Reconsidering nature and accountability: the possibilities of strategic postmodernism

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Australian governments and political parties have been slow to adapt to the challenges posed by the environment. Though a process of 'policy learning' undoubtedly exists, in which wise, 'landmark' decisions are increasing in frequency, it belies the urgency of environmental problems with its snail's pace (Walker, 1992a, p. 233).

Australia does not have a particularly strong environmental track record (Walker, 1992a). Environmental policy formulation, although often central to the political platforms in both the major Australian political Parties (Labor and the Liberal/National Coalition) and the minor political parties (Democrats and the Greens)\(^1\), has often been made contingent on the sale of public assets (such as Telstra) and limited by the lobbying power of environmentally contentious industry (such as forestry, mining, fisheries) (Kellow, 1992). Although these issues are important to the Australian public in general\(^2\), the policy formulation of government infrequently recognises environmental issues as serious, independent of industry and economics (Doyle & Kellow, 1995). There is an obvious relationship between 'nature' and business, but framing environmental discourses solely within this context belies

\(^1\) It is always difficult to clarify the political platforms of respective parties, but it is important to note that in Australia the Liberal/National Coalition is a conservative political grouping. Labor is slightly less conservative and has built its reputation as the political representatives of the 'workers'. In both of these parties, it is increasingly easier to see the similarities rather than the differences. The Greens are a relative newcomer to the Australian political scene, adopting an environmental platform. The Democrats emerged in the seventies in order to "keep the bastards honest" (their slogan not mine) and today they hold the balance of power in the Senate.

\(^2\) A Herald/AC Neilson-McNair Poll sited by Senator Meg Lees (Media Release, 97/863), reported that 90% of Australian's were either "concerned" or "very concerned" about the environmental effects of global warming.
the complex and differentiated experiences of both business and 'nature' within our communities. Business is multi-faceted and different industries have different relationships with nature, as is obvious if the film industry and the mining industry were to be compared (I have discussed this extensively in chapter five).

Many have noted that Australia lags behind the rest of the world in both corporate and governmental environmental accountability (this is true of both regulatory and voluntary accountability as shown by Walker, 1992; 1992a; Dovers, 1994; Burritt, 1995; Burritt & Welch, 1995; Doyle & Kellow, 1995; Gibson, 1995; Tilt, 1997). The Coalition Government's approach to climate change policy is reflected in these comments (see Appendix 8 for a chronology of Australian involvement in climate change negotiations). A contemporary example of this is the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 wherein the government has not included any legislative recourse for the effects of climate change (Connor, 1999). This is indicative of a failure to integrate serious environmental risks into legislation, and it fails to register any procedural, let alone moral accountability for the effects of climate change. In relation to the general lack of accountability for global environmental threats, particularly ones that have only speculative long-term horizons, Beck suggested that

(1)the problem of the incalculability of consequences and damages becomes clear with particular vividness in the lack of accountability for them (1992, p.102).

The main aim of the chapter is to show how the ideas that I have developed in the earlier part of this thesis relate to a specific event. My intention is not to condemn the event, or to suggest an alternative approach that would be more cohesive, but to show how discourse operates within debates over environmental accountability. This will
always be incomplete, but it can open debate beyond the circulation of dominant discourse, particularly where that dominance has manifested itself in exploitative and oppressive ways. Although I would argue that notions of accountability should be contextualised within a competing and contested social and environmental situations, and that the effect of accountability can be both liberating and oppressive, the way that these are constructed and the way that discourse can be circulated to reaffirm already existing meaning is the more important dimension of this research. As I have sought to show this in previous chapters, I will also show this in relation to the level of greenhouse gas emissions that Australia was prepared to be accountable for at COP3.

This chapter will show how the Coalition Government has favoured procedural accountability and has sought to frame the climate change debate within the parameters of policy effects on employment and economics. Other alternative approaches to both matters of accountability and also global environmental dilemmas were largely effaced within this context. As I have argued previously, discourse functions to frame meaning, and in this chapter I will show how discourses of environmental accountability were dominated and also contested within Australia in the lead up to the Kyoto Protocol and also its outcomes.

This will show how even oppositional and alternative voices to that of the Government utilised the same discourses of economic and environmental ‘collaboration’ in order to present their cases. In light of the argument I have developed throughout this thesis, this is a further example of how the traces of dominant discourses operate within social struggles towards ‘meaning’. In order to show this I will first consider the ‘greenhouse model’ that the Australian Government relied on in order to develop and support its policy on climate change and legitimate
its stance on international environmental accountability. This model largely defined what would be an acceptable target to be held accountable for and it also sought to frame such an interpretation in relation to the effect accountability would have on employment and economic activity within Australia. Although this link is important, it is not the only way that policy can be developed and the way in which questions of accountability can be defined and constructed.

I will then show how opposition to the Government's position was mounted through a circulation of the same discourse and that the validity of the 'economic/environment' link went largely unchallenged within the debate. The struggle to dominate meaning will be shown to limit interpretations of environmental accountability within established frames of reference, and without significantly challenging the cultural practices that have contributed to the transformation of global climatic conditions. As I have said before, these attempts at accountability impose and construct 'dominant' views of nature and largely efface the possibility of broader interpretations of accountability that may include future generations and extended responsibility to all 'living things'. This is particularly acute in relation to the ethical dimensions of accountability raised in chapter six, the lack of recognition of this is particularly apparent in the discussion over Australian greenhouse gas production. Where ethical discussion did take place and where an ethical grounding was articulated, it appeared to privilege the accountability relationships between humans (in relation to material prosperity, jobs and economic growth) rather than between humans and the non-human world. This is only possible when the world is imagined as inanimate and easily manipulated, it may not be as easy if the world was imagined as alive and in a constant state of transformation or 'becoming'. The position adopted by Australia, not only lacks a consideration of the emerging importance of environmental ethics, and
therefore the possibilities of meaningful accountability, it only agreed to
the most minimal requirements of what could be described as
procedural accountability. In order to consider these issues in more
detail, I will begin by discussing Australia’s role in the greenhouse cycle.

1. AUSTRALIA AND GREENHOUSE GASES

Australia is not immune from global environmental issues such as
oceanic and atmospheric pollution and most importantly at present,
climatic modification and its effects. The concentration of population on
the coastline, in fact, renders Australia disproportionately vulnerable to
the rising oceans and storms predicted as consequences of the
greenhouse effect (Walker, 1992, p.11).

Since 1985, when the Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone
layer came into force, Australian Governments have been involved in
international environmental negotiations (focusing predominantly on
energy efficiency strategies and the encouragement of voluntary action
by industry) (Johnston & Stokes, 1997). In 1990 the Hawke
Government (Labor) adopted the Toronto Agreement targets to stabilise
greenhouse gas emissions by 2000, and also to ensure a 20% reduction
by 2005 using 1988 as a base year. In 1992, this was renegotiated at
the Rio Earth Summit where Australia signed the United Nations
Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which set a target
of stabilising emissions at 1990 levels by 2000. After it appeared that
these agreements were not being met (at COP2, July 1996), the
UNFCCC agreed that binding targets needed to be set because the ‘in
good faith’ agreements were not being adopted and implemented in the
respective signatory countries (Johnston & Stokes, 1997).

