



# The NRM Adaptation Checklist: Key Messages

## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This Key Messages document provides an overview of more detailed information and guidance material that can be downloaded from [adaptnrm.org](http://adaptnrm.org). It is not intended to be comprehensive and the authors recommend that practitioners access the technical guide should they wish to follow the advice provided.

## ABOUT ADAPTNRM

The National AdaptNRM Impacts and Adaptation Project is a multidisciplinary endeavour that brings together a diverse group of scientists working with NRM practitioners.

While the project itself consists of researchers from CSIRO and NCCARF, our output and initiatives have been shaped and informed through the generous input of NRM practitioners across Australia as well as a multitude of researchers, state and federal government stakeholders.

## CITATION

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## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

### National Impacts and Adaptation Project Leader

Dr Veronica Doerr  
T. +61 2 6246 4099  
E. [veronica.doerr@csiro.au](mailto:veronica.doerr@csiro.au)

### AdaptNRM Engagement Leader

Dr Lilly Lim-Camacho  
T. +61 7 3327 4730  
E. [lilly.lim-camacho@csiro.au](mailto:lilly.lim-camacho@csiro.au)



# Climate change will have a direct effect on the natural resources and human communities that are the focus of NRM groups.

At the same time climate change will exacerbate the existing pressures that are managed by NRM groups and the responses of people and the environment to these pressures. NRM groups have been involved in developing NRM plans for their regions for long periods of time. These plans are strategic documents which guide their investment, activities and outreach, and are supported by a variety of other more detailed planning documents, background material and by annual investment plans. Most plans are developed to be adaptive in nature and to enable feedback on outcomes achieved and lessons learned to be taken into account in determining their way forward.

As yet most of the NRM plans in Australia have not fully taken climate change into account and have not fully considered actions aimed at adapting to climate change. Despite this, many existing actions remain relevant while others may need tweaking or may need to be discarded or reprioritised.

The NRM Adaptation Checklist has been designed to help evaluation, prompt practitioners about where changes to their plans might be needed, and provide additional information which can support the amendment of plans.

This document is a summary of key messages that have been developed to support NRM planners to take stock of their plans, evaluate the degree of climate readiness, and assess the forms of action that are required to develop a climate ready plan. The approach has been designed to be consistent with planning approaches already used by NRM groups, from adaptive management to resilience and risk management frameworks. The approach is developed to be fit for purpose and not to prescribe how to deal with issues, but rather to highlight the main issues and support gradual improvement.



To achieve this we outline four key challenges associated with adapting to climate change in NRM planning. These include:

- 1. Making decisions for multiple possible futures** – NRM planners must find ways to plan that are consistent with the range of likely futures and possible desired outcomes. This necessarily involves a degree of uncertainty, but this need not be a barrier to planning.
- 2. Employing flexible and adaptive planning processes** – New information will continue to emerge about the likelihood of future climates and consequences and planners may need to develop plans that are even more flexible and/or more rapidly adapted to incorporate this new information..
- 3. Explicitly identifying and preparing for likely future decisions** – Plans need to prepare for future decisions, including understanding which decisions need to be made now and which could or should be made later, identifying and monitoring the triggers that indicate when a new decision needs to be made, and planning to gather information to support future decision-making..
- 4. Strengthening the adaptive capacity of people and organisations** – There are many people and organisations that manage and depend on natural resources. Successful development and implementation of plans ultimately depends on the capacity of people to be flexible and adaptive throughout all phases of the planning process..
- 5. Making decisions for multiple possible futures** – NRM planners must find ways to plan that are consistent with the range of likely futures and possible desired outcomes. This necessarily involves a degree of uncertainty, but this need not be a barrier to planning.

The ‘checklist’ for NRM planning frameworks developed in this guide is intended to support self-evaluation by NRM groups of their current ability to meet these four challenges. It is built around five common stages or components: (i) assessment, (ii) strategic planning, (iii) implementation planning and action, (iv) monitoring, and (v) reflection. These are built into an iterative process – necessary because the most effective responses to climate change problems may not be known and outcomes may only be achieved after trying a range of options, assessing the responses, and making appropriate changes. From this a series of self-reflective questions are posed to discuss the ways in which planning to adapt to climate change may need to be done differently compared to what might have been done traditionally. The generic approach we have taken ensures that the guidance is relevant to all NRM groups, regardless of the specific planning approaches that have been followed to date.





## Step 1 Assessment

The assessment stage is an opportunity to take stock of resources and data, knowledge, and values that will inform planning or plan adjustments to incorporate climate adaptation responses. The assessment needs to account for multiple futures.

Why might assessment need to be different?

- To assess potential futures, not just current state
- To empower the community early in the planning process & build their capacity
- To effectively manage increasing quantities of information

A set of six questions are posed to determine whether sufficient building blocks and processes are in place:

- Do you understand the range of future climates over time for your region?
- Do you consider how both your natural and social systems are likely to be impacted by the likely range of future climates?
- Do you assess the capacity of your natural and social systems to absorb these impacts?
- Do you work with your communities to identify what they value in the context of future climates?
- Do you reflect on whether your broad objectives are still appropriate under future climates, and whether your existing management levers will still work under these changing futures?
- Do you use all of the above information to decide where to focus your more detailed climate-adaptation planning effort?

