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Women are seen queueing up to plant mangrove saplings along the riverbanks of the Matla river in Sundarbans, India. Photo credit: Avijit Ghosh /Climate Visuals

Enhancing Climate Governance to Deliver Adaptation Action

Lessons from Four National Climate Councils on Delivering Adaptation Action

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAC	Câmara de Assessoramento Científico (Scientific Advisory Board, Brazil)
CCC	Climate Change Committee (United Kingdom)
COP	Conference of the Parties
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (United Kingdom)
DESNZ	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (United Kingdom)
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (South Africa)
E3G	Third Generation Environmentalism
ICCN	International Climate Councils Network
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JAR-IP	Just Adaptation and Resilience Investment Platform (South Africa)
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
PCC	Presidential Climate Commission (South Africa)
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

Executive summary

Climate councils are well positioned to strengthen adaptation governance, but their adaptation roles remain weaker than on mitigation. This report asks which institutional arrangements make councils most effective, comparing four councils in Brazil, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom, through interviews and documentary research.

Effectiveness depends on how mandate, independence, resourcing and accountability combine. Across all four cases comparable patterns emerged, shaped by differing capacity: adaptation mandates are narrower than mitigation ones; advice more commonly translates into action where a formal duty compels government to respond; planning concentrates nationally while delivery capacity is weakest at the local level, where adaptation actually happens; councils rarely advise on the spending decisions that determine whether adaptation plans are implemented; and all are mainly tracking activities, albeit testing measuring whether climate risk is falling.

The report recommends five reinforcing reforms: statutory advisory mandates that protect councils from political and departmental pressure; formal response cycles that oblige governments to act on advice; mandates to assess local as well as national delivery; fiscal channels that link advice to budget decisions; and outcome-level indicators that measure reductions in climate risk rather than activity alone. No single design is universal, and reforms must be adapted to each country's legal and political context.



A fisherman harvests catch from irrigation canals supported by the Baixo Limpopo Irrigation and Climate Resilience Project (BLICRP) in southern Mozambique, developed in partnership with the African Development Bank, the Climate Investment Fund and the World Bank. Southern Africa faces climate risks at nearly twice the global average, making community-level adaptation investment critical to livelihood resilience. Source: Climate Visuals / Climate Investment Fund.

Context setting

Why Adaptation Governance Is the Binding Constraint

1. Context setting

Every year, the evidence of the climate crisis's arrival is more salient. Droughts, floods, record-breaking weather events point to a situation that intensifies faster than the world's capacity to respond to it. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that between 3.3 and 3.6 billion people live in settings highly vulnerable to climate change, (IPCC, 2022; WMO, 2021). Despite the challenges, the global adaptation finance gap is estimated at between US$187 and US$359 billion per year (ICCN, 2025). Mitigation slows the accumulation of future risk, but it does nothing for the warming already locked in. Adaptation, is therefore not a secondary concern but an equally important one.

Climate councils are a distinctive institutional response to this challenge. They are independent, expert advisory bodies, typically established by national legislation or executive mandate, that sit between scientific evidence and government decision-making. Their value lies in their independence, by offering advice insulated from electoral cycles and departmental interests, they can help governments make credible, evidence-based commitments and hold them publicly accountable for delivery.

For adaptation, these functions typically take three forms, recognised internationally as core components of good adaptation governance: assessing climate risk, advising on national adaptation planning, and monitoring and evaluating government progress (ICCN, 2025). The International Climate Councils Network (ICCN) now connects 27 full members and four associate bodies. Its Adaptation Working Group is tasked with coordinating councils' adaptation roles through knowledge-exchange.

However, adaptation governance lags well behind mitigation. The politics of adaptation are different due to less clearly defined mandates. Mitigation is anchored by a standardised common unit, the tonne of carbon, which measures targets, budgets and progress against international benchmarks. Adaptation lacks this tool since it is inherently cross-sectoral. It spans across water, agriculture, infrastructure and disaster management with local, diffuse and difficult to quantify benefits. Where mitigation can be coordinated through a shared numerical anchor, adaptation must be coordinated across fragmented ministries and multiple levels of government, each with its own mandate and incentives. This is why governance, rather than ambition or capabilities alone, is essential.

