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The 2024 Fred Kan & Co. Prize was awarded to Ms. Malene Eilertsen for her dissertation--Assessing the Perception and Personal Experiences of Climate Change in Hong Kong in the Wake of Recent Extreme Weather Events—which was submitted to the board of Examines for the degree of MSc in Environmental Management at the University of Hong Kong. We provide an overview of the dissertation in this edition of the UPELQ.

The Editors

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Assessing community perception of the link between climate change and severe weather events in Hong Kong

Ms. Malene Eilertsen (the author) was the worthy 2024 recipient of the annual Fred Kan & Co. Prize for the dissertation submitted as part of the MSc Environmental Management course at the University of Hong Kong. The Prize was, as usual, awarded by the MSc Board of Examiners.

As is clear from the dissertation title: *Assessing the Perception and Personal Experiences of Climate Change in Hong Kong in the Wake of Recent Extreme Weather Events,* the author's research and her consequential dissertation focus on whether people in Hong Kong relate climate change to severe weather events, rather than the environmental issue of the cause of climate change.

Aim of the research

Climate change cannot be observed directly. However, probable consequences of the process of climate change, such as floods, severe weather patterns and wildfires, "*can be observed and experienced.*" Previous studies have shown that people react differently "*in attributing personal experiences to climate change.*"

The author explores the "*psychological connection between direct experiences and the broader cognitive dimensions of climate change perception*". Thus, the author's research was, in short, to understand "*how individuals perceive adverse events, such as flooding or extreme weather, as consequences of climate change."*

Risk perception

The author notes that "*risk perception, refers to how individuals make subjective assessments of potential risks, or hazards*". Public perceptions are influenced by "*intricate psychological and social factors*", not simply scientific arguments. For the purposes of her research, climate change risk perception was taken by the author to encompass "*the subjective evaluation of climate related events and the perceived threats posed by environmental changes*".

Various factors influence subjective evaluation of climate risks, such as extent of relevant knowledge; personal experience; social norms and value orientation (i.e. "*egoistic values*" or "*socio-altruistic values*", or "*biospheric values*").

Methodology

In summary, the aim of the study was "*to assess the level of awareness and comprehension within the Hong Kong population regarding climate change and its potential consequences*".

To achieve this, a well compiled, relatively comprehensive written survey (questionnaire), was distributed to a selection of Hong Kong residents.

There were 396 effective responses. The data provided by the respondents was then analysed and formed the factual basis for the author's conclusions and dissertation.

A table (Table II) provides a snapshot of the makeup of the respondents

Table II shows the descriptive statistics for the demographic variables.

Demographic variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	205	51.8
	Male	186	47
	Prefer not to say	2	0.5
	Non-binary	3	0.8
Age	18-24	90	22.7
	25-34	127	32.1
	35-44	66	16.7
	45-54	64	16.4
	55-64	45	11.4
	65+	3	0.8
Education	High School	75	18.9
	Bachelor's degree	218	55.1
	Master's degree	89	22.5
	Doctoral degree	14	3.5

According to the author, the survey responses showed "*that a significant majority (76.7%) reported having personally experienced climate change in Hong Kong, and 57.6% believed that their experiences were linked to climate change to a great or considerable extent.*"

The author comments that "*another key finding is that the majority (82.6% agree or strongly agree that they believe climate change is happening now. Similarly, 73.2% think that climate change is relevant. To avoid the complexity in terminology, the respondents were not directly asked about scepticism or uncertainty using those specific terms. Rather, participants were simply asked whether they believe climate change is occurring and whether they view it as relevant. These high levels of agreement that climate change is happening and that it is relevant, suggest relatively low levels of uncertainty and scepticism regarding the issue.*" [References to illustrative diagrams omitted.]

A majority of respondents (59.1%) think climate change is a concern for our community. Surprisingly, a substantial number (39.9%) expressly do not believe that climate change is "*a significant concern*."

Discussion of survey responses

The dissertation includes a comprehensive discussion and explanation of the survey responses. Several of the main findings and conclusions are as follows.

Knowledge and attribution

The survey provided "*a valuable insight into the public's understanding and attribution of climate change in the context of Hong Kong*". "*Attribution*" is "*the ability to link observed changes in the climate to their underlying causes*". Attribution influences a person's perception of climate change.

Participants (in the survey) "*had a fairly high level of knowledge about climate change, with a main score of 0.839 and a median of 0.875 on a 0-1 scale*".

Participants also "*demonstrated a relatively high level of knowledge regarding the impact of climate change*". However, the picture is "*more nuanced*" when considering the causes of climate change. Whilst "*most respondents correctly identified that human activity, rather than natural processes, is the main driver of today's climate change, there was a sizable proportion who attributed the primary responsibility to the agricultural sector (23%). This suggests relatively little scepticism about human induced climate change*." [This comment is puzzling, as the "agricultural sector" consists of human activity.]

Experience and attributions

The author notes that her research "*aimed to address three key research questions regarding how individuals in Hong Kong perceive and attribute their experiences with climate change. These research questions were motivated by the deeper goal of understanding the extent which people in Hong Kong recognize that climate change is a relevant and pressing issue, and, in fact, something in Hong Kong is being impacted by. Indeed, Hong Kong has been subjected to an increase in extreme weather events in recent years. The city has experienced intense typhoons, floodings and heatwaves*".

A majority (76.7%) of participants "*reported having personally, experienced the impact of climate change*". This suggests "*that not only are Hong Kong residents observing the impacts of climate change firsthand, but a majority also recognize the connection between these events and climate change. This heightened awareness shows us that the public in Hong Kong is attuned to the relevance of climate change in their city.*"

The survey results also suggest that "*the emotional, subjective experience is a more powerful driver than just knowledge of the issue, and it plays a critical role in shaping people's attribution of their experiences to climate change*".

The author also notes that "*the demographics such as age, gender and education level did not appear to be significant factors in this attribution process*".

Risk perception

A goal of the author's research was "*to understand how Hong Kong residents perceive the risk posed by climate change and what factors contribute to their perceptions*". Therefore, a "*key question was to what extent demographic variables, experiential factors, knowledge, and socio-cultural factors influence the perceptions of climate change risks. The survey data provided valuable insights into the determinants of climate change risk perception in the context of Hong Kong*".

Gender is a significant factor in climate risk perception (of "attribution", above). Females "*perceive climate change as a bigger threat compared to males*". Similarly, younger people "*have a higher level of concern and risk awareness*".

There is also a strong correlation between an individual's knowledge of climate change and his/her perception of the risk posed by climate change.

The most influential factor in risk perception, however, is "*affective responses*", that is, the person's personal experience of the impacts of climate change.

Overall, in terms of risk to society, "*59.1% of participants considered climate change to be concerning, 56.9% believe it is an immediate threat, and 68.2% think climate change is unpleasant*".

Key findings

The author notes that the survey result "*suggest the Hong Kong public is highly attuned to the relevance of climate change for their city. A significant majority of participants believe they have personally experienced the impacts of climate change in Hong Kong, with 57.6% reporting these experiences are related to climate change to a great or considerable extent. This is not primarily because participants knowledge levels are fairly high, instead, it is their emotional responses that emerged as the longest and most significant predictor of how much they attribute these experiences to climate change*".

This result contradicts previous studies which indicated "*that many residents in Hong Kon do not view climate change as an urgent threat. This study revealed that majority do see climate change as an immediate threat*".

The author says the "*strong correlation between variables like age, gender, knowledge, experience and affective responses, with risk perception, underscores the complex nature of how people process climate change related risks. Prior to this study, there was a lack of how exactly people perceive these risks in Hong Kong. However, this study has shown that affective responses and knowledge are the most influential predictors*".

However, the author (quite rightly) notes that due to the relatively small size of her survey, its results "*may not be fully representative of the broader Hong Kong population*," particularly as the survey was "*heavily skewed towards younger participants*."

Recommendations

More climate change education

The author notes that although there is in Hong Kong a "*general high awareness and concern about climate change*", more can be done to ensure there is effective communication to the public concerning climate change and the potential harm it could cause.

For example, very little about climate change is taught in schools. It is important that climate change issues are substantively incorporated into school's curricula.

Hong Kong Observatory "*can provide scientific data and report in these impact that can create localized communication materials*".

Effective communication regarding climate change

Further, effective communication strategies "*should focus on making the connections between people's lived experiences and the causes and impacts of climate change more salient and relatable. Drawing a clearer line between the extreme weather events in Hong Kong and their attribution to climate change would help cultivate a stronger sense of personal connection to the issue. The Hong Kong Observatory, as well as the media, could play a crucial role in helping to make these connections. By explicitly linking the extreme temperatures, storms, and other climate-related events climate change, they can foster a deeper emotional resonance.*"

It is important that the media report on climate change issues, fully, accurately and objectively. The author notes that Hong Kong residents "*have a relatively low confidence in the media's reporting on climate change*". Approximately 40% of the community "*reply on media as a source for climate change information*".

It is critical that journalists "*avoid misrepresentation and provide fair and accurate information*" regarding climate change.

