

RTI 032 of 2017-18 – Agricultural Landscape Rehabilitation Scheme

Details of the Information sought:

I am seeking information concerning the design of the Agriculture Landscape Rehabilitation Scheme (ALRS) - 'Scheme' and specifically:

1. The members of the Selection Panel for the Scheme that recommended the funding model.
2. The other funding models considered by the Selection Panel.
3. Expert opinion, technical advice, business cases or other documents that ranked the Scheme priorities by the funding models considered by the Selection Panel.
4. The total number of nominations accepted and the total amount awarded

I understand that of the 170 applications received, 20 were funded by the Mersey Dasher Riparian Recovery Project (MDRRP). In regard to this funding can you please supply:

1. The total amount funded through this project (in full).
2. The total amount provided to the 20 ALRS scheme applicants.
3. The criteria used to assess whether an application was funded via the ALRS or the MDRRP.

Response to applicant:

[First set of questions]

1. There were five members of the selection panel:
 - a. Representative from Natural and Cultural Heritage Division, DPIPWE
 - b. Representative from AgriGrowth Tasmania Division, DPIPWE
 - c. Representative from Office of Security and Emergency Management, DPAC
 - d. Representative from Office of Security and Emergency Management, DPAC
 - e. Representative from TFGA
2. The selection panel considered a number of options for a funding model, including:
 - i) **Funding high ranking nominations in full.** Given that these were largely the most costly projects, this would have resulted in a very small number of projects being funded, meaning the vast majority of eligible nominations would receive no funding.
 - ii) **Equal proportional funding.** All projects treated equally irrespective of their size (eg, all would receive the same percentage of funds requested). This would result in large projects receiving significantly more funding than eligible medium and small projects.
 - iii) **Bracket and cap model.** Nominations are categorised into different sized projects, and a funding cap applied to each bracket. For example, up to \$50k capped at \$25k, \$50-\$80k capped at \$35k etc. This would result in all eligible nominations receiving funding with larger projects receiving considerably less than what was requested.
 - iv) **Varied proportional increase.** Nominations are categorised into different sized projects and a proportional increase in funding could be applied. For example, \$25k and less receive 100%, \$25-50k receive \$25k plus 20% of funds requested over \$25k, \$50k-\$80k receive \$30k plus 10% of funds requested over \$30k etc. This would produce similar results to the 'bracket and cap' option.

3. To maximise the integrity of the program, the Scheme design, eligibility guidelines and assessment of requests against the guidelines were informed by technical information and advice from a range of sources, including: technical reports, expert consultants and relevant officers from the Department and NRM regional bodies. Given the technical complexity of flood impact assessment and river rehabilitation, the majority of technical effort, advice and assessment was built into the 'front end' of the program to assist farmers and landowners assess damage and determine appropriate remedial action. For example, three consultancy firms were commissioned to provide expert geomorphologist advice to any/all landowners/farmers seeking to develop a nomination for funding. Most nominations were supported by technical reports prepared by one of these consultants.

A Technical Review Group, comprising Departmental experts in water, geoscience, and the agricultural sector, NRMs, and a geotechnical consultant reviewed all nominations against the program guidelines to assess compliance of nominations against the guidelines and rank eligible projects based on the prioritising criteria – essentially their 'public value'.

The selection panel considered advice from the Technical Review Group and funding/financial information prepared by Departmental officers. The panel considered the pros and cons of the four funding model options against the general intent of the initiative – namely, to ensure an equitable distribution of finite funds to a broad number and range of projects deemed eligible for funding under the program. It did not support options (i) or (ii) described above. The panel subsequently requested and was provided with financial data modelling of the possible outcomes for different categories of project/requests (small, medium and large) under options (iii) and (iv).

4. There were a total of 171 nominations received across 24 catchments.

Excluding successful nominations that were subsequently funded through the Natural Disaster Relief and recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) funds, the total amount of funds assessed to be provided was \$2,833,837.88.

(Information about the NDDRA funding – also called the MDRRP funding – is provided below in answer to your second set of questions)

[Second set of questions]

1. On 11 March 2017, the Australian and Tasmanian Governments announced an additional \$2.15 million in disaster funding, through NDRRA for the Mersey-Dasher catchment. Funding under this Program is focussed on protecting public infrastructure in three areas on the Mersey-Dasher River System.

2. The total amount of funds assessed to be provided for ALRS nominated works using the NDDRA funds for the Mersey-Dasher River System is \$525,504.31.

3. The criteria used to determine whether a successful ALRS nomination was funded through the Mersey-Dasher River System NDDRA funds was based on whether a nomination was within one of the three areas for works on the Mersey-Dasher River System and that the works proposed were directly relevant to the project activities identified for the NDDRA funds. The relevant nominations were originally assessed with all other ALRS nominations.