



NCCARF

National
Climate Change Adaptation
Research Facility
Adaptation Research Network
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS

**ADAPTATION
COLLEGE**

This is a submission to the Productivity Commission Public Enquiry 'Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation', commenting on the Issues Paper (October 2011).

This submission represents the collective views of the NCCARF Adaptation College. The Adaptation College is a group of early career individuals from Australian civil society, government, and research groups working in climate change adaptation. The aim of the group is to facilitate practical learning about the social dimensions of adaptation, and to build a lasting network of future leaders in climate adaptation. More information is available at: <http://www.nccarf.edu.au/social-economic-and-institutional-dimensions/>.

The views expressed here represent the agreed collective views of the authors for the purposes of this submission and do not necessarily represent the views of the institutions to which they are affiliated.

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Markets, and public and private goods

Locating 'adaptation' only within market based frameworks will lead to a situation where the adaptation responses considered will most often be 'physical', 'infrastructural', and 'technological' – i.e. those things that market can provide, rather than solutions that could be provided by the State or civil society. It also strongly suggests adaptation responses to protect private goods. This creates a narrow understanding of what people from a range of sectors can contribute to adaptation, and of what the goals of adaptation should be.

The risk of adopting purely infrastructural or technological solutions to climate adaptation is that it can lock communities and stakeholders into particular trajectories of change, and therefore decrease the potential for adaptive responses of diverse kinds. For deeper and sustained adaptation (behaviourally and culturally) broader socio-technical change will also be needed as well as different approaches to information provision and communication.

There is also a deeper question about the appropriate role for government in adaptation: to what extent should governments be supporting adaptation to sustain the provision of private as opposed to public goods? The providers of private goods could be expected to be primarily responsible for adaptation, although governments may need to assist them with the provision of information, and policy settings that encourage change. However, climate change poses risks to important public goods – such as ecosystem goods and services, social justice, and the health system. It is the *raison d'être* of governments to ensure the provision of public goods, and so adaptation that sustains the provision of these must be the primary focus of governments' efforts on adaptation. The extent to which market based instruments are effective policy instruments is yet to be determined, in many circumstances policy tools such as moral suasion, community engagement, and regulation may be the most efficient, effective, and equitable means of achieving adaptation.

Considering Communication, Information Provision and Other Barriers to Adaptation

We wish to make the following three broad comments on adaptation communication:

First, one-way information provision will not necessarily achieve the adaptation outcomes expected by governments and other sectors. Social science literature has shown that simply providing 'more information' does not lead to better decision making for a range of environmental outcomes, particularly if that information is of a generalised nature for a broad audience.

Second, talking to specific sectors and groups of stakeholders about their needs, and giving information and opportunities for knowledge exchange tailored to these needs, is an important evolution of current 'information provision' models. A barrier to adaptation could be the failure to provide targeted and relevant information to specific groups. To take an example, simply telling people more about climate science in order to motivate adaptation based change is unlikely to work in establishing adaptive outcomes.

Third, there is a difference between simple information provision (i.e., of different ways to save water) versus encouraging stakeholders to consider their own adaptive responses which will lead to more sustained change. For example, recent research has shown that simply giving people information about different ways to use water does not lead to the levels of longer term and sustained change as people who are encouraged to come up with their own ideas about different water using practices they could adopt in their everyday lives.

Diversity and vulnerability

Effective adaptation should be founded on an understanding of context-specific capacities and vulnerabilities, recognising the need to define a common understanding and articulate a common goal as to what 'effective' adaptation entails. The current Issues Paper does not discuss vulnerability or vulnerability assessment.

Economic, geographic, environmental and cultural diversity within Australia and associated differences in capacity means that one size fits all policy and market-based responses will not deliver effective adaptation. The Issues Paper notes that the impacts of climate change will vary across regions and sectors, and discusses the principles of subsidiarity and local governance as potential solutions (p. 21). However, it fails to examine questions of vulnerable individuals, communities and populations.

