Eight Principles of Adaptation Planning

The following principles should guide the development of good adaptation policy:

1. Establish shared responsibility for planning
Adaptation is a multi-scale and multi-actor process. Therefore, responsibility for adaptation planning and implementation should be shared across scales: this could include sharing responsibility between public and private actors, across sectors, across levels of government, and with the community at risk.

2. Be flexible, reflective and iterative
Adaptation planning should think long term. It should be a staged process – think long term goals, but build on short-term strategies to get there. Flexibility is also important. Build in time periods in your plan to evaluate how adaptation is progressing, and change things if needed.

3. Be consistent in your messaging
Policies and planning across government departments (e.g. in planning, water, environment, heritage) and between levels of government (local, state, Commonwealth) should be aligned – or at the least, they should not be contradictory. Explore the possibility for synergies across scales.

4. Ensure an equitable distribution of risk
Climate change impacts everyone. The challenge is in ensuring that the distribution of climate risks is not inequitably distributed. This may mean proactive policy-making or developing new frameworks to reduce the burden on the most vulnerable – whether this is individuals, or local government agencies.

5. Make tradeoffs explicit
Adaptation will inevitably involve tradeoffs. The costs and benefits associated with adaptation decisions need to be acknowledged; and the processes for dealing with tradeoffs made transparent.

6. Prioritise public goods
The role of government is to prioritise public goods and services. Therefore, government adaptation response should look to ensure the viability of these important assets.

7. Be mindful of greenhouse gas emissions
Adaptation actions should not lead to increased emissions of greenhouse gases; and should look for ways of actively reducing emissions through adaptation actions.

8. Recognise that there are limits to adaptation
Adaptation planning and policy-making should recognise that there are inherent limits to how far a system, sector or social group can adapt; particularly under high emission scenario futures.