

## Stakeholder Workshop Discussion Paper 1

# *Climate change adaptation capacities and needs in the community and natural resource management sectors*

This paper aims to provide an introduction to the scope and purposes of the VCCCAR Project: 'Implementing Tools and Capacity-building for the Community and the Natural Resource Management Sectors'. It briefly outlines:

- Reasons for engaging in climate change adaptation;
- The project's approach;
- Different ways of becoming involved in the research; and
- Next steps in the research process.

This discussion paper has been written by the research team<sup>1</sup> as background for the project's Stakeholder Workshop being held on 13 September 2012. During the workshop, participants will be invited to discuss how the projected impacts of climate change will affect their organisations and sectors, and asked to share what they consider priorities for climate change adaptation.

## Why climate change adaptation?

The State of Victoria faces a number of significant impacts from climate change, such as:

- Increased frequency and intensity of heat waves;
- Increased occurrences of fire weather and more intense bushfires;
- Sea-level rise, coastal erosion and coastal flooding due to storm surges;
- Inland flooding due to heavy rainfall;
- Prolonged droughts and less reliable rainfall; and
- Increasingly variable weather patterns.

These changes affect both natural and human systems. They provide opportunities for some, but if left unaddressed, can have significant consequences for people, animals and plants, natural habitats, and built environments. These effects may be positive or negative, although the benefits are likely to be small when compared to potential losses. In many cases, negative consequences can be avoided or reduced by careful planning. This is often called anticipatory or planned adaptation to climate change. Planning for the impacts of climate change and implementing adaptation are considered critical for avoiding future harm to human and natural systems and their components as a result of climate change.

Climate change adaptation involves developing mechanisms to reduce negative impacts of climate change at various scales. In contrast, climate change mitigation aims at reducing further global warming through reducing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. Adaptation is no longer considered the poor cousin to mitigation in terms of response mechanisms to climate change, as society comes to grips

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<sup>1</sup> Contact details appear on the last page.

with the extent of climate impacts faced. Adaptation can address both the negative effects of change and take advantage of beneficial opportunities that appear.

The impacts of climate change are experienced by individuals and organisations across Australia in many different ways. These experiences vary according to a range of factors, such as regional climate, altitude, topography, and the current state of ecosystems, buildings and infrastructure. Climate change impacts also vary depending on local and regional social and economic conditions, including population density, the regional importance of some economic sectors, and the level of awareness of climate change issues found among residents, business owners, community leaders and visitors.

To be successful, climate change adaptation requires action at all administrative scales, from the local to the national to the global level. Governments at all levels in Australia have taken a role in addressing adaptation, but it is clear that, to a substantial degree, individuals and organisations will need to look after their own future and engage with adaptation themselves. Organisational-level adaptation is not only important in the context of climate change but for ensuring the viability of the services an organisation provides during ongoing societal change and during peak times of strain on its resources.

From an organisational point of view, adaptation can be considered a process of continuous social and institutional learning, adjustment and transformation. Essentially changing the way we do things to respond to the current and projected impacts of climate change. Adaptation understood in this way aims to reduce the vulnerability of people, animals, plants and the systems that support them.

## **Project approach**

The main goal of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the adaptation capabilities and needs of three types of government service providers and funded agencies (community service organisations - CSOs, catchment management authorities - CMAs, and primary care partnerships - PCPs) and to facilitate the implementation and testing of tools and methodologies for climate change adaptation planning.

### ***Areas of research interest***

This project explores three key research themes, designed to analyse individual, organisational and sectoral contexts, test adaptation tools, and build capacity for future adaptation success.

#### *Theme 1: Exploring the organisational context for adaptation in government agencies and service providers*

- How are these types of organisations and broader sectors currently planning for climate change adaptation and what enables or constrains their status?
- Who are the key stakeholders within and outside of the organisations influencing adaptation?
- How do individuals within these organisations see how climate change adaptation ought to happen?

#### *Theme 2: Design and testing of tools and support mechanisms for climate change adaptability*

- How can adaptation planning tools assist organisations in planning for climate change adaptation?
- What evidence is there of changes in adaptation planning practice or learning as a consequence of using these tools?
- Can/should it be assumed that existing tools and support mechanism are the best fit for the identified needs, or are customised, individual support mechanisms more meaningful?

#### *Theme 3: Building organisational capacity for participation in adaptation*

- What competencies need to be built within government service providers/funded agencies to successfully adapt to climate change?
- What are the elements of a program that would effectively engage and support the community and natural resource management sectors in climate change adaptation?

## Social learning as a theoretical approach to the project

To address the above research themes, we are drawing on a number of theoretical concepts. The concept of social learning is central to the approach taken. Learning approaches are particularly suitable for adaptation planning in a climate changing world, where it is impossible to think of an 'end point' when adaptation will be complete or when we are 'adapted'.

