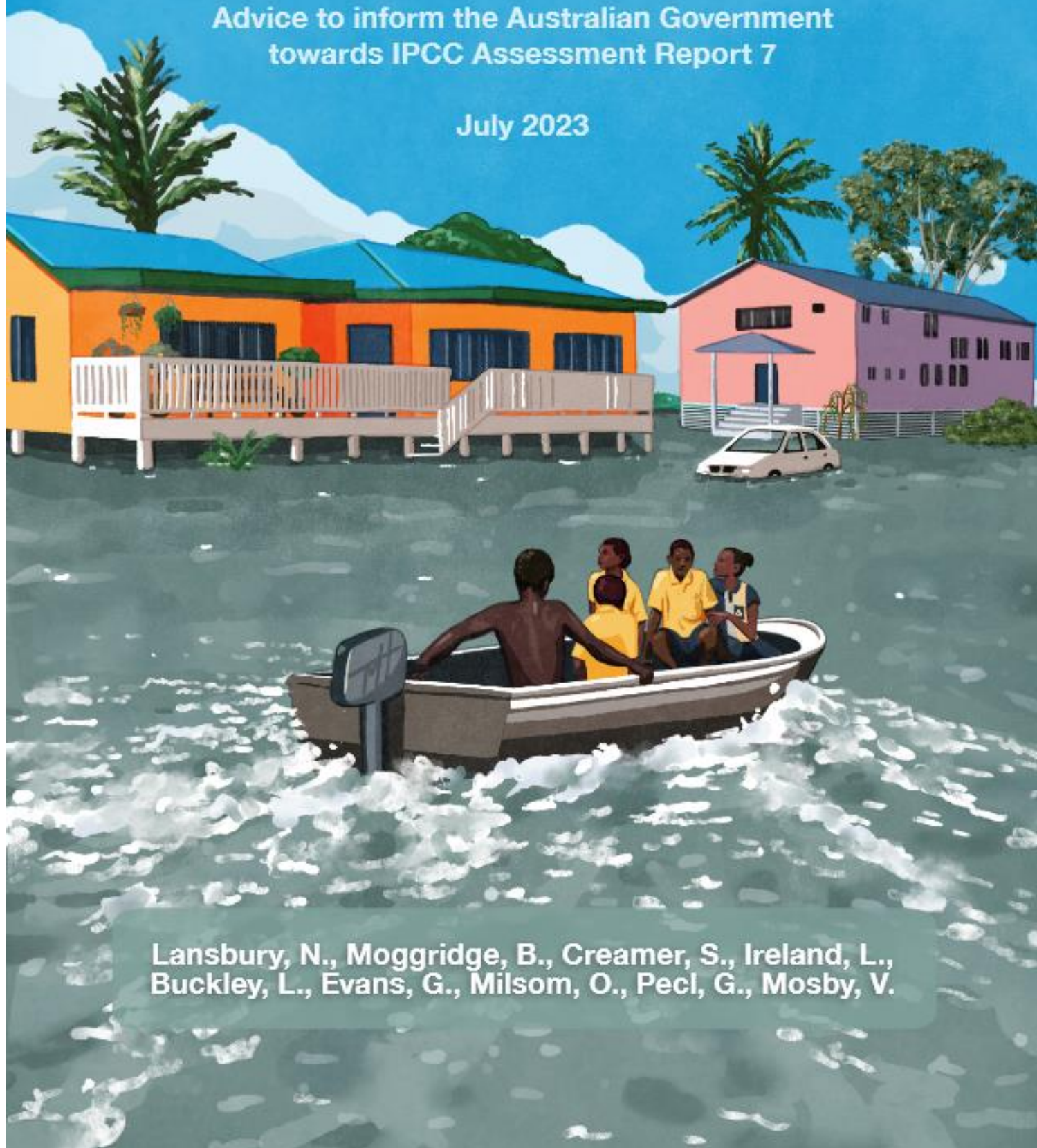


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' voices and engagement in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:

Advice to inform the Australian Government towards IPCC Assessment Report 7

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

Are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices present in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports?

