Fact sheet

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Climate Systems

National Environmental Science Program

The State of Climate Change Adaptation in Australia

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The Australian Adaptation Database was developed to increase understanding of Australia's progress toward climate change adaptation. The database is a systematic collection and categorisation of adaptation activities occurring across multiple scales, sectors and geographic locations throughout Australia. The database is updated on an ongoing basis.

As new entries are added, we will release quarterly reports providing an overview of emerging trends in the database.

As this is the first report, we provide an update from the initial release of the database in April 2025 until January 2026. In this reporting period, there have been an **additional 402 entries** coded into the database.

April 2025
500 entries

January 2026
902 entries

January 2026 key insights

- Adaptation activity in Australia has **increased over time** (Figure 1). More than half of the adaptation initiatives in our database are from 2020 to 2025.
- **State and territory governments** (Figure 2) are the most common actors responsible for adaptation initiatives in our data, connected to 40% of initiatives.
- Most initiatives in the database respond to **'general climate change'** (Figure 3) rather than being connected to a specific climate hazard. This suggests that most adaptation activity intends to address broad, cross-cutting climate risks and their secondary impacts, instead of targeting a single or distinct climate hazard.
- **Governance instruments** (Table 1), comprising largely of strategies, plans, and policies, are the most common type of initiative in our data, followed by tangible interventions.
- The geographic distribution (Table 2) of initiatives represented likely reflects **reporting capacity**, though we expect jurisdictions with greater capacity to report also have greater capacity to undertake adaptation.

