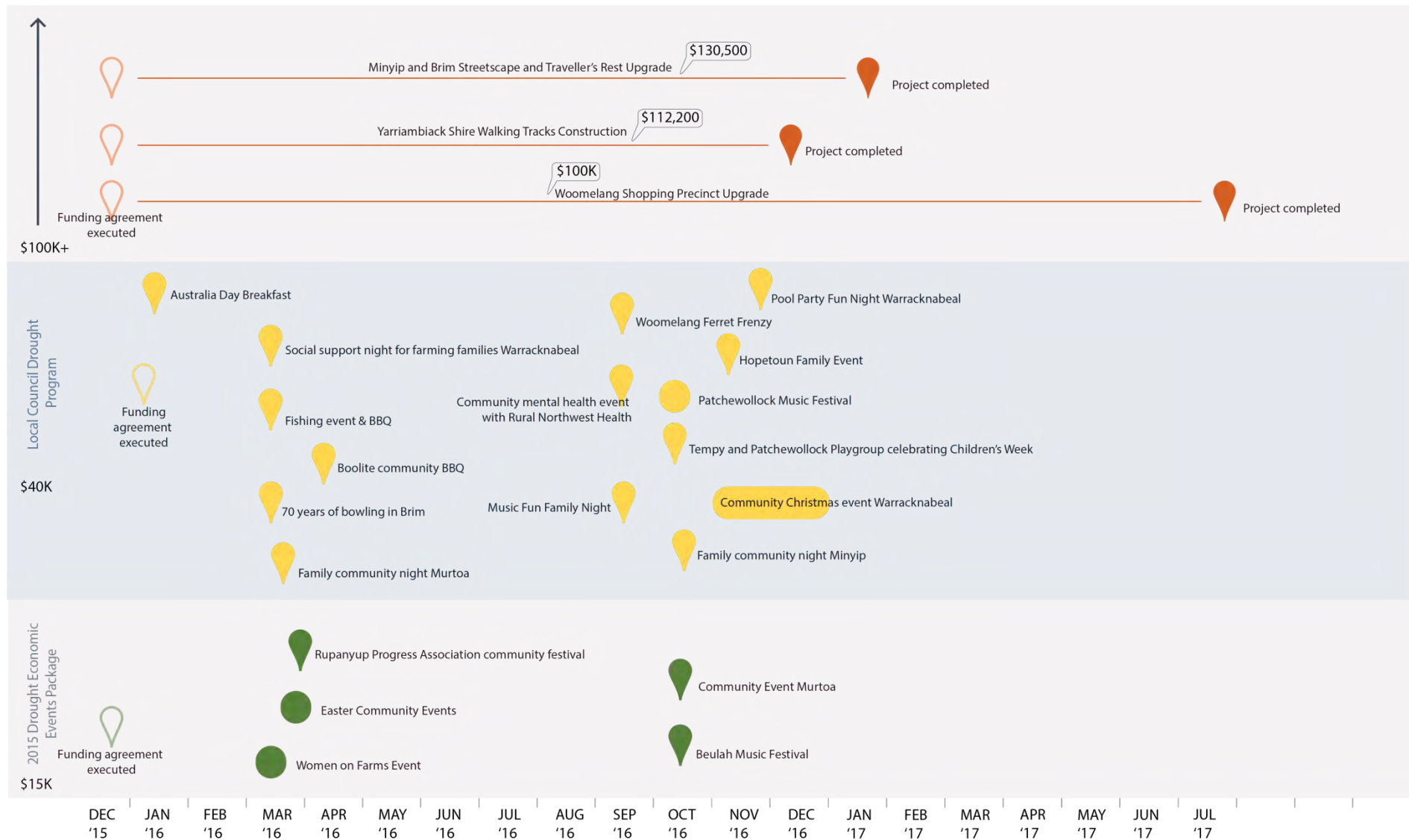


Figure 7-1: Distribution of community events held within Yarriambiack Shire during 2016 and fast tracked regional development projects



Figure 7-2: Distribution of community events held within the Horsham Rural City Council during 2016 and fast tracked regional development projects

3. Fast-tracked Regional Development Projects

This initiative was designed to bring forward regional development projects that strengthen the economic and social base of drought-affected communities. The projects had to meet the criteria for funding under the Victorian Government's RJIF¹⁹ however the types of projects accepted for funding was broadened for the drought response. The projects supported local infrastructure aimed at creating opportunities for economic growth, as well as supported events that promoted the impacted areas.

Shire councils and one other local organisation were successful in receiving funding for a range of projects that supported the development of community assets. Just over \$5 million was allocated to 32 projects through this program. Projects included facility and infrastructure upgrades; Streetscape and precinct upgrade; new recreational trails; business cases for support infrastructure for agriculture and community events promoting the region.

The majority of the projects are completed, and final milestone reports were provided for 21 out of the 32 projects. Evidence of completion for the remaining projects was not provided, however it is expected that the majority of these are either completed or near completion. These projects have been highly planned and programmed by Councils with much experience in project managing these types of projects so low risk of failing to be completed. The investment was spread between all local government areas ranging from 3 per cent (Buloke SC) up to 26 per cent (Horsham RCC) of the funds going into each municipality.

The evaluation found a range of evidence relating to how well the program delivered on short-term and intermediate outcomes. A description of this evidence is found in Table 7-3.

Table 7-3: Evidence on outcomes from the fast-tracked regional development projects component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community-led infrastructure is identified and implemented. 	<p>There was considerable evidence that the funded projects were 'community led' at a substantial level.</p> <p>Councils undertake community action planning every 5 years to identify priorities for infrastructure.</p> <p>20 infrastructure projects were scoped and constructed and were strongly based on regional needs through linkages with councils and their associated community groups.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities feel supported. 	<p>The program reporting did not collect any direct evidence through survey or evaluation that communities felt supported.</p> <p>Anecdotally, there was good recognition by communities that locally planned and executed projects had been funded by the DRP.</p> <p>The feedback from local government delivery partners was that the projects were very highly regarded with good mental health and wellbeing benefits arising from increasing social contact between people during a drought. This is assumed to have directly contributed to communities feeling supported.</p>

¹⁹ The RJIF is the Victorian Government's overarching regional development package, comprising three programs: the Regional Infrastructure Fund, the Regional Jobs Fund and the Stronger Regional Communities Plan.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic growth in drought impacted areas is facilitated by providing opportunities for community-led initiatives and important local infrastructure. 	<p>The projects funded were all high priority initiatives identified by local communities that otherwise would not have been funded and delivered during this timeframe. Bringing forward these projects has meant that the economic benefits have already begun to flow into these regions in the majority of cases.</p>
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The projects funded all had community input. The projects tended to have been “on the drawing board” for some time and those that had the highest level of existing design and planning e.g. schematics and some budgeting, were usually the ones that were ‘fast tracked’ and funded.

The guidelines for council contributions were the same as in the RJIF guidelines and these were adhered to. However, there was some feedback that while there was more flexibility in the types of projects funded, which was welcomed, there was a feeling that guidelines on the co-contribution and reporting requirements, could have been relaxed given that it was a drought response package. Those councils with limited resources to execute these types of projects would have benefited from this.

It was suggested that new and/or modified guidelines be prepared for emergency response type support and that these should be “designed and owned” by regional personnel within the delivery agencies (local government, RDV, DEDJTR, water authorities etc.).

“We need to be realistic about our expectations on Councils to follow process [e.g. RJIF guidelines] when resources are stretched normally and even more so during and following drought.” ~ RDV Officer

4. Road Rehabilitation Works

Increasing mass limits (larger trucks) is vital for regional economic growth and farm business productivity yet diminishes the overall sense of safety and well-being on rural roads. The quality of the regional road network is as important as other state provided infrastructure including hospitals and schools for liveability. Rural and regional people spend a lot of time driving so funding to improve roads is always welcomed, particularly in times of drought.

VicRoads received funding for three roadworks projects undertaken in three different LGAs, the Yarriambiack, Buloke and Loddon shires.

There was little evidence available on how well the program delivered on the intended short-term and intermediate outcomes. A description of this evidence is found in Table 7-4.

Table 7-4: Evidence on outcomes from the Road Rehabilitation Works component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-led infrastructure is identified and implemented. 	<p>The roadworks projects had been on the ‘drawing board’ so were essentially brought forward by the funding.</p> <p>Limited evidence that the projects were ‘community led’.</p> <p>The projects were chosen because they were in a drought affected area and there had been community and agency complaints about the condition of the road.</p> <p>However, VicRoads make regular regional open house visits and have a customer complaints and enquiry system – to hear and record community voice on issues to do with main roads.</p>

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities feel supported. 	While there is no direct evidence of this outcome, a well-maintained pavement and surface improves amenity and road safety which is important for the driving experience and highly valued by people living in rural communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic growth in drought impacted areas is facilitated by providing opportunities for community-led initiatives and important local infrastructure. 	No direct evidence and unable to directly quantify an economic growth component to this funding, however, maintaining a good rural highway network is important for the road freight network which is heavily relied on for transporting agricultural produce to markets.

VicRoads report that they try to be responsive to communities, but it is difficult for a financial/economic analysis to show a positive benefit to cost ratio on very low trafficked rural roads.

“The stretch of the Borung highway in the Yarriambiack shire rehabilitated by this project was notorious for having poor ride quality (due to the expansive clays) and needed a lot of ongoing maintenance. Initiative funding like this is always welcomed and can help with this.” ~ VicRoads Program Manager

5. Sporting Club Grants Program

The program improved community participation in sporting club events by providing additional financial resources through an existing grant mechanism. Sporting clubs are an important hub for rural and regional communities that contribute to social and human capital.

A description of the grants delivered and available evidence on outcomes is provided in Table 7-5.

Table 7-5: Evidence on outcomes from the Sporting Club Grants Program component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members participate in events 	<p>The 36 grants covered the following drought affected LGAs to maintain and promote participation by 3,471 people in local sporting clubs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ararat Rural City (x2) for Elmhurst Golf Club and Elmhurst Tennis Club Buloke Shire (x9) covering Birchip Harness Racing Club through to Wycheproof/Narraport Netball Club Central Goldfields Shire (x5) for Bealiba & District Pony Club through to Goldfields Gymnastics Gannawarra Shire (x2) for Cohuna Golf Club and Quambatook Football Club Hindmarsh Shire (x1) for Nhill Lawn Tennis Club Horsham Rural City (x9) for Horsham Calisthenics College through to Volleyball Horsham Loddon Shire (x2) for Northern Victorian Quarter Horse Association and Wedderburn Hockey Club Pyrenees Shire Council (x4) for Avoca Friends of the Pool through to Lexton Golf Club Yarriambiack Shire (x2) for Minyip Murtoa Football Club and Murtoa Bowling Club

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities feel supported 	<p>Limited evidence, other than alignment of broader Sporting Club Grants Program and maintaining community connections, promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, and building resilience.</p> <p>While the program was successful in promoting participation in local sporting clubs there is limited evidence to suggest that communities felt supported as a result. However, the final evaluation report and feedback from participants was being conducted at the time of writing this report.</p>
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The augmentation of the existing grant program was specifically for community events and maintaining and promoting participation in local sporting clubs. This was in addition to the existing category 1 (uniform), 2 (skill development) and 3 (operational capacity) support grants. The *Sporting Club Grants Program; Additional Guidelines for Drought Affected Areas* document extended the existing *Sporting Club Grants Program Guidelines* and outlined the objectives and eligibility criteria. This ensured a transparent and clear process for grant applicants.

“Participants were very appreciative based on anecdotal evidence, and funding contributed to open days, family fun days, award dinners, social competitions to promote involvement and participation in sporting clubs.” ~ Project Officer interviewee

There was a missed opportunity to integrate the specific drought funding with the other categories to leverage investment, as it had to be spent on separate events. This meant that skill development and operational capacity could not be explicitly strengthened through the events.

The grant application process for eligible sporting clubs was delayed. There were originally two rounds planned, the first occurring in early 2017 which was after the drought had ended. The second round was not run. While the substantive program was usually oversubscribed, the funding for drought affected areas was significantly undersubscribed due to lack of communication and awareness by sporting clubs and only operating one round of grants instead of two.

“All happened quite late in the piece for when the grant process was being opened. [The] program [was] oversubscribed, although only funded 36 grants for drought affected areas. There was perhaps minimal awareness of the additional grants as it was the first time it had run, and was stated it was a temporary source.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

The program demonstrated good data collection at the output level and has processes in place to collect data at the short and intermediate outcome levels. However, the process of data collection and evaluation reporting was being undertaken at the time of writing this report.

Sporting clubs may have been further supported had the second planned round of grants been undertaken. This highlighted a missed opportunity to consolidate and leverage the government investment in the first funding round, and perhaps increase club participation and reach.

SRV regional staff could have contributed more proactively to informing the needs and ensuring better reach in relation to the additional drought response grant program. For example, were \$500 grants the best way to promote community participation in sporting clubs? SRV regional teams are the main contact points for clubs in these areas and this mechanism should be used next time a program is being scoped or developed in response to drought, as it was a missed opportunity.

“Could do this in the future with more notice and better planning and responding to communities needs by using regional staff and networks prior to implementing project.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

There was also a very ‘top-down’ directive approach given by the Drought Interdepartmental Coordination Group to SRV staff, with limited consultation prior to the project being finalised. Hence, there was limited

awareness by SRV staff that the component program was part of a broader package of works. Greater awareness of the package could have informed agency staff as to the type of information to collect from grant applicants, developing more appropriate guidelines, or what outcomes to measure.

6. Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants

The program was successful in identifying and prioritising infrastructure directly with local council, schools and community sport and recreation groups through a competitive grants process administered by DELWP. These projects reduced potable water use at community facilities. The implementation of this infrastructure is still underway. Of the 25 projects, 13 were completed within the designated time frame and budget and the remaining 12 required timing variations due to time delays with funding approval and consideration of climatic conditions, the timing on the type of works and impact on local community access to facilities. All projects are due to be completed by December 2017.

The program was able to contribute to communities feeling supported by providing resources for maintenance and improvement of recreational facilities in drought affected areas. These facilities are often the centre of rural and regional areas. However, there is limited evidence the infrastructure contributed to improved economic growth.