In order to encourage greater compliance, the international community
agreed that there needed to be an increase in international
accountability, transparency and compliance with the international greenhouse agreements. So, in December 1997 the Parties to the agreement met in Kyoto to discuss legally binding emissions targets (discussed extensively in the previous chapter). The Australian Government (led by Liberal Prime Minister, John Howard) went into the negotiations strongly opposing any uniform emissions targets and advocating a differentiated approach, because it would be fairer for those economies that relied heavily on carbon based products for their economic security and material prosperity (Howard, 1997). Prime Minister John Howard’s policy response entitled “Safeguarding the Future: Australia’s Response to Climate Change” released on the 20th November, 1997 (just two weeks before the Kyoto meeting) claimed that only an 18% increase in emissions would be fair to Australia and further, that he had a responsibility to “defend Australian interests, Australian jobs and Australian industry” (Howard, 1997, p.1). This was a controversial approach and it plagued the Australian Government throughout 1997 as they attempted to sell their ‘differentiated’ approach to President Clinton, Chancellor Kohl, Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Hashimoto with little sign of success (Stephens, 12/6/97).

Australia has contributed significantly to the greenhouse cycle as it accounts for approximately 1.4% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. At a global level this does not appear to be a large proportion, however, with a population of approximately 18 million, emissions per capita and per GDP are high. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) television documentary entitled “The Hot Debate” reported that Australia “is the third highest emitter per capita of greenhouse gases in the world” (18th of August, 1997) and the International Energy Agency has suggested that Australia is an inefficient user of energy (relying on fossil fuels for roughly 94% of our energy needs) compared to others in the OECD community and argued
Chapter 9  Australia and Climate Change

that it could "thus cut back emissions more easily" (ABC radio, 5th November 1997, www.abc.net.au/ra/elp/sincfile/sf051197.htm). Australia also relies heavily on coal as a major energy source and exports large amounts to international markets, creating an extended responsibility and impact beyond traditional geo-political boundaries.

Environment Australia\textsuperscript{3} suggested that the high per capita rate of emissions was partly due to Australia's dependence on coal to generate electricity and energy together with emissions intensive industrial processes (such as the processing of steel, iron, aluminium and petroleum products) (Environment Australia, 1998). However, this is not independent of Australia's poor land-use techniques, which have relied heavily on land clearing for crops or cattle, leaving a relatively small amount of carbon 'sinks' (like forests) (Walker, 1992; ABC radio, 5th November, 1997). Australia also has established itself as a seller of raw materials, which means that it relies heavily on the sale of its 'natural resources' for its ongoing material prosperity.

In light of this, Australia's policy to push a differentiated approach to greenhouse responsibility appeared self-serving and short-sighted (Hogarth, 26/22/97). It appeared to favour mining industries that contribute approximately 4.3% to total GDP and provided roughly 87,000 jobs in 1996-97 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 14/7/99, www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.NSF/Australia+Now++A+Statistical+Profile/C1B0BE4D09A55474CA2567220072E9C3/). It also failed to consider the ways that Australia could alter its energy sector (wind and solar power) and discounted the possibility that social policy changes could encourage more efficient energy usage (such as the provision of public transport). The approach adopted by the Government also

\textsuperscript{3} This is an Australian government agency, its role being to contribute to policy formulation, monitor changing environmental conditions and educate the public.
focused predominantly on the economic costs, marginalising the environmental issues and the role Australia should play in becoming more accountable for its heavy reliance on fossil fuels. Although such a position did not go unchallenged, it largely effaced the ethical dimensions of environmental accountability particularly in relation to environmental issues that have unpredictable consequences. In doing so, the reliance on procedural and largely symbolic accountability took precedence over other possibilities. In order to illustrate the way that discourses of environmental accountability were framed by the Australian Government in terms of financial costs to Australia (relating to job losses and its effect on industry), in the following section I will consider the model on which the Australian Government relied in order to set greenhouse gas targets.

2. THE MEGABARE CONTROVERSY: POLICY FORMULATION, ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND CORPORATE SELF INTEREST?

    Downer: If we were to sign up to the proposition that had been put forward by people like the European Union, well then that could cost us ah...I mean, these are...these are guess-timates, it is very hard to know exactly, but it could cost ah...cost up to 60 billion dollars worth of ah...of lost investment and many tens of thousands of jobs.

    Reporter: Tens of thousands of jobs?

    Downer: Sure

    Reporter: Where did you get that figure from?

    Downer: Well what we do is work on the basis of ah...in particular, the modelling done by ah... ABARE.


As Alexander Downer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs noted, the Australian Government relied heavily on the investigations conducted by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
(ABARE) to formulate its stance on greenhouse gases (culminating in the modelling of MEGABARE and GIGABARE). ABARE is a public sector agency working as part of the Department of Primary Industries and Energy (formally known as the Bureau of Agricultural Economics). It is an organisation that has been involved in economic research for over 50 years, providing advice and information to decision makers in both the public and private sectors. This being the case, ABARE was commissioned to develop a sophisticated economic model of the effect of greenhouse gases (abatement/non-abatement) on the Australian economy (Ombudsman, 1998).

ABARE’s charter states that it can conduct research that is within the objectives of the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, the Minister for which at the time was Senator Warwick Parer. With the increasing commercialisation of the public sector, ABARE has been required to solicit funds for its research from the private sector beyond that provided by the Government (currently 40% of ABARE’s funding comes from the private sector). This places the ‘independence’ of the organisation in considerable doubt, particularly when the organisation is made responsible for developing research results that will largely inform the development of government policy. In the context of these political complexities, ABARE was asked to produce a model of the global economy that would enable ‘accurate’ greenhouse gas policy development. The stated purpose of the MEGABARE model is outlined in the interim document as

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4 Interestingly, Senator Parer has subsequently met a considerable amount of controversy over a $2 million Trust in coal mining and export company, Queensland Coal Mine Management (ABC, 11/3/98, www.abc.net.au/98/03/11/980311_95.htm). The Government considered whether this presented a conflict of interest and decided that it did not (ABC, 17/3/98, www.abc.net.au/98/03/17/980317_37.htm). The relationship between Senator Parer’s shareholdings and the ABARE modelling outcomes indicates the tensions that arise in public sector funding arrangements, made even more complicated when agencies are required to solicit external funding.
The initial major focus for the development of MEGABARE was the desire to create a dynamic general equilibrium model of the global economy suitable for international greenhouse policy analysis (1996, p.2).

In a later section I will problematise the epistemological and ontological implication of this attempt to 'model nature'. These issues aside, the model met with considerable controversy, both on the basis of its outcomes and its funding relationship with the private sector (largely energy industries). I will now consider the first of these issues.

