

CHAPTER 6

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

The Australian print media's reporting of the environment has never been more intense or important in the context of public policy debate than it is in 2007. The issues of global warming and climate change are scientifically complex for journalists to cover and pose unknown risk to the community. This type of media coverage is far removed from the early years of environmental consciousness in Australia during the late 1960's. At that time, the campaign to save a national icon, the Great Barrier Reef, from mining and oil exploration had grabbed media attention. The frequency, depth and quality of environmental reporting are often debated, but what emerges in a review of the literature is the way in which print media coverage of issues has changed during the past forty years. In anticipation of a detailed contemporary analysis, this chapter will trace those changes and identify patterns that have emerged in three time periods Doyle (2000) has acknowledged as representing different stages of environmentalism. The first period dates from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s; the second period covers from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s; and the third stage of environmentalism takes in the years from the mid 1990s to the present. Media coverage in these periods reflects the evolution of the environment movement and its campaigning strategies, a changing emphasis on problems of concern and the 'routinisation' of the environment as an issue.

A review of the literature has found that the patterns of print media coverage are based on the dominant environmental issues of wilderness preservation and opposition to uranium mining, as well as an emphasis on personalities, visual imagery, corporatism, local and global threats and the political process. The intensity of reporting has also fluctuated dramatically since the environment, as an issue of public concern, reached its peak in the period from 1989 to 1993 (Anderson, 1993; Pakulski and Crook, 1998). Media and politicians have contributed to the "routinisation" of environmental issues— that is, their move from "the new and special to the expected and familiar" (Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 12) The literature review also reveals how little academic analysis has been done on any form of Australian media coverage of the environment since the late 1990s. What has been recognised is the "decline of the environment

as a significant policy concern on the mainstream political agenda" (Jensen-Lee, 2001) soon after the election of the Howard Government in 1996 and the growing presence of environmental organisations and independent news sites on the World Wide Web (Pickerill, 2000; Smith, 2001). More recently, Cullum (2004) has looked at five years of climate change reporting in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* from 1997–2002, while Lester (2005) has examined the media's use of language in covering Tasmania's wilderness conflict. These trends have been identified in research that will examine how Australian print media has covered environmental issues during the past decade. The changes in this reporting are significant because they not only demonstrate how environmentalism has evolved, but also raise questions about the core rationale of the media to inform the community about important issues. Smith (2001) has argued that traditional media is incapable of reporting on complex environmental problems and its approach of focusing on personalities and protests is akin to "covering economics by only reporting bank robberies" (Muller, 2002). This chapter will review the role Australia's print media has played in covering the environment during the past forty years.

REPORTING PEOPLE AND PLACES: THE LATE 1960s TO MID 1980s

The first period of reportage, from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s, featured some of Australia's most memorable environmental campaigns and activists. They were fighting to save iconic landmarks such as the Barrier Reef, Lake Pedder, Fraser Island and the Franklin River. Growing public dissent and mass mobilisation characterised this period and the strategy was well suited to the media's needs for strong visuals, colour and movement. The physical landscapes of coral reefs, sand dunes and magnificent wilderness offered stunning images, while media-savvy leaders such as Judith Wright, John Sinclair and Bob Brown provided the colour and strategy as they led fellow activists in their campaigns. These environmental battles were waged during a period of great political and social change in Australia, providing fresh, exciting content for television, newspapers and radio.

At this point in a review of the literature on the Australian environment movement, it is evident that the early campaigns were based on a strategy of public education with the media focussing on a specific spokesperson to deliver the message on behalf of the group concerned. Pakulski (cited in Hutton and Connors, 1999, p. 126) recognised this phenomenon when comparing the environment movements in Germany and Australia. He argued that one aspect of their formation was "the emergence of leading personalities and exemplary figures at the extra-local, national level". This characteristic contrasts with an organisation like Greenpeace, which operates predominantly as a group of activists without the focus on one "charismatic leader" (Hansen, 1993, p. 167).

