Appendix A
Regional impact case studies

Contents of this document

This appendix presents case studies from selected HRCPD Initiative regions where the evaluation team conducted 'deep dive' consultations. These regions were chosen to reflect the diversity of delivery models, contexts and outcomes across the Initiative. Each case study draws on Regional Drought Resilience Plans, regional profiles provided by FRRR, final grant project reporting, interviews, observations and program data provided by FRRR and ARLF to illustrate how the Initiative was implemented on the ground, what impacts were achieved and what the emerging long-term impact of the initiative is. The case studies drew largely from CIP and SNG data as this was collected at a regional level. Reference to other elements is made throughout where appropriate.

The following regional case studies are contained in this document:

1. North and Northwest Tasmania
2. Fitzroy Capricornia, Queensland
3. Northern Tablelands, New South Wales
4. Mallee, Victoria
5. Far West, New South Wales
6. Great Southern, Western Australia
7. Wimmera Southern Mallee, Victoria
8. Murraylands and Riverland, South Australia
9. Tablelands, Northern Territory
10. Wheatbelt Central East, Western Australia
11. Northwest Queensland
12. Central West Queensland
13. Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

When referring to youth or young people, this is defined as individuals aged between 18 and 35.

Some CIP and SNG projects had received extensions or were yet to provide final grant reporting data at the time of writing. These instances are indicated by 'data not available'.

Overall, regional communities identified four ways to sustain the impact of the HRCPD Initiative

Sustained, flexible funding models are foundational for communities to maintain and scale drought preparedness impact

The Initiative has demonstrated that when communities have access to flexible and predictable funding, they can innovate, adapt, and deliver locally relevant drought preparedness solutions. Regions have built new networks, piloted practical training, and scaled up transformative activities that improve social resilience. Sustaining this momentum requires ongoing investment that is accessible and enables organisations to continue driving action and strengthening local responses to drought.

Empowered local leaders and volunteers underpin adaptive capacity building and embed drought resilience

The Initiative has empowered local leaders, mentors, volunteers and young people with the confidence and tools to step up and coordinate action to build drought resilience. Leadership programs and succession planning have expanded the reach and activities of community champions to build stronger social capital and wellbeing. Continuing to invest in leadership pathways and grassroots coordination, will provide communities with consistent capability to respond to drought and embed preparedness as a shared responsibility at the community level.

Organisational capacity is strengthened through collaborative networks and locally-relevant support

Organisations have built capacity through peer learning and collaborative networks which have enabled communities to share practical skills and drive effective drought preparedness activities. These networks have supported changes in awareness, improved cohesion, and empowered coordinated responses to drought. Sustaining this strength will require ongoing support for network-building and, streamlining supports to allow volunteer-led and small organisations to focus on action rather than administration.

Inclusive, culturally grounded approaches broaden community participation and strengthen resilience

HRCPD projects have proven that embedding cultural knowledge can empower diverse cohorts, especially First Nations and CALD communities, to drive drought resilience efforts. By embedding traditional practices and co-designing activities, communities have built trust, revitalised local knowledge, and enabled intergenerational learning. Sustaining these strengths will ensure all community members are engaged, equipped, and connected to build social capital and transformative resilience to drought.

North and Northwest Tasmania

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North and Northwest Tasmania regional overview

A Region of opportunity, resilience and innovation

Community dynamics influence how resilience is built.

In North and Northwest Tasmania, local leaders reported that the region's small community populations and volunteer fatigue are challenging community resilience. Younger people are increasingly engaged with climate issues, with grantees noting that climate change and climate anxiety resonate more strongly than drought awareness. Local leaders reported that stronger community wellbeing, mental health, and effective leadership succession is key to sustaining local capacity and continuity.

Climate challenges in the region are varied and interconnected.

The region faces variable rainfall, frequent storms, and broader climate shifts. Communities see drought as one aspect of ongoing climate disruption.

As one participant reflected; "last year a key challenge was recovering from extreme storm damage," and "the crop's dead and the farmer doesn't care which one caused it," underscoring the need for integrated climate responses.

Place-based approaches are vital given the region's geographic context.

Remoteness, limited services, and dispersed populations meant delivery of the Initiative had to be local, flexible, and trusted. Communities responded best to place-based approaches grounded in local knowledge. As one participant said, "Local knowledge is the best way to engage and motivate people."

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: **$440.3K**

Small Network Grants funding: **$38K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Rural Business Tasmania Inc	Regional CPLO	Coordination	350	PO4, PO7
RANT Arts	Close Up: Drought Preparedness	Training initiatives	18	PO1, PO3
Rural Business Tasmania Inc	Local Communities Volunteer Project	Community events	124	PO4, PO7
Southern Farming Systems Ltd	Empowering rural youth to build capacity in Tasmanian rural communities	Community events	160	PO4, PO5
Tasmanian Leaders	Drought Resilient Impact Preparedness leadership program	Development and leadership	15	PO3, PO4
Rural Alive & Well Inc	Drought Resilience and Suicide Prevention for Rural Communities:	Networks	1546	PO1, PO6
Big Hart Inc	Watershed 'Just Feasts' Program	Community events	180	PO1, PO7

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

3 Changemaker sessions across Devonport, King Island and Flinders Island and 1 Community Leadership program

101 total participants, of which 18 were young people and 2 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

1 Organisation accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

2 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

46 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

In North and Northwest Tasmania, the Initiative helped shift the conversation from drought as a weather event to social resilience as a community practice. Through creative storytelling, leadership retreats, food-based engagement, and volunteer matching, local organisations built new networks, empowered young people, and sparked grassroots solutions to complex challenges. A selection of case studies from the region is shown below.

Big HART's Just Feasts Project strengthened community and food system resilience.

The Just Feasts project built community resilience by bringing people together through food and place-based learning. Six themed events immersed producers, youth, and locals in regenerative agriculture and food sovereignty.

Supported by $20,000 of SNG funding, the project offered lunches for new mothers and provided youth with hands-on hospitality skills, creating new career pathways and building confidence. Participants used the platform to discuss challenges and collaborate on new local initiatives, like a proposed community abattoir and a ten-year artisan site to train and retain young people in the region.

> The Watershed Space became a place where people came together to learn, share, and build resilience through food and connection.

> Adapting events to suit the community helped include diverse voices and sparked important conversations.

Tasmanian Leaders used place-based knowledge to motivate new local leadership.

The three-day Tasmanian Leaders retreat, funded by the CIP Grants, brought together Aboriginal community members, local leaders and emerging changemakers to participate in a series of sessions about the impacts of drought and climate on the land.

Hosting the program at a rural property contextualised the sessions and allowed people to build deep connections. The sessions combined climate science, regional planning, and Aboriginal knowledge to provide participants with the tools to lead climate resilience efforts in their communities. The CIP funding was essential for increasing accessibility and participation.

> Being on site around the campfire at night and just listening to their conversations... they were all very much related back to community.

> They went back to help their communities as little conduits of knowledge.

RANT Arts' creative engagement unlocked new voices in resilience.

RANT Arts' Close Up project used creative storytelling to engage young people in conversations about climate, resilience, and mental health. The organisation also drew upon the Expertise Concierge for tailored advice. The project's success lay in its ability to:

- Attract participants through accessible framing (e.g. "climate" rather than "drought")
- Hand over creative control to participants
- Produce high-quality digital assets with lasting value

Karen spoke to the Evaluation about the impacts of the videos. Click to hear her story via the video below.

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Projects enabled more strategic, locally led responses to climate challenges. For example:

Big HART helped participants to "look at [community resilience] in more of a holistic way... through systems and how to take climate change into consideration."

The Tasmanian Leaders retreat prompted "people to consider and understand what is happening [in their community]... so that they're not duplicating or doing something else that might be better suited elsewhere."

Projects helped to reduce isolation, build trust, and create a stronger foundation for collective action in times of stress.

Big HART placed drought in the minds of people it hadn't before "We had mums and babies in the room... just having that cross-section of communities was really good."

The Tasmanian Volunteer Program matched "new people up with existing volunteer groups... It's a bit of a succession plan."

Projects developed community videos, new enterprise models, and embedded partnerships with schools and councils.

RANT Arts created "three digital community assets... deliberately designed so that they are relevant into the future."

"Big HART extended the impact of the Supper Series event by "putting it into an experience that made people then go home and talk to their partners and friends about it."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Scale what works through sustained funding and long-term investment.

Short-term grants enabled innovation, but stakeholders emphasised the need for longer-term funding to maintain momentum, retain staff, and deepen impact.

Big HART faced repeated risk of losing staff due to funding gaps. A $20,000 grant "doesn't go very far" unless backed by other sources. In response, the organisation adopted a ten-year residency model with enterprise partnerships to generate continuity.

Target future initiatives to include diverse community cohorts.

Some felt there is anxiety about future climate events, particularly among young people and marginalised groups.

RANT Arts found that young participants were deeply engaged with climate themes. One participant expressed not wanting to have children due to climate anxiety. Creative formats like storytelling and community feasts give participants language and frameworks to process their emotions, helping shift anxiety into agency and action.

Inclusive planning supports effective engagement and coordination.

The CIP co-design process ensured community perspectives were included. Some local organisations did not have the capacity to participate like RANT Arts, who were identified during local co-design as best placed to deliver the project. Rural Business Tasmania emphasised the value of aligning efforts with councils and delivery partners to reduce duplication and help surface local projects.

Fitzroy Capricornia Queensland

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Fitzroy Capricornia regional overview

Strong grass-roots foundations for transformative drought preparedness

Strong networks anchor diverse communities

Fitzroy Capricornia's diverse population, including 16,000 First Nations people and a large youth cohort, underpins strong community-led networks. But social challenges persist. Remote towns like Woorabinda face youth mental health issues, isolation, and weak service access. Volunteer burnout is rising: "It's quite a big thing in our rural towns." Despite strong existing networks, ongoing investment in social infrastructure is vital to sustain resilience.

Climate pressure mounts despite deep local drought knowledge

The region has endured 18 droughts in 20 years. Communities have already built resilience through diversified farming, improved water infrastructure, and strong peer networks. But climate extremes are intensifying, "It's not just drought, it's a rollercoaster of climate." Some areas miss rain while neighbour's flood. Recovery now depends on shifting from reactive aid to proactive adaptation.

Future industries rely on fragile water systems

Remote communities are separated by vast distances that strain service delivery and infrastructure. Heavy industry in Gladstone and emerging sectors like hydrogen and aquaculture rely on secure water supply, but gaps threaten progress: "Limited meeting spaces, poor internet, and transport challenges hinder service delivery and community engagement." Water cartage in towns like Mount Morgan show the real cost of these challenges. The region requires resilient water systems, even stronger infrastructure, and coordination across industries.

The Initiative invested in capacity building and community infrastructure.

Community Impact Program funding: **$304.5K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association	Regional CPLO	Coordination	1882	PO2, PO1
Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association	Improved Community Access	Community infrastructure	200	PO1, PO7
Central Queensland Landscape Alliance	Remote Community Capacity Building	Training initiatives	184	PO4, PO5
Not for Profit HQ Limited	NFP Report Card Assessments - Upskilling	Training initiatives	92	PO4, PO7
Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council	Woorabinda Rangers and Youth Development Program	Training initiatives	150	PO7, PO4

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

5 Changemaker sessions across Banana, Rockhampton, Emerald, Gladstone and Woorabinda

112 total participants, of which at least 3 were young people and 21 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

6 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

29 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

The Initiative is leveraging Fitzroy Capricornia's strong existing social networks to drive community-led adaptation to drought. Local leaders are stepping up, supported by new infrastructure, tailored mentoring, and stronger not-for-profits. Inclusive, place-based engagement is reaching isolated towns and amplifying the voices of First Nations people, youth, and volunteers. These efforts are creating a more connected, capable, and climate-resilient region.

Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association Community Room Project provided space to connect.

The DCCA Community Room provides a trusted, technology-equipped space to connect communities. Funded by a CIP grant, The Room supports local groups, businesses, and families with reliable internet and video conferencing, enabling participation in workshops, meetings, and sensitive gatherings otherwise limited by the region's vast distances and poor connectivity. The dedicated coordinator connects grassroots groups and First Nations communities, addressing isolation and volunteer fatigue. The service fee model ensures financial sustainability, while interest from nearby towns like Biloela shows demand for replicating the model. The project provides vital community infrastructure that strengthens cohesion, supports adaptation, and offers a scalable resilience model.

> There's no way I could have imagined that we'd be hosting families preparing for funerals in here... just having a private space that took all of your family away from some of those risk factors was incredible.

NFP HQ report cards supported local organisations to improve service delivery.

NFP HQ's Report Cards strengthen the region's not-for-profits by providing tailored assessments and mentoring focused on governance, finance, and communication. Strengthening not-for-profits is vital for drought preparedness, as these organisations coordinate local responses and provide critical support– Including for First Nations communities. NFP's in-person workshops build peer networks and improve internal governance, cultivating relationships and systems that make up enduring social infrastructure. With a vision to expand NFP Houses across the region, it lays the groundwork for more resilient and connected communities amid mounting climate and social pressures.

> [Workshop participants] come in extremely nervous... but they go out really excited... it's a whole validation experience.

> We're actually looking at creating other NFP Houses in different places– that's our long-term vision.

CIP leadership activities build capability and confidence to drive local initiatives.

A female participant in the Emerald Changemaker workshop described how she was equipped with the tools and confidence to

- "put my hand up for more leadership roles in our community."

In a second reflection, she shared her plan to

- "take the leap and start an AgTech group."

This step shows how the Changemaker helped spark new, locally driven initiatives that respond to emerging challenges in the region.

Photo of the Rockhampton Changemaker workshop, provided by ARLF

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Communities are creating practical spaces and roles that strengthen local responses beyond the funding cycle.

The Community Room provides a reliable, tech-enabled facility where local groups could meet, plan, and access digital services.

Service fee models have been introduced to support continuity; "Private companies have invoiced us to use [the Community Room]. We've set up a structure… post funding the items will be available for people to hire out."

Projects expanded participation by building connections across distance, generations, and cultural groups.

The Community Room has enabled, "More people in the community to have their say… even when it's not possible to be in town."

The regional CPLO, DCCA have "been acting as the conduit between [Not for Profit House] and community groups… using our contacts to get them involved."

Place-based initiatives are empowering communities to lead drought resilience efforts.

The DCCA emphasised the benefit of local leaders saying, "You get more engagement when you hire someone local who's part of that fabric… you probably get three times the hours that you're paying one person."

A Changemaker participant highlighted how they have the confidence to, "be more effective in bringing about change and helping our stakeholders' transition."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Sustained funding for dedicated coordinator and support roles.

Coordinator roles eased volunteer pressure and improved project delivery. Ongoing funding is vital to sustain these benefits. DCCA noted, "Just having a coordinator for community groups to fall back on is huge," while CQ Landscape observed, "Taking that workload off a volunteer in a committee has a great impact."

Strengthened governance and organisational capacity.

Organisations have improved governance and financial health through NFP HQ's tailored assessments and mentoring. However, organisations still face gaps in policy, planning, and compliance. As NFP noted, "conflict is still the number one issue… followed by lack of compliance knowledge and lack of policy and planning." Continued support is needed to build on these gains and create clearer frameworks and role clarity.

Continued peer learning and regional collaboration.

Workshops helped organisations build strong networks. CQ Landscape noted they "were working with other like-minded organisations now… building relationships." DCCA credited the CIP program for helping "accessing and applying for and finding community events to come here." Changemaker participants committed to "connect with other orgs," "engage more with community," and "encourage more changemakers." These collaborations are crucial to maintain.

Northern Tablelands
New South Wales

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Northern Tablelands NSW regional overview

Communities are reconnecting to strengthen resilience and amplify what works

Community organisations connect fragmented populations and sustain social resilience.

Local organisations play a critical role in bridging gaps created by uneven capacity across communities. Smaller towns like Ashford face economic and social disadvantage, limited services, and a shrinking volunteer base. In contrast, larger centres such as Armidale benefit from centralised infrastructure and attract younger populations. Despite these disparities, volunteers provide continuity and trusted formats that keep communities connected. As one local leader said, "If we weren't doing these activities, who would?"

Recent and successive disasters have revealed system-wide vulnerabilities.

Recent environmental crises have exposed vulnerabilities in the region's water systems and eroded social capital. The 2017–2020 drought and 2019 bushfires caused widespread environmental, infrastructure, and economic damage. Armidale and Uralla faced "day-zero" scenarios, requiring water cartage and strict restrictions. In response, communities have led efforts to reconnect and support recovery.

Water security remains a critical enabler of regional growth.

Dryland agriculture continues to underpin the regions economy, while emerging industries like tourism and renewable energy are gaining momentum. However, growth depends on reliable water access. Investments such as the Malpas Dam upgrade have improved resilience in some areas. Yet many smaller towns still rely on single sources with limited storage. These communities remain vulnerable to climate shocks, which stall efforts to diversify the economy.

The Initiative invested in community events and training to build networks and capability.

Community Impact Program funding: $285K

Small Network Grants funding: $40K

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
GLENRAC Incorporated	Regional CPLO	Coordination	135	PO1, PO5
GLENRAC Incorporated	Growing Social Capital, Glen Innes	Community events	4250	PO1, PO7
Southern New England Landcare	SNEL HELP – Preparing Communities for Drought	Community events	451	PO1, PO7
Gwymac Incorporated	Connecting our Community for Resilience in Tough Times	Development and leadership	198	PO1, PO5
Granite Borders Landcare Committee	Drought Community Impact Program	Training initiatives	499	PO1, PO5
Inverell Community Radio	Keep the News Local and Keep it Coming	Community infrastructure	135	PO1, PO2
Southern New England Landcare	Community Connection for Outlying Areas	Training initiatives	179	PO1, PO7

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

2 Changemaker sessions across; Armidale and Glen Innes and 1 Leadership Action Initiative in Uralla.

86 total participants, of which 4 were young people and 4 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

1 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

44 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

In the Northern Tablelands, the Initiative enabled local organisations to deliver projects that would not have been possible otherwise. These projects built practical skills, improved access to services, and strengthened social capital across diverse communities. Thousands of residents, including young people and First Nations participants, engaged in activities that helped shift the region out of recovery mode following successive disasters and prolonged drought. By supporting locally driven responses, the initiative helped communities reconnect, rebuild, and lay foundations for drought resilience.

GLENRAC strengthened connection and resilience through 42 local events

GLENRAC delivered events across Glen Innes and outlying communities like, Deepwater and Wytaliba that brought families, landholders and service providers together to connect and learn. More than 4,250 people took part in activities ranging from Rural Women's Days and wellbeing sessions to climate risk workshops and youth-centred events like Rural Youth on Show.

The project involved 126 organisations from across sectors, improving community access to services. Events built confidence, and informal networks that continue to strengthen local resilience. This reach and impact would not have been possible without CIP funding.

> The power of those networks and relationships; in the event of a natural disaster, that's going to be the real value of the project.

> We have seen people engaged through this project stepping up more into community leadership roles or leadership roles in their own business.

Granite Borders Landcare delivered 19 hands-on events that built practical skills.

Nearly 500 local residents, including young people and First Nations participants, joined workshops on composting, pickling, cheesemaking, biodiversity preservation and water monitoring. Over 90 community members attended the food preservation sessions, boosting social connection. Some events promoted regenerative agriculture strategies, with participants committing to reduce chemical use, improve soil structure, and share techniques with peers.

The workshops built practical skills to help communities adapt to a changing climate. CIP funding expanded Granite Border's delivery capacity, enabling events that were otherwise unaffordable.

> Workshops enabled them to advance skills they already had, learn new ones and make important networks with community members doing similar things.

> Community members are more connected with, scientific knowledge, resources and methods for managing natural disasters.

Inverell community radio kept 17,500 residents informed and connected

SNG funding enabled the delivery of five news bulletins every weekday focused on local news and connecting listeners to drought preparedness information. A dedicated journalist (pictured below) became a trusted voice in the region, helping to provide consistent, locally relevant content; share updates from councils, emergency services and support organisations; and connect listeners with services, events and opportunities to participate in resilience building.

As one team member put it, "no matter what's happening on your property, it's these events and the community getting together... That gets people through the drought."

Photo right of the 'Keep the News Local and Keep it Coming' project, provided by FRRR

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Community members are reconnecting through inclusive and locally responsive events.

Southern New England Landcare reported an increased level of social connectedness as they struggled to "break people away from conversations during lunch and morning tea and return to the event presentations."

GLENRAC reported how their project brought "many people together for the first time in years" and "created opportunities for people to contribute to their community's wellbeing and preparedness."

People and organisations have more practical skills to prepare for and respond to drought.

According to Gwymac, members of their workshops "are able to use regenerative monitoring tools and techniques on their own farms" To improve resilience to climate events.

Eighty-two per cent of participants in Southern New England Landcare's practical workshops "are likely or very likely to implement changes due to the events they attended, and the information received about drought preparedness."

Peer groups and service networks coordinate more effectively to fill service gaps and strengthen knowledge sharing

The Glen Innes Rural Support Service Network brought local and visiting service providers together for regular meetings which, "created space for shared understanding to help address past gaps in service delivery and strengthen planning."

Gwymac's workshops resulted in the creation of a Mastering Soil Health Together group, who are continuing to meet and adopt non-traditional regenerative practices

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Organisations need more predictable funding to embed change.

Most CIP and SNG organisation in the region called for greater continuity of funding and longer funding horizons from the outset of programs. Organisations expressed concern about how not being able to fund key staff would result in projects lapsing. GLENRAC highlighted how "community-level change takes time, many of the strongest relationships and outcomes emerged in the second year of our project."

Future programs need fit-for-purpose design that ease administrative burden.

Many organisations highlighted that current reporting and evaluation requirements are repetitive and not well-aligned with the realities of small, volunteer-driven groups. Streamlined reporting and practical evaluation tools that reduce duplication would allow for greater focus on project delivery.

Leadership pathways need further development to support succession and reduce volunteer fatigue.

Concerns about volunteer burnout and the sustainability of local leadership were raised across the region. Many groups rely on a small number of committed individuals and are worried about what happens when key people step back. Both GLENRAC and Southern New England Landcare pointed to ongoing challenges with succession and recruitment, with GLENRAC stating, "every community group has the same issues around succession and relevance."

