



Sustainable Future

Planning & Design

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Adapting to climate change: an imperative for all of us

In November 1992 some 1,700 of the world's leading scientists issued a warning to humanity that human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. They said current and often irreversible damage to the environment and critical resources, if not checked, will put at risk the future we wish for human society and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in a manner that we know.

Eighteen years on humanity must now face the consequences of not heeding this warning. While many governments, organisations and citizens diligently enacted plans to reduce their carbon footprints and live more sustainably, it's now too late to just take a mitigation approach.

Climate science is now telling us that even if greenhouse emission gases are significantly reduced today, mitigation efforts alone are not enough to prevent climate related disasters. Humanity must also prepare to adapt to the extreme effects of climate change; and we must start now because the 'adaption planning window' is much shorter than scientists thought.

"The only glacier in the Western Pacific (Punjak Jaya, Indonesia) is disappearing at a rate of 7m per year. It could be gone in 4 to 5 years...we thought we had decades before the ice disappeared." A quote by Professor Lonnie Thompson, Ohio State University, from an article in the 3rd July 2010 Weekend Australian titled 'Pacific glacier may soon disappear'.

As the climate change debate shifts from a focus mainly on mitigation efforts to how humanity is going to adapt to more extreme climate, we are now seeing governments and businesses across the globe escalating the development of climate change adaption strategies.

For example, the May 2010 National Research Council 'Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change' report requested by the US Congress anticipates climate change will cause a greater than 500% increase in the number of expected heat-related deaths in large US cities, alter the distribution patterns of plants, change habitats and cause the large-scale retreat of populations from at-risk areas.

The report notes that adaptation to climate change calls for a new paradigm—one that considers a range of possible future climate conditions and associated impacts, some well outside the realm of past experience. This means not waiting until uncertainties have been reduced to consider adaptation actions.

The report goes on to say that adaptation is a process that requires actions from many decision-makers in federal, state, tribal, and local governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and community groups. The nation must mobilize now to increase adaptive capacities. This action can be viewed as an insurance policy against an uncertain future.

Developing effective climate change adaption plans

While some adaption plans have been developed and implemented, much of it is in a reactive sense, such as attempting to secure water supplies after prolonged drought. Effective adaption plans are contextual and anticipatory in nature and are based on understanding the relationships between humanity and our organisations and communities, and the probable future of Planet Earth.

The planning process must also be able to deal with numerous variables and different vested interests, as well as being able to generate widespread commitment and motivate people with vastly different beliefs about the reality of climate change.

Our action research has discovered that many leaders do not have the skill and knowledge to successfully complete this task. As such, my colleague, Dr Merrelyn Emery, and I initiated the **Sustainable Future Planning & Design (SFP&D)** development program.

This program introduces government, business, education and community leaders to planning and design tools that can be readily applied in their organisations and communities for the development of action plans to effectively adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects.

The program revolves around a one-day training workshop. It enables people from all walks of life to collectively make a difference now to take action on climate change.

Our new website (www.sustainablefutureplanning.com.au) provides more details about this program and the socio-ecological theory that underpins it, as well as the climate science that informs it.

This website will also be a vehicle for people to share their adaption and mitigation planning experiences. And although adaption plans are often specific to local contexts, people can still learn from other initiatives and if required, adjust them to suit their own circumstances.

Pro bono offer to undertake a climate change resilience survey

We have also produced a climate change resilience survey that determines the organisational and community capacity to effectively adapt to climate change and respond to its extreme effects.

The survey not only provides an understanding of how people see climate change, but also identifies the determinants of engagement and motivation that are operating within a specific organisation or community. Without motivation, coping capabilities will be weakened and the best plans will fail.

The References & Publications page of our new website has further information about the climate change resilience survey.

We plan to conduct several pro bono resilience surveys for local or school communities and/or for not-for-profit organisations. The survey outputs will help us produce resilience trend reports that will provide valuable insights for strategic planners, policy makers, and risk managers and for those who are responsible for sustainability.

Please contact us if you would like further information about this offer. And please don't hesitate to forward this newsletter to those whom you believe could benefit from our survey.

Finally, we trust that you find our new website helpful. If you have any comments about it or queries with any of the above please call or send us an email.

Regards,

Peter Aughton and Merrelyn Emery,

Founding members of the Sustainable Future Planning & Design (SFP&D) development program and its associated website www.sustainablefutureplanning.com.au

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