

Transcript

Lord Krebs: speaking to delegates at the Adapting to Climate Change in China's (ACCC) conference – 'International Conference on Climate Change Adaptation'

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this very important summit on climate adaptation.

I am delighted to be able to say a few words, and very sorry that my commitments in the UK have prevented me from travelling to China to be with you for what promises to be a fascinating meeting.

In 2008 the UK parliament passed into law an Act that established a legally binding target for reducing our national greenhouse gas emissions. The law also requires the government to produce a national adaptation programme, due to be published next week.

Importantly, the Act created an independent watchdog, the climate change committee to both advise the government and monitor its progress.

I chair the climate change committee's adaptation subcommittee. Our role is to advise the government on the risks from climate change and to report to parliament on a regular basis on the National Adaptation Programme.

Our reports have to assess whether the Programme is addressing the key risks arising from climate change and whether the government's policies are effective, and are making progress, in tackling these risks.

Some of these risks will be intrinsic to the UK, others will arise as a result of impacts elsewhere on the globe that affect the supply of commodities for the UK.

Adaptation to climate change is crucial. However good mankind is at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, we are inevitably going to see further changes to our climate in the decades ahead.

But there is considerable uncertainty, especially at the regional and national level, as to the nature of these changes in climate.

Uncertainty is the first difficulty in determining an appropriate adaptation strategy.

The second is how to measure progress. Unlike reducing greenhouse gas emissions, where there is an internationally agreed currency against which progress can be measured, adaptation has no agreed common metric.

In fact adaptation is almost always going to be situation specific and will require local action.

Our emphasis is on adaptation actions that are 'low regrets', that are sensible to do under a wide range of scenarios, or that will avoid locking the country in to long term, irreversible, decisions that could turn out to be bad for adaptation.

My committee has spent the past three years developing an analytical approach to measuring adaptation. We call it the assessment toolkit.

It includes indicators of risk and of actions to reduce risk, as well as analyses of decision making processes that are relevant to adaptation.

A key difference between our approach and that adopted in most other countries is that we are measuring outcomes of adaptation actions, and not just the processes and plans that are aimed at producing adaptation.

We are systematically applying our toolkit to the key climate risks to the UK that have been identified in the UK's climate change risk assessment.

Last year we reported on metrics for two key risks for the UK: increased risk of flooding as a result of extreme weather events, and increased risk of water shortage as a result of drier summers.

This year we are reporting metrics for adaptation of the land for food production, carbon storage, protection of biodiversity, and coastal defence.

Next year we will report on metrics for health, infrastructure and the supply chain for industry.

All our reports are available online on the CCC website.

To give a flavour of how our assessment toolkit works, I will briefly refer to two risks related to water: flooding and household water supply.

A significant number of properties in the UK are at risk of flooding already, and our indicators of exposure include the rate of building development in high flood risk areas.

At the same time, we can assess the expenditure on flood defences as well as other protection measures.

Projecting forward, and taking into account the effects of climate change, we conclude that the current policies and levels of investment will not be sufficient.

Either the government has to accept that more properties will be flooded from time to time, or it has to change policies of planning and investment in flood defences. We will monitor what the government does.

Turning to water scarcity in the home, many parts of the UK are already water stressed, and this stress will probably increase in the future as a result of climate change combined with economic and population growth.

Current policies to meet the supply demand gap lean heavily on increased supply, but our modelling suggests that both increased supply and reduced demand will be needed in some parts of the country.

One obvious way to reduce demand is to charge per litre used, by metering.

Again, we will monitor and report to Parliament on whether or not the government's policies are sufficient to maintain or increase resilience in the face of climate change.

I hope that this brief overview gives you a flavour of how we are approaching the challenge of adaptation.

I wish you well for this summit and I look forward to hearing about the outcomes.

Thank you.