Any groups that have (for physical, cultural or financial reasons) limited mobility, limited access to information, limited access to social networks of support and connectivity, limited ability to understand received information (e.g., due to irrelevance of information or cultural barriers) and limited means to act on information presented to them will be those that are most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

An example of the impacts of these barriers to accessing relevant information, and a lack of ability to act on information presented is the example of Hurricane Katrina in the United States, where those most strongly affected by flooding were populations from areas of low socio-economic status, with limited individual and collective ability to act on information provided.

We recommend that the Productivity Commission strongly consider issues of equity in making their recommendations on implementation of a Commonwealth Government adaptation response. The overarching solution to addressing vulnerability will be an approach that is embedded within a framework of guiding principles and shared outcomes across all levels of government; within which roles, responsibilities and implementation expectations are clearly articulated and resourced to ensure an enabling environment.

This will necessarily involve strong planning guidelines, as well as community engagement, and participation from those groups who are most vulnerable to climate risks. Engagement and participation will need to span the full range from the problem identification to solution delivery.

Building Capacity and Identifying Co-Benefits of Adaptation

Vulnerability differs by geographic location, gender, financial status as well as a host of other factors (social, cultural, educational and financial capital). Therefore, capacity-building needs are also context specific and will be related to these different factors. Effective adaptation responses will not be found in a 'one size fits all' approach but should be diverse responses to the varied communities needs. This will need to be delivered via a coordinated framework which clearly articulates roles and responsibilities across the various spheres of government. There is also an opportunity to identify net-benefits and co-benefits of adaptation approaches.

For example, the notion that the greatest net benefit for the community should be selected as the appropriate policy response may result in further marginalisation of the most vulnerable. A focus on building adaptive capacity within vulnerable groups, and across diverse sectors of the community might require a different framing of 'net benefit', which may need to incorporate aspects of non-quantifiable benefit and / or co-benefits. Capacity building may have value not acknowledged within an economic framework, such as strengthening resilience (ability to cope with change in a positive way).

Behaviour change is about building adaptive capacity across all sectors of society including governments, communities, business / industry and individuals to enable positive and collaborative responses to managing risk to both public and private goods / assets. This might include building governance skills and local institutions (community based networks / organisations) to enable adaptation decision-making and learning, and to foster behaviour change. It might also include supporting the development and uptake of learning opportunities (e.g. knowledge uptake through social media, engagement with end-user driven research, community engagement processes, and leadership building).

If this Issues Paper has a view to informing the development of Commonwealth programs, policies and practices on climate change adaptation, there is also a need to understand which sphere of government is responsible for which aspects of adaptation policy / program implementation, and ensure that those agencies have capacity to deliver on those outcomes and expectations. For example, local government might be seen as an appropriate sphere of government to engage directly with community, particularly around necessary adaptation policy or implementation applied within a local context. However capacity within local governments, particularly those in areas of low socio-economic status, or remote communities, is often low. Many local governments have finite budgets and limited capacity to 'raise revenue' from additional rates and charges, and those budgets are allocated across a broad suite of services delivered to the community, many of which are statutory, essential, public good services and assets directly affected by climate change impacts. It is currently unclear as to how engagement to facilitate the development / implementation of community supported adaptation policy and practice might be delivered as local government must be able to access resourcing, both human and financial, to facilitate the development of capacity in this area.

Adaptation is necessarily an ongoing process. The capacity of Australia to implement adaptation responses into the future requires an investment in the development of skills of younger people who will be the drivers and managers of future adaptation in the decades to come.

Linking Mitigation and Adaptation

The interaction between adaptation and mitigation is not often clearly communicated, with both playing an important and interactive role in climate change management. Therefore, effective adaptation requires clear consideration of its articulation in relation to mitigation. Installing and switching on an air conditioner powered by a carbon-emitting energy source, often described as an 'adaptive' response to heat stress and urban heat island effects, is in fact an example of a maladaptive response. Although it could be classified as an adaptation to a particular physical context, the impact of this response undermines attempts at mitigation (and is therefore maladaptive).