Mallee
Victoria

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Mallee regional overview

Strong grass-roots foundations call for greater support

Strong networks and diverse voices underpin local resilience

Resilience in the region is shaped by strong community networks and capable local leadership. These strengths have supported confident recovery and preparedness efforts. Between 2019 and 2023, 66 not-for-profits delivered 89 projects, including 41 focused on disaster readiness and recovery. Cultural and linguistic diversity is also a defining feature of the region. In Robinvale, more than 40 cultural groups and over 20 languages contribute to a rich and dynamic community life.

Drought-tested systems shape local capability and complexity

Communities in the region have built deep expertise in managing drought and disaster through lived experience. This has shaped local systems and responses. Between 2017 and 2019, high water prices and stage 3 and 4 restrictions tested local resilience. Buloke and Swan Hill are among Australia's most drought-sensitive areas, according to ABARES. Frequent droughts and disasters complicate planning and service delivery, and place pressure on already stretched systems.

Agricultural strength is tested by strained water infrastructure and regional spread

Agriculture drives the regional economy, contributing 81.7 per cent of export value. This strength also creates vulnerability. Future droughts could reduce GDP by 11.4 per cent and lead to 1,800 job losses. Remoteness and regional spread limit access to essential services, with long wait times for mental health and financial counselling. Water infrastructure is constrained. In severe drought, the southern-connected Murray–Darling Basin may not meet demand, regardless of price. The Barmah Choke further restricts water delivery.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: **$365.2K**

Small Network Grants funding: **$39.1K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Mallee Sustainable Farming	Regional CPLO	Coordination	40	PO1, PO3
First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation	Community Impact Program- Mallee Region	Training initiatives	50	PO6, PO1
Mallee Sustainable Farming Inc	The Mallee Matters	Community infrastructure	20	PO1, PO7
Rural Business and Community Ltd	Shared Shop	Community infrastructure	15	PO1, PO5
Birchip Cropping Group Inc	Mallee BCG Young Farmer Network	Networks	248	PO1, PO4
Rural Financial Counselling Service Victoria	Resilient Small Businesses	Networks	100	PO4, PO1
Food Next Door Coop	Sustainable CALD Market Gardening	Training initiatives	Data not available	
Birchip Cropping Group Inc	BCG Main Field Day Secondary Student Stream	Training Initiatives	75	PO5, PO7
Rural Business and Community Ltd	Shared Shops Trail	Community Infrastructure	25	PO1, PO7

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

1 Changemaker session in Mildura and 1 Emerging Leadership Program

16 total participants, of which 6 were young people and 1 was First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

2 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

25 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

The Initiative strengthened regional drought resilience by deepening community connection, improving resource efficiency and expanding economic participation. It sparked collaboration across diverse groups, built trust in local systems and increased access to services. Participants developed leadership capability, confidence and empathy, creating long-term preparedness capacity in the region.

Shared shop initiative sparks rural renewal and cross-town resilience through its collaborative business model.

Rural Business and Community Ltd established the Donald Shared Shop (pictured right) to support small businesses facing high overheads and limited foot traffic. Fourteen businesses, including artists, authors and pet goods makers, shared retail space, costs and staffing.

The shop improved collaboration between business owners and increased community engagement with the main street. It also raised awareness of local services and offerings. The success of the Donald shop led to an SNG grant for a Shared Shop Trail. This initiative connected similar shops in other Mallee towns through shared promotion and regional coordination.

> It's that spiralling up while everything else is spiralling down.

> [Business owners] all know the next drought's coming, and they value the connectedness and ability to do something with their business model in anticipation of tough times.

Food Next Door supported CALD farmers to prepare for drought

The Co-op supported newly arrived migrant and refugee communities in Mildura to access underutilised farmland. The project delivered multilingual training in irrigation and crop planning. Farmers grew culturally appropriate food, reduced water use and built stronger relationships with local institutions.

The project improved the co-op's water efficiency by 25 per cent and changed behaviour of farmers across the region. A CIP grant enabled the translation of training and resources, which built trust among farmers. It also supported access to technical advice and services from other agencies that were previously out of reach.

> They all now know how to manage water better and are growing more with less.

> We've built trust with agencies that didn't know how to work with migrant farmers before.

The Mallee hosted an ARLF Emerging Leadership Program

Young leaders (18–30) built networks, community, and personal resilience through the program. Participants shared outcomes including:

Building connected communities

"I've committed to uniting young people with volunteering organisations."

Leading with empathy and awareness

"I've stopped making quick assessments and started understanding the paradigms that shape people."

Communicating with confidence

"This program has added confidence within me, especially in speaking with my peers."

Photo of the 'Donald Shared Shop' project, provided by Radiant Media

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Stronger, self-sustaining community networks are well-placed to drive drought preparedness

Businesses, community groups and CALD communities are connecting through joint initiatives. One participant said "students from across the region, who might not usually come together, connected in an agricultural setting."

Networks are becoming self-sustaining, with leadership and ownership embedded in the community. As noted by Rural Business and Community, "the town is starting to own the idea of the Shared Shop."

Local leaders are building the skills and capacity to adapt to future droughts

Practical training and knowledge transfer is occurring through things like multilingual farm guides, water management workshops and peer learning.

Local leadership is playing a greater role in sustaining and growing initiatives. MSF noted how they, "supported the growth of emerging leaders and community champions."

Communities are showing greater optimism and willingness to innovate

Attitudes are shifting from surviving to thriving. The Donald Shared Shop has resulted in an, "aspiring business in town spiraling upwards where everything else is spiraling downward."

Regional cohesion and a sense of belonging are growing. This is encouraging more innovative thinking. The Donald Shared Shop, "achieved increased community liveliness, with unexpected positive shifts in business mindset."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Initiatives need to consolidate local leadership and community ownership to sustain

The Mallee is making progress towards self-sustaining networks and local ownership, but this progress remains emerging and needs further support. Sustaining impact will require deliberate investment in leadership development, succession planning and broader community ownership. As reflected, "If I walk away, I'm not quite sure who's going to carry the can yet, but there are potential people there now. That'll be all right."

Organisations need more flexible and accessible funding models

Current funding models were complex and inflexible for some grant participants, risking the sustainability of small, rural and multicultural organisations. The high cost of delivering services in remote communities must be factored in. As one organisation shared, "The program is not designed for us. We had to fit within a scoped box rather than be part of what is going on."

Future program design needs to continue aligning with the Mallee's diverse population

Programs effectively tailored activities through co-design and ensured broad access for diverse rural communities. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of sustaining this flexibility so future initiatives continue to reflect the Mallee's diverse population and remain responsive in design, delivery and support.

Far West
New South Wales

nous

Far West NSW regional overview

Resilience building needs to consider rich regional and cultural history

Local knowledge and cultural leadership connect dispersed communities

The region's dispersed population and rich history call for locally embedded, relationship-based approaches to social resilience. With just over 20,000 people spread across a remote area, distance limits connection. Mobile delivery models are essential. Programs like "We've Got Your Back" reduce isolation and support mental wellbeing by meeting people where they are. First Nations people shape local initiatives, representing 13.2 per cent of the population and holding deep cultural ties to the Baaka River.

Deep experience drives climate resilience and adaptive responses

Far West communities draw on lived experience to prepare for drought. The area has a long history of compounding climate events and is typically among the first to enter drought and the last to recover. ABARES sensitivity scores reflect this sensitivity. During the 2017 to 2019 drought, the Baaka River received no flow for 18 months. This absence of water disrupted the river-centric lifestyle in Wilcannia, as highlighted in interviews conducted with SNG recipients.

Resilient communities need service models and infrastructure that matches their scale

Service delivery in the region reflects its scale, economic profile and infrastructure gaps. Agriculture underpins the economy but is highly exposed to climate risk. Mining in Broken Hill offers some benefit, but not enough to offset stress in smaller agricultural communities. Tourism provides income but is also drought-sensitive. Water infrastructure has not kept pace with demand. The 2023 revision of the Wilcannia Weir proposal followed a 50-year investment gap and drew strong community criticism for failing to meet current and future needs.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Small Network Grants funding: $381.8K

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Australian Inland Botanic Gardens Inc	Community Drinking Water Project	Community infrastructure	300	PO4, PO2
Baaka Cultural Centre Wilcannia Aboriginal Corporation	Artist In-Residence Drop-In Studio	Community infrastructure	Data not available	
Broken Hill Community FM Association Inc	Drought Resilient Community Radio Transmission: Far West NSW	Community infrastructure	10	PO7, PO4
Contact Incorporated	Empowering remote far-western NSW: Uniting communities for drought resilience through strengthened connections and networks	Networks	125	PO1, PO7
Foundation Broken Hill Limited	Community Director – Engaging and building our local community	Community infrastructure	80	PO4, PO1
Isolated Children's Parents Association of NSW Incorporated	Kick Start Decisions and Reboot Connections: Learn to "Dance in the Dust"	Training	150	PO2, PO1
Mallee Sustainable Farming Inc	Crossroads: Developing Leadership Skills for Rural Women in Isolated Areas of Far-Western NSW	Networks	12	PO1, PO6
Milparinka Sporting Club Incorporated	New Amenities	Community infrastructure	25	PO1, PO4

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

4 Changemaker sessions across Buronga, Cobar, Broken Hill and White Cliffs and 1 Community Leadership Program

60 total participants, of which 8 were young people and 5 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

2 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

26 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

In Far West NSW, the Initiative supported projects that improved access to services, strengthened social connection, and celebrated cultural history. Communities co-designed infrastructure, delivered mobile outreach, and hosted inclusive events that built resilience in drought-affected and geographically isolated areas.

Contact Inc's mobile events strengthened community connection and service delivery in isolated areas.

Contact Inc delivered eight events across Far West NSW, including community days, first aid training, grant writing workshops, and service expos (pictured right). The events were designed around community rhythms and reached isolated families, First Nations people, and young parents in isolated places often excluded from service delivery.

The project built social connection and increased awareness of support services. Participants reported feeling more confident and connected, with several stepping into facilitation roles for later events. SNG funding enabled place-based delivery, which is critical in a region where distance, disadvantage and poor infrastructure limit access.

> There's a sense of greater optimism… people are telling us what else they'd like to have happen in the future.

> Local champions identified during the project are now acting with greater confidence as connectors or co-hosts.

The Baaka Cultural Centre strengthens cultural identity and community resilience.

Community members in Wilcannia co-designed a climate-safe, culturally relevant space for First Nations artists, young people and Elders to connect and create. They use the centre to run workshops, share knowledge, and produce art that reflects Barkandji heritage and the significance of the Baaka River.

The project built skills, strengthened intergenerational ties, and created new opportunities for local employment. Young people gained confidence and explored creative careers. SNG funding enabled the fit-out and activation of an underused building into a functioning space that the community can take ownership over.

> It goes to the emotional wellbeing of these people… to have a centre where they can just be themselves.

> The river is the heartbeat… when it flows, people are in a better mindset, and the art reflects that.

Milparinka's infrastructure upgrade boosted connection and event capacity

Using a $50,000 SNG, the Milparinka Sporting Club upgraded its ablution block to better support events like the annual gymkhana. The project delivered four key outcomes:

- Strengthened community pride and cohesion through teamwork during eight working bees.
- Enabled larger, more inclusive events, improving the club's financial sustainability.
- Boosted the local economy and expanded social networks.
- Built confidence and resilience, demonstrating how infrastructure investment can empower drought-affected communities.

