

A SCEPTICAL CLIMATE
Media coverage of climate change in Australia
2011

Part 1- Climate Change Policy



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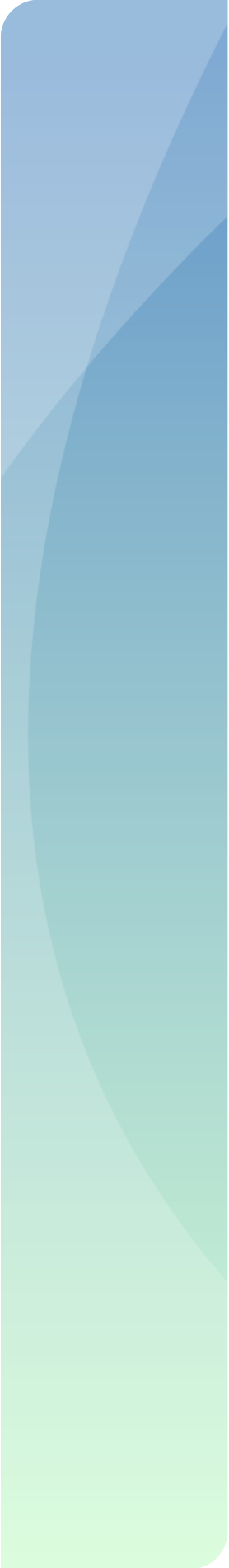
PREFACE

There are few media stories in which there is such an obvious public interest as that of climate change.

There is no doubt that the subject has been well covered by the media. In 2009 no topic occupied more media attention in Australia (Media Monitors, 2009) and in 2011 climate policy has again been very high on the Australian domestic news agenda. The quantity of the coverage, however, tells us little about the quality of that coverage.

While media often criticises others for poor communication, journalists too carry responsibility for communicating both the science and policy of climate change to the public. The way in which the media represents issues and news sources influences and to some extent, produces public opinion.

The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism's research work on climate change is part of the Global Environmental Initiative (GEJI), a partnership of nine tertiary institutions in Australia and Europe working on research and teaching about the environment and media.



Our Australian partners include the University of Technology Sydney, Monash University and the University of Tasmania, and in Europe, City University (United Kingdom), Helsinki University and the Danish School of Media and Journalism.

As well as developing environmental journalism projects, we have conducted research into the media's role in reporting on climate change and the environment.

This project aims to provide more information about the quality of reporting on climate change. How well is the Australian media performing its role in reporting the issue of climate change? Are Australian audiences receiving adequate and accurate information? Is the selection and treatment of sources and the representation of viewpoints and evidence fair, accurate and balanced? Does the media provide a forum for debate and a range of sources?

Two reports will be published. This, the first, is on the coverage of climate change policy. The second will focus on climate science coverage.

These reports are timely. The Australian government has set up an Independent Media Inquiry into the Australian print and online media, (2011).

This Inquiry is seeking to establish whether there are issues, which affect the Australian media's ability to act in the public interest and whether current standards and codes of practice fulfill their goals of pursuit of truth, and 'fair and accurate' reporting.

As I have already argued in a submission to the inquiry, the quality of reporting on the critical issue of climate change provides a litmus test in seeking answers to the Inquiry's terms of reference.

Professor Wendy Bacon

December 1, 2011

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Key Findings

COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

- Overall, negative coverage of the Gillard government's carbon policy across ten newspapers outweighed positive coverage across ten Australian newspapers by 73% to 27%. (Note: After neutral items were discounted). (See page 32)
- All papers contained some positive and a substantial amount of neutral material. The highest level of neutral articles was found in *The Age* and *The Hobart Mercury*, the lowest level was found in *The Northern Territory News* and *The Daily Telegraph*. (See page 32)
- After neutral items were discounted, negative coverage (82%) across News Ltd newspapers far outweighed positive (18%) articles. This indicates a very strong stance against the carbon policy adopted by the company that controls most Australian metropolitan newspapers, and the only general national daily. (See page 33)
- By comparison, Fairfax was far more balanced in its coverage of the policy than News Ltd publications with 57% positive articles outweighing 43% negative articles. (See page 33)
- *The Age* was more positive (67%) rather than negative towards the policy than any other newspaper. *The Daily Telegraph* was the most negative (89%) rather than positive of newspapers. (See page 33)
- Headlines were less balanced than the actual content of articles. (See Figures 7 and 9 on pages 29 and 30).

- Neutral articles were more likely to be headlined negative (41%) than positive (19%). (See page 34)
- Readers relying on metropolitan newspapers living in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane received more coverage of carbon policy issues than readers in Perth, Adelaide and Darwin. (See page 25)
- *The Australian* gave far more space to the coverage of climate change than any other newspaper. Its articles were coded 47% negative, 44% neutral and 9% positive. When neutrals were discounted, there were 84% negative articles compared to 17% positive. (See page 32)

LANGUAGE USED TO DEFINE THE DEBATE

The words used to describe issues influence the way it is discussed. The carbon emissions reduction policy was originally referred to as the carbon pricing policy, although from the beginning, the Opposition leader Tony Abbott from referred to it as a 'tax'. Under questioning, Prime Minister Julia Gillard agreed on February 24 that the policy would be "*effectively like a tax*" (7.30 Report, 24 Feb 2011).

The articles were coded on whether they referred to the carbon reduction scheme as a 'price', 'tax' or both.

- Over half the articles only used the word 'tax' (51%), 11% used 'price' and another 39% referred to both. Once again there are differences between Fairfax and News Ltd.'s metropolitan newspapers. (See page 34)

- 77% of *The Daily Telegraph*, 70% of *The Courier Mail* and 62% of *The Herald Sun* articles referred only to 'tax', whereas only 29% of articles in *The Age* and 37% of articles in *The Sydney Morning Herald* did so. (See page 36)
- *The Australian* used only 'tax' in 44% of stories and only 'price' in 11% of cases. (See page 36)
- The repeated description of the scheme as a 'tax' tended to reinforce a perception that the policy was aimed at individual consumers rather than large companies. (See page 35)

FRAMING OF ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE POLICY

- Negative arguments against the policy were strongly focused on the impact of the policy on the Australian economy. Some papers placed more emphasis on broader issues such as fears of reduced investment and job losses, while other focused on rising prices. (See page 36)

SOURCES IN THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA

These findings are based on an analysis of the first three sources quoted in all news and features.

- 11% of news and features quoted no source and 30% of the rest quoted only one source. The claims by many single sources about the likely impact of the carbon policy were not tested against the views of other sources. Only 42% of the rest of the articles included more than two sources. (See page 40)
- Political sources were used more frequently than any other sources (54% of all sources), reflecting the intensity of the political debate. (See page 42)

- Federal Labor sources were 28% of all first sources. (See page 42)
- Business sources (23%) received greater representation overall than Coalition political sources (18%). (See page 42)
- Fossil fuel lobby and other big business sources opposed to the policy were very strongly represented, often without any critique or second source. (See page 40)
- Clean energy and other businesses sources in favour of the tax received low coverage, particularly in News Ltd papers. They complained during the campaign that they were excluded and adopted specific strategies to address this with some success. (See page 46)
- Although they played a key role in negotiations, the Australian Greens received low coverage (5% of all sources). (See page 42)
- Business sources (23%) receive more coverage than all Australian civil society sources together including unions, NGOs, think tanks, activists, members of the public, religious spokespeople, scientists and academics (17%). (See page 42)
- Business sources quoted 4 or more times over the 6-month period were quoted being negative towards the policy in almost 80% of occasions. Many Australian readers would have been left with the impression that the nearly the entire business community was opposed to the carbon price policy. In fact this was far from the truth. (See page 49)
- Bluescope Steel was quoted 71 times, substantially more than any other business source. This was more than the number of times all NGOs and scientists combined were quoted. (See page 47)
- Figure 17 also shows that peak councils such as the Business Council of Australia, Minerals Councils of Australia and Australian Coal Association achieved very strong representation. (See page 47)

- Academics and scientists were also poorly represented. (See page 42)

EDITORIALS

- 23% of editorials were positive, compared to 15% of positive articles in the entire sample. (See page 53)
- *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Herald Sun*, *The Courier Mail* and *The West Australian* were all clearly editorially opposed to the policy. From the point of view of editorials, *The Age* was the most positive publication. (See page 53)

OPINION

- Journalists or regular columnists wrote 75% of opinion pieces. (See page 54)
- 59% of that commentary was negative, 23% neutral and 18% positive. (See page 55)
- All newspapers carried some positive commentary. (See page 55)
- The *Herald Sun* opinion writers were overwhelmingly negative (96%). *The Courier Mail* (89%), *The Australian* (85%), *The Daily Telegraph* (85%), *The Northern Territory News* (85%) and *The West Australian* (85%) were also very negative in their commentary. (When neutral figures were removed). (See page 55)
- *The Hobart Mercury* was more balanced in its commentary than other News Ltd papers. (See page 55)
- Andrew Bolt and Terry McCrann, who are skeptical towards the scientific consensus on anthropomorphic climate change, published more opinion pieces on the carbon pricing policy than any other commentators. (See page 57)

- Together, opinion writers who are sceptical of the scientific consensus on climate change including McCrann, Bolt, Tim Blair, Miranda Devine, Piers Akerman and Christopher Pearson accounted for at least 21% of all words of commentary published by journalists and regular commentators in the ten newspapers over this period. Their columns are prominently featured online, often accompanied by highly negative cartoons and illustrations. (See page 59)
- Opinion pieces in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* were more evenly distributed between negative and positive than News Ltd opinion pieces. (See page 55)
- *The Age* was the only paper to publish more positive commentary (59%) compared to negative (41%). (See page 55)
- Fairfax newspapers did not publish any opinion articles by climate sceptics about climate policy, during this period. (See page 59)

Introduction

This study provides a snapshot of how ten Australian newspapers covered the issues of climate change policy over a six-month period from February to July 2011. The key issue during this period was the introduction of the Gillard Labor government carbon emissions pricing scheme. The struggle over the introduction of this policy overshadowed all other climate change issues.

