



WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ADAPTATION

The Glacier Trust
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The Glacier Trust is a UK registered charity (no. 1124955). We enable climate change adaptation in the remote mountain communities of Nepal.

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST

As a specifically adaptation focused charity, we have a vested interest in the promotion of climate change adaptation as an issue. Indeed, we hope that this report will generate more interest in the topic and we are happy to declare that here. Our intention is not to criticise the organisations studied here, we have deep respect for all of them and understand the context in which they operate.

In this report, we will not explore the reasons why adaptation receives the amount of coverage it does; although we do encourage others to examine this, including those organisations studied. We only wish to observe the current state of the sector in relation to this issue. This is the second annual '**We Need To Talk About Adaptation**' report.

For more information on the work of The Glacier Trust in Nepal, please visit our website: www.theglaciertrust.org.

The report is available for download at: www.theglaciertrust.org/we-need-to-talk-about

FOREWORD

Prof. Rupert Read, Extinction Rebellion Political Liaison.

We need to talk about climate breakdown

Let's come clean. As those well-known eco-extremists JP Morgan/Chase recently put it, the human race is heading straight for societal collapse, and potentially human extinction. In that context it is way, way too late to be talking only about prevention and mitigation. Climate breakdown is here. We might manage to stop it, or even repair it. But we desperately need to talk about adaptation to what is here and to the much worse stuff that is coming, however well we fight in the years to come.

While the report that you have in your hands shows there has been a small rise in discussions around adaptation, change is (too) slow, while dire crisis grows. We have to get serious about the alternative (to mitigation-only approaches), no matter how arduous or painful this may be.

Deep adaptation can offer refuge and hope in the lead up to possible eco-induced societal collapse. This civilisation is coming to an end. Our societies need to transform ways of living so drastically that even if we prevent collapse the civilisation that emerges will no longer be recognisable as this civilisation.

Adaptation is not resignation. We must prepare ourselves for what is to come and use our voices to incite sanity about dumping fossil fuels asap. We must ride two horses simultaneously: mitigation and adaptation. (The concept of transformative adaptation links these two directly.) The UK's environmental charities and Green Party leaders have a responsibility to prepare for the different, degraded world we are moving into. Poorer areas of our world are already battling the consequences of our resistance to taking adaptation seriously. In that context, the work of The Glacier Trust is a life or death matter.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Morgan Phillips (UK Co-Director, The Glacier Trust)

In November 2020 the UK will host COP26, the twenty sixth annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties. COP26 will be the most significant global gathering on climate change since Paris 2015.

In February 2019, The Glacier Trust published our first '**We Need To Talk About Adaptation**' report. That report analysed 1,579 articles from the blog and news sections of five of the UK's leading environmental organisations. Our intention was to highlight the amount of coverage given to **adaptation** as a specific topic within the overall subject of climate change.

We found that just 12 of the articles studied (0.75%) were focused specifically on adaptation, with only a further 71 giving a passing mention to either adaptation or the related subject of losses and damage.

This second annual report analyses a period (August 2018 - December 2019) that saw a significant upsurge in the public interest and media attention given to climate change. It was a period in which the language around climate issues was challenged, with terms such as 'breakdown', 'crisis' and 'emergency' increasingly used in place of the less urgent sounding 'change'.

Given this context, it is unsurprising to find that the five organisations we studied have increased the proportion of articles on climate change. In our 2017/18 report, 28% of the articles studied were on climate change specifically, this has now jumped to 51%; notably though, only 10% of these climate change articles referenced or mentioned adaptation or loss and damages; down from 16% in 2017/18.

This comparative lack of coverage on adaptation has consequences; it has an 'out of sight, out of mind' effect that filters through to the highest levels of negotiations and debate.

The agreements and commitments made at COP26 will set the agenda for climate action in the coming decades. Radical action is needed on both adaptation and Mitigation, but the chances of radical action on adaptation appear unlikely. This was a point made forcefully by Claire O'Neill in her passionate letter to the UK Prime Minister as her role as COP26 President came to an end before it had really started [our emphasis added]:

The annual UN talks are dogged by endless rows over agenda's, ongoing unresolved splits over who should pay and insufficient attention and funding for adaptation and resilience.

O'Neill's frustrations with the UN process are shared by many involved on the adaptation side of the climate movement. We are frustrated, but perhaps not terribly surprised; we cannot expect the UN and world leaders to give sufficient attention to adaptation and resilience when they are receiving next to no pressure on this from our leading environmental organisations.

The consequences for those on the front line of climate breakdown, often the most vulnerable people in society, are very real. Without the resources, funding and training that will enable them to adapt in mindful and lasting ways, they will either not adapt at all, or adapt in *mal*adaptive ways. In some cases, these *mal*adaptations will be reliant on heavy fossil fuel use (air conditioning, concrete, heating and so on) and cause damage to precious ecosystems. Without careful planning, mindfulness and sufficient resources, **adaptations to climate change can cause further climate change and ecological breakdown**. A disastrous multiplier scenario; a race to the bottom.