The evidence on short-term and intermediate outcomes is shown in Table 7-6.

Table 7-6: Evidence on outcomes from the Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community-led infrastructure is identified and implemented 	<p>The 25 infrastructure projects that were scoped and currently being delivered were based on regional needs through linkages with councils and their associated community groups and schools.</p> <p>A wide range of drought proofing projects were funded in each shire. These included: rain water harvesting tanks, irrigation and reuse system upgrades, resurfacing sporting ovals, synthetic turf on sports fields, reseeding ovals, and other projects that reduced potable water use at sporting facilities during a drought and beyond.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities feel supported 	<p>There is recognition and literature that it's not just about individual business or household infrastructure or support during drought. There are community facilities that need upkeep and drought has an impact on community assets in regional areas. Drought periods can be an opportune time for local communities get together to plan for and undertake improvements to communal assets.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic growth in drought impacted areas is facilitated by providing opportunities for community-led initiatives and important local infrastructure 	

The program developed the *Sustainable Water Fund Community Sport and Recreation Program; Application Guidelines*. These guidelines outlined objectives, eligibility criteria, process of assessment and other

supporting resources for grant applicants. This was a transparent and clear process that enabled local needs to be identified.

“It was community-led and used local knowledge within the guidelines of the program.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

Timelines were an issue for program development and roll-out. Applications were open for submissions by grant proponents from 29 September to 10 November 2016, which was after the drought had broken. Grant applicants were advised in the guidelines they would be notified from November 2016. This did not happen until 7 February 2017. As a result, 13 projects were completed within the designated time frame and budget whilst the remaining 12 are still being implemented by councils, schools or community sporting organisations, and are now due for completion in December 2017.

DELWP was in a strong position to deliver the program, given prior experience with similar programs during the millennium drought that aimed to reduce potable water use. That meant the systems and process to deliver the short- and intermediate outcomes were more mature, even though time delays were experienced.

There is generally a lack of funding for local sporting clubs and facilities in rural and regional areas to implement water savings projects. The projects were up to \$150,000 each, and this level of resourcing is not possible for small club and community groups to access or raise themselves. Hence, without the funding the majority of projects would not have been implemented, nor would the communities have been able to be supported.

“It’s out of reach for a lot of the councils and community groups and essentially closes the facility during drought times.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

The most significant learning from implementing this program was about timing and the extent to which it assisted communities to respond to the drought. While the program was delivered under the ‘response’ package that was intended to assist with drought recovery, the infrastructure and projects being delivered after the recovery period are now preparing the community for the next drought.

“The drought in the north west was over by the time we ran this program, administered the funding and got it out as early as possible. This funding has prepared communities for the next drought and reduced reliance on potable water supplies.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

This raises the importance of running this type of program prior to a drought to assist in the proactive planning and preparedness of community sporting clubs and facilities. This would improve the resilience of these facilities and associated local community clubs and members.

“We are now considering extending this program to other parts of the state to prepare other regions – prepare rather than respond. Rural and regional areas are much more connected to their water storages compared to the metro areas. Sporting clubs are an important part of the social fabric of regional communities.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

Interview participants commented that there was a lack of connectivity at a whole-of-package level, and the program was very much delivered in isolation of the other component programs. There was limited opportunity to utilise the DELWP regional team, however, the program did engage with SRV regional staff to more effectively and efficiently identify the needs of the community and respond.

7. Foodbank Project

The program successfully responded to infrastructure barriers that were identified at a local community level by installing a cold storage unit in Charlton to hold perishable food, in addition to the non-perishable items that were already being held.

The program allowed the provision of material relief and face-to-face contact and support with those facing financial hardship. The key beneficiaries were identified and targeted by the local community charity, and infrastructure support allowed them to undertake this task more effectively.

The evaluation found a range of evidence relating to how well the program delivered on the intended short-term and intermediate outcomes of the program. A description of this evidence is provided in Table 7-7.

Table 7-7: Evidence on outcomes from the Foodbank Project component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-led infrastructure is identified and implemented. 	<p>Having the cold storage unit installed enabled Charlton Lions Club through Foodbank to hold perishable food longer and distribute this to people in need, particularly during summer with >40-degree days.</p> <p>This replaced inadequate transport system and volunteer travel to Bendigo-Charlton return with fridge box trailer, and previous shipping container for dry and non-perishable food.</p> <p>Created the capacity for local food-relief agencies to distribute fresh and chilled products, that are more nutritious and healthy than only processed non-perishable items.</p> <p>Enabled local food-relief agencies to collect fresh produce directly from local producers in their area.</p> <p>Increased the quantity and variety of food available to rural communities seeking food relief, as well as the quantity of food that was donated and re-distributed in targeted areas. It also increased the longevity of perishable foods, reducing wastage.</p> <p>Empowered local communities to participate in the food-relief response in their region.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities feel supported. 	<p>Increased the distribution of fresh produce in regional and rural areas.</p> <p>Increased the donation and collection of fresh produce in regional and rural areas.</p> <p>Built capacity among food relief agencies to respond to the needs of their local community.</p> <p>Improved mental health and well-being benefits from regular contact with volunteers supplying food hampers.</p>

The program was able to respond in a timely way by using an existing government service provider of material relief in Foodbank, as well as an engaged local community charity group in Charlton Lions Club. The capacity of Foodbank combined with the local networks and non-traditional 'food relief' approach of the Lions Club was a successful partnership.

Capacity of regional charities is sometimes lacking, and this was addressed by undertaking Food Handling and Safety courses and Mental Health First Aid training through 1-2 hour sessions held in the region, as well as raising the awareness of providing access to fresh food in the hampers. Foodbank also ran additional pop-up farmer's markets that improved fresh produce access in regional areas.

"Everyone was really pleased with the service. We were having grown adults breaking down in front of the volunteers, and they actually looked forward to our regular visits." ~ Delivery partner interviewee 1

Barriers included access to fresh food, cost of chilled transport, cost of running cold storage, and stigma associated with seeking help to feed your family.

One unintended outcome was the perception that the program was potentially taking away custom from some local businesses. However, Charlton Lions Club were only supplying about four meals at a time. It wasn't so much about the quantum of food, it was about the social interaction and contact to see if people were coping.

There was a missed opportunity to utilise the DHHS regional area officers and previous Foodbank Regional Support Team to identify key needs and tailor targeted support earlier in the program development. This would have ensured a quicker and more effective response in the communities that needed the most assistance.

"Not a package from our perspective, we were only asked to look after this one small program – was only a fridge. But no one consulted with us or talked to us beforehand, it was more imposed and can you look after it." ~ Project Manager interviewee

One of the key benefits identified by delivery partners and volunteers at Charlton Lions Club was the opportunity to make contact with residents and farmers in drought affected areas, rather than solely being about the provision of material relief and food. This provided a number of mental health and well-being outcomes in terms of early referral and prevention.

"The benefit I see for farmers is we are having face-to-face contact with them and having a chat. We give them some quality vegetables and at least they will be having some decent feeds and some contact." ~ Delivery partner interviewee 1

"People are stressed and have had a lot to endure, and this gesture has been well received. While people said they did not need food on the first visit, all but a handful had continued accepting the offer." ~ Delivery partner interviewee 2

The Foodbank Project has positioned the Charlton community to be able to respond in a more coordinated and effective way during the next drought or extreme event. The program was highly regarded in the local community, and volunteers are now more aware of the difficulties some people face and how to respond and provide assistance.

"We could ramp this up if needed, and re-register with Foodbank providing we have volunteers and access to donated food. So, we're in a good position for the next drought." ~ Delivery partner interviewee 1

This program has helped strengthen Foodbank's collaborative partnerships with regional and rural welfare agencies, food wholesalers and primary producers. The ability to engage with a diverse range of material relief providers and charities also increases access to those people in need during a drought that may not seek assistance otherwise.

“In regional areas, there’s a stigma and sense of pride where people don’t access traditional charity, so there needs to be other community non-traditional charities like Lions.” ~ Delivery partner interviewee 3

The infrastructure delivered through this program is still used today and is a key infrastructure pillar in the regional food-relief network. However, there are ongoing issues with affordability of electricity to operate the cold storage units, which may need to be considered in future support packages.

7.2.4 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

The Community and Regional Development support area comprised a far-reaching package of component programs which enabled government to respond to the drought in a timely way. The programs provided essential coordination support and a multi-dimensional grants program that was a driver of a lot of activities and infrastructure works that stimulated local economies in drought affected regions.

Highest impact component programs

The Regional Drought Coordinator role, the Local Council Drought Response grants and Fast Tracked Regional Development project investments had the most impact. They were all well programmed projects that provided timely and very much welcomed support to drought affected communities. The RDC role was essential and the two mainly local government delivered programs, strongly supported and administered by RDV, were planned from the ground up, and had a high level of success in delivering a large amount of events and regional development projects which made a difference.

Timeliness and response versus recovery

In some instances, component programs were delayed in planning, development, implementation and/or approval of grant funding. This had implications for the timeliness of support provided under the package to drought affected communities. Community needs were therefore changing from responding to drought, to recovering from drought after a change in seasonal conditions. In some cases, programs were so delayed they were actually improving the preparedness of communities for the next drought, as the recovery effort had passed.

This raises both challenging and interesting issues for designing future drought packages when considering the Planning, Preparedness, Response and Recovery emergency management spectrum.

The evaluated effectiveness and timing of delivery of some of the component programs varied widely. For example, the sport and recreation water infrastructure grants were successful in enabling local councils, schools and community groups to directly identify their infrastructure needs through a competitive grants process (administered by DELWP) and these projects reduced potable water use at community recreational facilities. The delivery of projects saw 13 of these completed within the designated time frame and budget. Twelve projects required timing variations due to delays with funding approval, consideration of climatic conditions, the timing of the type of works, and impact on local community access to facilities. All projects are due to be completed by December 2017. Similarly, sporting clubs are an important hub for rural and regional communities that contribute to social and human capital and the grants program was well intentioned. However, the grant application process was delayed with only the first of two planned rounds of funding rounds delivered by SRV.

On the other hand, the local Council delivered program of events were timely and very well attended, and the fast-tracking process to enable investment into long time planned (and in some cases longed for) infrastructure

projects, were well received and brought immediate support, relief and directly generated local economic activity and income in affected communities.

Both 'ground up' and 'top down' priority setting

An online forum (Your Say) set up by the Victorian Government in December 2015 invited the community to comment on the support the government should provide to make a difference in drought affected communities. Responses to the call helped shape the programs in the second funding announcement, for example, the Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants.

The two local government delivered programs, administered by RDV, were very much planned from the ground up and subsequently had a high level of community ownership and involvement. In contrast, some of the component programs' agency staff or delivery partners were provided with very specific directions on how their programs were to be implemented, for example the Sporting Club Grants Program. In their view, these directions came before they were able to adequately consult with their regional teams to assess needs and scope an appropriate program. On balance, the programs were still effective but consultation during the design stages could have been more timely.

Lack of connection at a whole-of-package level

There was limited awareness of the connection of individual component programs at a whole-of-package level by agency staff and delivery partners involved in the implementation of the programs. This meant there were missed opportunities to leverage investment in other programs either being delivered by the same department, or in the same local geographic area.

The RDC role was well regarded and a large job for one person, especially given the large size of the drought affected area. To improve communication about the package across the 11 local jurisdictions beyond the funding period of this role, ongoing resourcing of the *Drought and About* newsletter to all involved in the front-line delivery of programs would have been of interest and great value.

Role of Seasonal Conditions Committee in coordination

The Seasonal Conditions Committee (SCC), hosted by Horsham RCC, was found to be a focal point for planning and information sharing on the drought response package, especially so for LGAs surrounding Horsham i.e. Wimmera/Southern Mallee region. The Wimmera Development Association (WDA) also played an important role in communicating the progress of the programs locally via a bimonthly newsletter.

The SCC now meets less frequently, every six months, so the continuity afforded by having this network continue is valuable in that it can be convened very quickly to play a coordination role when an emergency response is needed. Many of the members at the table have a large amount of corporate memory and have held various positions within different agencies within the Wimmera Southern Mallee region so have a wealth of knowledge and experience between them.

7.2.5 OUTCOMES SUMMARY

The intended outcome of this injection of funding into local economies was to strengthen the economic, social and environmental base of drought-affected communities by investing in local community infrastructure.

The short-term outcomes of this program were strongly met i.e. community led infrastructure was identified and implemented and community members participated in events in drought affected jurisdictions. In the main, reporting on the local activities and infrastructure projects was comprehensive. The grants for the diverse range of infrastructure projects, large and small, were strongly appreciated and provided an immediate

stimulus to local construction activity. It was strongly evident that the events grants were welcomed by community groups and achieved high reach in terms of participation which also had an immediate impact on increasing social contact in all 11 local government areas. It is reasonable to assume that the intensity of activity had some mental health and wellbeing benefits and helped reduce the stress and burden of drought.

Drought periods can be an opportune time for local communities to get together to plan for and undertake improvements to communal assets and this is what they did. Following the completion of important local infrastructure, the intermediate outcomes of communities feeling supported and stimulated economic growth were met. While there is no direct measurement or data collection on these outcomes, bringing forward the delivery of key regional development projects would have boosted economic activity locally.

An assessment of the amount of evaluation evidence and level of impact of component programs within the Community and Regional Development support area is provided in Table 7-8.

Table 7-8: Summary of the amount of evidence and level of impact of component programs

NO.	COMPONENT PROGRAM	AMOUNT & QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ²⁰		LEVEL OF IMPACT
		SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	
1	Regional Drought Coordinator	Good	Adequate	High
2	Local Council Drought Response	Good	Poor	High
3	Fast Tracked Regional Development projects	Good	Adequate	High
4	Road rehabilitation works	Poor	Poor	Medium
5	Sporting Club Grants Program	Adequate	Poor	Medium
6	Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure grants	Adequate	Poor	Medium
7	Foodbank project	Good	Adequate	High

RATING	AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF EVIDENCE	RATING	LEVEL OF IMPACT
Good	Previous dedicated evaluation, extensive reporting on outputs, achievements and outcomes	High	Large number of participants, broad and extensive reach into communities
Adequate	Basic reporting information provided, few gaps	Medium	Moderate number of participants, moderate reach into communities
Poor	Little reporting other than activities, incomplete	Low	Small number of participants, limited reach into communities

7.2.6 LEGACY

The infrastructure projects were all well planned and executed, and over time, will continue to bring social economic and environmental benefits to these communities. The program provided funding for a wide range of tangible improvements to the road network, recreation facilities, streetscapes, and new facilities such as community hubs. Other projects such as new walking trails and major park restorations will attract new visitors to these regions and will directly contribute to sustaining small towns and growth of regional centres.

