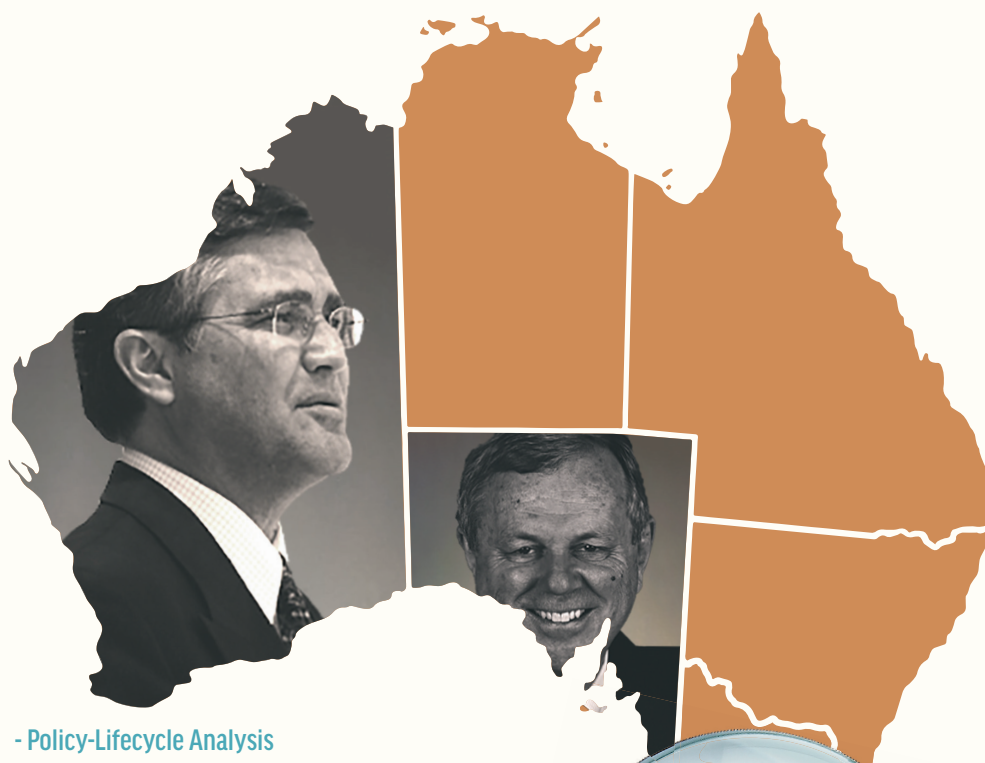


THE HIDDEN SUCCESSES OF THREE SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES

EVIDENCE FROM THREE AUSTRALIAN STATES



- Policy-Lifecycle Analysis
- Policy Legacy
- Political Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Kuntal Goswami

Charles Darwin University

Rolf Gerritsen

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EDITED BY ALISON-JANE HUNTER

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We sincerely thank Dr. Alison-Jane Hunter for editing our book.

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Forewords



Emeritus Professor Geoffery Gallop,
University of Sydney,
Ex-Member of the Western Australia,
Legislative Assembly (1986-2006),
Ex-Premier of Western Australia
(2001-2006).

Many governments around the world, notably at the local and regional-levels, have embraced a sustainability approach to governing. It's not just the investment and jobs that matter, integrating economic growth, social inclusion and protection of ecology is a good way of thinking about issues but not so easy to implement. It's not easy to bring three items to the table, each has its own logic and evidence, and find reconciliation in the public interest. Give and take will inevitably be there and all too often it can diminish rather than expand our policy choices. Nor is it helped by a

world where vested interests and populist fundamentalists are working hard to keep government as simple as possible and therefore well suited to political marketing. Indeed, the very idea of sustainability may be used as little more than a marketing tool rather than the basis for serious policy making.

In *The Hidden Successes of Three Sustainability Policies*, Goswami and Gerritsen start with the international and national context and finish with sustainability measurement and reporting by government agencies in three Australian States, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. There's lots of material on the development of the ideas that are most useful for students, and they don't shirk from the challenge of digging deep in order to inform those looking to utilise such approaches sensibly. For example, they demonstrate that the very idea of sustainability can, if only gradually, impact on the decision-making culture of an organisation if given sufficient support from "above". Sustainability is very much an idea in search of a leader, it has its own terms and conditions for success.

The material the authors gather to reach their conclusions is impressive – and presented with both clarity and precision. They use a range of statistical and other official sources, on budgets in particular, in order to seek answers to the question of impact. Where the facts lead us to modify what might otherwise be a theory about these matters, they let the fact speak for themselves rather than pushing them aside in the interests of a more coherent, if less complicated story. Indeed, the methodology, focusing on politics, economics, and institutions, is much more open-ended and relevant than those that start and finish with "theory". They understand that what is involved here is politicians with ideas, plus circumstances that can have impact, as well as existing structures that influence both behaviours and outcomes.