2.1 Assumptions and Outcomes?

ABARE's objective is to convert you, not inform you (Gittens, 28/6/97, p. 96).

Such assumptions also fit into the prevailing Canberra economic orthodoxy: the market knows best and governments should not meddle (Gilchrist, 30/8/97, p.5).

On the basis of the ABARE model, the Australian Government argued that if Australia was to agree to anything less than an 18-28% rise in greenhouse gas emissions it would be put at an economic disadvantage compared to other signatory countries. If a 'business-as-usual' approach was adopted Australia has a projected emissions growth of 39.3%, in this context it was argued that Australia would be making a significant contribution if it was to limit the rise to a percentage increase below this amount (and thus still be able to expand greenhouse emissions over 1990 levels) (ABARE, April 1997). The model also estimated that reductions would cost Australia about $9000 per person, which was 22 times higher than estimates of effects conducted in relation to Europe, and it was claimed it would cost Australia considerably in terms of its employment capacity (Gittens, 28/6/97;
Hogarth, 25/11/97; Mitchell, 4/2/98). In this context, ABARE (April, 1997) estimated that wages in Australia would fall by 19% below 'business-as-usual' if a stringent greenhouse gas target was set for 2020. According to these figures, real wages in the European Union would fall only by 4% under the same conditions. ABARE argued that

(i)n the case of Australia, which supplies large shares of the world's coal and minerals processes, emission abatement activities would entail major structural adjustment in industry, with high economic costs (September 1997, p. 5).

Within the context of an international community that was gearing towards a reduction in greenhouse gases, these outcomes met with considerable controversy. The criticisms mentioned above by Gilchrist (30/8/97) and Gittens (28/6/97) focused extensively on the ideological imperative of such outcomes. However, the ontological and epistemological problems with modelling the economic impacts of greenhouse gas policy on Australia did not really enter the mainstream debate over MEGABARE, which is not all that surprising considering the discussions that have occurred in chapters preceding this one. This being the case, controversy about the 'correctness' of these assumptions, rather than the generally accepted wisdom of economic modelling received a great deal of attention in the lead up to COP3 (Hogarth, 25/11/97; Lees, 1997, 97/880; Peck, 1998). It would be erroneous, however, to assume that there were no criticisms of the model. Ross Gittens, the economics writer for the Sydney Morning Herald wrote that the figures

seem to be largely the product of several debatable assumptions on which the modelling was based (28/6/97, p. 96).

And further
the use of the models results in press releases and pamphlets, there's no acknowledgement of the key assumptions that produce those results. Nor is there any presentation of the alternative results that would be produced by different assumptions (Gittens, 28/6/97, p. 96).

Many high profile economists, academics and environmental researchers questioned the assumptions that underpinned the model, including Clive Hamilton of The Australian Institute, Ian Lowe, Professor of Energy and Environment at Griffith University and Warwick McKibbin, Professor of Economics at the Australian National University. Lowe claimed that it was a

case of garbage in, garbage out that if the assumptions that go into a model are wrong, then the answers that come out will also be wrong (ABC, 18/8/97, www.abc.net.au/science/eureka/transcripts/hot.htm).

Pursuing this further, on 1st October, 1997, the Democrats tabled a document signed by 131 economists who argued that the modelling was faulty, biased, inaccurate and overly pessimistic. They argued that the economic modelling studies on which the Government is relying to assess the impacts of reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions overestimate the costs and underestimate the benefits of reducing emissions (The Australian Democrats, 1/10/97, www.democrats.org.au/parliament/1997/1001/2mlmpi.html).

Although this joint statement was highly critical of the model, it used the same underlying economic assumptions in order to criticise ABARE’s work. They called for an adjustment of the assumptions but did not address the inadequacies of this type of application to issues of complex global environmental concern. The decision to base environmental policy and international environmental accountability almost exclusively on the results of global economic modelling was not criticised. The model required an estimate of the costs of not reducing
greenhouse gases, an estimate that required this to be measured in financial terms, which entirely ignores the possible irreversibility of global climatic instability. In which case the financial costs are largely irrelevant because 'nature', unlike a bank, cannot be borrowed from and paid back later. Beck argued in his analysis of a 'global risk society' that

financial compensation cannot be awarded for the damages done; it has no meaning to insure oneself against the worst-case effects of spiraling global threats. Hence there are no places for aftercare if the worst should happen (1996, p.15).

The outcomes of this report encouraged the Australian Government to adopt an approach that argued the effect of climate change abatement strategies would affect some countries more than others and, as such, that for the Protocol to be truly effective and equitable these differences needed to be considered in the development of emissions targets. In this sense effectiveness and equity were defined in terms of the impacts the Protocol will have on the economy, rather than inter-generational issues of equity and environmental equity. These were largely ignored. In this context, the model was criticised extensively within both the national and international community (although largely on its economic assumptions rather than the limited scope of economic analysis on environmental policy development). As Hogarth reported in the Sydney Morning Herald,

(it is well-known that models used by consultants can be 'tweaked' to produce the results desired by their clients. A model constructed by an agency of a government already committed against a proposed agreement, therefore has a credibility problem regardless of the professionalism of its designers (25/11/97, p.13).
The funding of this model also came into considerable controversy and I will now consider the implications of this on the development of Australia’s stance on greenhouse gases and the construction of international environmental accountability.

2.2 Funding and Outcomes?

For us, the issue here is accountability and the effect this has had on Australia’s environment, international credibility and future (Lees, Media Release March 1998).

The Australian Government relied on a largely industry funded model to produce its greenhouse policy and as a result, concern was raised about the effect this would have on the construction of international environmental accountability. Although symbolically an attempt had been made to acknowledge the significance of climate change, this was largely procedural and narrowly focused. Boundaries were drawn between knowable and unknowable outcomes, worthy and unworthy speculations and satisfactory and unsatisfactory risks (Beck, 1996).

This delimited the possibilities of accountability to a skeletal and instrumental process, with an excessively economic and short-term focus. It presupposed the superiority of economic instruments in dealing with emerging environmental issues, circulating the certainty of a ‘modelled reality’ as if it could replace the biophysical uncertainty of climate change. In this context there were a number of challenges to the short-term, symbolic and procedural commitment of the Australian Government to accountability for Australian greenhouse gas production.
and consumption\textsuperscript{5} (Aragawal & Narain, 1991; Anonymous, 1997; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 18\textsuperscript{th} August, 1997; 5\textsuperscript{th} November, 1997; Barson & Wright, 1998). Beyond the criticisms raised in the previous section, argument brewed within the Australian community leading up to the Kyoto Protocol over the dubious funding arrangements constructed for the fast-tracking of the model. External funding of ABARE had been around since at least 1992-93, where external funding made up 20\% of the total operating funds, but it was not until 1993 that the Government sought to formalise the arrangements (it did this for a number of research institutes, such as Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Australian Geological Survey Organisation and the Australian Institute of Marine Science) (Ombudsman, 1998). The Government set ABARE the target of raising 30\% of its funds by 1995-96 (this has increased to a target of 40\% in 1996-97) (Ombudsman, 1998). ABARE also placed a high level of priority on attracting funding for the project, stating

because of the very tight policy time frame, ABARE decided to seek top-up external funding for the project to increase its resourcing beyond the constraints of its own budget and, thereby, to reduce the time taken to construct the model (August 1997, p. 1).

