



National Drought Forum 2023

Climate session and closing remarks transcript

(Duration 72 mins 45 secs)

26 September 2023

Introduction

This is the transcript of one of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's National Drought Forum sessions. This transcript is for the Climate session, including closing remarks for the event, delivered at the Forum, 26 September 2023.

This session features Oli Le Lievre, MC, with session presenters Tony Maher and Nadia Bouhafs and a panel chaired by Daniel Rea, with panellists Melinee Leather, Josh Gilbert and Caitlin McConnel.

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Transcript

[Recording begins]

Oli Le Lievre [01:44:59]:

Alrighty. I'm going to kick off with a bit of a wrap of some of the workshops. We are in the Leagues Club, which does have some fantastic specials on, so we do want to finish on time. So welcome back everyone to the afternoon session. The quietness falls. Thank you for your participation in those last couple of workshops. I've actually got all the solutions to drought out in front of me here, so thank you everyone for coming together and solving that, that's fantastic. So, I think I probably just want to start off just with a few quotes that we had, I was in the Not the Usual Suspects session this morning, and then were just a couple of different quotes which I think really summarise, probably the thinking of what it means to be, I guess, involved, and the community side of agriculture in some of these challenging times.

And so I think the 2 Melanies shared about their grower group, and developing individual business plans and how that benefited them and how actually, frequent and consistent communications between different businesses, and providing that feedback, was actually really important. But the foundations of that communication was built on love and kindness, and I think they probably got 2 words that we often bring agriculture, but actually when it comes to having these difficult discussions about peoples' businesses and where they're at, having those conversations from a point of love and kindness is actually really incredible. The other one which came up in there was that no one of us is as smart as all of us, and I think that just epitomises why we're all in the room today.

One that I think is really poignant is about how the policy boundaries disappear when people are in crisis. And so they're not looking for these linear things that exist to actually want real solutions. I

think that's something that we need to be really mindful of that when it comes to crisis. And that's where the planning and preparation both off the back of the last crisis or drought and leading into the next one is so important so we can actually make informed and strong decisions.

And then Georgie Somerset, making sure that we're allowing diverse voices in and actually having the courage to make sure we're listening to those different perspectives as well is incredibly important. So jumping across to the workshops we had the first one, which was What Helps and What Hinders. So what should guide the Australian Government's decision making in response to drought be?

Very small questions to answer. I think we jumped around a lot as part of that, and as well as, there will be summaries of these workshops over the coming days to keep your eyes peeled for that. Sorry, I've lost my spot. The Back to the Future workshop discussed where the Future Drought Fund has been and where they're heading, chatting about transformational change, and that this doesn't occur overnight, it actually takes the involvement of people over quite a long period of time. And the importance when it comes to big change of actually having that local presence and people in communities. And I don't think that's news to anyone. I think it's something that we need to just be mindful of and actually reiterating. And then the importance of extension and knowledge management.

So sharing that information up and down the chain. The last workshop was around the Who, What and When, centred around the question of how can we use information flows to build better connectedness. And that the information needs to be localised, so it needs to be timely, it needs to be correct and consistent across drought cycles for people, businesses and communities.

And it's really important for farming communities to ensure that they know where they can go to for information. And I think that's something that we probably need to continue to spell out. Never make assumptions that people just know where to go. It's actually those little things. It might be just a simple share on your social media page or through a community group or whatever it might be, but actually making sure that we are giving those information pathways for people, sometimes it's the simple things which can make the biggest impact.

And then another theme, and I think this probably goes across the board in agriculture more broadly, is around language and messaging and that making sure that your messaging in your language is actually suitable to who your audience is. I'll have to say to our team at Humans of Agriculture, who are we talking to? What are we talking to them about, and why should they actually care?

And if you can answer those 3 things really simply, you can actually deliver communications really simply. So, that flows into our next session. We've got Tony Maher coming back to chat about the topics of climate change, sustainability, resilience and preparedness have really consumed have been a key part of today's conversation. And Tony is coming back. He's going to talk about the Australian Agriculture Sustainability framework and we're going to have a couple of panels off the back of that.

So back to you, Tony, thanks a lot.

Tony Maher [01:49:50]:

Alright, thank you, everyone. Now I've only got a couple of slides and I know that slides are dangerous after lunch and afternoon tea, so I'm going to whip through these slides. It's again quite an important...I can just get the first one up. Okay. So, the Ag Sustainability framework, we all know that climate sustainability, ecosystem services, natural capital, whatever else you'd like to call it, is driving Australian agriculture, it's driving global agriculture and the intersection between what is essentially environmental regulation and agricultural production has been occurring for some time.

But I feel like, and I'm not alone here, I think it's coming to an intersection where the industry really does need to take control of that narrative, so the Australian, I'm going to give you 5 things that you need to know about the Australian Ag Sustainability framework. The first is, it's a collaboration and I talked about collaboration and partnerships this morning, it's a collaboration between the Australian Government and the National Farmers Federation. So you've got 2 key players hopefully that are driving in partnership, the agenda on agricultural sustainability. The Government has recognised that they need to work with the industry on sustainability, environmental legislation. They've provided the NFF with some money to do a couple of things. So that's the first thing.

It's a really important collaboration. And again, climate and sustainability is going to be, progress in a proper way through collaboration. The second thing is that the AASF, as I refer to it, is a way that articulates the sustainable of Australian agriculture at a national level, in a consistent way. So that's the second thing that I'd like you to take away.

It's a nationally consistent framework that articulates and increasingly demonstrates, the capability, the characteristics, the sustainability of Australian agriculture. We have, as an industry, as a country, traded off the clean and green image for decades. Now we're being asked to prove it. Document it, report on it, demonstrate it, and I'll get to the third points. And we are capable of doing that as an industry.

The third thing is that, and this is a good follow-on point, is that this framework and the narrative that goes with it and all we talked about messaging, which is really important, builds on the work that's already been done. So this isn't a new certification standard, it's not a new accreditation or auditing framework, what it does, is it builds on the work that's being done by the cotton industry or the grains industry, by the dairy industry for a long time, by the red meat industry.

What it will do is bring together all of those sustainability initiatives, policies and lots of work that's been done over a long period of time by farmers, by RDCs, bring it together under one umbrella initiative for Australian agriculture. So that's the third or fourth point that I want you to take away, is that this framework is an umbrella scheme framework for the entire industry. It's not a new framework. It's bringing them all in under one framework.

