



What advice do climate change advisory bodies provide to policymakers?

Results from the first longitudinal analysis of the UK Climate Change Committee's policy recommendations.

Key messages:

- Over 40 countries have set up climate change advisory bodies to advise policymakers.
- Created in 2008, the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) is one of the oldest bodies of its kind.
- Between 2009 and 2020 the CCC has provided the UK Parliament with at least 700 policy recommendations on both mitigation and adaptation.
- Our study found its recommendations have become more cross-sectoral and clearer in their addressee. Nearly half of its recommendations have been repeated by the CCC over time.
- More research needs to understand when and why advice is/isn't used by policymakers.



Introduction

This briefing note is based on a recently published open access article:

[Advising national climate policy makers: a longitudinal analysis of the UK Climate Change Committee.](#)

This briefing paper reports the main findings from a recent study of the CCC's climate policy recommendations, 2009-2020. The aims of the study were to explore:

1. What mitigation and adaptation recommendations the CCC had provided to the UK Parliament since it was created;
2. When, to whom and in what form these recommendations were provided;
3. How, if at all, these recommendations have changed over time; and,
4. The extent to which the recommendations challenged the policy status quo.

Recommendations were analysed via a content analysis. Each recommendation was coded against the criteria listed in existing studies that suggest recommendations should: (1) have an addressee (2) have a clear sectoral focus (3) include targets and (4) include clear points of future action. For full details on the methods used refer to the published paper: [Advising national climate policy makers: A longitudinal analysis of the UK Climate Change Committee - ScienceDirect.](#)

Overview

Nearly all countries have adopted climate policies. Many have committed to achieve net zero emissions and increase their climate resilience. Governments are increasingly reliant on expert advice for the design and delivery of these objectives. To help with this, over 40 countries have set up climate change advisory bodies. Many of these bodies have become a central feature in national climate change governance. However, very little is known about what advice these bodies provide to policymakers or how it might change over time.

The UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) was established in the 2008 UK Climate Change Act (CCA). It is one of the oldest climate change advisory bodies of its kind in the world and its design has been emulated in other countries. This study was the first in-depth longitudinal analysis of the advice provided to UK policymakers by the CCC.

Results

Since 2009 the CCC has provided the UK Parliament with 700 mitigation and adaptation policy recommendations. The focus and characteristics of these recommendations have changed over time.

Between 2009 and 2020 over half (58%) of the CCC’s mitigation recommendations were addressed to a named actor. Most commonly recommendations were addressed to government departments, particularly the industrial strategy department, the transport department and the environment department. Adaptation recommendations were more frequently addressed to a named actor (88%).

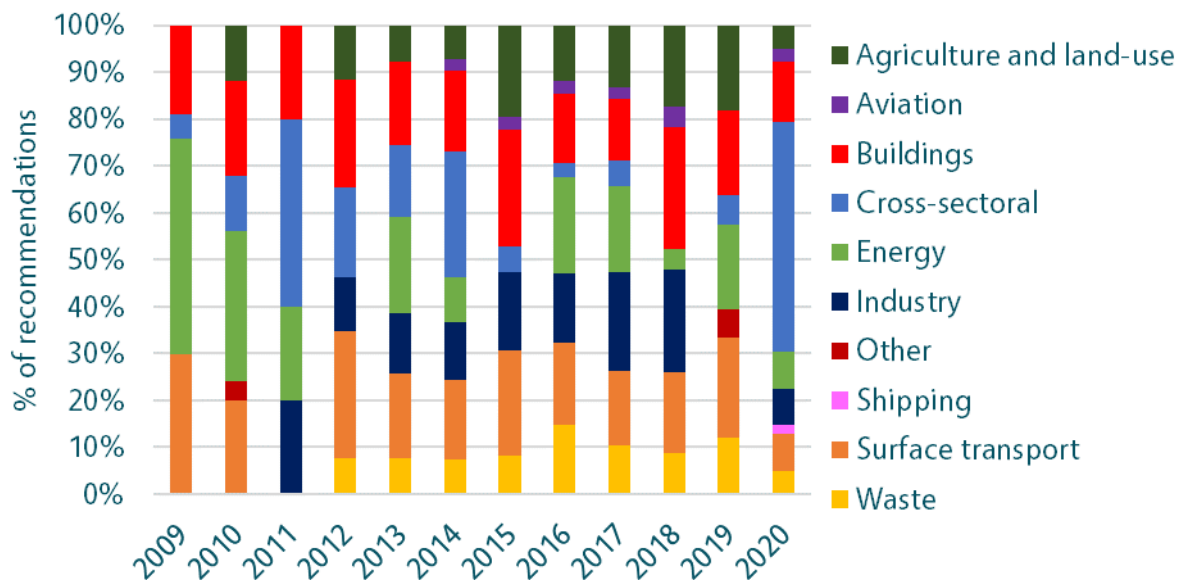
There was also variation in the sectoral focus of recommendations. In its first report in 2009 the CCC’s recommendations mainly focused on energy, surface transport and buildings. In its 2020 report recommendations addressed ten sectors including aviation, industry, shipping, waste, and agriculture and land-use (Figure 1). Over the last 12 years, the CCC’s mitigation and adaptation recommendations have become more cross-sectoral. Examples of the CCC’s cross-sectoral mitigation recommendations include:

“[i]mprove the evidence base on energy efficiency of appliances, district heating, surface transport emissions by mode, agriculture emissions, waste emissions” (CCC, 2012: 12)

“[i]ntegrate Net Zero into all policy making, and ensure procurement strategies are consistent with the UK’s climate objectives” (CCC, 2020: 25)

Adaptation recommendations have tended to focus on the same four sectors over time, specifically water, infrastructure, buildings and agriculture and land-use.

Figure 1. Sectoral focus of the CCC’s mitigation recommendations, 2009-2020.



Over the study period only 53 (10%) of the CCC's mitigation recommendations included both a timescale for delivery and a quantified target. Only two adaptation recommendations had both of these characteristics. More commonly, recommendations contained neither a timescale nor a target, at 37% of mitigation recommendations and 31% of adaptation recommendations.

Between 2009 and 2020, no less than 43% and 42% of mitigation and adaptation recommendations were repeated at least once. Curiously mitigation and adaptation recommendations that were addressed to an actor tended to repeat more than those without an addressee. For instance, mitigation recommendations addressed to multiple government departments were repeated more than those addressed to a single department.

Only 3% of the CCC's mitigation recommendations challenged the policy status quo. The same figure for adaptation recommendations is 7%. These more challenging recommendations tended to underline the importance of a fair and equitable decarbonisation, and called for climate policy to address other elements such as human health. For example, in 2020 the CCC provided the Treasury with the mitigation recommendations that it should "[d]evelop a plan for funding decarbonisation fairly and review the distribution of costs for businesses, households and the Exchequer" and "[c]onsider near-term as well as long-term decarbonisation funding needs and policy implications for a just transition" (CCC, 2020: 27).

Conclusions and future research priorities

Three important findings emerged from our analysis. First, only in recent years have the CCC's mitigation recommendations begun to consistently include an addressee whereas this has been common practice for the adaptation recommendations. Second, the CCC's recommendations have been relatively repetitious: no less than 43% of mitigation, and 42% of adaptation, recommendations were repeated at least once either verbatim or partially over time. Thirdly, for a long period, the majority of the CCC's recommendations did not significantly challenge the policy status quo. However, this trend changed noticeably with the publication of its 2020 report which was qualitatively different from previous reports. For the first time, policy recommendations were organised by government department and covered both mitigation and adaptation.

Our study also opens up new areas of research on climate change advisory bodies. Four issues stand out as meriting greater attention. First, new work should seek to understand their inner workings, particularly how and why they formulate their advice in the form that they do. Second, why and under what conditions do advisory bodies continually repeat their recommendations? Future research could build on our finding that the nature of repetition varies significantly across time and sectors, and between the areas of mitigation and adaptation. Third, there is an opportunity to use our methods to analyse advisory bodies in other countries and fields beyond climate change, to produce a more systematic account of the changing nature of policy advice. Fourth, there is the vexed issue of how, if at all, advice impacts climate policy. Future

research could explore the factors that lead to successful policy advice and what structural factors allow an advisory body to achieve policy impact. This is a particularly important area of research because climate change advisory bodies often have no formal powers to enact climate policy or force policymakers to implement their recommendations.

References

CCC (2012) *Meeting Carbon Budgets - 2012 Progress Report to Parliament*. Available at: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/meeting-the-carbon-budgets-2012-progress-report-to-parliament/>

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