It's all too easy to see how the sustainability idea and its development as a plan for governing can lose favour in the real world of politics. The political logic goes as follows within government it will be said that such planning detracts from the economic and political necessities to create investment and jobs. This it does, say the critics, by constraining the market and shifting resources within government towards non-productive and politically doubtful ends. What this tells us is that "the economy"

has its vested interests and its ideologues of the free market right and the productivist left who fight hard against the effort to bring the triple-bottom-line and complexity to the table. They write, correctly I think and certainly as it applies in my case, that Bacon, Rann and Gallop were each in their own way social democrats seeking a new way forward from that of their micro-reforming predecessors and their green competitors. More could be made of this specific ideological battle; the GFC was a significant blow to the aspirations of the sustainability crew and their attempts to rise above the day-to-day issues. The Pandemic, on the other hand, is giving some encouragement to the idea that it's not just about the economy, as important as that is. Hence, it is timely to accept the climate change risk and the message it has sent about the flaws in a single-minded pursuit of economic growth.

The book is a useful reminder of the intensity of the politics that have surrounded sustainability as a project. We do need the stakeholder analysis that Goswami and Gerritsen use to inform us of “the balance of forces” within government (both political and bureaucratic) and without (both vested interests and ideologues) when it comes to the question of the range and depth of support for, indeed of opposition to the very idea of sustainability. After all, it's one thing to develop policies that are relevant and feasible but quite another to ensure their acceptability. It's a strength of *The Hidden Successes* that it incorporates politics and legitimacy questions into the analysis, not to make a case against sustainability but rather to remind us, as is the case with all public policy, that material interests, professional prejudices and ideological warriors are all at the table making life difficult for those seeking a long term, strategic approach to government.



Associate Professor Kate Crowley,
Public and Environmental Policy,
University of Tasmania.

Sustainability agenda has long been an imperative for urgent action at national level in Australia. In the late 1980s, Australia attempted to develop an ultimately doomed national ecologically sustainable development process (ESD) that did not survive the shifting political landscape. However, a new language and imperative worked its way into the planning lexicon. In its own *National Strategy for Sustainable Development* (1992), the Commonwealth government of Australia defined sustainability as:

‘the use, conservation and enhancement of the community’s resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased’ (Commonwealth of Australia 1992:128). Once defined, this was not a concept that could readily be abandoned, however much it may officially have failed to gain traction at Federal level. Indeed, as *The Hidden Successes of Three Sustainability Policies* shows, by way of detailed empirical analysis, sustainability culture has become deeply ingrained within Australian policy and practice at State level.

It is fair to say that sustainability has lost the impetus it once enjoyed internationally, although not without having deeply impacted policy practice. The OECD continues to promulgate sustainability in its reviews of OECD countries. It notes in its recent *Environmental Performance Review Australia* (2019) that some progress has been made on its recommendation to integrate environmental objectives into Australian State/Territory processes. Otherwise, the OECD’s policy briefs and strategies for advancing sustainable development are now somewhat dated, having been displaced by broader influences, like the global financial crisis,

climate change, green growth, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the OECD remains committed to its member countries working to address the economic, social, *and* environmental challenges of globalisation. The member states of the United Nations (2020) have a more active sustainability agenda, adopted in 2015, to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. Amongst other aims, this agenda calls for local action embedding transition into the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities, and local authorities.

Invariably the pressure for localised sustainability responses was felt at the subnational level in Australia, inevitably as part of the state planning process that is predominantly favoured by Labor governments. The States and Territories are constitutionally responsible for the environment and social services delivery after all, typically along with safeguarding the social and environmental spaces. *The Hidden Successes of Three Sustainability Policies* details their sustainability efforts, with policy championing, implementation, evaluation, learning and adaptive governance prominent in its analysis. In Tasmania, a modest sustainability culture has persisted despite the last decade of conservative government, as can be seen in inclusivity practices, such as Indigenous policy advances, climate change funding and emissions reduction actions. In contrast, the creeping lack of transparency makes it more difficult to define definitively a practice of transitioning towards greater transparency, even under Labor governments. Importantly, however, *The Hidden Successes of Three Sustainability Policies* concludes that subnational governments will persist in the pursuit of sustainability where federal governments fail.

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Preface

This book provides a practical demonstration of policymaking and policy life-cycle analysis. In order to accomplish these objectives, we have used three Australian state-level policies, Tasmania *Together*, South Australia's Strategic Plan and the Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy, as case studies.

We all hear about a government policy or scheme when it is formally announced in the newspaper, or on television but we do not know where the initial idea comes from, nor how and why the idea is transformed into a formal political agenda. These are some of the important questions we need to understand in the field of policymaking. Equally important is to explore how and why a policy loses its relevance.