Effective adaptation governance requires the capacity to set direction across silos, hold governments accountable for implementation, and channel evidence into spending decisions, precisely the functions that fragmented institutional arrangements tend to

frustrate. This is where climate councils fit. Standing apart from departmental turf and electoral cycles, they can take across-sectoral, long-term view, convene actors across government, and bring independent evidence to bear on where resources should go. What a council can achieve depends on the strength of its mandate, protection of its independence, resources behind it and accountability mechanisms that compel a government response.

A review of adaptation legislation found that nearly half of countries with legal reporting requirements do not publish reports regularly (Chan et al, 2026), underlining how easily adaptation mandates remain procedural rather than consequential. The IPCC's forthcoming Seventh Assessment Report reflects the fact that these problems remain frontier challenges rather than settled questions. Its Working Group II contribution will focus on adaptation indicators and metrics, institutional and governance frameworks, and the gap between assessment and effective implementation (IPCC, 2025).

Policy Problem

Climate councils are institutionally well-positioned to strengthen government accountability for adaptation, but are not always systematically designed or empowered to do so. The central question is which institutional arrangements, what combination of mandate, independence, resourcing and accountability, enable them to influence adaptation governance most effectively.

Research questions

1. How do climate councils currently interpret and operationalise their adaptation mandates?
2. What institutional, legal and political constraints limit their ability to hold governments accountable?
3. How do different advisory and oversight strategies shape the uptake of adaptation recommendations in legislation, budgeting and implementation?
4. Which institutional designs appear most effective in strengthening adaptation governance, and why do they vary?
5. How can councils strengthen their MERL functions to improve accountability and credibility?

1.1 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative comparative design, examining four national climate councils selected from the ICCN: Brazil's Scientific Advisory Board (CAC), New Zealand's Climate Change Commission, South Africa's Presidential Climate Commission (PCC), and the United Kingdom's Climate Change Committee (CCC). Case selection reflects variation in institutional maturity, legal basis and regional context, allowing for structured comparison across a diverse but thematically coherent sample. Primary data consists of five semi-structured interviews: with a representative of each council and an expert from the NAP Global Network, providing country-specific depth and an institutional perspective. This was complemented by documentary desk research including climate legislation, council reports and National Adaptation Plans. The analysis is organised around five themes: institutional design, advisory influence, cross-sectoral governance, financial resources and monitoring. These were applied consistently across all four cases to enable systematic comparison.

This analysis is framed through the lens of inter-institutional coordination. Peters (2018) identifies coordination as the central challenge of modern governance, discussing how fragmented institutional actors align their actions toward a common policy goal. Climate councils occupy a structurally distinctive position in this challenge. They sit at the interface between scientific expertise and government decision-making, managing credibility simultaneously with scientific bodies, ministries, subnational authorities, finance actors and communities, while holding no direct implementation authority of their own. Failures in this position take the form of mandate gaps, overlapping authorities and advice that reaches neither spending decisions nor local delivery. Heath and Staudenmayer's (2000) concept of coordination neglect, the tendency of organisations to invest in dividing tasks rather than integrating them, is useful to explain how councils and governments act on collective outcomes. Provan and Lemaire (2012) complement this with a network lens for understanding what effective cross-governmental convening requires. These trace a different dimension of the challenges across the studied national councils.



On Arborek Island in Indonesia's Togean archipelago, the Bajo community has planted mangroves and coral blocks along the shoreline to prevent coastal erosion — a community-led adaptation response to rising sea levels and storm surge. The wooden stilt houses visible behind reflect a way of life built on the water, now increasingly threatened by climate change. Source: Climate Visuals

Thematic Analysis

Lessons from four Climate Councils

2. Thematic Analysis: Comparative Climate Governance

This chapter presents a comparative thematic analysis the four national climate councils. A structural asymmetry is observable across all cases, where adaptation mandates are consistently narrower, less operationalised and less resourced than their mitigation counterparts. This points towards the Grantham Research Institute findings that (adaptation has occupied a structurally secondary position in national legal architecture wherever climate councils have been established (Chan et al., 2026).

