



Grantham
Research Institute
on Climate Change
and the Environment

Establishing a National Heat Risk Commission

Adeline Talks Series

Event note

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The event – motivation, organisation and participants

The ‘Adeline Talks’ series celebrates the legacy of Adeline Stuart-Watt, a highly respected and very sadly missed friend and colleague at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment who died in April 2023. The event series brings together senior experts and colleagues from different sectors to tackle difficult and complex climate adaptation and resilience challenges in the UK in the form of an annual roundtable.

The inaugural event that this note describes took place in London on 11 February 2025. It focused on the establishment of a National Heat Risk Commission for the UK. The discussion was informed by the Grantham Research Institute’s work to assess and enhance governance responses and understand public perceptions to extreme heat. The work aims to analyse ways in which the UK can better prepare for periods of extreme heat.

The event was organised by Dr Candice Howarth and chaired by Emma Howard Boyd. It was held under the Chatham House rule.

Senior representatives from UK Government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector joined the roundtable event to discuss:

1. How can the UK better prepare for and manage the impacts of extreme heat without increasing emissions?
2. The case for a National Heat Risk Commission.

Participants included:

Agostinho Sousa	Head of Extreme Events and Health Protection, UK Health Security Agency
Anna Beswick	Policy Fellow, Grantham Research Institute, LSE
Anna Mavrogianni	Professor of Sustainable, Healthy and Equitable Built Environment, UCL
Bob Ward	Co-Chair of London Climate Ready Partnership
Candice Howarth	Head of Climate Adaptation and Resilience, Grantham Research Institute, LSE
Cath Bremner	Co-Chair Adaptation Finance Working Group, Climate Financial Risk Forum
Ceris Jones	Climate Change Advisor, National Farmers Union
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Emma Pinchbeck	CEO, Climate Change Committee
Giles Atkinson	Acting Director, Grantham Research Institute, LSE
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Kathryn Brown	Director of Climate Change and Evidence, The Wildlife Trusts
Lucy Munn	Deputy Director of Operations, COBR, Cabinet Office
Radhika Khosla	Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Cooling, University of Oxford
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This note summarises key themes from the two main discussions. As stated on p2, the note solely reflects the authors’ interpretation of the event.

Discussion 1: How can the UK better prepare for and manage the impacts of extreme heat without increasing emissions?

This discussion followed a presentation by Dr Candice Howarth on work undertaken by the Grantham Research Institute analysing how to better align heat risk resilience with emission mitigation agendas.

Building awareness and support

Most participants stressed that heat risk is a critical issue, where there is a **large gap between the high level of risk and the action been taken**. Feedback focused on the need to develop more political awareness and a stronger sense of urgency to act in response to heat risk. Some participants acknowledged a **lack of political engagement** and willingness to act. Two participants noted that there are some encouraging signs of political willingness to engage with climate risk in general, especially where impacts are being realised within communities of constituencies (e.g. farming communities).

Some participants acknowledged that **heat risk has to compete** with many other risks also viewed as urgent. A strong case needs to be made to prioritise heat risk and move beyond talking about this risk to action. There was some feeling of **decision-makers fixating on the uncertainties in the evidence** of what works to protect people during extreme heat events; awareness-raising and capacity-building could help address this.

Most participants felt there is a **lack of accountability and ownership** of cascading/indirect impacts of heat risk across government, making this a complex issue to address. This is further complicated when considering how to better align the need to enhance resilience to extreme heat without adopting measures that could increase greenhouse gas emissions.

Critical concerns

Participants acknowledged that heat risk has a **disproportionate impact on those who are already most vulnerable** in society. This emerged as a major concern and was stressed multiple times. Aligned with this, participants also described how a lack of heat policy and targeted interventions would lead to 'autonomous adaptation', where those who can afford mechanical cooling will retrofit their own properties. This has important implications for energy consumption and climate justice.

Participants stressed that there is a need to align and **integrate national risk assessment processes** to ensure that heat risk is assessed consistently. For example, there is a disconnect between the National Risk Register (NRR) and the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. There is a further lack of integration of heat risk resilience into broader policies and strategies that have implications for and will be impacted by heat risk.

More **organisations need to be brought into discussions** about emergency response to extreme heat events, not just those represented in local resilience forums. NGOs, charities and civil society organisations all have a role to play but there is no coordination between them at present. The charity and third sectors **need to get better at talking about what they do and how it helps** in managing the risks of extreme heat; a lot of action is hidden.