Photo of a Contact Inc event, provided by FRRR

Long-term impact and vision for the future

The reach and activities of local leaders, mentors, and networks has increased

Local leaders and organisations are stepping forward, driving connection and participation. Contact Inc observed "a willingness to help organise activities, take part in discussions, and express pride in both their community and the programs delivered."

Projects have provided the space for new networks and participation pathways. The Baaka Cultural Centre noted that "the art centre itself provides a creative outlet and a shared safe community space for gathering."

The initiative has driven a positive change in community attitudes towards drought preparedness

Communities are more engaged in climate and wellbeing conversations. Milparinka Sporting Club observed "that more people are open to discussion about drought preparedness and are engaging in mental health activities."

Broken Hill Community FM believes that their project demonstrated how drought "affects the entire community" and is not just an impact on primary producers.

Stronger cohesion and belonging are cultivating community support structures necessary for drought preparedness

Community spaces and events foster belonging and wellbeing. The Milparinka Sports Club facilities, "now allow [them] to host more community gatherings which are an absolute necessity in times of drought."

Communities are embedding networks built during projects for the long term. Contact Inc reported how, "some regional service providers have expressed a strong commitment to continuing partnership."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Organisational capacity needs support from local leadership and volunteerism

Local leadership and volunteerism are critical to sustaining organisational capacity. Many groups rely on a small number of committed individuals, making it essential to grow and maintain the pool of local leaders and volunteers. Foundation Broken Hill believe that providing "organisations with better strategies for attraction and retention, will in turn increase the ongoing sustainability of these community organisations and volunteering."

Organisations need more flexible and ongoing funding models to deliver long term impact

There is concern that the end of grant funding will leave communities without the resources to build on current progress. As Contact Inc noted in their final grant report, "the most important change [for future programs] would be to ensure it is underpinned by best practice principles that address rural, remote, and Indigenous disadvantage. Key to this is adequate and flexible funding that enables planned, comprehensive, and place-based interventions."

Invest in infrastructure and communication systems for social connection

Milparinka Sporting Club and Baaka Cultural Centre show how accessible, well-equipped venues support drought resilience. These spaces help communities stay connected, share information and access support during stress. To remain effective, they need ongoing funding for staffing, programming and outreach. As Milparinka Sporting Club said, "our project is on track to achieve long-term outcomes because our facilities now allow us to host more community gatherings, which are an absolute necessity in times of drought."

Great Southern Western Australia

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Great Southern regional overview

Community strength is driving strong adaptation to future drought

Drought resilience tested by social vulnerabilities

The Great Southern region shows strong social resilience, shaped by active community engagement and deep connection to Country. Over 330 people from 150 organisations co-designed the Regional Drought Resilience plan. Despite this strength, mental health pressures and demographic vulnerabilities limit preparedness. For Noongar communities, drought disrupts cultural identity and wellbeing, as drying landscapes threaten connection to Country. Katanning and Tambellup face heightened mental health risks during drought, compounded by ageing populations and limited service access.

Farmers are innovating to stay productive as climate pressures intensify

The region is not in formal drought at the time of evaluation, but water stress is evident. Jerramungup and Kent have declared water deficiencies, and scheme water is strained after consecutive dry years. Curtin University identifies hot droughts, where heat stress combines with water scarcity, as a growing hazard. Later autumn breaks and reduced winter rainfall are also disrupting cropping systems. Farmers continue to adapt through no-till cropping, diversified rotations and precision agriculture.

Strong agricultural foundations underpin distanced communities

Agriculture drives economic activity across the region, particularly in Kent and Broomehill–Tambellup, where it makes up 65 per cent of output. This reliance brings risk, with high drought sensitivity reflecting exposure to seasonal variability. Katanning shows the value of economic diversity, while smaller LGAs remain more dependent on primary production, limiting their adaptability. The end of the live sheep trade has prompted some growers to fill dams and shift to cropping, increasing pressure on water storage. Isolation adds further complexity, with eastern LGAs lacking consistent access to infrastructure and services.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Small Network Grants funding: **$345.7K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Borden Pavilion Committee Incorporated	Through the Lens: our fragile environment and economy through the eyes of our local community	Community events	90	PO1, PO7
Gnowangerup Aboriginal Corporation	Carrying insights of cool burning: Noongar techniques and fire mitigation strategies in a drying climate	Networks	24	PO3, PO2
Katanning Land Conservation District Committee	Bringing EcoWeek Back, to Reconnect and Strengthen the Katanning Community	Community events	201	PO1, PO2
Katannings Piesse Park Community Inc	Shady Places & Food Security	Development and learning	316	PO5, PO7
Oyster Harbour Catchment Group Incorporated	Mega Community Toolbox: Improving the Community's Capacity to Connect	Networks	306	PO1, PO2
Porongurup Community Association Inc	Porongurup Hall Kitchen Renovation Project	Networks	20	PO2, PO5
Southern Dirt Inc	Cultivating sustainable futures; building long-term drought resilience through grower group led educational initiatives	Community events	254	PO5, PO4
Stirlings to Coast Farmers Inc.	'Fit for Farming' - building social, mental, physical and financial fitness for a more resilient Great Southern farming community.	Community events	120	PO1, PO2
Wellstead Community Resource Centre Inc	Choosing Wellness in Wellstead	Networks	200	PO1, PO2

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

4 Changemaker sessions across Katanning, Albany, Cranbrook and Ongerup

63 total participants, of which 7 were young people and 3 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

2 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

27 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

Across the Great Southern region, HRCPD projects have enabled communities to take practical, locally led action to build drought resilience. Communities have restored cultural fire practices, revived local events, created shaded spaces and improved food security. These projects have built skills, strengthened networks and created intergenerational conversations to embed long-term drought resilience.

Noongar-led cool burning strengthens fire and drought resilience in Gnowangerup.

Gnowangerup Aboriginal Corporation trained Noongar rangers, purchased protective equipment and delivered 25 fire mitigation activities, including cool burns, planning sessions and community workshops. These actions built practical skills and restored cultural fire practices, improving the region's capacity to manage drought and fire risk. Local authorities now actively seek GAC's involvement in fire mitigation, recognising its leadership and effectiveness. The SNG grant was essential, enabling GAC to meet safety standards, deliver services and respond to direct community requests for cool burning. By embedding Indigenous knowledge in local fire strategies, the project has positioned GAC as a trusted partner in preparing for future droughts.

> We would not have developed a working capacity to deliver on people's long-held cool burning aspirations.

> The outside community now see the GAC as a capable organisation with regard to fire mitigation and cool burning.

EcoWeek builds drought resilience through community-led events.

Katanning Landcare revived EcoWeek with 14 events over ten days, engaging over 200 people and 12 organisations in workshops, talks and activities. The events focused on environment, sustainability and drought preparedness. Most participants were women, and ten percent identified as Aboriginal or culturally and linguistically diverse, creating new pathways for collaboration. EcoWeek strengthened local networks and increased awareness of support services, with participants accessing venues and providers for the first time. The grant was essential to restarting EcoWeek after COVID, enabling Landcare to deliver a high-quality program.

> So much of the feedback received was about how much people enjoyed meeting new people, connecting with like-minded people and going to places or learning skills that they haven't done before.

Shade and seed saving prepare Katanning for dry times.

Katanning Piesse Park Community Inc. used planting, food growing and seed saving to build practical community responses to drought.

The project's success lay in its ability to:

- Engage over 5,000 people in hands-on, inclusive activities
- Create shaded public spaces that reduce heat stress and support fire protection
- Establish a seed bank and water-wise gardens to improve food security

Bev Lockley shares how these changes are helping her community prepare for a hotter, drier future. Click below to hear her story.

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Isolated towns are experiencing greater social cohesion across the region

The Initiative built stronger relationships and reduced isolation. The Wellstead Community Resource Centre experienced "a stronger sense of belonging and cohesion amongst residents, which in turn supports local response to drought."

Isolated communities reported feeling more seen and valued. The Porongurup Community Association reflected how their project, "supported our sense of pride and community strength."

Layered initiative elements aligned leadership activation and implementation pathways

Changemaker workshops played a role in activating leadership, while SNGs provided a delivery pathway. Kattaning Piesse Park reflected how, "the workshops helped people realise they could lead change, and the grant gave us the means to take action."

Collaboration grew between previously disconnected groups. Southern Dirt reflected how their project, "brought together people who might not typically engage with each other, such as school students and farmers, creating a shared sense of responsibility."

Communities are embedding adaptive practices to promote region wide drought preparedness

Communities have been equipped with practical skills to prepare for drought. Southern Dirt's workshops and planting days, gave students, farmers and local groups, "practical, place-based strategies to mitigate drought impacts."

Projects created repeatable models that enable communities to adapt with limited resources. As Wellstead CRC described, "the workshop has uncovered a low-cost model for social connection that can continue to be delivered post funding."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Refine reporting processes to reflect the volunteer capacity of the region

Regional success has relied on a small group of committed volunteers. Many are stretched thin across regions. As Kattaning Land Care Conservation District Committee (KLDC) put it, "The adults that are keeping the community groups going… are tired." Final grant reports consistently highlighted that evaluation activities could be onerous and needed to better reflect the capacity of volunteer led groups.

Encourage greater linkages across the Future Drought Fund where funding for environment and economic priorities can be acquired

Participants consistently called for investment in infrastructure, such as water storage, equipment and community facilities, that reflects changing rainfall patterns. Many existing systems are no longer fit for purpose, and the cost of upgrading them is beyond local capacity. KLDC noted, "we need massive changes in our infrastructure because of changing rainfall patterns… a lot more money [should go] into real infrastructure."

Increase funding and extend delivery timelines to enable deeper, lasting impact

Participants consistently noted that short-term, one-off funding limited their ability to embed drought resilience. Larger grants and longer delivery windows would allow communities to align activities with seasonal conditions and reach more people. Southern Dirt explained, "With additional funding and time, we could have expanded our reach… Longer project timelines would also allow for better alignment with seasonal conditions and school calendars."

Wimmera Southern Mallee
Victoria

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Wimmera Southern Mallee regional overview

Experienced communities need support pathways to put initiatives into action

Community leaders and peer support underpin drought resilience

Despite low population density and an ageing demographic, communities mobilise local leaders and volunteers to build resilience. The region has some of the highest volunteering rates in Victoria. Mental health needs are significant, especially among farmers with prior drought exposure. In response, communities introduced Mental Health First Aid training and peer support networks after the Millennium Drought to reduce isolation and strengthen psychological resilience.

Communities with lived experience are equipped to navigate future drought

Communities have built practical knowledge through drought exposure and expect locally tailored support. Volunteer capacity is stretched. One participant noted, "the region knows drought." Groups like the Horsham Dry Seasonal Conditions Group have led past responses and shaped the region's resilience plan. Recent disasters, including widespread flooding across all five LGAs in 2022 to 2023, have tested local capacity. In 2025, parts of the region face record-low rainfall, increasing urgency and pressure on farms and rural services.