On February 24, the Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that there would be a price imposed on carbon emissions in Australia from July 1, 2012. On July 10, she announced details of the 'Clean Energy Future package' including information about the price of carbon, tax cuts, compensation and industry assistance. Over the period, there were rallies, community meetings and intense lobbying efforts for and against the policy. The Australian Parliament enacted the package of Clean Energy Future bills on November 8, 2011.

Media coverage still continues as the government works towards implementing its policy and the Federal Opposition vows to repeal it if elected. Climate change activists and the Australian Greens will argue that the policy is only a 'first step'. This means climate change policy will undoubtedly be a key issue in the next Federal election, and that the media reporting issues raised by this study will remain relevant.

WHY NEWSPAPERS?

The study focuses on ten Australian newspapers. Ideally one would study all media but this is a difficult and resource-intensive task. Newspapers are convenient to study as they have fixed content that can be retrieved.

Newspapers still have a substantial although slowly dropping readership. However, although readers are shifting to online media, newspapers still provide most of the substantial journalism content of company news web sites which in the case of News Ltd and Fairfax (owners of all but two of these newspapers) are among the most used sites in Australia.

Radio and television news agendas are also still influenced by newspaper agendas and many examples were found during this study of newspaper journalists being interviewed on talk back radio and television. Newspapers journalists frequently appear on *ABC*, *Sky News*, the Macquarie radio network, including *2GB*, and Fairfax radio stations in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

The aggregation of newspaper sites into company websites such as *www.news.com.au* also means newspaper content remains available for much longer than it used to and that stories from sister publications support each other in 'related coverage' links. While the business-advertising model that supported newspaper journalism is fading, readership of newspaper content may even be increasing.

NEGATIVE OR CRITICAL?

Some may suggest the negative quality of the reporting demonstrated in this study is an expected reflection of the nature of news values and the critical, watchdog function of journalism. There is a difference however between negativity and critical scrutiny. It is possible to be supportive of the carbon policy and adopt a critical and questioning approach, remaining alert to flaws in the claims of government and vested interests. It is also possible to promote claims by supporters of the tax uncritically.

Negative coverage can also be critical, pointing out shortcomings in policy, but it can also lapse into one-sided promotion of particular interest groups, abusive commentary and exclusion of stories and sources that do not fit the negative narrative.

The underpinning of journalism is the pursuit of the truth. In pursuing truth, journalists aim to be 'fair and accurate'. This does not mean that in every article a reporter needs to canvas a range of opinions in every article but it does mean that editors have a responsibility to ensure readers get a good range of views and accurate information from which to make up their minds on critical issues. Promoting sources with vested interests without testing them against credible sources provides opportunities for misinformation and scare campaigns.

Our methodology and findings are presented in the following section.

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Content Analysis

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to assess media and journalistic practices in relation to the reporting of climate change policy in Australia, we conducted a content analysis of 10 Australian newspapers between February and July 2011.

We have supplemented the content analysis with examples and small case studies.

The newspapers chosen were: *The Australian*, *The Age/Sunday Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald/Sun Herald (SMH)*, *The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph*, *Herald Sun*, *The Advertiser*, *Courier Mail /Sunday Mail*, *The Northern Territory News*, *The Mercury* and *The West Australian*. (Note: Mastheads that have a Sunday edition were merged. For example, *The Age* figures include *The Sunday Age* figures.)

METHODOLOGY

The Dow Jones Factiva database was used to retrieve all articles relevant to climate change policy and the debates around them. Researchers then removed those items that only included incidental mentions of climate change policy. For example, articles that included references to the '*Minister for Climate Change*' were not included and if '*climate change*' merely appeared in a list of items in a story on another topic, the article was excluded.

Pieces in which climate change policy was not the main focus of the article but which nevertheless included significant content about climate change were included.

Articles were coded into spreadsheets according to:

- Date;
- Word count;
- Topic (Climate policy);
- Genre (Feature, News, Short Feature, Letters);
- Headline;
- Stance (Towards positive or negative towards the proposed carbon policy);
- Language use (Price or tax or both);
- Types and identity of sources quoted;
- A breakdown of business sources into different industries.

For articles in the last three months of the study, we also included the dominant theme of the article, where one was apparent.

Social science and media students from the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Sydney were selected as researchers to be part of the study. They were trained in the coding according to selected criteria. All raw data was entered into spreadsheets and checks were conducted to ensure accuracy in coding.

It should be noted that all figures in this report have been rounded to a whole figure.

Figure 1 shows Audit Bureau of Circulation (2011) figures for circulation and Roy Morgan Research (2011) figures for readership, ownership and format of selected newspapers.

Figure 1: Ten Australian Newspapers: Ownership and Circulation.

Newspapers	Location	Owner	Circulation	Readership	Format and target audience
The Australian	National	News Ltd	130,307	257,000	Only general national newspaper Higher income readers
The Sydney Morning Herald	Sydney, NSW	Fairfax	200,194	754,000	Broadsheet Higher income readers
The Daily Telegraph	Sydney, NSW	News Ltd	354,893	949,000	Tabloid Lower income readers
The Age	Melbourne, Vic.	Fairfax	197,200+	685,000	Broadsheet Higher income readers
The Herald Sun	Melbourne, Vic	News Ltd	488,600+	1,333,000	Tabloid Lower income readers
The Advertiser	Adelaide, S.A	News Ltd	173,957	430,000	Tabloid, only metropolitan daily, Adelaide
The Courier Mail	Brisbane, QLD	News Ltd	199,284	591,000	Tabloid, only metropolitan daily, Brisbane
The Mercury	Hobart, Tas.	News Ltd	43,513	103,000	Tabloid, only metropolitan, Hobart
The Northern Territory News	Darwin, NT.	News Ltd	19,985	44,000	Tabloid, only metropolitan daily, Darwin
The West Australian	Perth, WA.	Seven West Media	195,007	547,000	Feeds into Channel 7 Yahoo Website. Only metropolitan daily, Perth

FINDINGS

In all there were 3971 articles that dealt with climate change policy. Of these articles all but 181 articles focused on the carbon emissions reduction policy.

Number of Articles

We identified all articles in the period February to July 2011 that dealt with climate change policy, and compared the number of articles and the space allotted in terms of words, across the ten newspapers. *The Australian* had by far the most coverage of the ten newspapers with 28% of all articles. *The Age* and the *SMH* had very similar amounts (approx. 13%) followed by *The Courier Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun*. *The Adelaide Advertiser* and *The West Australian*, *The Hobart Mercury* and *The Northern Territory News* had considerably less coverage than other newspapers, (See *Figures 2 & 3*).

This shows that outside the large population centers of Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, readers whose main source of news remains metropolitan newspapers received far less news and discussion about the carbon policy than readers elsewhere in Australia.

Figure 2: Number and percentage of articles about climate change policy across 10 newspapers, Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Total no. of articles	% of total no. of articles
The Australian	1108	28%
The Age	511	13%
Sydney Morning Herald	501	13%
The Courier Mail	378	10%
The Daily Telegraph	372	9%
Herald Sun	365	9%
The Advertiser	261	7%
The West Australian	189	5%
Hobart Mercury	149	4%
The Northern Territory News	137	3%
Total	3971	100%

Figure 3: Total word count and share of articles focusing on climate policy across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Word Count of total articles	% of Word Count of total articles
The Australian	761682	34%
The Age	333542	15%
Sydney Morning Herald	311295	14%
The Daily Telegraph	187524	8%
The Courier Mail	184151	8%
Herald Sun	177108	8%
The Advertiser	109048	5%
The West Australian	85714	4%
Hobart Mercury	67052	3%
The Northern Territory News	37383	2%
Total	2254499	100%

Shorter articles, and therefore fewer words, are a feature of tabloid newspapers. *The Australian* had the largest share of words, and a greater proportion (34%) of words than it had of the articles (28%), indicating that the average article length of articles in *The Australian* is greater than in other Australian newspapers in the study.

Genre

We divided the articles up into news, comment, editorial and features.

Figure 4: Genre of climate policy articles, from Feb. to July 2011.

Genre	Total	%
Comment	909	23%
Editorial	154	4%
Features	1276	32%
News	1632	41%
Total	3971	100%

Figure 5: Percentage breakdown of genre count of climate policy article, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Comment	Editorial	Feature	News
The Australian	22%	3%	38%	37%
The Age	26%	5%	33%	36%
Sydney Morning Herald	27%	4%	33%	36%
The Courier Mail	22%	3%	34%	42%
The Daily Telegraph	25%	5%	34%	36%
Herald Sun	28%	5%	19%	48%
The Advertiser	15%	3%	33%	48%
The West Australian	19%	9%	33%	40%
Hobart Mercury	19%	3%	19%	60%
The Northern Territory News	9%	0%	14%	77%

News

News was the largest category, although not as dominant here as in some other earlier comparable studies. For example in an Australian Centre for Independent Journalism 6-month study of humanitarian issues coverage carried out 10 years ago, the proportion of news was approximately two-thirds of all items (Bacon and Nash, 2003:96). As Figure 5 demonstrates, the *Hobart Mercury* and *Northern Territory News* had higher levels of news than other papers.