## Step 2 Strategy & Priorities

This component is where NRM vision and overall goals and priorities are set. If these are not consistent with the challenges of climate adaptation, it can become difficult to meet climate adaptation challenges in sub-strategies and implementation plans. It is important, as part of an iterative framework, that changes are considered when the need becomes apparent and sufficient flexibility is built into plans.

Why might strategic planning need to be different?

- To plan for multiple possible futures
- To incorporate longer-term decision-making with short-term flexibility
- To facilitate solutions at a greater range of scales, especially larger cross-border scales
- To foster adaptive capacity through innovation and creativity

The following five questions were designed to check steps are in place to build just such a plan:

- Have you developed a climate-appropriate vision for your region?
- Do you check whether the principles and objectives underneath your vision are also climate-appropriate and whether they are consistent with each other?
- Does your plan include goals related to building adaptive capacity?
- Do you explicitly incorporate flexibility into either your plan or the plan review process?
- Do you try to ensure your plan and the plans of your stakeholders are consistent?

## Step 3 Implementation Planning & Action

This is where you start to make more detailed decisions about the targets and actions you might take to achieve the strategic objectives and visions. Traditionally, this more detailed planning is done separately for different domains (e.g. water, agriculture, biodiversity, etc.) and in many cases this may involve the development of separate sub-strategies and/or implementation plans – a segregation that may itself be a challenge to climate adaptation.

Here, think about how you might implement actions in the face of uncertainty (multiple futures) and dealing with the key challenge of

considering which actions are appropriate at what points in time as the climate changes, and to explicitly plan to switch as the need arises.

Why might implementation planning and action need to be different?

- To plan actions that are appropriate for multiple futures
- To consider different sequences of actions over time
- To explore the consequences of actions across domains to avoid perverse outcomes
- To build adaptive capacity through innovation, action and experimentation

The following eight questions have been designed to help you to approach these relatively new challenges.

- Do you assess whether our current high priority targets and actions are still likely to be your top priorities under future climates?
- Do you use a creative brainstorming process involving community and stakeholders to identify potential actions you might take?
- Have you considered taking an ‘adaptation pathways’ approach - explicitly planning to switch actions over time?
- Do you consider implementing actions in such a way that they can be modified in the future?
- When deciding which actions to take, have you thought about using a decision-making approach that considers uncertainty and risk in addition to cost and effectiveness?
- Are your sub-strategies or implementation plans strongly coordinated across domains and scales?
- Do you deliberately implement multiple different actions to address a given objective in order to ‘experiment’ and see which is most effective?
- Do you partner with the community and your stakeholders in both developing implementation plans and taking action?

## Step 4 Monitoring

In this section we consider how monitoring may be different when dealing with climate change adaptation and the need to support flexibility of your actions. We also consider the need to monitor triggers that could indicate when actions and approaches may need to be changed. Effective monitoring can be costly and we emphasise the need to be targeted and to develop partnerships to increase the scope of monitoring activities.

Why might monitoring need to be different?

- To monitor which climate futures are eventuating
- To monitor trigger points for future decisions

- To more critically target monitoring of actions
- To build adaptive capacity through partnerships and helping people observe changes and success stories

The following five questions have been designed to help you to consider monitoring under a climate affected future.

- Do you track emerging climate futures for your region?
- Do you monitor triggers for future decisions?
- Do you consider whether monitoring is likely to give you useful information about effectiveness of your actions given monitoring effort and time frames, and then implement monitoring only where it will be useful?
- Do you monitor changes in your region's adaptive capacity?
- Do you explore potential partnerships for building monitoring programs?

## Step 5 Reflection

Reflection is an integral part of any adaptive management, and under a climate affected future has additional importance. This is when you can decide if it's time to consider adjusting actions as part of an adaptation pathway or even adjust overarching objectives. This is the stage where your planning can become truly adaptive and when you can make decisions about reducing potential for maladaptation or when transformative adaptation might be required.

Why might reflection need to be different?

- To reflect on success in terms of avoiding undesirable futures (rather than progress toward a single, desirable future)
- To decide whether it is time to address decisions that were previously delayed
- To reflect on adaptive capacity and ownership of the plan by your community

We have identified three questions to help you assess whether your reflection approaches are supporting climate adaptation planning and outcomes.

- Do you reflect on where you are among the range of possible futures for your region?
- Do you reflect on the processes that you followed in preparing a climate adapted NRM plan, not just the plan itself?
- Do you reflect on whether it's time to consider shifting actions, based not just on monitoring their effectiveness but also based on trigger points for future decisions?

To support you to consider the questions we elaborate on why they are important and how you might approach them in a resource constrained environment. We also provide an overview of the risks to your plans and to your ability to achieve your objectives if each question is not being addressed effectively. We then provide a series of case studies and tools to support you to address the questions and build effective plans.

The NRM Adaptation Checklist does not aim to answer all questions or to provide links to all answers, but rather to help practitioners to ask some of the right questions and to start the journey of adapting effectively to climate change.

The approach is consistent with the Principles for the Regional NRM Planning for Climate Change Fund identified by the Commonwealth Government.

The NRM Adaptation Checklist is as a means to support continual improvement and for groups to start now and build into the future.



## Download Available

THE NRM ADAPTATION PLANNING CHECKLIST IS AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD ON [WWW.ADAPTNRM.ORG](http://WWW.ADAPTNRM.ORG)

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