Economic dependence on agriculture and infrastructure gaps create sensitivity to drought

Generations of drought experience have shaped agricultural systems, but sensitivities remain. In Yarriambiack, nearly half of all jobs are in agriculture. Across the region, 55 per cent of land is used for broadacre cropping, which is drought-sensitive. Infrastructure gaps, especially in digital connectivity, limit access to online training and coordination. Mobile black spots prompted development of a Digital Plan to assess gaps in infrastructure and uptake.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: $358.5K

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Wimmera Southern Mallee Development Limited	Regional CPLO	Coordination	600	PO3, PO7
Wimmera Catchment Authority	Ranch Billabong	Community infrastructure	10	PO2, PO5
Wimmera Southern Mallee Development Limited	Community Connector Program	Networks	500	PO1, PO7
Wimmera Southern Mallee Development Limited (CPLO)	Migrant Youth Support	Training initiatives	30	PO1, PO3
West Vic Business Incorporated	Community Placemaking	Networks	30	PO5, PO3

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

1 Changemaker session in Natimuk and 1 Community Leadership Program

44 total participants, of which 3 were young people and 0 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

1 Individual participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

28 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

The Initiative has delivered tangible outcomes across the Wimmera Southern Mallee by enabling projects that would not have progressed without targeted support. It has strengthened regional drought resilience by empowering First Nations leadership in land and water management, building drought literacy and social connection among migrant youth, and unlocking local planning capability for resilient infrastructure.

Empowering First Nations to lead water management and restore cultural connection

The Wimmera Catchment Authority and Barengi Gadjin Land Council reconnected the Ranch Billabong to the Wimmera River through a 165-metre pipeline. This infrastructure enabled First Nations community members to manage water flow to the site, revitalise its ecological function and support cultural practices. The project funded two engagement activities, directly involving 10 participants and benefiting around 100 people. The billabong is a culturally significant site for Wotjobaluk people and has long served as a place of refuge and healing. The project strengthened First Nations leadership in land and water management and built capability within BGLC to plan and manage watering regimes. CIP funding was essential to move the project from aspiration to delivery. Without it, the pipeline would still be unfunded.

> The pipeline enables First Nations community members to manage water supply to the Ranch Billabong.

Connecting migrant youth to country and community to build drought resilience

Wimmera Southern Mallee Development supported migrant and refugee youth in Nhill and Horsham to build drought awareness, social connection and leadership. Many participants had never experienced drought and felt disconnected from public spaces and services. Through 40 youth sessions and 25 resilience-building activities, the program helped young people explore the landscape, understand local risks and share knowledge with their families. One participant became a youth coordinator, and more than 400 community members are expected to benefit. The CIP grant enabled consistent, culturally safe engagement that would not have been possible with existing resources. See the attached video for more information.

> I now understand that drought is part of this landscape. When it happens, I won't be so surprised and will know how important it is to stay connected.

> The success of the project was reflected in the growing confidence of participants to try new things, challenge themselves and engage regularly.

Unlocking community-led planning to shape Haven's future

West Vic Business helped Haven community leaders turn a long-held vision into a practical plan for a new precinct, including a bush kinder, early childhood services and integrated infrastructure. For decades, local advocates had pushed for development without progress. The CIP funding created momentum by:

- Building planning capability through targeted workshops
- Connecting leaders with council, education and environmental stakeholders
- Framing the precinct as a response to both population growth and drought resilience

Long-term impact and vision for the future

The initiative catalysed community-based networks that are central to drought resilience planning

The Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience network (CACR) was established as a regional governance and coordination platform, becoming "a regular forum for members to raise climate adaptation and community resilience issues."

Networks enabled cross-sector collaboration and knowledge sharing. Wimmera Southern Mallee Development (WSMD) joined the "Drought Ready Network to connect with communities facing similar challenges and applied learnings locally."

Diverse communities have been empowered to lead and participate

First Nations leadership in land and water management has been strengthened through culturally significant projects. WMCA have, "given traditional owners the self-determination to lead the water management space.'

Migrant youth gained the confidence to lead. One project participant shared, "I would not have had the confidence to step into leadership without being a part of the WSMD project."

Communities are embedding resilience into everyday regional systems

Resilience is now a regular topic of discussion and planning across sectors. The regional CPLO said people, "are talking about and celebrating resilience and embedding resilience building into their business as usual."

Infrastructure planning now supports long-term drought resilience. For example, the Wimmera Catchment Authority reconnected the "Ranch Billabong to the Wimmera River, enabling First Nations management of water supply."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Regional networks must be maintained to support drought resilience

Regional networks such as CACR and Business Connect underpin drought resilience by enabling collaboration, knowledge sharing and strengthening community ties. These networks address gaps that formal services cannot always reach. WSMD stated its intention "to continue CACR – even without specific funding – as this is the 'glue' for preparedness activities."

Targeted investment in locally relevant programs is needed to surface new leaders

Leadership development and community empowerment are essential to building long-term drought resilience. Participants in the initiative called for greater investment in place-based leadership programs that reflect local culture. The regional CPLO noted that the region "needs more leaders and people taking it to the next level… Leadership development activities need to be tailored for this region and community."

Funding gaps risk undermining collaboration and resilience momentum

Initiative participants raised concerns about the gap between funding rounds and the uncertainty of future support. Without bridging funds, established networks and initiatives risk losing momentum. The regional CPLO noted that many resilience actions are underway, but without funding, "they would happen in isolation of each other… The extent of collaboration and coordination would not have been possible and knowledge of [resilience building] would not be as widespread."

Murraylands and Riverland South Australia

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Murraylands and Riverland regional overview

Regional networks, adaptive practices and infrastructure gaps shape drought resilience

Communities in the region have a strong culture of grass roots resilience building

Community resilience in the Murraylands and Riverland region is built on strong local networks, cultural continuity and grassroots leadership. Local leaders highlight the role of cultural knowledge and intergenerational relationships, especially where formal services are limited. Volunteerism remains central, though repeated disaster recovery has led to fatigue. Despite this, communities are pursuing local solutions, with young people increasingly involved in wellbeing and climate resilience efforts.

Drought affected communities are using innovative practices to adapt to future conditions

Repeated disasters have shaped a culture of planning across the region. Farmers typically expect "one productive year in ten and plan accordingly." Risk management is embedded in daily practice, drawing on lessons from 2017 to 2019 and 2022 through water efficiency, financial planning and diversified cropping. Current flash, green and fodder drought phases reinforce the need for early action. These conditions highlight the value of proactive planning, timely support and adaptive strategies to reduce harm before crisis.

The strong agricultural economy needs improved infrastructure and connectivity

The region has a strong agricultural sector, but this increases exposure to climate shocks and places pressure on supporting sectors like transport, health, and education. Agriculture drives 43 per cent of businesses and 16.2 per cent of employment. Southern Mallee's drought sensitivity score (0.91) is among the highest nationally. Infrastructure gaps complicate service delivery. While some towns have strong communication infrastructure, Karte and Colebatch remain underserved. The regional drought resilience plan recommends renewable backup systems and improved community awareness to support emergency continuity.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: **$432.6K**

Small Network Grants funding: **$27K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Regional Development Australia	Regional CPLO	Coordination	230	PO1, PO7
Ngarrindjeri Empowered Communities	Mardawi Community Project	Training initiatives	150	PO1, PO3
Our Town Berri	River Families First	Community events	400	PO1, PO5
Loxton Chamber of Commerce	Collective Business in Loxton	Community infrastructure	230	PO7, PO5
Mallee Sustainable Farmers	Risky Business – Sustainable Mallee Farming	Networks	150	PO1, PO4
Coonalpyn Golf Club Inc	The Club In The Scrub	Community infrastructure	8	PO1, PO2
WoTL Ltd	Building the capacity of women to thrive and nurture themselves, family and community during times of drought.	Development and learning	14	PO6, PO1

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

6 Changemaker sessions across Waikerie, Mannum, Tintinara, Barmera, Berri and Murray Bridge and Loxton.

87 total participants, of which 11 were young people and 3 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

1 Organisation accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

1 Individual participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

29 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

The Initiative enabled communities to strengthen leadership, deepen collaboration and build practical capabilities to prepare for and adapt to drought. Projects created inclusive spaces for intergenerational learning, improved access to services and resources, and expanded networks that support collective action.

Empowering young Ngarrindjeri women to lead through culture, connection and creativity

The Mardawi Community Project strengthened Ngarrindjeri cultural leadership to build resilience to drought. It delivered 14 workshops in basket weaving and rush harvesting, engaging over 150 participants across generations. These activities surfaced traditional ecological knowledge, including sustainable harvesting practices. The workshops created culturally safe spaces that strengthened social cohesion and mental wellbeing. These outcomes have expanded community networks and embedded cultural knowledge that supports collective action against drought. CIP funding enabled the project to move from concept to delivery by resourcing logistics, coordination and enterprise development.

> The Project has significantly strengthened our local community's preparedness for the next drought by revitalising and embedding traditional ecological knowledge.

> Elders and younger generations are reconnecting, sharing traditional knowledge and practices.

Connecting families to build resilience through community-led support and learning

River Families First supported parents in Berri to build networks of connection and access practical tools to respond to drought-related stress (pictured right). The project delivered subsidised first aid training to 54 parents and grandparents, launched a local resource website, and built a Facebook group with over 300 members to coordinate and engage families. Events such as a community expo and guest speaker sessions created inclusive spaces for learning. These activities increased awareness of services, strengthened social connection and improved community belonging.

> If parents within the community feel supported, then the community will grow.

> We have seen an increased sense of belonging among parents and greater connection within parents.

The region was host to several ARLF Changemaker Workshops

Participants gained confidence, expanded networks and deepened their understanding of drought resilience by:

- **Strengthening individual leadership through storytelling and practical tools.** Participants reported applying "golden nuggets on changemaking".
- **Integrating diverse voices into collaboration.** One participant described "listening deeply to community and rolling out initiatives."
- **Equipping communities with frameworks to adapt and prepare for drought.** The workshops encouraged "conversations around changemaker practices" and their integration into planning and delivery.

Photo of the 'River Families First' project, provided by FRRR

Long-term impact and vision for the future

New groups of leaders have stepped into visible roles and created networks that shape community resilience

Young leaders have progressed into strategic roles. Ngarrindjeri Empowered Communities had a "participant that started within community-based programmes and progressed to provide strategic leadership and support."

Alumni networks from Changemaker workshops have created sustained momentum for community-led change. The regional CPLO reflected how these networks "have become part of the community voice."

Projects have strengthened social connection and reduced isolation

Event-based models have increased participation and trust, especially in isolated and low-socioeconomic areas. Our Town Berri realised that, "people want to come together for an event… connection supports you mentally."

Infrastructure upgrades revitalised social connection and support pathways. The Coonalpyn Golf Club "has become a venue where farmers, families, and local service providers can discuss challenges and collaborate."

Communities are building enterprises that enable diversification and drought resilience

Community-led enterprises are maturing into sustainable organisations with employment pathways. The Mardawi Aboriginal corporation "is now a mature organisation… starting to gain that ability to employ people and make key partnerships."

The Collective Loxton is now a well-established, successful shared retail space that provides "a united voice for local businesses to pull together during tough times of drought."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Strengthen local networks through ongoing collaboration

Sustaining impact in the region requires deeper collaboration across initiatives and localities. While individual projects achieved strong local outcomes, there was less structure for cross-project engagement. As the Regional CPLO Regional Development Australia reflected, their four projects were quite different and not always easily transferable across areas.

Initiatives need funding and support beyond current grant cycles

Many projects generated strong engagement but face sustainability risks once funding ends. Participants highlighted the need for practical support to maintain momentum, such as guidance on securing future funding, building volunteer bases, and forming local partnerships. Our Town Berri reflected how they, "would love to sit down and work out how we will fund these going forward."