Table 1 - Institutional Profiles of Selected Climate Councils

	Brazil	New Zealand	South Africa	United Kingdom
Name of council	Camara de Assessoramento Cientifico (CAC) — Scientific Chamber	He Pou a Rangi — Climate Change Commission	Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)	Climate Change Committee (CCC)
Year established	2025	2019	2020 (formalised under law 2024)	2008
Legal basis	Plano Clima - presidential decree	Climate Change Response Act	Climate Change Act	Climate Change Act
Institutional status	Scientific advisory chamber	Independent Crown entity; funded by Ministry for the Environment	Independent multi stakeholder body; situated within The Presidency	Independent statutory advisory body
Composition	32 scientists, volunteer role	Independent commissioners and professional staff ~60	Multi stakeholder ~50+	Professional secretariat (~70 staff); separate adaptation sub-committee
Adaptation vs. mitigation balance	Formally co-equal	Asymmetric — mitigation mandate stronger	Integrated under just transition framing; prioritization of mitigation	Structurally separate under the Act

Theme 1: Institutional Design, Mandate and Independence

The institutional architecture of a climate council determines the scope of its mandate, the protection of its independence and the resources available to act on both. The UK CCC has a particularly robust design. A dedicated Adaptation Sub-Committee is enshrined in the Climate Change Act 2008, keeping adaptation structurally separate from mitigation with its own guaranteed resource base. A hard publication firewall withholds key messages from government until public release, protecting independence without compromising working relationships. The result is a council whose authority does not depend on political goodwill.

New Zealand's Commission operates under a structurally asymmetric mandate. Mitigation work encompasses annual emissions budget advice and input into the Emissions Trading Scheme, while adaptation is confined to six-yearly risk assessments and two-yearly National Adaptation Plan monitoring with no equivalent policy advisory function. Interview evidence confirmed that the Commission holds a smaller role on the adaptation side and lacks the active policy guidance function it exercises on mitigation. South Africa's PCC's authority is enhanced by its role in the office of the president, which enables cross-governmental convening. Nevertheless, this embeds the council within executive cycles rather than legislative protection. Its formal standing is de-facto contingent on political continuity rather than statute. Brazil's CAC formally treats adaptation and mitigation as co-equal within dedicated subcommittees, the most deliberate integration design, but 32 volunteer scientists operating without a dedicated secretariat face structural capacity constraints.

Core finding: Legal recognition alone is insufficient. Effective adaptation councils require strong mandates, genuine independence and adequate resourcing for effective governance.

Theme 2: Advisory Role and Influence

All four councils produce adaptation advice, but what constitutes influential advice, and what enables it to translate into government response, varies considerably. The central question is whether advisory mechanisms are structurally protected or contingent on political and commercial relationships. In the UK, government is legally required to respond to the five-yearly Climate Risk Assessments and two-yearly adaptation progress reports as shown in fig 1. Independence and accountability are reinforced through publicly available progress assessments that create transparency and build reputational pressure on government to

respond. The CCC's influence does not depend on maintaining favourable relationships with individual ministers or departments since this architecture is enshrined in statute.


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Policy paper

Government response to the Climate Change Committee 2025 adaptation progress report

Sets out the government's response to the Climate Change Committee's 2025 progress report and their recommendations on climate adaptation.

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Published 29 October 2025

Documents

Government response to the Climate Change Committee 2025 adaptation progress report

Request an accessible format.

Government response to the Climate Change Committee 2025 adaptation progress report

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Corporate report

Committee on Climate Change 2025 progress report: government response

Government response to the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) 2025 progress report.