The fourth, is that it's the first of its kind in the world. As an industry what we've seen partnering with government and industry here in Australia is not happening in other countries. What we've seen in other countries, similar to Australia, where agriculture is an important part of the economy and of part of the society and community.

We've seen countries like the Netherlands, New Zealand, Canada, that might be similar in many ways, to Australia. We've seen those governments actually put in place onerous regulation and legislation that is having a huge impact on farmers and the agriculture sector. So, this framework

allows us to get ahead of that game. It's a partnership between industry and government and it's offensive and defensive.

It means that industry, and this is the fifth point, that industry is controlling the narrative on the sustainability of Australian agriculture. Government has said here's some cash, go away and develop up a framework that tells the great story and tells the great news capability of Australian agriculture. And that's unique because around the world, particularly in Europe, countries are saying, governments are saying, we think we need to reduce emissions, we need to reduce water use, we need to reduce nitrate use, you know, nitrogen, and here's how we're going to do it. We're going to set these targets. Here, we actually get to build on the work that's been done, tell it to the Australian Government and if I can throw in a sixth one, which I wasn't going to, but I will, the sixth point is that it allows us as a country because we're so export dominated and orientated, it allows us to have that conversation with those key export markets, and increasingly...getting ahead of myself with the slides now....but increasingly, this is price of entry into the market. We may not like it, but it is price of entry.

The good thing is that we are well prepared, and we've done the work, we're bringing it together, so we can get that price of entry into those markets. So, it's in its early stages, but it is a long-term plan for industry to actually take control of that narrative, demonstrate it, articulate it, prove it to domestic markets and increasingly, international markets.

So that's what those first 5 points or so try and say. Now, they'll get that these slides get a little bit more complicated. But again, a couple of key things. The sustainability framework is aligning with a whole range of other work that's being done. So things, international I'm talking about. So things like sustainability assessment, food and agriculture systems, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Reporting Initiative, and some of you will be more familiar with these than others.

But the Taskforce for Nature Related Financial Disclosure and the Taskforce for Climate Related Disclosure, those things are bearing down on the industry, particularly, again, I'm going to talk to some of you today about the scope 3 emissions and what that means for Australian agriculture and farmers, as the requirements cascade down from corporates, whether they be financial institutions or retailers or major food manufacturers, the requirements for the reporting scope 3 emissions in this case, are looming large for Australian agriculture.

So, this sustainability framework aligns with some of those international guidelines, so we're not developing this in isolation. And further to that point, and I'm sorry that that's quite small, but down the middle of that slide, it lists off some of the domestic frameworks that are in place. And I know Mike Guerin from AgForce is in the room and AgForce have been progressing Ag Care.

So that's an initiative, that again provides tools, services to farmers to actually document, baseline their farm business. This framework will work with those. It's not wanting to duplicate those. Another bit of work and there are many, and that's why the slide is so small, but we're just trying to demonstrate that this is within existing initiatives. The other is Farming for the Future.

So some of you will have heard from, about Farming for the Future, which is we have a partnership, the Machdoc Foundation and Farming for the Future. Again, enabling, providing data to have the conversation about what's happening on farms so that we can continue to communicate that story

and AASF brings together those range of initiatives. Cotton BMP, the Sustainable Ag initiative, so many of the frameworks or systems or certification schemes that are out there it, would be a career limiting move if I was going to add another framework for farmers to respond to.

That's not what we're doing, we're bringing it together so that they can use that existing information. So what does success look like? And again, 3 or 4 points here. So, the first, and we're in the initial stages, so we've got an initial funding from government for about \$4 million over 3 years, and that's just been replicated or continued. So, I don't think Murray's in the room, but the Department of Agriculture has seen the work that has been done. They've got faith in that work. So they've renewed the partnership, which is great. Success looks like, we continue to be seen around the world as a reliable supplier of high quality, safe, traceable, sustainable food and fibre. That's absolutely critical.

I think all of you will know that we export 75% of what we produce. We can't get market access, if we can't give people confidence about how we're producing our food and fibre, then that agenda starts to get a little bit wobbly. We continue to demonstrate our good work and tell our great story. This will be one initiative that allows us to do that.

Not pretending this will be the only thing the industry can use. But from an NFF point of view, we want to bring together that work and be a platform, not the platform, but a platform to actually allow that to happen. So that's what success looks like. We will be prepared and engaged in the global village discussion, and it is a village discussion, around sustainability. Australian agriculture will be at the table and we'll be able to prove what it is that we're doing in this space and that's absolutely important.

And we'll have ultimately, and this is down the track, risk spooking the horses from what I'm about to say, but this should continue to be an industry driven initiative. So it's government funded at the moment, but we would like for it to evolve into an industry driven scheme that is self-funded, self-administered and that we, as industry, maintain, build, establish a credible system that has integrity, has a trust, has the buy-in from industry, has recognition, respect from government, because it's the government officials that actually go and develop oh, sorry, negotiate, these trade agreements with here for example it's government to government. Industry might like to think that they have a say at the end of the day we have an influence, but it's the governments that agree to those free trade agreements. So the government can lean on this and say it's industry driven, industry owned, it has integrity, it has credibility, here's the proof, here's what we're doing from a sustainability point of view.

So, I would like to see it develop into an entity that is a standalone, industry driven, owned, and I don't know what that looks like. So let's not get ahead of ourselves. But it is an industry driven scheme. Industry retains ownership and control and governance over what that looks like, and we can continue to evolve as our systems evolve and they will, and they have. So that's what I think success looks like.

So we're now early stages, but it's an exciting bit of work. It's lots of work and I know some people in the room are contributing to it. So finally, I would just like to say thank you to them. This really does need input and industry buy in if it's going to work.

And there's some great people in the room that have contributed to it. So I thank them for their contribution and support. So Oli, that's me, I've wound it up 2 minutes ahead of schedule. So thank you very much for it.

Oli Le Lievre [02:02:26]:

Thought you must have thought I was death staring you Tony. I don't want your job, despite what you said earlier. So I'd like to welcome our next presenter, Nadia Bouhafis, who's the Assistant secretary of Climate Policy at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, to chat about the Agriculture Land and Sector Plan, which was mentioned earlier today. So welcome, Nadia.