Adaptation activity has grown over time

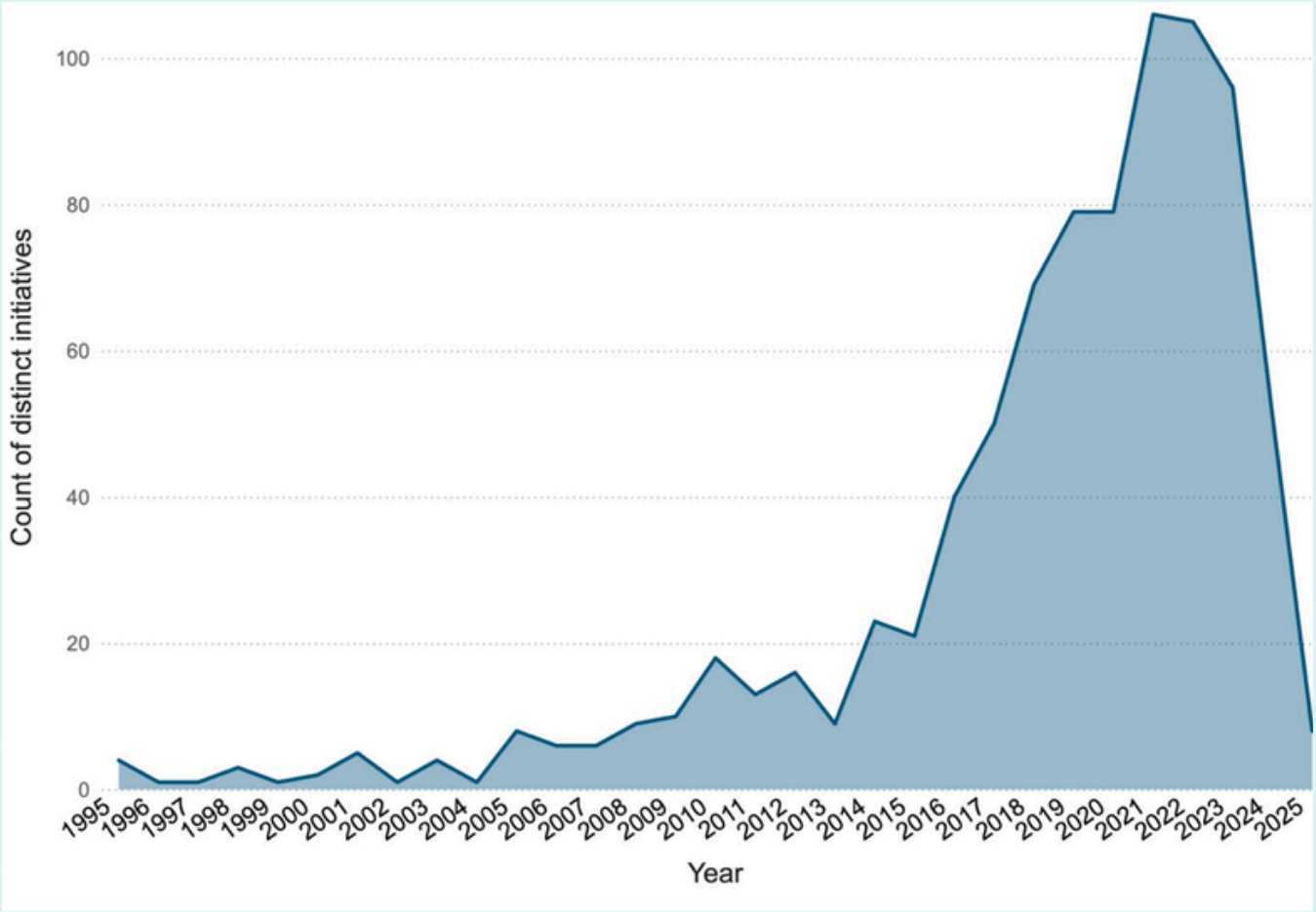

Figure 1: *Number of initiatives recorded in the database for each year from 1995-2025 (excludes 15 entries from 1977–1995 and 42 initiatives with no information available).*

What it is:

Figure 1 displays the year each adaptation initiative began for the period from 1995–2025.

Key trends:

- Adaptation activity recorded in the database from 1995 to 2004 is limited to less than 3 initiatives per year.
- There has been an increased growth in initiatives since 2005.
- More than half of all dated entries (445 initiatives) started between 2020-2025.

What this means:

- This data is consistent with the increase in adaptation activity over time, as is expected.
- The apparent decline in 2025 does not indicate reduced activity, but rather a lag in reporting. The most recent years are always underrepresented in the database.

‘Adaptation’ can be many different things

Table 1: Number of entries in the database for each adaptation ‘purpose’ in January 2026.

Purpose	Description	Count
Intervention	Adaptation action taken to directly reduce climate risk or increase resilience to climate change.	242
Institutional change	Key structural changes that promote adaptation or increased ability to adapt.	111
Coordination	Networks or bodies created to facilitate coordination among a group acting on adaptation.	43
Knowledge building	Information sharing activities designed to communicate knowledge about risks or adaptation options to inform adaptation.	169
Stakeholder engagement	Learning from local and community knowledge, and using this information to steer adaptation.	35
Information gathering	Information collection about risks, hazards or potential adaptation options, to inform or justify.	109
Research	Formal gathering of information through research or pilot projects.	80
Governance instruments	Orders and procedures that seek to steer adaptation. This includes policies, plans, strategies, frameworks, guidelines, and regulations.	329

What it is:

This ‘adaptation purpose’ category seeks to differentiate between various types of adaptation activities, based on their intended outcome(s) (Table 1). It recognises that each activity contributes uniquely to effective adaptation and the ultimate goal of reducing vulnerability to climate change. Each initiative can have up to two ‘purposes’, and 216 initiatives have been coded to two.

Key trends:

- Governance instruments remain the most frequent adaptation type recorded, currently represented by 329 initiatives.

What this means:

- Our data indicates that the foundational policy and governance mechanisms to drive adaptation are progressing well, and knowledge to support meaningful action is being developed. There’s a need to continue funding enabling factors for adaptation intervention, especially for local governments and community organisations.
- Note that governance instruments are usually publicly available and well-documented, so they are likely overrepresented in the database.

