Dialogue on National Climate Change Assessments: Summary Report

Representatives from Australia, Canada, The Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States of America responsible for delivery of their respective national climate change assessments came together in London, UK on 06-07 February 2013. This dialogue provided an opportunity to explore experiences, challenges and lessons learnt with respect to the nature, scope and purpose of the assessments, their evolution, and their dissemination and use. This meeting was also seen as initiating the development of a community interested in enhancing the quality and saliency of national assessments.

Through a series of presentations and discussions, participants had the opportunity to share lessons, experiences and challenges under the following topics	Perspectives, lessons learnt and challenges identified and requiring further exploration:
Nature, scope and purpose of assessments Purpose and key drivers for the assessment and implications for nature, scope and delivery	While many countries have a national climate change assessment, the purpose and drivers for these differ. There are major differences between statutory assessments that primarily target informing Government adaptation policy (UK), statutory assessments where the focus is on creating an integrated research programme and undertaking scientific assessments that synthesise the results from this (US) and non-statutory assessments (Australia, Canada and NL) that tend to be more focused on key sectors (e.g. national infrastructure) or regions, with the purpose being more around informing decision-making and raising awareness of adaption actions(also included as part of the remit of statutory assessments). There is increasing interest in focusing future assessments on adaptation and not further detailed resolution of risk and vulnerability - framing on adaptation strategies and options rather than trying to communicate impacts or risks. It was noted that the UK is the only country for which the national assessment has been explicitly set as a statutory requirement within a government adaptation policy framework. *Challenges and Lessons Learned – Purpose and Drivers* • Maintaining funding and organisational capacity in the face of radical shifts in government support and policy. Having a statutory requirement does not necessarily get round this issue (e.g., latitude in interpretation of statutory requirements). • How to maintain a consistent, sustained process – as policy/economic drivers and context are changing – assessments need to inform these but not be dependent on them; • Enabling a large network of organisations involved in the process to maintain on-going capacity. • Important to define the audience(s) – often not clear. • Need to be clear about whether the assessment is solely about informing adaptation policy or about raising awareness and informing adaptation decision-making. • The process of undertaking the assessment can be as or more important than the results – what does this mean for the purpose of the assessment and how it can achieve the desired benefit? • A scientific assessment of risks will not bring about transformational policy change, yet many of the

	assessments are very much science led processes. • Extreme events/disasters such as "Super-storm Sandy" are often much greater policy levers for adaptation than are national assessments. Therefore need to consider how a national climate change assessment can drive adaptation policy if that is its purpose.
Scope – what was in scope and out of scope	*Challenges and Lessons Learned* • Although national in scope, it is recognised that assessments could have a potentially greater impact at a regional rather than national scale as regions often have the justification/authority for implementing policy/actions on the ground. The challenge is how to produce a national assessment that is also useful at a local level or, alternatively, how to produce a national assessment while managing expectation regarding utility at the local level. • Consider implications of how the assessment is structured as this impacts on how it can be used – e.g. political or administrative regions may not be able to use a national assessment as the data/risks identified nationally may not be relevant at finer scales. To have policy relevance the assessment needs to be structured around existing policy areas. • Having access to data at fine enough/appropriate scales for use by the intended audience(s); • How to link climate change mitigation policy with adaptation policy and the relative cost-benefits of policy in these areas is considered a priority in some countries, but not in others; • Need to include a focus on current impacts - need a normative dialogue approach to be able to engage and influence people and to place information provided into context.
Target Audiences	Target audiences are often not defined clearly, with frequent reference to "users" and "stakeholders". Target audiences are defined by some as primarily government and policy-makers, but others also include science advisors, federal agencies, practitioners, industry sectors, academia, IPCC, NGOs, general public, media etc. *Challenges and Lessons Learned* • How to extend ownership beyond government and engage with the wider community when assessments are government reports? • How to encourage practitioner experience and tools to flow in and out of the risk assessment process. • How to address multiple audiences at a variety of scales – is this possible within a national assessment framework?
Outputs	*Challenges and Lessons Learned* • Recognition that few if anyone reads the entire assessment report/s – implications for how report