Nadia Bouhafis [02:02:53]:

Hello, everybody. I should start by saying that, maybe it's a good thing, but I kind of left my glasses at the airport so I can see this front row here. And so you guys will be my indicator in terms of what's working right now. But a quick wave to the fuzzy faces at the back. Look, can I just thank our colleagues, certainly from the Future Drought Fund and drought teams for organising such a relevant program today. And apologies if I'm stealing somebody else's thunder who's also going to convey our sincere appreciation for what has been certainly a productive conversations, or several productive conversations.

So, look, my name is Nadia Bouhafis. I've been a part of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for around 16 years, working across agriculture, trade, policy and biosecurity. And I've also had the privilege of representing our country as the Agriculture Councillor to Japan for quite a number of years.

I'm passionate about the agriculture sector and the immense and integral contribution that it has made and will make to our country. A key part of the Department's, and the Government's agenda, is climate change, including impacts, risks, resilience and of course, reducing emissions. You heard this from the Treasurer, and you heard this from our agriculture minister. Drought is a part of our future.

History reminds us that our country hasn't always been as prepared as we are today for the next drought, but we have the added and urgent complexity of climate change, of which drought severity is an indicator. Earlier this year, and as you've heard, agriculture ministers around the country released the first national statement on climate change and agriculture. As Minister Watt said, the national statement is a commitment by governments, to work together with industry and to provide leadership on climate smart agriculture. I encourage you to read it. No bias at all. It includes interesting case studies of how some farming businesses can be climate smart to achieve the climate change response that we need.

You've also heard that the government has a goal of reaching net zero across the economy by 2050. But what does this mean? Who does what, and how are we going to get there?

As part of the agenda, the government has announced the development of plans, outlining 6 key areas of the economy that will play a part in the emissions reduction story. This includes electricity and energy, transport, resources, the built environment, industry and of course, agricultural land. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has been asked not only to hold the pen for

the Agriculture and Land Plan, but also to ensure that the development of the plan is based on extensive, consultative and thorough processes.

Genuinely asking the question, 'What is agriculture's role?'. When we talk about the agriculture part, of the Agriculture and Land Plan, we're talking about what happens within a farm boundary, be it cropping, hort, livestock or even forestry. The land part of the plan is as you guessed, the land which sits outside of a farm boundary and includes, for example, national parks.

As we work to develop the Ag and Land Plan and look at reduction opportunities, there are lots of things we need to consider, such as how drought affects emissions, maintaining agricultural productivity, building workforce capacity in the sector. Innovation, supply chain resilience and what's practical, useful and possible, just to name a few. I echo Minister Watt's sentiments earlier on the importance of both government and industry taking a lead in this space, and we plan to publicly seek views on the role agriculture and the land can play in the emissions reduction conversation.

And as part of this conversation, we're going to ask questions because to be frank, we've got more questions than answers. We're interested in your information, views and comments. What will make the biggest difference in terms of enabling emissions reductions? What opportunities might there be? But more importantly, or importantly, what are some of the challenges we need to work through and overcome? In asking these questions, we're going to recognise that First Nations people hold considerable knowledge and expertise in land management.

Critically, the plan will explore an achievable pathway for the agriculture sector to reduce emissions and store carbon. It needs to be robust, ambitious and like I said, achievable. It should be informed by the extensive work that's already been undertaken by our RDCs, industry bodies and others. It should also be informed by the sector's emission reduction potential, as well as other factors like production, social, regional and market realities.

Of course, there will be different views on the potential opportunities and challenges, influenced by a certain set of goals, production, outlook and the likelihood of limited or more widespread uptake of lower emission production technologies and practices. Every area of agriculture contributes emissions, so understanding the opportunities and constraints in livestock, cropping, hort or fuel and energy supply chain management, for example, will be a part of the discussion.

Governments overseas are developing sustainability policies as we've had to deliver on the goals of the Paris Agreement or their own objectives. While policy in relation to agriculture and the land is still developing, it is reasonable to expect that any new requirements will flow through to Australia's export-oriented agriculture sector. Globally, Australia wants to play a part, but we need to ensure that reducing emissions or meeting sustainability requirements, doesn't threaten food production and security.

The background context is critical in this regard, because Australian producers are comparatively from an emissions reduction perspective. As part of the pathway, development and work, what role do we play in supplying less emissions intensive food and fibre into global markets? We're not yet seeing enough consumer and business demand to substantially influence practices or decision making on a larger scale, but we know it will come.

This then flows into another consideration, about how we think about domestic and international opportunities and the trade off, about the use of land for carbon storage. Being able to demonstrate emissions reduction will add value to our sustainable agricultural credentials, when maintaining and increasing international market access. As Tony has already flagged, the Government is partnering with the industry to develop sustainability credentials, including around emissions information in the future.

And the good news is, as you know, Australia has strong sustainability credentials compared to other significant agricultural producers around the world. We're better than most at what we do, but to be honest, sustainability reporting can be complex and time consuming. It's important for Australia to effectively communicate these credentials and continue to build on our strong foundation. Based on our research today, opportunities for action fall under generally, 3 broad themes: driving innovation, building capacity and ensuring a system can change. We know there are a number of mature and emerging technologies, practices and other measures that could help manage the impacts of climate change, reduce emissions or increase carbon stores. But, there is a lack of sufficient local evidence that can make it hard to demonstrate the efficacy and viability of practices and technologies at scale.

While uncertainty is an inherent part of innovation, sometimes adoption can be slow without proven success stories, without proof. Trialling solutions at a commercial scale, for example, minimising the risk and demonstrating cost neutrality or profitability, will encourage uptake. It's also important to explore alternative and emerging management practices, including First Nations Traditional Knowledge. But, delivering emission reductions and expanding carbon storage across agriculture and the land will need more than just investment from government and industry. It will also require significant investment by the private sector.

Reducing risk and lowering the cost of capital can help stimulate that investment, including on farm and in the research, development and commercialisation of technologies and practices. This then raises the question of where the government's focus should be in this pathway development. That is, where should we be investing?

The climate agenda is a fairly busy space. There is a lot of information, activities and programs out there. I don't know about you, but there are quite a few carbon calculators out there. For example, our state and territory colleagues, industry groups, local Landcare and sustainable Ag facilitators and more are operating in this space. We've seen impressive practices, from a number of farmers, that perhaps we should look to expand.