THE REEF CAMPAIGN

The significance of the campaign to protect the Great Barrier Reef has been widely acknowledged in the literature that examines the Australian environment movement. Bowen and Bowen (2002, p. 4) suggested that the “Save the Reef” campaign of the 1960s and 1970s was the country’s “most politically vigorous and successful early environmental protest movement”. Young (1996, p. 67) identified it as one of Australia’s first large scale environmental conflicts, along with moves to stop the flooding of Lake Pedder in Tasmania. The literature also recognises the role that the media played in reporting on the issue. In examining the widespread public support that developed around the Reef campaign, Young (1996, p. 68) focuses on the role of “a sympathetic media” with particular reference made to the then new national newspaper *The Australian*. On December 24, 1969 the paper, which had promoted environmental issues through a series of feature articles, described the battle as “the most sustained public campaign in memory on a conservation issue” in Australia, after mass protests adopted the “Save the Barrier Reef” slogan (Bowen and Bowen, 2002, p. 317). The following year, *The Australian* continued to promote awareness about environmental issues with a series of stories devoted to a range of concerns, including the Reef. These significant state-based environmental issues attracted strong national newspaper coverage; this aspect of state-based development under a national media spotlight will be examined further in a more detailed study of environmental press coverage.

For any campaign to be successful, it needs to be brought to the public’s attention. Judith Wright was only too well aware of this, and through her membership of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, was involved in a leading advocacy role from the beginning. Wright and her colleagues used the media, strategically, as part of a public awareness campaign. The battle began after an Innisfail newspaper featured a limestone mining application that would allow the removal of coral from nearby Ellison Reef. Wright (1977, p. 13) acknowledged that she and fellow activists deliberately courted the media, specifically a journalist from *The Australian*, Barry Wain, to engender public interest in this issue because they believed it was very newsworthy. They explained to Wain that the Ellison Reef case was just the beginning, and that more controversy was ahead as oil drilling permits had been issued. The national newspaper’s interest in the story paid off. As Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 103) noted, “conservation stories sold well, and Wright always kept them informed”. The Queensland Government eventually rejected the mining application, but the oil drilling permits remained.

In October 1969, the Reef activists would again turn to the media for a strategic boost to their campaign. A jointly owned Japanese-Australian company had plans for the first offshore oil drilling to take place at Repulse Bay off Mackay. Judith Wright (1977, p. 99) claimed that the southern media appeared to have gone quiet, so she and fellow activist John Busst decided further publicity was

required. With *The Australian* newspaper firmly committed to the issue, Wright (1977, p. 99) recognised that she had become “a kind of curiosity showpiece in the conservation movement”. She made herself available for a round of media interviews with newspapers and television programs such as the ABC’s *This Day Tonight* (TDT), which was considered the leading television current affairs program of that period. TDT was at the forefront of developing that genre of television and played a major role in the ABC’s effort to report on regional and rural Australia, as well as catering for a metropolitan audience. Mulligan and Hill (2001, p. 158) have also suggested that Wright’s high profile in the literary world meant the media would focus on her as a spokesperson. Her personal reflections on the outcome of the media campaign suggest she knew exactly what was required to capture the news headlines. She wrote:

When the TV programme and the press articles came out, it was clear that the move had been a good one. All the southern newspapers began once more to carry the news that oil drilling was about to begin in Reef waters and that the Commonwealth’s assurances seemed to be coming to nothing after all. Again the Reef was a big news story.
(Wright, 1977, p. 100)

Judith Wright was, indeed, a personality, but not just because of her literary career. She had demonstrated all the skills of a “media savvy” activist, and with her colleagues, employed strategies for future environmental campaigns to follow. Through her role in the national movement to save the Reef, she had become an identifiable media spokesperson for a major environmental cause. Young (1996, p. 70) acknowledges that the campaign’s success in having the Reef declared a marine national park was “the first major victory for environment groups in Australia”. The media’s contribution to the campaign was its focus on personality as much as upon political considerations.

THE FRASER ISLAND CAMPAIGN

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, two other environmental campaigns began at opposite ends of Australia, receiving significant media coverage. As a “second wave” of environmentalism (Hutton and Connors, 1999; Mulligan and Hill, 2001) this period embraced a broader agenda of issues and activists were willing to adopt new strategies to achieve their aims. International groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace had also arrived in Australia bringing a global perspective to the local environment movement. However, the focus was on already Tasmania’s Lake Pedder and the sand hills of Fraser Island off the southern Queensland coast.

