

# Securing Australia's Future: Reimagining Climate Adaptation



## Setting a reimagined adaptation agenda for the National Climate Change Adaptation Summit 2021

Future Earth Australia at the Australian Academy of Science is leading a process to consolidate and extend a broader agenda of proactive and productive reform of climate adaptation, alongside a clear acceptance of the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to secure Australia's future. After the devastating bushfires of last summer, it is clear that Australia needs an evidence-based policy response to the range of emerging threats posed by environmental change in order to secure Australia's future. To this end, we welcome the Prime Minister's comments earlier in 2020 on the need to focus on resilience and adaptation for all Australians—and argue it must be done in a substantive, inclusive, community-based manner.

We contend that adaptation and resilience must be framed with respect to enabling a just transition for all Australians. We recently consulted with a range of sectors across Australia to inform the foundation and framing of a National Adaptation Summit planned for early 2021. We asked: 1) how we might rethink adaptation in light of the deep transformation required in Australia's society and economy; 2) what are the strengths, weaknesses and range of adaptation policies over the years; and 3) how we can bring community knowledge and preferences into adaptation planning.

In summary, our participants told us:

### Rethinking adaptation requires

- Understanding and engaging climate change as a real and growing risk, including how governments and the private sector are managing this risk and can improve.
- Recognition that communicating climate adaptation across different sectors, communities and groups must be engaging and targeted.
- Commitment to a clear role for top-down leadership from the Federal and State/Territory Governments, in conjunction with well-supported and financed local or regional 'bottom-up' council and community initiatives.
- A strong policy framework from governments at all levels, to enable multi-scalar responses and broader societal engagement.
- Recognition of a variety of knowledge types necessary to build adaptation pathways and the role of different sectors—economic, social, environmental and cultural—in developing and implementing policy and action.

### Strength and weaknesses in adaptation policy include

- Understanding the exclusion of community and Indigenous knowledges in much adaptation policy and planning.
- Recognising that local government cannot do it all and that local government are not 'the community'.
- Recognising the complex and systemic nature of climate risk, and therefore climate adaptation, and designing governance structures for systems and sustainability.
- Understanding the inequity in adaptation; some jurisdictions are resilient and well-adapted to some shocks, others are not.
- Understanding that while there has been a long focus on climate science and emissions mitigation, adaptation and resilience demand a focus on social and cultural needs (e.g. housing quality and habitat loss).
- There is a strong foundation and capacity across our communities and sectors to adapt proactively, but this capacity is not being seized upon. Expertise is not 'joined up' vertically between government levels nor horizontally between entities facing similar adaptive challenges.
- We have good capacity and a number of adaptation planning activities but see barriers to full implementation and action.

### How to bring community knowledge into adaptation planning?

- Community members need and want to engage with how their values and vulnerabilities interact with adaptation and resilience.
- Use place-based approaches (regional or local) to integrate across siloes and to work with locals towards a tangible and actionable agenda that benefits communities.
- The knowledge and history of First Nations Australians, and their long experience with adaptation, must be centred in and thoughtfully engaged throughout a process of reimagining and 'Securing Australia's Future' so that it is representative of First Nations values and worldviews.

These roundtables are just the start of a longer conversation and national agenda-setting strategy being led by Future Earth Australia at the Australian Academy of Science. Future Earth Australia is currently developing a fuller synthesis of these roundtable discussions for publication in early August 2020. Further updates on this initiative can be found at [www.futureearth.org.au](http://www.futureearth.org.au)

## Consultation Participants

Parry Agius	Linking Futures
Kate Auty	Environment Protection Agency Victoria
Karen Avery	Northern Territory Office of Climate Change
Paul Bertsch	CSIRO
Sarah Boulter	National Climate Change Adaptation and Research Facility
Keith Bradby	Gondwanalink
Judith Bruinsma	Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils
Donovan Burton	Climate Planning
Karen Cain	La Trobe Valley Authority
Matthew Chesnais	Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
Jen Cleary	Centacare Catholic Care South Australia
Neil Cliffe	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Jane Colton	Tasmania Climate Change Office
James Duggie	Western Australia Department of Environment
Bhiamie Eckford-Williamson	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University
Dorean Erhart	Local Government Association of Queensland
Diane Favier	South Australia Department for Environment and Water
Michael-Shawn Fletcher	Division of Science, University of Melbourne
Brian Foster	Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Group
Katrina Graham	City of Hobart
Rebecca Harris	Climate Futures, University of Tasmania
Arnagretta Hunter	Doctors for the Environment
Ruth Irwin	Mosman Council
Sarah Joyce	Western Australia Department of Health
Rebecca Lang	Climate Space
Eric Lede	City of Darwin
Joanne Ludbrook	South West and Peel Coastal Management Group
Jeremy Mansfield	Lendlease
Garry Middle	Western Australia Local Government Authority
Nick Post	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Mark Siebentritt	Edge Environment
Rodrick Simpson	Greater Sydney Commission
Ian Southall	La Trobe Valley Community Power Hub
Bob Speirs	Community Groups on Adaptation
John Thwaites	Monash Sustainable Development Institute
Blair Trewin	Bureau of Meteorology
Zoe Whitton	Citi Bank, Investor Group on Climate Change
Cecilia Woolford	Outback Areas

## Expert Working Group

Professor David Schlosberg	University of Sydney
Professor Juan Salazar	Western Sydney University
Emeritus Professor Stephen Dovers	Australian National University
Dr Johanna Nalau	Griffith University
Dr Mark Stafford-Smith	CSIRO
Dr Andrew Ash	CSIRO
Dr Tayanah O'Donnell	Australian National University