“There is limited recognition regarding First Nation peoples other than relegating us to ‘vulnerable communities’ in the context of climate change. This disregards our over-65,000 years of sustainable practices and customary knowledge of the natural environment and thus our significant contribution to policy. First Nations need a voice” (Aboriginal respondent, IPCC Voices survey, 2023).

Climate change research is not capturing all relevant data. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have lived in Australia for thousands of generations and through changes in the climate. Knowledges of how to manage Country (traditional estate) to ensure ecosystem health, food sources, and sustainability of Peoples through these changes have been passed down through Traditional methods. Much of these Indigenous Knowledges provide insights on how to adapt to the changes occurring now and projected into the future under the more rapid and human-induced climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a United Nations-established body that seeks to document observed and projected aspects of climate change, through modelling of changes, documentation of vulnerabilities of ecosystems and societies, adaptation opportunities, as well as mitigating the causes of the changes. The Knowledges held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have great relevance to the IPCC process in terms of monitoring changes through locally specific indicators, as well as mitigation and adaptation options. Moreover, many communities living on Country are located in areas that are highly exposed to extreme and changing conditions under climate change, including increasingly frequent and severe cyclones, sea level rise, and extended heatwaves.

However, until the most recent IPCC Assessment Report (AR6; IPCC, 2022), minimal inclusion of Indigenous data had occurred, often because these datasets were not widely documented in peer-reviewed academic sources and thus were not located and summarised in Assessment Reports. This ‘invisibility’ in government and Western-focused documentation persists, and it influences governments’ follow-on consideration of priority areas and populations to which climate change policies, funding and monitoring must be tailored - including in Australia.

Why did the Australian Government commission this advice?

“The purpose of the consultancy is to provide advice to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, on what the Australian Government can do to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ voices in the IPCC” (Commonwealth Contract with the ‘IPCC Voices’ research team, March 2023).

This report was commissioned by the Australian Government ahead of the IPCC Assessment Report 7 planning discussions in August 2023, explicitly in response to increasing calls from Indigenous community, media and academia (including IPCC Lead Authors) for inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and Knowledge holders in the Lead Authorship, to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges and perspectives are directly presented by First Nations scholars and Knowledge holders themselves.

Who led this research to ensure culturally appropriate methods, consultation and portrayal of findings?

“Hear from the real and authentic voices. These ‘invisible people’ can be hard to access, and the Government cannot reach them. But trusted Aboriginal people can reach them through their networks... through having Indigenous peoples like us leading this research we are getting the right conversations, concerns, and solutions that the Government would not get otherwise... This is how effective consultation works” (Indigenous member of the IPCC Voices research team, 2023).

To guide the approach to deliver this purpose, a research team was formed comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars, IPCC Lead Authors, and researchers with skills in cultural competency. Adjunct Professor Sandra Creamer AM (Waanyi Kalkadoon, The University of Queensland), Dr Vinnitta Mosby (Meriam Nation, Torres Strait, James Cook University), Associate Professor Brad Moggridge (Kamilaroi, University of Canberra) and Lillian Ireland (Melukerde, legal scholar) are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars who bring cultural Knowledges and diverse Country representation to this group.

Dr Nina Lansbury (non-Indigenous, The University of Queensland) and Professor Gretta Pecl (non-Indigenous, University of Tasmania) are AR6 Lead Authors who worked alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Contributing Authors of the Australasia Chapter and brought their academic expertise and working knowledge of IPCC

processes to this report. Dr Geoff Evans, Dr Lisa Buckley and Olivia Milsom (non-Indigenous academics) provided research, management and other contributions.

How was this advice collated?

“They want their voices heard rather than being collected in numbers. They say, ‘we want proper talking; come and see what’s happening to us’” (Indigenous member of the IPCC Voices research team, 2023).

