The received wisdom used to be that climate change would have relatively little impact on China. But that views seems outdated.

Like the United States, China is large and geographically diverse; as such, the impacts of climate change vary across the country. For example, the Chinese government reports that the “frequency of heat waves in summer has increased and droughts have worsened in some areas, especially in northern China; heavy precipitation has increased in southern China; and the snow disaster has became (sic) more frequent in western China.” China projects a likely drop in the yield of the three major crops — wheat, rice and corn.

In the water sector, Chinese officials note that the overall water supply of the Yellow, Huaihe, Haihe and Liaohe Rivers in northern China has decreased significantly, while water supply in southern China has slightly increased. Chinese officials report increased flooding and droughts. Looking forward, they predict that “accelerated melting of glaciers in western China due to climate warming will further reduce the area of glaciers and glacier ice reserves, thus having significant impacts on rivers and run-offs with sources in glacier melt water. Climate warming could reinforce the drought trend in northern China, and intensify water scarcity and imbalance between water supply and demand.”

Chinese authorities report an “accelerating trend of sea level rise” over the last three decades, which has caused “seawater intrusion, soil salinization and coastal erosion,” has damaged the ecological systems of coastal wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs, and has “diminished the service functions and bio-diversity of ecological system in coastal area.”

Overall, the government seems far from sanguine about the potential impacts of climate change. The government’s prediction is that “climate change will also produce far-reaching impacts on society, economy and other fields, and cause huge losses to the national economy.” It predicts increased chances of the spread of disease; increased potential for “geological and meteorological disasters and consequent threats to the security of major projects;” and threats to the “ecological environment and bio-diversity of nature reserves and national parks” resulting in economic loss. Finally, the report predicts increased “threats to the safety of life and property, and to the normal order and stability of social life.”

Of course, political developments are as unpredictable in China as everywhere else. The fact that the government, or at least portions of the government, realize that

climate change would be bad for China, may or may not translate into concrete policy. But there's at least some reason to think that China is taking the problem seriously.

NOTE: A paper that covers this subject in more detail is now available on SSRN.