Approaches that integrate cultural knowledge drive deep and lasting impact

Culturally grounded approaches create lasting impact by building trust, strengthening identity and connecting generations. The Mardawi project shows how inclusive, place-based methods engage communities beyond conventional programs. Ngarrindjeri found that, "The workshops became powerful spaces for inclusive participation where people of all ages came together to learn, connect and share."

Tablelands
Northern Territories

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Tablelands regional overview

Communities embrace resilience beyond drought preparedness

Strong cultural identities underpin social resilience across vast distances

Traditional owners play a central role in maintaining community cohesion and stewarding the land. The region spans seven local government areas and includes diverse First Nations groups. Remoteness and a sparse population require creative solutions that enable access to services and social connectivity. With 44,863 residents living across outer regional, remote and very remote areas. As one interviewee explained, "You have to drive three hours to get to the shop... you can't just pop down the road for support."

Communities experience drought through its ripple effects

Since 2019, communities across the region have faced bushfires, cyclones and floods, with Katherine and Roper Gulf particularly affected. Drought is often experienced through its social and economic consequences. In Katherine, it is felt less as a weather pattern and more through its effect on livelihoods and wellbeing. This accumulated trauma makes proactive engagement difficult. As one participant shared, "Once you come out of drought, you do not want to go back... going to a drought workshop is almost triggering."

Geography drives broad preparedness, not just drought

Agriculture remains a dominant industry, anchoring local economies and supporting community livelihoods but creating vulnerability to drought. While infrastructure investment is uneven, targeted projects, such as the $9.4 million Katherine Flood Mitigation Levee, demonstrate a growing commitment to disaster preparedness. However, many local government areas still face infrastructure gaps that limit service delivery and amplify the impact of extreme events. As one interviewee, "remote communities have limited access to infrastructure... impacts are felt more profoundly."

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Small Network Grants funding: $279.1K

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation	The Gawk Gawk (Clean Water) for Wellbeing Project	Community events	500	PO1, PO5
Katherine Town Council	Resilience and Wellbeing in Tough Times	Community events	32	PO4, PO3
Mimal Land Management Aboriginal Corporation	Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum 2024	Community events	260	PO7, PO5
Northern Territory Farmers Association Inc	Mental Health First Aid / Accidental Counsellor Training	Training	27	PO6, PO7
Charles Darwin University	Building Social Drought Resilience Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Groups in Katherine	Community events	23	PO1, PO3
Northern Territory Farmers Association Inc	Northern Australia Food Futures Regional Roadshow - Preparing For The Future	Community events	70	PO3, PO1

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

4 Changemaker sessions across Katherine, Batchelor and Humpty Doo.

72 total participants, of which 17 were young people and 15 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

0 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

23 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

Locally tailored engagement in the NT Tablelands strengthened social connection, improved knowledge sharing and empowered diverse leaders to drive drought resilience. Communities built trust, revived cultural practices and created accessible resources. These efforts increased their capacity to collaborate, adapt and support one another in response to climate challenges.

Building drought resilience by empowering multicultural leaders and sharing knowledge in Katherine

Charles Darwin University (CDU) strengthened drought resilience in Katherine by equipping 23 cultural leaders with knowledge, tools and networks. Participants (pictured right) from six cultural groups co-designed multilingual flyers that explained drought risks, emotional impacts and where to seek help. The workshops built trust by engaging cultural leaders and addressing barriers like language and stigma. Participants reported stronger social connection and a clearer understanding of drought as a shared responsibility. Without Small Network Grant funding, CDU could not have delivered tailored engagement or translated resources.

> Participants better understood who to contact and rely on during times of drought.

> CALD groups give lots of credence to their leaders. So, you need to engage the right people to build trust and credibility.

Reviving water ceremony and cultural leadership to strengthen drought resilience on Jawoyn Country

Jawoyn Association revived cultural water practices and empowered traditional owners to lead land stewardship. The project reintroduced ceremony at Leilyn for the first time in over 50 years, supported the creation of a Water Council of 12 elders, and engaged over 600 people in cultural activities that reconnected community members to place, identity and healing. Elders shared knowledge through artefacts, photos and videos, creating resources for future generations. These activities deepened cultural confidence and restored community authority over water, helping people feel more equipped to protect country and respond to future climate challenges.

> This has been healing for our community, and we feel less disempowered in using our voices to protect water and be part of caring for country.

> [The ceremony] brought back a strategy for empowered change and ceremonial practice for protection of country.

Bringing drought preparedness to the farm gate in remote Mataranka

NT Farmers connected remote producers with services, knowledge and each other. Local access to support is limited, but an SNG grant enabled a tailored roadshow that built momentum by:

- Hosting a regional forum and field tour with 70 participants, including First Nations leaders and agricultural stakeholders
- Creating one-stop-shop hubs that linked locals to drought services and expert advice
- Strengthening networks and follow-up pathways to support long-term resilience

Photo of the 'Building social drought resilience among culturally and linguistically diverse groups' project, provided by Bornsexy Media

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Networks have bridged gaps between isolated individuals, communities and organisations

Networks now connect across cultural, linguistic and sectoral boundaries. NT Farmers said the Mataranka Roadshow "fostered new connections and strengthened relationships among diverse community members, local organisations and external experts."

Workshops by CDU, "brought together leaders from diverse cultural groups, building trust and enabling knowledge sharing and collaboration on drought preparedness across the region"

Participants have greater adaptive capacity to drought through new skills, tools and knowledge

Trainings have increased participants' practical skills, and mental fitness to manage drought. Participants in the Katherine Town Council workshops indicated "feeing more equipped to face adversity through understanding what it takes to build mental fitness."

Tangible resources have created opportunities for peer learning. The multilingual flyers developed during the CDU project will be a "lasting resource" that will educate groups about practical drought preparedness beyond the funding period.

Communities have implemented culturally appropriate drought resilience practices

Mimal Land Management's Strong Women for Healthy Country Network supports 300 Indigenous women from 40 organisations and brought together 260 women at its 2024 forum to design and deliver culturally-informed resilience activities.

The Jawoyn community revived practices like "water blessings, water ceremony, visiting and monitoring the water ways and springs, reconnecting the songlines."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Volunteer networks need funding to continue to match compliance obligations

Volunteer-led organisations are still expected to meet the same compliance and reporting standards, but core funding and support have reduced. This mismatch puts unsustainable pressure on volunteers and threatens the ongoing viability of these critical networks. Landcare NT highlighted in their final grant report how volunteer groups are struggling to justify the administrative burden of being incorporated when the funding that made this possible has disappeared.

Build enduring trust through consistent culturally safe approaches

Trust, especially in CALD and First Nations communities, is fragile and can be easily eroded by inconsistent engagement, broken promises (e.g. unsuccessful grant applications after community engagement), or approaches that do not respect local leadership and cultural protocols. CDU reflected how, "CALD groups give lots of credence to their leaders (elders). So, you need to engage the right people to build trust and credibility… If you don't build that trust, they will never even meet you for you to even organise their workshop for you."

Transient communities require mechanisms for effective knowledge transfer

The NT Tablelands region is characterised by a highly mobile workforce, creating a risk that skills and networks will dissipate unless knowledge transfer is ongoing. As Mimal Land Management notes, "you might have to deliver the same content year on year on. How we look at better delivering training, skill building, that meets the needs, helps to progress people that are staying."

Wheatbelt Central East
Western Australia

nous

Wheatbelt Central East regional overview

Strong community resilience in the face of drought

Small towns sustain strong community networks

Social resilience in Wheatbelt Central East is grounded in strong local identity and self-determination. Residents are deeply connected to place and take pride in their communities. Investment in arts, culture, tourism and local initiatives supports this cohesion. Volunteerism is widespread but under strain, with small populations and geographic isolation contributing to fatigue. Many residents hold multiple community roles across remote towns. The region's demographic profile offers potential for new leadership, with 1,205 of 7,975 residents aged 18 to 35.

Resilience is shaped by deep drought experience

The region has developed a pragmatic and increasingly proactive approach to resilience in response to repeated environmental stress. The region has experienced multiple droughts, late frosts, and increasing heat extremes. In the past 30 years, dry years have occurred seven times, and the number of consecutive days above 38°C is rising. These conditions have affected crop yields and community morale, prompting shifts in land management and income strategies.

Service hubs anchor smaller towns in crisis

The region contributes strongly to Western Australia's economy and is actively diversifying, despite its remoteness and exposure to economic volatility. Agriculture is the backbone, supported by flat terrain, 350mm average annual rainfall and mixed cropping and livestock. Drought affects employment and business activity. One interviewee noted, "everyone's affected because of the lack of spend in the town." In response, local governments across 11 LGAs are improving freight infrastructure and service access. Major towns like Merredin and Kellerberrin act as service hubs for smaller communities.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: $440.5K

Small Network Grants funding: $40K

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management	Regional CPLO	Coordination	15	PO1, PO7
North Eastern Wheatbelt Travel Association	Events Officer	Community events	40	PO1, PO4
Town Team Movement	Wheatbelt Rising	Training initiatives	556	PO5, PO7
Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring	Wheatbelt Beyond Youth Mentoring	Development and leadership	500	PO1, PO6
Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group	Agribusiness Network	Networks	260	PO7, PO1
Meridian Regional Arts Incorporated	Meridian Regional Arts	Community events	2542	PO1, PO5
Shire of Bruce Rock	Cultivating Resilience: Establishing a Community Drought-Resistant Garden	Community infrastructure	40	PO4, PO6
Shire of Westonia	Westonian's Working Together Towards Community Resilience.	Development and leadership	700	PO1, PO3

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

4 Changemaker sessions across Merredin, Bruce Rock and Mukabudin.

58 total participants, of which **8** were young people and **0** were First Nations

Expertise Pool

2 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

2 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

18 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

Community-led initiatives in the Wheatbelt Central East region reframed drought resilience to include social connection, wellbeing and leadership. Youth mentoring and placemaking projects built confidence, reduced stress and strengthened local ties across remote towns. CIP funding enabled hands-on support and turned community ideas into action.

Empowering regional youth to lead with confidence

Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring (WBYM) supported over 200 students through one-on-one mentoring, leadership camps and mental health training, delivered by 150 volunteer mentors across drought-affected communities.

Students reported feeling more confident, connected and capable. One mentee shared, "I've learned how to speak up and help others do the same." Schools and families saw reduced stress and stronger community ties, with mentors helping students set goals to solve problems and build resilience.

CIP funding was essential to fund the camps, training and regional staff.

> We get very positive feedback from talking to former students about the benefits they have gained

> Hands down there's just no comparison in what we were able to achieve prior to the funding

Wheatbelt communities reframed drought resilience by leading 26 local projects that built pride, connection and leadership

The Town Team Movement (TTM) supported seven towns to deliver murals, street parties, youth initiatives and leadership workshops that directly engaged 556 people and indirectly benefitted over 2,000 residents (pictured right).

Two new 'Town Teams' formed, and local leaders stepped up to coordinate events, apply for grants and activate public spaces. The project reframed drought resilience from requiring technical and agricultural solutions to include social connection, placemaking, and community wellbeing.

CIP funding enabled hands-on support, built local capability and turned community ideas into action.