More effective and robust government action to combat climate change

The author's final recommendation is by far the most important (and the most frustrating, given the government's record of apathy regarding all environmental issues):

Ultimately, the biggest priority should be for the government to take climate change seriously and do whatever is necessary to reduce global warming. This should include not only educating the public, but also implementing substantive policies to mitigate emission and adapt to the impacts.

We congratulate Ms. Malene Eilertsen on her award of the Fred Kan & Co Prize and her well-researched and written dissertation.

TOWN PLANNING

Draft Urban Renewal Authority Sai Yee Street/Flower Market Road Development Scheme Plan approved

On 17 April 2025, the Chief Executive in Council approved the draft Urban Renewal Authority ("**URA**") Sai Yee Street/Flower Market Road Development Scheme Plan ("**DSP**"), which provides a statutory land use planning framework to guide the implementation of the said development scheme.

The development scheme area, covering about 29,315 square metres, is designated as "Other Specified Use" annotated "Mixed Use (1)" and "Other Specified Use" annotated "Mixed Use (2)".

By adopting the "linked-site" approach and the "Single Site, Multiple Use" model, the DSP intends to achieve a holistic replanning of land uses in the Sai Yee Street/Flower Market Road area through redevelopment of various existing Government, Institution or Community ("**G/IC**") facilities with adjoining urban fabric for a comprehensive mixed-use development, with a combination of various types of compatible uses including residential, commercial (hotel/office/retail), G/IC, a sizeable public open space (i.e. Waterway Park), cultural, recreational and entertainment uses.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 17/04/2025]

Five approved outline zoning plans referred back for amendment

On 25 April 2025, the Town Planning Board ("**TPB**") announced that the Secretary for Development had referred five approved outline zoning plans ("**OZPs**") to the TPB, namely the approved Shau Kei Wan OZP, the approved Cheung Sha Wan OZP, the approved Peng Chau OZP, the approved Hung Hom OZP and the approved Yuen Long OZP, for amendment to reflect the latest land use proposals.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 25/04/2025]

Approved Shau Kei Wan Outline Zoning Plan amended

On 23 May 2025, the TPB announced amendments to the approved Shau Kei Wan OZP.

The amendments mainly involve:-

1. rezoning a site occupied by the Former Shau Kei Wan Market ("**SKWM**") Building and the SKWM Building Sitting-out Area from "Government, Institution or Community" ("**G/IC**") to "Residential (Group A)7" with stipulation of building height restriction for private residential development; and

2. rezoning a site occupied by the Kam Wah Street Rest Garden from "G/IC" to "Open Space" to reflect the as-built condition.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 23/05/2025]

DIGEST OF LEGISLATION

Protection of Victoria Harbour legislation amended

The *Protection of the Harbour (Amendment) Ordinance* 2025 (the "Amendment Ordinance") was gazetted and came into force on 16 May 2025 to establish a clearer regulatory mechanism for reclamations in Victoria Harbour while facilitating harbourfront enhancement works for public enjoyment.

A spokesperson for the Development Bureau indicated that the Amendment Ordinance, which amends the *Protection of the Harbour Ordinance* (Cap. 531), introduces a dual approach to harbour reclamations. While maintaining stringent protection against large-scale reclamations, it establishes a streamlined mechanism for small-scale harbour enhancement reclamations and non-permanent reclamations that improve harbour functions and benefit the community.

Under the amended Ordinance, harbour enhancement reclamations and harbour non-permanent reclamations meeting specified criteria and serving the public interest may be exempted from the "Presumption against Reclamation" by the Financial Secretary. Other reclamations remain subject to the existing Presumption and must undergo new statutory procedures, including preparation of an "overriding public need" assessment,

public consultation, and submission to the Chief Executive in Council for determination. The three considerations from earlier court judgments have been incorporated into the Ordinance.

According to the spokesperson, administrative guidelines will be finalised and published within two months of the Amendment Ordinance coming into force. The government has reiterated that there are no plans to initiate large-scale harbour reclamations for housing, commercial or industrial developments. The Amendment Ordinance was passed at the Legislative Council meeting on 14 May 2025.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong*, 16/05/2025]

WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

Hong Kong Palace Museum forges major cultural partnership with Fudan University

Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM) has cemented a significant five-year partnership with Shanghai's prestigious Fudan University under a newly signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The agreement, formalised during a ceremony at Fudan University on 26 May 2025, aims to deepen collaboration in academic research, exhibitions, talent development, and cultural exchange between the two institutions.

Strategic Collaboration Areas

The MoU outlines four key areas of cooperation:

Academic Research: Joint research projects, international symposiums, and thematic seminars. An upcoming international symposium will explore how museums can adapt to social changes and technological challenges.

Exhibitions: Collaborative curation and touring exhibitions. This builds on their 2024 partnership for "The Origins of Chinese Civilisation" exhibition.

Smart Museums: Pioneering research of AI applications for collections management, conservation, visitor experiences, and digital museum development.

Talent Development: Structured staff exchanges, training programs, and plans for public-facing museum studies courses. Fudan students will gain hands-on experience as docents at HKPM exhibitions.

Leadership Perspectives

Dr. Louis Ng, Director of HKPM, emphasised the partnership's significance: "*This MoU enhances collaboration between Hong Kong and Shanghai in cultural heritage and innovation. As museums evolve with digital transformation, our joint AI research will advance smart museums and new technologies for preserving and sharing cultural heritage*." Dr. Xu Zheng, Executive Vice President of Fudan University, highlighted the alignment with the university's commitment to interdisciplinary cultural preservation.

Immediate Impact: Shanghai Exhibition

The partnership springs to life next month with HKPM's exhibition "City Rhythms: Chinese Traditional Culture Reinterpreted" (20 June – 31 July at Shanghai's ZHANGYUAN). Featuring interdisciplinary works by 16 Hong Kong artists, the showcase reimagines traditional Chinese gardens while exploring cultural links between Hong Kong and Shanghai. Fudan students will serve as docents and volunteers.

Strengthening Hong Kong's Cultural Hub Status

This collaboration reinforces HKPM's role as a global bridge for Chinese cultural exchange, Hong Kong's position under the West Kowloon Cultural District (WestK) initiative to become an "East-meets-West" cultural hub, and synergies between academic excellence and museum innovation.

[*West Kowloon Cultural District Authority Press Release,* 27/05/2025]

HONG KONG BRIEFING

Air Pollution Control (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 takes effect

The *Air Pollution Control (Amendment) Ordinance 2025* came into operation on 11 April 2025, introducing stricter air quality standards and enhanced regulation of unlicensed specified process (SP) operations.

Under the Amendment Ordinance, five existing Air Quality Objectives (AQOs) have been tightened, and three new parameters recommended by the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Air Quality Guidelines have been added. These updates aim to align Hong Kong's air quality standards with international benchmarks.

The Amendment Ordinance also provides transitional arrangements for designated projects with environmental permits (EPs) issued before 11 April 2025 under the *Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance* (Cap. 499). For applications to vary EPs submitted within 36 months of the new AQOs' commencement, the previous AQOs will be applied as the approval criteria.

To address unlicensed SP operations, the Amendment Ordinance grants the Director of Environmental Protection to issue closure notices for premises conducting SPs without a valid licence. Non-compliance with such notices may result in a maximum penalty of $1,000,000 and imprisonment for up to 12 months. The Amendment Ordinance also expands the regulatory scope to include "cement works" on ships and barges within the SP licensing regime.

To assist cement operators newly brought under regulation, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) is implementing a six-month transitional arrangement. During this period, these operators may apply for SP licences without facing penalties for unlicensed operations. However, this arrangement does not apply to cement operations already regulated under the original ordinance.

The Amendment Ordinance reflects Hong Kong's commitment to improving air quality, safeguarding public health, and enhancing regulatory oversight of polluting industries.

[*Press Release - the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region,* 11/04/2025]

New funding round for Cleaner Production Partnership Programme

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has launched a new round of the Cleaner Production Partnership Programme to support Hong Kong-owned factories in their green transformation efforts. Applications for funding are now open and will be accepted until 30 June 2027. This initiative aims to promote energy saving, reduce emissions, and lower carbon consumption, contributing to improved environmental quality and aligning with the nation's high-quality development goals.

The new phase emphasises the adoption of innovative cleaner production technologies. Hong Kong-owned factories are encouraged to implement New Cleaner Production Technology Projects (NCPTPs), with a focus on technologies developed locally or through collaboration between Hong Kong and Guangdong organisations. These projects provide a demonstration platform for practical applications, facilitating the entry of such technologies into the Mainland market.

To incentivise participation, the government has set a funding ceiling of $650,000 per project. For projects involving Hong Kong-developed technologies or joint efforts between Hong Kong and Guangdong, the funding limit rises to $750,000. The government will subsidise 50 per cent of the project costs, subject to the funding ceiling.

