

Beyond communication: Using climate information to foster and deliver climate action

Eve Norris (Rapporteur), University of East Anglia; Sophie Day, North Norfolk District Council and University of East Anglia; Robert Nicholls, Katie Jenkins, University of East Anglia; Saffron O’Neil, University of Exeter; Jordan Harold and Irene Lorenzoni, University of East Anglia (Chairs)

During the Critical Decade for Climate Action Conference, hosted by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia (UEA), climate experts gathered to showcase evidence-based ideas and critically evaluate opportunities for climate action. This briefing note serves as a summary of Session 8a on Tuesday 9 September 2025.

Climate information becomes truly useful when it fosters climate action. This goes beyond communication. Producing useful climate information necessitates moving towards more integrated and embedded approaches, such as co-creation of information and climate action. Inevitably, this requires the dedication of time, resources, and the building of good working relationships. Going beyond communication implies benefits and challenges. Halfway through this critical climate decade, this session brought together varied experiences and learnings on how to foster engagement with climate information in support of climate action.

This is a summary of the presentations and discussions at the “Beyond communication” session at the Tyndall Centre’s ‘Critical Decade for Climate Action’ conference in September 2025.

Opening commentary

The session explored varied contexts – from local community engagement and adaptation planning, through to national TV programming. Speakers discussed co-producing solutions with communities, supporting local decision-making, and embedding climate messages in everyday life. The panellists’ perspectives on coastal adaptation, regional climate risk assessments, and media-based sustainability narratives illustrated both the opportunities and challenges in using climate information to support climate action.

Coastal adaptation, Sophie Day

In North Norfolk, communities are at imminent risk of coastal erosion, with rates projected to accelerate partly due to climate change. This will result in the loss of homes, heritage, infrastructure and other assets, impacting the

viability of settlements, the local visitor economy, and transport links.

Sophie Day, part of the Coastwise project, highlighted that while information about climate change and coastal erosion is available, adaptation action is challenging to deliver. Information can be uncertain, inaccessible, non-statutory, hard to understand, is open to being contested or ignored, and often elicits emotive reactions. Meaningful adaptation action requires transcending existing silos of responsibility and funding, going well beyond business-as-usual governance arrangements. Drawing on the Coastwise work, Sophie explained that traditional narratives around property loss often overlooks aspects of community identity, cultural memory, and wider social impacts.

The Coastwise project aims to co-create local transition plans, enabling communities not only to understand their risks but also prepare proactively for change rather than reacting in crisis. Climate information is key to this, through building coastal erosion literacy, supporting adaptive governance mechanisms to establish and evolve, and creating entry points for pragmatic community engagement and empowerment. Sophie argued that communication is

the foundation of engaging with communities and finding solutions – i.e. shifting from fear towards developing meaningful, deliverable plans.

Key challenges include:

- Limited national and regional capacity (policy and funding) to support adaptation planning and delivery.
- Institutional inertia and decision delays in government at all scales.
- Difficulties in articulating and demonstrating the benefits of adaptation (can be long term).
- The unsettling and difficult-to-accept nature of some of the information for communities.

Initiatives catalysed by climate information in the Coastwise project include co-created local coastal transition plans, national funding and financing bids, national conveyancing research and outreach, exploration of housing options over different epochs, and holding Coastwise Café events with coastal communities. For adaptation to work, collaboration, cooperation and planning are essential, requiring determination, honesty and time from all involved.

Regional risk assessment, Robert Nicholls and Katie Jenkins

The Fens is a large and agriculturally important region of England, much of which lies below sea-level but has been sustained through centuries of adaptation. With climate change accelerating sea-level rise and increasing risks from other hazards such as drought, the long-term viability of the Fens is becoming increasingly uncertain.

Robert Nicholls presented insights from the Fens Climate Change Risk Assessment and shared approaches used to communicate findings with local organisations to support adaptation decisions. For example, the risk assessment highlighted that if defences that are highly vulnerable to failure were to breach, inundation would be significant as sea levels rise – for example, with 1m sea level rise and a 1-in-200-year storm, flooding could reach 50km in land. By modelling risks to agriculture, biodiversity, flooding, and heat stress, under different socio-economic and temperature scenarios, the project provided evidence to guide local decision-making while also informing national priorities.

Within the Fens, diverse groups with differing interests and backgrounds presented a challenge in communicating the risk information. However, having a regional identity and shared problem helped to inform the framing of communications and foster collective understanding and agreement. Recognising that people engage with information in different ways, the project used a range of formats to help diverse audiences engage with the risks.

argues that recovery narratives are not neutral but shaped by power, agendas, and selective storytelling. How disasters are talked about matters, as certain narratives are privileged, influencing how events are perceived and understood. He notes that the ‘silence’ or absence of certain voices, places, or issues in reporting is as significant as what gets highlighted.

Key insights included:

- Projects that are grounded in context are easier to communicate.
- Having a clear ‘customer’ to communicate with makes messaging more effective.
- Presenting the risk assessment findings in multiple forms (e.g. maps, visualisations, infographics, storylines, fact sheets) helps diverse audiences engage with complex risks.
- Communication is a key first step in encouraging diverse groups within the Fens to understand, debate and agree on next actions.

Climate narratives on TV, Saffron O'Neill

Recognising that much climate information often reaches a limited audience, popular media has the potential to reach broad and diverse groups in society. Although much is known about climate coverage in traditional news media, less is known about climate narratives embedded in other media with broader reach.

Saffron O'Neill highlighted that TV cookery shows attract large audiences and have the potential to convey climate and sustainability messages. Food and farming practices significantly contribute to planetary and public health; reducing meat and dairy consumption is a key action for helping to meet UK climate targets. However, there are strong cultural and ingrained beliefs about meat, which create significant barriers to changing dietary habits. In this context, cookery shows could be an opportunity to foster climate action.

In an analysis of 101 TV cookery shows, most recipes cooked are meat-based whilst non-meat recipes are often justified in terms of health or cost, potentially stigmatising low-carbon choices. Narratives on sustainability are rare. This may reflect a level of cautiousness by TV producers on how audiences might react to such narratives.

However, with some cooking shows attracting extremely large audiences, there is a significant opportunity to reach new audiences who may not engage with climate content elsewhere. Potential themes could include plant-based foods/recipes, energy use in home cooking and aspects of food production. Co-production with media practitioners could enhance the applicability and impact of research,

helping to integrate sustainability narratives in ways that resonate with diverse audiences.

Key challenges include:

- Identifying ways forward for conversations on potentially polarising climate topics, such as food and diet.
- Knowing how and when to emphasise co-benefits; and avoiding stigmatising the low-carbon option, e.g. as other, different, or difficult.
- Addressing barriers and opportunities for researchers to work on media sources with higher reach (which are often methodologically challenging).

Concluding reflections:

The session underscored that fostering climate action is not simply a matter of providing and communicating information – it requires deep engagement and a willingness to connect with people in their lived experiences and contexts.

Co-production emerged as a central theme: researchers must actively listen to communities, understand their experiences, and identify where scientific expertise can support local priorities. Climate communication must resonate with everyday concerns and values. Crucially, the session emphasised that meaningful progress depends on bridging bottom-up initiatives (i.e. by individuals and communities) with top-down support (i.e. by governance, public institutions, business and other organisations). This is not a quick fix; it requires sustained investment in relationships, transparency, and shared purpose.

The interconnected nature of climate action offers diverse opportunities to engage new audiences, but doing so effectively requires humility and collaboration and time. As we move further into this critical climate decade, the reflections offered a hopeful yet grounded reminder: climate action is most powerful when it is co-created, context-sensitive, and rooted in trust.