



Submission Focus

The focus of the AdaptiveFutures submission is on the specific topic of 'adaptation effectiveness'. This is for two reasons.

First, the Issues Paper (October, 2011) addresses the topic of climate change adaptation overall and also provides an overview of the policy instruments that could be used to address adaptive barriers. As such, it is evident that Productivity Commission staff has thoroughly reviewed the overall concepts of climate change adaptation and its barriers. Also, we make an assumption that the Inquiry will receive a number of thorough submissions from colleagues in the adaptation research/practitioners communities pointing to additional sources of information and case studies on Australian and overseas practice in adaptation theory and practice, including some of our own work.

Second, in recent years we have undertaken a number of specific initiatives focusing on the concepts and practice of adaptation effectiveness evaluation. While most of this work has been with our international clients within the United Nations system, we have been active participants in ensuring that our domestic practice advises clients on ensuring that their adaptive actions are the most effective. Within the last 12 months we have worked on projects for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) on projects that are either wholly, or in part, analyzing issues of adaptation effectiveness. In addition, Dr Robert Kay, AdaptiveFutures Principal Consultant, led a panel session at the 2010 Climate Adaptation Futures Conference on "Measuring the Effectiveness of Adaptation" that included the perspectives of leading Australian and international adaptation thinkers. Subsequently, a book chapter has been drafted that draws on the panel discussion and the latest adaptation effectiveness literature entitled "Perspectives on Adaptation Effectiveness". The Chapter is currently under review and is scheduled for finalisation in early 2012.

Consequently, we believe that our active engagement in both the conceptual dimensions of adaptation effectiveness and consideration of practical issues of effectiveness evaluation will be of benefit to the Inquiry – and in particular to address the specific question asked by the Inquiry: "clarify what is meant by 'effective' adaptation and consider how effectiveness can be assessed in the context of adaptation."

Finally, our work means that we have been actively tracking the rapidly emerging specialist literature on adaptation effectiveness and its evaluation. The majority of this literature is in the form of working documents, concept papers and reports. A list of these key resources and their citations are provided in Annex 1 as **COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**. As such, referencing to individual sources of information are not made in the submission, rather the Inquiry is asked to refer to Annex 1.

Conceptual Aspects of Adaptation Effectiveness

The Issues Paper is correct in its view that 'effective adaptation' is 'open to interpretation' (p.5). Also, the Issues Paper states: "in general terms, effective means producing the desired or intended result, but something more specific may be required for the purposes of this inquiry." (p.5). This fundamental question is one that has been taxing national governments overseas, multilateral organisation and a host of other organisations worldwide tasked with ensuring that adaptation is 'the best it can be'. A listing of the various published outcomes of these deliberations is shown in Annex 1 and the

In summary, the current consensus on adaptation effectiveness is that striving to develop a single definition of effective adaptation that would then lead to a simple set of 'adaptation effectiveness indicators' is not the best way to proceed. Rather, a better way forward is to be rigorous in some aspects, while flexible in others – particularly the 'adaptation context' within which adaptive decisions are made.

The critical area of required rigor is in being extremely clear on elucidating what is meant by 'adaptation' within a range of adaptive decision contexts (many of which are outlined in the Issues Paper and the references cited therein). The next required step is stringently analysing what key elements within each of these contexts are considered 'effective'. As the Issues Paper rightly points out there are a range of criteria that may be considered as effective in context, such as greatest net community benefit, optimizing decision timing, short-term cost effectiveness (or return on investment), biodiversity conservation and so on. While this may appear self-evident, the key point is that 'effective adaptation depends on the context within which adaptive decisions are made'. This '*it depends*' factor (on adaptive context) has rapidly become a central tenet of adaptation effectiveness thinking, and is a concept used by AdaptiveFutures in our adaptation effectiveness practice.

Of course, the next question, on the assumption that the 'it depends' concept is accepted, is: 'it depends on what?' In this regard, our work (that builds on both our experience and also the current literature) suggests that it is useful to think about three dimensions, namely:

1. Spatial dimension – over what geographic scale is the action targeted (i.e. from household through to national)
2. Temporal dimension – when will the action be implemented and over what timeframe will the action be operational.
3. The focus of adaptive action – along a spectrum from those actions that address the drivers of vulnerability to climate change at one end, with those actions that address climate change drivers only at the other (McGary et al, 2007)

While the first two dimensions are relatively self explanatory, the third dimension on 'adaptive focus' is one that has rapidly gained traction overseas, particularly within the context of adaptation financing that has lead, among other things, to the recent establishment of the Green Climate Fund at UNFCCC COP 17 in Durban. In short, the debate on this issue is around 'is it more effective to fund initiatives that reduce the underlying factors of vulnerability, such as clean water and food security or address specific climate change drivers (or both)'. Again, while this is an 'it depends' question there have been a number of extremely useful analyses undertaken by a number of international organisations that explore this issue that will be of direct relevance to assist the Inquiry (see Annex 1).

In order to make the transition from the conceptual level of thinking to their practical application AdaptiveFutures is currently developing for a client a set of operational principles of effective adaptation, which builds on our previous work and a review of the global adaptation landscape. These eight key qualities or characteristics required to ensure that an adaptation initiative is likely to be effective are briefly outlined in Annex 2 as **COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**.

Practical Aspects of Adaptation Effectiveness

Taking the conceptual issues of assessing effective adaptation to a practical set of indicators that can help 'track' on-ground initiatives is, as outlined in the Issues Paper, a challenge being faced by all those with a stake in ensuring 'good' adaptation outcomes. On the assumption, that the conceptual 'dimensions' of effective adaptation are accepted – including the dominant paradigm of context specificness ('it depends') – then the key challenge is practically defining indicator measures that are able to be both applicable in context and also able to be compatible/harmonized with indicators that are more applicable in other adaptive decision contexts.

Again, there are extremely useful pointers in this regard in the emerging international literature (see Annex 1 and 2). This literature, and the associated emerging international practice, provides as a minimum, guidance on a set of criteria that can be applied to measuring the performance of adaptive programmes, projects and activities. There is also a suite of practical tools that have been developed by international organisations that help them evaluate the effectiveness of their respective programmes with their specific organizational contexts (see Annex 1).

AdaptiveFutures is currently working with one client to develop a practical Decision Support Framework (DSF) to help optimize the effectiveness of its adaptation support activities within a particular set of decision contexts. It is hoped that the outcomes of this work, together with other adaptation effectiveness initiatives in which we are engaged, will be available to share with the Inquiry prior to the Public Hearings in mid-2012.

About AdaptiveFutures

AdaptiveFutures aims to support the climate change adaptation needs of governments, private sector, communities and individuals. It is the first global company focused specifically on climate change adaptation. The company combines experience and expertise from Coastal Zone Management Pty Ltd, a niche climate change consultancy, and ContentPlus Pty Ltd, a professional and IT services consultancy. Together, we understand what it means to make adaptation decisions, and what needs to be in place to support effective adaptation. Climate change adaptation is a multi-dimensional issue and to think about the issue effectively means clearly thinking about all its complexities. So when we approach adaptation projects with our clients we're thinking about space, economic and social sectors, and cross cutting issues (poverty alleviation, social marginalisation, gender considerations, human settlements, infrastructure and ecosystem management).

Further examples of selected projects and publications can be found on the AdaptiveFutures website www.adaptivefutures.com