

Is No Regrets Adaptation Really No Regrets?



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This Talk

- Definition of no regrets
- Why is it so popular?
- Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Definition of No Regrets

- Definition I have used is:
 - Adaptations that can be justified based on current climate *and further* justified based on climate change
 - As climate changes, there are more benefits
 - If climate does not change (antiquated), then you have no regret

Examples of No Regrets

- Warning systems
- Market-based allocation of scarce resources
- Reduce pollution
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Alternative Definition of No Regrets

- The adaptation makes sense no matter what climate change happens
 - Robust adaptation
- I don't think that is no regrets
 - Robust adaptations done because of climate change

Other Terms

- Low regrets
 - Adaptations made because of climate change
 - E.g., put in a larger culvert
- Spend more money than would otherwise
- “Low” is because of discounting it typically does not make sense to spend a lot of money

Maladaptation

- This term has unfortunately been widely misused to incorporate moral judgments about adaptations
- I think maladaptive adaptations result in increasing vulnerability to climate
 - In particular to current climate (and climate change)
 - Also to climate change alone
 - e.g., encouraging development in low-lying coastal areas

Why is No Regrets So Appealing?

- It sounds easy
- Do not have to base justification on climate change
 - In politically polarized situations that can be an advantage
- I think “4 out of 5” adaptations make sense anyway
- Enhances mainstreaming

Is No Regrets a Good Thing

- To some extent yes
- It makes the initial steps of adaptation relatively easy
- This can promote widespread adoption of adaptation practices

Adaptation in the U.S.

- We are seeing adaptation planning by
 - Federal agencies
 - Many states
 - Many municipalities
- Mainly incremental steps and not big investments
- I find this encouraging



Is No Regrets a Bad Thing?

- Yes, if it is all that is done
- No regrets will only go so far
- In many cases difficult and possibly expensive adaptation will be necessary
 - Beyond low regrets!

Small Islands



- No regrets adaptations:
 - Reduce pollution
 - Reduce overfishing
 - Protect coral reefs

Small Islands (cont.)



- No regrets adaptations:
 - Reduce pollution
 - Reduce overfishing
 - Protect coral reefs
- Will these be sufficient to address long-term climate change?

Small Islands (cont.)



- I don't think so
- More difficult, expensive, and possibly painful choices may be needed
- For example
 - Island raising
 - Migration

Closer to Home

Allow insurance to be more risk based

- This could discourage settlement in low-lying coastal areas and fire risk areas
- Could promote hazard mitigation



Closer to Home

Allow insurance to be more risk based

- This could discourage settlement in low-lying coastal areas and fire risk areas
- Could promote hazard mitigation
- Will this be enough?
 - Unlikely in long run
- May need stronger measures
 - Prohibitions on rebuilding
 - Relocation



Another Point on No Regrets

- Why aren't they being implemented?
- Clearly there are barriers
- Therefore, truly no regrets adaptations may be challenging to implement

Do Disasters Present Opportunities?



My Take

- I am not troubled by an emphasis by governments on “no regrets” adaptations

My Take

- I am not troubled by an emphasis by governments on “no regrets” adaptations
- It greases the skids for them to begin working on adaptations
- We’re in a nascent stage wherein getting buy-in is a good thing

The “Danger” of No Regrets

- In a democracy, it can be very difficult to get elected officials to push painful choices
 - Adaptation may eventually require some painful choices
- When does one get off a no regrets only policy?

What Does the “Adaptation Community Need to Do?”

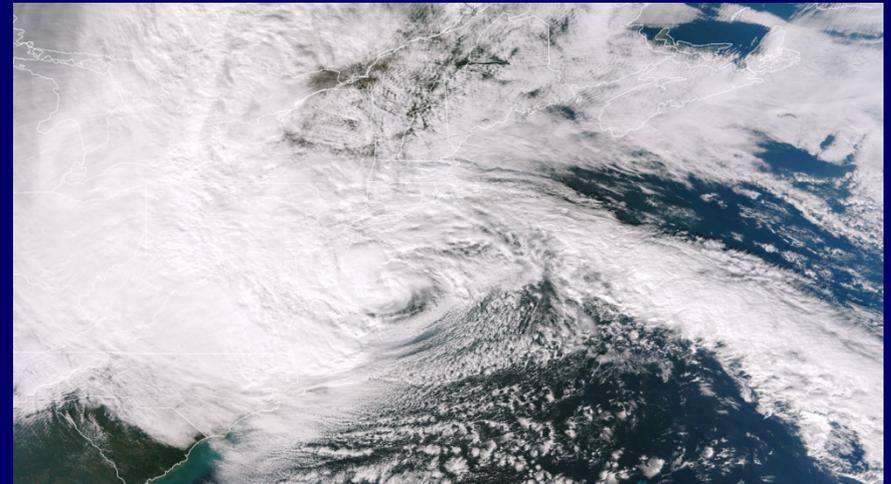
- Encourage adaptation
 - If that means no regrets at first, don't stand in the way
 - The process needs support

What Does the “Adaptation Community Need to Do?” (cont.)

- Encourage adaptation
 - If that means no regrets at first, don't stand in the way
 - The process needs support
- Also need to soberly point out long-term risks
 - At least encourage a dialogue, vision, and a roadmap of where to go

Post Sandy

- Make it clear that we may not be well adapted to ***current climate risks***
- So need to do more
 - That comes under no regrets
- If we are vulnerable to current climate, we are more vulnerable to climate change



Thank you!

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