> [TTM's] approach is community-led action with community doing the doing, rather than local government or resource centers doing it for them

> Each community landed on a different view of what preparing for drought looks like

Northeastern Wheatbelt Travel Association reframed tourism as a tool for drought resilience

The project united six Wheatbelt communities to deliver tourism initiatives that increased visibility, revitalised public spaces and supported economic diversification. It achieved this by:

- Delivering six community-led tourism projects, including signage upgrades, visitor events and digital campaigns.
- Building a shared regional identity, with towns collaborating to promote common assets and stories.
- Supporting local leaders, to step into new roles with confidence.

Photo of the 'Town Team Movement' project, provided by Rebecca Parkhouse

Long-term impact and vision for the future

New community leaders emerged to drive local drought resilience across the region

The Town Team Movement saw an increase in the number and impact of community leaders with no prior experience stepping "into leadership roles for the first time – applying for grants, coordinating artists, organising catering, negotiating with Shires."

Wheatbelt and Beyond have seen a "high energy group of leaders support each other." who will "continue to work together, to strengthen our projects and the benefits to the community."

Organisations, sectors and communities became more connected and formed strong coordination networks

The Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group "have created an extended network of diverse, for purpose organisations, that are now connected in our region and are not solely focused on agriculture."

According to TTM, the relationships built within towns, across the region, and into wider circles now "form a multi-layered support system that strengthens the region's ability to face future challenges."

Communities reframed drought preparedness as a shared, community-led responsibility

Many in the community previously saw drought preparation as strictly technical, but TTM observed that "people began to see how bringing their community together in shared spaces directly supports connection and mental wellbeing."

The regional CPLO, Wheatbelt NRM broadened its traditionally agricultural remit. It coordinated projects that focused on the social and cultural elements of drought resilience and connected with organisations it would not have otherwise.

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Formalise established regional coordination networks

The initiative sparked new relationships and cross-sector collaboration. These gains may fade without a formal structure. A long-term regional coordination mechanism will maintain momentum, support joint problem-solving and unlock shared opportunities. This approach builds on networks formed during the initiative. As the Northeastern Wheatbelt Travel Association observed, "the whole region is in a better position to collaborate."

Support succession and volunteer development to embed impact long term

Many community activities depend on ageing volunteers and undocumented processes. Without targeted support, critical events and programs may lapse. Succession planning and volunteer development will ensure continuity and attract new leaders. As one participant from Northeastern Wheatbelt Travel reflected, "You just cannot undermine how important succession planning is… We need younger people to step up and take the roles on." Two years was only enough to get started; these initiatives must continue long term to embed change.

Future programs need longer project design timelines to enable meaningful co-design and stronger delivery

Compressed design phases limited the ability to align efforts and plan for scale. Future programs should allow more time for collaborative planning, local adaptation and workforce mobilisation. Funding must also remain consistent throughout the planning process to ensure accuracy. One interviewee from TTM noted, "The application and planning period was very short. This was further complicated by a nearly $20,000 funding cut after initial design and submission."

Northwest Queensland

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Northwest Queensland regional overview

Strong resilience foundations have been tested in recent years

Communities know how to look after each other

Communities in the region have a strong history of self-reliance and social cohesion. However, recent droughts and disasters have strained volunteer capacity and engagement. With 71 per cent of the population in remote areas and 29 per cent in very remote zones, service access is limited, making local leadership and connectedness essential. Leadership development and wellbeing initiatives were prioritised in the HRCPD design to help rebuild capacity.

Proactive actions are being taken to plan for drought

Lived experience of drought and other climate events has driven a shift toward proactive planning. The region has endured multiple droughts and the 2019 monsoonal floods, which caused the loss of 500,000 cattle and significant infrastructure damage. These events shaped local understanding of drought as cumulative and unpredictable. As one resident said, "drought is insidious. You know it's there, but it's the unknown." Communities have introduced scenario planning and early warning systems to anticipate risks and adapt practices.

Remoteness and infrastructure gaps shape a strong agricultural economy

The region's vast geography and dispersed population shape an economic profile anchored by agriculture and mining. With 95 per cent of land dedicated to cattle production, communities have built deep expertise in land management and primary production. Recent investment has strengthened these foundations. Infrastructure upgrades and economic diversification are improving service access and reducing climate risk. For example, Flinders Shire Council received $150,000 to upgrade 'The Hub' in Hughenden, enhancing digital connectivity and wellbeing support for remote station owners.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: **$357.5K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Southern Gulf NRM Ltd	Regional CPLO	Coordination	37	PO4, PO6
Southern Gulf NRM Ltd	Proactively Improving Mental Health preparedness in Northwest QLD	Training initiatives	61	PO6, PO1
Southern Gulf NRM Ltd	Community Group Development Facilitator for Northwest QLD	Training initiatives	37	PO4, PO1
Mitakoodi Community and Housing Aboriginal Corporation	The Cloncurry Community Hub and Film Festival	Community infrastructure	50	PO1, PO7

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

- 3 Changemaker sessions across Mt Isa and Cloncurry
- 39 total participants, of which 9 were young people and 5 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

0 Organisations accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

2 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

9 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

Through targeted workshops and training, HRCPD built leadership confidence, expanded cross-sector networks and embedded mental health literacy. Participants gained practical tools, fresh perspectives and stronger connections, equipping communities to lead change and prepare to respond to future climate stress.

Young people in Cloncurry are leading drought resilience by creating the services and opportunities they need

Mitakoodi Aboriginal Corporation established the Cloncurry Youth Hub, a youth-led organisation with formal governance and a dedicated space.

The hub has engaged over 2,000 people, with 80 per cent identifying as First Nations and 70 per cent under 18, through events like a three-day film festival focused on leadership, culture and climate awareness.

A youth committee and new Aboriginal Corporation give young people formal roles in planning and decision-making, while partnerships with CSIRO, TAFE, JCU and local schools are creating pathways to education and employment.

The initiative is placing young people and traditional knowledge at the centre of drought preparedness and local planning.

> The kids are feeling that [the Youth Hub] is empowering them to have ownership of something and an identity of their own.

Preparing for drought by supporting mental wellbeing

Southern Gulf NRM delivered six Mental Health First Aid workshops across Northwest QLD, training 61 participants to support wellbeing during drought. The workshops helped break down stigma and build confidence, especially in small and remote communities.

Participants reported stronger peer connections and emotional engagement, creating safe spaces for sharing and support.

The initiative is expected to benefit over 500 people across six communities, embedding mental health literacy at the grassroots level. The project has ultimately strengthened community capacity to respond to future climate stress.

> Participants feel more confident in recognising signs of mental distress and knowing how to start conversations and offer support.

> The workshops helped break down stigma and normalise conversations about mental wellbeing.

Northwest QLD hosted three ARLF Changemaker Workshops

Participants from agriculture, public service and community organisations built confidence, strengthened networks and prepared for drought. Participants said the workshops helped them to:

Gain fresh perspectives on leadership

- "I am going to be more open in mindset…"

Build stronger cross-sector connections

- "Greater connection with community networks and influence an application for funding to improve broader community outcomes."

Apply practical tools to strengthen capability

- "Using the resources and tools taught to create strategies and review policies."

Photo of a Northwest QLD Changemaker workshop, provided by ARLF

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Adaptive capacity has increased through youth leadership development

The youth-led Aboriginal corporation setup through the Mitakoodi project empowered, "youth to become Directors and members and to have different age group committees."

The corporation's structures support long-term planning and community-led resilience. For instance, Mitakoodi has a desire for, "the steering committee to develop strategies and tactics to help manage challenges in the community."

Social cohesion is being built through workshops and events that connect isolated communities

Southern Gulf NRM's workshops "created safe spaces where participants could openly discuss shared experiences… Fostering a sense of solidarity."

In smaller communities, like Hughenden and Cloncurry, the Southern Gulf NRM workshops were "particularly impactful in bringing together people who may not typically interact."

Collaboration across sectors is supporting localised drought resilience strategies

The Mitakoodi project has collaborated with numerous partners in the health, government and education sectors, helping to embed local knowledge into broader planning frameworks.

CPLO coordination and Changemaker workshops connected diverse organisations and individuals. Southern Gulf NRM reported participants from agriculture, health, education, youth, Indigenous organisations and local government.

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Secure long-term investment in youth-led and culturally grounded initiatives

The initiative supported new youth organisations and cultural programs. Without continued funding, these efforts may stall. Future programs should provide flexible, place-based funding to support youth governance, cultural learning, and caring for Country. Mitakoodi Aboriginal Corporation described the initiative as a turning point for youth involvement, noting that it "sparked ambition" and created structures for long-term leadership.

Tailor delivery models to fit remote and low-population communities

Strict participation thresholds for leadership excluded some towns from workshops and activities. Future programs should adopt scalable models that reflect the realities of small and remote communities. Southern Gulf NRM reported how, "strict minimums can be difficult to meet in sparsely populated areas, which can result in missed opportunities. A more tailored or scalable approach would ensure communities of all sizes can access the program and benefit from its outcomes."

Strengthen early engagement to build local buy-in

Some projects struggled to attract participants despite strong planning. Future programs should invest in early engagement and outreach to build trust and relevance. Southern Gulf NRM noted that the initiative needed to, "provide more support for community engagement strategies… Especially in smaller or more remote towns."

Central West Queensland

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Central West QLD regional overview

Drought is part of life in Central West QLD

Targeted support is needed to amplify resilience foundations

Leadership is a community strength, with residents expressing pride and trust. However, every local government area has lost residents since 2001, and youth outmigration is weakening future pipelines. First Nations communities, who make up 12.5 per cent of the population, face compounded barriers to health, education and employment due to drought. Wellbeing is supported by strong relationships, safety and meaning, but high rates of diagnosed mental illness among children and adolescents highlight the need for stronger support.

Experienced communities are facing tougher droughts

Communities are experienced in managing drought, but recent events have pushed their limits. Since 2014, all seven local government areas have been drought-declared. The region has faced drought for nearly half the time since 1964. Climate projections show more extreme heat and erratic rainfall. Pasture growth has dropped by up to 16 per cent and ground cover loss is worsening erosion, sedimentation and invasive species. Recovery is slower and more complex, especially when drought overlaps with other shocks, such as COVID-19. As one interviewee said, "We are moving further away from thinking of drought as a packaged event—this is how we live."

Economic foundations are strong, but remoteness increases risk

The region plays a vital economic role but faces heightened vulnerability due to isolation and infrastructure gaps. It covers 23 per cent of Queensland yet has only 10,100 residents, limiting scale economies and service access. Agriculture dominates employment but depends heavily on rainfall and volatile markets, exposing the region to climate and economic shocks. Many towns rely on rivers or bores with high evaporation rates. Diversification is increasing with 34 per cent of farms are expanding agricultural enterprises and 64 per cent reporting non-farm income.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: **$437.4K**

Small Network Grants funding: **$20K**

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Central Western QLD Remote Area Planning and Development Board	Regional CPLO	Coordination	Data not available	
Central Western QLD Remote Area Planning and Development Board	Woven Stories	Coordination	Data not available	
Western Queensland Drought Committee	WQDC Legacy & Future – Settling the Dust	Coordination	Data not available	
GroWQ Association Inc	Rural First Aid Training	Training	188	PO1, PO4

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

4 Changemaker sessions across Tambo, Longreach, Boulia and Winton.

38 total participants, of which 2 were young people and 0 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

1 Organisation accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

0 Individuals participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

11 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

Across Central West QLD, locally led initiatives are strengthening resilience by building skills, networks and shared purpose. Communities are building capability and confidence to respond to local challenges. New connections are strengthening civic pride and unlocking leadership, especially in remote regions. Targeted investment is enabling inclusive participation and creating momentum for long-term drought resilience.