Lastly, with a fair bit of time left, I want to acknowledge that I only touched on a small part the climate issue here today. There is so much more to this. As we've heard at various points throughout the day. Impacts, data, extension and deployment skills, training, workforce, community resilience, wellbeing, and more. So I ask that when we come out to you with questions about agriculture's role in a lower emissions world, that you share your experiences, your information and advice. Because there are going to be some pretty tricky questions, some pretty big problems that we need to work through.

And as I'm sure you have since realised, we don't necessarily have all the answers. Thank you.

Oli Le Lievre [02:13:22]:

We're on track to finish early. Thank you. I think one thing I constantly think about when it comes to the role of this, the low emissions future I guess we live in, I think, like I often think of agriculture in our communities and we are such a humble bunch, but the world does crave leadership when it comes into these spaces. And I think as we've heard, it's going to come down to facts and evidence to underpin that. But actually, as a humble bunch, we can actually step forward into a really interesting time of leadership for our sector and society more broadly. And I think the non-negotiable in this is people need to eat.

And so I think it's not a us or them kind of thing. It's actually, how do we step forward with the data, with the science behind us and actually communicate that to people and probably, not swallow our pride, but step forward and say this is where we're going, and we're making sure that we're going to feed people and clothe them in ways which is socially responsible, environmentally responsible, and actually for Australia's future as well, and I think it is really exciting, so thank you both for sharing on that.

Now I'd like to welcome Dan Rae. He's a local here in Rocky. He's the acting partnerships leader in Climate Mate for Fitzroy. Dan is going to be chairing our panel, which is around climate and sustainability. Welcome, Dan.

Dan Rae [02:14:48]:

Thanks, Oli. I do want to just acknowledge around the Climate Mate and Fitzroy Basin Association, it's a whole team effort. There's a couple of us here today, but plenty more that are actually out on properties and visiting around the region right now. I would also like to acknowledge David Coburn, Climate Mate, he is the extension part of the Northern Australia Climate Program, and I'd like to just pay my respects to David who is here as well. I might actually ask our 3 panellists if they'd like to come and join me up on stage.

So, we're going to get to the panel discussion part. I think Tony and Nadia set it up really well. We've heard about what's coming this this framework and we've heard a lot about the wicked problems, I guess. But I'm also going to steal a little bit from Oli, and it's about storytelling. And that's what we're going to do this afternoon, is actually tell some stories about producers and people who do work with the land and how they are facing climate change and what they've done to improve those things.

You'll see up on the screens at the moment, there's a hashtag up there. If you scan that, I believe it'll take you to Slido, which is a little platform that enables you to ask some questions. However, there will also be, later on, some of the staff getting around with hand-held microphones. So feel free to go old school and just put your hand up. As an ex-school teacher, I'm quite well aware of spotting the hands up in the back of the room and also who's not listening.

So, alright, so we've got 3 wonderful speakers that are part of the panel this afternoon. First of all, Melinee Leather from Barfield Road Producers Group. And those of you who were in the Not the Usual Suspects session next door will recognise Melinee from part of the dynamic Melinee duo that presented earlier today.

I also have to say, Melinee, I'm not sure if anyone down Barfield rode last Tuesday was worried about the tourist in the Triton with a couple of swags on top that was weirdly driving down your road, but

that was just me and the kids were coming back from a camping trip with me, and they dared me to find as much dirt road between Theodore and Rockhampton, so I had to put a bit of local knowledge in.

I also have an apology from your program. I had a little change up so I'd actually like to welcome Josh Gilbert, some of you that were in this session before lunch. Josh chaired the session here. He's a Worimi man who lives and works on Country as a senior researcher at the UTS Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, and he's completing his PhD through Charles Sturt University. And also, a welcome to Caitlin McConnel, Senior Associate, agriculture and food and natural capital markets with Clayton Utz, but also importantly, a farmer, from Chris Station down in south east Queensland. So welcome.

So I'm going to kick off with a couple of questions and we'll work our way along the panel and then we'll open it up to the floor for some more questions. So the first one is a bit of a 2-parter. Have you noticed the effects of climate change on your property and what have you seen? And secondly, what are some of the changes that you've made on your farm as a result of those, to respond to that climate change generally? When I go fight over left or right? Caitlin, you can relate to something.

Caitlin McConnel [02:18:12]:

First cab off the rank. Good afternoon, everyone. It's an absolute pleasure to be here and join you in Rocky for this very important discussion. In the context of this, I think I'm in a very unique position in the sense that my family have been on our property since 1841, so 182 years, and have absolutely seen the impact that climate change has had on our operations.

I just want to touch on a quote that Dr. Maru mentioned today, that we experience the consequences of decisions made by others in historical decision contexts. My family are living the ramifications of my great, great, great grandfather not listening to the Dungibara People when he asked them whether or not the floodwaters met where he was going to build a house. They absolutely do and every major flood comes through our homestead and has since 1893.

In the context of a changing climate, I like to try and think I'm not the problem, but the instances of natural disasters have increased on our property really since my birth. So the 150 years before I was born, we had 3 major floods and really, if you look at it in the context, 3 significant droughts. In my 33 years, we've had 4 significant floods which have come into the homestead and we now have far greater impacts associated with drought. And just comparatively normally, you know, the 150 year swings would be, you know, the peaks and troughs of looking at those climate impacts. Last year was our second wettest year on record on farm. If we don't have 3 inches of rain between now and Christmas this year will be one of the driest in 182 years. So the change that has occurred in an 18 month period is extraordinary and obviously impacts the decisions that we make in respect of climate.

To that end, I'll touch on what changes have we made, and I really think in the first instance, and a lot of my contemporaries can share this, is I was told not to be a farmer when I was growing up and I've been doing everything I can to elbow my way back to the farm since my early twenties.

But one of the changes that we have had to make, and I think witnessing, growing up on a family property where we were a dairy property when I was born, deregulation of the industry really put a

dampener on the farm gate price of milk, but also our longevity in the industry, but also the millennium drought. So I was already aware of the need to have an outside source of income and diversification of, not only commodities on farm, but also outside skill sets.

So as a result of that, since 2000, we've gone from our property supporting 3 families, to now just supporting my parents. And we are subsidising really what we do with my off-farm income as a lawyer. The change in commodity and I guess again, coming to the context of climate, the decisions that fortunately my dad has made over the last 30 years, in order to really drive for that diversification of income, by default, I guess, and the way in which we managed our property with the dairy, we've moved to self-grazing operation and that's helped us with our beef cattle operation.

