# UK climate adaptation efforts show little progress amid rising risks



The UK's efforts to adapt to climate change have shown little progress over the past two years, according to a recent report by the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC). This period has coincided with record-breaking global and national weather extremes, notably the hottest year on record worldwide and England's wettest 18-month span from 2022 to 2024.

Climate adaptation, a matter largely devolved to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland with separate regional strategies, remains a critical issue in England. The previous UK government introduced a new climate adaptation strategy for England in 2023 to address rising temperatures and extreme weather. However, the CCC's latest analysis reveals that the approach is "not working" and urgently needs strengthening.

The CCC evaluated 46 adaptation outcomes across various sectors, including healthcare during heatwaves and financial sector preparedness for climate risks. Disappointingly, none showed "good" progress, with most remaining at low levels of delivery. While some policies, like those from the Ministry of Justice and a green finance strategy, have seen small improvements, others, particularly in flood protection investments, have deteriorated.

The report highlights several urgent climate-related risks confronting the UK. Flood risk is expected to grow substantially, with properties exposed rising from 6.3 million today to 8 million by 2050. Infrastructure such as roads and railways vulnerable to flooding could increase from one-third to half their total length. High-quality farmland at flood risk already covers 59% of the best land and is predicted to worsen. Heat-related deaths may multiply several times, surpassing 10,000 annually by 2050.

Referencing an Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) projection from 2024, the CCC notes that climate change could reduce the UK’s GDP by around 3% by 2074 under Paris Agreement targets, with a potential 5% loss if warming is higher.

The CCC’s reports, mandated biannually under the 2008 Climate Change Act, have repeatedly flagged adaptation as underfunded and neglected. The current adaptation strategy focusing on England and nationwide concerns like defence, known as the National Adaptation Programme (NAP3), was launched in mid-2023. The CCC previously described NAP3 as falling "far short of what is needed," a view echoed again with little evidence of improved government commitment since the 2024 Labour government assumed power.

The committee expressed serious concerns about possible cuts to adaptation funding in forthcoming spending reviews, warning that reducing financial support now would instead increase costs in the future as climate impacts intensify. Baroness Brown, chair of the CCC’s adaptation committee, told journalists, “We are seriously concerned that resilience and climate adaptation may be cut in the spending review. [The] government needs to recognise that this is not a future problem, this is today’s problem…I know the government is under a lot of pressure to make cuts, but this isn’t the easy one.”

Emma Pinchbeck, the CCC’s chief executive, highlighted the importance of forward-looking policies to avoid costly retrofitting of infrastructure like hospitals to cope with heat extremes.

Sector-specific analysis revealed several ongoing challenges:

* Land, Nature, and Food: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has delayed key strategies such as the land-use framework and food strategy, hindering adaptation progress. The committee criticised England’s environmental land management schemes (ELMs) for lacking clear climate adaptation guidance and uncertainty in farmer payments. The fishing industry’s climate plans have been downgraded, with the recent marine strategy lacking targeted adaptation actions.
* Infrastructure: The CCC recommends clear resilience standards in the forthcoming 10-year infrastructure strategy. While plans for roads and railways maintain ‘good’ ratings, actual progress in improving resilience to flooding remains stagnant, with more transport routes increasingly vulnerable.
* Built Environment and Communities: Flood risk is the primary threat, with the Environment Agency’s flood defence budget shrinking in real terms, failing to keep pace with rising risks. The CCC calls for long-term targets and funding to mitigate flood and coastal erosion threats and stresses the absence of a comprehensive plan to manage increasing heat risks in homes and communities.
* Health and Wellbeing: Policies to protect health services and public health from extreme heat and other hazards remain limited. Increased heat-related mortality and hospital overheating are growing concerns. The CCC urges development of improved public health adaptation plans and incorporation of climate resilience into NHS upgrades.
* Economy: The private sector faces ongoing barriers to climate adaptation, with limited finance and market failures impeding action. The CCC advocates creating an accessible adaptation data portal and integrating climate risk disclosures into sustainable finance regulations. A promised 2024 adaptation finance action plan has yet to be delivered.

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In total, the CCC's assessment found only four out of 89 recommended policy actions from their 2023 report have been fully implemented, with some critical areas such as food security, community preparedness, and building resilience notably unattended.

The report insists that the UK’s climate adaptation strategy requires a fundamental overhaul and better integration across government departments, with clear, measurable sector-specific targets, robust data collection, and accountability mechanisms by the end of 2025.

The Climate Change Committee’s findings paint a picture of a nation facing escalating climate risks but struggling to implement effective adaptation policies and delivery mechanisms. The report’s timing, midway through the current National Adaptation Programme cycle, underscores the urgency for a decisive government response to strengthen resilience against an increasingly volatile climate.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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