The **built environment was consistently highlighted as a priority sector** requiring urgent action to address heat risk. Some participants stressed the connection between net zero building retrofit and lock-in of heat risk, and the urgent need for action to address this. They also highlighted the connection between heat risk vulnerability and the need to **prioritise action to address heat risk in buildings housing vulnerable groups**.

Action-focused

Participants were keen for future work that addresses heat risk to **focus on action**. A few participants identified that single hazard heat plans may not be the best mechanism for driving action and noted that organisations and sectors are focusing on multi-hazard plans.

Participants recognised that addressing **heat risk will require collective action** to build awareness, identify specific actions and secure support for investment and implementation.

Several participants also stressed the **importance of local action**, recognising that national risk assessments filter down to the community level and that enabling local action is critical.

Emergency planning exercises at the national level, for example, could enhance their efforts to connect better locally.

Discussion 2: Making the case for a National Heat Risk Commission

Building on discussion points covered in Part 1, participants considered the potential for a National Heat Risk Commission to support progress in ensuring that the UK is better prepared for and able to manage the impacts of extreme heat without increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Role and type of activities

Participants suggested a range of activities to build momentum and drive implementation of action to address heat risk.

- Participants recognised that **the Grantham Research Institute at LSE has significant convening power** that could be used to bring together stakeholders who are critical to addressing heat risk. The Institute's reputation for heat research and policy and independence from government make it a **credible and trusted lead for bringing diverse partners together**.
- Questions were raised about the status and governance of a Commission, querying how it would influence decision-making. There was **scepticism over whether there would be ministerial/senior leadership support for leading a Commission** at this stage (and whether this was needed) and discussion about whether activities should focus on **working with officials** to drive progress at an operational level.
- Most participants emphasised a desire to **focus on implementation and action**, including 'quick wins'. The majority favoured integrating multi-hazards policies and plans, rather than developing a standalone heat plan. They also emphasised the importance of **connecting to existing forums and networks**.
- Some participants also voiced an interest in exploring the potential for short, focused sessions that address key challenges, **identify quick wins, build momentum and address priorities**.

Priorities

Several priorities for action were identified:

- **Leadership:** There is a need to build leadership and support for action on heat risk in the UK. To influence leaders, this will require a joined-up approach across government departments and sectors and tailored messaging and communications that link to government priorities. Future work needs to produce recommendations and products that can engage ministers and support the case for leadership and action.

- **Knowledge:** Discussions emphasised the needed to **develop the economic case for action** to address heat risk and that this will be important in engaging political and senior leaders. Related to this, it was also noted that government has been reluctant to invest in research to develop the economic case for action to address heat risk. In addition, there is a **disconnect between the approach that the National Risk Register and the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment** take to assessing and influencing how extreme heat is managed. Participants noted that efforts have been made in the past to join up these two processes, but this has been unsuccessful.
- **Coordination:** Roles and responsibilities for taking action to address heat risk need to be developed and defined, including engagement with local stakeholders to identify how heat risk can be managed from the national to the local level.
- **Influencing:** **Windows of opportunity to influence progress** on heat risk were identified, including the 2025 Spending Review, publication of the next Climate Change Risk Assessment in January 2027 and subsequent development of the National Adaptation Programme. Several participants identified that engagement across sectors and government departments would identify further windows of opportunity, routes to influence and trusted messengers.

Four action points for a Heat Risk Commission

This inaugural event from the Adeline Talks series identified the following four action points that a Heat Risk Commission should drive:

1. **Develop a strong case for prioritising heat risk and building political awareness and engagement.** In order to overcome the current lack of political support and competition with other risks, creating urgency around heat risk is needed, particularly through raising awareness of its impacts on vulnerable groups and communities.
2. **Integrate heat risk resilience into national and local policies and risk assessments.** Work is needed to align and integrate heat risk into national risk assessments, such as the National Risk Register and UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. This will need to be integrated with other policy priorities (e.g. net zero) while ensuring local actions are enabled to address heat risk at the community level, especially for people who are vulnerable due to the characteristics of their built environment.
3. **Develop and communicate the economic case for action on heat risk.** Focussed work looking at building the economic rationale to support the case for addressing heat risk is needed, especially to engage political and senior leaders. This should include revisiting the disconnect between the National Risk Register and the Climate Change Risk Assessment regarding heat risk.
4. **Define roles and responsibilities for heat risk management at all levels.** In order to build a coordinated response to extreme heat events, roles and responsibilities for managing heat risk need to be clarified, including engaging with local stakeholders to align actions from the national to the local level.