Adaptation planning is not simply a matter of 'having a plan'. It is a continuous and repeated process of learning, action, and reflection - ongoing *planning*. Different levels of learning can be identified (Figure 1 below). First order learning is the adjustment of action in response to the results of an action or basic 'learning by doing'. Second order learning is the adjustment of the principles (e.g. values, rules, theories) on which action is based, as well as adjusting the action itself in response to results.

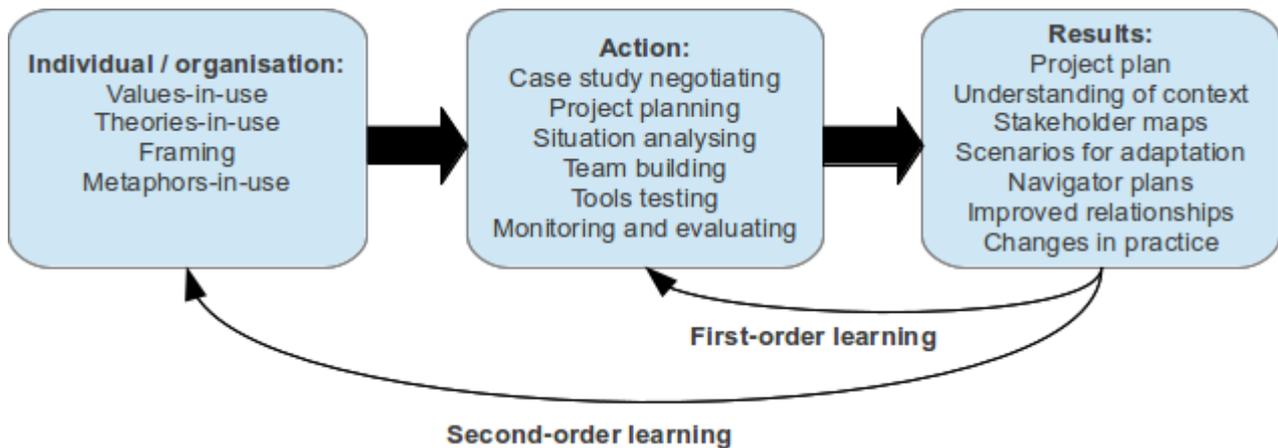


Figure 1: A learning-based model of engagement (adapted after Ison et al. 2009).

For the VCCCAR research project, the concept of social learning provides a theoretical lens to analyse and understand the learning, changes in practice, organisational and individual transformations that might take place when adaptation planning tools are tested in a given organisational environment.

The challenge for both researchers and practitioners is to apply learning approaches in practice in ways that transform the situation that is being researched. This will be achieved using a qualitative research approach. Rich data on the needs and capabilities of organisations and individuals will be collected through in-depth case study work with a select number of organisations from across the three types of government service providers and funded agencies.

In collaboration with members of the participating organisations, the researchers will analyse organisational adaptation needs and capabilities and the learning that may occur through testing a small number of established adaptation planning tools and methodologies. Research methods will involve semi-structured interviews, workshops and focus group discussions, as well as informal debate and participation (see Participant Information Sheet for further information on research methods).

## Participating in the research

This research project is designed to work around a set of case studies involving CSOs, PCPs and CMAs. The research team operates on the basis of an open invitation to negotiate participation in the project at any time, subject to available resources.

We envisage four levels of participation in the project, as depicted in Figure 2 below. We invite you, as the project participants, to tell the research team how you would like to be involved in the project.

- The **Blue** set of activities involves participation in the initial cross-sectoral workshop being held on 13 September 2012. Activities and discussions in sectoral groups will enable a better appreciation of the climate change adaptation situation in that sector, a group vision for the purpose of adaptation, and

an understanding of adaptation issues and opportunities. The outcomes of the workshop will be summarised and circulated to participants.

- The **Green** set of activities involves discussing and negotiating participation in the research project with individual organisations or clusters of organisations in particular sectors. While this activity lead to further stages of research, it is likely that the conversations themselves will yield valuable research data and a better understanding of organisational context.
- The **Red** set of activities involves participation in interviews, surveys and workshops to assess the existing setting in which your organisation and sector plan for climate change adaptation.
- The **Yellow** set of activities involves engaging in participatory action research to test tools for climate change adaptation planning. The exact set of activities and tools to be tested will be negotiated, but will likely involve semi-structured interviews, workshops and programs of action for testing tools. There is also an opportunity to jointly design a program of research around specific issues as they emerge.

