

# Adaptation as adoption? The relevance of rural extension

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# Rationale

1. Rural extension holds a lot of lessons for adaptation
2. Rural extension is an important aspect of the context in which adaptation is now being promoted
3. Climate change adaptation is a new (and contested) topic within rural extension



The image shows a screenshot of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network website banner. The banner features a collage of three photographs: on the left, three people in outdoor gear looking out over a beach; in the center, a group of people in a field with cows; on the right, a group of people in a forest. The text 'Members login' is overlaid on the top right of the banner. Below the photographs, the text 'facilitating change in complex environments' is displayed. The main title 'AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK' is prominently displayed in large, bold, orange letters. The website logo, 'AUSTRALASIA PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK', is located in the bottom left corner. The navigation menu at the bottom includes links for 'About APEN', 'About Extension', 'Careers & Training', 'ExtensionNet', 'Events', 'Resources', 'Members', and 'Contact us'. The tagline 'Extending Horizons' is at the bottom left.

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Members login

facilitating change in complex environments

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Extending Horizons

# Overview

- Sketch of 2 broad approaches to facilitating change in rural extension & their relevance to CC adaptation:
  - “Practice change”
  - “Capacity building”

More info: APEN (below) and Rickards, L. (2013) *Climate change adaptation and the Australian primary industries: an interpretive literature review*. [www.piarn.org/resource/832](http://www.piarn.org/resource/832)



The image shows a banner for the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network. On the left, there is a photograph of three people (two women and one child) looking out over a beach. On the right, there is a photograph of a group of people in a field, with a 'Members login' button and an 'OK' button. The banner features the text 'AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK' in large, bold, orange letters. Below this, it says 'facilitating change in complex environments'. At the bottom, there is a navigation menu with links: 'About APEN', 'About Extension', 'Careers & Training', 'ExtensionNet', 'Events', 'Resources', 'Members', and 'Contact us'. The tagline 'Extending Horizons' is visible in the bottom left corner.

AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK

Members login

OK

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# 1. Practice change

- “Rational agriculture” + behaviour change
- Explicit goals
  - production, productivity
  - OHS, animal welfare, environmental sustainability etc
    - Sometimes backed up with regulations/laws
- Premise: education with a purpose
  - “*Informed* decision making”... Leading to the *right* action
  - Some collaborative research, and intensive hands-on teaching, but ultimate aim = broad uptake in population

Research > Knowledge > Transfer > Adoption > Diffusion



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## Relevance of practice change to CC adaptation:

- Unfamiliarity of CC, accumulating info, & declining reliability of existing experiential knowledge: farmers need new knowledge
- Known climate change risks: need for anticipatory action & specific resilience
- Adaptation deficits: existing problems in managing climate variability require targeted interventions
- Complexity and busyness of farming: farmers want answers!
- Need to avoid maladaptation :
  - Do it right the first time - learn from others
  - Need for coordinated action, minimal negative flow-on effects
  - Knowledge as source of confidence and *willingness* to actively adapt



# Relevance of practice change to CC adaptation:

- **Valuable insights about facilitating change**
  - Change process not predictable, linear, rapid or irreversible
  - Multiple hurdles at each stage (beyond “barriers to adaptation”)
  - Adoption (of adaptation) = complex process involving many risks, decisions, steps, changes
- **Most CC adaptation work still focused on communication & “on/off” view of adaptation**
- **Willingness to adopt X innovation shaped by:**
  - Characteristics of the innovation, notably:
    - **Relative advantage**
    - **Trialability**
  - Characteristics of the messenger, the adopter and their relationship



## 2. Capacity building

- **Limitations of the practice change model**
  - Ethical: do we have right & capacity to instruct farmers?
  - Instrumental: unsatisfactory & unintended outcomes
- **Goal: individuals & communities more capable of change**
  - Direction of change = client-determined
  - Doesn't push "a message" (eg climate change is real)
- **Premise: support and skills (counselling model)**
  - "Supported decision making" as source of wellbeing, action
  - Generic skills and self-knowledge
  - Context-specific, iterative & often private learning

**Support > Confidence, skills > Active decision-making**



# Relevance of capacity building to CC adaptation

- **CC impacts context-specific and dynamic**
  - To what extent can answers, solutions or even trust-worthy options be provided? Do we have the knowledge to reliably guide farmers in what to do?
- **Shift towards presenting adaptation as broad principles**
  - Eg. Resilience thinking: diversity, redundancy, transformation
  - Eg. Opportunistic farming: going hard when conditions allow
- **Need for generic resilience**
  - Given uncertainty about future conditions (climatic plus)
  - Given adaptation deficit in this area: rural decline problems
  - Resistance to CC reflects in part a sense of threat (esp. in times of crisis)



# Relevance of capacity building to CC adaptation

- **Boundaries and goals of adaptation are subjective**
  - Eg. To what extent does adaptation require mitigation (including adapting to gov. & consumer mitigation responses)?
  - Eg. To what extent does adaptation require or re-legitimate productivity vs. sustainability goals at the farm and national levels?



# Concluding comments

1. We need to become more sophisticated in our thinking about adaptation
2. Rural extension is necessarily involved in adaptation in rural areas and provides lessons more broadly
3. Long-standing tensions exist between practice change and capacity building approaches to change
  - We need to be reflective about how CC adaptation initiatives are (implicitly) adopting elements of each
4. Long-standing tensions exist between production vs. sustainability objectives
  - Questions remain about how CC adaptation relates

