



National Climate Risk Assessment Senate Inquiry Supplementary Statement regarding the National Adaptation Plan

Adaptation shortfall is not addressed for the natural environment system

The Climate Risk Assessment states that existing adaptation actions and programs are likely to be insufficient to protect against climate change: "overall there is an adaptation action shortfall across all systems, risks, jurisdictions and geographies in Australia".

The National Adaptation Plan's chapter on the Natural Environment note 'key adaptation measures' already underway. Most of these are not designed for climate adaptation; it is assumed that climate resilience is a by-product of action. The Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Project at Ramsar wetlands in the Murray–Darling Basin is a notable exception. Moreover, key initiatives such as the Strategy for Nature 2024-2030 and 2022-2032 Threatened Species Action Plan have no ongoing funding. It does not commit new resources for adaptation programs specific to the natural environment nor address how existing programs might change to better embed climate adaptation.

It is unclear how to drive the step change required

Like the draft *Sustainable Oceans Plan* and draft *Strategy for Nature 2024-2030 Implementation Plan*, the National Adaptation Plan is critically lacking in specific objectives, theories of change, and accountability measures to drive changes required to meet the scale of the problem.

We need a broader conversation about adaptation governance

The Climate Risk Assessment identifies the "Risks to adaptation from maladaptation and inaction from governance structures not fit to address changing climate risks" as a priority risk that crosses all systems. Moreover, "fit-for-purpose governance is needed to define, drive and guide successful adaptation, and to track adaptation outcomes and adjust efforts as needed." Key problems include inadequate collaboration across government, ambiguity in roles and responsibilities, inadequate resources, inadequate engagement, and being slow to adapt to the pace of change.

The National Adaptation Plan does little to address these issues. The Plan outlines the "new models of governance and partnerships" but grounds them within currently agreed responsibilities. The Plan identifies 'leadership and governance' as a cross-cutting enabler of effective adaptation, summarises several current 'leadership and governance' initiatives and notes that 'strong governance will be progressed' as part of implementing the Plan.

Adaptation is about shaping a desired future,¹ and imagining possible futures is an active process by those involved in adaptation governance.² As such, governance is not only the formal institutional issues such as governance arrangements, legislation, resourcing and ‘mainstreaming’, but also norms, core beliefs about how policy should be framed and the role of the public sector, values, culture and politics.³ These are the unwritten “rules-of-the-game”⁴ that impact who is at the table to decide on adaptation actions and what options are considered suitable, which are and ultimately preferred, and who benefits. This introduces questions about sustainable development, community resilience and climate justice. To ‘bolt-on’ adaptation within existing governance arrangements and to reduce risks to current assets, is to reinforce the status quo – to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and protect existing privileges. It is not something that can be left to an implementation plan but must be part of a broader conversation with the Australian public about our shared future.

¹ Cretney, R., White, I. and Hanna, C. (2024) Navigating adaptive futures; analysing the scope of potential possibilities for climate adaptation *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* **20**
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2024.2344497>

² Kanarp, G. C. S., Böhm, Steffen, Löf, A. (2025) Contested adaptation futures: the role of global imaginaries in climate adaptation governance *Sustainability Science* **20**: 525-545. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-024-01608-0>

³ Bosomworth, K. (2017) A discursive–institutional perspective on transformative governance: A case from a fire management policy sector *Env Pol Gov.* 1-11. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/eet.1806>

Keys, N. Bussey, M., Thomsen, D. C., Lynam, T. and Smith, T. F. (2014) Building adaptive capacity in South East Queensland, Australia *Regional Environmental Change* **14**: 501-512.

⁴ Ibid.