

Post-political debate? Expert dissensus and the failure of Australia's ETS



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Experts and the market turn in climate policy

- Policy entrepreneurs
 - *..the presence of [market-based] measures is a remarkable testament to the influence of environmental economists on policy, and to the receptiveness of civil servants and politicians to new ideas (Pearce 2006:150).*
- Climate change economics as post-political
 - *the particular framing of climate change.. forecloses (or at least attempts to do so) politicization and evacuates dissent through the formation of a particular regime of environmental governance that revolves around consensus, agreement, participatory negotiation of different interests and technocratic expert management in the context of a non-disputed management of market-based socio-economic organization. (Swyngedouw 2010: 227)*

Dynamics of legitimation and Australia's ETS

- 2008-09 – The *Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme* debate
 - Concerted industry resistance, major wins on compensation, exemptions
 - Parliament split over CPRS 2009
 - Economists split over support for the ETS
 - Coalition proposes Direct Action Plan (DAP)
- 2010-11 – The *Clean Energy Future* package
 - Return to an ETS via carbon levy proposals
 - Emphasis on expert advice
 - Climate Change Authority as 'ratchet'
 - Public support for ETS and DAP at all time low



Illustrations of expert dissensus - 2009

- *..preference for a carbon price signal in the abstract is where the agreement among economists ends. (Parkinson 2009)*
- *An ETS raises a number of concerns, such as lack of flexibility for business, the corporate welfare implicit in giving away permits, the difficulty in removing or reforming the scheme when change is needed, significant compliance and administration costs, lack of transparency, continued rent-seeking and lobbying behaviour, and market manipulation. These costs would likely outweigh any potential environmental benefits. (Humphreys & Malpass 2009: 1)*
- *The CPRS is complex, expensive and ineffective. The government's strategy is to suggest to voters that they are taking significant action on climate change while simultaneously allowing them to assure industry that they aren't really doing anything. It may or not turn out to be a well-designed political tool, but as a policy tool it is an enormous distraction. (Denniss in Milne 2009)*



Illustrations of expert dissensus - 2009

- *I do favour an emissions trading scheme as the main means, not an emissions tax. This is because I contend that an effective ETS is politically more acceptable than an effective tax, not because it is theoretically better. (Pezzey 2009: 59)*
- *.. I'm arguing in general terms about emissions trading schemes and their problems, which cannot be redesigned. Most economists are arguing that you can redesign emissions trading schemes. (Spash in Colvin 2010)*
- *Politics, not economics, decides how much pollution will be allowed. Politics decides who will be allowed to pollute. Politics decides the conditions under which the pollution permits will be traded. (Berg 2011)*



Between technocracy and populism



The rise and fall of a climate action movement



Conclusions

- *The 2009 dissensus over carbon pricing shows that economists are active participants in the ongoing politicisation of carbon management*
- *Economic expertise doesn't deliver a post-political consensus on carbon pricing, but there is an underlying commitment to techno-managerialism*
- *Insofar as economic expertise de-thematizes class questions and distributive issues associated with climate/energy policy, it will likely continue to be subject to populist objections*

Thank you

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