From: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

Published 29 October 2025

Documents

Progress in reducing emissions - 2025 report to Parliament: Government response to the Climate Change Committee

Progress in reducing emissions - 2025 report to Parliament: Government response to the Climate Change Committee (large print)

Figure 1 - UK Government Response to the Climate Change Committee, Source: gov.uk

New Zealand's government must also respond to He Pou a Rangi recommendations within six months. This is a tighter procedural timeframe than the UK, but the obligation governs timeliness rather than substance. Government can respond within the deadline and still fall well short of what the Commission recommends. The Commission's standing has been reinforced from an unexpected stakeholder. The business community has backed its independence, particularly on mitigation, because previously mandatory climate-related financial disclosure created private-sector demand for clear, credible regulatory signals. The support from the business sector can prove valuable against efforts to roll back the Commission's role as well as legislative safeguards.

South Africa's PCC draws significant convening authority from the presidency, enhanced by its Nexus approach. However, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE's) rejection of a PCC recommendation on an NDC-related issue illustrates that presidential proximity does not guarantee influence. The PCC's response to this weakness has been to build a direct channel to finance actors — the JAR-IP platform, discussed under funding below — rather than to rely on advice alone.

On the other hand, Brazil's CAC by contrast, operates under a no response obligation from government, which limits the cut-through of its advice.

Core finding: Independence and accountability should be built into an institution, not borrowed from external demand. Without a statutory response obligation, non-compliance carries no institutional cost and advice can be received without consequences.

Theme 3: Governance and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

Adaptation governance is inherently cross-sectoral, spanning infrastructure, agriculture, health, water and local government, which are under separate ministerial silos institutionally incentivised to prioritise their own mandates. No council among the four has developed a mechanism that compels cross-departmental implementation, and the gap between national adaptation planning and local delivery is the defining governance struggle across all cases.

South Africa's presidential chair provides the strongest single mechanism for cross-government coordination, carrying executive authority to convene across ministries and levels of government. Nonetheless, local government remains the critical delivery level where financing and capacity gaps are most acute and most consequential.

Brazil's Ministry of Economy positioning is an architecturally ambitious cross-sectoral design, embedding climate objectives structurally across all ministries through the ecological transformation plan, but precedes the CAC and operates independent of it. An inter-federative articulation chamber manages sub-national linkages across more than 5,000 municipalities. However, structural presence across ministries does not automatically translate into adaptation expenditure, and the gap between architecture and implementation remains significant.

The UK CCC faces four-nation complexity with separate adaptation plans and different reporting cadences across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The structural separation of mitigation under the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and adaptation under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) creates coordination friction and risks reinforcing an artificial division between two interconnected policy domains. Moreover, the same structural separation that protects adaptation's resource base also risks isolating it.

Finally, New Zealand has no formal cross-government accountability mechanism for adaptation, and the proposed restructuring of Regional Councils threatens to fragment the local delivery architecture further, removing the primary vehicle through which national

guidance reaches implementation. Local case studies delivered by the Commission have however demonstrated the inherently local aspects of adaptation action.

Core finding: A version of the same governance paradox is visible in all four countries: authority and planning are concentrated at national level while the capacity and financing deficits are most acute at the local delivery level where adaptation must ultimately be implemented.

Theme 4: Funding and Resources

Funding bears on a council's adaptation work in two distinct ways. The first is operational, concerning whether the council has the secretariat, budget and continuity of resource to produce credible, sustained advice in the first place. The second is a question of financial leverage: whether the council has any channel through which its advice reaches the spending decisions, public or private, that determine what adaptation actually receives. These are separate questions, and the cases show they do not track each other, as a securely funded council may have little leverage over spending, while a council with no budget line of its own may host the most ambitious attempt to direct finance.

South Africa's PCC is the most ambitious of the four on leverage. Its flagship mechanism is the Joint Adaptation and Resilience Investment Platform (JAR-IP) channels a dedicated Climate Change Response Fund toward water, agriculture, and environment. It’s the most direct attempt among the cases to link advisory outputs to finance actors, connecting PCC advice to private investment decisions. JAR-IP seeks to close a gap: just 12% of South Africa's estimated R130 billion in annual climate finance (around R16 billion) currently flows to adaptation, against an estimated R866 billion needed by 2030 (ICCN, 2025).

