

Evaluative governance for climate action in Australia

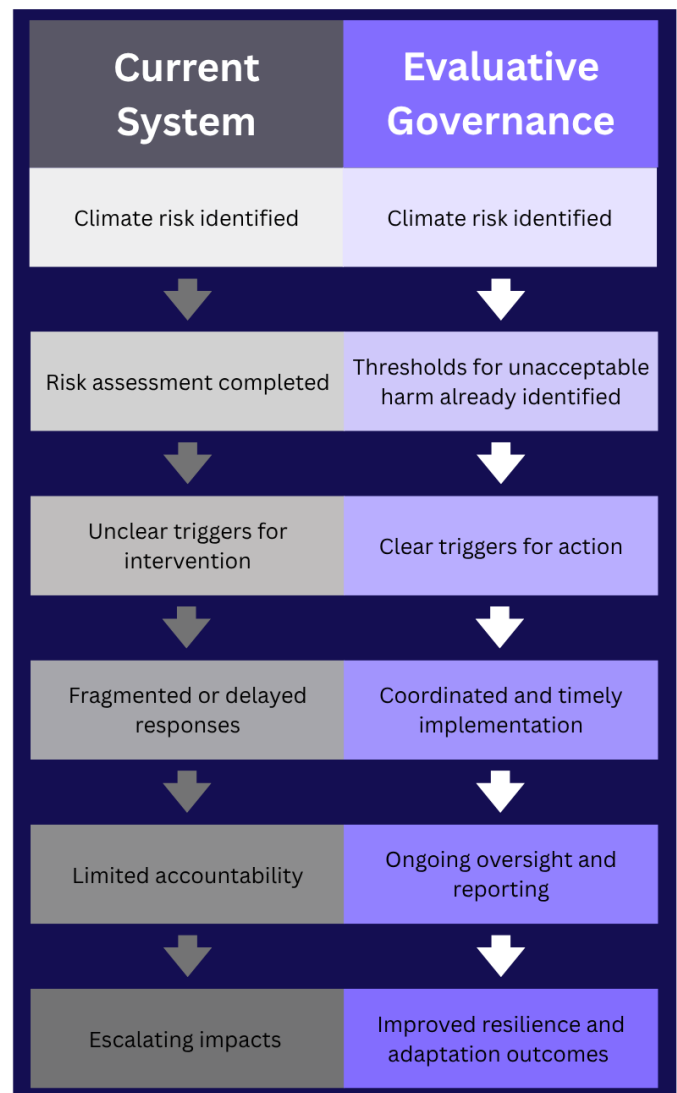
Embedding “evaluative governance” across the policy cycle can strengthen Australia’s capacity to move from risk identification to climate action. Evaluative governance can help us to make transparent, accountable decisions about what must be protected, at what cost, and for whom.

Climate impacts are intensifying, but governance systems often remain reactive and fragmented. Without reform, climate policy and risk assessment processes are in danger of becoming a catalogue of problems rather than a driver of action.

Recent events – including South Australia’s harmful algal bloom – highlight the need for governance frameworks that can translate climate risk assessment into coordinated, timely, and place-based action.

Australia’s 2025 National Climate Risk Assessment is an important step in identifying national climate risks. However, current governance systems still lack clear mechanisms to determine:

- Which risks are **unacceptable**
- When **intervention** is required
- Who is **accountable** for action
- How trade-offs are assessed **transparently and equitably**



Recommendations – 5 Priorities for reform

1. Define thresholds for unacceptable harm
Establish clear legal and policy triggers for ecological, cultural, social and health impacts – including non-economic loss such as heritage, identity and wellbeing.
2. Embed values and rights-holder leadership
Include structured deliberation with communities and rights-holders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to inform priorities, trade-offs and adaptation pathways.
3. Link risk assessment to implementation
Ensure national frameworks are supported by legislative obligations, coordinated implementation and sustained investment in place-based adaptation. Continued investment in Indigenous Protected Areas, Ranger programs and community-led adaptation can strengthen resilience and reduce long-term climate risk.
4. Strengthen long-term accountability
Introduce stronger independent oversight, adaptation reporting and cross-government approaches such as a “Climate in All Policies” framework.
5. Measure outcomes that matter
Assess success through ecosystem recovery, cultural continuity, public health, resilience and community wellbeing – not only expenditure or infrastructure delivery.

Australia has an opportunity to lead globally by aligning climate science with governance systems that are **transparent**, **accountable**, and **capable** of responding at the scale of the challenge.

References:

‘Evaluative governance for climate action in Australia’ – Nature Sustainability

Access at: <https://rdcu.be/fh198>

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