²⁰ This includes both the reporting provided by the project delivery teams and additional information gathered during this evaluation.

CASE STUDY: LIVING LANDSBOROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADE, PYRENEES

Key message: When the community is front and centre of decision making on shared assets there is a better outcome from State Government investment.

The Pyrenees Shire secured a funding agreement with Regional Development Victoria, under the Regional Infrastructure Fund guidelines, and received a fast-tracked regional development project grant of \$330,000 in 2016. The funding contributed to the re-development of community assets, linking these to open spaces in and around the township of Landsborough. This investment increased access to the town's assets, boosting the appeal of the town to visitors and improving residents' useability of the town. So, a valuable investment.

The Pyrenees Shire Council formed a Community Reference Group, comprising community and business members, to assist with planning and designing the project. Works undertaken included footpath upgrades between key nodal points linking shops and recreational facilities, improvement of the kitchen and streetscape at the community hall, a public all-access toilet and two new cabins in the local caravan park. Images of the enhanced community infrastructure are shown in Figures A and B.

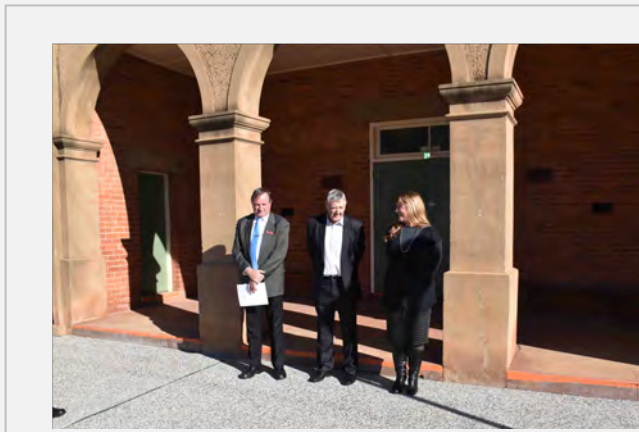


Figure A. Landsborough Hall redevelopment

It is anticipated that there will be an ongoing positive impact on economic activity and employment in that community. Landsborough is situated in the heart of the Pyrenees wine region and has potential to attract tourist visitors and temporary wine and viticultural workers.

The developments have reinvigorated community pride and engagement with their shared assets. The joint effort of Council and community was formally recognised by winning an award in the 2017 Capital Works under \$2 million category, by the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (Victoria).

Works were respectful of community character and the historical significance of the town.

Employment was a focus of the project, with local trades people engaged to undertake the work, and an additional facilities management position was created at the caravan park.

The works have generated greater activity in the community already with increased useage of the local community hall and the new cabins at the caravan park are booked out most weekends. There has been a much welcomed overall increase of visitation to the town.



Figure B. New cabins – Landsborough caravan park

8 Water Security Support

KEY MESSAGES:

1. Investment in water infrastructure has led to direct improvements in preparedness and capacity to respond to the next drought.
2. Partnerships with community on infrastructure projects take time but reap very positive results.
3. Councils and water authorities have strategically assessed their water security needs and several have developed concept designs / business cases for new water infrastructure projects pending funding.
4. Economic, social and environmental outcomes from the water program were achieved.

8.1 DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Water Security Support area was:

To improve access to water, provide emergency water supply points, extend pipelines.

Support was available through **one** component program via two rounds of funding:

ROUND 1. WATER INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS TO SECURE WATER SUPPLIES FOR: STOCK AND DOMESTIC, TOWNSHIP, FIRE FIGHTING PURPOSE

The aim of the first-round program (announced Nov 2015) was to:

- Improve access to water for landowners and the community that are not serviced directly from the water network to reduce the financial and emotional burdens of water carting over long distances and lessen the impact of potential water related social disadvantage to landholders
- Ensure continuity of water supply to existing customers and the community during peak demands caused by natural events and emergencies
- Improve procedural access, emergency water supply point availability and water security to meet immediate community water needs
- Extend stock and domestic water supply into areas at the edge of existing schemes, including Wartook Valley, Quambatook, Pella and Coonooer Bridge
- Investigate the feasibility of a new stock and domestic supply to rural properties within the South West Loddon, East Grampians and West Wimmera Rural Water Supply Project areas.

ROUND 2. WATER INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS TO SECURE ENVIRONMENTAL AND RECREATIONAL WATER IN TOWNS

The aim of the second-round program (announced March/April 2016) was to expand the type of work funded in the first round as well as broaden the program to:

- Enhance recreational and social water assets in drought affected regions
- Deliver environmental and recreational water to important community assets including weir pools, lakes and drought refuge pools.

8.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

8.2.1 DELIVERY OF ACTIVITIES

The outputs of these projects took the form of upgrades to water infrastructure in affected shires (e.g. pipeline extensions, construction of urban standpipes as emergency water supply points, firefighting tanks, water supply balancing storage tanks), enhanced recreational water assets and commissioning of technical feasibility and business case studies.

Most projects were administered by GMMWater in partnership with Councils, Wimmera CMA, North Central CMA, Glenelg Hopkins CMA, RDV, DELWP, Agriculture Victoria, VFF, CFA and several community organisations. Several of the larger projects were overseen by a dedicated Project Steering Committee providing technical support and advice, community input and project review. The available information shows that this support area has delivered activities and short-term outcomes beyond the original planned levels.

A summary of the type of projects delivered is provided in Table 8-1.

Table 8-1: Summary of delivered projects in the Water Security Support area

NO.	COMPONENT PROGRAM	TYPES OF PROJECTS	FUNDING
1	Water infrastructure projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Installation of firefighting tanks and emergency water supply points▪ Improvements and upgrades of existing water storages▪ Extensions to existing Wimmera Mallee stock and domestic pipeline schemes in several locations▪ Technical feasibility studies and business case development for several new stock and domestic pipeline schemes▪ South West Loddon Rural Water Supply Scheme Stage 1 Investigation and business case and Stage 1 Construction▪ Investigations into opportunities to increase social and recreation activity, and environmental values at several important community assets including lakes, weir pools and wetlands.	\$4,130,000
		Total announced funding	\$4,130,000

8.2.2 DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Most Water Security projects were delivered within the designated time frame and budget. Fourteen of the twenty projects are fully completed, with the remaining six projects due to be completed by December 2017 or early 2018.

“All funded projects were useful and we have a product from every project which is a good legacy.”
~ Program Manager, DELWP

Indicators or evidence that the Water Security Support area was delivered efficiently follows:

Projects were already “on the drawing board”

The projects were seeded through a ground up process led by DELWP which meant that the regionally based organisations (GMMWater, CMAs, local shires) were asked to put forward project ideas and applications and if approved, were ready and willing to take up the opportunity. The delivery process using GMMWater to administer the projects assisted councils with small rate bases that usually don't have resources or capacity

to undertake a lot of planning nor spare delivery resources to respond and deliver these type of programs, quickly.

Kept within the Drought Principles Framework

DELWP only funded projects that were true to the Drought Principles Framework which increased the relevance of outcomes from the water infrastructure projects.

Broadening water security projects from farmer-based programs and raw water supplies for townships, to include recreation/social water projects was an acknowledgement that during dry periods, water is important for morale and social fabric.

Timeliness

Due to the urgency in delivery of the emergency water supply points and fire hydrants there was some concerns early on due to inadequate consultation between Councils and GWMWater about the location of works and the need to resolve issues of ownership and transfer of assets. These issues were negotiated between the parties and resolved.

Water authorities are among the first to know when a dry period starts, they are generally the earliest to respond and will usually have the resources to do so. This certainly occurred in this drought.

There was strong governance around the Water Security Support program. The projects were delivered within usual budgeting and reporting protocols.

Indicators that the Water Security Support area was delivered efficiently were:

- Funding agreements were put in place with applicants that included delivery and invoice milestones which enabled monitoring of the financial and delivery performance of each project through quarterly milestone reports.
- DELWP provided a monthly report on progress to the Minister and will continue this reporting until all projects have been completed.
- When projects got behind, proponents were asked to provide more frequent reporting on progress.
- There was good coordination between program delivery by DELWP and the regional delivery organisations, chiefly GWMWater and several shire councils and catchment management authorities.

8.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes by component program

In this section, we examine the data and information available that describes how each component program contributed to the short-term and intermediate outcomes noted against each support area (in this case Water Security Support). We also look at the extent to which the outputs and results have addressed the problems identified for each support area.

Evidence on the short-term and intermediate outcomes from the Water Infrastructure Projects component program are shown in Table 8-2.

Table 8-2: Evidence on outcomes for Water Infrastructure Project component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Water is available for stock and domestic use or other management plans (on and off farm) are implemented. 	<p>There are measurable short-term outcomes from these projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The availability of water for stock and domestic (S&D) supply in drought affected areas has already increased in some areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extensions to existing pipeline schemes were completed and landholders now have access to secure S&D water e.g. Pella, Quambatook, Coonooer 2. Access to emergency water supplies has been increased in large parts of the drought affected area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fire-fighting tanks and emergency water supply points (stand pipes) have been installed in the West Wimmera and East Grampians areas 3. Infrastructure improvements have increased security of some town water supplies in drought affected communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minor works have improved interconnectedness, reliability and water quality for several small townships.
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Longer term access to water is improved where deficiencies are identified, and continuity of water supply is maintained. ▪ Farm businesses have increased water security to plan for future seasonal challenges. 	<p>There are measurable intermediate outcomes from these projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The availability of water for S&D supply is on a trajectory to increase in some drought affected areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business Cases (BCs) were developed for the South West Loddon and East Grampians pipeline projects and positive cost benefit ratios (CBRs) in the order of 2:1 were found ▪ Stage 1 construction of the South West Loddon pipeline has commenced and it is projected that landholders will have access to a secure water supply within two years ▪ Funding is being sought for the East Grampians pipeline project from State and Australian governments ▪ A technical feasibility and business case for a pipeline in the West Wimmera is nearing completion ▪ If the East Grampians and West Wimmera pipeline projects are successful in being funded in future, this will effectively drought proof a further 600,000 ha of broadacre farming area. 2. With secure S&D water, it is projected that there will be a substantial recovery in livestock numbers in these areas bringing strong production benefits to farm businesses and broader regional benefits. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of time series Agricultural Census statistics during Business Case development indicated substantial reductions in livestock numbers in drought affected areas ▪ Landholders interviewed as part of Business Case development indicated a strong desire to restock in response to a secure water supply 3. Supporting technical studies have been undertaken to assess the feasibility of improving access to social / recreation water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Buloke and West Wimmera shires are likely to receive an allocation of water from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline project that will replenish water-based recreation spaces that will transform their communities over time.

8.2.4 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

The outputs of the Water Security Support area took the form of projects focussed on upgrades to water infrastructure in drought affected shires. The broad-based nature of the program was one of its major strengths.

The works included pipeline extensions, construction of urban standpipes as emergency water supply points, firefighting tanks and water supply balancing storage tanks. Technical feasibility and Business Case studies were also undertaken for new stock and domestic pipelines and projects to deliver water to replenish and enhance recreational assets in several rural towns. The majority of the projects were administered by GWMWater with local partners, which was a particular strength of the delivery model.

“Project management of community led projects takes time and patience so acquitting funds can be delayed but we get very positive outcomes when we do it well.” ~ Project delivery partner

The majority of the projects were delivered within the designated time frame and budget and the remaining six projects are due to be completed by December 2017 or early 2018. In the main those projects with a stronger community component were delayed however it is anticipated that the outcomes will be superior because of the community involvement.

The choice to include recreation and social water projects was a strength of the program and considered valuable for community morale.

8.2.5 OUTCOMES SUMMARY

Our analysis has confirmed that the investment in the Water Security Support area has helped with drought preparedness as well as reduce the impacts of a broader multifaceted water security problem in parts of Victoria. The water security problem can be explained in the following terms:

- Falling farm productivity in livestock businesses without reliable water supplies
- A reduced ability of these communities to respond to emergencies, in particular bush fires
- Absence of reliable rainfall run-off is constraining investment in some affected areas
- Lack of access to recreational water bodies is entrenching social disadvantage

The intended short-term outcome of increased availability of water for stock and domestic purposes was met during the drought response. The intermediate outcomes of farm businesses having increased water security, to allow them to plan for future seasonal challenges, and having improved longer term access to water and continuity of supply maintained, was also met in a substantial way.

Supporting technical and business case studies have also been undertaken to assess the feasibility of improving access to social / recreation water and it is expected that these projects will be funded sometime in the future.

Direct benefits of the DRP investment have been delivered across triple bottom line outcomes:

- **Economic:** pipeline extensions have already increased availability and reliability of water supplies for broad acre farming enabling retention and finishing of livestock and less water carting during the next drought, minor works have increased connectedness of raw water supplies of small townships
- **Social:** enhanced firefighting capacity due to fire hydrants and stand pipes infrastructure, more vibrant social and cultural life where recreational spaces are planning to be replenished with delivered water supplies

- **Environmental:** increased capability to water priority refuges when needed; potentially there will be reductions in farm dam interceptions of unregulated flows post pipelining for the benefit of regional rivers and wetlands

An assessment of the amount of evaluation evidence and level of impact of component programs within the Water Security Support area is provided in Table 8-3.