The UK CCC is the most securely resourced operationally, funded through DEFRA for its adaptation work, but that stability creates a dependency on a single departmental relationship. On leverage, the CCC can identify funding gaps and present cost-effectiveness evidence but cannot direct spending decisions. A problem compounds this, as adaptation spending is difficult even to track, because government investment with adaptation co-benefits (biodiversity, flood infrastructure and land-management programmes) is tagged to its primary policy purpose rather than to climate resilience, leaving adaptation expenditure partly invisible to the very council meant to scrutinise it.

New Zealand’s Commission is funded through government appropriation, administered via the Ministry for the Environment. This gives it a degree of resource security tied to its statutory duties. However, its advice remains advisory rather than binding, and no formal channel connects its assessments to investment decisions nor tagging government

spending.

Brazil's CAC is the most under-resourced of the four on the operational measure. It runs without a dedicated secretariat or operational budget, relying entirely on scientists contributing alongside their primary professional roles. Its financial leverage is correspondingly thin: the council can advocate for resources but has no means to direct or shape government spending decisions.

Core finding: Councils can identify funding gaps but rarely reach treasury or spending processes. The form of a council's funding directly shapes its capacity to produce and sustain credible adaptation advice. Councils with dedicated budgets have greater capacity to work on and follow up on adaptation recommendations.

Theme 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning

The absence of a common adaptation metric, noted at the outset, becomes most consequential here. The UAE–Belém work programme on indicators (UNFCCC, 2025), launched at COP28 and due to conclude at COP30, represents the most recent attempt to establish shared global indicators, but it remains contested. The UNEP Adaptation Gap Report (UNEP, 2025) reinforces this, finding that countries are planning for climate resilience without the measurement systems needed to determine whether those plans are working. The NAP Global Network is an initiative that is however working to improve the development of indicators and MERL. Overall, an absence of standardised measurement directly weakens governmental accountability, because what cannot be measured cannot be scrutinised, and what cannot be scrutinised cannot be funded with confidence.

The critical shift all four councils are attempting is from activity-based monitoring, tracking whether planned actions are being implemented, to outcome-level assessment of whether those actions are actually reducing climate risk. Two barriers compound this challenge across all four cases, namely access to reliable data in the first place and the interoperability of data across institutions where it does exist.

The UK CCC has the most developed MERL infrastructure, with a formal reporting cycle and statutory response obligation creating structured accountability. Even so, most of its indicators measure the impact of climate events rather than the effectiveness of adaptation responses, making it methodologically impossible to isolate the contribution of adaptation actions from background conditions.

New Zealand has developed experimental outcome proxies including infrastructure in flood zones, risk of population isolation and social vulnerability indicators, though the Commission acknowledges these falls short of meaningful outcome measurement.

Brazil illustrates both barriers directly. It has invested in indicator development through the AdaptaBrasil platform, which reaches more than 5,000 municipalities, but data access across its large federal system and interoperability across incompatible federal, state and municipal databases remain core constraints.

South Africa faces the most acute challenge, as no national reporting standards exist, local government capacity to collect and submit data is severely limited, and what data exists cannot be systematically aggregated at national level.

Read together, the cases form a spectrum. The UK has the infrastructure but the wrong indicators; New Zealand is experimenting toward outcome proxies; Brazil has built a data platform it cannot yet integrate; and South Africa lacks the basic reporting foundation altogether. All four remain, in different ways, stuck at activity-tracking and could benefit from further resources to address this gap.

Core finding: Without credible outcome measurement, councils cannot make the case for sustained adaptation investment with the same force that quantified emissions data enables on mitigation. The MERL gap is both an evidence priority and a political one, and closing it requires sustained investment in measurement infrastructure as well as the political will to build it.



