

Foreword

Professor Ken Smith

How is it that some public policies come to be viewed as highly successful? This important question motivates the analysis in this book. In the context of the very significant resources allocated to analysis of policy and regulatory failure, professors Michael Mintrom and Paul 't Hart came up with the concept of bringing interdisciplinary authors together to workshop important recent public policy successes in Australia and New Zealand. I was keen for ANZSOG to support the project to rebalance the analysis from what at times seems to be an obsession with critiquing and cataloguing failure. Understanding the reasons for failure is clearly important, but it is also important in these times of diminishing trust to recognise why and how successful policy outcomes can be achieved. Until recently, few efforts have been made to think hard about these questions, let alone in a systematic fashion. While much effort has gone into the scholarship and practice of policy analysis and design, far less has gone into exploring the intersection between the workings of a policy, the process by which it was developed and implemented, and the politics surrounding it. This volume offers a systematic way of considering the factors impacting on policy success.

Reading this book, I have been struck by the compelling narratives and positive messages found throughout the case chapters. There will no doubt be ongoing debate about whether the policies analysed were all resoundingly successful, but few will doubt the impact on the people of our two nations of the initiatives outlined in these chapters. As the editors outline in Chapter 1: 'Policy successes, like policy failures, are in the eye of the beholder'.

The volume presents many policies that have received global recognition for their effectiveness. For example, Australia's response to the public health challenges of HIV/AIDS and Aotearoa New Zealand's Treaty of Waitangi settlement and reparation policy for settlement of historical injustices suffered by Māori are just two very different but powerful examples of major reform strategies initially led by political leaders, which garnered largely bipartisan support and drove new forms of public administration.

In quite a few instances, the policy reforms challenged powerful vested interests, such as the leadership of New Zealand's economic turn-around in the mid-1980s and Australia's gun control legislation implemented after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996. In both cases, the political leaders of the time—prime ministers David Lange of New Zealand and John Howard of Australia—led policy responses that Sir Humphrey would only describe as courageous and that were often opposed by large sections of their own support base. But both relied heavily on independent and expert advice from their public services and kept a keen eye on the broader public interest, rather than simply responding to narrower sectional interests.

I cannot do justice here to all the excellent case examples covered in this book. However, the bottom line is that there is much to be learned from the trajectories of successful policy reforms from one jurisdiction to another, even with the major differences in the nature of our governmental arrangements. What struck me in nearly all the case studies is the importance of the reinforcing interrelationships between the political, policy advisory and implementation systems, and the importance of preparation, persistence and timing in seizing opportunities for reforms.

This volume represents a terrific example of how ANZSOG serves as a catalyst for improvements in the design and effective implementation of government policies and programs. It sets forth a strong analytical framework that is then rigorously applied across diverse areas of public policy. The result is a highly readable—and highly instructive—collection of in-depth cases. In their various ways, these cases contribute insights that together form compelling patterns suggestive of what makes public policy successful. Clearly, this volume will prove a vital teaching resource in public policy courses in the future. I can also see in this collection many starting points for additional research. It is my sincere hope that this work will ultimately lead to many more successful public policies emerging in Australia and New Zealand and elsewhere in the decades ahead.

Beyond these contributions on the nature of policy development and program management, this book is also reflective of the ANZSOG enterprise in how it came together as a project. The intellectual framework for the book was developed by Professor 't Hart and colleagues at Utrecht University. That framework was then systematically applied in the Australian and New Zealand contexts through an effort that brought on Joannah Luetjens and Professor Michael Mintrom as co-leaders. Together, they made effective use of ANZSOG networks to identify the cases for inclusion and the chapter authors. It is important to acknowledge that Joannah began her career with ANZSOG as a research and administrative officer working directly with Michael Mintrom. Having acquired a graduate degree and amassed a strong publication record, she moved to Utrecht to pursue her doctoral studies with Paul 't Hart. Anyone who has been involved with ANZSOG knows that professors Mintrom and 't Hart, in their various ways as program directors, have each contributed to ANZSOG consistently over many years. The editors of this book have been joined here by many other academics and senior practitioners who have made—and will no doubt continue to make—important contributions to ANZSOG's teaching and research efforts since we were established in 2002.

Let me end by congratulating Joannah, Michael and Paul on the completion of this important book. I also offer my sincere thanks to all the authors of the case chapters. Ultimately, this is a book for optimists, for those who recognise the powerful, positive role that governments can play in making the world a better place for their citizens. I commend this work to all who have an interest in advising or implementing successful public policy and who aspire to leadership roles in and around government.

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