Table 8-3: Summary of the amount of evidence and level of impact of component programs

NO.	SUPPORT AREA & COMPONENT PROGRAM	AMOUNT & QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ²¹		LEVEL OF IMPACT
		SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	
1	Water Infrastructure projects	Good	Good	High

RATING	AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF EVIDENCE	RATING	LEVEL OF IMPACT
Good	Previous dedicated evaluation, extensive reporting on outputs, achievements and outcomes	High	Large number of participants, broad and extensive reach into communities
Adequate	Basic reporting information provided, few gaps	Medium	Moderate number of participants, moderate reach into communities
Poor	Little reporting other than activities, incomplete	Low	Small number of participants, limited reach into communities

8.2.6 LEGACY

The Water Security Support projects have resulted in drought affected communities across a substantial area of Victoria now being better placed to adapt to the next drought. The infrastructure projects have a design life of 30 to 50 years and there have been several concept designs and business cases developed (with positive benefits) for new water infrastructure projects. These can be used by councils and water authorities to support applications when responding to funding opportunities presented by future government programs (State and Federal).

The collection of DRP water projects presented a “once in a generation” opportunity to improve water security in these regions and the communities took it up.”

“If climate change predictions come to fruition, then the agencies will retain intellectual property and overtime demonstrate greater preparedness, monitoring and understanding – this will sharpen our response each time.” ~ Program Manager

The program funded water infrastructure projects in 10 municipalities. It was targeted to drought affected regions and these communities are now more drought ready by having more secure and interconnected water supplies.

During the millennium drought, Victoria was in crisis with town water supplies at risk. Following considerable investment under extreme time pressures, regional urban and Melbourne’s water supplies ended up more secure. The DRP has led to improved water security for some smaller townships, large numbers of livestock farmers and other regional businesses in the west of the State.

More mixed farms now have a reliable piped water supply that will enable them to retain and finish livestock, even during drought periods. Farmers won’t have to travel as far to water supply points due to there being

²¹ This includes both the reporting provided by the project delivery teams and additional information gathered during this evaluation.

more frequent emergency access water points. This has also increased bush fire preparedness and response capacity.

The water security projects were extended to include recreation / social water projects which means that over time more localities will have recreation water bodies with the ability to be replenished with delivered water. This will transform their communities over time bringing increased wellbeing through better recreation opportunities and social connectedness.

CASE STUDY: INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS – STOCK & DOMESTIC, SOCIAL WATER

Key message: Strong community involvement in feasibility assessment and concept designing of water infrastructure projects has tangible benefits and strengthens business cases for investment

Several pipeline feasibility and business case projects were funded by the response. These included the South West Loddon, East Grampians and West Wimmera Rural Water Supply projects aiming to secure stock and domestic water for farm businesses, and supplement town water supplies where cost effective. A further project aimed to augment piped water deliveries to Green Lake in the Shire of Buloke for recreation.

DELWP had overall program management of the Water Security Support area and GWMWater administered the majority of projects in partnership with local organisations. In some cases, a dedicated project steering committee was convened to provide technical support and advice, as well as additional community input. Strong community involvement added weight to the business cases by providing local insights and evidence when valuing benefits.

Direct benefits of the DRP investment have been delivered across triple bottom line outcomes:

- Economic: livestock farmers in Pella, Quambatook and Coonooer have increased availability and reliability of water supplies due to already operational pipeline extensions
- Social: new fire hydrants and stand pipes infrastructure have been installed in Ararat Rural City and concept designs for technically feasible pipeline schemes to deliver social and recreational water to communities in the West Wimmera and Buloke shires have been completed.
- Environmental: pipelines, when constructed, will increase the ability of CMAs to target and supply water to priority wetlands and other waterways when needed; there will be potential reductions in farm dam interceptions that will benefit regional rivers and wetlands following the construction of the South West Loddon pipeline.



Figure A. Prime lamb based farm business, Dobie (Ararat Rural City); B. Green Lake Regional Park, Sea Lake (Buloke Shire) C. Catchment fed dam for viticulture, Mt Langi Ghiran (Pyrenees Shire)

9 Local Employment Support

KEY MESSAGES:

1. The investment met a genuine need by providing employment support during drought.
2. Agency staff and delivery partners showed a high level of collaboration and adept response to community needs for local employment.
3. Some local employment and training was maintained and increased by both the programs.

9.1 DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Local Employment Support area was:

To provide employment opportunities for farmers and farm workers, and ensure that farm businesses can employ trainees:

Support was available through **two** component programs:

A. CMA DROUGHT EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide local employment for people directly affected by the drought to undertake works to protect and sustain important environmental assets on public or private land

B. AGRICULTURAL TRAINEESHIPS FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS

The aim of this component program was to:

- Provide school leavers with local employment and training so they would not have to leave their communities in search of work during the drought
- Support farming enterprises to host an agricultural trainee by subsidising the cost.

9.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

9.2.1 DELIVERY OF ACTIVITIES

The CMA Drought Employment Program (DEP) provided full and part-time employment to drought affected farmers, farm workers and individuals. This provided the opportunity to earn off-farm income to support their families, contribute towards local environmental outcomes and increase their confidence and skills for the future. The Mallee, Wimmera, North Central and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) led the implementation of this program with oversight and management provided by DELWP.

The Agricultural Traineeships for School Leavers program provided support for local employment and training for school leavers in drought-affected communities in north-west Victoria. Trainees completed the Certificate III in Agriculture during their traineeship. Regional education and employment provider, Skillinvest employed the trainees who were placed in host agriculture businesses. Trainees undertook a mix of on the job and off the job training provided at Longerenong College.

A summary of the projects funded in the Local Employment Support area is shown in Table 9-1. Both programs have clear data demonstrating that they have delivered their activities and short-term outcomes as anticipated.

Table 9-1: Summary of delivered activities in the Local Employment Support area

NO.	COMPONENT PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	STATUS	FUNDING
1	CMA Drought Employment Program [North Central, Mallee, Wimmera and Glenelg Hopkins CMAs overseen by DELWP]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fencing: 91 km constructed, 30km removed, 9km replaced, 61km maintained ▪ 724 ha of indigenous revegetation (Mallee 105 ha, Wimmera 43 ha, Glenelg Hopkins 70 ha, North Central 506 ha) ▪ 227 ha of rubbish removed ▪ 5,630 ha of weeds managed (herbaceous and woody, majority from NCCMA) ▪ 83 recreational/visitor facilities installed/replaced/maintained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 92 participants ▪ 81 male participants ▪ 11 female participants ▪ Age group broad mix (15-25: 6 per cent, 26-36: 24 per cent, 37-47: 12 per cent, and 55+: 59 per cent from NCCMA survey results) ▪ Worked more than 70,000 hours ▪ 64 community groups assisted 	Complete	\$4,150,000
2	Agricultural Traineeships for School Leavers [Skillinvest, overseen by DET]	Skillinvest Limited together with Longerenong College developed and implemented a program to create 20 agricultural traineeships for school leavers in drought affected North West Victoria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 20 trainees were placed into employment on farms ▪ 15 per cent are female trainees, which represents 3 females, however one dropped out (with 67 per cent retention) ▪ Overall retention in the program is 76 per cent ▪ Trainees were placed in 10 out of the 11 drought affected Shires. 	Complete	\$574,500
Total funding announced					\$4,724,500

9.2.2 DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Both programs have been completed and achieved significant outputs and engagement based on the funding received. This was primarily due to the existing capacity and location of the delivery partners in the drought affected areas that were able to respond quickly and provide place-based support with the collaboration and oversight of departmental staff.

Indicators that the Local Employment Support area was delivered efficiently are outlined in the following section.

CMA Drought Employment Program

- CMA partners were used which improved the timeliness of the response. It would have been very difficult to get DEP off the ground without the CMAs as delivery partners with their access to agencies, networks, connections, and skill sets at the operational scale.
- Regular meetings with the CMAs over the 18 months during delivery ensured regular reviews and sharing of lessons. The CMAs, via their local networks, were able to quickly identify priority projects.
- CMAs engaged local employment agencies as well as councils, Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature and DELWP to identify some of the projects then prioritise from there.
- NCCMA linked DEP in their region with the Foodbank program under the Community and Regional Development Support category that provided material relief for 147 farmers and community members during the drought through the Charlton Lions Club. This linkage was made due to the CMA contact network and opportunity to build in a more social component to the DEP crew's work in certain areas, through the Community Liaison Officer role. It worked really well and provided relief of 'volunteer fatigue' given the age of Lions volunteers was 63-82.
- CMAs focussed on-ground works on achieving environmental targets (e.g. pest and weed control priorities in their Regional Catchment Strategy), as well as linking to agricultural productivity with some of the Farm Business Support component programs.

Agricultural Traineeships for School Leavers

- DET has an existing funding relationship with Skillinvest on other projects, so was well positioned to respond to the drought.
- State government provided 56 per cent of the total program cost. The remainder was covered by Host Employers (farmers) (18 per cent) and Skillinvest (27 per cent), representing good value for money and leveraging of public money. The scheme was 100 per cent funded in Year 1 (farmers paid no costs) and 50 per cent of the cost in Year 2. Farmers then paid 50 per cent of the wages in the second year.

Both programs demonstrated cost-effective delivery, primarily in relation to leveraging existing partnerships and providing in-kind support from the traineeships delivery partner and host farmers.

9.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes by component program

In this section, we examine the data and information available that describes how each component program contributed to the short and intermediate outcomes noted against each support area (in this case Local Employment Support). We also look at the extent to which the outputs and results have addressed the problems identified for each support area.

1. CMA Drought Employment Program

Evidence of how well the program delivered on the intended short-term and intermediate outcomes of the CMA Drought Employment program is described in Table 9-2.

Table 9-2: Evidence of outcomes of the CMA drought employment program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE ²²
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacted workers, farmers and school leavers participate in alternative (temporary) employment opportunities to receive/supplement income. 	<p>There was a focus on eligibility of farmers and community members who had businesses/occupations directly impacted by drought, rather than just being located within these communities. This meant the program prioritised those most in need of supplementary off-farm income and included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 81 male participants 11 female participants Age group broad mix (15-25: 6 per cent, 26-36: 24 per cent, 37-47: 12 per cent, and 55+: 59 per cent from NCCMA survey results). <p>The program took a flexible approach to allow participants to go back to their farms and other work commitments as needed, on a case-by-case basis. This was viewed as a strength.</p> <p>Having a focus on eligibility meant those most in need of support were engaged in the program. Participants reported that they were pleased to be able to 'give back to their community' and contribute to environmental works. The program delivered a combination of environmental, personal and social benefits.</p> <p>Consistent 'uniforms' helped participants to present as a professional unit and helped to build a team sense.</p>
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in employment activities are maintained locally. 	<p>Participants commented that the skills obtained through DEP enabled them to be better prepared for their own farm business, as well as other jobs. The Drought Crew participants are now highly sought-after members in their community due to understanding of local issues.</p> <p>Economic benefits included increases in skilled workers, a boost to local businesses through material purchases and increased demand for the services provided by the program participants.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities feel supported as affected families remain in the community. 	<p>While the program offered much-needed temporary employment, this had broader short to mid-term financial and social benefits. This included participants being better able to support their families and continue to live and work in their communities. These effects are difficult to verify, particularly beyond the completion of the program</p> <p>The development of a network and a list of 'who to call for support and employment advice' was also noted as a valuable output of the program.</p>

The CMA Drought Employment Program provided the opportunity for farmers and other agricultural workers to earn an off-farm income. Work crews can have a stigma associated with them, but a conscious effort was made to make sure they were sensitively set up to benefit their community. This included providing uniforms, appropriate training and allowing projects to be identified locally as well as through the CMA.

DELWP requested additional funding following the successful implementation of the first \$1 million proof of concept stage with three CMAs. The additional funding of \$3.15 million in March 2016 was to support drought affected farmers and communities in conjunction with four CMAs.

²² Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017) Drought Employment Program 2015–17; Final Evaluation Report, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne

Glenelg Hopkins CMA joined after the second round to augment the program. This was successful due to the regular meeting of the CMAs at a statewide level and sharing lessons in delivery. This was the first time Glenelg Hopkins had delivered an employment program, so their entry into the program was greatly assisted by being able to draw on the experience of other CMA regions.

“Coordination with DELWP was good, and previous experience with [previous and current department staff]. I had a lot more contact this time around with [department staff], and it was non-hierarchical and could always pick up the phone and talk it through.” ~ Delivery partner interviewee

In addition to the immediate financial benefits, the Drought Employment Program resulted in improved mental health outcomes for participants.

“The most satisfying part of the program was doing some of the jobs that needed doing in our local towns that were not going to get done otherwise.” ~ Drought Crew Member Wimmera CMA

“As a younger member of the community, I gained more experience and have increased my chances in finding my next job.” ~ Youth Participant Glenelg Hopkins CMA

“Flexibility was a very positive/beneficial aspect of the program. I was able to work my hours around farm work and family commitments.” ~ Drought Crew Member Mallee CMA

The Cheetham Salt Works Manager at Lake Tyrrell was also happy with the fencing works completed through the program which helped keep visitors to the site safe.

“The fencing has already been a success with no tourists getting bogged in the Lake since the bollards have been installed,” ~ Cheetham Salt Works Manager.

The Drought Employment Program was not designed to provide employment over the long-term. The focus of the program was on providing short-term constructive employment for those who were drought affected. As the drought pressures eased, participants were expected to return to their ‘pre-drought’ occupations and employment. This appears to have occurred as expected.

2. Agricultural Traineeships for School Leavers

Evidence of how well the program delivered on the intended short-term and intermediate outcomes of the Agricultural Traineeships program is described in Table 9-3.

Table 9-3: Evidence of outcomes of the Agricultural Traineeships for school leavers component program

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impacted workers, farmers and school leavers participate in alternative (temporary) employment opportunities to receive/supplement income. 	<p>The scheme meant that young people could be kept in the region instead of moving away to find work – this helped meet short-term demand for labour on farms, especially needed after coming out of the drought. There was a 76 per cent completion rate of the Cert III, with 20 students starting and 15 continuing with their training. This was better than the average completion rate, which is approximately 50 per cent for Cert III.</p> <p>The program demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A new way in which a state government can achieve its objective of providing targeted financial support to recipients in response to a significant environmental event

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How government financial support can have multiple direct beneficiaries. In this program, supporting a farmer to host a trainee provided the: a) farmer with a subsidised on-farm worker for up to 18 months; and b) school leaver with employment and training leading to attainment of an industry recognised qualification.
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in employment activities are maintained locally. 	Agricultural traineeships combine employment and training leading to attainment of industry recognised qualifications. With access to fewer local employment and training opportunities, there was an increased risk of young people moving away from their rural communities in search of other employment and training opportunities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities feel supported as affected families remain in the community. 	All 20 trainees have formed a strong network in the short time since commencement. The Trade Blocks are designed for skill development but equally important for enabling trainees to build peer networks and develop effective relationships as the next generation of farmers and industry leaders.