Multiple hands jointly cradling a seedling suggesting institutional responsibility that effective climate adaptation governance requires

Recommendations

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are grounded in the five findings of the comparative analysis. Image 2 illustrates the link between the findings and recommendations. Each recommendation sets out a broad reform, but because no single actor can deliver it alone, it also implies specific tasks for the three audiences this research concerns: climate councils, governments, and the ICCN.

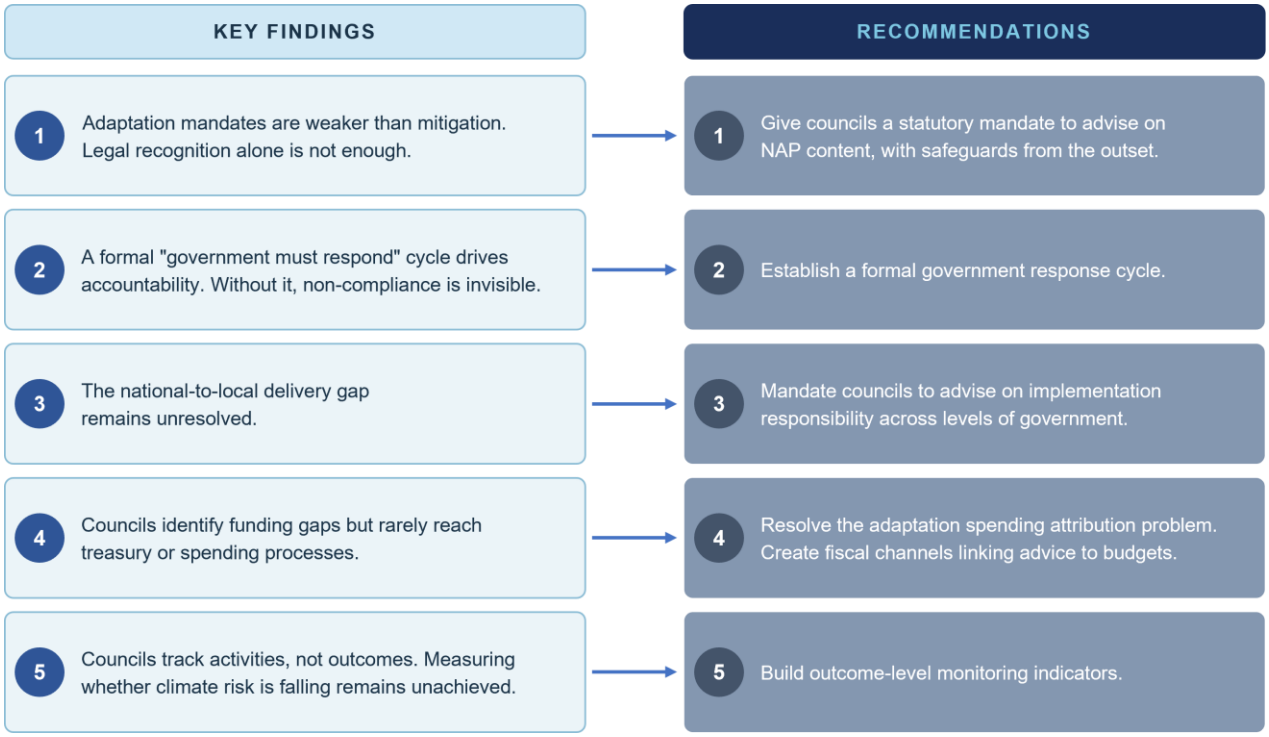


Fig 2 - From comparative findings to concrete recommendations; Source: authors

1. Councils should have a statutory mandate to advise on NAP content, with resourcing and institutional safeguards.

Adaptation mandates across all four cases are weaker and less operationalised than their mitigation counterparts. As South Africa and Brazil show, legal recognition alone does not protect a council's function. The reform has two parts. The first is a statutory mandate to advise on the content and adequacy of National Adaptation Plans, not merely on underlying risk. The second is the protected resourcing and institutional safeguards needed to exercise it.