This was irrespective of the fact that

the modelling was crucial to the Federal Government’s position on greenhouse gas emission at the December Kyoto conference (van Leeuwen, 4/2/98, p.4).

\textsuperscript{5} There is a difference between production and consumption of greenhouse gases that has not been clearly articulated within the literature. It is comparatively easy to calculate the amount of greenhouse gases produced in Australia, but almost impossible to calculate the greenhouse gases emitted in the production of all goods and services consumed in Australia. If goods are manufactured in China, but consumed in Australia, who is responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions?
The controversy erupted when the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) accused ABARE of unfairly favouring those with significant financial resources when it called for participants on its Steering Committee. According to the Ombudsman’s report into the allegations, the MEGABARE research proposal developed by ABARE stated that the Steering Committee would

> oversight the model’s development, to advise ABARE on project management matters as appropriate and to make certain decisions relating to the project which affect the interests of the sponsors (MEGABARE research proposal, September 1993, as cited by Ombudsman, 1998, p. 16).

It appears obvious that the direction of certain dimensions of ABARE’s research would be guided by the committee, just how much was questionable because of the paradoxical position that ABARE was placed in. On one hand, it must do its best to present an attractive investment option to potential sponsors and on the other, it must maintain its research integrity (Ombudsman, 1998). This is a complicated balancing act, and one that is increasingly problematic as more and more public services are required to find private funding, or are being contracted out, or are undergoing transformation based on a commercial sector model (Gray & Jenkins, 1993; Gare, 1995; Ogden, 1995). Under the competitive constraints placed on the research, ABARE rejected ACF’s attempts to have the membership fee of $50,000 waived, and as table 2 indicates the Steering Committee was made up largely of corporations, corporate alliances and government departments that had a vested (financial) interest in its outcomes, including Texaco, BHP, Exxon, Mobil, the Business Council of

The relationship between these businesses and organisations and greenhouse gas production is obvious, as mining organisations and those involved in fossil fuels have the most to lose financially if their operations were curtailed because of their environmental effects. As non-government environmental groups were not represented on the Steering Committee, the circulation of an industry driven viewpoint was made substantially easier. It also meant that those with an economic interest were able to affect the development of the model, whilst those without an economic interest were not able to challenge the construction of the model in any technical sense, let alone raise theoretical, philosophical or ethical questions.

On the claim that ABARE’s practices excluded the voices of organisations such as the ACF, the Ombudsman found that ABARE had not been open and transparent enough about the sources of its funding and had failed the public on this matter of accountability (Ombudsman, 1998). As such, the Ombudsman recommended that the ‘procedures’ used by ABARE be updated so as to aid this accountability function (Hogarth, 4/2/99).

⁶ Refer to Appendix 4, 5 and 6 for lists of companies who are involved in these collaborative councils and association, including the Australian Aluminium Council, Business Council of Australia and The Electricity Supply Association of Australia; I did contact the Australian Coal Association but I was told that it does not make its membership available to the public.
Table 2: Steering Committee Membership\(^7\) (source: Ombudsman, 1998, p. 40)

\(^7\) See also Appendix 7 for Greenpeace's breakdown of the funding arrangements.
It was also found that pursuant to s35 of the Audit Act 1901, ABARE paid into consolidated revenue account which was reappropriated by the Department of Finance and Administration to compensate ABARE. These accounting techniques make it impossible for ABARE to match revenue with expenditure or external funding with research results with any level of accuracy. It was concluded that this did not excuse ABARE’s lack of disclosure of external funding for its research publications, because at the very least they could have stated that the work was made possible by donations/sponsorship from the named corporations (Ombudsman, 1998). Mitchell quoted the Ombudsman as saying

(b) not allowing adequate and balanced community input and by not accurately declaring the sources of its funding in its climate change report, the bureau has compromised the credibility of its work (4/2/99, p.A6).

Although the Ombudsman did not seek to challenge the professional integrity of ABARE, it upheld the complaint brought by the ACF because the organisation had not acted sufficiently to include ‘other’ interested organisations irrespective of their ability to pay. However, what largely went unmentioned in the media was the timing of the report, as the complaint had been raised on the 2nd of June, 1997, well before the Government went into negotiations over the Kyoto Protocol, but the report was not released until February, 1998. This was two months after the model had been used to negotiate a ‘groundbreaking’ international environmental agreement. This meant that the report was politically benign, having little impact on the outcomes of the Government’s controversial stance. The report also focused on the need to change the ‘administration’ of external funding and its ‘procedures’ for public consultation, making no comment on the possible
consequences of the funding arrangements on the outcome of the report.

In so doing, the Ombudsman was clear that ABARE should do more to ensure the "reality and the appearance of independence in its climate change modelling" (Ombudsman, 1998, p.18). The fact that the type of budgetary constraints demanded by the Government required the research to be funded largely by industry was not questioned, challenged or considered. The notion of 'independence' could have been highly contested, but it was relegated to the margins, and the notion of independence and objectivity remained unscathed and ill-considered within the debate. The complexities of attracting investors, ensuring that something was in it for them, but also ensuring that research integrity and independence was maintained were left outside the boundaries of the investigation as though these were the assumed constraints of research under the current funding ideology (Gare, 1995 considered this extensively in relation to scientific research).

In light of the funding scandal and the Government's stance at Kyoto, Beder argued that

(t)he Australian Government is quite clearly representing coal interests rather than the public interest...It has accepted economic modelling largely funded by the fossil fuel industry which gives a distorted view of the costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It has ignored the arguments of environmentalists and energy experts who argue that the benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions outweigh the costs (Beder, quoted by Hogarth, 29/10/97, p. 10)

The credibility problem noted by the Ombudsman and discussed by Beder became a politically contested issue leading up to the Kyoto
Protocol, with Cheryl Kernot (then leader of the Australian Democrats\(^8\)) claiming that ABARE is the ideological cousin of the Industry Commission and it never misses an opportunity to slip the boot into environmental or social causes, churning out statistics from its largely discredited macro-economic modelling, showing how much better off we would be if only we mined more coal, produced more electricity and puffed more carbon dioxide every day (Kernot, August 97, Media Release 97/527).

The research results and the funding arrangements associated with the research garnered extensive publicity. Although the Ombudsman found that the integrity of the research was not in question, this belied the complex relationship between funding and outcomes. On the basis of the findings of ABARE, the Government argued that the costs of abating greenhouse gas to Australia would be far more extensive than most of the other signatories to the agreement and that they would agree to be held internationally accountable only for targets that met their criteria of effectiveness and equity, both of which were framed largely in relation to economic consequences rather than environmental consequences.