Skillinvest is a group training organisation that operates Longerenong College near Horsham. The organisation provides training for formal qualifications and has a strong relationship to its regional communities due to the satellite office locations. The program provided a service and support that addressed the needs of the Victorian Government, farming enterprises and trainees during the drought period.

The Agricultural Trainees are enrolled in Certificate III in Agriculture with a focus on cropping and grazing. They receive a mix of on-the-job training provided by their host employer (farmer) and off-the-job training (delivered as six one-week trade blocks) provided by Longerenong College.

Traineeship programs take time to develop and deliver. Skillinvest started recruiting immediately and the contract was signed at the end of June 2016 to enable the provision of funds in the new financial year.

The package funding was insufficient to cover the full cost of each traineeship, however Skillinvest took a decision to reduce the usual administration fees due to the drought circumstances. This provided greater value for money and improved efficiency of public investment.

Longerenong College also delivers Certificate IV in Agriculture as a traineeship. Although outside the scope of the Agricultural Traineeships Program, Skillinvest hoped many of the Agricultural Trainees would be supported by their host employer to complete the higher-level qualification. This eventuated with six of the participants intending to go onto Certificate IV, which is 40 per cent of those that completed the Certificate III and 30 per cent of all participants. Skillinvest indicated that this is a better rate than for most traineeships.

“The subsidised scheme was highly valued by the participant farmers.” ~ Project Director interviewee

“Helped keep young people in the district and start a career in agriculture.” ~ Delivery partner interviewee

9.2.4 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

The Local Employment Support area programs were delivered using existing partnerships which contributed to their cost-effective delivery. Both programs delivered their anticipated outputs and met a community need during the drought. This success was due, at least in part, to being able to quickly identify and involve the capacity and strength of local delivery partners in the drought affected areas. They were able to respond quickly and provided support with the collaboration and oversight of departmental staff.

The local employment support response comprised two different programs, both with very good results and achievement of outcomes.

Quickly recruiting participants for local employment, and enrolling trainees and host (employer) farmers was a key challenge for both programs. Due to the success of previous emergency response employment programs, community expectations were high, right from the beginning of the funding announcement. There was still much planning, scoping and development to be done after the funding announcement, which created a perception of a short-term gap before any activities were 'visible' on the ground.

"Gap between announcement and action – need to manage expectations in the local community and get some information in local papers, so there isn't any distrust or information vacuum." ~ Project Director interviewee

The agricultural traineeships program addressed a significant barrier that prevents farmers from taking on recent school graduates – cost. The subsidised scheme made an important difference that raised intake numbers in the Cert III Agricultural Traineeship program significantly for 2016

"The cost of the wages for trainees is an obstacle to farmers to take them on during drought periods."

"Prior to the program only two trainees were enrolled in 2016 when normally we would have around 20." ~ Delivery partner interviewee

9.2.5 OUTCOMES SUMMARY

Both programs provided significant evidence to demonstrate the achievement of the intended short-term outcome:

- Impacted workers, farmers and school leavers participate in alternative (temporary) employment opportunities to receive/supplement income.

This was primarily due to the previous experience of the delivery partners in implementing similar programs, and utilising systems and processes for monitoring and reporting.

There is also a high degree of evidence that both programs contributed to the achievement of the intermediate outcomes:

- Participation in employment activities are maintained locally
- Communities feel supported as affected families remain in the community.

Local employment opportunities were maintained in both instances, and this was the strongest of the two outcomes. Available data and interviews indicated that communities felt supported by the initiative, however the long-term retention of families in communities is more difficult to assess. This is because monitoring of participant's circumstances usually ceased after the program completion in 12-18 months.

An assessment of the amount of evaluation evidence and level of impact of component programs within the Local Employment Support area is provided in Table 9-4.

Table 9-4: Summary of the amount of evidence and level of impact of component programs

NO.	SUPPORT AREA & COMPONENT PROGRAM	AMOUNT & QUALITY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ²³		LEVEL OF IMPACT
		SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	
1	Drought employment program	Good	Good	High
2	Agricultural traineeships - school leavers	Good	Adequate	Medium

RATING	AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF EVIDENCE	RATING	LEVEL OF IMPACT
Good	Previous dedicated evaluation, extensive reporting on outputs, achievements and outcomes	High	Large number of participants, broad and extensive reach into communities
Adequate	Basic reporting information provided, few gaps	Medium	Moderate number of participants, moderate reach into communities
Poor	Little reporting other than activities, incomplete	Low	Small number of participants, limited reach into communities

9.2.6 LEGACY

There has been significant progress made in building capability and strengthening regional and local networks to respond to employment challenges during the next drought. Agency staff and delivery partners have demonstrated a high degree of collaboration, and timeliness in responding to community needs.

Developing the Drought Employment Program was a collaborative effort between DELWP and DEDJTR early on in the package development. DEDJTR were aware that DELWP and the CMAs had previous experience in employment programs with previous droughts, floods and structural adjustment (e.g. fruit industry). The quick development and roll-out of a proof of concept with tranche 1 (\$1 million) allowed a larger second stage to be developed prioritising crews, areas and projects.

The agency staff and delivery partners involved all agreed they were in a much better position to respond to the next drought as they were refining the lessons learnt from previous programs.

“Four more CMAs have now been involved in another employment program. They are all willing to share experiences, and is much about how we capture and report information and achievements e.g. funding requirement to develop short YouTube videos.” ~ Project Manager interviewee

“We are limited to a certain extent by not knowing the next emergency or issue, but the CMAs are really adept at getting these types of projects operational at a large scale.” ~ Project Director interviewee

Skillinvest, based in Horsham delivered the agricultural traineeships and gained the support for the program from the drought affected shires through representation at the Seasonal Conditions Committee, Horsham RCC meetings.

²³ This includes both the reporting provided by the project delivery teams and additional information gathered during this evaluation.

CASE STUDY: DROUGHT EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Key message: Using experienced service providers connected to their local community contributes to integration and spill over benefits in other government investment areas

The Drought Employment Program was able to respond quickly to the needs of the community. This was because the CMAs had been involved in delivering similar employment programs in their regions in the past to address drought, flood or specific agricultural industry issues. The CMAs already had the community networks, expertise and prioritised environmental works for the Drought Crews to be recruited and deployed in a relatively short timeframe (Figure A).



Figure A: Example revegetation, weed control and fencing works in the various CMA regions (Photo credits: DELWP)

Using experienced services providers in the CMAs who were connected to local communities meant other drought component programs and funding could be leveraged. This occurred in the case of North Central CMA where their Community Liaison Officer identified opportunities with the Foodbank program through local communication and coordination. The support for Foodbank provided material relief and improved access to fresh food for those in need by distributing food hampers through the Charlton Lions Club. The Drought Crew was able to assist Lions Club volunteers with transport and distribution of the food hampers when they experienced difficulty with access to vehicles and long distances needing to be travelled by older volunteers.

This maximised the immediate benefits for individuals, as well as promoted improved social and mental health outcomes for participants through community engagement (Figure B). The spill over benefit for government and program delivery was the issue of drought being addressed by the whole community, rather than a series of individual issues or funding streams related to just the environment, economic development or community support. The experience of North Central CMA demonstrated an excellent example of integrating all these facets during adversity.



Figure B: Broader social and economic benefits of community engagement from the Drought Crews (Photo credit: DELWP)

"We met a lot of people like us in the same boat. As well as the financial benefits, the program helped with our physical and mental wellbeing, which has taken a hit over the past few years. It gave us a purpose to get up each morning." – Drought Crew Member North Central CMA

10 Key Findings

In this section, the findings of the evaluation are presented in three categories:

1. Consistency with the state government's drought policy principles (Section 10.1)
2. The degree to which the most recent package reflects lessons from previous drought responses (Section 10.2), and
3. Findings and recommendations across nine themes (Sections 10.3 – 10.11).

10.1 DROUGHT POLICY PRINCIPLES

An important task for this evaluation was to consider whether the Drought Response Package was consistent with the principles that underpin the Victorian Government's '*Drought Preparedness and Response Framework*'. This framework is intended to assist government to make 'informed and measured decisions about how best to support Victorian farmers, businesses and communities manage and recover from the impacts of drought'. These principles were provided to RMCG by Agriculture Victoria.

The evaluation found that the package was consistent with the government's framework. In the next section, we have provided comments on the degree to which the overall package has been consistent with each specific principle.

i. Drought should be treated as a legitimate business risk that farmers and other businesses should prepare for.

The programs under Farm Business Support and Small Business Support areas all reinforced this message to farmers and other businesses. They addressed immediate needs but used this engagement to raise the longer-term issues with participating farmers and other businesses. This generally took two forms- creating infrastructure that would help farmers better manage future drought (e.g. stock containment areas and farm water infrastructure), and secondly, focussing on provision of information and support for business and financial planning.

Importantly, the package specifically excluded some types of support. There were cases where support that was offered as part of previous drought packages was excluded from this package, and there were some cases where suggestions made in the consultation phase for this package were not taken on-board. For instance, subsidies or rebates for business expenses like municipal rates, water rates, or water tanks were excluded because they were considered to be normal business input costs.

ii. Drought policy should aim to support the long-term structural adjustment directions.

The Farm Business Support programs were directly focussed on long-term structural adjustment. The services delivered by these programs included financial planning and farm infrastructure grants (e.g. Stock Containment Area Grants). The financial planning services (e.g. Rural Financial Counselling Service) facilitated discussions with farmers on the long-term directions for their farm businesses, and considered options as varied as expansion through to withdrawal from the industry. The infrastructure grants were focussed on (small) improvements on the farm that would help the business to better manage future droughts and other challenging conditions.

Explicit in these programs was the goal that they should not impede structural adjustments in agricultural industries in the drought affected areas. The evaluation found that the design and delivery of these programs

was consistent with this principle and they are unlikely to have impeded current or future structural adjustments.

iii. Drought assistance will be considered in the context of the national drought reform principles and on-going assistance that is provided by the national farmer preparedness package.

The evaluation did not identify any cases where the package was inconsistent with or duplicated on-going services provided by the Commonwealth Government. This was a key focus of the governance group who were coordinating the package across the Victorian government. The Rural Financial Counselling Service was a very positive example of coordination with Commonwealth Government services.

iv. Drought assistance will be considered in the context of on-going Victorian Government services that assist communities, farmers and businesses prepare for drought.

The evaluation did not identify any cases where the package was inconsistent with on-going Victorian Government programs. There were several examples where the programs drew heavily on existing or previous similar work to ensure consistency and efficient delivery. For example, a particular strength of the package was the large number of programs that were essentially extensions of existing programs. These included Rural Financial Counselling Service, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, Water Infrastructure Grants and projects, the road rehabilitation works and many other regional development projects.

v. Drought related assistance should target household welfare and communities through support for social and economic infrastructure.

The explicit creation of five support areas in addition to the more conventional Farm Business Support is a clear example of this principle in action. The most prominent of these additional support areas are the six programs in Individual and Family Support, and the seven programs in Community and Regional Development Support. The programs focussed on social and economic support and used a mix of approaches to ensure support reached the target audience. For example, families were supported through their local school, through local medical services and through many infrastructure projects.

This was also exemplified by the inclusion of social and recreational water projects in the Water Security Support area; rather than being solely focused on improving water availability and reliability for emergency response, livestock farm businesses and town water supplies.

vi. Drought assistance should focus on maintaining and increasing the efficient use of natural resources.

The main programs that addressed this principle were the SCA and the Water Infrastructure programs. SCAs have been widely used in previous droughts and there is good anecdotal evidence that it is effective at reducing stress on livestock and natural resources during drought. The program was very popular which led to it being over-subscribed. The approach taken to manage access to stock containment areas saw farms with higher stock numbers prioritised. This did raise some concerns but was sound, given the aim was for long-term protection of the land and natural resource base.

The water infrastructure projects have directly increased the efficient use of water resources in targeted regions. Extensions to existing pipelines were completed, construction of the new South West Loddon pipeline commenced, and several other technical feasibility studies and business cases were prepared for future rural water supply pipelines in parts of western Victoria. Environmental benefits are also expected in the longer term through reduced reliance on catchment dams and opportunities for watering drought refuge areas with

pipelines. Projects resulting in reduced potable water use on sport and recreation facilities have also led to more efficient water use.

10.1.1 WELLBEING SURVEY CONFIRMING PRINCIPLES

An analysis of the 2016 results of the Regional Wellbeing Survey by the Agriculture Policy unit within Ag Vic compared the responses of farmers who reported that they had experienced drought (in 2014, 2015 or 2016) with those who had not. The analysis also cross-tabulated the responses from farmers located inside and outside drought affected LGAs across Victoria. A key aim was to identify whether there were statistically significant differences between drought and non-drought affected farmers.

The analysis did find significant differences in several specific areas. It found that drought affected farmers:

- Reported higher levels of financial hardship and stress
- Had reduced pride in their farm landscape
- Made many changes in farm management to accommodate or ameliorate drought effects
- Reported many barriers to running their farm business the way they would like
- Made greater use of the Rural Financial Counselling Service, drought concessional loans, and other support services
- Had a greater focus on drought in their farm planning, and
- Placed greater importance on increasing farm productivity.

The findings of this analysis add further weight to the approach that is reflected in the package – namely that farmers and farm businesses are affected by drought in many different ways, ranging from financial through to personal, so the support offered should reflect this.

10.2 LESSONS FROM PREVIOUS DROUGHT RESPONSES

The Victorian Government's previous drought response package, for the so-called 'millennium drought', was evaluated by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies (SACES). Many of the findings from that evaluation have influenced the programs reviewed in this project. Notable from that evaluation is that the package was much larger (over \$300 million) and there were many more programs (around 40 compared to 21 in this package).

