

A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR JUST ADAPTATION

SUMMARY

“No one is invulnerable to the impacts of climate change.”

A National Strategy for Just Adaptation (the Strategy) seeks to disrupt current adaptation thinking and foster recognition, inclusion, and capacity building for all Peoples and nature. It has been compiled from over two years of collaboration and research, including over 35 authors from diverse backgrounds and 13 university, government and private partners.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

While a certain level of urgency is necessary to minimise harm from climate impacts, this Strategy emphasises the need for longer-term planning. It reimagines high-level concepts and societal constructs that need to change to decrease outcomes of inequity and marginalisation within Australia. This National Strategy for Just Adaptation aims to broaden and rescope the way adaptation policy, planning, and action are framed.

The Strategy purposely poses itself as a counter-narrative to previously developed strategies; moving from a focus on strictly technical elements to encompassing social, political, and behavioural strategies and systems change. It then means using these to address multiple and intersecting injustices and enhancing adaptive capacities of people, places and ecosystems in all their diversities

while learning from and integrating the ancestral and ongoing adaptive practices and knowledges of Indigenous Peoples.

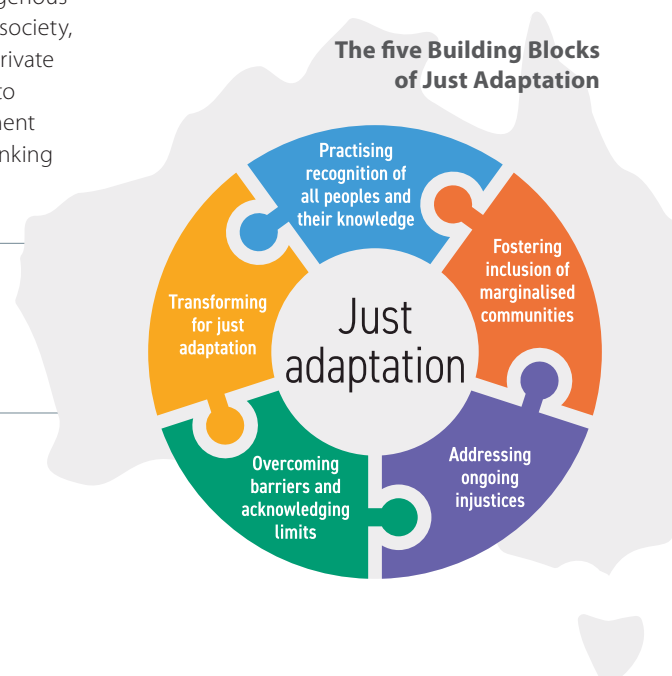
The Strategy guides an intellectual reframing of climate adaptation to one that centres Country, and challenges the status quo and systems that perpetuate disadvantage. It can be utilised in myriad ways to create and implement climate adaptation policies or projects as best fits each sector or organisation.

To usher in this new wave of thinking and doing in climate change adaptation, we identify five Building Blocks that together support transformational change and address injustices (see below and page 4).

There is good evidence that achieving more just outcomes in the long run reduces the costs of adaptation to government and delivers many co-benefits relating to a happier and healthier society.

This approach offers all of us – Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons, civic society, the diverse array of communities, private sector interests, and from national to state and territory to local government – a framework to embed justice thinking into adaptation planning.

“Just adaptation engagement demands coalition building, based on an ethics of care that can identify and accommodate differing priorities and transform uneven power dynamics.”



PRIORITY REFORM AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These Priority Reform Areas consolidate the key messages from the five Building Blocks and provide recommendations to embed justice into climate adaptation. Actions range from principles to the practical, and all are required to create the transformational change that is needed. Myriad co-benefits for people, communities, society, and the planet would undoubtedly flow from implementation of these recommendations.



1. EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

A foundational need and opportunity for just adaptation in Australia is to recognise, support, and learn from the unique experiences and knowledges of Indigenous Peoples. This requires:

- 1.1 Deep listening to and embedding of Indigenous Peoples' knowledges.
- 1.2 Promotion of Indigenous Peoples' rights to Country, including resources, livelihoods, and lifeways.
- 1.3 Promotion of Indigenous voices in all levels of government.
- 1.4 Development of a national Indigenous-led climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy.
- 1.5 Support for Indigenous Caring for Country programs, including for strengthened capabilities of Indigenous rangers to include specific adaptation actions and projects in their work.
- 1.6 Development of Indigenous-led and inter-cultural collaborative approaches to adaptation that deliver more just outcomes.