The Programme, initially launched in 2008, has received over $600 million in funding across four rounds, achieving significant improvements in regional environmental quality. In 2024, the Chief Executive proposed injecting $100 million into the Programme to further support green transformation and renovations for Hong Kong-owned factories in Hong Kong and Guangdong.

[*Press Release - the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region,* 14/05/2025]

Prolonged dry season highlights climate change risks

The city is experiencing a significant rainfall deficit, contributing to critically low reservoir levels and highlighting its vulnerability to extreme weather patterns intensified by climate change.

While Hong Kong traditionally has a distinct wet season (summer) and dry season (winter), the current lack of precipitation has been exceptionally severe and persistent. This is not just a minor inconvenience; it directly threatens the city's water security. Reservoir levels have dropped to concerning lows, prompting water conservation appeals from authorities. The situation underscores the precarious balance of Hong Kong's water supply, which relies heavily on rainfall captured in reservoirs, supplemented by water imported from mainland China.

This drought is a clear manifestation of climate change affecting the region. Scientists link the increasing frequency and intensity of such extreme weather events – including both severe droughts and intense rainfall – to global warming. Hong Kong's status as a densely populated metropolis and major financial centre makes it particularly exposed to these climate disruptions. Water scarcity poses a direct risk to public health, business operations, and overall economic stability.

Beyond the immediate water shortage, the drought exposes the city's underlying climate vulnerabilities. It raises urgent questions about the resilience of critical infrastructure and the adequacy of long-term water resource management strategies in the face of a changing climate. The current crisis is a potent reminder that climate change is not a distant threat but a present reality demanding immediate adaptation and mitigation efforts. For Hong Kong, ensuring reliable water supplies in an era of increasing climate volatility is becoming a paramount challenge, crucial for safeguarding its future as a global centre.

[*Bloomberg,* 22/05/2025]

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT (ACE)

On 7 April 2025, the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) held its 267th meeting. The meeting focused primarily on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report concerning the Development of Tseung Kwan O Area 137 and Associated Reclamation Sites, with particular attention to marine conservation, air quality control and sustainable development practices.

Development of Tseung Kwan O Area 137

Presentation and Q&A Session

Mr Gary Tam, representing the project proponent, briefed members of the ACE on the EIA project, highlighting key project benefits and development plans for Tseung Kwan O (TKO) Area 137 and its associated reclamation sites. The EIASC Chairman subsequently reported on the subcommittee's recommendations from its meeting held on 17 March 2025.

Conservation of marine and terrestrial organisms

Members expressed satisfaction with the project proponent's receptiveness to their suggestions, particularly regarding conservation measures for vulnerable species. One member highlighted the adoption of micro-fragmentation approach for translocating certain coral species listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The member noted that the conservation arrangements for Small Persimmons, classified as critically endangered by the IUCN, were satisfactory. The member emphasised that the conditions and recommendations proposed by the EIASC were intended to supplement the project details to ensure proper execution of environmental compensation and conservation measures.

A member with expertise in aquatic biodiversity acknowledged the challenges in translocating large coral reefs and emphasised the importance of considering cost-effectiveness. He explained that natural coral growth would occur in suitable habitats and agreed that micro-fragmentation should be employed for vulnerable coral species, estimating that the capacity for establishing such corals in the project areas would be limited.

Another member clarified that coral coverage in both TKO Area 132 and TKO Area 137 was less than 10%, confirming that the quantity of coral reefs involved was not substantial. While the EIA report specified that corals attached to moveable substrates with diameters less than 50 cm and suitable health conditions would be translocated, the EIASC had recommended additional measures, including micro-fragmentation, to enhance transplantation rates, particularly for corals of higher ecological value.

Concrete batching plants and community engagement

The operation of concrete batching plants (CBPs) in the development area emerged as a significant concern. A member reported that while the project proponent had provided information on clean operation practices for new CBPs, the EIASC had emphasised the importance of maintaining close communication with local residents to address their concerns about the CBP in TKO Area 132.

Members underscored the necessity of continuous engagement with residents throughout the extended development period following the first population intake. The establishment of community liaison groups was welcomed as a mechanism for ongoing communication and prompt resolution of environmental concerns. This requirement was subsequently included as a formal condition of the project's endorsement.

A member highlighted that tightened control under the *Air Pollution Control Ordinance* (APCO), combined with adoption of new technology, would ensure proper CBP performance in TKO Area 132. The EIASC had proposed the establishment of community liaison groups as one of the conditions to facilitate communication and enquiry handling on project-related environmental issues.

Dr Samuel Chui, in response to the Chairman's enquiry, explained that the *Air Pollution Control (Amendment) Ordinance* 2025 would come into effect on 11 April 2025, updating Air Quality Objectives and strengthening control of unlicensed specified process operations. Dr Chui referenced recent enforcement actions against two non-compliant CBPs in Yau Tong. The operators of these CPBs pleaded guilty to conducting illegal cement works without valid licences and were fined accordingly. The new regulations would enhance oversight of CBP operations.

Nature-based solution guidelines

A member enquired whether comprehensive nature-based solution guidelines, similar to those established for the San Tin development project, could be adopted for the current project. Mr Simon Chan acknowledged that CEDD was still developing these guidelines, which had yet to be published. He expressed confidence that the project proponent would consider these matters, including the EIASC's recommendation on eco-shoreline design as a nature-based solution.

The Chairman expected CEDD to follow the guidelines as appropriate, given their development under the department's purview. A member emphasised that two of the five proposed recommendations involved nature-based solutions: eco-shoreline design with wave-like structures to provide diverse habitats for marine organisms, and planting native species for greening purposes to enhance ecological connectivity and urban biodiversity.

Council decision and formal conditions

Members unanimously expressed support for the proposed project in view of its associated benefits. Having considered the findings of the EIA report and additional information provided by the project proponent, the ACE agreed to endorse the EIA report with three conditions and five recommendations as detailed in paragraph 9 of ACE Paper 5/2025.

The three conditions of endorsement required the project proponent to submit a Coral Translocation and Enhancement Plan (CTEP) to the Director of Environmental Protection for approval no less than three months before commencement of marine works. The CTEP must provide details of pre-construction coral surveys, translocation methodology, recipient site suitability, post-translocation monitoring, and coral enhancement measures. Additionally, a Tree Management and Enhancement Plan (TMEP) must be prepared covering affected trees, compensatory planting, and monitoring programmes. The third condition mandated the establishment of community liaison groups comprising representatives from concerned and affected parties.

The five recommendations encouraged the project proponent to explore eco-shoreline design, use low carbon emission construction methods and materials, consider climate resilience in seawall design, plant native species for greening, and enhance waste reduction, reuse and recycling during construction and operation phases.

Other environmental impact assessments

The EIASC Chairman reported that the subcommittee had received the Executive Summary of the EIA report on "Expansion of Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter -- Investigation, Design and Construction," which had been circulated to members. As the EIA report had not been selected by the EIASC for presentation and discussion, the Environmental Protection Department would consider that the ACE had no comments on the report under section 8(3)(b) of the EIA Ordinance. Members were advised to provide any comments directly to the Director of Environmental Protection within the public inspection period.

CLIMATE CHANGE

South Asian militaries need to build a regional climate security strategy

Militaries, which are amongst the biggest consumers of fuel, account for 5.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. If the world's militaries were a country, they would have the fourth-highest carbon footprint after China, the United States, and India.

With 750 bases worldwide, the U.S. military's emissions are the largest, rivalling the entire annual output of smaller nations like Portugal and Denmark. The U.S. Air Force's F-35 fighter jets emit as much CO2 as an average U.K. petrol car does in one year for every 100 nautical miles flown.

South Asian militaries can play a crucial role in addressing climate change in the region. However, this requires political and military leaders to acknowledge that climate security constitutes a "regional security threat".

First, they must recognise that climate security is not a zero-sum game like military security. For instance, a rise in temperatures due to CO2 emissions in Bangladesh will have repercussions for neighbouring India, and vice versa.

Climate security is also interconnected with other security areas. Migration caused by rising sea levels illustrates how climate security is structurally linked to political, social, and economic security. Compared with the global average, the Indian Ocean is warming faster than other seas, with estimates suggesting that between 10 to 50 million people in South Asia may be threatened by rising sea levels by 2100.

Moreover, the need for climate security compels collaboration amongst South Asian militaries. Approaching climate change from an isolated national perspective can be detrimental for these countries. The interconnected nature of climate phenomena means that the localised environmental insecurities of one nation cannot be effectively analysed or addressed without considering the broader regional context.

South Asian militaries could draw inspiration from NATO, which aims to become a net-zero organisation by 2050. Military planners in South Asia should prioritise establishing a regional climate-security nexus as part of their national interests, and this nexus should encompass military organisations, the defence industry, the civil sector and academia.

[*The Diplomat*, 10/03/2025]

Hong Kong's climate moving from "extreme wet" to "extreme dry"

Hong Kong's climate has shown signs of flipping from "extreme wet" to "extreme dry" and is becoming more at risk of drought as a result of climate change, according to a study by an international NGO.