Saving lives and building resilience in isolated areas through on-farm first aid training

GroWQ delivered nine first aid workshops across Central West QLD, training 188 farmers, families and neighbours in life-saving skills. The sessions strengthened community connection and emergency preparedness, with one participant using the training to save a life just days later. Holding workshops on farms removed barriers to participation and turned training into social connection, especially in remote towns like Yaraka. SNG funding subsidised training costs, and allowed delivery in remote areas, ensuring the program was accessible to communities most affected by drought. Hear more about GrowQ's project in the attached video

> It was great to meet others who live nearby and face the same challenges, it felt like we're all in this together.

> People don't want to come into town... Organising the training on properties with neighbors enhanced relevance and practicality.

Arts and culture are shaping regional resilience planning and coordination

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) delivered arts and culture workshops across six communities, connecting creatives, councils and community members to explore the role of culture in resilience. The workshops led to new regional networks, digital storytelling and a cultural planning framework. The project also prompted a further workforce planning project funded by Jobs Queensland. Participants reported a stronger sense of belonging and civic pride, with local governments now considering arts planning as part of their drought resilience strategies. CIP funding enabled RAPAD to scale the project, adapt delivery and engage expert facilitators.

> People saw [the workshops] as an activity, but they could see that it could be part of a bigger picture, at a local or regional level.

> Arts, culture and creativity is something much bigger than what you might imagine.

The regions CPLO led regional coordination, connecting seven regional councils

The Western Queensland Drought Committee strengthened regional resilience and coordination in the face of ongoing drought. It achieved this by:

- Delivering locally led initiatives, including drought planning forums in towns like Boulia.
- Building a shared regional strategy, with councils collaborating to address service gaps and reduce duplication.
- Backing emerging leaders, including Indigenous youth, through connections to national programs like Changemaker.

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Local networks of leaders, volunteers and organisations are emerging to support drought preparedness

A region-wide network has been built and maintained. The Western QLD Drought Committee has established and maintained contact with 676 rural properties, 405 businesses, and 2,175 community members across 7 shires.

These networks are now trusted and responsive, with reports about how community members actively surfacing local knowledge such as rainfall patterns and conditions on neighbouring properties.

Communities are more equipped to respond to drought and are shifting mindsets towards preparedness

GroWQ's first aid trainings have equipped individuals with life-saving skills and increased confidence to act during emergencies. One participant "administered life-saving first aid just nine days after completing the training… the knowledge gained was instrumental."

Trainings shifted the conversation from response to preparedness. GroWQ reflected how their trainings "sparked broader discussions within communities about drought preparedness, including the importance of mental health and safety planning."

Adaptive capacity is being strengthened through local planning, workforce development and education

RAPAD are "putting together a workforce plan for arts and culture," which will support the rapid growth of the arts and culture sector in the region, supporting economic diversification.

Projects are equipping communities with the tools, skills, and partnerships needed to respond to future challenges. RAPAD reflected how funding has, "been a springboard… we're helping communities develop their own cultural plans."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Embed local coordination roles to maintain community connectivity

The Initiative succeeded where local leaders had the time, trust, and mandate to connect with farmers, small businesses and community members. Without continued coordination, this momentum risks being lost. The Western QLD Drought Committee reflected how "[being CPLO] could be a whole job for someone to connect with communities and organisations… Staying connected with people is almost a full-time job."

Simplify access to funding and build capability to navigate grants

Community organisations are motivated to lead change but face barriers in identifying, applying for and aligning grants with local needs. GroWQ reflected in an interview how it's hard to know what grants are out there and which suit organisational needs. They also expressed how it is difficult as a user to figure out how to link community outcomes to grant outcomes.

Keep building practical capability and confidence to respond to future droughts

The initiative showed that hands-on, locally delivered training can shift mindsets and strengthen social cohesion to support emergency preparedness. To maintain these benefits, communities need ongoing, place-based activities that reinforce local networks and keep services accessible in remote areas. GroWQ shared that "smaller and more isolated communities, such as Yaraka, were grateful for the tailored nature of the course. Attendees noted that they now feel better equipped to handle emergencies independently, which is especially important during drought conditions when external support may be limited."

Eyre Peninsula
South Australia

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Eyre Peninsula regional overview

The region is responding to environmental and economic strain

Grass roots volunteers glue the community together

Eyre Peninsula's resilience depends on grassroots organisations and high volunteering. Sporting clubs and informal groups have supported mental health and social cohesion during drought. But this resilience is under pressure. COVID-19 and demographic shifts have reduced community capacity. Volunteering is falling, down from 18 per cent but still above the SA average of 14.1 per cent. Small towns are losing population, clubs are merging, and "the few are doing the majority of the work."

Climate change is compounding drought risk

Farmers are drawing on lived experience to adapt. Many are using no-till farming and crop diversification out of necessity. Despite these efforts, climate change and compounding disasters are increasing pressure. The region faces record-low rainfall, and Wudinna ranks second nationally for drought sensitivity. Rainfall has dropped by up to 13 per cent, and by 2050, up to 70 per cent of time could be spent in drought. One interviewee said droughts have a "slow, grinding, wears-you-down effect—mentally, financially and physically. Yet they also foster community closeness and improved forward planning."

Water and workforce pressures are reshaping a strong economic centre

Agriculture and seafood drive the region's economy, but water scarcity, service gaps and global market reliance increase vulnerability. The region produces 26 per cent of South Australia's cereal crops and 82 per cent of its seafood. Rising input costs and market dependence heighten risk. Water scarcity is worsening with 75 per cent of drinking water comes from the declining Uley South Basin. Relief depends on new desalination infrastructure. Population growth is concentrated in regional centres, while smaller towns face decline, reducing service access and increasing social vulnerability.

The Initiative invested in trusted local leaders and organisations.

Community Impact Program funding: $314.3K

Small Network Grants funding: $28K

ORGANISATION	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	TARGET OUTCOMES
Agricultural Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula Incorporated	Regional CPLO	Coordination	30	PO1, PO7
Agricultural Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula Incorporated	Young Farmer – Facilitated Peer to Peer Learning	Development and leadership	Data not available	PO1, PO3
District Council Of Cleve	Future Farmers Focus	Training initiatives	100	PO5, PO7
WoTL Ltd	Better Connected Communities	Training initiatives	129	PO1, PO7
WoTL Ltd	Regenerate Rural Women	Training initiatives	29	PO1, PO6
Coomandook Area School	Roots & Rise: Cultivating Resilience	Networks	30	PO1, PO5
Yaninee Public Hall Incorporated	Toward the Ton	Community infrastructure	400	PO7, PO1

ARLF Leadership Activities included:

4 Changemaker sessions across Tumby Bay, Cummins and Streaky Bay, Wudinna.

31 total participants, of which 6 were young people and 0 were First Nations

Expertise Pool

1 Organisation accessed Expertise Pool services through the concierge

Mentoring Program

1 Individual participated in the mentoring program

Learning Network

7 Individuals became members of the Drought Ready learning network

Case studies of regional impact

Local energy across the Eyre Peninsula is translating into leadership, with emerging voices shaping how communities respond to drought. Practical support is building confidence and connection, unlocking ideas, strengthening networks and sustaining momentum. Even small initiatives are creating ripple effects, reaching far beyond the farm gate or town hall.

Equipping young farmers to lead resilient agriculture on the Eyre Peninsula

Agricultural Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula (AIR EP) used CIP funding to establish peer-to-peer learning groups in Rudall and the Far West. More than 30 young farmers participated in workshops on soils, budgeting, nutrition and decision-making. Many had never managed a farm during drought and built confidence as leaders while forming new networks across regions. Participants became more willing to ask questions, explore regenerative practices and connect beyond their immediate communities. CIP funding enabled high-quality facilitation, supported remote engagement and funded a study tour that sustained relationships beyond the grant.

> Many participants are moving towards decision making roles within their farm business. We are equipping them with the tools to ask the right questions, which has been a really big thing.

> Networking across the districts within our region will be of huge benefit to the young farmers. That will strengthen in the years to come.

Connecting communities to rally through drought into the future

Women Together Learning's (WoTL) Better Connected Communities project strengthened social ties in drought-affected regions. Through eight networking and community-building events, participants accessed new services and networks, some of which they continue to use. The sessions brought practical skills and moments of joy, energising communities to persevere through hardship. Events addressed immediate needs, including personal and business responses to drought, and built future resilience through leadership and decision-making support. More than 70 people directly benefited, with an estimated 500 reached through extended networks.

> We're bringing technical experts into the community, increasing awareness of who people can call upon if they need outside help.

> This experience gave [participants] a chance to connect more deeply.

Yaninee Institute brought community together to strengthen drought resilience

Yaninee Institute's 'Towards the Ton' project upgraded the community hall and delivered a centenary celebration for 400+ people during drought (pictured below). The event reconnected residents, created the Yaninee Food Co-op, and brought optimism to a stressed community. The project used SNG funding to;

- Improve buildings and history displays
- Mobilise volunteers and local groups to plan and run the event
- Promote the event widely to engage current and former residents

Photo of the 'Towards the Ton' project, provided by FRRR

Long-term impact and vision for the future

Emerging leaders are being equipped with the capacity to drive long-term drought resilience

The initiative supported young people with the tools to step into leadership and decision-making roles in agriculture. Cleve Area School noted how young people became more equipped to contribute to a sustainable agricultural industry.

Young people also developed more confidence to lead. AIR EP observed that young farmers are increasingly stepping into leadership roles within their businesses.

Community networks have become stronger despite persistent drought conditions in the region

Regional networks expanded and collaboration across districts improved. AIR EP reflected how, "networking across the districts within our region will be of huge benefit in the years to come."

Diverse groups came together to access support, share experiences and build social cohesion. WoTL's project, "has brought new women into our network and emboldened those women with skills to support themselves, and their communities in difficult times."

Localised projects resulted in greater planning and practical capacity for future drought

The Initiative empowered local ambassadors to shape activities and solutions that fit their context. WoTL reflected how they, "would talk to the ambassadors and have a conversation and go, what are you seeing in your patch? What do you think is needed?"

The initiative cultivated practical adaptation, with participants sharing knowledge and adopting new approaches. In the case of WoTL, "individuals upskilled in personal and business resilience skills and strategies to assist in times of drought."

Sustaining the impact of the Initiative

Embed regional networks to maintain knowledge sharing and resilience building

The initiative created new connections across districts and demographics. These networks are now critical infrastructure for resilience and must be supported beyond the life of the program. Ongoing funding for dedicated personnel and support is needed to sustain engagement between farming groups, schools and community organisations.

Invest in local leadership programs to continue building community capacity

Local leadership development and ambassador models were seen as highly effective for building resilience, especially among women and young people. These models are scalable and should be embedded in future programs. For example, WoTL has built networks of ambassadors that they can deliver programmes through, leveraging existing local knowledge to tailor delivery.

Support communities to turn drought experience into preparedness action

Communities across the Eyre Peninsula have built strong foundations for resilience. They know what to do and have the networks and leadership in place. But applying that knowledge takes time and support. During drought, competing demands and economic pressures make it harder to follow through. As WoTL reflected; "Let's not deliver workshop after workshop… [because] people actually need to have some time to implement what they've learned."

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