We urge the environmental organisations studied here (and the environmental movement more broadly) to **talk more frequently about adaptation**. There are positive, inspiring and hopeful stories of adaptation and resilience building. But there are also stories of companies, individuals and even governments who are adapting in self-interested ways; ways that suit them, but show little regard for others - examples of this need to be exposed and learned from. There are many talented people in our environmental organisations, they have the skills to bring adaptation out of the shadows and ensure it gets the attention it deserves.

As we stressed in last year's report: telling the story of adaptation does two key things:

- **It puts adaptation on the agenda**; doing this increases the chances that the adaptation needs of those suffering the impacts of climate change are heard.
- **It raises awareness of good practice in adaptation**, helping it to spread and reducing the risk of widespread *mal*adaptation.

The question is, **are we talking about adaptation?**

The report that follows answers that question in respect to five leading UK environmental organisations.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this report we present findings from desk research into the prevalence, or not, of stories covering climate change adaptation and the case for compensation for losses or damage related to climate change.

Our research looked at the news and blog outputs of five of the UK's largest environmental organisations: four NGOs and one political party.

Included in the study are:

- **Friends of the Earth UK (FoE UK)**
- **World Wildlife Fund UK (WWF UK)**
- **Greenpeace UK**
- **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)**
- **The Green Party of England and Wales**

We reviewed 857 articles in total from a 16-month period beginning 13th August 2018, ending 31st December 2019.

Articles were analysed to determine their content and categorised as follows:

- Other environmental, social or economic issues.
- Climate change general (no mention of adaptation / losses and damage)
- Climate change (with passing mention of adaptation)ⁱ.
- Climate change (focused on adaptation).
- Climate change (focused on losses and damage).

The results of this research are presented below.

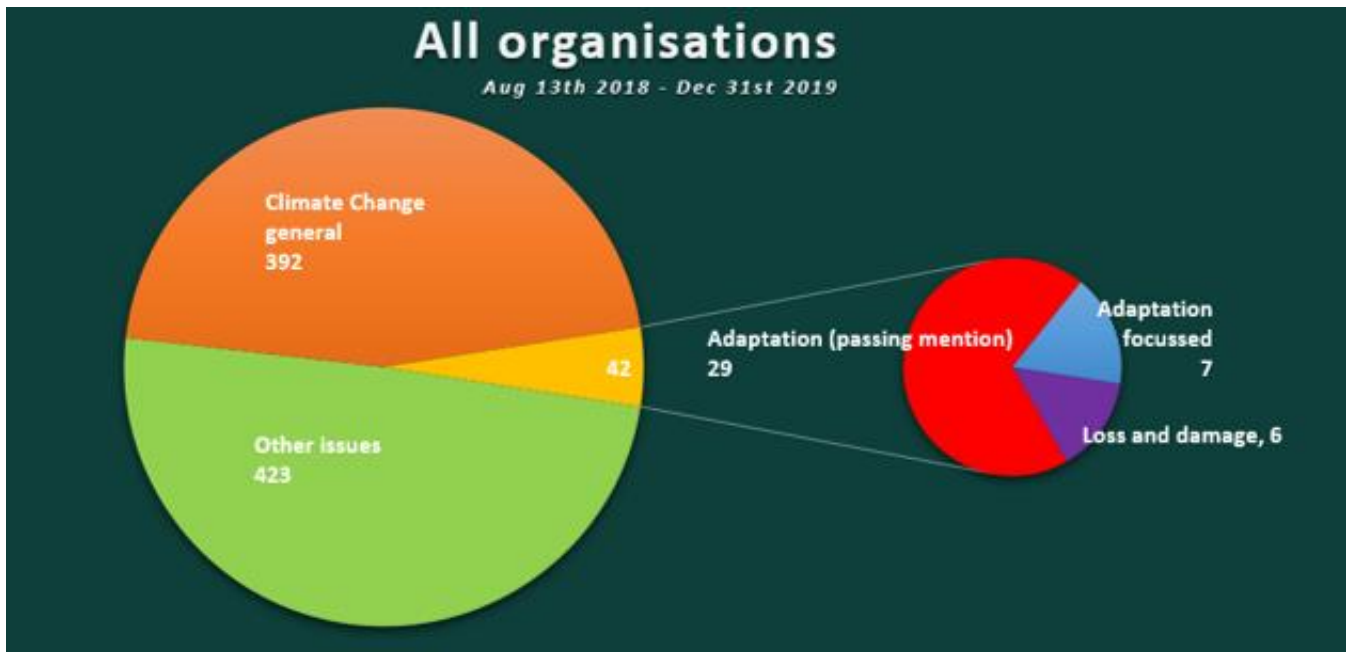
3. RESULTS

Of the 857 articles studied, 434 (50.6%) covered climate change issues; the remaining 423 (49.4%) were focused on other environmental, social and political issues. This represents a significant change from our 2017/18 study, when climate change articles only made up 28% of all articles.

