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States & Regions



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THE CLEAN REVOLUTION

POLICY INNOVATION BRIEFING

How South Australia is engaging local communities on adaptation

POLICY INNOVATION BRIEFINGS

State and regional governments around the world are developing a new generation of innovative climate and energy policies. These briefings will explore these emerging policy models, as well as what it will take for them to scale globally.

In March 2008, South Australia experienced 13 straight days of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit temperatures (37.8 degrees Celsius), breaking the previous record for consecutively hot days.¹ Ten months later, the state was hit by another record-breaking heat wave, with temperatures in Adelaide rising to an all-time high of 114 degrees Fahrenheit (45.7 degrees Celsius).²

The second heat wave, in particular, had serious impacts on public health. Ambulance call outs (16%), hospital admissions (33%) and mortality (32%) all rose significantly compared to previous heat waves, suggesting the event “may have exceeded the capacity of the population to cope.”³

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), such heat waves are expected to become more and more common in Australia over the coming years, and a regular occurrence by 2030.⁴

For South Australia’s policymakers, the trend of rising temperatures presents the dual challenge of helping citizens deal with increasingly extreme heat, and protecting the region’s infrastructure and industry⁴ from related climate impacts like sea-level rise, drought and extreme storms.⁵

REGIONAL COMMITTEES

Officials in South Australia’s Climate Change Unit recognized early on that the key to developing an effective adaptation plan was working directly with local communities – where the impacts are felt, and where new policies must be implemented. But engaging local leaders on adaptation can be difficult. In a recent survey, 73% of global cities cited a lack of commitment from local officials as a major challenge to adaptation planning.⁷

To overcome this challenge, South Australia sought to create twelve “regional committees” comprised of key local government, industry and community leaders. Rather than receiving unilateral funding and resources from the state, the committees were given shared responsibility over key elements of the planning process, including coordinating integrated vulnerability assessments, drafting adaptation plans and socializing the results with the broader community.

“We wanted to work side by side with local communities to understand their perspective, and to embed it into the planning process,” said Michelle English, manager of South Australia’s Climate Change Unit.

¹<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/statements/scs15b.pdf>

²<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/statements/scs17d.pdf>

³<http://www.ehjournal.net/content/10/1/42>

⁴Since 2009, the state hit the unprecedented 115-degree mark two more times in 2013 and 2014.

⁵Key infrastructure and industry includes \$27 billion worth of commercial buildings, \$10 billion worth of roads and railway systems, a \$5 billion agricultural sector and a \$1 billion wine industry.

⁶<http://www.climatechange.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science/climate-change-impacts/south-australia>

⁷<http://web.mit.edu/jcarmin/www/urbanadapt/Urban%20Adaptation%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

FURTHER READING[Adapting to Climate Change in South Australia](#)[Prospering in a Changing Climate: Government Action Plan for the Climate Change Adaptation Framework in South Australia](#)

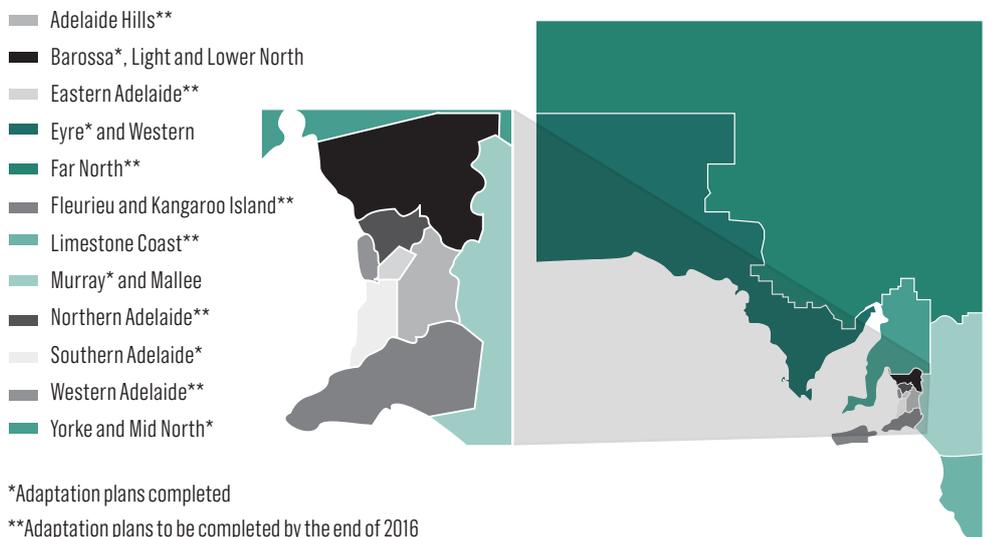
In agreements underpinning the processes, the committees also agreed to share planning expenses with the state – an arrangement that helped to both lower state government costs and increase the sense of ownership on the part of committee members.

“Co-investment has been a powerful tool for us,” English added. “Rather than ending up with a long wish list of potential projects, local stakeholders are engaged in prioritizing the most feasible actions.”

Through the regional committees, South Australia placed local leaders at the center of their adaptation planning process. This enabled the state to benefit from local knowledge, reflect local values and leverage local decision-making bodies to affect change.

CULTURE OF SHARING

After three years of engagement, each of the twelve committees have begun their integrated vulnerability assessments. Five committees have completed adaptation plans (i.e. Yorke and Mid North, Eyre Peninsula, Southern Adelaide, Murray Darling Basin, and Barossa), and the remaining are expected to complete plans by the end of 2016 – putting the state on track for universal planning.

Status of adaptation plans in South Australia’s twelve regional committees

So far, the program has cost about US\$1 million – a fraction of what some other governments have spent – with another US\$2 million provided by local partners, the national government and other sources.

But state officials believe the most meaningful impact to date has been the committees' ability to energize local leaders; something they hope will lead to even further progress in the future.

“We’ve seen people’s minds be changed,” said Stephanie Ziersch, climate change adviser for the state. “When people understand how climate change is impacting their own community, even their own homes, it makes it personal.”

“We now have groups of influential, local decision-makers throughout the state with a vested interest in seeing this process succeed, and a growing culture of sharing that will enable it to.”

FINDING SYNERGIES

The next step for the state is reviewing the adaptation plans from each region and developing a holistic response.

“The regional plans will give us a clear picture of the risks we face,” Ziersch added. “Some of them require a regional response, while others, like sea-level rise, affect multiple regions and require a statewide approach.”

“Our job now is to find synergies across the regional plans, and to identify the changes that we, the state government, need to make in order to make sure that the right agencies are involved, and that the needed actions are taken.”

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