WaterAid, an NGO focused on water, sanitation and hygiene across the world, studied the climate trend of 112 cities between 1982 and 2023, analysing their "climate hazard" risks and whether they are more prone to flooding or to drought.

According to WaterAid's report published in March 2025, Hong Kong is not only drying but also experiencing a flip in climate hazards from extreme wet to more extreme dry conditions.

The city had experienced more extreme dry months and fewer extreme wet months in the second half of the study period (from 2003 to 2023) than it did in the first half (from 1982 to 2002). The NGO ranked Hong Kong as fourth in an index measuring the strength of a shift from wet to dry, behind only Cairo, Madrid and Riyadh. Taipei ranked ninth.

The report said that the change and the intensification of climate hazards are due to climate change, resulting in a warmer atmosphere and more moisture evaporation, but it did not elaborate on the particular climate conditions affecting Hong Kong.

The report also suggested that a flip to drier conditions would pose new challenges to cities adapted to a wet climate, as these cities may lack the water supply and sanitation systems to deal with more frequent droughts and water deficits.

[*Hong Kong Free Press*, 14/03/2025]

Japanese company directors and their climate-risk game

Japanese company directors could soon be personally liable if they fail to address adequately climate-related risks, according to a new report by the Commonwealth Climate and Law Initiative (CCLI) titled *Directors' Duties Regarding Climate Change in Japan: 2025*.

Under Japanese corporate law, directors of large companies are already legally obliged to establish robust internal control systems for managing business risks. The report makes clear that this obligation now encompasses climate-related financial and physical risks, ranging from acute threats such as typhoons and extreme heat to longer-term issues like water scarcity and biodiversity loss, all of which pose systemic threats to Japanese industry and financial markets.

The urgency of these obligations is magnified by sobering economic projections. According to the G20 Climate Risk Atlas, Japan could incur economic losses of JPY 952 trillion by 2050 if current policies remain unchanged. Climate-related damages over the past decade have already cost Japan approximately JPY 13.7 trillion, with Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya particularly vulnerable to increasingly severe weather events. The International Chamber of Commerce has estimated Japan's climate-related costs between 2013 and 2023 at USD 90.8 billion, reflecting widespread disruption across sectors ranging from agriculture to heavy manufacturing.

At the heart of the report is a renewed focus on fiduciary duties. Directors must act in the best interests of the company and exercise reasonable care and diligence, which now includes identifying and mitigating climate risks, seeking expert advice and integrating climate considerations into business strategy.

As climate impacts intensify, litigation risks are expected to rise. Shareholder lawsuits targeting board inaction are likely to become more commonplace, particularly if companies suffer material losses. The Bank of Japan has also warned that failure to manage climate risk could destabilise the financial system, with the potential for sharp corrections in asset values.

[*ICLG News*, 03/04/2025]

Climate change closes "hungry gap" in the UK

It has been a sunny, very dry spring in the UK, with the warmest start to May on record and temperatures predicted to reach up to 30 degrees Celsius at the earliest time on record.

Usually, this time of year is known as the "hungry gap", when winter vegetables have run out and consumers are waiting for the summer crops to arrive. However, the sunny, dry weather has eliminated this.

Hélèna Dove, the head of the kitchen garden at Kew, said that gardeners were experimenting with stone and tropical fruits, which do not usually fare well in the UK's traditionally mild climate. "*The warm spring means crops like citrus, kiwi, and tropical plants are thriving earlier, with longer seasons and better yields. We're even growing peaches, apricots, and nectarines outside currently, something that would have been unthinkable in previous years due to the risk of late frosts and lack of early pollinators.*"

There is a reliable food source this year with plants such as calendula flowering early. Whilst some traditional fruits, such as apples, are struggling, this is an opportunity for farmers to rethink what they plant, working with the climate to save energy, water, and potentially even reduce imports.

Nevertheless, according to Dale Robinson, supply chain head at the organic vegetable box company Riverford, growers remain mindful of the increasing unpredictability brought about by climate change, as the real challenge lies not in the gradual shifts, but in the erratic weather extremes – sudden frosts, hailstorms, droughts – all of which can undo months of hard work in a single day.

[*The Guardian*, 02/05/2025]

Climate crisis threatens banana supplies

The climate crisis is threatening the future of the world's most popular fruit, as almost two-thirds of banana-growing areas in Latin America and the Caribbean may no longer be suitable for growing the fruit by 2080, new research has found.

Rising temperatures, extreme weather and climate-related pests are pummelling banana-growing countries such as Guatemala, Costa Rica and Colombia, reducing yields and devastating rural communities across the region, according to Christian Aid's new report, *Going Bananas: How Climate Change Threatens the World's Favourite Fruit*.

Bananas are the world's most consumed fruit and the fourth most important food crop globally, following wheat, rice, and maize. Approximately 80% of bananas grown worldwide are intended for local consumption, and more than 400 million people rely on this fruit for 15% to 27% of their daily caloric intake.

An estimated 80% of banana exports which supply supermarkets around the world come from Latin America and the Caribbean, one of the most vulnerable regions to extreme weather and slow-onset climate disasters.

The crop is under threat from the human-made climate crisis, jeopardising a vital food source and the livelihoods of communities which are not to blame for climate change as they have contributed virtually nothing to the greenhouse gases driving global warming.

Bananas are sensitive fruits. They require a temperature range between 15 and 35 degrees Celsius to thrive, and just enough water but not too much. They are sensitive to storms, which can cause a banana plant to shed leaves, making it much harder for the crop to photosynthesise.

The climate crisis directly harms growing conditions and contributes to the spread of fungal diseases that are already decimating crops and livelihoods. Black leaf fungus can reduce the ability of banana plants to photosynthesise by 80% and it thrives in wet conditions, making bananas at risk from erratic rainfall and flooding. Rising temperatures and changing rain patterns are exacerbating another fungus, fusarium tropical race 4, a soil-borne microbe which is devastating entire cavendish banana plantations across the world.

"*Bananas are not just the world's favourite fruit; they are also an essential food for millions of people. We need to wake up to the danger posed by climate change to this vital crop,*" said Osai Ojigho, Christian Aid's director of policy and campaigns. "*The lives and livelihoods of people who have done nothing to cause the climate crisis are already under threat*."

[*The Guardian*, 12/05/2025]

China's building crash combusts global warming

Casting your mind back to the China of 2003 almost feels like an exercise in historical fiction.

With an economy barely larger than Italy's, it was still underdeveloped and isolated. Plagued by power shortages, a delinquent banking system and SARS — the brief coronavirus epidemic that resembled a trial run for COVID-19 — there was still little outward sign of the coming boom.

And yet the China of 2025 is oddly reminiscent of a generation ago. With a four-year real estate crash showing few signs of abating, construction of new housing is now back to the levels of the early 2000s. Just 132 million square meters of homes have been started in the four months through April, according to government data this week. That's less than a third of the level before the crash began in 2021 and the lowest total since 2003.

For all that has been written on the financial impact of China's housing bubble bursting, that degree of slowdown suggests we may still be underplaying the scale of this reversal as a shift in economic activity — and, importantly, the carbon emissions that result from it.

That's because the first commodity market to feel the impact of a slowdown in new home building is cement, one of the most polluting substances on Earth. It's essential as the binder that holds concrete together, so it's one of the first materials to be used when developers break ground at a new site. But it accounts for about 8% of the world's emissions and China's consumption alone comes to nearly 4% of all carbon pollution.

Where housing starts go, cement quickly follows and that's what we're seeing right now. January-to-April cement output came to just 495 million metric tons, the lowest level since 2009. At that time, China was still filling in the details of what would soon become the biggest stimulus package in history. Those measures helped turn the country from a sweatshop for foreign manufacturers to a modern economy encrusted with brand new concrete infrastructure. We're now returning to those far-off pre-stimulus days.

What does that mean for the global climate? Each metric ton of cement accounts for about 0.6 tons of carbon emissions, so the decline in annual output between 2021 and 2024 of roughly 550 million tons is already equivalent to reducing the emissions of the U.K. or Poland to zero.

It would be unwise to assume this is a blip. Real estate declines can be persistent, thanks to the way they crystallize large-scale shifts in the demographic and financial makeup of the population. U.S. housing starts have never recovered to more than 80% of the peak they hit in 2005, while the U.K. is running at barely half the level it reached all the way back in 1988.

There's good reason to think the same dynamic may be playing out in China.

[*The Japan Times*, 25/05/2025]

Rapid assessment of climate links with severe weather

A group of scientists in Japan has launched a new research center to rapidly analyze and quantify the impact of global warming on extreme weather events, aiming to make the impact of human-induced climate change more visible to the public.

The Weather Attribution Center Japan (WAC), founded Tuesday by an independent group of researchers specializing in a growing field of science called event attribution, aims to publicize the results of its assessment within days of typhoon, torrential rain or extreme heat – while the impact of the weather event is still fresh in the minds of the public and policymakers. The researchers started studying the link between weather events and climate change about 15 years ago, but until now they have only been able to publish their results a few months after extreme weather occurs.