Adaptation is currently being led by state and local government

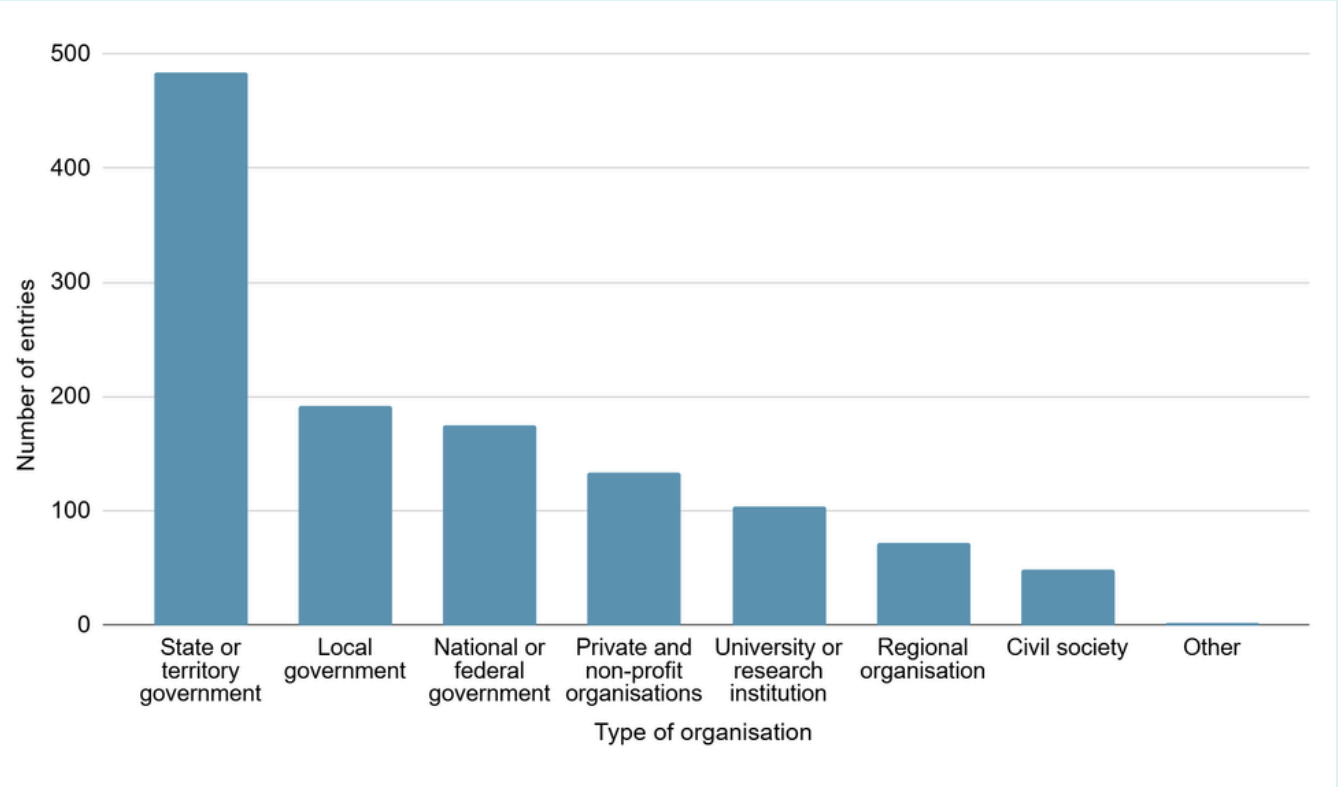

Figure 2: *Number of entries from different actor(s) or organisation(s) in January 2026.*

What it is:

This shows the actor(s) or organisation(s) who are responsible for implementing each adaptation initiative (Figure 2). The 'other' category includes 2 entries of national initiatives led by international actors. Each initiative can be linked to up to three different actors.

Key trends:

- State and territory governments are the most frequent actors represented in the database, currently making up 40% of the data.
- Local government representation has increased to 192 in January 2026.

What this means:

- State and territory governments remain the most frequent actors linked to adaptation initiatives in the database.
- These patterns reflect reporting capacity, with federal and state government agencies more likely to document and publish adaptation activity online.
- Local government representation has increased, but is still likely under-represented in this data.
- Improving the visibility of local adaptation is a priority for 2026 as we continue to expand the database.