Adaptation policy settings, guidelines, and activities need to be generated and evaluated in terms of their adaptation effectiveness, but also in terms of their impacts on, and relationship to, mitigation efforts. Conversely, many mitigation efforts may significantly increase adaptive capacity. Two examples of this are Indigenous fire management regimes, and localised renewable energy initiatives.

International dimensions

Australia is a globally connected country in terms of its trade, population, and media. The effectiveness of our adaptation responses will be constrained unless we consider them in this larger global context. Our future prosperity relies on the stability and development of countries in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. There are three dimensions to consider:

First, adaptation to climate change in Australia needs to be mindful of the competitiveness of our exporters. Mitigation has encouraged a strong focus on the mining and energy sectors, but successful adaptation requires a renewed examination of the long term competitiveness of our agricultural exporters. They will be affected by the ability of Australian producers to adapt to climate change relative to those in the countries with which we compete.

Second, through its diplomatic relations and development assistance, Australia is already assisting countries in the region to adapt to climate change (for example, through the International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative). Community and country-driven processes for adaptation in the region are required to facilitate adaptation in ways that sustain development and political stability in our region. Such in-country processes will require the aid program to be focussed more on developing the capacity of communities to adapt, with particular attention to marginalised populations, women and children. Such community-based approaches may be contextually more efficient and equitable than large investments in climate science, so these approaches should be considered complementary, not mutually exclusive. The challenge is to reach the communities in ways that deliver meaningful outcomes, which requires well-designed partnerships with local science and research, local governance structures and non-governmental organisations, to be funded over long-time horizons.

Third, labour mobility, both within Australia and with respect to its near neighbours, is a crucial issue. Productivity gains and the redress of skills shortages in Australian labour markets are primary benefits of appropriate regional labour mobility schemes, but these also provide mutual benefits for adaptation. Well-managed labour mobility schemes that target vulnerable communities in our region

(for example the Kiribati-Australian Nurses Initiative) can facilitate adaptation to enable sustainable development in those countries in our region that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The Inquiry Process

Finally, we have some general comments on the process of the Inquiry.

First, we would like to see clarity on the consultation process for the final report. At present, there does not appear to be a consultative process for the final report in the 'key inquiry dates' timeline.

Second, we consider that there is value in continuing to consult directly with local and state government representatives, as well as carrying out the more formal Inquiry process.

Third, whilst we appreciate that the Commonwealth operates under tight timeframes to carry out processes such as this inquiry, we strongly feel that longer time frames are required for a comprehensive consultation process, in particular where there are explicit or implicit expectations on spheres of government or organisations, which may have impacts on the resourcing or capacity of those organisations to deliver on current / future policy commitments or delivery of services.

Here, we point to the best practice example of the Western Australian Partnership Agreement on Communication and Consultation, between the State Government and the two representative bodies for Local Government (the Western Australian Local Government Association and Local Government Managers Association), which outlines an appropriate consultation process and requires that as Council and Association decision making processes normally take eight weeks, a minimum of twelve weeks should be afforded for consultation on a (non-urgent) Public Inquiry.

Additionally, following consultation with the State and Territory Local Government Associations, in 2006, the Australian Local Government Association and the Australian, State and Territory Governments entered into an Inter-governmental Agreement Establishing Principles Guiding Inter-governmental Relations on Local Government Matters. The objectives of the inter-governmental agreement include providing for greater financial transparency between the three spheres of government in relation to local government services and functions.

As climate change adaptation will have impacts and impose obligations on the suite of services / public good assets delivered by, maintained by and / or vested in governments, adequate consultation periods and consideration of any explicit or implicit impacts of recommendations should be clearly stated to enable appropriate responses from those agencies with direct responsibility for providing those assets and community services. A clearly articulated and consistent framework for inter-governmental collaboration on climate change adaptation would be of value.