Conventional research methods take months because they require comparisons of massive simulations of data with and without climate change, the scientists said. The team came up with a way to expedite the process for events in Japan by preparing for analysis six to 14 days before the targeted weather event takes place.

The researchers will utilize the Meteorological Agency's "early weather information," which is released when five-day average temperatures or precipitation levels are expected to deviate widely from the normal.

"*Climate change is an issue that requires immediate action*," Yukiko Imada, associate professor at the University of Tokyo and one of the WAC's founding members, said. "*It's important to foster public awareness that the entire society needs to change."*

WACs establishment – supported by grants from financial services giant Fuyo General Lease – comes on the heels of an April report by market research firm Ipsos, which found that Japan had the lowest percentage of people who agreed with the sentiment that individuals like them must act now to combat climate change, at 40%, against a 32-country average of 64%.

Despite the increased speed of analysis, the results are accurate, researchers stressed, thanks to the country's huge climate simulation database called d4PDF. The database – created in 2015 with funding from the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology – contains results of simulations conducted over thousands of years and factors in Japan's unique geography as well as the influence of ocean-related natural phenomena such as El Nino.

The group will start releasing results on its website of its analyses of extreme temperatures, with which the effect of warming is the most clear-cut. It is now testing attribution studies on heavy rainfall and is aiming to eventually automate such analyses.

Moves are intensifying in the scientific community to rapidly release findings about climate change's impact on heat waves, landslides, tropical storms and wildfires.

For example, when attribution scientists at the Imperial College London analyzed the impact of climate change on Typhoon Shanshan, which battered large parts of Japan last year, they declared warming had "supercharged" it, even while the storm was still crawling through Japan.

Likewise, the World Weather Attribution, a pioneer in rapid attribution analysis, investigated the Los Angeles wildfires that started on Jan.7, announcing on Jan.28 that human-induced climate change increased the likelihood of the infernos by 35% and their intensity by 6%.

[*The Japan Time*, 26/05/2025]

US pullback threatens planned debt-for-nature deals

Billions of dollars of debt deals aimed at protecting vital ecosystems from Africa to Latin America are at risk of unravelling or may need reworking amid concerns that crucial US backing is about to dry up under President Donald Trump.

The "debt-for-nature" swaps, which reduce a country's debt in return for conservation commitments, have gained traction in recent years with deals involving the Galapagos Islands, coral reefs and the Amazon rainforest amongst the most prominent.

The US International Development Finance Corporation ("**DFC**") has been a key player, providing political risk insurance for over half of the deals done over the last five years, accounting for nearly 90% of US$ 6 billion of swapped debt. A source with direct knowledge of the plans said the DFC had about five swaps in the pipeline which were in question with CEO-in-waiting, Ben Black, and US government efficiency chief, Elon Musk, [as he then was] both criticising its climate work.

The source did not specify how much debt was covered by the swaps but pointed out that the last few DFC-backed deals involved over US$ 1 billion each.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has also criticised multilateral lenders for climate change work amid a broader US retreat that has seen it withdraw from the Paris Agreement to curb global warming.

Angola and Zambia and at least one Latin American country are amongst those whose "debt-for-nature" swap plans risk needing to be reworked or even abandoned due to DFC uncertainty, four sources that have been directly involved in the projects said.

Angolan Finance Minister Vera Daves de Sousa said her country, which is one of the most indebted in Africa and whose rivers feed the Okavango basin vital for endangered elephants and lions, has been talking to the DFC about two potential swaps. One is a debt-for-nature deal, the other a broader "debt-for-development" swap tied to education and young people.

In Zambia, which late last year was looking closely at a swap linked to its vast national parks that are home to over 40% of Africa's elephants, things have changed too. "*We are not completely shutting (the swap) down but we are not actively at it right now,*" its Finance Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane said.

[*Reuters*, 27/05/2025]

New global forecast warns of deadly climate extremes

Get ready for several years of even more record-breaking heat that pushes Earth to more deadly, fiery and uncomfortable extremes, two of the world's top weather agencies forecast.

There was an 80 per cent chance the world would break another annual temperature record in the next five years, and even more probable that the world will again exceed the international temperature threshold set 10 years ago, according to a five-year forecast released yesterday by the World Meteorological Organization and the UK Meteorological Office.

"Higher global mean temperatures may sound abstract, but it translates in real life to a higher chance of extreme weather: stronger hurricanes, stronger precipitation, droughts," said Cornell University climate Scientist Natalie Mahowald, who was not part of the calculations but said they made sense. "*So higher global mean temperatures translate to more lives lost*."

For the first time there was a chance, -albeit slight, -that before the end of the decade, the world's annual temperature will shoot past the Paris climate accord goal of limiting warning to 1.5 degrees Celsius and hit a more alarming 2 degrees of heating since the mid-1800s, the two agencies said.

There is an 86 per cent chance that one of the next five years will pass 1.5 degrees and a 70 per cent chance that five years as a whole will average more than that global milestone, they figured.

The projections come from more than 200 forecasts using computer simulations run by 10 global centres of scientists.

Ten years ago, the same teams figured there was a similar remote chance – about 1 per cent – that one of the coming years would exceed that critical 1.5 degree threshold and then it happened last year.

This year, a 2-degree Celsius rise above pre-industrial years enters the equation in a similar manner, something UK Met Office longer-term predictions chief Adam Scaife and scientist Leon Hermanson called "shocking".

"It's not something anyone wants to see, but that's what the science is telling us," Hermanson said.

Factoring in the past 10 years and forecasting the next 10 years, the world was probably about 1.4 degrees hotter since the mid 1800s, World Meteorological Organization climate services director Chris Hewitt estimated.

Ice in the Arctic – which will continue to warn 3.5 times faster than the rest of the world – would melt and seas would rise faster, Hewitt said.

[*SCMP*, 29/05/2025]

Snow and glacier melt "puts 2b lives at risk"

The lives of nearly 2 billion people in South Asia are at risk as snow and glacier melt across the Himalayas accelerates, aggravated by black carbon pollution from burning biomass and fossil fuels and unsustainable farming, climate experts have warned.

Also known as soot, black carbon darkens snow surfaces and absorbs sunlight, causing it to act like a heat lamp and hasten melting. The fine particulate pollutant is typically released during the combustion of organic matter such as wood, crop residues and diesel.

With the largest ice reserves outside the polar regions, the Himalayas are the main source of water for many rivers flowing through the densely populated Indo-Gangetic plains. But this critical function is at risk from rising black carbon emissions and climate change.

The rivers nourish fertile agricultural zones across the Indian subcontinent – the world's largest rice-exporting region. They have also been the source of growing geopolitical tensions, including between India and Pakistan.

Average snow surface temperatures in the Himalayan peaks have risen by more than 4 degrees Celsius, with black carbon a key contributor, according to a report by New Delhi-based think tank Climate Trends released last Friday. It warned that the impact of these emissions was worsened by deforestation, crop burning and poor land management.

More than 40 per cent of India's black carbon emissions came from biofuels, according to the report, with significant contributions from states were agricultural and forest fires were common. Emissions have also been recorded at high levels in eastern Himalayas, particularly in Nepal.

"*The Eastern Himalaya consistently exhibits the highest levels of black carbon, likely due to its proximity to densely populated and biomass-burning regions,"* said Palak Baliya, lead author of the study.

The impact of emissions and climate change on Himalayan glaciers should be monitored carefully, the report said, as studies had showed that their ice volumes and potential water contribution might be less than previously assumed.

The Himalayan and the Tibetan Plateau were among the most vulnerable regions in the world to climate change and pollution, according to experts, who said that a rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius in global temperature translated into a rise of about 2.2 degrees in the Himalayas because of heat reflected from glacial ice.

Himalayan glaciers like Chhota Shugri in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh had borne the brunt of extreme heat events, losing up to two metres of ice, said Farooq Azam, a senior cryosphere specialist at the International Centre for Integrate Mountain Development, speaking at the India Heat Summit last week.

Since 2022, glacial mass loss had been four times higher than normal, he said, adding that a similar phenomenon had been observed in Switzerland and Austria.

Last week, the collapse of the Swiss Brich glacier drew worldwide attention to the dangers vulnerable communities face from unstable ice. Footage showed a huge cloud of ice and rubble hurtling down the mountainside into the hamlet of Batten.

Asia was the world's most disaster-hit region from climate and weather hazards in 2023, the UN said last year, mainly due to floods and storms.

[*SCMP*, 04/06/2025]

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

AFRICA

Southern Africa nations launch climate-resilient health initiative

Eight Southern African nations: Botswana, Lesotho; Madagascar; Malawi; Mozambique; Namibia; South Africa and Zimbabwe, have established a groundbreaking USD 35 million initiative to fortify health systems against escalating climate-related threats. Supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and funded by the Pandemic Fund, the three-year programme aims to enhance regional preparedness for emergencies driven by climate change, such as disease outbreaks and extreme weather events.