From the campaign launched in the early 1970s to stop sand mining on Fraser Island emerged another environmental advocate, who also proved to be adept at dealing with the media and promoting the news values of that particular issue. In 1971, John Sinclair and fellow conservationists formed the Fraser Island Defence

Organisation or FIDO, as it was commonly called, to be the “watchdog of Fraser Island” (Mulligan and Hill, 2001, p. 160). Again, in a strategy similar to the one Judith Wright adopted, Sinclair took his story to the national media and persuaded the *National Times* to publish a feature article (“Paradise in Peril”, 1974). Challenges to mining leases in the local mining warden’s court gained him even more media attention. Sinclair became a familiar face in both Australian print and broadcast media, as part of the campaign to educate the public about the beauty and conservation value of Fraser Island. FIDO fought a long difficult battle against the mining companies and Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s Queensland Government. It has been described (Hutton and Connors, 1999, p. 146) as “one of the most bitter battles fought by a militant, campaigning, nature conservation group against a large corporation”. After lengthy political and legal battles, the island was finally placed on the World Heritage List in 1992. This campaign demonstrated the value of using the media to draw attention to the beauty and conservation value of another iconic Australian landmark.

THE GREEN BANS

The emergence of strong personalities in media coverage of Australian environmental issues continued in the 1970s, when a conflict developed over preserving open space in central Sydney. Trade unionist Jack Munday led the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation in its successful Green Bans campaign from 1971 to 1975. A group of Sydney women trying to preserve open space noted his comments in the press about trade unions participating in a broader range of social, political and environmental issues. The two groups came together to form the Green Ban movement and, with the help of large scale community support, waged a successful campaign against the development of bushland in the New South Wales capital. Munday (Hutton, 1987, p. 107) described this alliance as two enlightened groups coming together in a “common environmental struggle”. His skills in media advocacy had helped to give the Green Bans considerable coverage.

As the 1970’s progressed, the environment movement in Australia grew rapidly in a climate of widespread social activism which coincided with the election of the reformist Whitlam Government in 1972. Environmental protest campaigns not only featured strong personalities, but also more radical tactics designed to attract media coverage, which they did. The large scale protests of the Green Ban movement and the anti-uranium campaigns both featured a strong grassroots element as well as links to the Left and trade unions.

DIRECT ACTION BLOCKADES

Media attention turned to the northern New South Wales rainforest at Terania Creek near Nimbin in 1979, where the new, more radical approach to environmental campaigning would be put into practice to stop clearfelling of State forests. Conservationists from throughout the country arrived to join a four-week blockade of a road into the Terania forests, during which protesters stood in

front of loggers' bulldozers and climbed trees endeavouring to save them. Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 153) argued that this action "radically changed the nature of campaigning for nature conservation" because it relied on direct action to communicate the message to the public. This form of environmental protest, in which activists performed for the media, was pioneered by the international organisation, Greenpeace, which originated in Canada in 1971. However, as a strategy, it was yet to be employed systematically at a national level.

The Terania Creek campaign, with its use of set-piece actions, was also well suited to the visual demands of television news. The novel protest strategies drew an attentive media contingent, and Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 153) acknowledged the work of two ABC television journalists, Jeni Kendall and Paul Tait, who reported on the story for a national audience. The capacity to report national issues in depth made the ABC, like *The Australian*, a significant forum of debate. Activist Ian Cohen has described this form of environmental campaigning as theatre:

Theatre of the environment uses the vulture of the media (usually a tool of the environment) to present the story; we dangle and perform, often in precarious circumstances, making ourselves and our act irresistible to the press. It is a play, an irreverent game, yet at the same time it provides a vital conduit for messages otherwise unable to be transmitted into a monopolistic realm. (cited in Hutton and Connors, 1999, p. 154)

The message of the Terania Creek protest was certainly heard by the then Premier of New South Wales, Neville Wran. He was, initially, reluctant to act, but changed his mind after hearing a radio report about the issue on the ABC's *Science Show* (Hutton and Connors, 1999). Ultimately, his influence in a Cabinet meeting in 1982 resulted in saving 93% of the rainforest area in northern New South Wales that conservationists wanted protected.