But he was an early adopter of agri-voltaics. So since 2010 we've had over 100 kilowatts of solar on our property and he worked with the engineers to actually ensure that the solar trackers that we put in enable livestock grazing underneath our trackers, which is extraordinary. That was first and foremost for a diversification of income, and then unexpectedly now, it's going to assist us in terms of really meeting our disclosure obligations, but also the way in which we business now and offsetting those costs.

So they're sort of, I guess, the tangible changes that we've made and what we've seen and. Yeah, it's extraordinary to think, you know, looking at again, that historical context, what has happened in the past, and it's important we learn from that, but also making sure where we're going over and above, not just what we're doing on-ground, but also off farm to make sure we're mitigating those impacts.

Melinee Leather [02:23:00]:

Yeah, Good. Thanks, everyone. It is such a pleasure to be here today and listen to all of the interesting speakers and get an opportunity to talk about this really important topic. In our time in business, with a family cattle property here in central Queensland, we're running about 5000 head across 3 different properties, so, and over the last 35 years we've seen a number of obviously droughts, floods and fires.

So, you know, definitely we're noticing that it's getting hotter and drier. So we've really had to decide how we're going to adapt to that. And I think for us it's an accumulation of different projects and different things that we've been trying. And I think, you know, for all of us, that's something we're going to have to consider, that it's not just one thing that will help this situation.

So in terms of land management, we've found the introduction of legumes, particularly, and Bron will be happy to hear about this one, but the leucaena, desmanthus, things like that. So you know, things like that give us multiple benefits. So we're not only getting emissions reduction from our cattle, but we're getting better water retention in our soils, a decrease in erosion and better sequestration rates.

So looking at land management is really important. Rotational grazing, you know anything that we can do to improve groundcover, measuring and monitoring. So we're really lucky, we've got a lot of tools and technology and Cibo Labs is something that we lean heavily on for grass budgets and ground cover monitoring. And I think MLA is doing some really good work in that all producers have that available to them through the feed base monitor. So, you know, I think as we've got to embrace technology and use what's available to us, constantly aware that we've got to measure, monitor and

record to be able to, you know, not only influence the decisions we make within our business, but really to tell our story to the people we're marketing our product to as well.

And I think Tony touched on it nicely today with the with the sustainability framework that you guys are working on. I've heavily been involved with the Australian beef sustainability framework. So of course that's my priority as a beef producer, but it's important that we've got an agriculture one as well. So and you know, things like the SDGs and science-based targets are all important for us to be looking at as producers on ground as well.

So yeah, and as I said, a number of projects, we're looking at soil carbon projects on Barfield, we're doing projects with the federal government on remnant veg, planting trees, you know, I think it's just something where we've got to keep trying, measuring and monitoring, and working out what's going to be the best suit for our business now and our animals.

Josh Gilbert [02:26:12]

Hi, everyone. Thanks for the opportunity to have a yarn. So for those I haven't met I'm Josh, I'm a Worimi man, our family has been on Worimi country for 60,000 plus years. My aunt keeps in her handbag a book that says of where our family had the first recorded birth in a cave in the mountains just out of town where I live, and for me, the greatest joy of being on country and living and working from home is the opportunity to think about, what is farming going to look like for the next 60,000 years at home? We know our records have been kept for about 200 years because there is a big agriculture company, AA Co., that basically got gifted our land 200 years ago and because it was a public company, all of their records got kept. On our country, it took about 15 years before the early colonisers at that time started reflecting to say we're doing something wrong on this country. They reflected that they were doing something wrong, but they didn't actually remedy that by asking Mob about, well, what they should be doing and how they could remedy that. But for me, it's a bit of a learning that, you know, you can see what might be happening on this country, but we just need to have the ability to have a yarn about it and talk about it and learn from each other.

So it's a great privilege for me to be on country and to keep working from that and to think about that dream of, you know, my kids and for the next generations to keep coming and farming on that land. But I'm really mindful of, you know, the seasons that we've just had. So we've come through a period of, one of the worst droughts, certainly my grandparents, who are still around, have ever seen. My great grandparents were still around when I was young and it would have been one of the worst I think they would have seen if they had been around. Then just to, you know, change things up a bit. We had a few bushfires, moving a lot of stock and challenging times.

We had 2 pretty quick succession floods that came across our property and you know, we're going back into drought now. So I guess for me that learning is well, I think that the long term plan of what does the next 60,000 years on this place look like? In the back of my mind, like I don't even know what this year is going to look like.

So I think just being really mindful of what some of those learnings and practices could be and thinking about the environment in terms of that broad landscape. I was also really lucky to learn from some of my elders, back, sitting on the page and listening to their yarns of back when the ocean was

127-ish kilometres from where it currently sits, and learning from them about the stories of what happened in those large big climate change events, that mould the landscape to how it is today.

And that's really interesting just to reflect back on, to say, well, you know, what does that future look like when that was the impacts of the past? I was pretty lucky. My as my great grandparents were around. My great grandfather made this decision back in these early times of farming to bring Brahman cattle down to where I live in Gloucester, which definitely didn't make sense back then.

It was a bit of a challenging conversation, even we were trying to sell cattle back a few years ago. But now with the impacts of climate change, we know that people are looking towards that where we are, which is really quite fascinating me to see how that market's moved and shifted. We know the impacts of climate change pretty broadly that, you know, obviously that the way in which the condition of the ground is very different, but you know, in terms of livestock, we're going to have more pests and diseases, we're going to have more stresses on our cattle. And that's something we're certainly mindful of when we think about what our operation looks like now and into the future. Probably the last quick thing I'll just say, and this is one of the really mindful things, one of the things I'm most mindful of is that we tell our story and that we can't continue having consumer social license, I guess, to operate.

And, you know, climate change is one of those elements. But there are there are a raft of others and telling our story around what we do, why we've gone down different paths and why we're so fiercely proud, what we do and what we think the future needs to look like is because we know that what's happening has been working.

Ten years ago, when I started getting involved in these spaces just mentioning the words climate change is enough to probably make the whole room shudder and for half the room to leave. So it's really interesting that right now in this environment where that's just okay and people understand that. And so I think, the more stories we can tell, the more social license we build, I think we have a lot more opportunities to continue broadening out our connection with our consumers.