One of the key findings of the previous evaluation was that 'legitimate business costs such as rates, fees and charges, should not be subsidised by government', since this was considered to interfere with appropriate structural adjustment and business transitions. Building on this, some of the programs that were not included in this most recent package are significant. Water rate rebates and shire rate rebates were the most expensive of the programs in the previous package. The SACES evaluation explicitly singled these out as being legitimate and predictable business costs that should not be subsidised, and that this type of support should either be phased out or re-designed. Business costs were not directly subsidised in the most recent drought package and we did not identify any disquiet about the exclusion of these rebates.

Another finding from the previous evaluation was that emergency relief was delivered into 'the hands of those families with the greatest financial need' and in an 'appropriately speedy and compassionate manner'. Our evaluation found that the funding was adequately targeted (while not means tested) and was a key success factor in the individual, family and community support delivered through the package.

Finally, our evaluation reached a similar conclusion to this previous assessment in relation to confirming the long-term impact of some programs. For example, the SACES evaluation noted that the impact of programs

on community resilience (as a long-term outcome) is uncertain. We also noted the uncertainty associated with the long-term outcomes for many programs. However, the fact that many programs have now been used several times over many years, means that a specific focus on investigating whether they are delivering the long-term impacts as anticipated is possible. Among the programs that could be assessed to specifically explore their long-term impacts are the SCA, RFCS, Mental Health First Aid Training, kindergarten and school funding support programs, and the Drought Employment Program.

10.3 THEME 1: DELIVERY OF DROUGHT SUPPORT AS A PACKAGE

The Drought Response Package was broadly successful. Across the 21 programs, all except two have been completed, or will be, in the near future. The programs have successfully focussed effort in drought affected communities. The package provided a comprehensive response that addressed economic, social (well-being) and environmental issues and concerns in the affected communities.

Participation numbers across most programs were relatively high, with some cases where interest exceeded what could be delivered. This suggests that the program was successful in raising awareness of the services available, even if some people were unsuccessful at accessing them. While awareness levels varied between programs, there were no cases where lack of interest meant that a program failed to deliver some level of assistance to drought affected people, businesses or communities.

Our evaluation found that the Regional Drought Coordinator (RDC) role was a key to success. This coordination function helped to ensure the wide variety of programs on offer functioned as a package, shown by the finding that there were no major cases of duplication or poor coordination identified.

This RDC role operated from December 2015 to December 2016, was based at Horsham and worked with all affected drought communities. The RDC supported councils, businesses and individuals and played an important role in communicating and coordinating all drought response activities. The prompt creation of this position (with a skilled staff member filling the role) and it being regionally based, were critical for the success of the role.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Regional Drought Coordinator role should be converted to an ongoing 'Regional Climate Response Coordinator' role that would be proactive and focussed on preparedness rather than response and recovery²⁴.

10.4 THEME 2: CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND LONG-TERM CHANGE

The socio-economic impacts of drought are not only felt during the drought, they linger within communities, often for several years after the drought breaks. Some of the programs within the package were targeted at addressing the immediate crises or the acute issues within drought affected communities. Support such as fee and equipment subsidies and kindergarten grant programs can provide important short-term relief to families.

In contrast, driven by the principles underlying Victoria's Drought Preparedness and Response Framework, other programs focussed on mechanisms that would reduce the impacts of future droughts on farms,

²⁴ This recommendation aligns with a similar previous recommendation made in the 2017 Evaluation of the Drought Extension Program by First Person Consulting.

businesses and individuals. These longer-term changes require different responses that often take time to yield results.

The evaluation found that some programs that aimed to deliver short-term support along with a long-term change had mixed success and it is unlikely that both needs were well served. There were two issues that arose. The first was that focussing on long-term change can be very difficult if the more immediate and urgent concerns are not addressed adequately. The second was that if programs stop once the official end of the drought has been declared then progress towards achieving sustained change can stall and even revert. Long-term change may require support beyond the end date of the drought. Examples of each of these are provided below.

The Farm Risk Management Grants program aimed to address long-term issues by requiring a business plan in order for an applicant to access grant funding, but the circumstance of some participants undermined this intent:

- For some, the task of preparing the business plan added even further stress to their situation, and it appeared unlikely that the plan produced would have any long-term effect, and
- Some participants saw this task as an administrative barrier to getting the grant funding they were seeking, so complied with the process but invested as little as possible into it (e.g. the plan was completed by their accountant with little apparent input from the farmer).

An example of the need to consider extending access to a service beyond the drought period is provided by the PCP Mental Health and First Aid training. These programs can be shown to have medium-term benefits, but their long-term impacts depend on their continuation outside of drought times. Without this continued support, the gains from short-term actions can wane and the chances of achieving long-term changes decline with them. This continued support does not necessarily need to come from a drought response package. For instance, in the case of the Mental Health training, on-going support has been secured from an alternative source (though still within government).

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) faced both of the challenges noted here. The long history of the RFCS means that it has evolved and been refined over many years. The service strikes a good balance between short and long-term needs, and has some level of continuing support (outside of crisis periods), though this could be greater. As part of this package the RFCS services were made available to small (non-farm) businesses in drought affected rural communities. In addition to increasing availability of the service outside of crisis times, this extended scope was very positive and recognised the wider impacts of drought.

RECOMMENDATION

2. Programs that support long-term planning and drought preparedness should continue beyond the official 'end' of the drought period when people's capacity to look at long-term planning increases. Examples of the programs that fit this model are financial counselling and business planning (for farms and small business), mental health services and farm drought support (the coordinator role as well as extension services).
3. Extend the scope (and potentially resources) of the Rural Financial Counselling Service to provide on-going access for all small businesses (farm and non-farm) in rural communities affected by drought.

10.5 THEME 3: TIMELINESS

Timeliness is critical to the success of any emergency or crisis response. Many of the programs included in the drought package were available relatively quickly after the announcement of the package (though not all). However, not all programs were equally time critical. For instance, some were critical because they were

focussed on addressing an acute need in the community (e.g. small business financial counselling or drought employment). However, others did not have immediate and direct impacts on people experiencing stress (e.g. regional infrastructure projects such as road rehabilitation works).

Building time sensitivity into implementation planning may also help to manage expectations in the community. For instance, immediately following the announcement of the drought package, expectations were (naturally) high. Some of the delivery staff interviewed for this evaluation reported that there seemed to be a lull in this period and it was unclear what they were expected to do. This lull had the potential to damage community perceptions of the package and could have compromised one of the central objectives of the approach – that communities felt supported.

RECOMMENDATION

4. In future packages, the planning phase should consider grouping actions into those addressing the acute or immediate needs of a community, versus those focussed on the longer term (after this drought and in preparation for the next). Ensure the programs focussed on the acute or immediate needs are given priority for immediate roll-out. The programs that are more strongly focussed on future preparedness can be commenced slightly later.

10.6 THEME 4: TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Looking broadly at the origins of the set of 21 programs, they can be characterised into three types:

- Activities that were already planned for delivery in the near future that could be brought forward (e.g. water and road projects and other ‘fast tracked’ infrastructure)
- Existing activities or support that could be expanded (e.g. financial counselling, agricultural traineeships, Foodbank)
- New activities specifically developed for this package (e.g. well-being events, drought employment program, small business workshops).

The majority of programs fell into the first two categories. This was an effective approach for several reasons. One was that the organisations or agencies delivering the programs had previous experience to draw upon. Their familiarity and experience meant they were more able to deliver the services quickly and efficiently and, for the recipients, the services were usually coming from a familiar source so might have been perceived as more easily accessible (an important factor for people in crisis).

A second reason was that the fact that these programs were already planned or existed in some form, meant they could be scaled up with relative ease. This scaling up was a key success for many programs, with some identifying that they could be expanded even further in future droughts. One of the examples of this was the agricultural traineeships. This program was expanded dramatically as part of the package and was very successful suggesting that it could be expanded again in future. This would need to be planned in consultation with the regional delivery partner involved to ensure it does not expand beyond their capacity.

However, this approach did not always result in services being delivered in a timely way, and there were examples where there was still a disconnection between management of a program and the regional staff with knowledge of their local community.

While broadly a successful approach, one of the issues that arose with this model was the assumption that the delivery partner could rapidly ramp up their activity in order to deliver the drought support programs. This issue was most evident for the programs delivered by local governments. There did not appear to be adequate consideration that capacity among the local governments involved would vary widely. This is particularly

relevant when the range in size of local governments involved in the drought is considered (e.g. Horsham Rural City Council employs approximately 191 staff whereas Hindmarsh Shire employs around 84 staff). There were cases where program delivery added to the stress of staff in these agencies who were already under pressure.

RECOMMENDATION

5. Future drought packages should continue to leverage existing services and activities that have already been planned, as their core offerings. Based on the local needs, any or all of these programs could be expanded. New activities can be included but they should be explicitly designed to fill a known gap.
6. Future drought packages should look at whether programs that were effective parts of this package can be expanded to operate at a larger scale (e.g. the agricultural traineeships for school leavers).
7. Ensure delivery teams include local staff from the earliest possible stages in the process to enable delivery to be tailored to local communities.
8. Work with delivery partners to identify whether they require additional assistance to deliver the services they are responsible for.

10.7 THEME 5: ACCESSING SUPPORT

One of the significant changes between previous drought responses and this package was the approach taken to eligibility. Many of the programs, particularly those focussed on individuals and families, changed or removed elements like means testing to determine eligibility to access services or support. For instance, access to the kindergarten fee support or school camps, sports and excursions fund normally requires the applicant to provide evidence of economic need (for example via a Health Care Card). As part of the response package, this requirement was waived, and fee support was available to anyone in the drought affected LGAs.

This approach appears to have been a very effective way to achieve one of the main intermediate outcomes of the package – to help communities feel supported as they manage the drought. Both recipients and the delivery partners involved in distributing this assistance were very positive about this approach. It was reported as being instrumental in being able to quickly and easily offer widespread support to affected communities. The simplicity of the application process was highlighted by many, with the added comment that sometimes the demands placed on applicants to these types of programs just add further stress to a difficult situation.

The initiative that was designed to bring forward regional development projects to strengthen the economic and social base of drought-affected communities was welcomed and highly valued by local councils. However, while the types of projects accepted for funding was broadened for the drought response, the projects still had to meet the criteria for funding under the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. There was a feeling that guidelines on the co-contribution²⁵ and reporting requirements, could have been relaxed given that it was a drought response package. Councils with limited resources to execute these types of projects would have benefited from this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. As part of the acute phase of responding to drought, continue to use approaches that minimise the demands placed on those seeking assistance, particularly relating to family and individual support. Where possible and reasonable, reduce or waive eligibility tests in order to be responsive to immediate needs of communities in stress. It should be made clear to all that this is a temporary change due to the extreme circumstances.

²⁵ If the grant is >\$300k the co-contribution from the recipient is 50:50, if <\$300k the co-contribution \$1 for every \$3.

10. Always include regional delivery staff in the development of eligibility guidelines and co-contribution requirements associated with response programs to ensure these parts of the programs are sensitive to local conditions.

10.8 THEME 6: GOVERNANCE

The Drought Interdepartmental Coordination Group operated as the key governance and coordination group for the Drought Response Package. This group had representatives of all Victorian government departments involved in support and delivery of the package. The group met regularly throughout the delivery of the drought support and were effective at monitoring and adapting the complex package as needed.

Advice and feedback from the regions was largely provided through each department and their delivery partners in the regions. Feedback suggested that most of the activities and regional development projects were chosen and designed locally, and this was appreciated. This appears to have been an effective model although there were some cases of communication breakdowns between support area management and regional delivery teams. Some of the program delivery staff reported that they were not adequately consulted during the design phases of the programs, and others noted that they felt they were directed to deliver the programs based on a prescribed approach (rather than being able to tailor the approach to their community).

In addition to these formal governance arrangements, the Seasonal Conditions Committee hosted by Horsham Rural City Council appears to have evolved into a key regional advisory group. They had broad representation from government agencies across their region and they appeared to make a significant contribution to coordination and communication of the package. While this committee may not have been a formal part of the governance structure for the package, they played a valuable role by providing local perspectives on how the package should be implemented in their community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. In future drought response packages, continue to use a governance model that features a coordinating body with representation from all of the agencies involved. Continue to emphasise the importance of strong communication between this group and the delivery partners, support agencies and stakeholder organisations.
12. Future drought response packages should actively support regional level coordination groups (like the Seasonal Conditions Committee that operated in this drought), aiming to ensure all regional delivery partners are connected with at least one of these regional groups. This should not extend to requiring the formation of these groups but should focus on supporting them when and if they are initiated in the regions.

10.9 THEME 7: MEASURING IMPACT

This evaluation has drawn on quantitative and qualitative data. A key source of data for evaluations like this is the regular progress reporting routinely completed during program delivery. A reporting template was provided to the programs and, with only a few exceptions, all programs provided a final report. However, the quality of information provided in these reports was inconsistent and sometimes lacked details (such as participants, activities, milestones, commentary on lessons learned, improvements for the next response).

Even so, there were some support areas where there is strong evidence of impacts. For example, in the Water Security Support area there are tangible outcomes that have already increased drought preparedness. The evidence for this includes:

- The pipeline projects have already increased the availability of water for stock and domestic (S&D) supply in some areas and more pipeline construction is underway in others
- In areas where there are now pipelines, farmers won't have to travel as far to reach water supply points
- Access to emergency water supplies has increased
- Fire-fighting tanks and emergency water supply points (stand pipes) have been installed in the Loddon, West Wimmera and East Grampians areas
- Infrastructure improvements have better secured town water supplies
- Minor works have improved interconnectedness, reliability and water quality for several small townships.

Impact can be difficult to assess. However, an important precursor of being able to assess program impact, is to assess its reach with the target audience. That is, did it have the potential to make a significant difference to the community? Unfortunately, the data collected by the programs does not allow an assessment of the degree to which the programs serviced the demand or needs of the target communities. For instance, events run under the Farm Business Support area attracted over 5,300 participants but it is not clear what proportion of the target audience this represents, nor how many individual participants there were. Comparing this to the estimated number of farm businesses in the drought affected areas would give some sense of the effective reach of the programs.