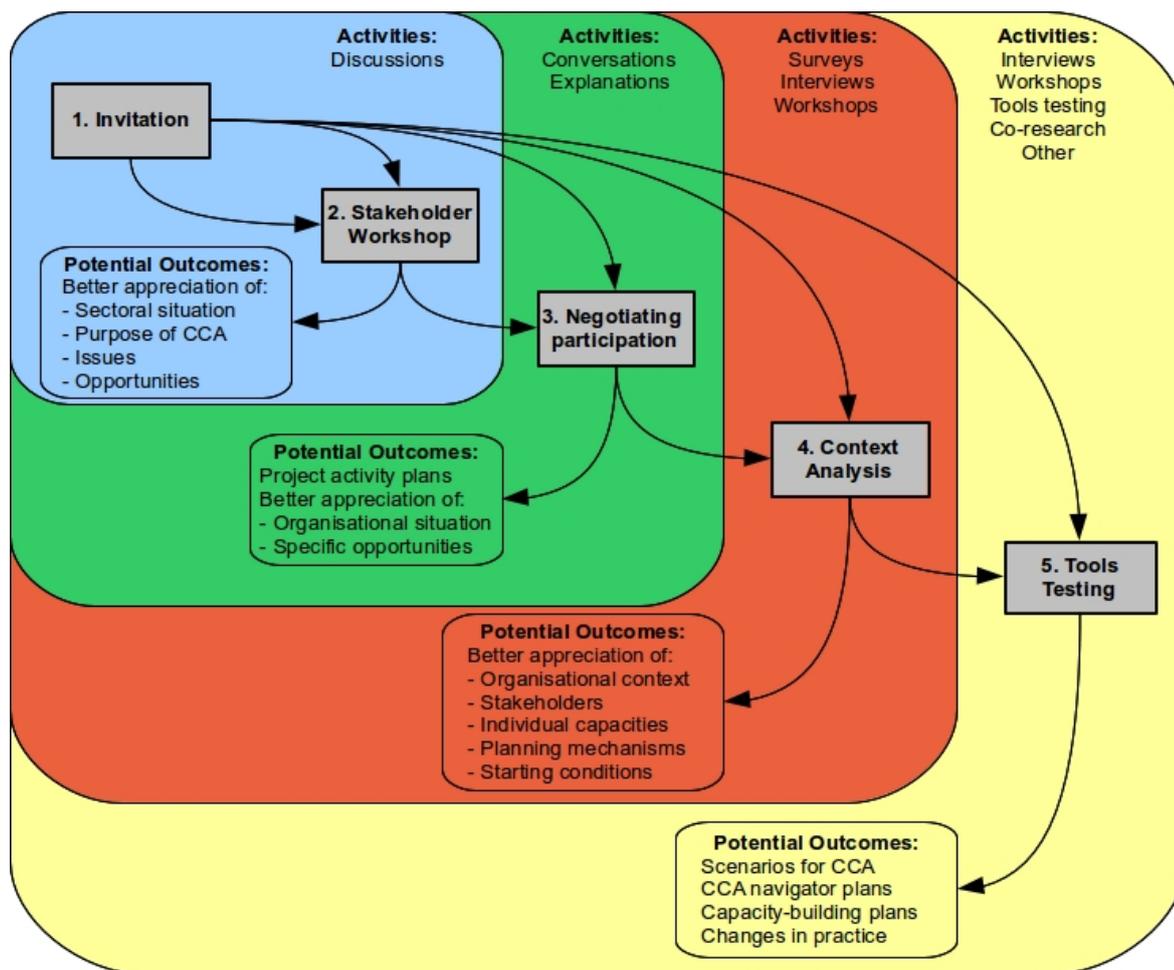


Figure 2: Levels of participation in the research project and potential outcomes.

## Current status and next steps for getting involved

The project officially started on 31 August 2012 and will run until the end of November 2013 (see separate Project Summary document for further information). The project has received human ethics research approval from RMIT University (see Participant Information Sheet document for information on ethical aspects of this research). A project information and scoping session was held at the VCCCAR Annual Forum in Melbourne on 25th July 2012.

The Stakeholder Workshop on 13 September 2012 is the start of formal project activities. Invitations were sent to all CMAs and PCPs in Victoria, as well as to a large number of CSOs, including local governments. Over 40 organisations expressed interest in attending the workshop or participating in the project.

Representatives from CSOs, CMAs or PCPs interested in participating in the research can be involved by:

1. Sending an email to Hartmut Fuenfgeld ([hartmut.fuenfgeld@rmit.edu.au](mailto:hartmut.fuenfgeld@rmit.edu.au)), briefly stating their interest in the project;
2. Following the email, a researcher will get in touch to schedule a phone call or visit to explore the best options for being involved;
3. The level of participation in the research will be agreed by researchers and representatives of the organisation in writing.

The overall number of participating organisations and their level of involvement will be coordinated by the research team in a way that best meets project objectives and fits within the capacity of project resources.

## Researcher contact details

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