And that in part is going to mean that we can continue feeding our populations not just now, but into the future. Thank you.

Dan Rae [02:31:15]:

And I think it's important to pick up on that, that positive of how the conversation has evolved. I think today especially, we can get bogged down in the wicked problem. But talking about some of those changes that you've made on farm and Mel, I might start with you. What are some of the benefits that you've seen to those on the farm changes? And in the second part I'll say to that is not just productivity or meeting those ticking those boxes, but what have been some of the unexpected benefits that have come out of it?

Melinee Leather [02:31:45]:

Yeah, sure. Look, and there's different things from different projects, right. And I'll just touch on a couple of the ones that we've been working on, in particular at Barfield, so that's situated between Banana and Theodore and that is linking remnant vegetation with tree planting and most of our neighbours thought we had lost the plot. Planting trees in central Queensland is fairly challenging at

the best of times, let alone trying to do it in quite large areas on, you know, expansive beef properties. So look at our first planting we had a 50% file rate. So it's just so hot and dry and it's a difficult thing to undertake. But working with people like the Fitzroy Basin Association, it took that, it gave us the confidence to have a go. And I think that's where, you know, a lot of these things, it just takes someone to have a crack at it, right, and then we can learn from there.

And obviously that first planting where we lost 50% of the trees, we learnt how to plant them better, we learned how to plant a little bit deeper, add mulch, you know, a lot more robust tree guards and things like that. We're not seeing a lot of benefits from that project yet, but we know in the future that we're going to, we know that we're going to have better shade for our trees, we're going to improve on our biodiversity with our plants and animals that are there on Barfield.

So at the moment we've just finished soil sampling for our emissions reduction projects, soil carbon project, and I think that we haven't got the results back yet. But once again, that's going to be a really exciting project in terms of, we aren't intending to sell carbon credits from our property, but we want to be prepared when the market demands that all of us, and Tony touched on it earlier, you know, we're responsible for the scope 3 emissions.

So how are we going to manage that going forward? And we want to start to put plans in place now. So obviously some of the things we're doing, it's a long-term gain, I think. Certainly, things we're seeing immediate gain is the things like planting leucaena and the legumes, where we know we're going to get reduction in emissions from our cattle that are grazing on that, we know that we're getting increased productivity gains, we know that we're getting better soil moisture retention and sequestration from that woody growth. So, I think, you know, some of these things, there's not that immediate gain, but like I said, that long term gain, understanding what our markets are demanding of us in the future.

And, you know, I think, once again, we've just got to trial these things. We've got to be brave enough to have a go and. Then we've got to be willing to share that information widely so that we can get really good uptake.

Dan Rae [02:34:37]:

Thank you. And Caitlin, some of the changes that you talked about on farm, what have you seen as the benefits of making those changes? And again, maybe some of the unexpected outcomes?

Caitlin McConnel [02:34:51]:

So, in terms of the changes that have been made, really the benefits that we're seeing now have been by accident, in the sense that the way in which we graze our property and manage our property and have for decades now emulates what was traditionally done with the dairy cattle. So, we traditionally, and have for decades, utilised strip grazing, cell grazing practices and making sure that our water infrastructure is such that we didn't have our dairy cattle walking significant areas in order to get water, particularly summer.

So what we've seen now is obviously and comparatively, you know, we look across the neighbours' fences as well, we still have significant body of feed coming into now what is almost one of our driest periods. And we're not in a situation at the moment where we're going to have to start offloading. So

just by, I guess, by accident and by default, we, by emulating those traditional practices and no longer using synthetic fertilisers, because we're no longer growing lucerne purely for the dairy, we're actually seeing diversification of wildlife and biodiversity.

So we're seeing some native grasses starting to come back, which, through inter-generational knowledge, and we're still very fortunate to work closely with the Dungibara People who are still in the region, recognising that native species are coming back on our property that haven't been seen in generations, which is extraordinary. In terms of the benefit from agri-voltaics, we are not only seeing the diversification of income and realistically it comes to the discussion point we've seen today.

Our family are receiving more income from our solar than we are from our commodities at the moment. And one of the key discussions that I'm having not only on farm but also as my role as a lawyer, is how we are encouraging primary producers or how can we encourage primary producers to continue to grow food and fibre when the reality is, it's far more lucrative to receive income either from emerging natural capital markets or ongoing carbon markets or renewable energies.

So that's sort of, I think, a discussion for another time. But, we've seen utilising that does help and certainly has helped with some of our management as well. But an interesting space nonetheless.

Dan Rae [02:37:36]:

Wonderful. It's amazing the diversity that starts to come back when we give it a chance and work with it rather than against it. Josh, you touched on looking forward, in fact, looking a long way forward. But even, maybe even just in our lifetime, what do you see as the future of agriculture under the, you know, changing climate, and a little bit about how you think we can make that happen? Yeah. So big question I know.

Josh Gilbert [02:38:05]:

Yeah. And I'm also mindful of that question as well and I'll try and take both, but, essentially if I unleash the academic me, which is very dangerous because I'm definitely not an academic, but just some stats, I think that's worthwhile noting. So about 60% of Australia is owned by Indigenous people through Western legal systems. As you know, roughly 60%, ownership is its own term, which is a bit of a challenge to grapple with. But under the current kind of regime and legislative provisions that we have here, 60%, around 60% of Australia is owned by First Nations people and our Closing the Gap target has an extra 15% increase in that, which is a pretty interesting space when we consider about 3.8% of First Nations people own, could own up to 75% of Australia's landmass.

And yet we have only 2.1% of Indigenous people that actually work in the Ag sector, and only less than 5, like the number 5, agricultural graduates graduating from every university in Australia that identifies as Indigenous. So there's some huge fundamental gaps I think around what that kind of transformation or the kind of shift that needs to take place when we think about that relationship. I think for me, Mob have a lot of the answers, they have the stories and the connections to this place that I was all this all this time that, you know, 60,000 years and I often say, if we have 60,000 years of Indigenous knowledge sitting in the library, we'd be pretty remiss not to go and at least open the book and have a look at it and have a yarn.