Comment

23% of articles across the sample were comment pieces, of which in-house journalists or regular columnists wrote more than 75%. It is possible that this reflects a trend in which more editorial resources are now focused on opinion writing, a cheaper and more individually distinctive genre than news. The highest levels of comment were found in the Herald Sun (28%), the SMH (27%) and *The Age* (26%).

Features

We further divided features into those over 800 words, short features from 400-800 words and those less than 400 words. The reason for subdividing features is that the feature form traditionally allows for more sources, perspectives and depth. However, increasingly newspapers are developing a genre of very short features, including columns such as 'Cut and Paste' in *The Australian* which juxtaposes comments from different sources to make rhetorical or mocking points. Although these are now labeled as 'features' in Dow Jones Factiva database, they have little in common with more conventional features and could be considered to be a form of commentary. There were higher levels of 'very short features' in the tabloid newspapers than in the broadsheets.

Figure 6: Percentage breakdown for features across ten newspapers, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Features (>800)	Short Features (400-800)	Very Short Features (<400)
The Australian	33%	50%	17%
The Age	26%	55%	19%
Sydney Morning Herald	16%	71%	13%
The Courier Mail	18%	39%	43%
The Daily Telegraph	21%	45%	34%
Herald Sun	17%	29%	54%
The Advertiser	13%	41%	46%
The West Australian	8%	37%	55%
Hobart Mercury	14%	36%	50%
The Northern Territory News	11%	11%	79%
Total	23%	48%	29%

When considered together Figures 5 and 6 show that while 32% of articles were features, only 7% of all articles were features of more than 800 words. This indicates a low depth in reportage and few opportunities for a range of sources to be given a voice in the coverage. It also shows there was far more commentary by in-house journalists and regular columnists than features of more than 800 words.

This may partly reflect the policy nature of the topic, which does not lend itself to 'colour' writing. There were however many opportunities where a range of sources could have been used to illustrate a range of different responses and arguments, where single source stories were produced instead. The highest proportion of such features was in *The Australian* and *The Age*.

Headline Stance

Journalism involves a production process – headlining, text editing, story structuring, selecting sources, layout and visuals are all practices that create meaning.

We coded the articles according to headline stance towards the carbon price policy announced by the Gillard government on February 23, 2011. We excluded those articles where the headline was not relevant (N/A) and coded the remaining 3643 articles as neutral, positive or negative.

The author acknowledges that coding is an interpretative exercise. Checks were however carried out between coders. Different readers could interpret the same headline differently. Indeed, some headlines are deliberately written to achieve that effect. Where meaning was obviously ambiguous, the article was coded ‘neutral’. Many neutral articles were announcements of policy, basic explanations of policy and stories focused on the political tussle between the Gillard government and the Opposition Coalition of National and Liberal parties.

Figure 7, shows that headlines across all newspapers was more negative than positive. There was a stark contrast between the News Ltd and Fairfax newspapers.

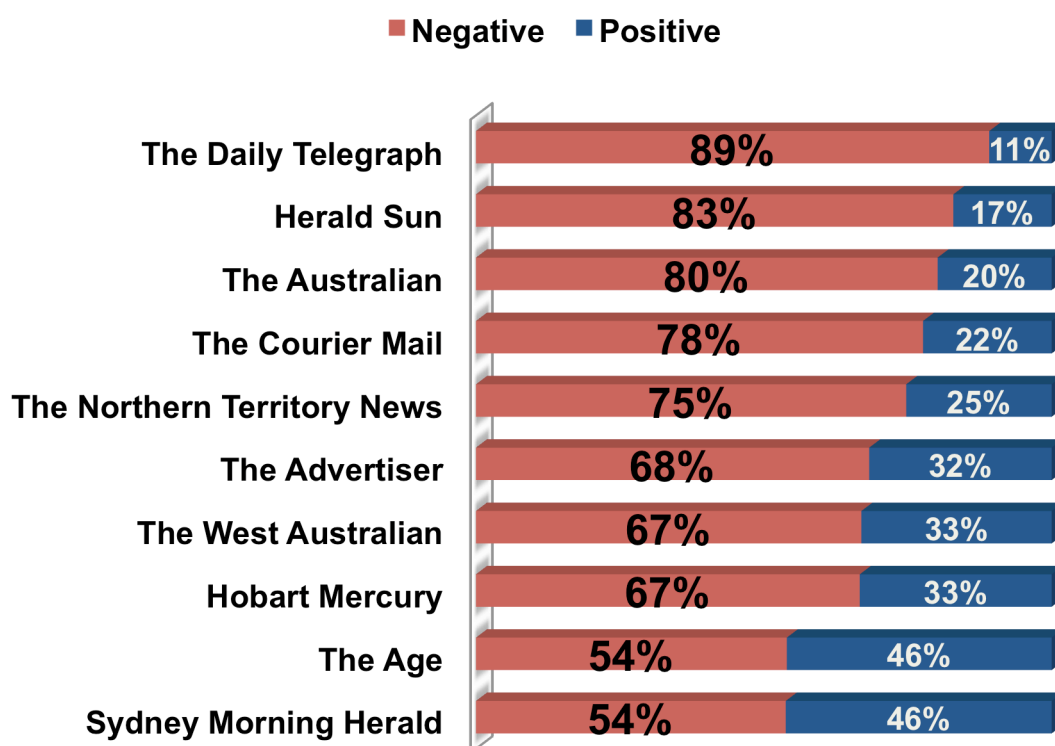
Figure 7: Headline stance of articles across ten newspapers, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Negative	Neutral	Positive
The Daily Telegraph	65%	27%	8%
Herald Sun	59%	28%	12%
The Courier Mail	57%	26%	16%
The Australian	54%	33%	13%
The Northern Territory News	53%	29%	18%
The Advertiser	50%	26%	23%
Hobart Mercury	48%	27%	24%
The West Australian	45%	33%	22%
Sydney Morning Herald	42%	23%	36%
The Age	36%	33%	31%
Total	51%	29%	20%

Overall, 80% of headlines were negative or neutral and more than 50% were negative, but there were clear variations across the newspapers. Even allowing for some coding differences, Figure 7 demonstrates a highly negative stance towards the policy on the part of News Ltd papers. More than 50% of headlines in all News Ltd newspapers were negative and more than 75% were negative or neutral. In the case of the Sydney tabloid, *The Daily Telegraph*, more than two-thirds were negative. The Fairfax papers the *SMH* and *The Age* and Seven West Media's *The West Australian* were more balanced – although the tendency was still towards negative headlines.

When the neutral headlines were removed, negative and positive groups were compared. As *Figure 8* shows, the contrast between publications was marked. Headlines in News Ltd papers on the Eastern seaboard mainland were more biased against the policy. *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun* were more negative than *The Advertiser* and *Hobart Mercury*.

Figure 8: Positive compared Negative headline stance of articles across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.



Some examples of negative headlines

'PM's warmist assurances nothing but a smokescreen', (*The Herald Sun*, March 19, 2011)

'The truth is, you can't put a price on carbon - no one can', (*The Age*, March 29, 2011)

'Just pay up and ignore the irony', (*The Daily Telegraph*, February 14, 2011)

'Here comes the high-cost sun', (*The Australian*, March 22, 2011)

'MEAN GREEN TAX You will pay \$16.60 more a week HOW IT WILL HIT YOU', (*The Herald Sun*, April 2, 2011)

'\$860 CARBON SHOCK - Revealed: More pain for struggling households', (*The Courier Mail*, April 4, 2011)

Content of Articles- Stance Towards the 2011 Carbon Reduction Policy

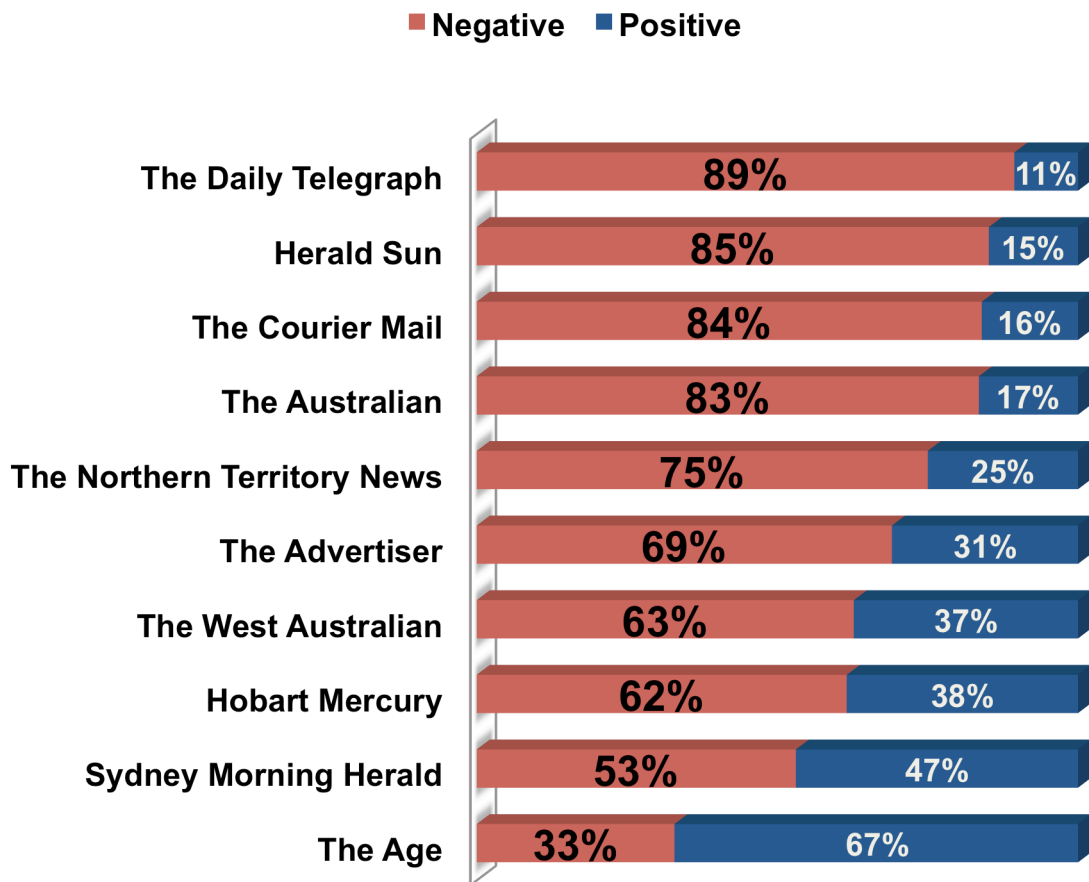
We coded the content of all articles for neutral, positive and negative stances towards the policy. As Figure 9 shows, there was a higher level of 'neutral' in the content of articles than in the headlines that are written to grab attention. The highest levels of neutral content were in *The Hobart Mercury* and *The Age*. The lowest levels were in *The West Australian*, *The Northern Territory News* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