Actions can include:

- **The ICCN** should publish a comparative mapping of adaptation and mitigation mandate gaps across member councils and publish a model framework for legal safeguards that members can adapt.

- **Climate councils** should seek a statutory mandate to advise on the content and adequacy of NAPs, not only on underlying risk assessments; advocate for legal enshrinement including protected monitoring cycles and dedicated secretariat

capacity; and build constituencies by embedding outputs in financial disclosure, subnational planning and private sector decision-making.

- **Governments** should legislate adaptation mandates at the same level of specificity as mitigation mandates, fund councils with protected budget lines, specify the minimum scope, frequency and resourcing of council work, and review whether departmental structures separating adaptation and mitigation undermine joined-up governance.

2. Establish a formal government response cycle

The presence or absence of a statutory duty to respond is the single most consequential structural variable for advisory influence across the four cases. Without it, non-compliance is invisible and carries no institutional cost. The New Zealand case shows that a response duty is only as strong as what it requires. A duty that governs timeliness alone lets government reply within the deadline while falling well short of what the council recommended; the obligation must therefore reach substantive adequacy, not merely the fact of a reply.

Actions can include:

- **The ICCN** should develop a model duty-to-respond framework adaptable to different legal contexts, that members can use to advocate for adoption.

- **Climate councils** should advocate for a response mechanism governing both timeliness and substantive adequacy, and publish assessments of government replies in subsequent reports to sustain reputational accountability.

- **Governments** should legislate response obligations specifying a timeframe and minimum level of substantive engagement, and track responses as part of the national adaptation planning cycle.

3. Mandate councils to advise on implementation responsibility across levels of government and assess local delivery capacity.

The gap between national planning and local delivery must be addressed directly. Capacity and financing deficits are most acute at local delivery level, yet national plans rarely assign implementation responsibilities and resources across governance levels explicitly. Councils need a mandate to assess whether delivery is feasible where it matters most and governments need to hear that assessment.

Actions can include:

- **The ICCN** should support members with shared guidance on assessing multi-level delivery, and facilitate peer exchange so councils can draw on solutions that comparable councils have developed for the same coordination problems.

- **Climate councils** should assess whether national plans adequately attribute implementation responsibilities and resources across governance levels, and develop the capacity to evaluate local delivery capabilities.

- **Governments** should assign clear implementation responsibilities across levels of government, mandate councils to assess local delivery capacity, and resource subnational actors to act on adaptation.

4. Resolve the adaptation spending attribution problem and create fiscal channels linking council advice to budgets.

Councils can identify funding gaps but rarely reach the treasury processes where they could be addressed. Two problems compound this. First, adaptation spending is hard to see, as investment with adaptation co-benefits is routinely tagged to its primary policy purpose rather than to climate resilience. Second, adaptation remains peripheral to national economic planning even where the financing gap is severe. The reform is to make adaptation trackable through standardised tagging, and connected to budget decisions through formal fiscal channels.

Actions can include:

- **The ICCN** should support members with shared guidance on expenditure tracking and costing methodologies, and advocate for adaptation a critical public investment with finance ministries and multilateral institutions.

- **Climate councils** should frame the economic case for adaptation as a prerequisite for development rather than a cost, and press for adaptation-relevant expenditure to be costed and made trackable so funding gaps can be evidenced rather than merely asserted.

- **Governments** should resolve the adaptation spending attribution problem through standardised tagging for adaptation-relevant expenditure. They should create formal channels requiring adaptation findings to be considered in spending reviews, introduce standardised tagging for adaptation-relevant expenditure, integrate adaptation into national growth strategies and fiscal planning, and empower Ministries of Finance with legal mandates to act on adaptation including systematic costing of measures in NDCs and NAPs.

5. Build outcome-level monitoring indicators.

All four councils remain at the activity-tracking stage, monitoring whether actions are taken rather than whether climate risk is falling. Without credible outcome measurement, councils cannot make the investment case for adaptation with the same force as quantified emissions data enables on mitigation.