In this section I have shown how the foundations on which Australia formulated its greenhouse gas policy are questionable, and lacked appropriate accountability and ‘transparency’. These foundational flaws, having been exposed after the negotiation on greenhouse gas targets had occurred, have been continued throughout the construction of what Australia is prepared to be accountable for within the context of the Kyoto Protocol.

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\(^8\) This is a minor party, although they currently hold the balance of power in the Senate. They have some environmental credentials, but the significance of these and the parties commitment to environmental issues is questionable.
Beyond these criticisms, little debate has occurred over the validity of basing an acceptable level of accountability on the outcomes of a global economic model that effaced the effect of changes in greenhouse gas abatement possibilities. In this sense, the ethical dimensions of accountability that are vital to the concept of emerging accountability arrangements for unpredictable, long-term environmental issues were largely obscured. Perhaps the only 'success' of the model lay in its ability to entrench the validity of procedural accountability because of its alleged independence and objectivity and its scientific rationality and in its ability to circulate such discourses substantially enough to limit the debate within its parameters. Even alternative perspectives (like those of Greenpeace) were forced to engage in debate over the model, and were given only limited discursive space to consider radical alternatives. This also made it difficult to articulate the problems of presupposing accountability for the financial and economic consequences based on short-term horizons over the ethical dimensions of accountability over the long-term. I will now consider the limitations of such modelling.

3. MODELLING NATURE: THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

So the model’s results rest on a host of assumptions, most of which don’t make much difference but some of which are crucial. Clearly, there’s considerable scope for getting the results you want (Gittens, 28/6/97, p.96).

There are a number of problems with the assumptions that are held ‘a priori’ in the construction of models such as MEGABARE. Like all attempts to represent a complex set of variables it reduces the global economy to a set of mathematical equations in an attempt to predict the outcome of different greenhouse gas policy decisions on the global
economy. The wisdom of such an approach is rarely questioned and the neo-classical assumptions that are held constant in the work are largely beyond consideration, these are conditions that manifest the dominance of 'method' over subject matter (Gorz, 1989; Gray, 1990; Ralston-Saul, 1994; Harvey, 1998). As Foster argued

(claim) for this approach have recently been much urged in both official and academic circles, and it has found serious political favour...the overall picture of environmental value as expressible and manipulable in money terms may fairly be called the prevailing orthodoxy of the UK policy community on these issues...To call this trend (value for money) even questionable, never mind 'evil and destructive', would be to meet with widespread blank incomprehension (1997, p.7-8).

For instance, the MEGABARE interim document states that

(perfectly competitive markets are assumed (1996, p.3),

and the

models contain a large number of equations, only a small subset of the equations embody different behavioural hypothesis (1996, p.1).

Even such things as

fertility and mortality rates are related to economic welfare (MEGABARE, 1996, p.5).

There are innumerable examples throughout the MEGABARE model of its reductionist imperative in regard to all human relationships being based on economic rationality. Although this does have an undeniable impact on greenhouse gas policy (and indeed fertility and mortality rates) it is offered extensive privilege over any other possible behaviours and reasons for such behaviours (gender, class and most particularly...
cultural). To reiterate much of the argument that has been developed in previous chapters, the model is a good example of the problems associated with disconnected representations of complex and contested social realities. It makes no mention of the 'life' that is to be affected by climate change, the social and environmental upheaval that may occur if it is not stopped, the complex relationships that we have with nature or its possible meaning(s) beyond the rhetoric of economics.

Peterson and Peterson (1996) have argued extensively against economic modelling as the foundation for social or environmental policy because it assumes and delimits the human experience in terms of already existing neo-classical economic assumptions. This in turn makes it even more difficult to advocate in favour of the environment on grounds other than economic (as will be shown in a later section in relation to alternative political positions within the Australian context and also the discourses operationalised by non-government environmental organisations). They argued that models that “privilege economic modes of experiencing over all others threaten to distort the social experience” (Peterson & Peterson, 1996, p. 210) and that they can only operate after “arbitrarily decontextualising the wilderness in question” (1996, p.210). In this sense, the aim of economic modelling is to remove the uncertainty of nature from the analysis (surrounding its value, the complexities of its meaning, the role it plays in the life-cycle, the possibility that it has value beyond that which humans attribute to it) and replace it by the alleged certainty of economic theories of utility maximisation and the ability of economic behaviour to adequately represent the reality of complex social and environmental issues. Significantly, Peterson and Peterson (1996) articulate the effect of discourse on the construction of social and environmental relationships. They wrote that
The discourse used to define or evaluate anything has the potential to invent that thing in fundamental ways. To begin with, it creates knowledge about that thing and guides appropriate responses to it. For example, if wilderness is defined primarily in economic terms, it becomes an economic resource. As an economic resource, its value is determined completely by its relationship to the cycle of capacity and incapacity to make payments. Thus, its concrete naming has determined its abstract nature, while insidiously naturalising existing patterns of domination as they relate to (nature) (Peterson & Peterson, 1996, p. 215).

This supports the argument developed throughout this thesis. Discourse frames meaning, and an examination of dominant discourse is vital to the extensions of meanings to include previously excluded perspectives. In order to guide policy responses to issues such as climate change, more than economic discourse is required if we are serious about challenging and changing the construction of alienating, disembodied and exploitative relationships with the environment. It is only when our attempts to represent nature are extended beyond the reproduction of the status quo that we are able to challenge the inequity that denotes relationships within human societies and relations between humans societies and between human societies and the environment.

The kind of modelling used in MEGABARE and the reliance placed on it by the Australian Government to inform its construction of appropriate levels of accountability further implies that

research is both disembodied - an essentially ahistorical, apolitical, technical process, a transcendental, contextless procedure - and disembodied - carried out by isolated, asocial, genderless individuals without history (Usher, 1993, p. 101).
Producing a model of the world’s economy is a difficult task, as it involves making a range of assumptions about the behaviour of countries, economies, companies and citizens. In postmodern terms it represents a reproduction of ‘the real’ wherein the authenticity of the original is effaced and made irrelevant to decision making. In terms of this particular model, the economy (and the effect of greenhouse gas reductions) is considered by running variables through thousands of mathematical equations which come up with results that most accurately predict the effect of a change in the equation on the world’s economy. It rests on ‘a priori’ assumptions about the global shift towards market economies, makes assumptions about future (possible) technological change and development and it is devoid of moral, ethical or ‘lived’ dimensions about notions of social and environmental justice, fairness or equity. It does not consider the subject position as embodied but rather relies on the abstraction to mathematical equations. In such attempts at modelling, assumptions are made about nature, its predictability, its value, its meaning and its resilience that assume a position of ‘truth telling’ that belies the diversity of beliefs about nature, assuming ‘a priori’ the ability and right of humans to ‘manage nature’.