Figure 9: Number and percentage of articles stance towards the policy, across 10 Australian newspapers, Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Negative	Neutral	Positive
The Daily Telegraph	58%	35%	7%
The Courier Mail	51%	40%	10%
The Northern Territory News	50%	33%	17%
Herald Sun	50%	41%	9%
The Australian	47%	44%	9%
The West Australian	40%	36%	24%
The Advertiser	34%	51%	15%
Hobart Mercury	28%	55%	17%
Sydney Morning Herald	27%	50%	23%
The Age	15%	54%	31%
Total	40%	44%	15%

We again removed all articles that were coded neutral and compared the negative with the positive.

Figure 10: Percentage of stories positive towards the policy compared to stories negative to the policy in 10 Australian newspapers, Feb. to July 2011.



All newspapers published some positive articles. However when combined with the headline findings, Figure 10 shows the negative approach to the policy adopted by *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Herald Sun*, *The Courier Mail* and *The Australian*.

By comparison, *The Age* and the *SMH* were far more balanced although there was a contrast between these two newspapers with the *SMH* publishing 27% negative articles compared to the *Age*'s 15%.

The Age was the only paper to publish more positive than negative articles but this does not necessarily mean *The Age* should be regarded as a 'pro' paper in the way the News Ltd papers are anti, as the ratio of positive to negative articles in *The Age* was considerably less than the ratio of negative to positive articles in News Ltd papers.

There were more neutral articles than there were neutral headlines. Of neutral articles that had positive or negative headlines, 19% were positive and 41% were negative.

In our second report, we will report on climate science reporting. It is worth noting that the report will show that *The Age*, the newspaper with the most in-depth coverage of climate science, had the most positive stance towards action on climate change. Readers that were receiving the most negative coverage of the policy in *The Herald Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian* also received a substantial dose of commentary, which either rejected or raised questions about the scientific consensus on human induced climate change.

Some might argue that the negative approach to the carbon policy is simply the result of the application of conventional news values that tend to highlight conflict. But while the negativity of news values may well explain some of patterns revealed by the content analysis, they do not explain why the marked difference between Fairfax and News Ltd papers. The explanation lies rather in different corporate and editorial policies that editors and journalists apply in making decisions about how to cover climate change issues. This does not imply uniformity across a company or a masthead but the patterns of representation are the result of informal policies combined with the application of professional reporting conventions by individual editors and reporters.

Carbon Tax or Carbon Policy? Defining the Debate

Figure 11: Use of terms- carbon price and carbon tax, from Feb. to July 2011.

Terminology usage	Total	%
Both	1465	37%
Carbon Price	407	10%
Carbon Tax	1918	48%
N/A	181	5%
Total	3971	100%

The words used to describe issues also frame the terms in which an issue is discussed. The carbon emissions reduction policy was originally referred to as the carbon pricing policy, although the Opposition leader Tony Abbott from the beginning referred to it as a 'tax'. Under questioning, Julia Gillard agreed at a press conference announcing the policy on February 24 that the policy would be "*effectively like a tax*" (7.30 Report, 24 Feb, 2011). From then on, the word 'tax' was used more frequently than 'policy'. This framing of the issue as a 'tax' tended to encourage a perception that the policy was aimed at individual consumers rather than large companies.

We coded the articles for whether they used carbon policy, carbon tax or both. The results can be found in Figure 11. Nearly half the articles referred only to 'tax', 10% used 'price' and another 37% referred to both. Once again there are differences between Fairfax and News Ltd.'s metropolitan newspapers.

74% of *The Daily Telegraph*, 69% of *The Courier Mail* and 62% of *The Herald Sun* articles referred only to 'tax', whereas only 28% of articles in *The Age* and 36% of articles in the *SMH* did so.

The Australian used only 'tax' in 42% of stories and only 'price' in 10% of cases.

Figure 12: Word used by journalists to describe the policy: tax, price or both across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Both	Carbon Price	Carbon Tax
The Australian	45%	11%	44%
The Age	51%	20%	29%
Sydney Morning Herald	47%	16%	37%
The Courier Mail	22%	8%	70%
The Daily Telegraph	19%	4%	77%
Herald Sun	32%	6%	62%
The Advertiser	30%	7%	62%
The West Australian	49%	4%	47%
Hobart Mercury	41%	10%	49%
The Northern Territory News	29%	13%	58%
Total	39%	11%	51%

Dominant Themes in Coverage

For stories between May and July 2011, we examined a selection of stories to identify a series of themes commonly used to frame arguments against the policy. We identified articles where there was a dominant theme around which the story was narrated.

Of the articles, which had a dominant theme, 73% framed the debate about the policy in terms of Australian economic issues. The strong economic framing of the debate was consistent across the publications. These articles were divided into those that were about loss of investment or jobs and those that focused on impact on prices.

43% of articles were focused on impact on investment and job market and 30% on the impact on the cost of living impacts, which in most cases meant the price of household items. In both of these the policy itself was mainly referred to as a 'tax'.

As Figure 13 shows, the *SMH*, *The Age*, *The Courier Mail* and *The Australian* focused more on impact on investment and jobs while *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Hobart Mercury* highlighted the potential impact on prices.

Example

'Carbon tax slug double whammy' was the headline on a news report in *The Herald Sun* on March 2, 2011. The story began:

“*Consumers would be forced to pay more in GST, stamp duty, capital gains tax and even council rates under Julia Gillard’s scheme. Opposition finance spokesman Andrew Robb said a carbon tax would be a “tax on a tax” that would feed into the price of almost every consumer item and service. Mr. Robb said it could add thousands of dollars in unforeseen costs in building and furnishing a home. “It’s lifting the GST and a host of other taxes by stealth, “ Mr. Robb*
”
said.

The story also briefly quoted Monash Professor Henry Ergas, as agreeing that a tax could cause other taxes to rise and PM Julia Gillard who accused the Opposition of a 'scare campaign.' It finished by again quoting Mr. Robb: *“With a new home most of the materials are energy intensive. It would be carbon tax riddled and it could add many thousands of unforeseen costs that are not being compensated for.”*

Nearly 14% of the articles analysed had the issue of Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s or the Federal Labor government’s alleged lack of integrity as their dominant theme. Nearly all of these focused on PM Julia Gillard’s pre-election ‘promise’ not to have a carbon tax.

The Daily Telegraph (26%) more strongly adopted this 'lack of integrity' theme than other newspapers. For example, on June 12, 2011, Piers Akerman published a column, 'The science behind tricking the public' which began:

“ *The mendacious Gillard government is continuing its drive to impose a punitive carbon dioxide tax on Australians while refused to address the key issues. Put aside if you can the lies that both the Prime Minister and her deputy Treasury Wayne Swan, told the electorate before the election....* **”**

The theme of another 11% of the articles analysed was that there was 'no point' in implementing the policy. Only 2% of articles framed the debate in terms of the relative merits of the Opposition Coalition's policy position. Other minor themes included the cost of 'carbon cops' or compliance bureaucracy that would be needed to monitor the policy and the cost of the government's advertising campaign.

Although at time of publication, we have not coded the arguments put forward in favour of the tax, we observed a low level of exploration of the environmental benefits of the policy. (A more detailed framing analysis will be conducted in later part of the project).

Figure 13: Breakdown of themes in articles in which there was a dominant frame, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Economy, Jobs, Investment	Prices	No Integrity (Gillard)	No Point (Policy)	Abbotts Policy is Better	Other
Herald Sun	61	60	24	15	4	0
%	37%	37%	15%	9%	2%	0%
Hobart Mercury	20	24	7	8	1	0
%	33%	40%	12%	13%	2%	0%
Sydney Morning Herald	82	65	23	9	5	0
%	45%	35%	13%	5%	3%	0%
The Advertiser	43	31	8	18	0	0
%	43%	31%	8%	18%	0%	0%
The Age	74	32	10	25	2	0
%	52%	22%	7%	17%	1%	0%
The Australian	206	81	67	43	9	7
%	50%	20%	16%	10%	2%	2%
The Courier Mail	66	26	13	19	2	0
%	52%	21%	10%	15%	2%	0%
The Daily Telegraph	29	44	30	9	0	4
%	25%	38%	26%	8%	0%	3%
The Northern Territory News	24	26	5	5	1	0
%	39%	43%	8%	8%	2%	0%
The West Australian	20	37	9	4	1	1
%	28%	51%	13%	6%	1%	1%
Total	625	426	196	155	25	12
% of Total	43%	30%	14%	11%	2%	<1%

Sources Quoted

It is hard to influence public policy if you do not have a voice in the media (Thompson, 1990; Ericson 1989). At the heart of journalism is the relationship between journalists and their sources (Ericson, 1990; Cottle, 2003; Roberts & Nash, 2009). The inclusion or exclusion of sources is one significant way in which media exercises power. An analysis of quoted sources is therefore an important way of assessing the nature of coverage. The first three sources in all news and features articles across the six months were coded.

