

Scholarship Program Summary Report



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Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry



Future
Drought
Fund



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TNQ
Drought Hub

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Context

This report outlines the purpose, delivery model, outputs, and outcomes of the TNQ Drought Hub Honours Scholarships Program, administered under the Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub. The program contributes to Australian Government objectives relating to drought resilience, agricultural productivity, regional capacity building, and innovation adoption in Northern Queensland.

Program Overview

The TNQ Drought Hub Honours Scholarships Program supports regionally focused, applied research addressing drought and climate resilience challenges in Tropical North Queensland. The program funds post graduate level research projects aligned to Hub priorities and delivers both tangible research outputs and human capital development outcomes. From 2023 to 2026 inclusively the program supported 25 Honours scholarships, delivered in partnership with James Cook University.

Program Objectives

The program contributes to industry focused objectives by:

1. Generating applied research and practical knowledge relevant to agriculture and allied sectors
2. Increasing research and innovation capacity in regional and northern Queensland
3. Supporting drought preparedness, adaptation, and resilience at enterprise, landscape, and community scales
4. Strengthening future workforce capability in agriculture, natural resource management, policy, and regional development
5. Supporting culturally appropriate and economically viable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agricultural enterprises.

Program Scope and Eligibility

The target cohort was primarily Honours-level postgraduate students undertaking regionally relevant research associated with drought resilience and climate adaptation. 25 students from James Cook University were successful in being awarded a scholarship. Invites were also extended to other TNQ Drought Hub partner universities. Full-time students received \$5,000.00 and part-time students \$2,500.00 for the successful delivery of two milestones capturing the key research findings and the practical application from the research undertaken to assist in the provision of extension services.

Program Activities

Funded activities include:

- Student-led research projects aligned to TNQ Drought Hub priority areas
- Structured milestone reporting aligned to industry and Hub information needs
- Industry presentations facilitated by the TNQ Drought Hub to support knowledge transfer and adoption
- Engagement with regional stakeholders to ensure applied relevance.

Priority Research Areas

All funded projects align with one or more of the following TNQ Drought Hub strategic priorities:

1. Drought and climate change adaptation
2. Land management
3. Innovation and technology
4. Skills and capacity building
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agricultural enterprise.

Outputs

Research Outputs

Across the reporting period, funded projects delivered:

- Applied research outputs addressing drought impacts, climate variability, land condition, and enterprise resilience
- Methodological advancements supporting monitoring and assessment in large, remote northern landscapes
- Practical, adoption focused innovation outputs suitable for use by producers, advisors, and regional stakeholders.

Outcomes

The program contributed to:

- Improved availability of regionally specific, applied research relevant to Tropical North Queensland
- Enhanced decision-making capability for producers and regional stakeholders through actionable insights
- Strengthened linkages between emerging researchers, industry, and community stakeholders
- Development of applied research, engagement, and knowledge translation skills among post graduate students
- Increased regional research capacity and graduate pathways into agriculture, natural resource management, policy, and regional development roles
- Positioning students as emerging regional professionals rather than solely academic researchers.

The Hub conducted a review of the scholarships program in late 2025, responses were overwhelmingly positive. At least three Hub students have stayed in the sector, one student ready to commence their PhD and two others in NRM / environmental services roles. The scholarship program was also credited with

enabling students to enact parts of their work program they would not have been able to do otherwise, such as adding extra field sites.

Priority Area Contributions

Drought and Climate Change Adaptation

Research improved understanding of climate variability and drought impacts on northern agricultural systems, with outputs supporting enterprise level preparedness, adaptive decision-making, and regional resilience planning.

Land Management

Projects addressed sustainable land use, erosion, and soil condition in northern rangelands, supporting evidence-based grazing and land management strategies aligned to productivity and environmental outcomes.

Innovation and Technology

Research focused on practical, adoptable technologies, including digital and spatial tools, improving monitoring efficiency, reducing costs, and supporting adaptive management during climate extremes.

Skills and Capacity Building

Human capacity development was embedded as a core outcome, with structured reporting and engagement activities designed to strengthen applied research and industry capability.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agricultural Enterprise

Research supported culturally appropriate and economically viable enterprise development, contributing to self-determination outcomes, protection of traditional knowledge, and improved market participation.

Program Characteristics

Across all funded activities, the program demonstrated:

- Strong regional specificity with a focus on Tropical North Queensland
- An applied and translational research approach
- Embedded industry and community engagement
- Alignment of research investment with workforce development objectives

Governance and Assurance

The TNQ Drought Hub administered the scholarships in accordance with Hub priorities and university requirements. Milestone reporting and industry presentations provided assurance that funded activities progressed as agreed and delivered outputs consistent with program objectives.

Program Contribution

The TNQ Drought Hub Scholarships Program operated as a targeted mechanism for translating public research investment into regional resilience outcomes. By integrating applied research with workforce development and industry engagement, the program contributes to long-term productivity, resilience, and capacity outcomes across Tropical North Queensland.