	structured and presented. • Especially when the target audience is broad it is important that the outputs are easily accessible. In these cases, making the assessment available online is an option being pursued, including access to underlying data, and presenting information in a way that is useful to decision makers; • Presenting information on risks is not necessarily enough – where the intention is to inform policy recommendations as where to invest policy effort can be informative; • Need to have transparency about how conclusions were reached and what assumptions were made. How to deal with the complexity of the science but present a clear consensus message to policy makers. • How to make a case for cost-benefits of adaptation – often there is not a strong enough case presented for action on adaptation.
Delivery mechanisms and scope of the effort	A variety of approaches have been adopted, with most involving a large number of people and considerable cost (i.e. in excess of £1-3M), as well as government and agency staff time and in some cases large numbers of volunteers (e.g. Third US assessment had input from more than 1000 volunteers). In addition, the assessment can be underpinned by large research programmes – for example the US assessment could draw on a $2.6 billion research programme, national atmospheric observing systems and modelling efforts; and the Netherlands, the €100M "Knowledge for Climate" research programme. Models for delivery include a network model, especially where the purpose of the assessment is capacity building and raising awareness; and delivery by a government-let contract to a research/consultancy consortium.
Dissemination and using assessments Understanding the intended use and users	Need for clear definition of target audience(s) and scope early in the assessment process (informing the different means of presenting the assessments/products); Recognise that there are direct and indirect audiences Scientific understanding remains an important driver – need to ensure scientific rigour *Challenges and lessons learnt:* Is assessment solely about informing (how does the purpose(s) of assessment relate to intended audiences?); Recognise that most people only read their 'backyard' component of the assessment; Need to systematically document users; testing with the intended audience relative to desirable outcomes, then consider the results in terms of implications for how to present the assessment (multiple products targeted to the specific audiences) Recognise that other users could include an international audience (e.g., neighbouring countries) – what are

	the implications for linking national assessments and/or facilitating transfer of knowledge and tools. Recognising that for many users the need for adaptation action is more acceptable than that directed at mitigation, even in this case there is less acceptance of the need for strong government action and for going beyond incremental change.
Enhancing and understanding the impacts	Need a mix of different sciences engaged within the assessment and its delivery – provides an opportunity to explore production and delivery of the assessment from different perspectives; Distinct products for the different audiences (policy relevant at multiple scales); Use storyline to enhance understanding and promote wider engagement ; Focus on growth is a potential pathway to enhancing the use/impact; Simple, plain language summary can enhance awareness and result in greater impact. *Challenges and lessons learnt:* Planning and coordination of communications and product release is critically important, can be challenging and requires time and investment; Gradual dissemination (percolating through peer networks) can be effective but takes time; Need time for messages to get out there; Assessments can have a greater impact at a sub-national level, but this adds to the challenge of production and dissemination – multiple audiences at a variety of scales; Information and network society creates a complex communication model; Providing timely access (recognising policy and decision timetables, and statutory requirements – how to balance in the current, near-term and future?); How far to go into recommendations (for policy, practice and research) – avoiding the perception that preconceived recommendations dictate content; Transition in assessments to thinking about how to make them useful (moving from what is happening to how to address); How to engage in systems thinking with users; With adaptation underway, there is a need for assessments to include monitoring of adaptation outcomes and feedback as part of the adaptation cycle; Need to include and highlight the business case for adaptation – asset value for a well-adapting system – this is more than just acknowledging that adaptation can work; What additional work is required to enhance the impacts of the assessment – linked to level of effort and finances? This includes finding the appropriate balance between improving the evidence and improving the assessment process and dissemination.

Expectations related to use	Ease of accessibility in a range of appropriate formats for identified users is important; Impacts focus can lead the assessment and its use down the pathway of primarily considering technological adaptation. This is a particular concern should it divert from consideration of technological and socio-economic development; There are limitations to a sequential 'science then policy' approach and reflection of that in the assessment – need for more of a parallel approach, each informing the other. *Challenges and Lessons Learnt:* With multiple audiences, there is a need to manage expectations – possibly address using case studies; Need for a balance between understanding the impacts and risks, and understanding adaptation. There is the view that the assessment should be trying to frame adaptation in addition to communicating risk; Policy agenda is leading – how to translate long-term adaptation strategies into manageable steps, within recognisable policy frameworks.
What is a 'successful' assessment – evaluation	Success of an assessment is tied to its impacts relative to intended purpose. Understanding who is using the report and for what purpose; Recognise that the assessment is only one aspect of the evidence being considered by users; Need for monitoring, evaluating and documenting the impact of the report/assessment. *Challenges and Lessons Learnt:* Lack of documentation on how assessments have been used – how and why the audience(s) are using the different products; Feedback on use is primarily anecdotal and it is difficult to attribute action to assessment – recognise when evaluating, the need to understand short-term and long-term (allowing time for dissemination and pick-up) benefits; Need for users to demonstrate value of the assessment; Need for criteria for successful assessment Metrics related to the use (outcomes and impacts) have value, but there is also an issue related to timing (when should success be judged); predetermining criteria may be difficult.

Next Steps

- Report from this meeting, including the establishment of a website from which the presentations and this report will be accessible (see http://www.ukcip.org.uk/projects/national-climate-change-assessments/)

- Article for a submission to a peer-reviewed journal – insights, drivers, differences and similarities, and implications for the assessment process and outputs
- Desire to continue as a community, to engage others and to retain the informal nature of these dialogues Number of areas identified for follow-up – adaptation indicators, purpose and evaluation of assessments. Potential of setting up teleconferences or web-based conversations as the basis for these exchanges.

Participants

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