The impact assessment that has been completed through this evaluation has focussed on using the available evidence (from reports, interviews and other evaluative work) to judge the likely progress towards the long-term goal of the package. On the balance of evidence, we have found that it is likely that drought affected communities, businesses and individuals will have 'improved skills, infrastructure, and capacity to manage future drought events' as a result of this program. However, we are not able to assess whether these changes are sufficiently widespread to have had a major impact across the affected communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. As part of routine reporting, programs must include data on what proportion of the potential recipients have been reached. This measure of the potential reach of the program must be identified during the planning phase for the response package (or as part of the first progress report) so that reporting expectations are clear from the beginning.
14. To improve routine reporting, each program must identify at least one baseline measure during the program planning phase (or as part of the first progress report). This baseline should be either a direct measure, or an indicator, of progress towards the program's outcome. It must be a measure that is expected to respond to the actions being delivered through the program. Changes due to the program will then be measured relative to this baseline.
15. Conduct a longitudinal analysis of the impacts of drought support programs by re-visiting people who received support during previous droughts in this region. Analyse whether they were better prepared for this most recent drought. An example of this would be to assess whether stock containment areas established during the millennium drought were effective in the most recent drought. Other candidates for this type of review are the farm business planning services, mental health services and water infrastructure projects. The RFCS should be considered for this type of review however, this should be incorporated into the Australian Government's review program for the service.

10.10 THEME 8: EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT

Successful marketing and communication of opportunities to access support can result in demands that can't be met and unrealistic expectations being raised. This can turn an otherwise successful and effective program into a problem. The Farm Risk Management Grant (FRMG) program may have run this risk. With around 400 unsuccessful applicants (and 108 successful applicants) it had the potential to generate so much

dissatisfaction among the target community, that the positives could have been completely off-set by these negative experiences. We did not identify any data that suggested this was the case, but with this level of over-subscription it was, and may still be, a possibility.

A combination of good design and adaptive management can anticipate and manage this type of situation. The over-subscription that occurred in the SCA program was managed effectively. In the case of the FRMG, in the planning phase, the potential levels of interest were assessed. An over-subscription was anticipated and options to change the approach in order to reduce the number of unsuccessful applicants were considered. As anticipated, the program was heavily over-subscribed however, those actions were not implemented.

RECOMMENDATION

16. Continue the practice of identifying the risks of over-subscriptions to programs (during planning phases and once the program is running) in order to identify these risks as early as possible. If there is a risk of major over-subscription (e.g. the number of unsuccessful applicants is larger than the number successful), review the program design and, when possible, implement appropriate actions to avoid creating a large number of unsuccessful applicants.

10.11 THEME 9: PRIORITY SETTING

Several existing programs changed eligibility requirements in order to streamline access to support. This sometimes avoided the need to have a selection or priorities setting process (e.g. all children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program were eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy). However, because budgets were (and are always) limited, some priority setting processes were needed. There were several programs that involved some form of application for support (from an individual, business or a farm, or local council) and these were often over-subscribed. This meant that a selection or priority-setting process was used. Some of these processes were inadequate. For instance, the Farm Risk Management Grants were heavily over-subscribed and the selection process used was 'first come, first served'. While this may be a clear and simple method, it is not related to the goal of the program, and in fact could be argued as being directly contradictory. That is, those best organised are more likely to be successful under this method, which seems unlikely to be the farmers with the greatest need for risk management assistance.

A major risk that selection and priority-setting processes need to guard against is favouring applicants who are the most organised or the best connected, rather than those who are the highest priority for assistance (i.e. those in greatest need). Some of the processes used in the programs did not seem to manage this risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. Build the following priority-setting principles into programs where there are grants involved. Priority-setting techniques must:
 - be consistent with the goals of that program
 - favour those options that offer the best combination of benefits (maximum) and costs (least)
 - make sure applicants are aware of selection criteria that will be used
 - guard against unintentionally favouring unrelated attributes of applicants (e.g. applicants who are skilled at completing an application form are favoured)

Appendix 1: Outcomes Logic Model



Victorian Government Drought Response Package Vision: Communities, farm businesses, small businesses and families are supported with appropriate, timely, and targeted government support (that aligns with Victorian and national policy) that minimizes the negative impacts of drought and increases future drought resilience.

<p>On-farm water may become unavailable Farm businesses and landholders may need to cart water</p>		<p>Support for water security: To improve access to water, provide emergency water supply points, extend pipelines Water infrastructure improvements</p>	<p>Operational DELWP, Water authorities, local councils Beneficiaries Landowners, farm businesses, communities</p>	<p>Water is available for stock and domestic use or other management plans (on and off farm) are implemented.</p>	<p>Longer term access to water is improved where deficiencies are identified and continuity of water supply is maintained. Farm businesses have increased water security to plan for future seasonal challenges.</p>	
<p>Lower levels of production/ income results in reduced employment (either less hours or positions) by farm businesses and agriculture-dependant businesses</p>		<p>Local employment support: To provide employment opportunities for farmers and farm workers, ensure that farm businesses can employ trainees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drought Employment Program • Agricultural Traineeship for School Leavers • Back to Work program 	<p>Operational DELWP, DET, DTF, Skillsinvest, CMAs Beneficiaries Farmers, farm workers, school leavers, other employees</p>	<p>Impacted workers, farmers and school leavers participate in alternative (temporary) employment opportunities to receive/supplement income.</p>	<p>Participation in employment activities are maintained locally. Communities feel supported as affected families remain in the community.</p>	
<p>Appropriateness</p>	<p>Efficiency</p>		<p>Effectiveness</p>			

Appendix 2: Evaluation framework

Evaluation frameworks used for each of the six areas of support.

Table A2- 1: Evaluation framework: Farm business support

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: FARM BUSINESS SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Have the <u>four</u> programs been delivered as planned? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ activities and outputs delivered ▪ within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level) ▪ in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices? 	Stock Containment Areas Grant (SCA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Location and no. of properties with stock containment areas ▪ Grants provided ▪ Support/advice provided on operation of stock containment areas 	Evaluation report
	Farm Risk Management Grants (FRMG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # participants ▪ No. and location of grant recipients ▪ Changes made to manage risk 	Reports provided
	Drought Extension Services (DES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # farmers in drought affected areas engaged ▪ # using services ▪ feedback on services 	Evaluation report
	Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # farmers using service ▪ feedback on service 	Reports provided
Effectiveness	Short-term outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the short-term outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward these short-term outcomes?	Farm businesses know about support and access (those) services. Farm businesses take on information to make timely decisions and have improved knowledge, skills and confidence to manage the season.	Feedback from participating farmers Data collected on farm business changes (e.g. as part of follow-up work on grants (SCA or FRMG)) How could the programs be improved?	Evaluation report (SCA, DES) Interviews with delivery managers in DEDJTR and Rural Financial Counselling Services Executive Officers.
	Farm production Farmers improve on-farm infrastructure (e.g. SCA/ FRMG) to manage the season. Key soil and land assets are protected from over-grazing. Livestock management is improved during drought.	Changes become part of normal farm operations (e.g. use of stock containment areas integrated into groundcover management) Requests for advice.	Evaluation report (SCA, DES) Interviews with delivery managers in DEDJTR and Rural Financial Counselling Services Executive Officers.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: FARM BUSINESS SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Effectiveness	Intermediate outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward the stated intermediate outcomes?	Farm businesses feel supported. Farm businesses manage the impacts of drought by making timely decisions or implementing new practices. Farm businesses have increased knowledge, infrastructure and access to resources to assist with planning for future seasonal challenges. Soil and environmental assets are protected.	Preparedness for future events (drought or other issues). Legacy (lasting effects) of the Farm Business Support programs. Anticipated responses among farmers to next dry period.	Interviews with delivery managers in DEDJTR and Rural Financial Counselling Services Executive Officers.
Efficiency		Data	Source
Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs? What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?	n/a Note: need to consider grant eligibility criteria and balance btw drought policy and what is practical to administer.	Indicators that demonstrate cost-effectiveness such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adjustments made to improve results procurement methods (e.g. quotes) using scoring and prioritisation tools using partnerships to deliver works where appropriate coordinating the delivery of works 	Interviews with delivery managers in DEDJTR and Rural Financial Counselling Services Executive Officers.

Table A2- 2: Evaluation framework: Small business support

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Have the <u>two</u> programs been delivered as planned? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities and outputs delivered within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level) in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices? 	Dedicated Small Business Services provided by the Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. and location of counsellors appointed # small businesses using the service feedback on the service 	Reports provided
	Small Business Workshops & Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. and location of workshops and programs e.g. Crisis Business planning workshops # participants 	Reports provided
Effectiveness	Short-term outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the short-term outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward these short-term outcomes?	Small businesses know about support and access services. Small businesses make timely decisions.	Feedback from participating businesses Evidence of small businesses implementing changed practices How could the programs be improved?	Interviews with delivery managers in DEDJTR, SBV and Rural Finance. Data reported as part of program delivery

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Effectiveness	Intermediate outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward the stated intermediate outcomes?	Small businesses feel supported and manage the impacts of drought.	Outlook among businesses Legacy (lasting effects) of the Small Business Support programs Increased capacity and preparedness to withstand the impacts of drought	Interviews with delivery managers in DEDJTR, SBV and Rural Finance.
Efficiency	-	Data	Source
Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs? What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?	n/a	Indicators that demonstrate cost-effectiveness such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adjustments made to improve results procurement methods (e.g. quotes) using scoring and prioritisation tools using partnerships to deliver works where appropriate coordinating the delivery of works 	Interviews with delivery staff and leads in each program

Table A2- 3: Evaluation framework: Individual and family support

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Have the <u>five</u> programs been delivered as planned? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities and outputs delivered within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level) in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices? 	Primary Care Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. and location of funding recipients # partnerships feedback on funding and its impact 	Reports provided
	Mental Health First Aid Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. and location of training courses # participants feedback of training and how it's been implemented 	Reports provided
	Targeted National Centre for Farmer Health program (could include Look over the Farm Gate (community events and promotion))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. and location of activities # participants feedback on activities 	Reports provided (Evaluation of 'Look over the Farm Gate' and 'Sustainable Farm Families 2016/17 Draft report')
	Back to School program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # engaged in target areas # using services feedback on services 	Reports provided
	Kindergarten Fee Subsidy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # accessing the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy No. and location of kindergartens to receive a Financial Hardship Grant 	Reports provided

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT			
	Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. and location of students to access service Feedback on service and evidence of service enabling participation in extra-curricular activities 	Reports provided
Effectiveness	Short-term outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the short-term outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward these short-term outcomes? How could the programs be improved?	Community members are aware of services and support available. Increase in the number of community members who can recognise signs of stress and refer people to help. Participation in social, education and community activities is maintained.	Feedback from grant recipients and community members that participated in activities and accessed services. Data on changes in attitudes and capacity to recognise and respond to stress. Numbers accessing services and participating in activities now, compared to pre-2015.	Data reported as part of program delivery e.g. grant reporting Community health data Interviews with DHHS, DET and NCFH leaders.
Effectiveness	Intermediate outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward the stated intermediate outcomes?	Families feel supported and manage the impacts of drought. The escalation of the social impacts of drought are minimised.	Outlook among drought affected communities Legacy (lasting effects) of the Individual and Family Support programs Increased capacity to recognise and manage stress-related issues	Interviews with DHHS, DET and NCFH leaders. Regional Wellbeing Survey data
Efficiency		Data	Source
Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs? What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?	Has this program demonstrated that it has been delivered cost effectively i.e. what measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used to maximise the outputs from that program.	Indicators that demonstrate cost-effectiveness such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adjustments made to improve results procurement methods (e.g. quotes) using scoring and prioritisation tools using partnerships to deliver works where appropriate coordinating the delivery of works 	Interviews with DHHS, DET and NCFH leaders.

Table A2- 4: Evaluation framework: Community and regional development support

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Have the <u>seven</u> programs been delivered as planned? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities and outputs delivered 	Regional Drought Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number, type and location of services delivered by the Regional Drought Coordinator # of people, businesses and organisations engaged Feedback from participants 	Report provided Evaluation report (stakeholder interviews)

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level) in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices? 	Local Council Drought Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and location of grants awarded Types of initiatives delivered through grants # participants reached through funded initiatives Feedback from participants 	Reports provided (limited information) Grants information in GEMs LGAs final reports
	Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number, type and location of grants awarded Completion of water infrastructure projects # participants reached through funded projects 	Reports provided (limited information)
	Sporting Club Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number, type and location of grants awarded Evidence of sporting club programs having been implemented # participants reached through the funded programs 	Reports provided (limited information)
	Fast Tracking regional development projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and location of projects fast tracked Type and completion of regional development projects # participants reached through funded projects Feedback from project managers 	Reports provided
	Prioritising rehabilitation road works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of the three funded projects in north west Victoria Feedback on rehabilitation works # using/benefiting from the works 	No data
	Support for Foodbank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of participants # of cold storage units implemented Feedback from participants 	Reports provided (limited information)
Effectiveness	Short-term outcomes	Data	Source
<p>To what extent have the short-term outcomes been achieved?</p> <p>What is the evidence of progress toward these short-term outcomes?</p>	Community-led infrastructure is identified and implemented.	Evidence of the completion of infrastructure works and implementation of other funded programs. How could the programs be improved?	Data reported as part of program delivery
	Community members participate in events.	Data on community participation Feedback from participants (e.g. grant recipients, community members who participated and/or benefited from programs) How could the programs be improved?	Data reported as part of program delivery
Effectiveness	Intermediate outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved?	Communities feel supported.	Outlook of the local communities.	Evaluation of RDC role.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT			
What is the evidence of progress toward the stated intermediate outcomes?	Economic growth in drought impacted areas is facilitated by providing opportunities for community-led initiatives and important local infrastructure.	Continuation of community-led initiatives and ongoing use of infrastructure by the local community. Legacy (lasting effects) of the Community and Regional Development Support programs Evidence of a stable or growing local economy e.g. emergence of new businesses, business turn-over, population changes, real estate prices, compared with pre-2015 data.	Telephone interviews with program leaders. Review of publicly available information on local economic conditions.
Efficiency		Data	Source
Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs? What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?	Has this program demonstrated that it has been delivered cost effectively i.e. what measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used to maximise the outputs from that program.	Indicators that demonstrate cost-effectiveness such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adjustments made to improve results ▪ procurement methods (e.g. quotes) ▪ using scoring and prioritisation tools ▪ using partnerships to deliver works where appropriate ▪ coordinating the delivery of works 	Interviews with delivery staff and leads in each program