After the media had shown keen interest in the protests to save these rainforests, its focus moved to another forest battle in the wilderness of south-west Tasmania. The formation of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society in 1976 sent a message to the rest of Australia, according to one of its early directors, Bob Brown, and that was about the value of wilderness and leaving the "wild Earth" untouched (Hutton, 1987, p. 41). Much of the literature on the national environment movement (Burgmann, 1993; Doyle, 2000; Hutton and Connors, 1999; Pakulski and Crook, 1998) acclaims the 1980s as a period of "revolution in environmental awareness". In the early years of that decade, Brown led a campaign that *The Australian* newspaper later referred to as "the environment fight of the century" (*The Australian*, 29 July, 2004) to save the Franklin River.

The media's role in reporting on the Franklin River campaign has been widely documented (Burgmann, 1993; Doyle and Kellow, 1995; Hutton, 1987; Hutton and Connors, 1999; Mulligan and Hill, 2001; Pakulski and Crook, 1998;

Serventy, 1988). The campaign has been described as “the environmental fight of the century” (*The Australian*, July 29, 2004) and “the pinnacle of ecocentric, wilderness politics” (Mulligan and Hill, 2001, p. 243). However, Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 158) dispute the claim that it was “the first great wilderness campaign of the modern environment movement”. They argue that other battles were occurring at the same time in the forests of south-west Western Australia, the northern New South Wales rainforests and even earlier at Lake Pedder. It could be argued that the Franklin campaign was the most memorable because of the powerful visual images of towering rainforest and misty river valleys that the media, both print and broadcast, brought into Australian living rooms and onto breakfast tables during the blockade.

The physical setting for the conflict between wilderness activists and Hydro Electricity Commission workers was a perfect backdrop for newspaper photographs and television reports. Pakulski and Crook (1998, p. 9) noted the irresistible quality of the campaign as a television news story that saw more than 2000 people involved in non-violent direct action. They described how “it took on a mythic quality as heroic and idealistic protesters battled a pragmatic and materialist enemy against the backdrop of the wild river and forest...” (Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 9). Montgomery (cited in Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 88) observed it was the “the first peak environmental story to run consistently on page one”, and the standard of the campaign, in terms of scale and intensity, could be compared with previous Greenpeace operations. The wilderness battle aroused so much interest in the state of Tasmania, that *The Australian* newspaper was moved to appoint its first full time correspondent there.

Using the term “frame” to refer to a structure or central theme where stories can be located, the media framing devices of protest and personalisation were both evident in the television news at the time, as activists and workers clashed and campaign spokesperson, Bob Brown faced journalists. The “biggest conservation protest ever held in Australia”—at least up to that time—was part of a skilful media campaign led by the “well dressed and well spoken” Dr Brown (Burgmann, 1993, p. 199). The then director of the Wilderness Society, Brown (Hutton, 1987, p. 44) wrote about the Franklin River and referred to the wilderness and “its articulate self-advocacy” that appeared on television, in books and newspapers. The broadsheet and public media took the opportunity to inform their audience about environmental issues through people like Bob Brown. In recent years, environmentalists such as Ian Lowe of the Australian Conservation Foundation (AFC) have written regular columns on issues of concern. In the early 1980s, Brown claimed the depiction of wilderness heritage in the media resulted in an aware and transformed Australian public that demanded the destruction stop. The national and international nature of the Franklin campaign, which had drawn many people from outside Tasmania, contrasted with the earlier Terania Creek and Nightcap campaigns where local activists led the protest.

Bob Brown became the “media face” of an environmental campaign in the manner that Judith Wright, John Sinclair and Jack Mundey had before him. His leadership in south-west Tasmania and determination to succeed made him a central figure, but he also had a “presence” and knew how to engage with the media. Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 159) acknowledged this in describing Brown’s role as being “at the apex of the campaign”.

