

## Book reviews

### Outstanding textbook for Australian students

Susan A Moore

***Environmental Policy: Australian Practice in the Context of Theory (1st edition) by Ian Thomas***

The Federation Press, Annandale, NSW Australia, 2007, 492 pages, AUS\$69.50 (US\$60), ISBN-13 978-186297-603-3

I am always searching for the perfect book to teach policy to environmental science students. These students, many of whom go on to become impact assessment practitioners or work on the boundaries of the industry, as consultants or government regulators, come to policy with a limited understanding of what it is and its importance in professional practice. With this in mind, this book has been a pleasure to read and review.

The author provides essential context for the book in the Preface; two points make clear its value as a teaching text. The first very practical comment is that the book has a strong emphasis on implementation. As the author notes, without implementation a policy is useless. Having this point on the first page makes it clear to students that this book is grounded in reality and policy should be taken seriously. Second, he emphasises that all policy involves politics and so we cannot ignore it. I have found that a dislike and even disdain by students for the place of politics in environmental management has hindered their understanding of environmental policy. So again, making this comment on the first pages of this text is particularly useful.

The book is then divided into four parts. Part A provides a background for environmental policy. This has a strong focus on the place of values in environmental

management, making it important reading for all of us involved in environmental management and impact assessment. This part also briefly reviews the history of environmentalism in Australia.

Part B overviews the range of environmental policy, moving from the international arena through local government to corporate environmental policy. The international chapter focuses on strategies, the Commonwealth (Australian/national level of governance) chapter covers both strategies and legislation, and the states and territories chapter focuses on legislation. It would have provided a more comprehensive overview if strategies had also been covered at a state level, however, the critical question with describing policy is where do you stop in terms of the level of detail and description included. The local government chapter is the most comprehensive, covering strategies, legislation and self-regulatory approaches, such as environmental management systems.

Part C provides a wealth of policy theory. The author has strategically positioned this material in the middle of the book where its value can be realised. He also begins this part with an overview where the importance of theory is made abundantly clear: "... if we ignore policy, and the experience that has grown around policy, we run the very likely chance of 'reinventing the wheel'." (page 155).

The policy cycle (Bridgman and Davis, 2004) is used to organise the theoretical material, giving it an implementation focus. Landcare policy, a peculiarly Australian response to rural landscape management but with implications and transferability worldwide, is used to illustrate the theoretical material. The chapters in this part move through agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, policy instruments (also titled implementation), monitoring and evaluation. These are all standard elements of the policy cycle and underpin the description of policy in numerous public policy texts (for instance, Hogwood and Gunn, 1992; Howlett and Ramesh, 2003).

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Part D provides much-needed information on the influences on policy. I would have been tempted to include this part earlier, but perhaps readers need to understand environmental policy as a practical and theoretical enterprise before the influences make sense, hence the positioning of this part later rather than earlier in the book. The author first returns to values and politics in this last part of the book; both are critical influences on the development and outcomes of environmental policy. He also provides chapters on intergovernmental arrangements, influences on corporate environmental policy, and the influence of globalisation. All three of these chapters provide material of great use to environmental and impact assessment practices in this first decade of the 21st century.

This book is most relevant for Australian students, however, the theoretical material in Part C and the influences on policy explored in Part D are applicable almost anywhere in the world. The author is to be commended for being explicit about the need for theory and for making sure it is presented in a form that ensures its usefulness: ordered and explored according to the well-known policy cycle (Bridgman and Davis, 2004) and peppered with illustrative examples drawn from Landcare. This 'applied' approach to policy seems particularly important for impact assessment students and practitioners who want an easy-to-access, yet comprehensive book on environmental policy that is relevant to their interests (such as environmental values, legislative and administrative frameworks).

The only shortcoming is a lack of integration

within the theoretical chapters. Similarly to the authors of other public policy texts, such as Howlett and Ramesh's (2003) *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*, this author imports multiple views, often differing and without resolution, into his book. Such an approach is useful as it exposes students to the classic scholars in the field but it also means they that may not get a synthesised, integrated understanding of key policy areas. This lack of integration and associated confusion are often enough to discourage those students who lack an intrinsic interest in policy in the first place.

In conclusion, this is an excellent textbook as well as reference for those practicing impact assessment. It is particularly valuable on three counts: its inclusion of theory; a strong emphasis on implementation; and ensuring currency through addressing globalisation and corporate as well as public environmental policy. This will be an outstanding textbook for Australian students and for any scholars and practitioners in impact assessment wanting a quick entrée to the antipodean context. I commend it to all readers with the need or interest to explore Australian environmental policy further.

## References

- Bridgman, P and G Davis 2004. *The Australian Policy Handbook*. St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin.  
 Hogwood, B W and L A Gunn 1992. *Policy Analysis for the Real World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 Howlett, M and M Ramesh 2003. *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*. Ontario: Oxford University Press.

## Diversity and richness of ideas, tools and insights

Barry Sadler

### ***Impact Assessment and Sustainable Development: European Practice and Experience* edited by Clive George and Colin Kirkpatrick**

Edward Elgar, Cheltenham UK and Northampton MA, 2007, 305 pages, £79.95, ISBN-13 978-1-84542-787-0

The title of this book and the credentials of the editors, who have written extensively on the relationship between impact assessment and sustainable

development, should be sufficient to gain the attention of many *IAPA* readers. Many of the contributors too are well-known names in the literature on this field, and the work of the European school of integrated, sustainability assessment is strongly represented. Non-European readers might want to note that this particular conceptualisation does not necessarily equate with other proposed or applied frameworks for integrated assessment, sustainability appraisal or their various combinations and acronymic derivatives (of which there are several in the book).

These approaches form an important sub-text of a book that is omnibus in scope as implied by the conjunction in the title — impact assessment *and* (not *of* or *for*) sustainable development. What readers will

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