2. EMBEDDING A JUST ADAPTATION FRAMEWORK ACROSS GOVERNMENTS AND SECTORS

Changes to conventional approaches to adaptation are needed at all levels in government, sectoral bodies, industry, community organisations, and in research. This entails disposing of unhelpful understandings of 'vulnerability' and recognising instead that adaptation challenges are driven and perpetuated by structures in society that produce disadvantage. This requires:

- 2.1 Formal and widespread recognition that vulnerability to climate change arises from social, political, legal, and economic systems and processes, which create intersecting disadvantages that systematically prevent people from adapting or drive people toward maladaptation.
- 2.2 Purposeful review, reform, and coordination of policies, regulations and practices relevant to adaptation at all levels of government, to address structural injustices and to invest in the cultural capabilities to support the self-determined adaptation priorities of all Peoples.
- 2.3 Mobilisation of significant resources, including knowledge, guidance, practices, and funding, for local governments to support adaptation to climate change by their communities and regions, with a focus on justice for all people who experience disadvantage in our society, and including Indigenous organisations that have local government responsibilities.
- 2.4 Integration of justice into infrastructure and urban design processes, project option development, assessment, and implementation.
- 2.5 Assessments of sectoral and place-based barriers and limits across diverse social actors, within, between, and across bottom-up community engagements to national and global sectoral interactions, with attention to hidden linkages and distributional inequities.





3. INCLUDING THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS AREAS OF MARGINALISATION IN JUST ADAPTATION PROCESSES

Recognition and inclusion must lie at the core of just adaptation to effectively counter injustices. Yet, existing power structures and vested interests will constrain such inclusion unless diverse groups, supported by public, private, and community resources, grow their capabilities to become actively involved in decision-making. This requires:

- 3.1 Concerted efforts to invite and embolden diverse and often excluded stakeholders to contribute their place-based knowledges, lived experiences, and leadership to participate as equals in just adaptation processes and shape decision-making about adaptive responses and pathways that they consider worthwhile, just, and liveable.
- 3.2 Support for enablers of just adaptation, to overcome known barriers, ethically manage losses and limits to adaptation, ensure forward-looking and dynamic decision-making, and creatively address differential climate risk.
- 3.3 Development of accessible communication of tools and processes for more inclusive and empowered engagement of diverse stakeholders in adaptive decision-making at all levels.
- 3.4 Mandatory inclusion of diverse stakeholders in policy debates and decision-making across all levels of government and non-government bodies to ensure the potential for more just processes, rules, and outcomes.
- 3.5 Development of appropriate people or place-based approaches and guidelines to assist policy makers and local community leaders to embed a just adaptation framework in their work and assist their communities.



4. SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS TO DRIVE TRANSFORMATION

Local communities and community groups must be given agency and trust to create their own relevant pathways in just adaptation. This requires:

- 4.1 An inventory of empowered practices that diverse communities already use and wish to expand, with particular attention to inclusive, deliberative, and just methods, tools, and methodologies that value recognition, equity, solidarity, responsibility, repair, regeneration, and an ethics of care.
- 4.2 Monitoring criteria or indicators of effective and just adaptation toward transformation, co-designed and implemented with affected communities, including identifying the conditions needed to achieve transformative goals and a close tracking of the capabilities that need to be strengthened along adaptation trajectories.
- 4.3 Support for collaborative networks, approaches, and actions for community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners to share progress toward just adaptation, supported by legislation that treats equity and ethics in tandem with efficiency.
- 4.4 Equitable financing and flexible, innovative longer-term funding mechanisms to sustain the longevity of capability-building programs that amplify the voices of communities and community groups.
- 4.5 Strengthening community leadership, connections, and political capabilities to contribute toward enabling a substantial and deep transformation of current modes of adaptation planning and implementation to redress persistent marginalisation while fostering imagination, deliberation, and care towards current and future generations of human and non-human populations in Australia.