In gist, the initiative targets critical gaps in three areas, which are (1) Early Warning & Surveillance, involving strengthening cross-border, real-time detection systems across human, animal and environmental health; (2) Laboratory Capacity: upgrading diagnostic networks and regional

testing hubs to improve disease identification; and (3) Workforce Development: building a skilled public health workforce aligned with national strategies.

Southern Africa, warming twice as fast as the global average, faces intensifying droughts, floods and cyclones, exacerbating diseases like cholera and malaria. Five of the participating countries rank among the world's 50 most vulnerable to infectious diseases, compounded by weak infrastructure, resource constraints and cross-border migration.

National Steering Committees and a Climate-Health Observatory are established under this programme to track climate-sensitive health risks and inform policymaking. It emphasises regional coordination, with WHO's Emergency Hub in Nairobi ensuring agile implementation. The initiative aligns with International Health Regulations and integrates with existing primary healthcare efforts.

Beyond immediate resilience, the project aims to create a scalable model for health security through national ownership and regional solidarity. It also seeks to strengthen leadership networks among health ministries and agencies for faster crisis response. Backed by the Pandemic Fund and technical support from WHO, the Gates Foundation and Africa CDC, the initiative underscores a unified effort to combat climate-driven health vulnerabilities while building defences against future pandemics.

[*WHO,* 09/04/2025]

ARCTIC

Preserving science and environment at the northernmost research hub

Ny-Ålesund, situated in Norway's Svalbard archipelago about 1,200 km from the North Pole, stands as the world's northernmost research settlement. Hosting scientists from 10 nations, this remote outpost is a critical hub for Arctic studies. Researchers here endure extreme conditions, including three months of polar night, to investigate pressing issues such as microplastic pollution, phytoplankton behaviour and Arctic cyclones. However, the accelerating impacts of climate change, particularly melting permafrost and diminishing sea ice, are transforming both the environment and the logistics of scientific exploration.

Governed by the stringent *Svalbard Environmental Protection Act*, Ny-Ålesund's international community prioritises minimising its ecological footprint. Year-round occupancy is capped at 30 persons to reduce resource consumption, whilst waste is meticulously sorted into more than 10 categories and shipped to mainland Norway for recycling. Food supplies, imported due to Svalbard's lack of agriculture, are carefully rationed to minimise waste, with leftovers repurposed and composted. Energy conservation measures include LED lighting, motion sensors and optimised heating. Electric snowmobiles are being tested, though current models struggle with the Arctic's harsh demands.

Cross-border collaboration is foundational. Teams share equipment, such as meteorological balloons and winter gear, as well as data to avoid redundancy. For instance, South Korea's Polar Research Institute built on German-Nordic findings to study Arctic ecosystems in darkness. Another climate team, contributing to global climate models, underscores the value of long-term atmospheric data collected via daily weather balloons. Similarly, the Ice Memory project, a Norwegian-Italian initiative, archives glacier cores to preserve climatic records threatened by warming. Such efforts rely on precision as even minor carbon emissions from vehicles can disrupt sensitive atmospheric measurements, necessitating strict protocols.

Ny-Ålesund's century-old buildings, originally constructed on stable permafrost, now face structural instability as thawing ground causes subsidence and rotting of wooden structures. Engineers employ innovative solutions, such as jacking structures onto steel girders and drilling 50-meter concrete pillars into bedrock to stabilise foundations. These adaptations, executed without disrupting ongoing research, highlight the intersection of heritage preservation and modern necessity. The Italian station has already undergone such renovations, with the UK's following suit.

Svalbard's status as the fastest-warming region globally has profound implications. Sea ice, once a reliable research subject, is now unpredictable, forcing projects to adjust or risk funding loss. The 2023 IPCC report, supported by Ny-Ålesund's data, predicts near ice-free Arctic summers by 2050, with current ice levels at their lowest since 1850. Scientists express both personal and professional urgency, fearing the loss of critical data and advocating for immediate actions.

[*BBC,* 11/04/2025]

AUSTRALIA

UNESCO renews warning of deteriorating Great Barrier Reef

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has again raised grave fears for the future of the Great Barrier Reef, highlighting the problems of water pollution, climate change and unsustainable fishing.

The committee this week released draft decisions regarding the conservation of 62 World Heritage properties, which included the Great Barrier Reef, for which it noted:

"*overall, while progress has been made, significant challenges remain in achieving water quality targets, managing extreme climate impacts, and ensuring the long-term resilience of the property.*"

The comments confirm what experts already know too well: despite substantial investments from successive Australian governments, threats to the Great Barrier Reef remain.

Climate change is the greatest threat to the Great Barrier Reef and other coral reefs around the world. However, water pollution is the most significant local threat. That issue, along with unsustainable fishing, is entirely within Australia's control.

The World Heritage Committee will consider the draft decision at its next meeting in Paris in July. It may amend the decision, but the concerns are now on the public record.

The Great Barrier Reef has been on UNESCO's World Heritage list for more than 40 years. The listing recognises outstanding natural and cultural places around the world.

The reef is jointly managed by the Australian and Queensland governments. UNESCO's draft decision expressed "*utmost concern*" with the findings of last year's Outlook Report, published by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. It noted:

"*the overall outlook for the property remains one of continued deterioration due largely to climate change, while the long-term outlook for the ecosystem of the property also remains 'very poor'.*"

Poor water quality persists

Poor water quality is a major issue on the Great Barrier Reef. It is caused when sediment, nutrients, pesticides and pollution from land-based activities, such as land clearing, farming and coastal development, are carried into the ocean.

In its draft decision, UNESCO noted with *"regrets*" that the latest water quality targets for sediment and nitrogen – a key component of fertilisers – were not achieved. UNESCO said the updated water quality plan should ensure targets and actions "*are sufficiently ambitious and funded*".

Measures taken from 2009 to now have reduced pollution only by about half the desired amounts. At the existing rate of progress and funding commitments, the targets will not be met until 2047 (for sediment) and 2114 (for dissolved inorganic nitrogen).

Huge gaps exist between current pollutants levels and the water quality targets. These and some other targets are well out of reach under existing funding levels.

The draft decision also requests a halt to illegal land clearing while strengthening vegetation conservation laws – both fundamental to reducing water pollution.

Severe weather events exacerbate the water quality problem. In February this year, for example, floodwaters from ten major rivers merged to form extensive flood plumes along 700 kilometres of coastline from Cairns to Mackay, and up to 100 kilometres offshore.

Such plumes can remain present for months after a flood. They can smother seagrass and corals, and cause damaging algal growth.

The wicked problem of climate change

UNESCO's draft decision noted "the overall outlook for the property remains one of continued deterioration due largely to climate change".

Ocean heatwaves can lead to coral bleaching and potentially death. Mass bleaching occurred again this year on the Great Barrier Reef – the sixth such event since 2016.

UNESCO described as "*deeply concerning*" preliminary results showing heat stress was the highest on record during the 2023–24 mass bleaching event.

Climate change is also expected to produce more frequent and intense extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, which can damage reefs and island ecosystems.

UNESCO called on Australia to align its policies with the global goal of "limiting global temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels", and to take steps to mitigate negative impacts from extreme weather events.

The challenges of fishing

Unsustainable fishing practices damage the Great Barrier Reef. UNESCO's draft decision noted progress in eliminating gillnet fishing, which is on track for the target of 2027.

The fishing method involves mesh nets which can accidentally kill other wildlife, including threatened species such as dugongs, turtles, dolphins and sawfish.

But smaller nets can still be used throughout much of the World Heritage area, so some threats to threatened species remain.

UNESCO also urged Australia to expand electronic monitoring of commercial fishing vessels, and to ensure the targets in its Sustainable Fisheries Strategy are met. It also called for a comprehensive review of coral harvesting, which primarily supplies the global aquarium trade.

What next?

Despite the significant resources and management efforts Australia expends on the Great Barrier Reef, serious threats remain.

The Great Barrier Reef is struggling under the cumulative impacts of a multitude of threats. The problems outlined above are not isolated challenges.

Both the Queensland and Australian governments could do far more to boost the health of the reef. Clearly, more funding is needed. Without it, the future of the Great Barrier Reef is in jeopardy, and so too its tourism and fishing economies, and thousands of jobs.

UNESCO has now asked Australia to provide more comprehensive results from the recent mass bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef, along with an updated plan to improve water quality. Its draft decision maintains the spotlight on conservation concerns for this precious natural asset.

[*In Daily SA*, 30/05/2025]

EUROPE

Marine heatwave grips UK waters

Sea temperatures around the UK and Ireland have surged to unprecedented levels, with some regions exceeding seasonal norms by up to 5°C, according to data from the Met Office and the National Oceanography Centre (NOC). This marine heatwave, intensified by one of the warmest springs on record, poses risks to marine ecosystems, fisheries and coastal communities, whilst underscoring the accelerating impacts of climate change.