And for me, that's a huge missed opportunity that, you know, we have the recent BOM data and other things like that that kind of indicate whether, what the next seasons are going to be and I understand climate change is impacting landscapes quicker than what we might be able to keep up with, but it seems remiss to me so I think to me that we haven't gone back and said that 60,000 years of knowledge, hey, can we just actually understand what happened here?

Can we have that perspective so that we can help build that into our models going forward? I think, so all of that basically means that we need to fundamentally get a workforce of Indigenous people who are active, who have the knowledge in their local community, and who we can activate to work on their own country or country that's used by agriculture that Indigenous people are in so that we can help provide and continue feeding our population forward.

And that will provide a lot of standing benefits when we think about what the sustainability and environmental credentials of this place will look like.

Dan Rae [02:41:02]:

Thank you and I might leave the future question ladies, to maybe a wrap up point because I'm going to pick up one of the first questions coming through on the Slido, which goes on the back of what you've just said Josh, but if there's anything you can add around, how can Australian agriculture improve the, I guess, the historic ignorance, I guess, of First Nations knowledge? How do we go about getting those perspectives on taking care of country?

Josh [02:41:26]:

Yeah, so the first one I often figure is just get involved. Might inviting Mob in and just having the conversation. So the demographic data around graduates at university is a huge missed opportunity, yeah? Fundamentally we need to build social license not only just in the environmental sphere but into the diversity sphere as well. And I said in my earlier session, on farms, we need to start thinking about diversity in terms of what we're producing, but think about the people who are doing it. So we actually need diverse people who are out there doing that and have diverse leadership across our sectors as well.

Dan Rae [02:42:02]:

Thank you. Does anyone else want to add anything along that line? Yeah, ah yep. Have we got a microphone down the front here? Sorry. Just so everyone can hear.

Suzanne Thompson [02:42:22]:

Just wanted to follow on from what Josh was saying. So managing a 22 and a half thousand acre property in the Desert Uplands region and central western Queensland and doing a HIR carbon project, also looking at doing, you know, the alternative income streams and stuff but given the opportunity to be a land holder, and to realise the opportunity to reassert our identity and connection back to country is very valuable for our region, and I know our neighbourhood. And I know one of the things that our neighbours in the desert uplands region are watching and observing when we actually are starting to do the cool burning, because we started to introduce cool burning and observing, because we know that when we cool burn a particular paddock after 30 mms of rain in

February, it gave us ground cover and herbage. When we did the same paddock on the opposite side of the road in October, it gave us all the native grasses.

And then as we watched the regime and watching the soils and watching that. And so, is that opportunity for First Nations peoples, to be able to come back and reengage with the very country that they, I suppose, had in preparedness for when all the other fellows arrived?

Dan Rae [02:43:32]:

Thank you. Alright, we've got some more questions coming in is fantastic. Caitlin, I'm going to throw this one to you, as a, I guess whether by accident or not, an early adopter in sustainability. Do you think that the message, regulation is coming for you, is a wakeup call to get farmers to take action, or do you think it will create defensive attitudes?

Caitlin [02:43:54]:

Good question. And I certainly think that this is where there is a significant gap in the market, not only for the knowledge piece for primary producers, but also for industry generally. The way I approach this, in the sense that, and I think this certainly comes to the point of, you know, how do we look at agriculture sector generally and how do we include Indigenous Australians as part of that knowledge base, and the reality is, yes, regulation is coming, but I think we need to fundamentally shift the way in which we look at the agriculture sector, in order to consider that as a question.

And the way in which I approach it, in the first instance, why is there an agriculture sector? And it is because we produce food and fibre. And to my mind, we're in a situation, we've got an ongoing food security inquiry here in Australia. We have one in 6 Australians nationally suffering food insecurity weekly and we have really, lost our connection to food as an integral part of our culture and our day to day.

And the context that I look at it, and in terms of rather than, you know, getting your back up as a primary producer that we have to start looking at disclosure related obligations or embrace these natural capital opportunities or investment, is that yes, it is coming, but we also have to make sure we're balancing it in the context of our ability to produce food and fibre. Because it's all well and good to achieve net zero, and we've now got our legally enshrined targets and that will and is filtering down to a business level, but to what extent are we then achieving net zero to the detriment of our ability to produce food and fibre and look after nature generally? So how do we bridge that gap and how do we ensure backs don't get up?

These are considerations that need to be had. It is a fundamental shift in the way farmers do business, but also investor, community and governments generally approach this issue. And to my mind, the only way in which we're going to have effective and tangible change is if we make sure that there is an opportunity and space for every player to be at the table in a safe and collaborative environment to make sure that these solutions are in the best interests, everyone, and not just either the ESG investor, or our legally enshrined target or the ability of our producers to tick the boxes as well.

Dan Rae [02:46:49]:

Very good. And running with that, and I'm asking the panel, but I might start with you Mel, because you did mention about the carbon project on your place. What's your view on carbon offset offsetting versus in-setting policies?

Melinee Leather [02:47:05]:

Look, I think there's opportunity there too for us to diversify income, but I think we've got to be very cautious in offsetting any of our credits. I think for us, for our own family business, we're only considering in-setting at this stage, because I think our markets will demand that we, and as you know, trying to meet scope 3 emissions, all of these things coming at us, we're going to have to be able to use our credits to basically sell our product. And I'm specifically talking about the beef industry here. You know, our scope 3 emissions are quite big, even with our financing, you know, it's not just where we're selling our product to, but all of the people that service us as well in regards to financing and things like that. So, I think it's going to be really important for us not to go selling off all our credits and leave ourselves basically hanging out to dry.

We're probably going to need them ourselves, and I think it'll be important that we use in-setting rather than offsetting. I think on a global scale, Australia's really well positioned. I think the work that we're doing around sustainability exceeds most other countries, and I think it's something we to be really proud of. We just have to be careful to manage these markets in the future.

Dan Rae [02:48:33]:

Anyone else want to jump on those? Now I'm conscious of time, is there anyone maybe who didn't scan the QR code who wanted to ask a question off the floor if they could quickly raise a hand? Otherwise, we're going to get some final thoughts from each of the panellists. Help us out. Alright, so I might just ask, and I am conscious that we are between, you know, everybody and the end of the day and perhaps an extra cup of tea or a lemonade.

So, could we go, we might start your end Josh. Now you've got to take your academic hat off here because it says on the screen, 30 second wrap up. But could we get a final thought or observation or something else that you'd like to add to this topic? Climate change and adaptation and sustainability discussion we've had?