Actions can include:

- **The ICCN** should develop a shared, standardised indicator framework that members can adapt to country context, and align it with the UAE-Belem Adaptation Indicators agreed at COP30 in partnership with the NAP Global Network.

- **Climate councils** should develop outcome-level indicators measuring whether climate risk is actually falling, protect comparability over time by avoiding frequent revisions, and advocate for monitoring frameworks to be linked to development planning cycles so findings inform investment decisions.

- **Governments** should invest in national measurement infrastructure, prioritise data interoperability across governance levels, and align adaptation monitoring with budget cycles so evidence translates into resource allocation.

4. Conclusion

This report set out to identify which institutional arrangements best enable climate councils to strengthen adaptation governance. Through a comparative analysis of four councils in Brazil, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom, combining semi-structured interviews with documentary research, the study found effectiveness depends less on any single feature than on how mandate, independence, resourcing and accountability combine.

Across all four cases, adaptation mandates are weaker than their mitigation counterparts, and legal recognition alone does not guarantee effective advisory power. Whether advice translates into action depends on institutional design, but above all on whether formal accountability mechanisms compel a government response. All four councils face the same unresolved disconnect between national planning and local delivery, struggle to reach spending processes, and remain at the stage of tracking activities rather than measuring whether climate risk is actually falling.

These findings point to five recommendations. Councils should hold statutory mandates to advise on the content of National Adaptation Plans backed by dedicated resourcing and institutional safeguards. Governments should establish formal response cycles. Councils should be mandated to assess local delivery capacity across levels of government. And investment in outcome-level monitoring indicators is needed to move beyond compliance tracking toward genuine accountability for results. There is no one-size-fits-all climate council, but the strongest ones are legally protected, empowered to act, and fiscally connected to the decisions they inform.

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Primary data: CCE3 Interview Analysis (2025), semi-structured interviews with representatives of the New Zealand Climate Change Commission, UK Climate Change Committee, Brazil CAC [and the NAP Global Network], South Africa PCC, PP405, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Annexes

Interview Guide – Climate Councils and Adaptation Governance

*These were general questions. Specific questions were elaborated for each country.

1. Mandate and Role in Adaptation

1. How does your council define adaptation or operationalised within your council in practice?
2. Could you describe your council's formal mandate in relation to climate adaptation?
3. Has your council's role in adaptation changed over time? If so, what has driven these changes?
4. Are there areas of adaptation governance where your council has a clear role, and others where the mandate feels less defined? Could you give examples?

2. Institutional Design and Constraints

5. Do you believe that your council influences the adaption policy? What are the factors affecting the ability to influence these policies?
6. How does your council interact with government ministries responsible for adaptation, including finance, planning, or environment?
7. To what extent does your council have access to the data needed to assess adaptation progress?

3. Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL)

8. How does your council currently measure or assess progress on adaptation?
9. What are the main challenges in developing indicators or monitoring adaptation outcomes?

4. Influence and Accountability

10. What factors determine whether your council's recommendations are taken up by government?
11. How effective are formal mechanisms that require the government to respond to your council's advice, if such mechanisms exist?
12. Can you share an example where your council influenced adaptation policy? Alternatively, a case where recommendations were not taken forward?

5. Financing and Governance Integration

13. Can you elaborate on how adaptation policies are reflected in national financing or budgets?
14. How does your council engage with budgeting or financing decisions related to adaptation?
15. How does your council coordinate and collaborate with responsibilities for adaptation that are distributed across different ministries and across levels of government (federal and subnational)?

6. Forward-Looking / Comparative

16. Based on your experience, what institutional features make climate councils more effective in strengthening adaptation governance and financing?
17. If you were designing a climate council today, what would you differently?



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This report has been prepared as part of the coursework for LSE MPP PP405 course. The views and opinions expressed in this document are solely those of the authors. This report does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the London School of Economics and Political Science.