

In the U.K., climate adaptation is mandated by statute, with primary responsibility in a single government agency and specific implementation requirements for local authorities. In the U.S., we can only envy the extent to which even the current Conservative government is taking the issue of climate change seriously.

A 2005 Climate Change Programme report helpfully assembled available information about climate impacts in England. The discussion of coastal flooding illustrates the report's approach:

With rising sea levels and increased storminess, coastal areas may be affected by severe flooding. Under the High scenario sea defences designed to withstand a 1 in 100 year event would only withstand events with a 2 - 8 year return period in East Anglia by the 2050s. Work in Scotland suggests that frequencies for the 1 in 100 year events would increase to 1 in 10 or 20 years by the 2050s under the same scenario. . . . Coastal erosion could also increase substantially, with annual damages expected to increase by 3-9 times, costing up to £126 million per year by the 2080s.

In 2008, the British government issued a framework for climate adaptation in England. The report focuses on a series of impacts including hotter, drier summers and more extreme weather events such as heat waves and heavy rain. The report establishes some basic principles, suggesting that adaptation should follow the principles of sustainable development, be proportional to the level of risk, and involve collaboration and transparency. Importantly, the report calls for the use of scenarios, one with a 50% probability and a more extreme one with a 10% probability.

In September 2010, the Adaptation Subcommittee of the Committee on Climate Change issued an assessment of current readiness to deal with climate change. Part 2 of the Climate Change Act 2008 established the Committee on Climate Change and charged it, among other duties, with making recommendations regarding adaptation. The report concluded:

The UK has started to build capacity for adaptation, with evidence of growing awareness of the risks and appropriate responses, particularly in public sector organisations. This compares favourably with progress in other countries, with some examples of good practice in adaptation decision-making. However, from the evidence reviewed, we conclude that capacity building is not yet

systematically translating into tangible action on the ground. . . .

Thus, despite the relatively advanced state of planning in Britain compared with the U.S., a great deal remains to be done.

NOTE: A [paper](#) that covers this subject in more detail is now available on SSRN.