I will now turn to consider some aspects of the public discourse that emerged leading up to the Kyoto Protocol, illustrating how MEGABARE provided the critical foundation of such debate. This in turn delimited discussions of Australian accountability for greenhouse gas emissions and abatement to the procedural, technical and ‘scientific’, making discussions of the ethical responsibilities almost invisible.
4. LEADING UP TO KYOTO: DISCOURSES OF ACCOUNTABILITY, FINANCIAL COSTS, JOB LOSSES, INDUSTRY CLOSURE?

But Australia is refusing to agree to the solution that the rest of the world is putting forward - binding international greenhouse reduction targets. Its argument is that we should be “differentiated” from the rest of the world because our economic system is uniquely dependent on fossil fuels like coal (Woodford, 28/6/97, p.33).

The public discourse over Australia’s position on greenhouse gas emissions leading up to COP3 was one of contest. It can be broadly categorised into two divergent positions. The Government, based on the modelling produced by ABARE maintained a position that suggested Australia would lose out economically if it were to agree to universal reductions in greenhouse gases. They claimed that employment, investment, and the general material prosperity of Australia would be damaged by the suggested binding agreement. This did not occur without challenge, as the Government’s claims were seriously contested in the mainstream media, questioning its environmental credentials (Gittens, 28/6/97; Woodford, 28/6/97) and the basis on which it formulated this particular policy decision (Gittens, 28/6/97; Gilchrist, 30/8/97). As Clark argued

> ecological thought has inherited the narrative of an ascendant instrumental rationality which reduces nature to an object to be worked upon and marginalizes all other ways of knowing and experiencing it (1997, p.79).

Unfortunately both the dominant and the divergent perspectives of accountability utilised similar assumptions, but deployed them in different ways. The procedural dimensions of accountability dominated discussions, with the emphasis being placed on the collection of data to determine policy, keeping inventories of greenhouse gas emissions and
possible abatement strategies and reporting these findings to the international community. The ethical dimensions of accountability were largely ignored, as were the hierarchical assumptions as to who and for what the Australia Government and public should be accountable. This limited the possibilities of reconsidering the relationship between humans and the non-human world, procedural and ethical accountability, current and future generations and the inequity between the wealthy and the poor. It also failed to consider what we have come to mean by these terms, whether a wealthy nation is one that is environmentally rich, rather than materially prosperous and whether a desirable nation is one that creatively re-imagines the relationship between culture and nature, rather than perpetuating a false dichotomy that continues to permeate our relationships with each other and the environment.

I will now consider the Australian Federal Government’s approach to environmental accountability, and the discourses circulated to frame the possibilities of its meaning. Although this will be brief, it shows some examples of how divergent accountability and environmental discourse was marginalised within the political process. This draws into focus how procedural accountability, linked to and contingent on short-term social and political objectives has been emphasised and how ‘nature’ has been made peripheral to the debate.

4.1 The Government’s Approach to Environmental Accountability

The Australian Government left the Kyoto meeting claiming they had secured a victory for the nation. The public were left asking—who wins with Australia increasing its greenhouse gases? Why weren’t other nations tougher on Australia’s pro-pollution position? And will the agreement be enough to avoid damaging climate change affecting us into the next century? (Reynolds, 1998, p. 9).
As I have suggested in the previous section, the Australian Government's position was informed by and justified extensively through the findings of the MEGABARE model. On the basis of this there was considerable debate over what Australia would be prepared to be accountable for in relation to the effect such accountability would have on the national economy. Even though, as suggested in the previous section, the model was constructed using questionable assumptions and on the basis of problematic funding arrangements, it is still extensively bound the debate within its parameters. There were two main government departments involved in the discussion on greenhouse gases, these being the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (headed by Minister Alexander Downer) and the Department of the Environment and Heritage (headed by Senator Robert Hill). In the lead up to COP3 all of these departments released multiple press releases supporting the Government’s position. These departments generally followed the same approach, privileging discussions of the effects of unfair targets on jobs and industry over the affects that such jobs and industry may have on the environment. The following examples are not extensive, but they show how this discourse framed the meaning of debate within these parameters.

4.2 The Prime Minister's Office

Since its election the Government has addressed the critical issue of global warming in a way that effectively promotes Australia’s national interests (Howard, 1997, p.1).

Prior to the meeting of COP3 in December 1997, John Howard as head of the Government released a comprehensive package on climate change entitled “Safeguarding the Future: Australia’s Response to Climate
Change”. The package argued that the only ‘fair’ outcome for Australia would be an increase of between 18% and 28% in Australia’s emissions from 1990 to 2010. Prime Minister John Howard argued that universal targets would be inequitable, affecting the Australian economy more than others. He argued that

(s)ome industries fundamental to the health of our economy would be hardest hit. The non-ferrous metals, iron and steel and coal industries would be seriously affected, and future investment and employment growth would be jeopardised. Even stabilising our emissions at 1990 levels would put at risk $68 billion of energy intensive projects and the tens of thousands of potential jobs that go with them (Howard, 1997, p. 17).

The package included:

1. Renewable Energy - funding for research and development into renewable energy. Electricity retailers to get 2% of electricity from renewable sources by 2020.
3. Automotive industry - encourage fuel efficiency labelling, phase out the use of leaded petrol, all cars to be 15% more fuel efficient by 2006 beyond business as usual approach.
4. Codes and Standards - develop energy efficiency labelling for all equipment.
5. Tree Planting - treble tree plantations by 2020, encourage investment in forestry farming.
6. Establish the Commonwealth Greenhouse Office to oversee the implementation of climate change policies (See Howard, 1997).

In releasing this package prior to the Kyoto negotiations the Government was accused of pre-empting and undermining the meeting.
This further entrenched the idea that Australia was in no way going to agree to uniform targets and that only incremental changes would be encouraged. As is evident from the above policy initiatives, the Government's perception of the economic consequences of greenhouse gas abatement ensured the response would be limited to the confines of 'economic acceptability' and it raised no substantial challenges to current industrial or social relations to the environment. Take for example the Government's initiative on tree planting, this made no mention of the need to preserve already existing wilderness areas and it assumed implicitly that all forests have the same 'sink' value.

The general short-sightedness of the approach adopted forgoes an opportunity to reconsider the future of Australian and global relationships with each other and the environment and to reconsider the possibilities and requirements of increasingly environmentally aware national and global communities. It flies in the face of the hope expressed by Beck when he wrote:

> (g)lobal threats are the embodiment of the errors of a whole epoch of industrialism; they are a kind of collective return to the repressed. In their conscious investigation lies perhaps a chance of breaking the spell of industrial fatalism (1996, p.24).

In contrast to Beck's (1996) view, the Prime Minister's position is summed up in the following statement.

> As I have demonstrated to date, my Government will continue to stand up for our national interest, jobs and economy in the international negotiations (Howard, 1997, p. 20).