Of the 434 climate change articles, 42 articles (9.7%) referenced or mentioned adaptation or loss and damages. In the 2017/18 study, this proportion was higher (15.7%)

Only 7 articles (0.82% of the 857 studied) were specifically focused on climate change adaptation. This is a very slight increase from the 2017/18 study, when 0.76% focused specifically on adaptation.

The pattern varied across the five organisations, with some increasing their coverage of climate change issues significantly, while others kept a similar balance to 2017/18. The vast majority of climate change stories were again focused on mitigation strategies, campaigns, or on accounts of the problem itself; adaptation and loss and damages remain very marginal topics. Only two organisations, FoE UK and WWF UK wrote articles in which adaptation was the main focus.



Results for each organisation studied are presented below.

3.1. FRIENDS OF THE EARTH (UK)

Friends of The Earth (FoE UK) was founded in 1969 to campaign on environmental issues; it has since grown into an international movement encompassing thousands of local groups and millions of supporters. FoE UK has a fixed term goal:

By 2030, the next generation will enjoy an environment that's getting better: a safer climate, flourishing nature, and healthy air, water and food.ⁱⁱ

Their position on climate change adaptation was last updated in November 2017ⁱⁱⁱ. They summarise it as follows: *'We need to minimise how climate change affects people and nature. We also have a responsibility to help the most vulnerable to cope.'*

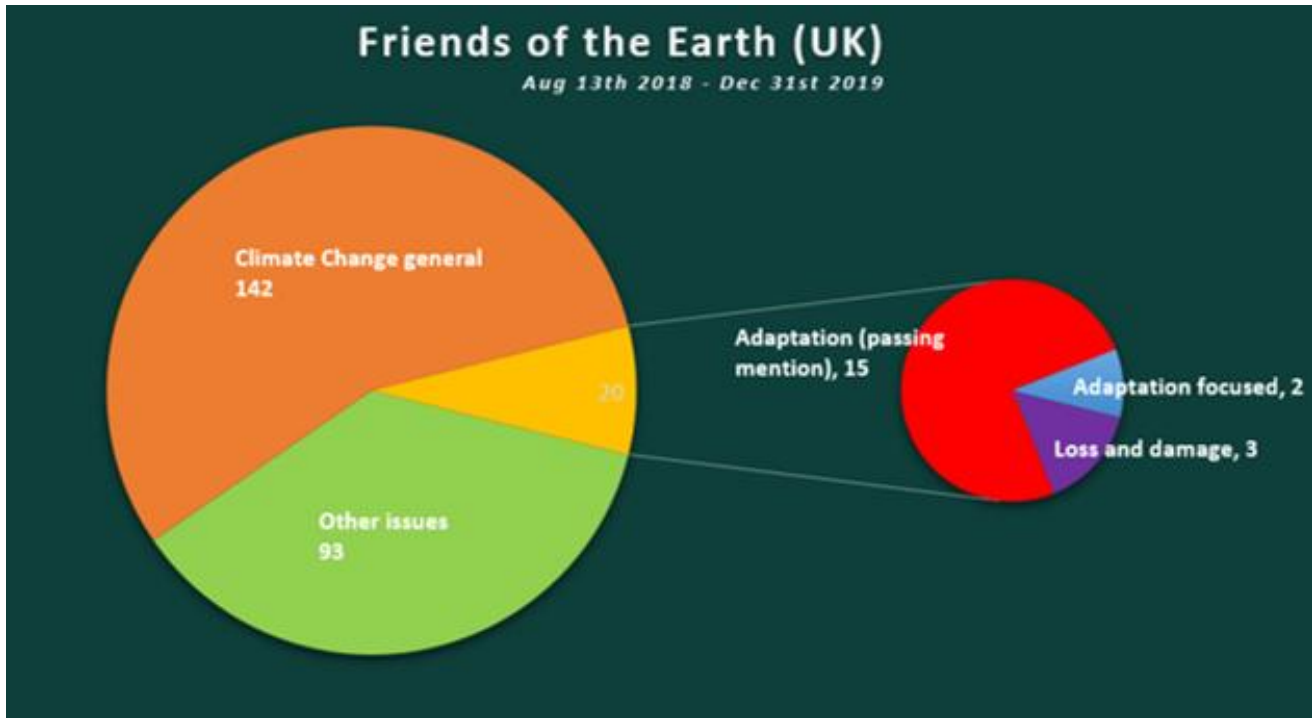
They describe the need for adaptation, discuss the insufficient funding made available to enable adaptation and list seven 'ways to adapt'. There is nothing on the potential environmental and social consequences of a failure to adapt, or of *mal*adaptation.

