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National policy choices for an international problem: case studies in greenhouse policy

Geoffrey Kelly
University of Wollongong, gdkelly44@gmail.com

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**National Policy Choices for an International Problem:
Case Studies in Greenhouse Policy.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Geoffrey Kelly BSc BE(Chem) (Cant), BCom(with merit) MCom

Faculty of Commerce

2008

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CERTIFICATION

I, Geoffrey D Kelly, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Commerce, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Geoffrey D Kelly
June 2008

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ix</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review: Motivations and Influences on Decision-Making.	15
Chapter 3 Instrument Characteristics and Case Study Methodology	51
Chapter 4 Climate Change Policy in Japan, 1990 – 2004.	86
Chapter 5 Climate Change Policy In Germany, 1990 – 2004.	126
Chapter 6 Climate Change Policy In the United Kingdom, 1990 – 2004.	172
Chapter 7 Climate Change Policy In Canada, 1990 – 2004.	218
Chapter 8 Climate Change Policy In Australia, 1990 – 2004	252
Chapter 9 Case Study Outcomes – Discussion and Conclusions	290
References	317
Appendix A A Chronology of Events in Climate Change and Further Sources of Information	347
Appendix B Abbreviations and Acronyms	352

Tables and Figures

Table 4.1. Summary of Emission Contributions and Their Growth – Japan	97
Table 4.2. Major Emission Reduction Measures & Instrument Components – Japan	104
Table 4.3. Emission Reduction Contribution by Measures Containing Specific Instrument Types – Japan	105
Table 4.4. The Origin of Emissions, and the Sectoral Impact of Measures – Japan	110
Table 5.1. Trends in sectoral CO ₂ emissions - Germany.	137
Table 5.2. Approximate Carbon Equivalence of Taxes on Energy Carriers – Germany	144
Table 5.3. The Nature and Impact of Emission Reduction Measures - Germany.	150
Table 5.4. Emission Reduction Associated with Different Instrument Types - Germany.	154
Table 6.1. Greenhouse Gas Emission in the UK.	179
Table 6.2. Sectoral Carbon Dioxide Emission (End-user sectors) – UK	180
Table 6.3. The Nature and Impact of Emission Reduction Measures	194
Table 6.4. Measures, Their Emission Reduction Contribution, and Components – UK	195
Table 6.5. Contribution from instrument types – UK	196
Table 6.6. Contribution from instrument types – alternative approach – UK	197
Table 6.7. Sectoral Contribution to Emissions and Emission Reductions – UK	198
Table 7.1. Greenhouse Gas Emission trends, Canada 1990 – 2003	225
Table 7.2. Projected Emission Increases, 2004 – 2010	226
Table 7.3. Canadian Measures at 2005	228
Table 8.1. The Burden of Taxation – Australia	255

Table 8.2. Emissions Projections 1990 - 2010 - with measures in place: - Australia	256
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Table 8.3. Australian Emission Reduction Measures and Projection of Results.	268
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Figures

Figure 1.1. Factors in Case Studies.	5
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father, Eileen and Michael Kelly, who first encouraged me in learning.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the choices governments make for their policy instruments in the context of a single national problem – climate change. Taking into account the context in which such decisions are made, the thesis seeks to identify the broader motivations influencing governments in their policy development and implementation. It considers also the implicit constraints on instrument choice and application arising from that context. A knowledge of such motivations and constraints is important for what it implies about the prospects for structured international cooperation requiring specific domestic actions, as is the case in climate change.

Various theoretical frameworks exist which seek to explain why governments may act in a particular manner. No one of these could be said to dominate others, or to be uniquely applicable in any given situation. This thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of government motivations by analysing the actions taken by five national governments – Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia - in pursuit of a common objective, over the period 1990 – 2004. The policy goal considered is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions for the purpose of mitigating global climate change. Using a case study approach, it examines the national and international context in which the various governments developed and implemented their national actions in pursuit of that policy goal. Further, it analyses the policy instruments governments adopted for the purpose, developing a numerical assessment of the reliance placed on instruments of different type, and the results achieved in their application.

Taking account of the various explanatory frameworks, both the policy-making context and the observed policy actions are used to analyse the principal influences and motivations which have led to the outcome observed in each case. In addition to inferences of likely government motivations, the individual national case studies provide both an examination of real policy instruments in use, and measures of the reliance placed on different instrument types, and their effectiveness. In three of the cases, the dominant motivation inferred for government actions was that of the pursuit of the public interest, albeit markedly differing from textbook definitions of the “public interest”. In the remaining two studies, institutional constraints were seen to be the

major determinants of outcomes, with those institutional constraints underpinned in the one case by public interest considerations, and in the other by public choice influences. The cases also demonstrated the higher degree of policy effectiveness associated with the more coercive instruments such as regulation.

The cross-border commonality of the policy issue studied here made possible the examination of results from individual cases from a cross-case perspective. Further aspects were evident from that, notably the influence of international relationships on domestic policy-making, and the limited role played by environmental advocacy groups in influencing policy implementation. The case studies showed that the only country where environmental pressure group representation could be seen as significant was in Germany, where representation took place through formal political participation, and the leverage so gained.

The principal objective of this thesis has been to throw light on the motivations of and influences on government in policy-making and implementation. In addition however, the research approach adopted has provided insights into the very real issues faced by national governments seeking to counter a problem of the nature of greenhouse gas emission reduction. These issues, and the means by which different governments have sought to address them, are central determinants of the likely success or failure of attempts at coordinated international action in one of the most critical current challenges, that of global climate change.