Table A2- 5: Evaluation framework: Support for water security

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: SUPPORT FOR WATER SECURITY			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
Has the program been delivered as planned? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ activities and outputs delivered ▪ within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level) ▪ in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices? 	Water infrastructure improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number, location and type of water supply infrastructure projects implemented ▪ # towns and/or recipients of water supply projects 	Reporting and monitoring data provided Note: includes sport and recreational water projects
Effectiveness	Short-term outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the short-term outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward these short-term outcomes?	Water is available for stock and domestic use or other management plans (on and off farm) are implemented.	Availability of water for stock and domestic supply in drought affected areas Implementation of water supply management plans – location and number How could the program be improved?	Data reported as part of program delivery Review of management plans Review of Business Cases

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: SUPPORT FOR WATER SECURITY			
Effectiveness	Intermediate outcomes	Data	Source
<p>To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved?</p> <p>What is the evidence of progress toward the stated intermediate outcomes?</p>	<p>Longer term access to water is improved where deficiencies are identified and continuity of water supply is maintained.</p> <p>Farm businesses have increased water security to plan for future seasonal challenges.</p>	<p>Stocking rates – numbers in non-drought versus drought periods</p> <p>Historical water storage and consumption data for non-drought versus drought periods</p> <p>Evidence of a maintenance / capital works plan to upgrade and improve efficiencies in water supply infrastructure over time.</p> <p>Reliability and continuity of water supply to landholders and townships.</p> <p>Capacity of farm businesses to withstand future drought events, due to increased water security.</p> <p>Legacy (lasting effects) of the Support for Water Security program</p>	<p>Water supply business case or plan</p> <p>Telephone interviews with deliverers</p>
Efficiency		Data	Source
<p>Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs?</p> <p>What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?</p>	<p>Has this program demonstrated that it has been delivered cost effectively i.e. what measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used to maximise the outputs from that program.</p>	<p>Indicators that demonstrate cost-effectiveness such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adjustments made to improve results ▪ procurement methods (e.g. quotes) ▪ using scoring and prioritisation tools ▪ using partnerships to deliver works where appropriate ▪ coordinating the delivery of works 	<p>Interviews with delivery staff and leads in each program</p>

Table A2- 6: Evaluation framework: Local employment support

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT			
KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS: DELIVERY	PROGRAMS: ACTIVITIES	DATA	SOURCE
<p>Have the two programs been delivered as planned?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ activities and outputs delivered ▪ within scope, budget, expected timeframe (high level) ▪ in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices? 	Drought Employment Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of people employed in environmental projects ▪ Location of recipients and environmental projects ▪ Feedback on employment program 	Reporting and monitoring data from CMAs Evaluation completed
	Agricultural Traineeship for School Leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of participants ▪ Support provided ▪ Feedback on training and support 	Reporting and monitoring data

Effectiveness	Short-term outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the short-term outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward these short-term outcomes?	Impacted workers, farmers and school leavers participate in alternative (temporary) employment opportunities to receive/supplement income.	Data on participants accessing employment support (demography, location, occupations). How could the programs be improved?	Data reported as part of program delivery
Effectiveness	Intermediate outcomes	Data	Source
To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved? What is the evidence of progress toward the stated intermediate outcomes?	Participation in employment activities are maintained locally. Communities feel supported as affected families remain in the community.	Continuity of employment positions Impacts of employment on communities Legacy (lasting effects) of the Local Employment Support programs Community outlook	Interviews with the 4 participating CMAs and Skillinvest.
Efficiency		Data	Source
Have the delivery partners demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of these programs? What measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used cost-effectively?	Has this program demonstrated that it has been delivered cost effectively i.e. what measures have been taken to ensure the resources available have been used to maximise the outputs from that program.	Indicators that demonstrate cost-effectiveness such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adjustments made to improve results ▪ procurement methods (e.g. quotes) ▪ using scoring and prioritisation tools ▪ using partnerships to deliver works where appropriate ▪ coordinating the delivery of works 	Interviews with delivery staff and leads in each program

Appendix 3: Interviews guide

PURPOSE

To ensure consistency in data collection, use these questions as a guide to develop up your own interview questions tailored to each component program.

ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS

DELIVERY OF OUTPUTS

Were the activities in your program rolled out as intended?

Ask about what you have found in the reporting to validate your interpretation.

Were there any major obstacles or delays?

If so what were they? Why do you think this happened? How were these issues resolved?

How did you go with the allocated budget and resourcing wise?

Did you get enough interest in the program? Over/under subscribed?

EFFICIENCY

Were there any occasions where you changed approach to improve an aspect of delivery?

Was there any mid-term review of your program?

What did it find? Did you make any changes or improvements to delivery as a result or along the way?

Did you partner with anybody else to make things work better?

Did you find efficient ways to coordinate activities?

How were your procurement practices? Did you let tenders, call for EOIs, get quotes? (won't be relevant for a lot of the programs)

Did you do anything to make the money go a bit further? If so what? How did it turn out?

Keep pushing your interviewees for real examples – keep an ear out for interesting stories and case studies.

ACHIEVEMENT OF SHORT-TERM OUTCOME

Can you tell me your opinion on whether the immediate outcomes of your program were met? Yes/No?

Are you aware of what the intended outcomes were? [If not, remind them]

How did the program go in achieving these intended outcomes do you think?

Can you provide any evidence to back this up?

If yes, can you provide any additional documentation to what we already have?

ASSESSING INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Consider if there are any significant differences between the short-term and intermediate outcomes?

Need to look for both if different?

Can you tell me your opinion on whether the intermediate outcomes of your program were met? Yes/No?

Can you provide any evidence to back this up?

If yes, can you provide any additional documentation to what we already have?

**CONCLUDING QUESTIONS SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING
LINES OF INQUIRY**

Do you have any feedback on / or sense of how well the whole package came together?

Was it effective as a package?

Do you think that you are better placed to deliver this or another program for the next drought? Why/why not?

What have you learnt? What advice would you give to those designing the next drought response package?

Appendix 4: Overview of data gap analysis findings

SUPPORT CATEGORY	SHORT-TERM (6-12 MONTHS)	INTERMEDIATE (1-2 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (3 YEARS +)
Farm business support	Reporting of activities and short-term results (as part of quarterly reports) was good. Evaluation of SCA and DES provides even more detail on activities.	A previous evaluation covered the Drought Extension Program and the Stock Containment Area Grants. Regular reporting on the other two programs was very good and provided useful insights into achievement of the intermediate outcomes.	<p>While there was no direct measurement of progress towards the overall long-term goal of the package there was data and information that functioned as indicators of progress. (Long-term goal: 'communities and businesses have improved skills, infrastructure, and capacity to manage future drought events')</p>
Small business support	Reporting of activities and short-term results (as part of quarterly reports) was good.	Small businesses feel supported and manage the impacts of drought.	
Individual and family support	Reporting of activities and short-term results was incomplete for several programs. Details were limited or absent.	No information on the specific outcomes related to families feeling supported or reductions in social impacts of drought being reduced.	
Community and regional development support	Reporting of activities and short-term results varied widely across these programs. Some was very detailed (e.g. fast tracking of regional development projects) while reports were not provided for other programs (e.g. road works projects).	No information on the specific outcomes related to communities feeling supported or improvements in economic conditions in drought impacted areas.	
Support for water security	Reporting of activities and short-term results (as part of quarterly reports) was good.	Information in reports showed that the intermediate outcome of improved access to water were likely to be achieved, for instance pipeline projects that created new access for farm businesses increased water security for future seasonal challenges.	
Local employment support	Reporting of activities and short-term results (as part of quarterly reports) was good.	Information in reports was able to demonstrate that local employment was maintained. There was no direct measurement of whether this prevented families from moving away, or increased the level of support felt by the community.	

KEY:

Data availability/strength of evidence:

High
Medium
Low

Appendix 5: Interviewees by Support Area

NO.	INTERVIEWEE	TITLE	ROLE IN PROJECT	ORGANISATION
OVERALL DROUGHT PACKAGE				
1	Julie Simons	Director Drought and Major Projects	Drought package design and coordination	Agriculture Victoria, DEDJTR
2	Mike Taylor	Victorian Agricultural Advisory Committee	Advice on drought support	Independent
FARM BUSINESS SUPPORT				
1	Julie Simons	Director Drought and Major Projects	Program Management	Agriculture Victoria, DEDJTR
2	Melissa Cann	Agriculture Services and Biosecurity Operations	Drought Extension Program Coordinator	Agriculture Victoria, DEDJTR
3	Patrick Timmons	Executive Officer, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Victoria – North West	Coordinated RFCS services in north west Victoria	Rural Financial Counselling Service
4	Nerida Kerr	CEO North East Rural Finance Counselling	Coordinated RFCS services in the Wimmera and south west Victoria	Rural Financial Counselling Service
5	Tracey Harper	Senior Policy Analyst, Agriculture Policy	Administered funding to Rural Financial Counselling Services	Agriculture Victoria, DEDJTR
6	Peter Nee	Head of Operations, Rural Finance, Victoria	Program Management	Rural Finance
SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT				
1	Patrick Timmons	Executive Officer, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Victoria – North West	Delivered small business financial counselling in NW Vic	Rural Financial Counselling Service
2	David Stafford	Executive Officer, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Victoria – Wimmera South West Inc	Delivered small business financial counselling in SW Vic	Rural Financial Counselling Service
3	Tracey Harper	Senior Policy Analyst, Agriculture Policy	Administered funding to Rural Financial Counselling Services	Agriculture Victoria, DEDJTR
4	Julie Mason	Programs Co-ordinator, Small Business Victoria	Administered funding and designed workshops for small businesses	Small Business Victoria, DEDJTR
5	Mark Fletcher	Project Officer	Designed workshops for small businesses	Wimmera Development Association
INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT				
1	Ian Wallis	Manager Family Allowance Unit, Family Services Division	Program Management	DET

NO.	INTERVIEWEE	TITLE	ROLE IN PROJECT	ORGANISATION
2	Jen Baker	Business Manager	Organised payments and applications for Donald PS	Donald Primary School
3	Rose Stewart	Senior Policy Advisor, early Learning Operations Unit	Program Management	DET
4	Sharon Sartori	School Program Advisor	Replaced the Program Manager	State Schools Relief (charitable organisation)
5	Tanya Owen	Project Administrator	Project Administrator	State Schools Relief (charitable organisation)
6	Kate Russo	Senior Project Officer, Primary and Community Health	Took over program management in May 2017	DHHS
7	Geoff Witmitz	Executive Officer	Service Delivery	Wimmera Primary Care Partnership
8	Sue Brumby	Director	Delivery partner	National Centre for Farmer Health
COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT				
1	Danny Dale	Manager Concessions and State-wide Contracts	Project Manager (Foodbank)	DHHS
2	David McNamara	CEO	Delivery partner	Foodbank
3	Melanie Watts	Charlton landholder	Community delivery partner	-
4	Tracey Harbridge	Catchment Restoration Officer	Delivery partner	North Central Catchment Management Authority
5	Peter Watts	Chair Charlton Lions Club	Community delivery partner	Charlton Lions Club
6	Nicholas Robson	Manager, Metro Water Corporations	Project Manager (Sport and Recreation Water Infrastructure Grants)	DELWP
7	Melanie Thomas	Manager – Physical Activity	Project Manager (Sporting Club Grants)	Sport and Recreation Victoria, DHHS
8	Laura Armstrong	Project Officer – Physical Activity	Project Officer	Sport and Recreation Victoria, DHHS
9	Simone Dalton	Senior Policy Analyst	Regional Drought Coordinator (Horsham)	Agriculture Victoria, DEDJTR
10	Phil King	Manager, Economic & Community Development	Project Manager	Hindmarsh Shire Council
11	Lynley Hoiles	Project Officer	Delivery partner	Northern Grampians Shire Council
12	Gavin Blinman	Community Services and Development Manager	Project Manager	Yarriambiack Shire Council
13	Angela Veitch	Assistant Project Manager	Delivery partner	West Wimmera Shire Council

NO.	INTERVIEWEE	TITLE	ROLE IN PROJECT	ORGANISATION
14	Kelly Jordan	Manager, Economic Development	Project Manager	West Wimmera Shire Council
15	Kevin O'Brien	Director of Community Services	Convenor, Seasonal Conditions Committee	Horsham Rural City Council
16	Martin Mark	Recreation Manager	Delivery partner	Central Goldfields Shire Council
17	Gary Nevill	Manager, Major Projects	Project Manager	Central Goldfields Shire Council
18	Doug Gowans	Director Assets and Development Services	Project Manager	Pyrenees Shire Council
19	Anne Cahir	Senior Project Officer, Regional Programs and Recovery	Main program contact	Regional Development Victoria, DEDJTR
20	Colin Kemp	Economic Development Officer	Regional contact, Horsham	Regional Development Victoria DEDJTR -
21	Lauren Sculley	Economic Development Officer	Regional contact, Ballarat	Regional Development Victoria DEDJTR -
22	Paul Goudie	Economic Development Officer	Regional contact, Bendigo	Regional Development Victoria DEDJTR -
23	Brian Wright	Team Leader Asset Management	Delivery partner, Western Region, Warracknabeal	VicRoads, DEDJTR
WATER SECURITY SUPPORT				
1	John Johnstone	Manager Strategic Planning and Projects	Program Manager on behalf of DELWP	DELWP
2	Simon Coutts	Manager Rural Pipelines Investigation	Project managed delivery of several GMMWater projects	GMMWater, Horsham
LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT				
1	Felicia Choo	Senior Project Officer, Ecosystem Services	Project Manager	DELWP
2	Rod Taylor	Manager, Ecosystem Services	Project Director	DELWP
3	Tim Shanahan	Team Leader Irrigation and Water Resources	Delivery partner	North Central CMA
4	Tracey Harbridge	Catchment Restoration Officer	Delivery partner	North Central CMA
5	Mark Frankland	Manager	Project Director	DET
6	Darren Webster	CEO	Delivery partner	Skillinvest
7	Jodi Potter	Operations Manager	Delivery partner	Skillinvest

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