For this report, we studied articles from the 'Latest'^{iv} section on the Friends of the Earth website:

| Article category | FoE UK |
|--|--------|
| Other environmental, social or economic issues | 93 |
| Climate change (no mention of adaptation or losses/damage) | 143 |
| Climate change (with passing mention of adaptation) | 15 |
| Climate change (focused on adaptation) | 2 |
| Climate change (focused on losses and damage) | 3 |

Compared to the last study period (Feb 2017 - Aug 2018), there has been a marked increase in the proportion of stories that cover climate change. Of the 255 articles studied, 162 were climate themed.

Coverage of adaptation has also increased, with fifteen articles making a passing mention and two fully focused on the issue. We also found three articles focused on climate change losses and damage. This is a significant improvement on our last study, when the only adaptation focused article we found was the 2017 policy position reported on above.



The first FoE UK article to focus on adaptation was published on May 9th 2019^v. This was a brief response to the Environment Agency's strategy to tackle flooding and coastal change. The article quotes FoE UK's head of science, Mike Childs, who calls for '*smarter adaptation and resilience building*'. It should be noted that Childs' quotes are under the following subtitle: '*Focus must first and foremost be on slashing emissions so that we can avoid the worst consequences of climate chaos in the first place.*'

The other article^{vi} that specifically address adaptation was released in the midst of the July 2019 heatwave. This article makes a call for '*doubled tree cover to protect people from the impact of extreme weather such as heatwaves and to help absorb carbon from the atmosphere.*' The article ends with a call to action to support FoE UK's tree campaign^{vii} by signing a petition.

3.2. WWF (UK)

Founded in 1961 the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) is one of the most recognisable environmental and conservation organisations in the world. WWF (UK) describes itself as follows:

WWF is the world's leading independent conservation organisation. Our mission is to create a world where people and wildlife can thrive together.

To achieve our mission, we're finding ways to help transform the future for the world's wildlife, rivers, forests and seas; pushing for a reduction in carbon emissions that will avoid catastrophic climate change; and pressing for measures to help people live sustainably, within the means of our one planet.^{viii}

Climate change has a significant profile on the WWF UK website. They discuss the effects of climate change on wildlife, polar regions, rivers and oceans, with an emphasis on habitat destruction.

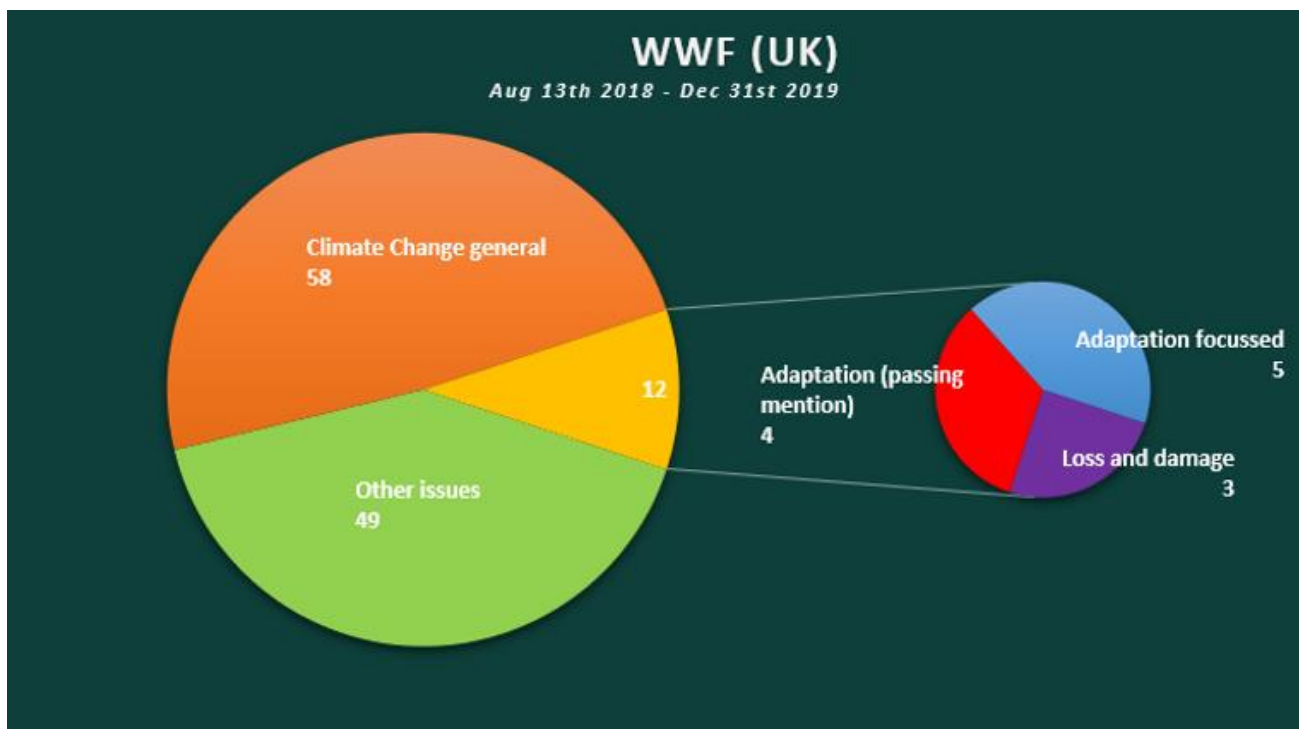
Their calls to action include encouragement to join WWF as a member, 'demand action on the climate emergency', 'measure your footprint' and 'change how you live'.