This book answers these behind-the-scenes questions. It provides a framework to investigate the life cycle of a public policy and a multi-disciplinary approach to understand the level of commitment towards holistic sustainability (environment, economic, and social). This makes the book unique and unconventional and therefore, it can be used as a practical guide for research students, academics, and public policy practitioners.

The book investigates every stage of these three selected case studies to understand the steps involved in policymaking and the reasons for

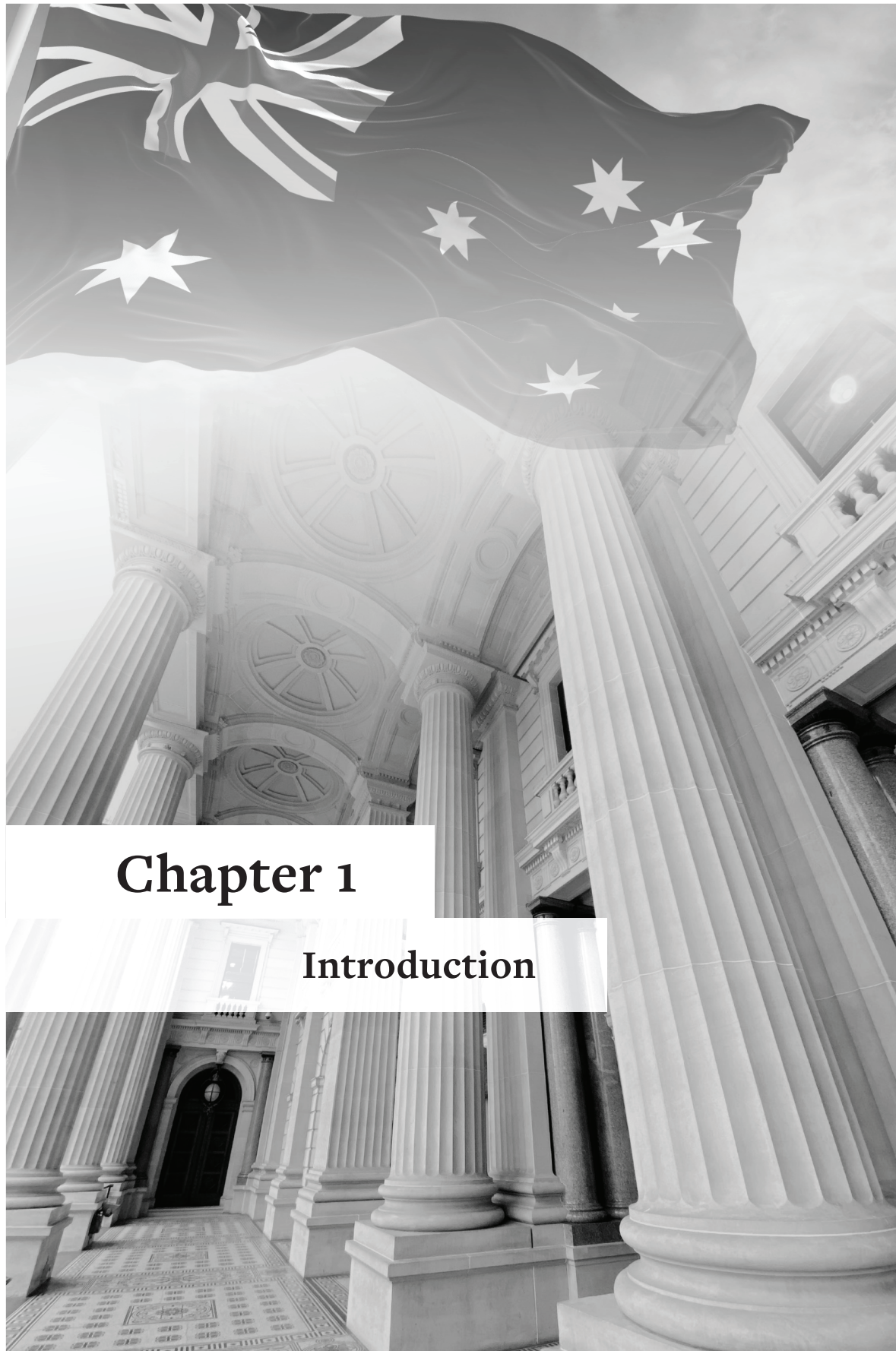
policy redundancy. All discourses are substantiated using a wide range of sources, including interviews with relevant stakeholders. A public policy is like a product, and it has a shelf life. However, the success of a policy lies in its commitment and legacy. The book also outlines a process to analyse public agencies' internal commitment to the sustainability agenda.

In addition to providing practical illustrations of policy analysis, this book also presents an overview of how the sustainable development agenda is disseminated and incorporated into the public policy domain. Each of the selected policies had a role in advancing the sustainable development agenda in the political domain.