Josh Gilbert [02:49:23]

Yeah, I think we've had a great start in Australia, there's a lot of work to be done, and it makes a lot of sense to me that we're including First Nations people in the conversation.

Dan Rae [02:49:35]:

Well done. Mel, a final thought?

Melinee Leather [02:49:39]:

Yeah, look, as I said before, I think agriculture's in a really good position. We're doing some really good work when we look at what's happening globally. I think we need to maintain being proud of what we do, be transparent in what we do, be willing to measure, monitor, record and share our

information. And you know, we've got a great future ahead of us. We can supply clean, green food to the world, and we need to do that in the most sustainable way that we can.

Dan Rae [02:50:10]:

Perfect. Thank you very much. And Caitlin?

Caitlin McConnel [02:50:17]

We are here, obviously to discuss drought, but I would encourage everyone as a final thought, the way in which we approached have issues including drought or climate and sustainability or issues in education and health care sector is traditionally to look at it in the silos of industry or government.

And in my view, I think what we ultimately need to do is come out of our silos, obviously utilising the knowledge we have, but come back to, what is the fundamental basis and human right, and that is to food. And the reality is, we can't tangibly create solutions to either drought policy, climate policy, education, health care, even, you know, you look at the Attorneys General department and the like, without having regard to the food and fibre that we're producing, the food and fibre that we are eating and the impact that that has on our day-to-day lives.

Dan Rae [02:51:12]:

Wonderful. Thank you very much. And I think that's a fantastic way to wrap up. I know at the end of these days it's a lot of talking and a lot of concentrating and listening and we can kind of start to fade off at the end. But hopefully hearing some of these stories about what's really happening on the ground and the excitement, I think is the thing that keeps coming through. So hopefully we bound out of here with a bit of enthusiasm about the excitement ahead and not too worried about the challenges. So once again, can you join me in thanking our 3 panellists? And to wrap up the afternoon, I'm going to hand back over to Oli.

Oli Le Lievre [02:51:56]:

So thanks very much Dan. We better give you a round of applause too. So, just before I invite Mel Brown up, I just I'll share a little story while I've got the microphone. I think today there's been some really fantastic discussions and it's worth acknowledging that this is just the continually evolving space that we're in. But I want to share a story because it's something that we all just say is normal now and how quickly things actually just become normal in our lives.

And so, when I was in year 9, it was 2007, which is actually quite a long time ago now, 2007. And it was the year that the iPhone was invented. And I was chatting to my careers advisor and some mates and I was asking, well what is the future in agriculture? Because to me, as a 15-year-old and to them, like, agriculture just seemed like it was farming. And I think if we think of what's happened in the evolution of that time today, we're using the iPhone to communicate with people. We're creating connections with people no matter where they are in the globe in instances, we're going to use it to validate and capture data and insights that we're going to use. And in 2016 I joined an Agtech startup and we were utilising the iPhone, that was only invented ten odd years before, and it was to capture data on farm, to help farmers manage their on farm decision making, but then actually provide that information through the supply chain.

And so I think what we take for granted as being just normal now, the speed of change and the discussions that we actually have today, we'll probably look back in several years' time and just go, well actually like, why weren't we always doing that? And I think in agriculture, as Josh and many others have shared today, we've got so much knowledge in First Nations Australians have been captured over tens of thousands of years and I think it's how do we grab all that information but continue to go, well, how does that shape us into being a better sector, into the future? So, to wrap everything up today, I'd like to welcome back Mel Brown. The stage is yours.

Mel Brown [02:54:01]:

Hi everyone. So I just want to thank you all for coming. I think it's been a great day and I know it's been a lot of time that you've taken out from your day-to-day business, working on your farms, etc. But I just want to say I really appreciate it, as does the team. We've got a lot out of it. So, some key highlights that I've taken away from today are the need to come together.

I think that's been a really key theme that's been coming across. That now is the time to really collaborate and just picking up on Caitlin's point around remove the silos. And I think that's a really genuine, clear point that we need to do. And that's government, industry stakeholders, really working closely on just remove those silos and share the information from our learnings. I think we need to also note, we've got a lot of work ahead of us.

That's pretty clear from today. There's a lot of work we need to do not only as government but as industry groups and working together. We've got the \$400 million next 4-year FDF fund that we should all work together to actually develop it and make sure that it's really useful, in terms of what we're implementing and getting the best value for money.

As I mentioned earlier today, this is just the beginning of the conversation, and we have further conversations planned later this year. So early next year, on the draft drought resilience funding plan. We've got the Future Drought Fund and the Australian Government Drought Plan. So, we've got quite a lot of work to do, but we want to work with you to actually deliver that and move forward.

I'd also like to highlight the National Drought Network, which was a topic of one of our workshops today and thank you to those people that attended that and had some really valuable discussions. So we really need to stay better connected. We're establishing a network to meet every 6 months or more if needed, and we'll be guided by all of you on that, to give everyone an opportunity to hear and share information relating to drought policy and programs.

If we act now, we can work together to build a network which helps these information flows and contributes towards Australia's capacity to withstand drought. So, I want to thank you for attending the Forum today and I hope you got as much out of it as I did. I think it was great, it was pretty great having the Treasurer, the Minister, Minister Furner to attend, and actually discuss today.

It just shows the importance that they see, and the importance that they put on all of this work that we're trying to do and work together. So, I'll wrap up and happy to have conversations with you all after this. But I would ask that you all take a muffin for the road because there's quite a lot out the back there. So thank you and I look forward to engaging with you all and engaging with you all throughout the next 12 months. Thanks.

Oli Le Lievre [02:56:52]:

Thanks Mel, and just a couple of quick ones. I just want to, on behalf of everyone here, thank the whole DAFF team. I know so much work has gone into this. So, thank you to all of you.

As the Australian Rural Leadership Program taught, me feedback is a gift. If you can please provide feedback that will help everyone moving forward. So there is a QR code on your table, or there will be a survey in the days to come. For those of you who are attending the site visits tomorrow morning, can you meet out the front here at 8.00a.m. for an 8.15 sharp departure.

And once again, thank you everyone, for coming. Thank you to the Department, thank you to the NFF for putting on today and make sure you travel safe, and we'll see you next time. Thank you.

[Recording ends]

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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