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National
Climate Change Adaptation
Research Facility



National Climate Change Adaptation Research Plan: Indigenous Communities

Summary

The National Climate Change Adaptation Research Plan: Indigenous Communities identifies the information that is needed to increase understanding of climate change adaptation for Australia's Indigenous communities. It outlines research priorities that will inform decisions about adapting to climate change to produce effective, efficient and equitable strategies and outcomes. This Plan will guide governments and other investors over the next five years to fund research to deliver maximum benefit to Indigenous communities, and provide a broad framework for longer term research planning.

Limited research has been directed at climate change and Indigenous communities, including impacts, factors that affect vulnerability and adaptive capacity, and climate change adaptation.

Most existing research focuses on identifying the biophysical impacts of climate change. Few studies have explored the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of Indigenous individuals, households, communities, businesses and institutions.

It is important to acknowledge the great diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which range from urban centres to very remote outstations, and to ensure that adaptation research encompasses this diversity. The climate change risks posed to Indigenous people are not uniform and will vary between locations and socio-economic status.

This Plan takes a cross-sectoral approach to consider the risks, vulnerability and adaptive capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It considers the factors which contribute to successful or ineffective adaptation responses both by the communities and responses made for the communities by others.

For the purposes of this Plan, Indigenous communities include both discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in other locales, whether remote, regional, peri-urban or urban.

The Plan identifies five broad categories of information needed to enhance decision-making:

1. The sensitivity and exposure of Indigenous individuals, households, communities, businesses and institutions to climate risks;
2. The vulnerability and adaptive capacity of these people to climate change;
3. Extreme weather events and emergency management planning for Indigenous communities;
4. Indigenous population movement, displacement, community relocation and severe climate variation; and
5. Climate change adaptation and Indigenous biodiversity management.

In addition to this summary, the full plan is available online at www.nccarf.edu.au

Climate change impacts in Australia: priorities for Indigenous communities

Within these five categories, thirteen research topics were identified and prioritised into six research questions according to the following criteria:

- The severity of the potential impact to be addressed;
- The degree of potential benefit that could be derived;
- The immediacy of the required intervention or response;
- The degree to which the research will lead to practical and achievable interventions or responses;
- The potential to produce benefits beyond informing climate change adaptation strategies;
- The extent to which the research addresses more than one issue or sector; and,
- The extent to which the research addresses the needs of the most vulnerable groups.



Research priorities for climate change and Indigenous communities

Understanding how interactions between social, cultural, institutional, economic and biophysical processes make Indigenous individuals, households, communities, businesses and institutions sensitive to climate risks, and the identification and evaluation of strategies to reduce this sensitivity.

Understanding how and why different Indigenous households, communities, businesses and institutions are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and the identification of strategies to reduce this vulnerability.

Understanding the capacity of Indigenous individuals, households, businesses and institutions to adapt to climate change, and the identification of strategies to enhance this capacity.

Understanding the capacity of Indigenous individuals, households, communities and institutions to prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme weather events, and the identification of strategies to enhance adaptive capacity.

Understanding the relationship between Indigenous population movement and severe climate variation.

Understanding how the use of marine, terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity resources by Indigenous peoples and groups will be affected by climate change.

Developing the Plan

The writing team for the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Plan: Indigenous Communities was led by Professor Marcia Langton (University of Melbourne), and was made up of Australia's leading specialists working in the area of Indigenous communities and climate change adaptation research, including Marcia Langton (Chair), Meg Parsons, Sonia Leonard, Damein Bell, Shaun Edwards, Vic McGrath, Kate Auty, Sue Jackson, Richie Howitt, Paul Burgess and Joe Morrison.

The team conducted a national survey of stakeholders including researchers, Indigenous representative bodies, health providers, regional authorities, non-government organisations and all levels of government. They were asked to identify crucial concerns and potential opportunities for Indigenous communities.

These survey results were incorporated into a consultation draft, which was opened for a formal period of review to ensure all interested parties were able to contribute comments.

A coordinated national approach to research for climate change adaptation and Indigenous communities in Australia

The Plan will be implemented with the support of the Adaptation Research Network for the Social, Economic and Institutional Dimensions of climate change, which is funded by the Australian Government via the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility. This Network is convened by Professor Jon Barnett, hosted by the University of Melbourne and co-convened by Professor Marcia Langton, who led the development of this Plan.

Both the Research Plan and the Network aim to facilitate a coordinated research effort to address the information needs of decision-makers with respect to adaptation to climate change and Indigenous communities. This will include identifying sources of research funding and communicating research outcomes to inform decisions in government, industry and communities.

The Australian Government has invested an initial \$2 million for research to address priorities in this Plan. This funding is available through the Climate Adaptation Research Grants Program with funds allocated via an open call for proposals.

NCCARF expresses its appreciation to the writing team, and the many individuals and organisations, who contributed their time and expertise to the development of this Plan.

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How to get involved: key contacts

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