In April and early May 2024, sea surface temperatures reached their highest levels in 45 years of monitoring. By mid-May, average temperatures hit 12.69°C, surpassing the 11.3°C threshold defining a marine heatwave for the season. The anomaly stems from a combination of factors, including exceptionally high air temperatures, weak winds failing to mix cooler deep waters with the surface and long-term ocean warming linked to climate change. Oceans globally have absorbed 90% of excess heat from fossil fuel emissions, warming by 1°C on average. In the North Atlantic, temperatures have risen 0.3°C per decade over the past 40 years.

While the temperatures still remain below lethal thresholds for most species, the prolonged warmth disrupts breeding cycles and migration patterns. Harmful algal blooms, like those that decimated mussel populations in 2018, are a concern, alongside jellyfish surges. In 2023, a similar heatwave drove a 32% spike in jellyfish sightings, including large barrel jellyfish. Warmer waters may also attract species such as bluefin tuna, altering fisheries dynamics. Scientists emphasise uncertainty about long-term impacts but warn of ecosystem shifts. Hotspots like the southern North Sea and English Channel, where heatwaves persist longest, are under particular scrutiny.

The heatwave also exacerbates land warming since sea breezes transported excess heat inland, contributing to above-average air temperatures. Globally, marine heatwaves have devastated coral reefs and seagrass meadows, but the UK's historically cooler waters have offered some protection. However, this buffer is eroding as climate impacts intensify.

The prolonged marine heatwave for over two months, far exceeding the typical two-week span, has surprised researchers. While a temporary cooling is expected as weather patterns shift, the Met Office anticipates 2025 to rank among the hottest years for air temperatures, further stressing marine systems.

[*BBC,* 22/05/2025]

JAPAN

Conservationists seek reintroduction of wolves

A plan to reintroduce wolves to Japan, more than a century since they were hunted to extinction, is gaining traction as conservationists warn that the country's rural ecosystems are increasingly out of balance and costly to maintain due to booming wild animal populations.

The Japan Wolf Association (JWA), established in 1993, argues that returning wolves to the wild could restore natural order in the countryside and help reduce the billions of yen in agricultural damage caused each year by deer, wild boar and monkeys.

The group is preparing small-scale reintroduction trials in remote regions and downplaying risks to human communities – but not everyone is convinced it's a wise move, given wolves' fearsome reputation.

Kunihiko Otsuki, JWA president and head of a timber company in central Japan's Nara *prefecture, is convinced that reintroducing the apex predator is the right course of action.*

"Wolves went extinct in Japan more than 100 years ago but now deer have become a huge problem for farming communities across the country," he told This Week in Asia. "*They eat crops and the natural vegetation in the mountains, and we believe reintroducing wolves would help bring the natural balance back*."

Japanese farmers also have to put up with troops of marauding monkeys that can quickly lay waste to particularly appealing crops, as well as boars that dig up root vegetables.

According to the JWA, damage to crops caused by wildlife amounts to nearly 10 billion yen (HK$548 million) annually.

Wild animals are also blamed for countless road accidents each year, as well as injuries to people.

The number of deer and boars has increased sharply as rural areas of Japan have become increasingly depopulated. Young people leave for major cities in search of work and fewer take up hunting, which is required to keep wildlife manageable, according to the association.

Citing the success of a programme to reintroduce the Japanese crested ibis, the JWA has proposed importing wolves from China for the main islands of Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, and more hardy species from Siberia for the most northerly main island of Hokkaido.

"*We would plan to start with a small group and allow it to gradually grow larger*," he said, although he admitted that there was the "*issue of politics*" to overcome in the form of opposing lawmakers, as Otsuki said.

Otsuki said wolf attacks were "*statistically extremely rare, particularly in Europe and North America*", despite the animals' reputation. While wolves might be viewed with trepidation by many, bear attacks were more likely in remote areas, he added.

Japan has seen a spike in bear attacks in recent years, with experts suggesting the animals are becoming less fearful of humans because they are no longer being shot by hunters and are therefore extending their range into areas adjoining villages and towns.

[*SCMP*, 04/06/2025]

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Community stops noxious battery recycling plant

In 2024, the Congolese Ministry of the Environment ordered the closure of an Indian-owned battery recycling plant in Pointe Noire due to pollution concerns. The plant had been poisoning the community around Vindoulou in the Pointe Noire region for many years.

Maître B.E. Moussounda represented plaintiff and community organizer Cyrille Traoré Ndembi through more than five years of legal battles against Metssa Congo, demanding the closure of its plant.

"Many thanks to ELAW for collaborating with us since 2023 to help hold this company accountable," said Me Moussounda. "We are pleased with this decision, which shows that communities can be victorious in battles against corporations trying to illegally operate polluting industries."

Ndembi and his wife and children began experiencing health problems within a few months of moving to the area in 2019. When he discovered his neighbours were suffering from many of the same issues, he decided to form a collective to speak out against the abuses of the company.

After several unsuccessful attempts with local authorities, Ndembi, acting on behalf of the collective, established partnerships with national and international human rights and environmental organizations to get the case heard.

ELAW Scientist Dr. Rye Howard says: "Ndembi's family and many other residents had tests to determine the lead levels in their blood, and every person tested showed dangerous levels of lead. Ndembi's young daughter's test results showed the highest blood lead levels in his family – 53 micrograms of lead per deciliter – 10 times higher than the World Health Organization's recommendations for intervention; and even the lowest blood lead measured in a child was 40 µg/dl, eight times above the WHO's limit, and twice as high as the level at which an American worker is recommended to be removed from the workplace."

"This plant was operating for years in the middle of a residential neighbourhood," says Ndembi. "The chimneys belching black smoke and raining down lead dust are close to a school that 500 children attend. Thanks to the support of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, Amnesty International, and *The Examination*, as well as local human rights organizations, we won the order to close the plant. Now, the work to dismantle it is underway."

Now, ELAW is collaborating with Me Moussounda and Ndembi to ensure that the company decommissions the plant properly and decontaminates the site. The community is also seeking compensation from the company for medical treatment. We will keep you informed of our progress.

[*Elaw Press Release*, 24/04/2025]

UNITED KINGDOM

Old technology to supply clean power

Hidden among the picturesque lakes and mountains of North Wales lies Europe's largest battery.

For years, water has rushed through Dinorwig subterranean tunnels to drive vast power turbines, but the channels currently lie empty – for the first time in four decades.

They've been drained for a £1 billion ($1.3 billion) refurbishment to extend the life of the plaint along with a Welsh sister project in Ffestiniog, both vital to the U.L. grid. Their pumped-hydro technology is more than a century old, but at the moment is virtually the only way of storing electricity for longer than a few hours. It also provides crucial kinetic energy to the network, keeping the frequency stable.

Hydro storage is a key partner to renewables generation in Britain's Clean Power 2030 plan, and the country needs more of it.

The technology – largely based on gravity – is fairly simple: Water is pumped from a lower reservoir to a higher basin when energy is cheap and plentiful; then when power is lacking, it's released back down and turns turbine. That flexibility allows the operator to fill gaps in supply when the wing doesn't blow or the sun doesn't shine.

At Dinorwig, there is a 500-miter drop through the rock where the water comes smashing down to generate power. Some parts of the tunnels are big enough to fit a house inside.

The U.K. has about 3 gigawatts of long-duration energy storage and almost all of that is pumped hydro, according to data from the national system operator. To achieve a clean grid by the end of the decade, it says as much as 8 GW will be needed. Dinorwig alone can generate 1.7 GW.

Although the technology is not hugely complicated, no new projects have been built for decades due to the high upfront cost and the government, which instead has channelled support toward solar and wind.

As well, pumped-hydro plants only make sense in specific geographies – often mountainous areas where water can be pumped between high and low reservoirs.

Industry regulator Ofgem hopes to spur new projects by opening a so-called cap-and-floor funding program, chich guarantees minimum revenues for developers and is due to kick in next year.

The economics don't work for everyone. Drax Group put a pumped-hydro expansion plan on ice earlier this year, citing rising costs and uncertainty over the returns. Scotland's SSE is pursuing a 1.3-GW projects, but it's yet to begin construction or secure all the necessary investment. The outline of the cap-and-floor mechanism right now doesn't make Coire Glas investible yet, an SSE spokesperson said by email.

Ofgem's funding will extend to other storage technologies such as flow batteries, which stash energy in liquid air systems, which liquefy and store air in insulated tanks.

All these could help move the U.L. toward net zero goals. But pumped hydro, while expensive compared with solar and wing, is still among the lowest-cost of all long-duration storage, data shows.

The extensive refurbishment of the Dinorwig plant, by majority-owned by French utility Engie, will take as long as 10 years to complete and will mean the plant can run for an extra 25 years.

[*The Japan Times*, 28/05/2025]

USA

Cross-border water pollution

White sand stretches for miles where Pacific Ocean waves crash into the shore. Nearby, bicycles lean against sea-side cottages that are accented by banana and palm trees out front. A rickety wooden pier offers spectacular views of sherbet-hued sunsets over the water.

To the eye, Imperial Beach, California., is an idyllic beach town, a playground for tourists and Southern California residents alike on the southern border with Mexico.