The research team created a survey and an associated extended yarning method that was disseminated widely across Australia, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to engage community members in the research, as well as to Indigenous and non-Indigenous climate change scholars. The process enabled community leaders, Knowledge holders, land managers, and health, housing, municipal, and other service providers to share their experiences, knowledge and concerns regarding climate change impacts, their aspirations for adaptation and mitigation actions, and for understanding the rationale for their voices to be included in IPCC processes, and mechanisms for elevating their engagement so this can happen. A key aspect maintained throughout the data gathering was: Who is speaking? Whose voice is this? Consequently, as much as possible, the direct voices of participants in the surveys and yarns are presented verbatim to retain the veracity of the message shared.

The total sample size was 102 surveys, with 70 surveys comprehensively completed. Of the respondents who identified their cultural background, 74 percent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who shared details had cultural connections with 43 Countries and/or language groups from across most states and territories.

What do Indigenous Knowledge Holders and scholars recommend to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Knowledges and voices are included in future IPCC reports and other climate change discussions?

On Indigenous Knowledges as IPCC data: *“Allow Indigenous-led data collection and responses that take in all the relationships between and in Country, rather than a siloed approach of ‘this statistic’ and ‘that research focus’* (Aboriginal respondent, IPCC Voices survey, 2023) and *“Evidence and data need to be collected on how we are experiencing these [climatic] changes”* (Torres Strait Islander respondent, IPCC Voices survey, 2023).

On Indigenous Peoples in the IPCC & beyond: *“[We want] to be given a platform to speak and to allow us to speak for ourselves on issues that directly impact our lives and wellbeing”* (Torres Strait Islander respondent, IPCC Voices survey, 2023).

On two-way climate change engagement between decision-makers and Indigenous Australians: *“Explain to us what is being shared by the IPCC report and how we might be able to contribute by way of our knowledge and understanding of the impacts of climate change”* (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondent, IPCC Voices survey, 2023).

The recommendations that result from this research are set out below, in order to respond to the Australian Government’s particular request for advice on actions and processes that the Australian Government can implement to:

- Strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ cultural Knowledges and perspectives on climate change impacts and responses in IPCC reports;
- Improve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and Knowledge Holders in IPCC processes.

Two additional areas of recommendation are placed after these initial responses to (i) describe how to provide climate change information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and (ii) how to achieve climate action at all stages in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities - from information gathering and monitoring through to the implementation of initiatives.

All recommendations are numbered for ease of location and description in the body of the report. These results and recommendations will be shared with the relevant Australian Government Minister and Australian Government departments, as well as with the research respondents and IPCC participants, and through wider public conversations.

Recommendations

- **Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ cultural Knowledges and perspectives on climate change impacts and responses in IPCC reports**

Commit to specific approaches that will ensure inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges and perspectives in IPCC reports, including through:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led climate change research
- The Australian Government commit to requesting and strongly supporting the IPCC to include both dedicated chapter/s on Indigenous Peoples as well as incorporating Indigenous Knowledges and considerations throughout all reports
- Respectful inclusion of Indigenous scientific data alongside Western scientific data (Recommendation 25)

Increase information in IPCC reports from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that:

- Considers wellbeing in a holistic way that is connected to Country
- Involves historical truth-telling
- Is Indigenous-led
- Values caring for Country (Recommendation 20)

Ensure that IPCC reports provide relevant and applicable information on climate change in terms of the science and the localised impacts, and increase the focus in the reports on Indigenous Knowledges (Recommendation 16)

Create an Indigenous-focussed section of the IPCC Assessment Reports (Recommendation 2). This can occur through:

- The Australian Government can request/insist that in the Australasian Chapter includes an Indigenous-focused section, and then:
- The Australian Government can suggest and lobby for a Indigenous-focused section for the broader IPCC report as a whole.