For this report we studied news articles hosted on the [WWF UK homepage^{ix}](#) and articles from WWF's [dedicated blog pages^x](#).

| Article category | WWF UK |
|--|--------|
| Other environmental, social or economic issues | 49 |
| Climate change (no mention of adaptation or losses/damage) | 58 |
| Climate change (with passing mention of adaptation) | 4 |
| Climate change (focused on adaptation) | 5 |
| Climate change (focused on losses and damage) | 3 |

Our previous report showed that WWF UK had a disproportionately higher number of climate change articles than the four other organisations studied; just over 50% of their stories featured climate change. This has now increased to 55.38%.

Passing mentions of adaptation are only found in four articles, there are three articles focused on losses and damage and five focused on adaptation. These raw numbers however hide the reality that adaptation is a very marginal topic for WWF UK.



WWF's five adaptation focused stories were found on the WWF blog and were all part of a series about their Coastal Kenya Programme. The first article (September 2018) introduced farmers who are planting trees as an adaptation strategy. This initiative is described by WWF as follows:

Through our initiative, all participating farmers have allocated one acre each [125 acres in total] to farm forestry. They grow climate change resistant fruit trees - mainly high value mango and coconut trees. Not only do they provide a substantial contribution to the national forest cover, but will also provide a source of long term household income. This income is also expected to build the farmers' capacity to withstand effects of climate change if other crops fail, making them more resilient.^{xi}

We've categorised the other four articles in this series as 'adaptation focused' because they cover the complexities of running a successful adaptation project. The remaining articles feature some first-hand accounts from WWF officers based in Kenya and cover issues such as the use of digital technology to share knowledge and best practice on sustainable agriculture, the role of women in climate smart adaptation and engaging young people in conservation efforts.

3.3. GREENPEACE (UK)

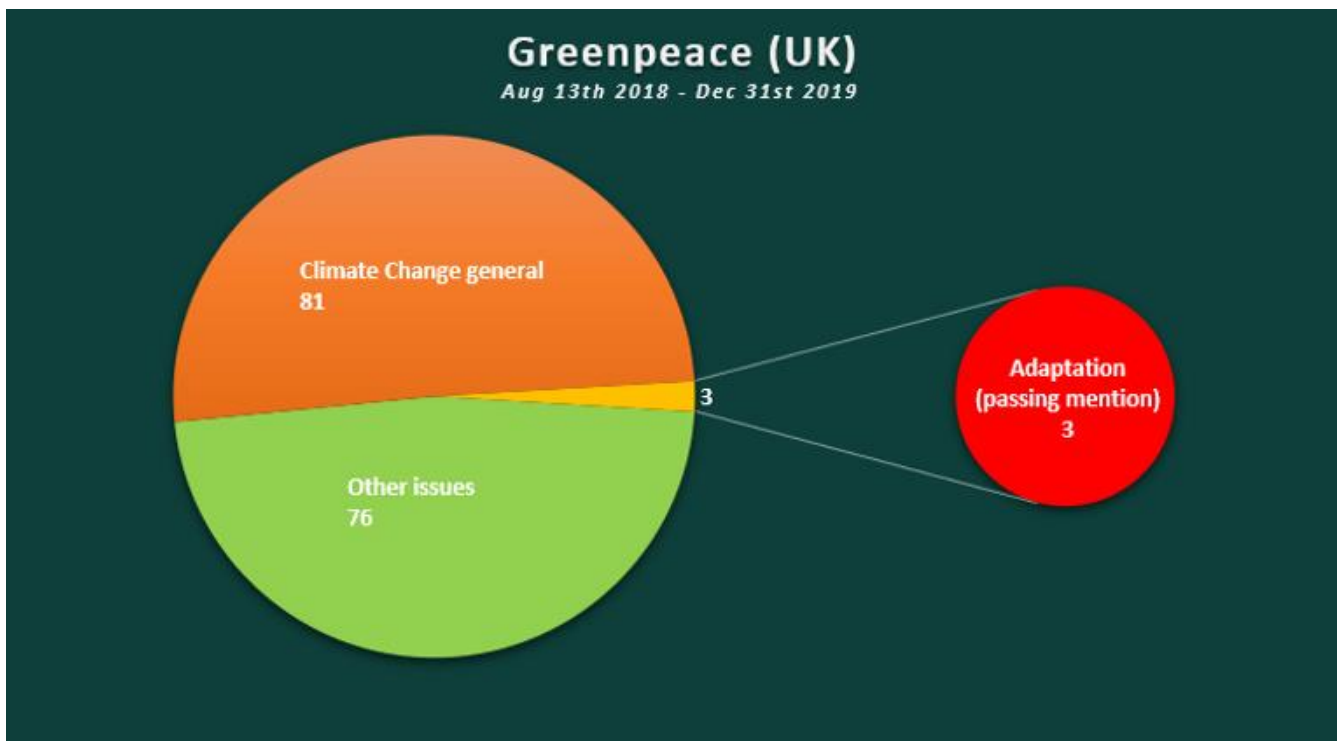
Greenpeace is a movement of people who are passionate about defending the natural world from destruction. Our vision is a greener, healthier and more peaceful planet, one that can sustain life for generations to come.^{xii}