More than 11% of stories had no source at all and another 30% of the rest of the articles had only one source. This indicates the one-dimensional nature of many stories. Articles that quote only one source are likely to convey a single message although it is possible to quote a source and then critique that source with other information. One-source stories can also be used as part of packages.

While the practice of using single source stories may be understandable in the light of shrinking editorial resources, it leaves the media more open to publishing promotional stories without scrutiny.

Examples of single source stories:

'Steelmaker blasts carbon tax plan' (Courier Mail, February 22, 2011).

The story's lead paragraph was:

“ *BLUESCOPE Steel chief Paul O'Malley has knocked the Federal Government's carbon tax plan, declaring it unfair, discriminatory and "not good" for the steel industry.* **”**

Although the story did not quote any other source, it did background the recent Bluescope losses.

‘Carbon Tax not fair: Oil giant’ (Herald Sun, March 7, 2011).

“ AUSTRALIA'S largest oil and gas producer, Woodside Petroleum, says it should be exempt from paying any carbon tax.

Woodside yesterday said, as a trade-exposed exporter, the company believed it should not pay any price on carbon

"Woodside believes the company's trade-exposed exports should be exempt from any price on carbon, given the absence of an international agreement on pricing greenhouse gas emissions," it said. **”**

We divided the sources up into the following categories:

- Political – Labor
- Political – Coalition
- Political – Greens
- Political – Independent
- Business
- NGOs
- International sources
- Government (public servants)
- Academic
- Trade unions
- Think tanks
- Activists
- Scientists
- Members of public
- Media figures

Figure 14: Number of first three types of sources quoted and percentage of total for each type of source, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Type of Source	First source	Second Source	Third Source	Total	% of First three Sources
Political- Labor	773	464	259	1496	28%
Business	622	395	217	1234	23%
Political- Coalition	370	378	194	942	18%
Academic	167	86	52	305	6%
Political- Greens	105	101	75	281	5%
Public	90	59	49	198	4%
Political- Independent	78	59	47	184	3%
Government	87	35	38	160	3%
Media figures	45	53	31	129	2%
Unions	49	35	17	101	2%
NGO	34	30	19	83	2%
Think tank	35	24	21	80	1%
Scientist	27	16	11	54	1%
Activist	19	24	2	45	1%
Other	23	14	6	43	1%
International sources	12	2	3	17	<1%
Farmer	11	5	0	16	<1%
Religious	5	0	0	5	<1%
Total	2552	1780	1041	5373	100%

54% of all sources coded were political sources, showing the strong political framing of the issue. Gillard government politicians were quoted on 28% of all occasions. This was expected as government politicians announce and initially frame policy. Many of these occasions were around time of major announcements.

Coalition sources (18%) were quoted less often than Labor sources (28%). Labor Ministers as spear headers of the carbon policy did have access but were also often quoted in response to business critics. As Figure 13 shows, there was little focus on Abbott's policy so demands for him to respond to criticism. However as Figures 14 and 10 show, the Coalition's anti carbon 'tax' message that was nevertheless promoted through the print and online media overall.

Business sources (23%) were more frequently used as first sources than all civil society sources, which include Non-government organisations, members of the public, academics, think tanks, religious spokespeople, unions, activists and scientists (17%). A strong narrative was the conflict between the Labor government and business opponents of the policy, rather than a broader debate involving many community interest groups.

The low use of civil society sources by Australian newspapers confirms an earlier finding in a comparative study of the coverage of COP 15 United Nations Climate change conference in 19 countries that found that Australian newspapers (*SMH* and *The Daily Telegraph*) gave less coverage to civil society sources than newspapers in other countries including China, United States, Sweden, Brazil and Canada. The only countries that had a lower proportion of civil society sources were Pakistan and Israel. (Eide, Kunelius & Kumpu, 2010: 25)

Figure 15: Type of first source quoted in articles on climate policy, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Type of source	Total	%
Political- Labor	773	30%
Business	622	24%
Political- Coalition	370	14%
Academic	167	7%
Political- Greens	105	4%
Public	90	4%
Government	87	3%
Political- Independent	78	3%
Unions	49	2%
Media figures	45	2%
Think tank	35	1%
NGO	34	1%
Scientist	27	1%
Other	23	1%
Activist	19	1%
International sources	12	<1%
Farmer	11	<1%
Religious	5	<1%
Total	2548	100%

First sources are significant because they are most likely to provide the primary definition of meaning. On 30% of occasions, Labor sources were quoted first. Business sources were quoted first on nearly one quarter of occasions and more frequently than the Opposition Coalition. The issue tended to be framed in terms of a conflict between the Labor government (holding power with the support of Greens and Independents) and business interests.

Despite the fact that Greens played a key role in negotiations over the carbon policy and are often criticised for wielding too much influence over the government, they were only quoted as one of first three sources on 5% of occasions and as a first source on 4% of occasions.

Non-government organisations that had played a prominent role in campaigning for climate change action were quoted as first source on 1% of occasions and overall on only 2% of occasions. To some extent this reflects the high concentration on business sources. In mainstream news journalism, business sources are rarely critiqued by non-business sources. The most frequently quoted think-tank was The Climate Institute, an organisation established in 2005 to promote climate change action, was quoted more than twice as frequently as any other think tank source.

The business sources were further coded according to industry. The result showed that sources linked to fossil fuel dependent industries were quoted more frequently than sources for any other industries. Energy (Other), which included the renewable energy sector, received low coverage.

Figure 16: Number of times industries of business were quoted and percentages of business sources and all sources, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Industry of Business	Total Sources	% of Business sources	% of All Sources
Fossil fuel*	426	35%	8%
Financial	245	20%	5%
General*	141	11%	3%
Construction	65	5%	1%
Retail- food	64	5%	1%
Transport	62	5%	1%
Energy (Other)	60	5%	1%
Manufacturing- other	35	3%	1%
Manufacturing- auto	31	3%	1%
Retail- other	30	2%	1%
Communication	25	2%	<1%
Primary (agricultural/food)	22	2%	<1%
N/A	21	2%	<1%
Tourism	4	<1%	<1%
Legal	3	<1%	<1%
Total	1234	100%	24%

* Fossil fuel industries including those dependent on fossil fuel industries including aluminum and steel.

* General sources include peak councils such as the Business Council of Australia

Individual business sources were also compared, demonstrating that Bluescope Steel was quoted 71 times, far more than any other business source. This was more than the number of times all NGOs and scientists were quoted. Figure 17 also shows that peak councils such as the Business Council of Australia, Minerals Councils of Australia and Australian Coal Association achieved very strong representation.

Despite the fact that many businesses supported the policy, all top-ten business sources were quoted making negative statements about the policy, although some said they were in favour of carbon pricing in general. Some, such as Business Council of Australia, were cautiously favorable earlier in the period and quoted in more negative ways by July when the details of the policy were announced.

Figure 17: Top ten business sources quoted, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Name of Business	Total	% of Business
Bluescope Steel	71	6%
Business Council of Australia	33	3%
Minerals Council of Australia	31	3%
Woodside Petroleum	30	2%
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	28	2%
Australian Coal Association	27	2%
Qantas	25	2%
Rio Tinto	25	2%
OneSteel	25	2%
Australian Industry Group	23	2%
Total	318	100%

The three people quoted as first sources more than any other business sources were Paul O'Malley (CEO, Bluescope Steel), Don Voelte (Woodside - LNG Gas) and Graeme Kraehe (Chairman - Bluescope Steel).

In some cases, different media outlets interpreted company statements more or less negatively. Qantas provides a good example of how a press release can be interpreted in different ways.

On July 11, Qantas put out a press release stating that the carbon policy would cost the airline \$110 -115 million and that the full cost would be passed onto consumers.

The cost to a domestic fare was estimated at \$3.50. The *SMH* published this story with the heading 'Airlines count the costs of carbon tax' (*SMH*, July 11, 2011), whilst news.com.au published 'Qantas slashes profit expectation by \$110m as carbon tax set in' (news.com.au, July 11, 2011). Both stuck closely to the content of the release.

ABCPM radio, on the other hand, took up the story on the same day and interviewed other sources including Macquarie Private Wealth division director Martin Lakos, who pointed out it was a little too early to be making clear predictions about the impact of the carbon tax on the economy: *"You know we've had this announcement you know for 24 hours only and so the complete analysis has not been completed."*

Crikey diverged from the press release with *Plane Talking* blogger Ben Sandilands' different interpretation: 'Carbon tax impact on Qantas similar to parking for a few extra minutes at Sydney or Melbourne Airport' (July 11, 2011). He began:

“ Although Qantas has couched its ASX statement on the impact of the carbon tax on domestic air fares in end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it terms it says it will only average an additional \$3.50 per sector in the financial year to June 30, 2013. ”

Figure 18: Breakdown of stance of business sources quoted 4 times or more, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
The Northern Territory News	16	0	1	17
%	94%	0%	6%	
The Daily Telegraph	42	2	3	47
%	89%	4%	6%	
The Courier Mail	51	0	7	58
%	88%	0%	12%	
The Advertiser	49	2	8	59
%	83%	3%	14%	
Herald Sun	67	4	11	82
%	82%	5%	13%	
The Age	89	3	19	111
%	80%	3%	17%	
Sydney Morning Herald	87	3	26	115
%	76%	3%	22%	
The Australian	220	19	53	290
%	75%	7%	18%	
The West Australian	17	0	6	23
%	74%	0%	26%	
Hobart Mercury	15	3	3	21
%	71%	14%	14%	
Total	653	36	137	826
Total %	79%	4%	17%	

Figure 18 shows the negative stance of most business sources quoted 4 or more times over the 6-month period. Many Australian readers would have been left with the impression that the business community was opposed to the carbon price policy. In fact this was far from true.