5. ADVANCING RESEARCH AGENDAS THAT PROMOTE JUST ADAPTATION

Decision-makers need support from the research community and other sources of knowledge to foster cross- and trans-disciplinary innovative methods. Such methods will create necessary data to demonstrate the benefits of more just approaches; provide tools and approaches to identify drivers of disadvantage, and support just and transformative outcomes for future generations and our planet. This requires:

- 5.1 Design of collaborative research agendas that support just adaptation across disciplines, identifying barriers that prevent just adaptation, structural factors that perpetuate disadvantage, leverage points for effective intervention, metrics of successful just adaptation, and policy-relevant evidence for the value of just interventions in different contexts.
- 5.2 Indigenous-led research, including methodologies, and collaborative inter-cultural programs and projects that facilitate co-learning and an equitable co-production of knowledge for transforming adaptation practices.
- 5.3 Supporting co-designed nature-based adaptation studies to both restore degraded landscapes and promote positive health outcomes while building a greater public understanding of the interconnectedness and co-dependence of humans and nature.
- 5.4 Creation of participatory, experimental, and experiential adaptation pathways that align with diverse values across generations, address uncertainty, and enable many more Australians to envision and shape their own adaptation trajectories, particularly those populations hitherto largely excluded in decision-making processes.
- 5.5 Establishment of a national clearing house for sharing knowledge, practices, and lessons learned, including information on vulnerability (who is vulnerable, why, where, when, and how) and guidance on how to overcome barriers and undertake effective and just action and with whom, potentially following the model of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF).

“The contributors to this Strategy view this document as a starting point, rather than an end point, for a difficult but critical and long overdue discussion.”

BUILDING BLOCKS OF JUST ADAPTATION

PRACTISING RECOGNITION OF ALL PEOPLES AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE

Recognition and inclusion of all Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people and their knowledges are critical to fair and inclusive policy and planning. There is a particular urgency for climate adaptation work in Indigenous communities and for this work to be led by Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous experts.

Country – we need to place ourselves within the full richness of the social-ecological-spiritual systems that we live.

Colonialism – Climate change is deeply rooted in colonial systems of extraction, exploitation and degradation of nature, Peoples, and cultures. Neoliberalism is an extension of this.

Communities – Just adaptation is inclusive of, and responsive to, diverse communities of place, communities of identity, and communities of interest.

ADDRESSING ONGOING INJUSTICES

Vulnerability is best seen as the result of systems and situations as opposed to a state or condition. Everyone is both resilient and vulnerable, but not to the same extent. Validating the diverse experiences and knowledges of all Australians supports contextualised and more meaningful responses that can likely increase buy-in and ownership.

As climate change affects Country, so too it affects cultural, economic, spiritual, and governance dimensions that are embedded in the land and waters. Allowing Indigenous Australians to make self-representations and care for Country can help alleviate entrenched injustices.

Planning legislation currently provides inadequate authority to local councils to successfully refuse maladaptive planning applications from vested interests.

FOSTERING INCLUSION OF COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCING MARGINALISATION

Meaningful inclusion goes beyond engagement to equal participation, empowerment and agency of typically disenfranchised members of society.

It is important to examine diverse human experiences across gender, class, indigeneity, ethnicity, race, neurodiversity, location, (dis)ability, and sexuality in their own contexts.

This inclusive approach differs substantially from the usual adaptation efforts to 'climate-proof' infrastructures and institutions to one that addresses cascading climate risks and emergencies, intergenerational inequity, intersecting marginalisations (eg. rural and LGBTQI+), and non-human beings.

Community members need to be heard to drive context-sensitive decision-making at the local level.

An Australian response to adaptation must include the web of relations, voices, perspectives, and unique rights of Indigenous Peoples. Including these creates immense opportunities both to progress the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and to greatly enhance the adaptive capacities of all Australians.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND ACKNOWLEDGING LIMITS

There are many known enablers or facilitators of adaptation, e.g. place-based knowledge, frontline practitioners, creative communication tools, trusted leadership, robust decision-making processes, and Indigenous governance.

Financial, time, and resource costs are not fairly distributed across society. Understanding of social relations, power, agency, capacity and capability is required for risk and cost.

Indigenous self-determination, relationships, and knowledges should be embraced for respectful collaboration.

Better evidence and leadership are needed to aid decisions.

TRANSFORMING FOR JUST ADAPTATION

Local pathway planning needs to tie into higher-level adaptation decision and policy making, connecting just adaptation across scales.

Transformation demands that decision-makers themselves change, as vital parts of our current social, cultural, institutional, and political communities and systems.

Just adaptation is an ethical, emotional, and political process, informed by both rigorous science and the hope for responsible co-existence.



“Leading adaptation practice should always seek to diagnose what structural inequities, power imbalances, and social norms cause climate change to harm some people and systems more than others and ask how to address the injustices that underlie the unevenness of these impacts.”