Greenpeace was founded in 1971 when activists set sail for Amchitka Island in Alaska to protest against the US government's nuclear testing. In 1972, thanks to the actions of the crew of the Phyllis Cormack (a parent of the famous Rainbow Warrior), the US abandoned nuclear testing at Amchitka.^{xiii}

Under their high level 'challenges we face' section, Climate Change is listed in the top four next to Soya, Meat and Dairy and Plastic Pollution. Their dedicated climate change page makes no mention of adaptation, losses and damage or building resilience.

| Article category | Greenpeace Blog |
|--|-----------------|
| Other environmental, social or economic issues | 76 |
| Climate change (no mention of adaptation or losses/damage) | 81 |
| Climate change (with passing mention of adaptation) | 3 |
| Climate change (focused on adaptation) | 0 |
| Climate change (focused on losses and damage) | 0 |

Climate change now counts for more than half of all Greenpeace articles, adaptation however only gets a passing mention in three of these articles.



3.4. RSPB

Climate change has very little prominence on the homepage of the RSPB, it does however feature heavily in news and blog articles.

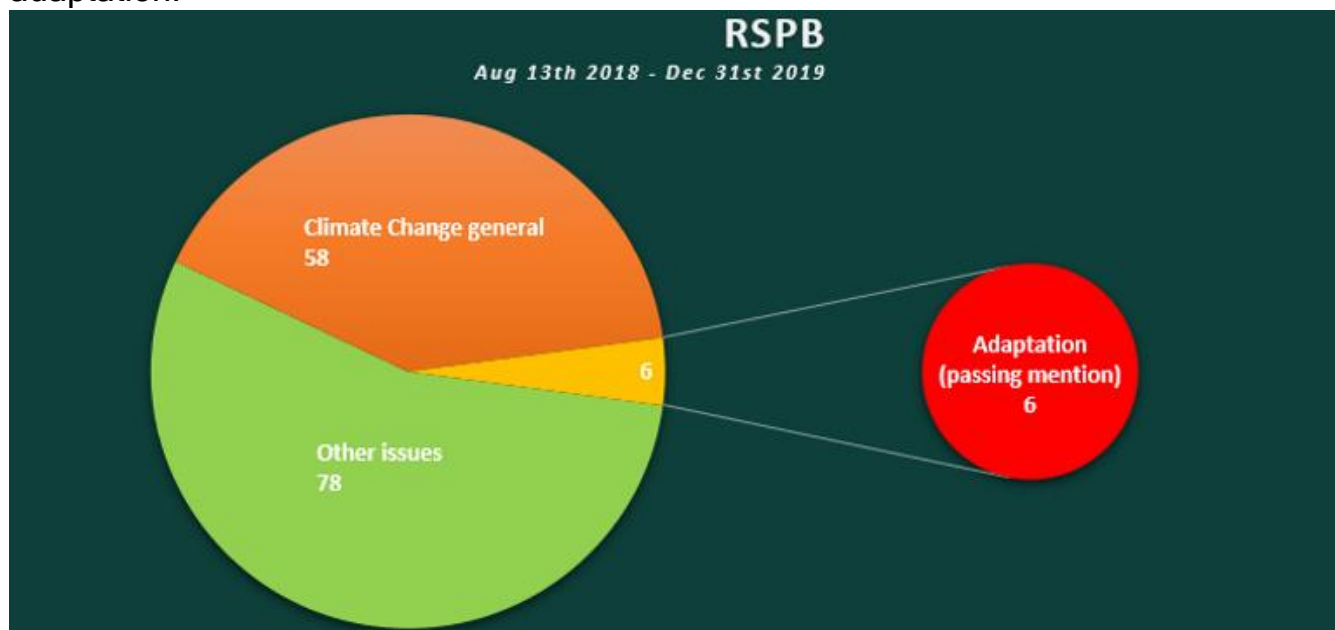
The RSPB is a wildlife charity, founded in 1889 and one of the largest membership organisations in the UK. Their position on climate change has a distinctly wildlife focused angle. As well as committing to tackling the causes of climate change the RSPB recognise the importance of helping wildlife to adapt:

Climate change is the greatest long-term threat to wildlife and humans. We work to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions which cause climate change and allow wildlife to adapt to a warming climate.^{xiv}

For this study, we analysed stories from the RSPB News^{xv} section and the influential blog of RSPB CEO Martin Harper^{xvi}.

| Article category | RSPB |
|--|------|
| Other environmental, social or economic issues | 78 |
| Climate change (no mention of adaptation or losses/damage) | 58 |
| Climate change (with passing mention of adaptation) | 6 |
| Climate change (focused on adaptation) | 0 |
| Climate change (focused on losses and damage) | 0 |

Coverage of climate change is surprisingly high, featuring in 58 out of 78 articles. Despite its apparent prominence in RSPB's position paper on climate change, adaptation receives very little attention, with no articles focusing specifically on adaptation.



3.5. THE GREEN PARTY OF ENGLAND AND WALES

The Green Party of England and Wales is the only non-charity studied in our report. We have chosen them because of their growing and significant voice on environmental issues in the UK. Climate change is a central issue for the Green Party and they have a particular focus on ‘climate justice for the people’; their homepage reads:

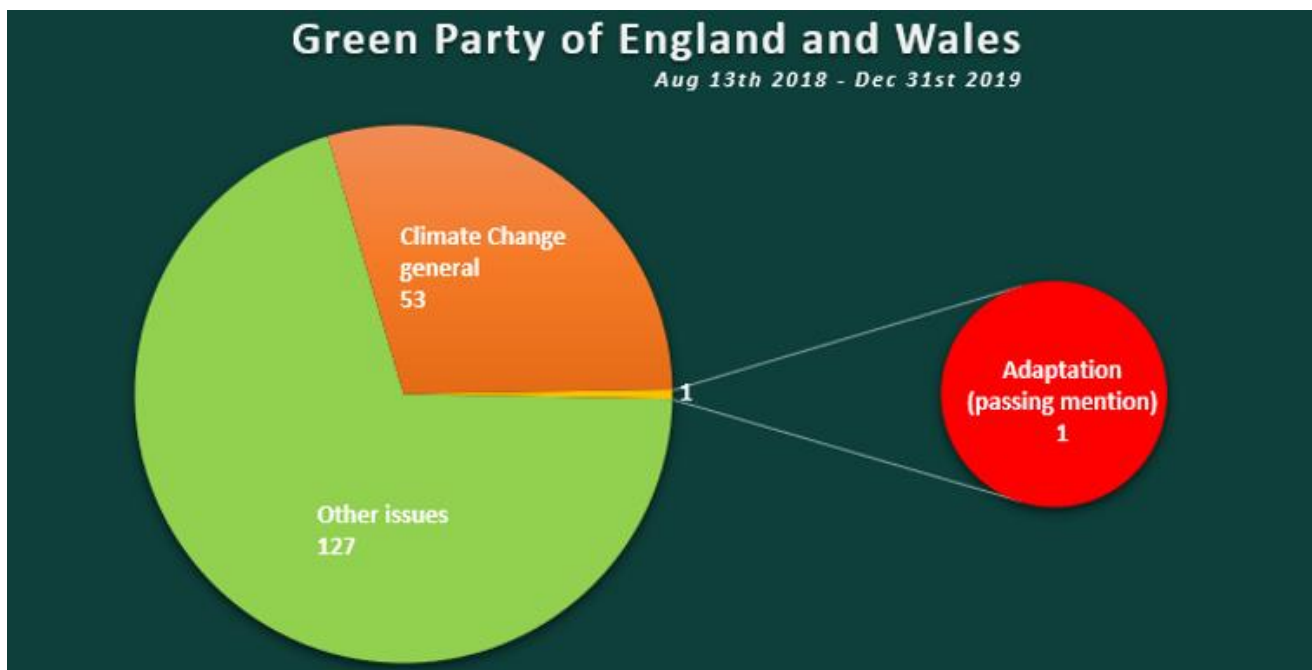
Half of the world’s carbon emissions have been emitted in the last 30 years.

We’re taking on the corrupt fossil fuel corporations and the politicians who serve them to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Our Green New Deal will provide a Just Transition to a regenerative future for the people of the planet.^{xvii}

| Article category | Green Party |
|--|-------------|
| Other environmental, social or economic issues | 127 |
| Climate change (no mention of adaptation or losses/damage) | 53 |
| Climate change (with passing mention of adaptation) | 1 |
| Climate change (focused on adaptation) | 0 |
| Climate change (focused on losses and damage) | 0 |

Of the 181 articles studied, only 43% were climate change focussed with adaptation getting just one passing mention. These are the lowest proportions across all the organisations studied.



