

Climate Change Adaptation Framework
Australian Greenhouse Office
Department of Environment and Heritage
PO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

Climate Change Adaptation Framework

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is a forum for the promotion of the health of the public as well as being a professional resource for public health personnel. The Association provides opportunities for the exchange of ideas, knowledge and information on public health and actively undertakes advocacy for public health policy development, research and training.

The PHAA has a national and multidisciplinary perspective on public health issues, and a significant interest in the potential impacts of climate change on the health and well-being of both Australia's and overseas's populations. Consequently, the PHAA provides the following submission to the Australian Greenhouse office regarding the Climate Change Adaptation Framework.

Firstly, the PHAA would like to congratulate the Australian and all the State/Territory Governments for giving serious consideration to the issues of climate change and how they will impact upon Australian's lives. We believe that it is essential that all levels of government and all communities actively address climate change issues, and this can only be accomplished via collaborative efforts. The rate at which climate change is occurring is such that we believe that we cannot allow any part of our community to drift into blame shifting or apathy and that there needs to be a strong focus on mitigation of as well as adaptation to climate change. This will require substantial social as well as economic/infrastructure change. Your leadership in this area is very welcome.

While the PHAA is essentially concerned with population health and prevention, we have provided comment on the wider framework as part of the context to the advice provided on health issues.

Introduction

PHAA is delighted to see that a framework for adaptation to the changes that have and will result from global warming is being developed. It would be useful if the introduction to this document delineated the place of this framework in the total context of Australian governments actions on climate change and green gas mitigation. This should include work that has been completed (say over the past five years); work currently under way and work that it is proposed will be undertaken (eg.

presumably there will be sets of strategies and plans that will follow the development and adoption of the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework). The placement of the framework within the total context would help decision-makers, communities, private enterprise, other non-government organisations and individuals determine where their energies are best used to affect positive change.

It is noted that there are already observable effects of climate change and some of the first level impacts are listed. It would be useful to add that while these first level effects are the most visible, the “downstream” effects, such as those that may impact directly and indirectly on the health of some communities, have the potential to be as significant and as costly to ameliorate.

The Framework for Adaptation

Goal

The three paragraphs do not clearly state a goal for the Framework. Presumably the goal is something like:

‘To provide a framework to guide the development of strategies, tools, and community responses that will help Australia adapt to the impacts of climate change.’

The goal needs to be spelt out clearly in order for people to see the potential place of the Framework in climate change initiatives and the place of strategies, plans and tools within the framework.

It is noted that the “proposed actions outlined in the Framework are intended to be implemented by Australian governments in partnership with industry and the community”. Even though Australia is relatively homogeneous, it would be better to include ‘communities’, as across Australia the effects of climate change will vary and the components of the framework that are taken up by communities will subsequently vary also. In addition, it would be useful to acknowledge partnership with individuals here. This would provide a context that makes clear that there are individual responsibilities in adaptation that extend beyond just those things that are the responsibility of governments and local communities. It is also important to recognise that some key industries have a particular role in mitigation (eg coal and aluminium smelting) and others have particular vulnerabilities (eg winter sports and tourism).

Principles

Overall the principles look to be appropriate to the Frameworks intention. However, it may be best to place those that relate most broadly to the Framework’s goal at the top (ie the ninth followed by the eighth) followed by the principles that indicate how the issue will be tackled (4,5,6, &7), followed by the principles that indicate who (1, & 3).

The third principle is not written as a principle but rather as an assumption. It could be part of the ‘how we will tackle the issues’ principles if it was rewritten along the lines of “early action to adapt to climate change will be emphasised”.

While the set of principles does include reference to utilising ‘good practice and best current knowledge’ there is no reference to fostering development of innovative

approaches/technology. This may not be the function of the Framework, but as there is no context for the framework in the paper, it looks like a considerable gap. Similarly, without a context noting where adaptation from predominantly car-based transport to predominantly public transport, this looks like a significant omission in the Framework.

Australian context for adaptation

This section would provide a better context if it was augmented to reflect the likely changes in broad terms, the impacts of these changes on the built environment, agricultural systems and human health and then the potential costs of these impacts if no adaptation is undertaken. This would provide both a context for Australia and the need to have an Australian specific framework for adaptation.