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT?: THE MID 1980s TO EARLY 1990s

The second period of environmental reportage covered the years from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s and encompassed much of the Hawke and Keating prime ministerships. Print media coverage of the environment reached a peak during this timeframe in 1988-89, but the reporting also revealed a change in emphasis. This occurred as the environment movement’s strategies shifted from mass rallies and direct action to working within the political process. Some sections of the movement, notably the ACF and its leader Phillip Toyne, dealt closely with the Labor Government in formulating policy. Wilderness and anti-uranium campaigns at the Daintree and Roxby Downs continued, while, according to Doyle (2000, p. 140) other campaigns “formed, surged and dissipated”. The nature of the media’s reporting had changed from dealing with “discrete issues” to “complex syndromes”. Stories about pollution and, later, ozone depletion were seen through the more dominant frames of ecology, science and technology (Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 80) rather than simply in terms of activism and conflict. Sydney’s print media, especially the *Sydney Morning Herald*, investigated local beach pollution, which offered a variety of news frames including politics and threats to health and lifestyle.

An analysis of the Australian environment movement during the 1980s revealed a move towards corporatisation of key organisations (Hutton and Connors, 1999). The Wilderness Society had already demonstrated its organisational and campaigning skills in both the Franklin and Daintree battles, while the ACF had become actively and successfully engaged in political lobbying. Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 167) claimed that these groups along with Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature had developed structures and employed personnel to sustain political influence in a manner similar to industry and unions. Media coverage of the Wilderness Society and ACF activities had been well documented in Australia, and while people were familiar with Greenpeace, its role as an activist group was highlighted in media reports of the *Rainbow Warrior’s* bombing in Auckland harbour on July 19, 1985. The vessel was in the area to protest against French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. Ten years later in 1995, Australian environmentalists protested against France’s continued policy of nuclear testing in that area. This ten year gap exemplifies the way in which certain environmental issues, such as uranium

mining and nuclear energy, drift in and out of the media's focus depending on the context of the story. A further ten years on, in 2005, the subject of nuclear power as an alternative to coal-fired power stations was again being discussed in all media forums.

The employment of new organisational tactics did not, however, deter some environmental groups from taking more direct action over specific issues. The wetlands and escarpments of the Kakadu area in the Northern Territory became famous in 1988 when both conservationists and the traditional owners, the Gagadju and Jarwon, campaigned to protect them from mineral exploration and mining. Again, the Wilderness Society and the ACF, along with the Northern Territory Environment Centre, took direct action by occupying a site called Coronation Hill. This was the last of three stages in the declaration of a national park to protect the Kakadu area. Hutton and Connors (1999, p. 177) claim that this strategy, which attracted extensive media coverage, made Kakadu a "household name". Ultimately, the conservationists and traditional owners overcame tensions and political obstacles to achieve World Heritage listing for the area, but Hutton and Connors (1999) state that sections of the Hawke Labor Government believed the environment movement had achieved too much influence. Environmentalists, for their part, were concerned at the possibility of diluting their platforms through political alliances.

Media coverage of the environment was also exerting positive influence outside politics by the 1980s. Tasmania was again the centre of media attention over an environmental issue with the dispute over the siting of the Wesley Vale pulp mill flaring in the late 1980s. The story received wide coverage which often focused on the campaign leader, Christine Milne. She argued that stories specifically about the chlorine bleaching of paper boosted "green consumerism" and resulted in increased public demand for recycled paper products. It has been noted elsewhere (Burgmann, 1993, p. 239) that the media took up the issue of "green consumerism" further when the *Weekend Australian* published an eight-page supplement in July 1989, titled a "Personal action guide for the Earth". It outlined how individuals could change their behaviour, as consumers, to save the planet by refusing to buy environmentally harmful products. Similarly, it could be argued today that media coverage about the dangers of plastic bags to marine life and the general environment resulted in an increasing usage of "green" shopping bags as a more desirable alternative. However, within the broader context of the environment movement, the move to emphasise individual actions and initiatives, as witnessed in the media, may have inadvertently reduced support for the Greens as a political movement. But Burgmann (1993, p. 240) argued that "subtly, green consumerism suggests there is no need to join a green political movement in order to achieve change". One implication for the media was a new emphasis on products rather than just personalities or places.