Overall, the book is bold and informative, addresses both the national and international contexts, and uses parliamentary discussions, budget, public agency's annual reports, stakeholders' comments, and other statistical data to seek answers to the question of impact. It also provides clarity and precision through the use of relevant diagrams and tables that summarise the text.

This empirical research also demonstrates that the very idea of sustainability can, if only gradually, have a positive impact on the decision-making culture of an organisation if sufficient support from policy champions is given. We reaffirmed this point in our postscript chapter.

Finally, the book reveals that institutional factors may facilitate the diffusion of a sustainable development value-based policy model, but the actual implementation of the policy framework depends on fortuitous political-economic factors. Hence, the book highlights the relevance of understanding and analysing the political dimension of sustainable development (O'Connor 2006).



Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context

Public policy is the political offspring of certain political processes, movements, values or ideologies. Every policy is drafted with an agenda to bring about change. However, every policy has a political shelf-life, no matter how great its objectives. Generally, a policy's shelf-life is linked to the political fortunes of its champion or of the political entity that drafted it. At the same time, the success of a policy can be judged by its commitment and policy legacy. Furthermore, public policy is not 'born out of the blue'. Instead, it is born out of a political, economic, social, environmental context that leads to the drafting of the policy. A policy also goes through different phases of relevance in its life cycle before it loses its shelf-life.

Hence, this book provides an analytical perspective of policymaking through systematic investigation of three Australian state-level public policies of the early 2000s. In Australia, between 1998 and the first half of the 2000s, all Labor Party-governed states adopted holistic-sustainability (environmental, economic, and social) value-based strategic plans or strategies. Through this new policy value, the Labor Party attempted to overcome the shortcomings of the New Public Management policy model. In this book three such over-arching state-level policies are selected to represent this trend. The three policies are: Tasmania *Together* (TT), South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP) and Western Australia's State Sustainability Strategy (WA's SSS).

The key question is whether the Labor Party's adoption of these policies was driven by a set of noble values as a kind of political-enlightenment, or if there were any deep-seated political motivation. In addition, we also looked at the political-economic context and the circumstances that led to the adoption of an holistic-sustainability value-based strategic plan or strategy. What led to what? What sort of policy-lifecycle pattern did these policies follow? Was there any policy legacy and impact? All these policy analysis perspectives have been addressed in this book.

About the Authors



Dr Kuntal Goswami is a multi-disciplinary professional with an academic and research background. He founded the *Australian Centre for Sustainable Development Research & Innovation (ACSDRI)* in 2018. He publishes and co-edits *THE BLUE PLANET – Magazine*. He teaches in the university and the vocational education sectors. His teaching and research interests are in Accounting & Finance, Investment Analysis, Taxation, Accounting Infor-

mation Systems, Marketing Management, Responsible Business Practice, Entrepreneurship & Innovation, Sustainable Development Goals, Public Policy Analysis, Climate Change Policy Agenda & Solutions, Carbon Accounting, Circular Economy Business Model, and Sustainability Accounting & Reporting.

He also runs an IPA Accounting Firm – Accounting & Business Care - since 2018. He is a Tax Practitioners Board (TBP) Registered Tax Accountant, and Business Activity Statement (BAS) Agent. In addition, he is an Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) Agent.

He has a Joint PhD from the Australian National University & Charles Darwin University. Currently he is an academic & researcher at Central Queensland University and Charles Darwin University.

He is a member of the Institute of Public Accountants (IPA), the Accounting & Finance Association of Australia and New Zealand (AFAANZ); the Centre for Social and Environmental Research (CSEAR, UK), the Institute of Managers & Leaders, and the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ). He is a Certified Climate Reality Leader and a member of the Climate Reality Leadership Corps Team.



Prof. Rolf Gerritsen is a Professorial Research Fellow, at Charles Darwin University.

Prof. Gerritsen has taught at various universities, including a decade at the Australian National University in the Graduate Program in Public Policy. He has also spent five years as Director of the Australian Centre for Regional and Local Government Studies, as a senior

Ministerial staff member at both the Commonwealth and Territory levels and has ran his own research consultancy for a number of years. Between 2002 and 2006, he was Director of Social/Economic Policy in the Chief Minister's Department in the Northern Territory. Before joining Charles Darwin University in late 2007, Professor Gerritsen was the "Outback Livelihoods" professorial project leader in the Tropical Savannas Cooperative Research Centre (2006-07).

Prof. Gerritsen's research interests are primarily in public policy and he has published in several policy fields with an emphasis on: Economic and regional development policy, Remote and Northern Australian development, Indigenous development and community resilience, Natural resource and conservation management, IGR, and local government and policy management.

THE HIDDEN SUCCESSES OF THREE SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES

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