Roles and responsibilities

Generally the roles and responsibilities look to be appropriate. However, having made clear in the principles that the framework is about “coordinating government action, partnership with industry and the community...” this section does not delineate roles and responsibilities for such **partnerships**, for industry or for communities or individuals. This is a significant omission, as by not incorporating particularly industry, as well as communities and individuals, adaptation to climate change is set up to be only a government issue, for which industry, communities and individuals have no responsibilities. Many of the adaptations, and much of the action that can be undertaken to both reduce and ameliorate climate change sit within the gamut of industry, community and individuals to bring to effect.

Under government roles, the last dot point should include direct and indirect health amongst the infrastructure examples (see Attachment A).

It should be noted in the box that the Commonwealth government also holds large tracts of land and that it has a leadership role and a research role to play in water management (especially around monitoring rates of change and impacts on river systems that cross State/Territory boundaries).

The one paragraph on the role of private organisations fails to mention partnerships and what the role of these might be or what the issues of common interest might be. It also fails to mention who has responsibility for resolving issues of trade-offs between public and private concerns, something that is likely to be critical in determining adaptation strategies. This has been clearly brought to the public’s attention in recent months as the wide spread eastern Australian drought has brought out the competing water claims from industry, agriculture and communities.

The one paragraph on communities fails to mention partnerships with government in bringing about social behavioral changes (eg conservative use of electricity and water) that are likely to be part of adaptation. This paragraph also fails to mention the potential of industry and community partnerships. There is a strong record of partnerships of this type in Australia, which needs to be sustained and further developed as part of any adaptation strategies. Where the significant industry (ies) in a community are affected by climate change and/or the need to mitigate or adapt to climate change, it is inevitable that there will also be local community changes.

Industry/community partnerships may be one of the most effective local adaptation vehicles available.

Review and reporting

This section sets out the very minimum that could be placed under the heading. It should be augmented with a statement of where information about potential changes due to regional impacts of climate change can be found. Is there a web address where such information is available? If so, the address ought to be included in this section in order to facilitate groups and individuals accessing information about their local/regional issues.

It is disappointing that this section does not set out some elements of what the review and reporting would cover or some performance indicators that might be used to measure the rate of adaptation against the urgency/priority of need for change for governments, industry, communities and individuals. Further it is not clear as to who will undertake the reporting and to whom it will be provided. Will the reviews be made publicly available?

Strategies and action

This section notes that “the proposed actions outlined for each of the priority areas...” but doesn’t specify what the priority areas are – are they the areas set out in the diagram and called “vulnerable sectors and regions”. If so a consistent nomenclature would help readers. If not then it would be good to spell out what the priority areas are and how they were defined.

Building understanding and adaptive capacity

It is noted under section 1.1 that “Australia’s internationally recognised scientists have generated a base of information about how the climate is changing and in many cases the broad physical impacts these changes may have. This information, used in a risk management framework, is sufficiently advanced to begin adaptation planning.” As noted earlier it would be very useful to have a reference to where this information could be found. In addition, while adaptation is defined, the “risk management framework” is not. It would be useful to have a similar definition in this document.

While there is minor reference to community resilience in this paper, it is not defined. This is a key concept in both environmental systems and in human communities. Ecological and social communities that have the greatest vulnerability may also have a lower adaptive capacity and lower resilience.

Under Proposed actions, it is stated that “A national programme to develop and widely communicate nationally consistent information for regional impact assessments.” This sounds useful, but it would be good to know if it is also being developed on some sort of risk management framework, with some delineation of how priority is being defined (eg priority being given to large urban centres where impacts are likely to involve large infrastructure costs, priority being given to economically vulnerable regions).

Under section 1.2 notes that “Little is currently known about the social and economic dimensions of climate change impacts, or the costs of many adaptation strategies.” However under proposed actions there is no reference to actions that would address

this. In addition there is no reference to the potential health impacts and costs of amelioration/adaptation and the health costs of not commencing adaptation strategies immediately.

Under section 1.3, proposed actions, the subpoint “methods for understanding social impacts” should include ‘and influencing social adaptation’. Figure 3, as a stand alone diagram with no reference to how it would be used under this Framework and specifically in relation to climate change impacts is insufficient. A section that sets out the purpose and specific application of risk management to climate change adaptation in Australia would be useful, especially if it delineated the different foci for different levels of government, industry, communities and individuals.

Section 1.4, while looking at trade and the positive benefits that we can gain from having adaptation agreements with other countries fails to indicate any interest in or responsibility in, the wider climate change ramifications in our world region. It may be useful for Australia to provide adaptation strategies to other countries less able to undertake such work themselves (eg poorer Pacific nations, island nations in the Asian region, nations with significant vulnerabilities such as those with large populations living on or deriving significant economic benefit from river deltas). This lack of acknowledgement of the severity of international impacts of climate change beyond looking at trade implications for Australia lacks leadership. Australia is well placed to help other nations develop strategies to help adaptation to climate change and needs to consider how to best address our responsibilities for ‘climate refugees’.