GLOBAL THREATS

Wilderness conservation and opposition to logging in conjunction with the related political issues placed the environment firmly in Australia's media headlines in the early 1980s; however, research into public opinion revealed the issues were not uppermost in people's thinking. Pakulski and Crook (1998, p. 9) argued that concern about the environment within the wider community was low at that time, and largely centred on educated urban residents. By the end of the decade, however, the position had changed as global environmental and ecological issues received 'broad and intense media coverage....that coincided with a sharpened political salience in the year preceding the 1990 Federal election (Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 2) Anderson (1993, p. 51) acknowledged the legitimacy of environmental issues in the political arena across Britain and Europe during the same period. The period from the end of 1988 and throughout 1989 witnessed what these researchers describe as a "dramatic increase" in press reports, with global environmental threats cast as the major issues in the popular press and on television. They said:

The most notable feature of the newspaper coverage in that period, apart from its sheer volume, was the emergence and deployment of a range of interpretive frames for environmental news that were not tied to the politics of forest protest (Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 10).

The increased media coverage of a wider range of environmental issues led to a higher level of public concern. Specific issues reported on at the time included global warming, ozone depletion, toxic spills and pollution of coastal waters and beaches. According to Pakulski and Crook (1998), stories about coastal and beach pollution featured strongly in the Sydney media, to the extent that they saw them as rivaling wilderness protests in newsworthiness the growing community concern about the environment was reflected in the increasing array of green organisations appearing throughout the country, including Landcare which was formed in 1989.

Public and media concern over the environment peaked in the years 1988 to 1993. It ranked just behind unemployment and health in terms of issues that voters considered important in a Federal election. During this period, media reporting was intense; there were high levels of concern about pollution, and green groups were not only proliferating but enjoying political and financial patronage from the Federal Labor government and the Australian Democrats. Despite all these factors signifying that environmental issues were important to people, the early 1990s experienced a general decline in activism across most of the world, including Australia. Anderson (1993, p. 51), writing about trends in Europe at the same period, notes a similar decline of interest in environmental issues, although recycling programs and green consumerism continued to attract support, becoming routine activities in daily life.

A 'ROUTINE' ISSUE?: MID 1990s TO PRESENT

The third period of media coverage to be examined extends from the mid 1990s to the present. In the early stages of this period, increased Green political representation saw the media refocus on individual "personalities", which reflected journalism's fascination with the "new" and "personal". In this context, the personality cult of the media became more closely allied with the electoral cycle. The "routinisation" of the environment, in 1995-96, contributed to a decline in the intensity of media coverage, public concern and political debate (Pakulski and Crook, 1998), all of which has occurred in Australia during this period. Jensen-Lee (2001) also acknowledged that the similarities in the environmental policies of the major parties lessened the opportunities for media stories based on political conflict. A recent exception was the release of the Liberal and Labor parties' old growth forest policies in Tasmania, before the last Federal election in 2004. Of the issues that have concerned the environment movement in more recent years, such as land degradation, water and climate change, activists and even some journalists believe that the media has not reported these stories adequately (Muller, 2002). Recent content analysis of Australian print media by the author (Macdonald, 2007) shows a dramatic increase in the coverage of climate change in 2006, especially since the release of former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" and the reports from the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change. One of the aims of the current study is to understand how such renewed interest impacts upon environmental reporting patterns. Will it usurp other issues or lead to a wider and deeper level of coverage?

GREEN POLITICS

As the 1990s unfolded, the environment movement had assumed a stronger political position with a total of 12 Green politicians elected to Australian parliaments. However, Pakulski and Crook (1998) showed there were signs of a decline in the green vote and by the middle of the decade issues such as taxation, reconciliation, One Nation and the Asian economic crises dominated the media. These changes indicated "a predictable final stage in an 'issue lifetime'" (Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 12), although it was noted that public concern and consumer behaviour continued in the right direction. The researchers argued that environmental issues had become "routinised" in media coverage, public issue agendas and as part of the political discourse. Their work recognises 1995 and 1996 as years when print media coverage of environmental issues revealed this "routinised" approach.

Fifteen years after the campaign to save the Franklin River, issues relating to wilderness conservation had disappeared from media coverage, albeit temporarily, and other stories about environmental themes such as global threats, disasters and ecological prudence had risen to prominence. Recent data (Macdonald, 2007) shows a low level of stories about forests and logging in 1997-98, then a rise in 1999. The early focus on direct action and political conflict had enabled a group

like the Wilderness Society and its leader Bob Brown to maintain a high media profile, while pursuing a successful outcome in the Franklin campaign. Pakulski and Crook (1998, p. 78) pointed out that the dominant issues of the late 1980s - global warming and ozone depletion - were largely science-driven, while politics and protest were marginalised as story framing devices. They noted that groups such as the Wilderness Society were "monopoly carriers of environmental issues" until the late 1980s. In the 1990s, identification with and support for such organisations gradually declined and prominent issues were not associated with any recognisable group. In addition, participation in direct activism transformed into the more conventional means of political expression such as the ballot box.

