

Recommendations for including global/international context in the 2013 National Climate Assessment:

Introduction:

As we discussed briefly at our first NCADAC meeting, there is strong support for including the international/global context in the 3rd Assessment. The options paper we received (but did not discuss in substance) at the first meeting represents solid preparation by many of our Federal colleagues. This recommended approach draws heavily on their excellent work.

The 2013 National Climate Assessment will be the first assessment to include efforts to integrate the implications of global and international aspects of climate change on the United States. Climate change is a uniquely global issue in which decisions made in one country may have impacts in a variety of ways on one or more other nations and vice versa. Climate change is also an issue that requires a concerted international response to advance understanding of the issue and to inform decisions about and implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies. Therefore, it is critical that any assessment of climate change impacts on the United States should include consideration of the global/international aspects of the issue of interest to the United States.

Our task at our meeting in August is to resolve ourselves on how best to provide this context in the NCA Report and to establish expectations about how the international context will be addressed by the regional, sectoral, and cross-sectoral teams.

Background:

The global and international context of the NCA can provide useful guidance for the United States Global Change Research Program and individual federal agencies as they craft and implement their global engagement strategies and ongoing research programs. It will also serve as an educational piece for these audiences and beyond, including the general public. Such an education and communication function could help people understand why climate change justifies international investments, coordination and cooperation in order to be addressed properly.

The paper we received in April states,

“a National Climate Assessment that does not consider the international context of climate change would be incomplete given that we live in a globalized society in which decisions, particularly those related to environment, are dependent upon and have repercussions beyond the borders of any one country. Earth system processes and ecosystems operate on scales that reach far beyond the borders of any one country. Many of the proposed topics for the National Climate Assessment are directly influenced by negotiations and related decisions that take place in the international context. Several of the regions considered by the assessment are inherently international. A national climate assessment that seeks to provide the “scientific underpinnings of informed policy” should properly consider the international context.”

As our federal colleagues concluded, truly integrating the global/international context into the NCA is a complex challenge. The global climate change assessment arena includes a

variety of activities in which the United States is deeply engaged. For example, the United States contributes intellectually and financially to assessments such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) - all of which are entirely or significantly related to climate and/or global environmental change. At the same time, there are several ongoing domestic assessments, primarily oriented to the national security implications of climate change on the United States.

The GCRA establishes the primary audience for the Assessment report itself as the U.S. Congress, the President, and Executive Branch agencies. Material related to the global or international context should target these same audiences, even though it is likely that the global/international aspects of the NCA will have audiences that extend well beyond the USG and beyond the US domestic stakeholder community.

The federal work group considered a wide range of options for including the global aspects in the NCA and concluded as follows:

- The NCA should integrate priority topics in the appropriate regional, sectoral and cross-sectoral chapters of the report through the use of “text boxes” employing type face and background color different from the body of the Assessment. Criteria and standards for these inclusions would be adopted by the NCADAC and will be consistent throughout the Assessment.
- The NCA should include a dedicated chapter that would concisely put the international aspects in context and highlight unique issues that are relevant to U.S. international priorities and interests (e.g., national security and foreign development interests, international financial commitments, engagement with existing global initiatives) that would otherwise not be addressed within existing domestic-focused chapters.

There are several principles that set the context for considerations of the recommendations below:

Contributions that assess the global/international context of climate change should be consistent with ongoing domestic and international activities and provide information that complements and supports those efforts over time.

In addition, the international components of the 2013 report need to be fully integrated with the content of the report and directly relevant to the purpose of the report and the strategy we have adopted.

Finally, material related to the global/international context must meet all the quality control and data integrity standards that apply to the overall Assessment activities.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate global/international context material into the main chapters of the NCA, insuring that what we include is relevant and useful. To avoid redundancy, we suggest close cooperation with other work groups and especially with chapter authors. Accordingly, a matrix approach is recommended, with Work Group Chairs designating a single point of contact from those working directly on each chapter. The primary task of these contacts will be to identify to the I/G work group topics, issues, or questions where international or global context would add meaning to the assessment. The I/G work group will coordinate topics across chapters to avoid redundancy and ensure consistency, identify appropriate authors to prepare the material, and review the submission before submitting it to chapter authors for inclusion. Topics may be identified at any point in chapter development through March 2012.
2. Based on the draft Criteria for Inclusion of a Subject in the Report (see appendix A), the I/G Work group will develop final criteria to provide guidance for chapter points of contact. The Work Group will develop these criteria by October for consideration by the NCADAC in November, 2011.
3. The inclusion of a separate International overview chapter, as well as alternatives to a separate chapter, will be considered by the I/G Work Group, in close cooperation with INCA representatives from appropriate agencies. The chapter or alternative approaches will provide global context and highlight unique issues that are relevant to U.S. international priorities and interests (e.g., national security and foreign development interests, international financial commitments that may be affected by climate impacts, engagement with existing global initiatives) that would otherwise not be addressed within existing domestic-focused chapters.
4. The I/G Work group will also review submissions from other working groups to identify and suggest international or global perspectives that may not have been suggested by chapter contacts, and work with other Work group chairs and chapter authors to consider inclusion of these topics.

Immediate Next Steps and Schedule:

1. Chairs of DAC Work groups will recommend to the Executive Secretariat single points of contact for each chapter of the NCA. These individuals will comprise the I/G Work Group (*by 15 September, 2011*)
2. Members of the I/G Work Group appointed by 25 September 2011.
3. The I/G Work Group will seek comments on the attached Draft Criteria from the NCADAC, and prepare recommendations for consideration of the NCADAC at the November Meeting. (*request for comments by 22 August 2011; recommended final criteria transmitted to NCADAC members by 10 October 2011; consideration and adoption, November 2011*)
4. Initial I/G work group organizational meeting will be scheduled for the first week in October. The agenda for this meeting will include consideration of alternative approaches for inclusion of an overview of the international context in the 2013 NCA.

Appendix A

Possible Criteria for Inclusion of a Subject in the NCA (from the report of the federal work group; April 2011):

1. Direct and predictable connection to the mandate as articulated in the GCRA of 1990 (<http://www.gcrio.org/gcact1990.html>)
2. Supportive and complementary to other ongoing assessment activities related to climate (related to mandate).
3. Focus on the implications for the US: IPCC and other reports focus well on impacts of climate change, the global aspects contribution of the U.S. Assessment report should focus on the implications for the United States
4. Particular topic is a current or emerging concern over the mandated period of consideration of the assessment- present, 25, 100 years.
5. Provides support for decision-making or prioritization of partnerships, and data collection.
6. Illustrates how international events, decisions, activities, and climate stresses elsewhere can contribute to vulnerabilities and opportunities in the United States.
7. Meets U.S. needs and interests that are not met by global assessments.
8. Informs U.S. climate-related overseas development assistance decisions (incl. where U.S. investments may be at risk due to climate stresses)
9. Evaluation of whether the events / conditions might affect U.S. resources (Capital flows/financial markets, intellectual property, commodity prices and market opportunities, regional regimes (UNFCCC), opportunities for REDD and emissions trading?)
10. Evaluation of whether the issues require U.S. resources or leadership to deal with, e.g. development issues, global public health systems, international conflicts, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief implications.