The Northern Territory News, The Daily Telegraph and *The Courier Mail* were particularly negative in their choice of business sources but *The Age*, the *SMH* and *The Australian* also strongly represented business sources opposed to the policy.

Small business owners were also selected who mostly represented the anti carbon policy position.

Examples:

On July 8, 2011, *The West Australian* piece 'Drycleaners feel the heat', began:

“ The price of sprucing up one's glad rags could rise amid fears the carbon tax will drive up the cost of drycleaning.

Drycleaners fear they will be saddled with increased costs as the tax hits their energy bills and other expenses, including Australian-made coat- hangers.

While the industry is likely to be spared a rise in chemical bills because most of its solvents are imported, a carbon tax-driven gas and electricity rise of 10 to 15 per cent could put an extra burden on an industry hit by power bills rising 57 per cent over three years.

Ad Astra Dry cleaning co-owner Joel Rogers said he expected running costs to rise about 5 per cent because of the carbon tax and he would probably have to pass that on to customers eventually.”

On July 8, the Herald Sun ran a short story under the headline: 'Slice of Profits eaten up'. The article featured cake specialist Rebecca Marnock who, despite the definite tone of the headline, was quoted in the lead paragraph as saying that she “*understood little about the carbon tax but did not think it would be a cause for celebration.*” Further down, she repeats, “*I don't know much about the carbon tax up at all. But if our prices go up fro our suppliers, there is every chance our prices would go up. If they went up too much, some wouldn't pay for them– they might try to make their own.*” ('Slice of profits eaten up.' *The Herald Sun*, July 8, 2011).

Journalists often select their sources to further illustrate points established by other evidence or to indicate a range of views. On the carbon debate, a range of sources was available. A feature in *The Age*, March 5 quoted a control room operator at Loy Yang Power station in the coalfields of the Latrobe Valley who was quoted as saying despite the potential future closure of the station, action on climate change was urgent. ('On the carbon row front line' *The Age*, March 5, 2011. On other occasions, *The Age* quoted Latrobe Valley sources who were opposed to the tax.

While a selection of human interest sources is a conventional technique of media packages coming out of major announcements, the reader is provided with no objective way of assessing whether dry-cleaner Joe Rogers' response to the carbon price policy is realistic or not.

In early July 50 businesses, including the global giant GE, AGL, the Body Shop and others signed a statement backing the price on carbon. This move was a deliberate attempt to counter the success of the anti-policy business lobby and gain more coverage for the pro-policy business community. An organisation was formed Businesses for a Clean Economy to address concerns that many businesses were not 'getting a say'. This story was taken up the ABC, which reported that in fact 100 businesses had joined the group.

Several companies in the group were interviewed including Graeme Wise, the Body Shop's chairman.

“

GRAEME WISE: The debate has become I think very selfish and very narrow. The point we're making and I think a lot of companies have joined us in making is that this is not talking about short-term profits for a few big companies, this is talking about the reduction of pollution and the best way of doing that.

SUE LANNIN: A new website called Business for a Clean Economy has also been set up.

*Lane Crockett from renewable energy company Pacific Hydro says it's time for a price on **carbon**.*

LANE CROCKETT: Businesses are behind the transition of our economy to a low emissions economy. We believe that it's better to take action now than wait and in fact from Pacific Hydro's view we'd say we're well past the time when we should have started to take action to reduce our emissions.

*SUE LANNIN: With loud opposition to a **carbon** tax from the mining industry, Graeme Wise says the debate has been skewed by vested interests.*

GRAEME WISE: As Mandy Rice-Davies said, "they would say that wouldn't they?"

The vested interests of that people is basically, seems to be driving this whole debate and I feel that it's time for the people who actually are part of the general Australian economy to make a stand on this and

”

say what they really think.

This story was taken up by AAP and run in *The Canberra Times*, *Financial Review*, several regional newspapers and MX News Ltd.'s give-away newspaper in Brisbane and Sydney. It was also mentioned in one paragraph at the end of a feature of more than 1200 words published by *The Australian*.

The rest of the article covered a number of issues about compensation including complaints by the Australian Coal Association ('Emergency aid for power plants', *The Australian*, July 6, 2011).

Despite the pro-carbon policy business initiative, several days later *The Australian* reported: “*Industry remains opposed to carbon tax, following release of key details of the package*”. ‘Industry’ was quoted as saying that the carbon tax was “*unnecessarily punitive and fails to provide adequate compensation to impacted sectors.*” Seven sources were quoted. The only source quoted who was not negative was the Australian Trucking Association who welcomed the decision to exempt the trucking industry from carbon tax until July 1, 2014. (‘Industry remains opposed to the carbon tax, following release of key details of the package’, *The Australian*, July 10, 2011).

The following day, *The Australian* published another story: ‘Coal Industry fears \$18bn hit from Gillard’s carbon tax’. It quoted mining giant Anglo-American saying that a promised \$1.3 billion assistance package would not be enough. This article also quoted Rio Tinto, the Minerals Council of Australia, the Australian Coal Association, the Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Aluminium Council who all were opposed to the government’s assistance package. It quoted the government as forecasting average income growth would slow by “*just 0.1% but counted this with the views of unnamed ‘economists’ who ‘said the tax would be negative for growth.*” (‘Coal Industry fears \$18bn hit from Gillard’s Carbon Tax’, *The Australian*, July 10, 2011).

Since the ‘economists’ were not named it is not possible to report whether any of them included the panel of market economists surveyed by *The Age*’s Tim Colebatch who had reported just five days earlier that they “*unanimously endorse a price on carbon as the best way to tackle climate change.*’ (‘Carbon tax the way forward: economists’ *The Age*, July 6, 2011). It could be said that Colebatch had also selected sources to reach the result he preferred but there is no evidence of that and since he named all his sources so that readers could assess their credibility for themselves.

Editorials

4% of articles analysed were editorials.

In this study, the editorials were slightly more likely to be positive than the rest of the articles. 23% of editorials were positive compared to 15% in the entire sample. They also tended to be less negative than the commentary. (See below).

Coders observed that it was often more difficult to classify the editorials than other articles. Some newspapers were broadly supportive of the policy and climate change action but were very critical of the Gillard government's particular policy. This applied to several editorials in *The Australian* that we coded as *neutral*. Some editors held open the possibility of approval of the policy earlier in the year but became more negative as details were released.

Figure 19: Breakdown of stance of editorials across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
The Daily Telegraph	18	0	0	18
%	100%	0%	0%	100%
Herald Sun	14	4	0	18
%	78%	22%	0%	100%
The Australian	18	14	2	34
%	53%	41%	6%	100%
The West Australian	8	8	0	16
%	50%	50%	0%	100%
The Courier Mail	6	4	2	12
%	50%	33%	17%	100%
The Advertiser	4	4	1	9
%	44%	44%	11%	100%
Hobart Mercury	1	2	1	4
%	25%	50%	25%	100%
The Age	1	3	19	23
%	4%	13%	83%	100%
Sydney Morning Herald	0	8	10	18
%	0%	44%	56%	100%
Total	70	47	35	152
Total %	46%	31%	23%	100%

The *SMH* and *The Age* editorialists supported the policy. The *SMH*'s editorial line was more positive than its overall coverage. Editorialists at *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun* were very negative about the policy. Other News Ltd papers and *The West Australian* appeared less negative. *The Australian*'s editorialists mentioned on several occasions that the newspaper was in favor of putting a price on carbon, although not necessarily in advance of other countries. They were nevertheless negative about Gillard, the Greens and aspects of the policy.

The small number of editorials in *The Hobart Mercury* revealed a balanced approach towards the policy, perhaps reflecting the substantial Green constituency in Hobart.

Note: This analysis of editorials does not include those on climate science, which are included in Part 2 of 'A Sceptical Climate'. The Herald Sun on February 2, 2011 for instance, published an editorial, which unlike much of its commentary supported the scientific consensus position on climate change.

Opinion

In all there were 909 opinion pieces. Nearly 60% of these were negative and 18% were positive. Nearly 25% were coded 'neutral'. As Figure 21 shows, when neutral pieces were removed, opinion pieces were 78% negative compared to 22% positive. However, all newspapers carried some positive and neutral commentary. For example, even the *Herald Sun*, which was extremely negative towards the policy, published several columns by its regular columnist Jill Singer who is in favour of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Traditionally commentary was mainly designed to provide a venue for voices outside the paper. In this sample, professional journalists or commentators wrote 75% of columns. Our analysis has focused on these pieces.

Figure 20: Percentage of negative, positive and neutral opinion articles, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Negative	Neutral	Positive
The Northern Territory News	85%	0%	15%
Herald Sun	81%	16%	3%
The Daily Telegraph	76%	11%	13%
The Australian	71%	17%	12%
The Courier Mail	63%	30%	7%
The Advertiser	53%	33%	14%
The West Australian	49%	43%	9%
Hobart Mercury	44%	24%	32%
Sydney Morning Herald	36%	34%	30%
The Age	30%	28%	42%
Total	59%	23%	18%

Figure 21: Percentage of negative opinion pieces v positive opinion pieces, across 10 Australian newspapers, from Feb. to July 2011.