Green political representatives in Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s represented a new voice for the environment movement and this was reflected in the print media coverage. Research (Gabriel cited in Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 92) into Tasmanian press coverage shows that the Green independents and later the Tasmanian Greens replaced the Wilderness Society as the main spokespeople on environmental issues in that state. They became regular sources of information for the media and adopted mainstream party strategies to ensure inclusion in regular political reporting. Gabriel (cited Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 95) argued that the emergence of the Green party "not only affected the nature of environmental movement representation in the press, but has also changed the nature of environmental debates". A broader range of issues was addressed and the globalisation of concerns was acknowledged.

With environmental news becoming more "routinised" in the 1990s and a general decline in group membership and activism, the media found a new voice in the growing ranks of Green politicians being elected to State and Federal parliaments. Environmental groups were not excluded from the public debate but the frames of protest and blockades were no longer prominent. One journalist (Montgomery cited in Pakulski and Crook, 1998, p. 89) has even claimed that colleagues could no longer take staged action and arrests seriously. However, organisations like Greenpeace have still participated in activities designed to attract media attention, such as their on site protests against the Stuart Shale Oil Plant near Gladstone between 1999 and 2001.

Since the Greens as a political party established themselves in both State and Federal political arenas, different views have arisen as to how the media has covered their contributions to the political and environmental debate. Lohrey (2004) accused journalists of concentrating too much on personal profiles during election campaigns instead of focusing on the way the party determines policy and the emergence of "an important political demographic". Others such as ANOP pollster Rod Cameron (*Australian Financial Review*, 24 July 2004) believed Greens' leader Bob Brown "had been given a dream run by the media" and there had not been sufficient critical analysis undertaken of the party's performance. In this regard, routine reporting of the environment emulated the routinisation of party politics itself.

CONCLUSION

Australian environmental reporting since the late 1960s has been based on several recurring themes. Reportage of early campaigns such as the Great Barrier Reef, Fraser Island and the Franklin River featured strong individual leaders who built reputations for their ability to use the media to their advantage. Momentum gathered for the environment movement, as a whole, with the use of visually powerful protest action and blockades during the 1970s and into the 1980s. The political implications of campaigns such as Fraser Island and the Franklin River also ensured they received strong media coverage at the time. In the late 1980s, researchers (Pakulski and Crook, 1998) noted a change in the nature of reportage. The framing devices of protest and political conflict declined to be replaced with stories based more on ecology and scientific technological implications. This trend continued in the 1990s and is even more prominent in the new millennium with issues such as salinity and climate change.

The science and possible impact of global warming has been increasingly occupying the concerns of both the public and the media since 2005. A preliminary analysis of ten years of environmental coverage in three Australian newspapers, *The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Courier Mail* has revealed that climate change is overwhelmingly the most reported issue during that decade. However, the peaks and troughs of the data show that after a surge in media coverage of the 1997 Kyoto conference on climate change, there was a dearth of reporting until 2005. A survey of the international newspaper literature for this period, moreover, confirms the same trend in such countries as the United Kingdom and the United States.

The ongoing globalisation of both media and environment suggest this ongoing analysis will be of both international and national interest. Nevertheless, the patterns in Australian print media coverage of the environment outlined here are significant for several reasons. They reflect the evolution of issues from being a novelty to a point now where they are not just routinely reported but, with reference to climate change, have become a regular part of the daily public debate. They also demonstrate the media's early reliance on the news value of conflict and the need for strong visual images to justify reporting a story, regardless of its impact on the community. In 2007, the media is now relying on the news value of impact in covering the issue of global warming and how it may affect the planet if no action is taken by individuals or governments. Reporting on the environment has never been more challenging because of the scientific complexities that surround issues. It remains to be seen how well the media performs in contributing to this important debate.

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