Reducing sectoral and regional vulnerability

Under cross-sectoral systems and processes either emergency management should be expanded to include public (population) health or public health should be included as a separate item, our preference being the latter as this would enable a broad ranging approach to the variety of factors directly and indirectly affecting health. Climate change has the potential to affect the geographical extent of some diseases and the time period within which vectors are active. There may be changes in the vulnerabilities of population sub-groups (eg Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities) and other population related outcomes that might need to be addressed via different sectors through collaborative actions.

The section on water resources does not include any reference to social marketing and or other techniques/tools that could be used to change community expectations about water availability and use. Changing community attitudes and expectations may be as important as other water management tools such as price signal mechanisms.

The section on Human Health states that “Numerically, the greatest health impacts, in terms of morbidities, mortalities and pressure on health facilities is likely to be from extreme events in populated areas.” It is not clear that this is necessarily the case. While it is true that disasters will impact heavily on populations and their health at the time of the disasters, the impacts of extra physical pressure on people with chronic diseases, mental health issues, the potential loss of access to affordable fruits and vegetables and the potentials for the nature and extent of communicable diseases to change may have a greater cumulative cost and impact on Australian society. In fact the greatest burden of adverse health impact may be mental health related to adapting

to the social and economic changes brought about by global warming and the needed adaptations to these changes.

Overall, the final sections on vulnerable sectors seemed to address the major issues. However, it would be good for the Framework to spell out in plain English at some point that information will be developed to help guide the community in how to change their lifestyle and work patterns to cope with the major and minor impacts of climate change in the short and longer term.

The one significant omission in the document that needs immediate attention, is specific mention of how the framework will help raise knowledge about the potential impacts of climate change on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and adaptation strategies for these communities.

I would be happy to discuss the issues raised in this submission with you or your staff should you think that helpful. I can be contacted on (02) 62852372 or at plaut@phaa.net.au

Yours sincerely

Pieta-Rae Laut
Executive Director

Climate Change Effects on Health and Health Services in Australia v3Feb2006

Climate Change Effect	Health Consequence
<p>Direct</p> <p>Temperature and humidity</p> <p>Weather events – changes in rainfall, and extreme weather such as storms, storm surges, flooding</p> <p>Sea level rise</p>	<p>Heat stress; more heat related sickness and deaths. Sickness, mild (e.g. rashes) to severe. Perhaps mild improvement in winter exacerbations of respiratory and lung disease.</p> <p>Rainfall changes reflected in indirect effects. More deaths and injuries. Social disruption; psychological sequelae.</p> <p>Cultural and social disruption; psychological sequelae.</p>
<p>Indirect</p> <p>Communicable disease</p> <p>Environmental effects – ecological disruption and habitat destruction from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potable Water loss • Drought • Increased salinity • Species loss • Pests <p>Economic effects (follow from environmental effects)</p> <p>Agriculture effects (Would include effects on hunting and gathering)</p> <p>Disruption of trade [including tourism] and other cultural activity</p> <p>Health service capacity</p> <p>Social effects</p>	<p>Dengue – worse in northern Australia, possibly as far south as Sydney by 2100. Diarrhoeal disease related to increased temperatures. More Ross River and other infectious diseases including new as yet unknown ones; more melioidosis. (Variable, depending on rainfall.)</p> <p>Increased energy to provide water; non-viability of remote communities unless more reliance on bores; increased energy. Effects on agriculture and hunting.</p> <p>Viability of agri-business and pastoralism threatened</p> <p>Agricultural effects and habitat destruction.</p> <p>Unpredictable impacts on health of ecology.</p> <p>Difficult to assess effects.</p> <p>While there may be some positive spin offs from more rain and higher temperatures, these are likely to be offset by other adverse effects on climate.</p> <p>Economic health of the agricultural sector weakened. Changed ability to grow food and other products. Closure of more farms and social disruption and psychological sequelae with failure of farms, collapse of rural communities.</p> <p>Reduced tourism with more heat? Economic impact.</p> <p>Restructuring of health service systems Capacity to pay for health services. more poverty -> more “socially determined” illness. Infrastructure (building and service) expenses</p> <p>Economic effects; psychological sequelae. Collapse of complex society possible.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">All these are synergistic.</p>