Newspapers	Negative	Positive
Herald Sun	96%	4%
The Courier Mail	89%	11%
The Australian	85%	15%
The Daily Telegraph	85%	15%
The West Australian	85%	15%
The Northern Territory News	85%	15%
The Advertiser	79%	21%
Hobart Mercury	58%	42%
Sydney Morning Herald	54%	46%
The Age	41%	59%
Total	76%	24%

Styles of commentary

We identified four broad styles of commentary produced by journalists and regular newspaper columnists. Columnists often use more than one of these styles.

The first is an older style of political commentary that seeks to judge performance and canvas political and economic options in an apparently 'balanced' way. These columns often focus on the on-going political struggle between leaders and parties. *Channel Nine's* political editor and News Ltd columnist Laurie Oakes and *The Age's* Michelle Grattan are examples of such columnists. Their tone is measured and never strident. They do take positions but they usually write in a more detached and 'neutral' style.

A second style is also detached but more pointed and often ironic. These journalists often use their columns to produce empirical analysis that could also be part of a feature. The SMH's Lenore Taylor, for example, published several columns in which she critiqued claims by interests opposed to the policy.

A third type of commentator is the specialist journalist. In this study, such specialists included the SMH Green Biz columnist Padding Manning who is supportive of action on climate change but investigative in his approach and regular *The Hobart Mercury* columnist Peter Boyer, a rare example of a pro-climate change action News Ltd columnist.

A fourth group of columnists was those who overtly promote a set of values and political positions that they apply to a range of policy issues. Some, but not all of these columnists overlay their core arguments with highly emotive language and attributions of blame that the first and second style of columnists rarely use. These include columnists such as *The Daily Telegraph* Piers Akerman. Columnists of this kind are usually conservative in political outlook. There are no equivalent examples of strident progressives found in the corporate media. (The author could also not find any in the independent or alternative media.)

Analysis of key commentators

The person with the most individual columns (some of them syndicated across *The Herald Sun*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Australian* and the *DT*) and highest number of words was Terry McCrann, who was extremely hostile to the policy and often questioned the scientific consensus on climate science. In all, McCrann published 60 pieces, which made significant reference to the carbon policy. Some of these were repeats, sometimes under different titles.

Four days after the policy was announced on February 24, McCrann published a column 'A pledge of suicide'. In the second paragraph of the piece he wrote that the tax is "designed to force us to cut our emissions of carbon dioxide. To stress, *emissions of the life-enhancing gas, not the so-called carbon pollution of bits of grit subconscious image that Gillard and Co deliberately promote*", (author's italics).

McCrann's key argument is that there was no point in Australia reducing its emissions because China will be dramatically increasing its emissions. He ends the column with: "*It is not just designed to hurt every Australian. Permanently. It is effectively a national suicide pledge. From the nation's leader. Incredible. Surreal. All-too real*". ('Carbon Tax, A Pledge of Suicide', *The Australian*, 28 Feb 2011).

Less than a month later, McCrann began another column 'A breath of fresh air' by referring to the "*insane stupidity of Julia Gillard's carbon tax*".

Much of the rest of the column reported the views of Graeme Kraehe, the Chairman of Bluescope Steel, who had argued in a speech at the National Press Club that the carbon policy would 'decimate' manufacturing in Australia. McCrann accuses Julia Gillard of "*deliberately misleading the Australian people*" and agrees with Kraehe's argument.

“
extraordinarily powerful and indeed brave speech from Kraehe, as this is a vindictive government that seeks to punish those who don't toe the line.

It also shames his fellow leading business colleagues who have variously been cowed by the government or have sought access and favours by toadying up to it.

Or like many in the financial services sector that can see money to be made in trading carbon in the new world. While being either indifferent to the industry corpses on which their profits would be made

or simply too stupid to understand that. Or both.” (‘A breath of fresh air’, *The Herald Sun*, March 23, 2011)

The person with the second highest number of columns was Andrew Bolt, with 41 pieces. Bolt is a well-known climate sceptic and was extremely hostile to the policy. Some of his columns were syndicated in *The Herald Sun*, *The Advertiser*, *The Northern Territory News* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

Together, opinion writers who are sceptical of anthropogenic climate change including Terry McCrann, Andrew Bolt, Tim Blair, Miranda Devine, Piers Akerman and Christopher Pearson accounted for at least 21% of all words of commentary published by journalists and regular commentators across the ten newspapers. Their columns are prominently featured online, often accompanied by highly negative cartoons and illustrations.

Non-government organisations campaigning in support of a carbon price adopted the fairly conventional non-government organisation communication strategy of including a celebrity in their work seeking support for change. The Director of the Sydney Theatre Company and well-known Australian actor Cate Blanchett agreed to be part of an advertisement.

On June 1, Bolt described the Blanchett ad as ‘unscientific’ and full of ‘falsehoods’, declaring Blanchett to be a ‘hypocrite’ who was part of an advertisement that “*should shame all green groups and unions that made the wretched thing and that this should warn the rest of us there is much less to this scare than such shameless people claim.*” (‘Alarmist Ad truly a disgrace’, *The Herald Sun*, 1 June 2011).

On July 13, Andrew Bolt commented, “*not a word Gillard says in favour of her dangerous tax can be trusted.*” Towards its end the column stated: “*what’s she selling is a giant fraud that mere spin cannot hide. The world isn’t warming as she thought*” And: “*The Nation being led to a gigantic folly, lured to a cliff.*”

News Ltd claim that Bolt is its best-read blogger. The company heavily promotes his appearances on radio and television. His political arguments are heavily laced with climate skepticism and accusations of fraud and dishonesty. (There is more discussion of Bolt’s constitutions in the second report on the reporting of climate science.)

Figure 21: Number of articles and word count of top ten commentators and percentage of total articles and word count of total by journalists and regular commentators, from Feb. to July 2011.

Commentator/ Journalist	Total no. of articles	% of total no. of comment articles	Word count	% of Words in all comment articles
Terry McCrann	60	9%	36887	7%
Andrew Bolt	41	6%	33906	6%
Dennis Shanahan	32	5%	17393	3%
Laurie Oakes	30	4%	28092	5%
Paddy Manning	26	4%	19898	4%
Miranda Devine	26	4%	21482	4%
Michelle Grattan	18	3%	12834	2%
Piers Akerman	18	3%	17632	3%
Paul Kelly	17	2%	23798	4%
David Penberthy	17	2%	14964	3%
Total	285	42%	226886	40%

We ranked the columnists according to the number of articles they published. Following McCrann and Bolt, the top ten included: News Ltd columnist Laurie Oakes who was usually neutral, *The Australian's* Denis Shanahan who was usually negative, *The Daily Telegraph's* Miranda Devine who was negative, *The Daily Telegraph's* Piers Akerman who was negative and *The Daily Telegraph's* David Penberthy who was usually negative. *The Australian's* Paul Kelly tended to be neutral.

Frequently published Fairfax commentators included *The Age's* senior political reporter Michelle Grattan, whose columns were coded neutral or positive, the *SMH* business reporter Paddy Manning, whose weekly Green Biz column, regularly covered the issue from the perspective of investigating vested interests opposing the policy and *SMH* political reporter Lenore Taylor who was one of the few journalists to presented a solid critique of Abbott's policy and claims about the impact of the carbon policy on power prices.

Some opinion pieces used feature style methods and sources to make their points. On June 4, David Penberthy, in a slightly humorous piece, 'Plumbers pan the carbon tax' syndicated across several News Ltd sites, began *"In a telling intervention which will change the dynamics of the debate, 13 of the nation's leading plumbers have spoken out about the carbon tax."* He summarized their position as follows:

“ *None of them has the faintest bloody idea how the carbon tax will work and generally they think the government is doing what one described as "shit job" of explaining it. They all agreed that costs would* **”**
be past onto consumers and with two exceptions, they queried the timing and purpose of the tax.

Two plumbers who supported action were quoted briefly at the end. Penberthy concluded that by comparison with his interviews, 'communiqués' from eminent Australians such as ex- Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser are *"a useless bit of middle-class posturing."* Penberthy's columns are syndicated in *The Daily Telegraph, The Advertiser, The Courier Mail, The Northern Territory* and *The Herald Sun*.

Some columnists noted the hysterical, strident tone of some of media commentary about the carbon policy. For example on July 13, *The Age* associate editor Shaun Carney in exploring why the public enthusiasm for a carbon tax had done an about face in four years, wrote that analysis should not be based on assumptions that the media *"feel obliged to trade in facts and information rather than emotion and drama"*. ('The Death of the Reform Era', *The Age*, July 13, 2011).

Other publications not included in this study, ABC's *Media Watch*, *Crikey* and *The Canberra Times* also played a role in trying to draw attention to what they see as scare tactics and misinformation serving vested interests.

Discussion & Conclusion

The Independent Media Inquiry into print and online media issues paper that was released in September 2011, sets out a list of matters the Inquiry will address. The first matter refers to the famous dissenting Justice Holmes judgment in the case of *Abrams v United States* in 1919 “*(The) ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas – that the test of truth is the power of thought to get accepted in the competition of the market.*”

While they may not have directly addressed the question, the response of Australia’s media companies was clear. The market, if left to itself can be trusted to deliver a quality media outcome for Australia.

The critical issue of climate change is an excellent case study through which we might examine whether this claim to trust is justified.

There are two unusual features of Australian society that are relevant to the discussion of the significance of the findings of this study.