When seeking this information, seek to:

- Recognise Indigenous knowledge as a system and integrate it equivalently with Western knowledges (Recommendation 8)
- Acknowledge the marginalising impact of IPCC processes (Recommendation 1)
- Focus on a strengths- and rights-based narrative (Recommendation 4)
- Do not categorise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as “stakeholders” (Recommendation 5)

- **Improving the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and Knowledge Holders in IPCC processes**

Increase and recognise Indigenous contributions, especially as Lead Authors (Recommendation 3).

Achieve this by seeking to:

- Set and engage at least a minimum number of Indigenous IPCC Lead Authors from Australia. Support these Indigenous Lead Authors and all Indigenous authors with adequate and appropriate resources to enable publication of IPCC-relevant publications (Recommendation 26)
- Provide opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to be heard at all levels (Recommendation 6)

Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ participation in IPCC and other climate change processes by:

- Valuing and including Indigenous Knowledges in a similar way to Western knowledges,
- Instating a minimum quota of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors
- Including/inviting Indigenous Peoples to engage in IPCC and other climate change processes
- Sharing IPCC reports back to community with locally relevant data and in culturally-appropriate ways
- Establishing a Voice to Parliament/Indigenous representation on climate issues
- Ensuring effective and meaningful two-way engagement between decision-makers and Indigenous Australians (Recommendation 17)

Develop and conduct inclusive, consultative, culturally-appropriate approaches with Indigenous Peoples on climate change that respects their contribution of responses, and works in partnership on developing and implementing resulting actions with consideration to the purpose of consultation, methods, respondent representation, and data management (Recommendation 27). Use consultation as the first stage towards meaningful action on climate change (Recommendation 28).

When engaging Indigenous Lead Authors, seek to:

- Implement free, prior and informed consent for Indigenous Peoples' engagement in climate change action and measures (Recommendation 10)
- Create genuine partnerships with reciprocity, power sharing and respect (Recommendation 9)
- Support Indigenous women to empower themselves in climate change leadership (Recommendation 13)
- Increase familiarity and use of the IPCC and its reports for Indigenous Australians with a community and/or professional role of relevance to climate change (Recommendation 15)

- **Providing climate change information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

IPCC reports are not currently a key source of climate change information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. To increase climate change information for Indigenous Australians, in particular:

- Direct IPCC and other climate change information through community organisations, dedicated local events, and visits
- Promote accessible and targeted climate change reports
- Ensure climate change information is disseminated through social media
- Seek media coverage of climate change on all news platforms (Recommendation 18)

Improve sharing of information about climate change (including from IPCC reports) through:

- Increased locally based engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in local community, through dialogue and in culturally-appropriate ways
- Increased engagement with young people through accessible formats that incorporate climate change science and Indigenous Knowledges (Recommendation 19)

Increase dissemination of IPCC Assessment Reports by partnering with a diversity of relevant Indigenous audiences to develop such summaries or fact sheets on specific IPCC topics as identified by, and relevant to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Recommendation 29)

- **Achieving climate action in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: Information gathering, monitoring and implementation of initiatives**

Continue to research the impacts of changes on ecosystems and human health (including social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing, as well as physical health) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in all ecosystem types (Recommendation 22).

Seek and support Indigenous guidance to reduce the impacts of climate change (Recommendation 23). Support funding and training of Indigenous community leaders, knowledge holders and ranger groups to monitor climate change impacts on Country and people (Recommendation 21).

Ensure contextual understanding of climate change and Indigenous Peoples by seeking to:

- Acknowledge the interconnected health of Peoples and health of Country (Recommendation 12)
- Recognise the colonial drivers of threats by embedding self-determination and capacity building in all action (Recommendation 11)
- Protect Indigenous Knowledge when using Knowledge (Recommendation 14)

Support local and Indigenous-led climate change initiatives including legal protections (Recommendation 7). Invest in adaptation strategies and actions to protect physical health, emotional and social wellbeing, safety, employment, income and opportunities on traditional Country for all Indigenous communities impacted by climate change and in any community to which people may be forced to relocate (Recommendation 24).