Adaptation rarely responds to discrete hazards

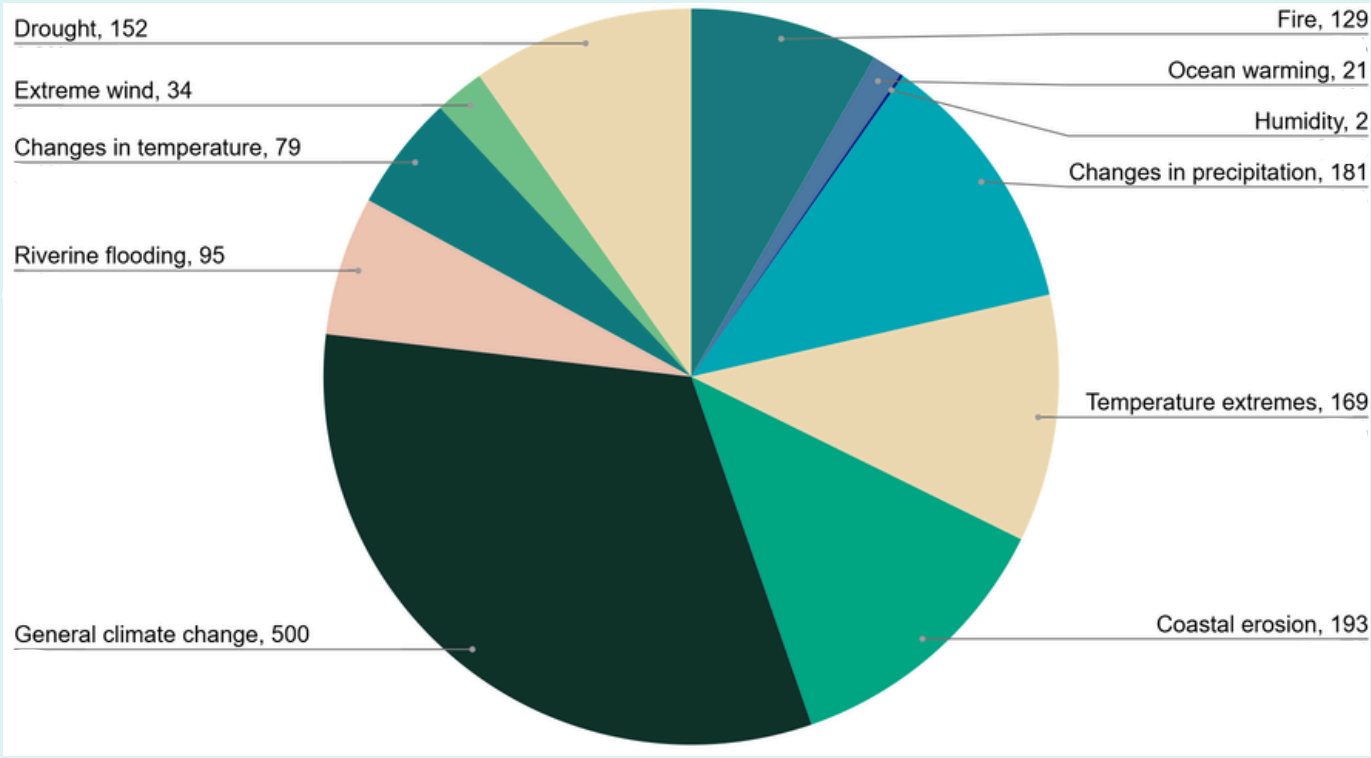

Figure 3: *Number of climate hazard types recorded in the database in January 2026.*

What it is:

Each adaptation initiative is categorised according to the climate hazard(s) they seek to address, based on a typology adjusted from the National Climate Risk Assessment Methodology (Figure 3). Each initiative can be linked to up to four hazard types.

Key trends:

- During data coding, it became clear that many adaptation initiatives are designed to respond to more than one climate hazard simultaneously: 76% of initiatives are either coded to multiple hazards or 'general climate change'.
- 'General climate change' has remained the most frequent category in the database.
- Actions that address coastal erosion have grown, with 96 new entries since April 2025.

What this means:

- Most adaptation initiatives intend to address broad, cross-cutting climate risks or their secondary impacts, rather than being responses to a discrete climate hazard. There are three types of 'general climate change' entries we have observed:
  a. initiatives addressing five or more hazards,
  b. initiatives addressing secondary climate impacts, such as supply chain disruptions, or
  c. broad cross-cutting responses not linked to a specific risk, for example, those that seek to increase adaptive capacity.
- Adaptation responses to coastal erosion are already well documented (including in the Living Shorelines Database) and easy to include. Responses to less visible hazards, such as humidity, appear only twice in the database.

Adaptation's geographic distribution is uneven

Table 2: *Number of state and territory entries in the database in April and January 2026.*

State or territory	April	December	Percentage increase between months
QLD	111	171	54%
SA	110	155	41%
VIC	71	129	82%
NSW	47	99	111%
WA	80	94	18%
TAS	31	50	61%
NT	23	27	17%
ACT	12	20	67%

Key:
Blue: High increase (≥ 75%)

Green: Medium increase (25–75%)

Yellow: Low increase (< 25%)

What it is:
This category identifies the Australian state or territory where each initiative is located.

Key trends:

- 83% of entries have been assigned to a specific state or territory, with the rest being national or international.
- Queensland and South Australia continue to be the most represented states in the database.
- New South Wales recorded the largest proportional increase in entries from April to January 2026.

What this means:

- Most entries are geographically identifiable and can be linked to a specific state or territory.
- At this point in time, the authors have low confidence that all states or territories have been adequately represented. Trends instead reflect the presence of well-documented, publicly available adaptation information.
- It is likely that those states and territories that have greater capacity to report also have greater capacity to undertake adaptation.

Further information

Australian Adaptation Database
https://australianadaptationdatabase.unimelb.edu.au

Australian Adaptation Database Methodology
https://australianadaptationdatabase.unimelb.edu.au/storage/01KG3MTJQ1ZCR8RK19A185F0FZ.pdf

A method for tracking national progress towards climate change adaptation
Brullo, T., Barnett, J., Waters, E., Boulter, S. 2026. Climate Risk Management.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2026.100800

For further information about the Australian Adaptation Database, you can contact: adaptation-database@unimelb.edu.au

The Climate Systems Hub is funded by the Australian Government under the National Environmental Science Program, with co-investment from the following partners: