



# The State of Climate Change Adaptation in Australia - Q3 2026

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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 release quarterly reports on the emerging trends and our progress.**

This report provides an update on database activity from June to September 2026. In this reporting period there has been an **additional 117 entries** into the database, bringing the total to 1,070.

June 2026

**953 entries**

September 2026

**1070 entries**

## September 2026 key insights

- Storm Water Management Plans and Disaster Management Plans from local governments from Queensland and South Australia account for most of the new entries this quarter.
- **36%** of all initiatives in the database are implemented at the '**local**' level.
- Collaboration among actors is common: **40%** of adaptation initiatives in the database have **multiple organisations sharing leadership**. This percentage excludes collaboration within organisations and informal collaboration.
- **More than half of the plans, policies and strategies** in the database are **actionable**. This means they have both clear intent and the mechanisms to be delivered.

## The database has more examples from local governments

**Table 1:** Number of entries in the database for each type of organisation, June 2026 to September 2026.

| Type of organisation                 | June | Sept | Percentage increase                                                                  |       |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| State or territory government        | 495  | 610  |    | 23.2% |
| Local government                     | 226  | 336  |    | 48.7% |
| National or federal government       | 176  | 178  |    | 1.1%  |
| Private and non-profit organisations | 138  | 138  |    | 0%    |
| University or research institution   | 110  | 110  |   | 0%    |
| Regional organisation                | 80   | 84   |  | 5%    |
| Civil society                        | 53   | 53   |  | 0%    |
| Other                                | 2    | 2    |  | 0%    |

**Key:**

 Blue: High increase (≥ 40%)

 Green: Medium increase (10–40%)

 Yellow: Low or no increase (< 10%)

### What it is

This shows Q3 increases in the database for the different types of organisations. Each initiative can be connected to up to three different organisation types.

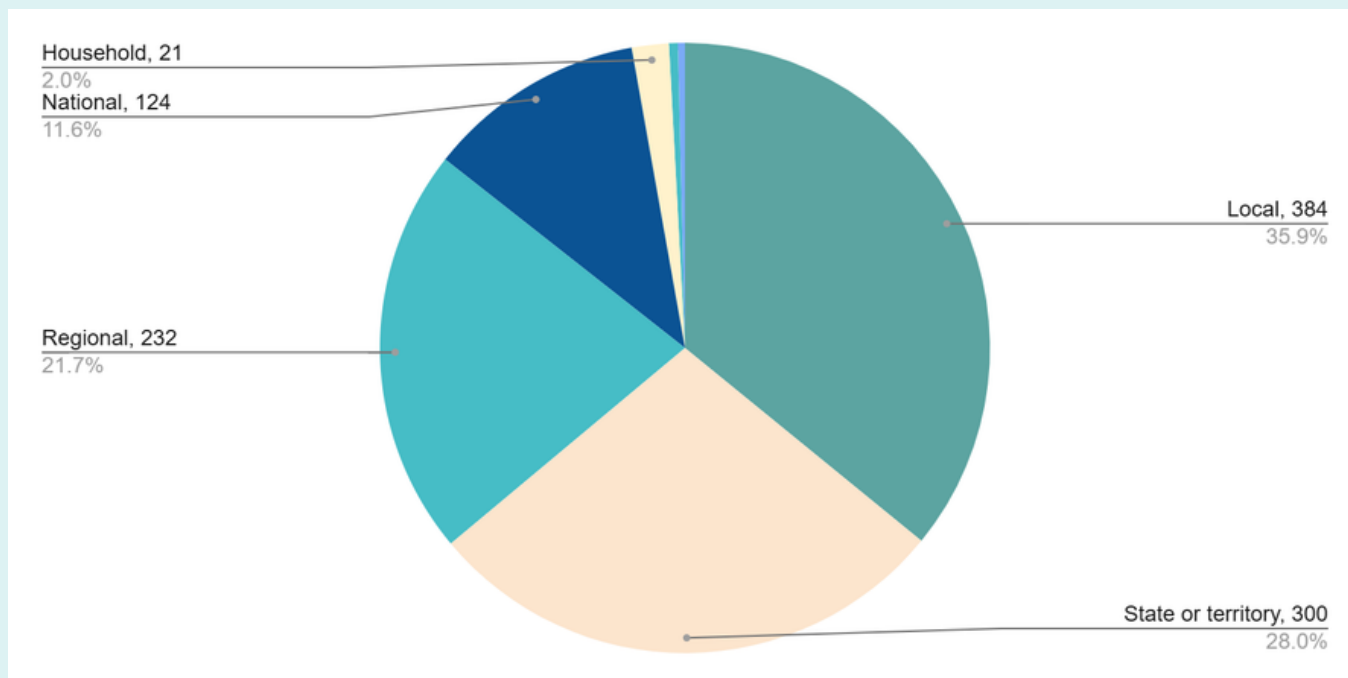
### Key trends

- Local government initiatives increased by 48.7%, and state and territory governments increased by 23.2%.
- State governments often collaborate with local governments on local initiatives.

### What this means

- Two significant new data sources contributing to this growth are: Queensland's [Local Disaster Management Plans](#) and South Australia's [Stormwater Management Plans](#).
- Drawing on these plans allows us to capture adaptation activity with shared state-wide policy frameworks, rather than as isolated measures.
- We're on the lookout for similar state-wide policy frameworks in other jurisdictions.

## Adaptation is happening at the local scale



**Figure 1:** Number of adaptation initiatives by scale of implementation, September 2026.

### What it is

Actors might operate at one scale, but implement at another. Here we analyse the 'scale of implementation': the scale the adaptation output is aimed at (not the actor doing the implementing).

### Key trends

- The largest single category is 'local' (35.9%). This is implementation happening within a single local government area, in local communities, or with local organisations.
- State or territory (28.0%) follows, representing initiatives implemented across the entire state or territory.
- Regional scale initiatives represent 21.7% and refers to initiatives implemented across multiple local government areas or a shared asset or geographical area with common or shared features.

### What this means

- Local scale action being the largest category makes sense. Impacts of adaptation are highly place-based, and require responses tailored to local risks, environments, and community needs.
- Local scale actions aren't always implemented by local government.
- Adaptation operating at the state or territory scale primarily includes policies, strategies or plans.
- More household and individual-level activity is happening. The database is not well suited to capture these type of initiatives.

## Adaptation is collaborative

### Living Lab Northern Rivers

NSW Reconstruction Authority,  
Southern Cross University, University of  
Technology Sydney

An initiative that brings together universities and community groups to co-design research supporting flood recovery in Lismore. The project is officially recognised as having multiple organisations actively involved on their website.

Initiative website: <https://lnr.com.au/>

### Turn Down the Heat Strategy and Action Plan

Western Sydney Regional Organisation  
of Councils (WSROC)

An approach to building a cooler, more resilient future for Western Sydney. It is recorded as a single regional organisation initiative in the database. Yet it involves collaboration with multiple councils working together on heat resilience planning.

Initiative website:  
[https://wsroc.com.au/projects/project-turn-down-the-heat/turn-down-the-heat-strategy\\_](https://wsroc.com.au/projects/project-turn-down-the-heat/turn-down-the-heat-strategy_)

**Figure 2:** Examples of collaborative adaptation activity in the database. The left example includes formally recognised co-leads, while the right example illustrates an instance where a single organisation is representative of a collaboration occurring. The second instance is more difficult to track.

### What it is

Collaboration is when multiple parties come together to work through and implement a collective solution to a multi-dimensional problem (Wood and Gray, 1991).

In the Australian Adaptation Database, a single initiative can list up to three leading organisations, because we found collaboration to be common. To be coded as a 'lead', an organisation must be responsible for initiating and implementing the initiative.

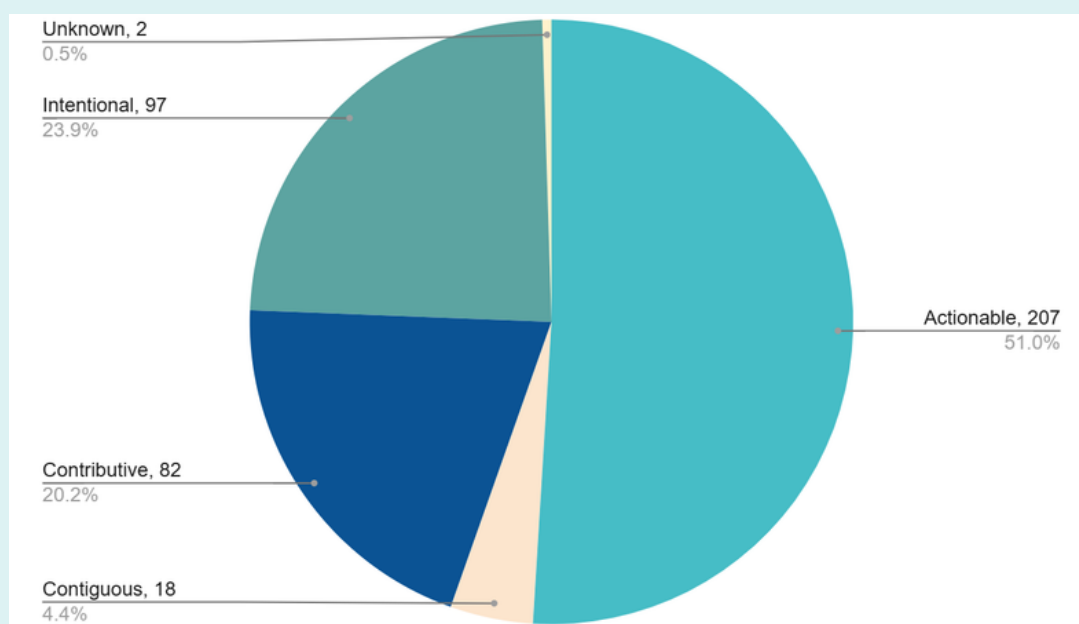
### Key trends

- 40% of initiatives have multiple organisations listed, showing that the responsibility for that adaptation is shared.

### What this means

- Projects with multiple distinct lead organisations are easy to view as collaborative.
- The number of collaborations is likely higher than the data shows, as instances where a single organisation is representative of a collaboration, where there are informal partnerships, or where internal collaboration is occurring are more difficult to track.
- Collaboration is also evident in the database as an intentional output of some adaptive initiatives. It is represented as important for strengthening participatory decision making, improves funding access, and helping to avoid maladaptation.
- Collaboration is an important enabler for adaptation.

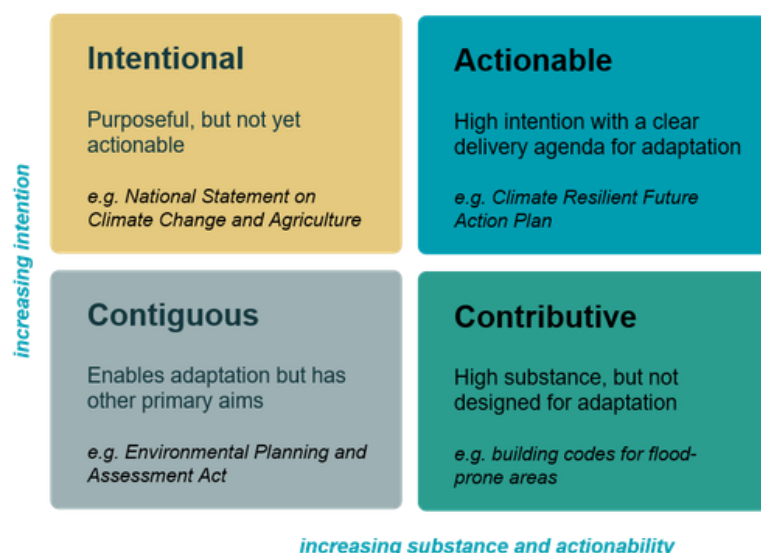
## More than half of the governance instruments are 'actionable'



**Figure 3:** The counts and percentages of governance instruments against a typology of substance and intentionality, building on Dupuis and Biesbroek's (2013) categories and described in [Q2 report](#).

### What it is

We categorise governance instruments according to their intended purpose and substance (Figure 4). Additional information on this category is outlined in our [Q2 report](#) (p.4).



**Figure 4:** Categorisation of governance instruments (adapted from Dupuis and Biesbroek, 2013)

### Key trends

- Over half of all governance instruments (51%) are *actionable*, with the remaining cases distributed across the *intentional* (23.9%), *contributive* (20.2%), and *contiguous* (4.4%) categories (Figure 3).

### What this means

- The adaptation literature raises concerns that governance instruments often lack the mechanisms to be delivered, widening the adaptation implementation gap.
- This data shows that many of the governance instruments in the Australian Adaptation Database are *actionable*.
- The implementation of these plans still depends on funding, political support and numerous other factors.
- Contiguous, contributive and intentional plans or laws also play an important role in supporting actionable governance instruments to exist.
- Fitting examples into these categories is subjective, based on careful review of the available information. This only analyses intent and substance and does not replace a need to measure effectiveness.
- 'Unknown' (Figure 3) indicates initiatives where source URLs are currently inaccessible.

## 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>

Comparing apples and oranges: the dependent variable problem in comparing and evaluating climate adaptation policies

Dupuis, J., Biesbroek, R.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.07.022>

Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Collaboration

Wood, D., Gray.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0021886391272001>

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