ASSESSING THE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION:

Governments and organisations at all levels are now responding to the challenge of climate change and, after an initial focus on mitigation, are now also focusing on adaptation to deal with the inevitable effects of climate change (Betsill & Bulkeley 2007, Measham et al. 2011). Adaptation is essentially local because both the impacts of climate change, and the actions that are available for adaptation, will be highly context-specific and occur within communities (Adger 2003, Armitage & Plummer 2010). While local government (LG) will play a key role, effective adaptation requires a concerted approach, both across all levels of government, and across multiple scales (Bulkeley & Betsill 2005, Cash et al. 2006).

Since the first Australian LG jurisdiction was established in 1840 the sector's role has transformed considerably from providing core services (roads, rates, rubbish) to encompass a far wider range of functions associated with delivering broader social, economic and environmental outcomes (ALGA 2012b, Dollery, Wallis & Allen 2006). LG faces numerous challenges in coping with its greater workload, including a lack of resources, especially funding (Self 2005). Moreover, a fundamental issue relates to LG's lack of status, power and influence within Australian governance structures (Keen & Mercer 1992, McNeill 2005).

Within this wider context, LG in Australia is coming under increasing pressure from higher levels of government to develop and implement climate change adaptation policies and plans. The extent to which individual councils can, and are, engaging in climate change adaptation is highly variable. The adaptive capacity of LG is a key concern being raised in climate change research and policy discourse. A review of literature suggests that many factors influence the adaptive capacity of LGs, which the researcher categorized under three headings of context, council and community (the 'three C's').

South Australia (SA) is already the driest state of the driest continent on Earth. With climate change it is expected to become even drier and hotter, experience more frequent and intense extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts and storms; and gradual sea level rise along its coastline. Each of the 68 LGs will need to undertake adaptation planning and action

diversity among South Australia's 68 LGs and a range of LGACI scores. Each case study comprised analysis of secondary data sourced from the Internet, and primary data generated through interviews with one staff member and an elected member (mayor or councillor) of each participating council. The three C's were used as a priori themes for thematic analysis of data generated through the interviews.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES:

LGACI scores varied considerably, from 26 to 82 out of 100, with a mean score of 48 and median of 45. A frequency chart shows scores in two main clusters, with a large cluster in the lower 35-49 capacity range, and a smaller one in the higher 60-74 range. LGACI scores were further ranked and divided into four quartiles, Q1-Q4.

capacity of LGs in SA, while case studies enabled many underlying and interrelating aspects of adaptive capacity to be explored, under the themes of context, council and community. The LGACI could be used by governments and agencies to assist in allocating resources to build capacity within the local government sector. However, its validity and robustness could be improved through a review of the index especially in the light of findings from Stage 2 of the research. Further research could also include case studies involving additional councils.

REFERENCES:

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