But lately, the view has been ruined by the sea breeze, which reeks of rotten eggs. The surfers who once prepared for big-wave competitions are gone. So are the tourists.

Imperial Beach is now the center of one of the worst environmental disasters in the United States: Every day, 50 million gallons (190 million litres) of untreated sewage, industrial chemicals and trash flow from Tiuana, Mexico, into southern San Diego County.

The dual national, cross-boarder problem traces back at least a century. But it has significantly worsened in recent years as the population of Tijuana has exploded and sewage treatment plants in both countries have fallen into disrepair.

Imperial Beach's shoreline, which has drawn tourists for more than a century, has been closed for more than 1,200 days in a row due to health concerns.

A growing body of research suggests that even breathing the air may be harmful, as toxic particles in the water can become airborne. There are no overnight solutions, and officials on both sides of the border say that it will take years long expansions of swage treatment plants to stop the pollution.

The crisis has upended life in southern San Diego County – what locals call South County – which has an unusual mix of touristy beach towns and industrial warehouses. The region is defined by its border with Mexico, where Spanish and English flow interchangeably and the densely populated hillsides of Tijuana loom in the distance.

But South County residents have felt powerless when it comes to the complex international dynamics that have allowed so much sewage to overwhelm their neighbourhoods.

In the 1990s, in an act of binational cooperation, the United States built a plant on its side of the border to help treat sewage from Tijuana, which often flowed into San Diego beaches via northward currents from Mexico. At the same time, Mexico established a plant in Tijuana as well.

But those plants haven't kept up with explosive population growth in Tjuana, one of Mexico's fastest-growing cities. Roughly 2.3 million people now live in the city, spurred in part by American companies that built factories there for cheap labor. Aging infrastructure and damage from turbulent rains have further reduced how much sewage the plants can treat. The sewage problem now stretches up to Coronado, a wealthy

enclave known for the historic Hotel del Coronado, where rooms regularly go for $1,000 a night and a $550 million renovation just finished after six years. Beaches have been forced to close there as well, so fewer tourists are booking lodging.

In addition to the sewage that goes directly into the ocean, another 10 million gallons each day flow into the Tijuana River, which begins in Mexico and winds northward into the United States before emptying at Imperial Beach, according to the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission, which manages the U.S. treatment plant and is overseen by the State Department.

The river waste comes from factories, as well as from shantytowns in Tijuana that aren't hooked up to the city's sewer system.

Along the river, scientists have detected astronomically high levels of hydrogen sulfide in the air, which can cause headaches, fatigue, skin infections, anxiety and respiratory and gastrointestinal problems. Residents have complained about such symptoms for years, said Paula Stigler Granados, a public health researcher at San Diego State University.

"I consider this to be the largest environmental justice issue in the whole country," Ms. Granados said. "I don't know any other place where millions of gallons of raw sewage would be allowed to flow through a community."

The U.S. boundary commission has secured $600 million to double its treatment capacity to 50 million gallons per day, according to Frank Fisher, a spokesman. The Mexican plant is also working on repairs and expanding capacity, he said. Many worry that the changes will take too long: The expansion at the American plant alone will take five years.

[*The New York Times*, 28/03/2025]

WORLD

The true cost of ocean plastic pollution

The problem of maritime plastic-waste pollution first became apparent in the 1970s.In the half-century since then, the problem has become ever more widespread.

Large pieces of debris, such as fishing nets and their disastrous effects on marine life are the most visible symptom. Such waste is estimated to kill more than 1 million seabirds and over 100,000 marine mammals annually, often through entanglement or suffocation, and promotes transport of invasive species, triggering a cascading effect on the ecosystems in which they play a central role.

Less visible, but more pervasive, are microplastics, which have been found in the deepest ocean trenches and all types of marine life. Microplastics can, among other things, modify bacterial and viral communities and disperse chemical toxins in food chains (often after being ingested by marine organisms).Some of these toxins, such as phthalates, are associated with the chemistry of plastics, while others, such as pesticides and heavy metals, are absorbed by the plastic before it reaches the ocean and enters the food chain.

How these toxic substances interact with plastics has been the subject of much study. Plastic is comprised of monomers that have been chemically boned to form long chains of polymers – ethylene, styrene and propylene become polyethylene. But the process of polymerization is often imperfect and some of the unpolymerized monomers that remain in plastic, like different types of styrene and bisphenol, pose major environmental and health risks.

Moreover, other chemical additives, including plasticizers, fillers, colorants, flame retardants and antioxidants, are incorporated into polymer formulations to modify their properties. And non intentionally added substances (NIAS) – impurities, raw materials used in manufacturing, byproducts and degradation products – bind to finished plastics.

In most cases, because free monomers, additives and NIAS are simply trapped within the tangle of polymer chains, rather than being chemically bound to them, they are more likely to leach out during the production, use and disposal of plastic, migrating into liquids, gases and solids. Some 16,000 such molecules have been identified, but their effects are still not fully known, nor is their toxicity, which can change depending on how they are combined. What we do know is that one-quarter of these 16,000 molecules pose a hazard to human health or the environment by disrupting biochemical processes in living organisms.

The generation of toxic waste and debris is not the only way that plastic can harm ocean health. The plastics industry has been a major driver of climate change, accounting for an estimated 3.4% of global greenhouse-gas emissions. Plastic production is on track to contribute 15% of GHG emissions by 2025, exacerbating global warming and thereby increasing the threats to marine life, which is sensitive to rising water temperatures.

Because plastic degrades the entire biosphere, not just the ocean, it is not a waste problem that can be solved by a few sustain-ability-minded citizens' recycling efforts. **This is a systemic crisis that requires an economy-wide solution.** A better approach is to understand plastic as one of the "new entities" that must not leak into the environment, a view initially formulated by the Stockholm Resilience Centre in its work on planetary boundaries and later endorsed by the United Nations. While acknowledging the impossibility of defining a precise thresh-old for harm, such an approach highlights the need for a drastic reduction in plastic use.

Research suggests that it would be economically feasible to halve global plastic production at a cost which would almost surely be less than the cost of inaction. But, according to a recent study by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, even this reduction would not be enough to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, the target set by the Paris climate agreement. Instead, they found that meeting this goal would require a 75% reduction in plastic production compared to 2015, when the agreement was adopted.

Addressing this global crisis with the necessary urgency will require mobilizing investment and support to reduce the production of single-use plastics, increase the lifespan of plastic objects through regulation and promote reuse and reparability. While it is tempting to lean on short-term

fixes, such as replacing plastic packaging with other disposable materials like paper, card board, aluminium, steel and glass, the goal must not be merely to mitigate the symptoms of the underlying ailment. [Written by the director of the *Tara Ocean Foundation*]

[*The Japan Times*, 20/05/2025]

ZIMBABWE

Reserve to cull elephants

Zimbabwe will cull dozens of elephants and distribute the meat for consumption to ease the ballooning pollution of the animals, its wildlife authority has said.

The southern African country is home to the second-biggest elephant population in the world after Botswana.

The cull at a vast private game reserve in the southeast would initially target 50 elephants, the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority (ZimParks) said in a statement.

It did not say how many of the animals would be killed in total or over what period.

An aerial survey in 2024 showed the reserve, the Save Valley Conservancy, had 2,550 elephants, more than triple its carrying capacity of 800. ZimParks said.

At least 200 have been translocated to other parks over the past five years.

"*Elephant meat from the management exercise will be distributed to local communities while ivory will be state property that will be handed over to the ZimParks for safekeeping*." it said.

Zimbabwe is unable to sell its stockpile of tusks due to a global ban on ivory trading.

Tuesday's announcement came a day after four people were arrested in the capital Harare with more than 230kg of ivory for which they were allegedly seeking a buyer.

In 2024, Zimbabwe culled 200 elephants as it faced an unprecedented drought that led to food shortages. It was the first major cull since 1988.

The move to hunt the elephants for food has drawn sharp criticism, particularly as the animals are a major tourism draw.

[*SCMP*, 05/06/2025]

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Convictions under environmental legislation: March to June 2025 (July data not available)

[Note: the EPD no longer classifies second (and subsequent) offences.]

The EPD's summary of convictions recorded and fines imposed during the above period is as follows:

March 2025

Thirty-eight convictions were recorded in March 2025 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Five of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 4 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 8 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 21 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance.

A company was fined $30,000, which was the heaviest fine in March, for importing controlled waste without a permit.

April 2025

Seventy-eight convictions were recorded in April 2025 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

31 of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 3 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 13 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 28 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 3 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

An owners' corporation was fined $40,000, which was the heaviest fine in April, for discharged waste/polluting matter into the water control zone.

May 2025

Thirty-six convictions were recorded in May 2025 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Five of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 2 of the convictions were under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance, 4 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 7 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 16 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 2 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $30,000, which was the heaviest fine in May, for importing controlled waste without a permit.

June 2025

Thirty-six convictions were recorded in June 2025 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

One of the convictions was under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 7 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 7 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 6 were under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 14 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 1 was under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $30,000, which was the heaviest fine in June, for importing controlled waste without a permit.

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