The first is that since the middle of the twentieth century, Australia has experienced an increasing concentration of media ownership that ranks very highly among liberal democracies. News Ltd dominates the newspaper market and in four state capital cities owns the only metropolitan newspaper. Fairfax controls one national business paper and three metropolitan newspapers, *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Canberra Times*. The news websites of these media companies, along with the *ABC* and *MSN*, are among Australia's top news websites. Both News Ltd and Fairfax have interests in the broadcast and other online media. The only other metropolitan newspaper – *The West Australian* – is owned by Seven West Media, which also owns *Channel 7* and the Australian *Yahoo* Internet site.

The second feature is that Australia's high dependency on fossil fuels has resulted in us having among the highest per capita greenhouse emissions in the world. Climate change has been a hot topic in the Australian media for several years, not so much because it threatens the planet but because of the tense political struggle over how the Australian government should respond. Amongst participants in this struggle are Australian media companies.

This year the focus has been on the Gillard Labor government's carbon policy that was announced in February and passed by the Australian parliament this month. This study reveals that the coverage of climate change by ten Australian newspapers from February to July 2011 tended to be negative towards the policy.

In itself, these findings are not particularly remarkable or surprising. What is more significant are the differences between the media outlets and the extent of the negative bias.

Overall, News Ltd papers have been far more negative towards the policy than the Fairfax papers. *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* were balanced in their coverage. *The Age* was the only paper to be more positive than negative.

There is variation across the News Ltd stable with *The Hobart Mercury* and *The Adelaide Advertiser* being more balanced than other papers. The two biggest News Ltd tabloids – *The Herald Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph* – have been so biased in their coverage that it is fair to say they 'campaign' against the policy rather than covered it. The influence of these two publications extends far outside Sydney and Melbourne. *The Herald Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph* columnists are syndicated across News Ltd mastheads including some regional ones. They also publish blogs, which carry a large amount of material in similar vein to print material and regularly appear on television and radio, supported by corporate marketing techniques designed to amplify their impact.

While the impact of columnists is considerable, negative coverage cannot be attributed merely to several well-published conservative personalities. Bias is an editorial accomplishment achieved through a variety of journalistic techniques including headlining, the selection and prominence of topics and sources, structuring and editing of stories, selection and promotion of commentators, editorials and cartoons or other visuals.

The issue is not one of free speech or the right of a few individuals to push their ideas but the market power of a dominant company to build support for particular policies and ideas.

The media are sensitive about accusations of bias because their own claim to legitimacy rests on codes and ethics that urge them to seek the truth through fairness, accuracy and impartiality. In a media market where two companies control a large slice of the media, accusations of bias are particularly discomfoting and suggest that some sources and points of view may not be getting a 'fair go'.

Media companies prefer not to acknowledge their own power in framing public debate. They argue that readers are free to go elsewhere, although often the outlets they point to are not in the same market or covering the same topics. Particularly important is the media's role in determining the visibility or invisibility of groups and sources and the ways in which different audiences are told (or not) what interests are at stake. The results of the source analysis show that business sources were afforded far more access than those of civil society, including NGOs who have played an active role in promoting action on climate change. Little space was given to sources, including business sources, which argued that the carbon policy would bring economic and environmental benefits. The fossil fuel business lobby were featured prominently, often with little scrutiny of their claims.

While some will justify a negative approach by appealing to the important role of journalists to scrutinise government, 31% of news and feature articles with no more than one source indicates that many sources are in fact not held to account. This may in part be due to the lack of resources in newsrooms under stress from a loss of advertising. However, as other media research has shown, this opens up possibilities for well-resourced interests to gain high visibility for their views through press releases including commissioned research and consultants reports tailored to the news cycle. Private power as well as government power needs to consistently scrutinised by journalists.

Failure to get coverage cannot be put down to failure of communication strategies although the success of big business sources is certainly aided by their interconnected advertising, public relations and lobbying activities.

The Australian, the only general national newspaper, pitches itself as a leader of national political debate, was also strongly negative toward the Gillard Government's carbon policy. This may reflect its overall opposition to the Gillard government, the Greens and support for big business. It often states its broad support for a carbon price and published neutral and occasional positive commentary. It can be contrasted with *The Age*, which carried a similar amount of neutral material but was the only paper to have more positive articles than negative.

In June, *The Age* published an article about a letter in which a number of prominent Australians including News Ltd.'s Chairman Rupert Murdoch's mother Dame Elizabeth Murdoch's had supported the carbon price. *The Age* story took a dig at *The Australian*, which had on the same day "... splashed with a report saying a carbon tax would force eight coal mines to close and cost thousands of jobs, *The Herald Sun* 'revealed' that the carbon tax would push up the prices of *Mars Bars and McDonald's*." (*The Age: Climate Crusader Dame Elizabeth Murdoch joins public campaign for a price on carbon*, June 15, 2011).

The Australian went on the attack with an editorial accusing *The Age* of censorship.

“
For a newspaper to censor or deliberately avoid points of view, such as these, because they conflict with or undermine its own position would be a fundamental breach of trust. Fairfax editors must hold their readers in such low esteem that they will only share with them information that will help shape pre-determined opinions. What a deceptive manipulation of public discourse and an insult to the readers. What disregard for the essence of news and journalism.”

The accusation that Fairfax has a 'dark heart' in which complex debates are distilled to simple viewpoints, peddled to a deliberately misinformed readership is a heavy one. It conflicts with the results of this study which showed that both the *SMH* and *The Age* were both more likely to be neutral and were more evenly balanced between positive and negative than the *Australian*.

The Australian's 'exclusive' June 14 report referred to in *The Age* had reported on what it claimed to be 'economic modelling' by consultants ACIL Tasman. To be fair the Minister for Climate Change Greg Combet was quoted briefly by *The Australian* contesting the its claims of mine closures and job losses, unlike reports on the Channel Nine and ABC websites which closely mirror the Australian Coal Association (ACA) 's media release. *The Age* meanwhile did cover the report on June 15 but also reported in two paragraphs on a Climate Institute response asserting that despite a slowing in jobs growth, 3575 news jobs would be created by 2020.

This report also quoted the ACA and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott who referred to the 'toxic tax'. We could identify no other media investigated or reported on the Climate Institute's response.

The Age also ran an opinion piece by Coalition shadow minister Julie Bishop on July 13, 2011.

Political values and support for political policies are embedded in journalists' reporting either implicitly or explicitly. It is clear that *The Age* is a more progressive than *The Australian* but there is no evidence in this study that *The Age* engages in censorship. Indeed it appears to be considerably more balanced than any News Ltd paper. All papers in this study strongly represented business sources and if any sources were shut out of the debate, it was civil society sources and scientists who supported the policy.

To be positive or negative towards a policy does not imply that a journalist loses impartiality, fairness or a critical approach. Columnists such as the News Ltd.'s Mike Steketee, Fairfax's Ian Verrender and Peter Hartcher wrote a range of incisive pieces making critical points about both sides of the carbon policy debate. The *SMH*'s Lenore Taylor held Abbott's policy and the claims of industry up to scrutiny more consistently than nearly all other journalists.

This study only provides a snapshot of the coverage. Despite low public support, the policy has passed parliament but the coverage continues.

On the day the Clean Energy bills passed parliament, *The Daily Telegraph* ran a full-page story: 'Carbon Casualties –three million families will suffer under a new carbon tax regime.' (November 10, 2011). The story that was featured on *news.com.au*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Perthnow* websites is about Teddy Samuelson. "*The stay-at-home mum said her husband worked "bloody hard for his money" with the family battling existing expenses and the cost of raising three boys in Sydney on Mr. Samuelson's wage of more than \$150,000 a year.*"

The article explained that "*A lot of the debate is based on inconclusive scientific evidence ... we don't really get a say in anything any more.*" While the available evidence showed that most Australians will be better off under the carbon price compensation measures, the story was headlined and constructed to emphasise the cost of the scheme to Australian taxpayers. The reference to inconclusive scientific evidence merged scientific claims with a feeling of democratic exclusion, reinforcing the doubts of readers who are not yet convinced by the scientific consensus on human induced climate change.

Just twenty years ago, a Parliamentary Select Inquiry investigated the Australian print media and found that while the media was highly concentrated and this had an impact on diversity, the Inquiry could find no evidence that the media, in particular News Ltd was biased.

Ten years earlier, the Norris inquiry into Victorian print media had also found dangerous levels of concentration but no definite evidence of bias. Now another government appointed Independent Media Inquiry is asking how well do current standards and codes of practice fulfil their goals and whether there are issues that affect the media's ability to act in the public interest? Surely there could be few stories that are more clearly in the 'public interest' than the critical issue of global climate change.

Yes, this report has established that the reporting of climate change in sections of the Australian media has been far from impartial, fair or balanced. Is it in the public interest for a media organisation that dominates the market to 'campaign' as *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun* have done, on an issue which a huge majority of the world's scientists have found threatens the lives of millions? In what circumstances does a lack of diversity and balance, represent a threat to democracy?

Our research has also found evidence of strong reporting, both in these ten publications, the *ABC* and the fledgling independent media. At the same time however, News Ltd amplifies the power of some of its most biased reporting through blogs, video, links with talk back radio and broadcast media.

Our second report which deals with the reporting of climate science will provide more evidence that while the carbon policy was the focus of intense attention, climate science reporting slipped right down the news agenda. Meanwhile Australian readers received their usual dose of climate scepticism.

Evidence in this report suggests that many Australians did not receive fair, accurate and impartial reporting in the public interest in relation to the carbon policy in 2011. This suggests that rather an open and competitive market that can be trusted to deliver quality media, we may have a case of market failure.

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