4. CONCLUSIONS

As far back as 2006^{xviii}, analysts were concluding that proponents of adaptation were finally being heard. The assumption then, fourteen years ago, was that its prominence in negotiations would continue to increase and that the profile of adaptation projects would grow and expand.

Fast forward to 2020 and adaptation is undoubtedly discussed by a broader range of policy makers and is given more consideration and attention in the UNFCCC process. However, it is still very much in the shadow of mitigation - and far more hidden from view than the advocates of adaptation in the 1990's and 2000's would have surely hoped.

The results of our research reflect this. Adaptation is barely mentioned let alone focused on by the UK's leading environmental organisations. Similar to last year, less than 1% of the articles we studied had a focus on adaptation. It has to be noted that even this tells a slightly misleading story. **Of the seven adaptation focused articles we found, five of these related to just one story, WWF's Coastal Kenya programme - which thankfully provides a useful case study of how to talk about adaptation.**

As a casual follower of any of the mainstream environmental organisations studied, or the environmental movement in general, you would be forgiven for knowing little or nothing at all about climate change adaptation. You would certainly not be moved to campaign for mindful adaptation or against harmful *mal*adaptation.

As we come to learn more about the adaptation strategies adopted by individuals, businesses, institutions and government's we become more aware that adaptation has consequences. These consequences can be positive or negative for the environment, in fact the environment itself is adapting as plants and animal species seek to cope with rising temperatures and extreme weather.

The negative impacts of *mal*adaptation to climate change should be of concern to environmentalists. Every time an air-conditioning unit is cranked up, or a plastic handheld fan is purchased, or a snow machine is turned on, planet Earth creaks a little more under the strain.

It is not that environmental organisations do not talk about adaptation at all, they do, so there is a precedent. As adaptation becomes something more and more of us do in the decades to come, it is vital it is done in ecologically mindful ways. The environmental movement has a crucial role to play in making sure that adaptation is transformative in a positive way; **talking about adaptation is a key starting point.**

A copy of this report will be sent to senior leaders at the five organisations studied. It will also be sent to high profile environmental journalists and movement leaders. We hope it leads to a significant increase in how and how often adaptation is talked about by the time we complete our third study in 2021. More importantly, we hope it helps drive an increase in mindful and transformative adaptation to climate change, with our leading environmental organisations taking an active role.

ⁱ A 'passing mention' is defined here as brief, less than two sentences, mention of adaptation or losses and damage in an article that is primarily focused on the scale of the climate change problem, on mitigation, or on another environmental or social issue. For example: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/extreme-heat-stark-warning-boris-johnson-says-friends-earth> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

ⁱⁱ Friends of the Earth (2020) *Our Strategy Towards our 2030 goal*. <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/who-we-are/our-strategy-towards-our-2030-goal> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

ⁱⁱⁱ Friends of the Earth (2017) *Climate change adaptation: our position*. <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/policy-positions/climate-change-adaptation-our-position> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{iv} Friends of the Earth (2020) *The Latest from Friends of the Earth* <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/latest> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^v Friends of the Earth (2019) *Friends of the Earth reacts to Environment Agency's strategy to tackle flooding and coastal change* <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/friends-earth-reacts-environment-agencys-strategy-tackle-flooding-and-coastal-change> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{vi} Friends of the Earth (2019) *UK gears up for hottest ever day, Friends of the Earth calls for more trees to protect us from extreme heat* <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/trees/uk-gears-hottest-ever-day-friends-earth-calls-more-trees-protect-us-extreme-heat> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{vii} Friends of the Earth (2019) *More trees please; Why we need to double UK tree cover* <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/trees> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{viii} WWF UK (2020) *Who we are* <https://www.wwf.org.uk/who-we-are> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{ix} WWF UK (2020) *WWF homepage* <https://www.wwf.org.uk/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^x WWF UK (2020) *WWF UK Blog home* <https://blogs.wwf.org.uk/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xi} WWF UK (2018) *Adapting to climate change in coastal Kenya communities* <https://blogs.wwf.org.uk/blog/habitats/forests/climate-change-coastal-kenya/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xii} Greenpeace (2020) *About Greenpeace* <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/about-greenpeace/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xiii} Greenpeace International (2018) *An interactive timeline of Greenpeace's History, Victories and Successes* <http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/594418/Greenpeace/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xiv} RSPB (2020) *Climate Change* <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/our-positions-and-casework/our-positions/climate-change/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xv} RSPB (2020) *RSPB news* <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/news/stories/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xvi} RSPB (2020) *Martin Harper's Blog* <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/martinharper/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xvii} The Green Party of England and Wales (2020) *Homepage* <https://vote.greenparty.org.uk/> [Accessed: 07/02/20]

^{xviii} Schipper, L (2006) *Conceptual History of Adaptation in the UNFCCC Process*, Review of European, Comparative & International Environmental Law (RECIEL), Vol. 15(1), pp. 82-92