Although it is impossible to represent the Prime Minister's view in entirety, the examples I have selected suggest the emphasis placed on the economy in the Government's policy stance. In this sense
accountability is related directly to the short-term economic interests of the nation, rather than the long-term environmental interests of the globe. Nature was obscured by the heavy emphasis on discourses that had traditionally dominated political debates, such as employment and economic activity, and these were which are related directly to the ambiguous notion of the 'national interest'. The hierarchical dimensions of human-human accountability are visible within the perspective adopted by the Prime Minister and from this standpoint it is difficult to engage in dialogue about the role, importance and future of the environment. To dislodge the procedural domination of form over substance, accountability to the current generation over future generations and the priorities laid down by elected representatives will require a complete and committed reconsideration of both nature and accountability.

4.3 The Department of Environment and Heritage

Ministers of the Environment, no matter what their party affiliation, are not to be envied. Hampered by the scope of their ministry and its financial endowment, they must keep their causes largely constant and counter the cycle of destruction in a primarily symbolic fashion (Beck, 1992, p.105).

Senator Robert Hill, who is currently the Australian Minister for Environment and Heritage and he led the Government’s negotiation at Kyoto. Although his charter is to maintain the integrity of the Australian environment and heritage assets, Senator Hill has consistently made statements that link Australia’s environmental future to its relationship with industry. There is a long history of tension between industry and the environment and this portfolio is placed within this context, however the Conservative Coalition Government’s particular emphasis on free market economics, commercialisation and privatisation of public
utilities and assets, and its faith in the user pays principle (evidenced by its policies on health, education, and even its ‘Work for the Dole’ reciprocal responsibility program) is also evident in its trust of the private sector to ensure the future of the Australian environment. For example Senator Hill has said that

(t)he Government believes that Australian business can take a lead in reducing environmental impacts (Senator Robert Hill, Media Release, June 1997, 52/97).

And further

(e)conomic instruments can be more effective in achieving environmental objectives than regulatory means (Senator Robert Hill, Media Release, July 1997, 77/97).

He also argued that, mining would remain a leading contributor to the Australian economy (Hill, July 1997, 77/97), contradicting the evidence provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that its relevance as an industry has been in consistent decline. In the period from 1986-87 to 1996-97, the industry declined by approximately 0.1% on average (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 14/7/98, www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.NSF/Australia+Now++A+Statistical+Profile/788B2C4292E86060CA2567220072E9C6/). It has also engaged extensively in ‘downsizing’ and has reduced its work force consistently over the same period.

Senator Hill has also claimed that jobs growth necessitates an increase in emissions. Not only is this assumed ‘a priori’, it also assumed beyond question employment growth is a major aim of the Government and

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9 The Dole’ has re-entered the Australian public service as another description of Job Search Allowance.
should be privileged over its (necessary) effects on the environment. Hill also indicates a reluctance to consider the possibility that employment growth could be made contingent on the economy shifting into the production of more efficient energy, or that energy efficiency could indeed bring jobs. He stated that

> (i)t is foolish to believe that we can continue to grow as an economy and provide jobs and job security for Australians without there being a resultant effect on energy-related emissions (Hill, Media Release, 26th September, 1997).

To a large extent Senator Hill reinforced the framing of environmental accountability in economic terms and his approach was significantly devoid of 'environmentally oriented discussion'. He even stated that “industry worked with us to achieve a fair outcome at Kyoto” and that he was “confident that the proposed reforms will deliver benefits for industry” (Hill, Media Release, 11th March, 1998). He failed to show an appreciation of the long-term horizon of the environment portfolio, speaking rarely of the environment, and the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change, preferring to argue that the economic costs of abating climate change would be catastrophic. Von Strokirch wrote that the

Australian Environment Minister Robert Hill made it plain in Kyoto that, having a fossil fuel intensive economy, Australia would not sign an agreement that would damage its economic interests (1998, p. 411).

The position articulated in these quotes relates to the research conducted by Covaleski and Dirsmith (1995) into the changing face of public administration in the United States. They argued that decision-making and control took on the appearance of procedural, measurable and predictable negotiations, using the technologies and discourses of business in order to direct their actions and articulate their position to
the public. The rhetoric of Senator Hill involves similar tactics, framing the possibilities of environmental accountability within a hierarchical structure of preferences that denies full exploration into the environmental consequences of climate change.

4.4 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade


The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has played an important role in attempting to formulate and sell the Australian stance on greenhouse gases to the rest of the world. As the above title suggests, DFAT were 'negotiating for reality' which links the Australian stance on greenhouse gases directly with business. Although the relationship between business and the environment is undeniable, by privileging the viewpoint of ‘costs to business’ rather than ‘costs to the planet’ the environmental consequences of climate change are largely effaced from the discussion. Greenhouse gases are not just a matter for the environment portfolio, but are also of international and global consequence and are thus, an important part of Australian foreign policy (Johnston & Stokes, 1997).

Alexander Downer is on the record as saying that

the Government is genuine in its commitment to achieving an international agreement that deals with global warming whilst simultaneously ensuring that Australia's future prosperity is not put at risk (Downer, Media Release, 7th July, 1997, FA67).
Implicitly, the Minister for Foreign Affairs has supported a stance that considers Australian jobs and profit, competitive advantage and international trade first, and then considers the environment. Again the theme is repeated, whereby the Government constructs a discourse of environmental accountability that is made marginal to the more pressing issues of jobs and economic prosperity. The above statement implies that dealing with global warming in a meaningful way may be in conflict with 'prosperity' which implies that prosperity is something other than a healthy environment (namely material prosperity).

When the outcome was reached, wherein Australia was allowed to increase their emissions by 8% over 1990 levels, Alexander Downer hailed the success of Australian diplomacy. Even though Australia was largely reported to have hampered the negotiations, and were one of three countries allowed an increase, he claimed that

(w)e can pride ourselves in the role that Australia played in constructing a framework for an overall reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions (Downer, 12th December, 1997, FA153).

And further, Alexander Downer claimed that this only showed that the Government was right all along in advocating differentiation unlike some groups in Australia who wanted us to take an approach that would put investments, jobs and Australia's economic prosperity at risk (Downer, 12th December, 1997, FA153).

Again, the political discourse showed that the Government had acted in Australia's best interests by securing its responsibility and accountability in terms of the primary signifiers of jobs and material security, whilst making the environment secondary to these concerns. This is all the more gratuitous when the Australian Government claimed that they had participated in a process that secured a global
decline in greenhouse gases as if they had made a positive contribution to the attainment of this goal. After the Government had announced its 'win for the environment', Alexander Downer claimed that

few things would make less sense than deliberately eroding Australia's competitive advantage in the energy intensive industries and mining industries (Downer, Media Release 22 January, 1998, FA4).

This is another example of how discourses of nature can be placed secondary to the ideological imperatives of growth economics, securing hierarchical and procedural relationships of accountability, whilst failing to consider the role of accountability, or the multiplicity of nature and its meaning within Australia. Beck warned against such a short-term approach because

(e)vidence that the 'side-effects' of products or industrial processes are endangering the basic conditions of life can cause markets to collapse, destroying political confidence as well as economic capitalism and belief in the superiority of experts (1996, p.2).

5. ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL VOICES

So we are looking for politics in the wrong place, with the wrong concepts, on the wrong floors, on the wrong pages of the newspaper (Beck, 1996, p.24).

Whilst these main Government departments were strongly arguing for a climate change policy that came secondary to issues such as jobs, industry and competitive advantage there were other political voices contesting such an approach. In light of the discussions in earlier chapters, it is not surprising that these mainly focused on the ability of policy to harmoniously operate in the goals of 'growth', jobs, industry and competitive advantage, these goals could still be achieved if the
Government has adopted a tougher environmental standpoint. As discussed previously, this is an approach to environmental issues that has been adopted on a widespread basis, but it does not challenge the underlying assumptions that have contributed to a system that manifests itself in environmentally destructive ways. In order to indicate the narrowness of the mainstream debate, I will explore briefly the perspectives of alternative political parties and also high profile environmental organisations.

5.1 The Position of the Australian Democrats

The rest of the world is talking about reductions or, at worst, stabilisation at 1990 levels, but this Government's only real commitment is that it will increase greenhouse gas emissions and 'ask' industry to go beyond no regrets measures (Lees, Media Release 20th November, 1997, 97/847).

Senator Meg Lees, environment spokesperson for the Australian Democrats, argued that the Australian Government's position on greenhouse gases was under-funded, short-sighted and self-interested (Lees, media release 97/653; 97/767; 97/847). The Australian Democrats also adopted mainstream environmental discourse to contest the Government's position from within the operations of its own discourse. By this I mean that the Australian Democrats attempted to show how the Australian Government's position was actually anti-jobs (as the mining sector continues to shed jobs in a bid for higher profits) and anti-growth (as the growth sectors in the future will use cutting edge energy efficient technology). Although the Australian Democrats did criticise the Government's position as an environmentally hazardous one, the appeal was not to an alternative philosophical position, but rather to an extension of the existing assumptions with a slightly more progressive acknowledgement of the need to sustain nature. Senator
Lees, acknowledged the assumption that economic growth is a ‘political untouchable’ and in doing so she argued that

the mining industry was shedding jobs by the thousands, while the Government ignored new, lucrative sustainable industries (Media Release 26th November, 1997, 97/863).

And further, that

there were practical and sensible ways to ensure greenhouse gas emissions could be cut to well below 1990 levels, while benefiting the economy (Lees, Media Release 11th December, 1997, 97/912).

In doing this Senator Lees recycled the approach adopted by the Government with an environmental edge, in doing do the Democrats failed to consider the ethical dimensions of the Government’s accountability requirements, and the possibility of highlighting these in the discussion of climate change.

5.2 The Position of the Australian Greens

The Australian Greens recognise that the Earth’s life support systems are fundamental to maximising human welfare (The Australian Greens, Care for the Earth, 14/7/99, www.peg.apc.org/~ausgreen/pol-env.html).

The anthropocentric nature of the above quotation is indicative of the more conservative bent placed on green politics in Australia. In order to maintain a green platform, the environmental discourse that dominates the party rests heavily on an appeal to enlightened anthropocentrism (Kellow, 1992). The value of nature in this sense, is made contingent on the effect its destruction would have on human life, perpetuating the assumption that humans are all knowing about the environment and it does not challenge the position of humans within environmental
debates. By this, I suggest that Green politics further enhances a human accountability, that by necessity includes the environment, rather than an environmental accountability that challenges the ethical possibilities of the assumptions that underpin modern social organisations (such as corporations and governments).

Senator Bob Brown of the Greens argued that the Australian Government had become an international disgrace on the greenhouse gas issue (Brown, 1997). In a letter to The Editor of The Australian, Senator Brown argued that Australia was missing the critical turning point to energy efficient technological developments (13th May, 1997). He claimed that Germany’s tough environmental legislation had meant that it had a competitive advantage over the rest of the world (Brown, 13th May, 1997). This is another example of how the idea that an environmentally favourable position is justifiable because it will also achieve a competitive advantage, is used to further an environmental argument. This relies heavily on mainstream environmental discourse that suggests growth, material prosperity and the environment are compatible social and environmental objectives. Again, issues of accountability were recycled by the Australian Greens but they were not re-imagined and the assumptions maintained in relation to the environment were highly problematic, particularly considering the parties’ environmental platform.

5.3 The Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace Australia

Considering the position of all of the non-government environmental groups within this thesis is impossible, but two main organisations standout, being the Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace Australia. The Australian Conservation Foundation was one of the more vocal non-governmental organisations to protest the
Government's stance on greenhouse gases. They argued that the Government should develop a policy that encouraged jobs and economic activity, but also acknowledged that this generation should be held accountable for the effects of its activities on future generations. The Australian Conservation Foundation drew into focus the funding arrangements of the modelling of greenhouse gases on the Australian economy conducted by ABARE. They also released alternative plans and policies to reduce greenhouse gases, culminating in the release of their "Fifteen Ways the Commonwealth Government can Reduce Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions" briefing paper in October, 1997. This was made public just prior to the Government's release of their own policy, and it argued that the reduction of greenhouse gases could have economic benefits for Australia, and that the package should encourage a large number of non-greenhouse benefits including:

1. Reduction in Energy Bills.
2. Employment Generation.
3. Industry Development.
4. Reductions in Urban Air Pollution and Noise.
5. Reduction in Urban Congestion.


This policy reproduced the mainstream policy objectives of jobs and growth in its assumptions, but also included a more heavy weighting of the importance of the environment compared to the Commonwealth Government. The environment, in the form of climate change debates is squeezed into the already existing discourses that dominate social, economic and political organisations. This is a pattern repeated by Greenpeace Australia in their discussions of the effects of climate change on Australia.
Greenpeace also utilised the idea of ‘economic benefits’ to advocate a tougher greenhouse gas policy. They claimed that

Australian research and development is some of the best in the world - John Howard’s Government is allowing billions of dollars of potential in the solar market to escape from under Australia’s nose (Greenpeace, Media Release 20th October, 1997).

As the following quote indicates, Greenpeace Australia repeated their call to analyse the economic ‘realities’ of greenhouse gas policies.

This scaremongering has obscured any intelligent analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities facing the overall Australian economy in addressing global warming (Greenpeace, October 1997, www.greenpeace.org.au/ClimateChange/6.34.html).

This is not to suggest that either of these organisations fail to appeal to an audience that recognises the ‘intrinsic’ values of nature and the ‘ethical’ considerations of human actions and their environmental consequences, but the production of a public discourse in regard to greenhouse gases relied heavily on the already existing discourses of jobs, economy and industry. They repeat the dominant discursive assumptions established, in this case, by the Government (and arguably its links to industry as will be noted in a following section) and repeat the prominence of such discourses, reinforcing their importance and connections to the greenhouse gas debate.

6. PUBLIC DISCOURSE: THE MEDIA

But ecological images and symbols do not at all have intrinsic certainty: they are culturally determined and mediatized; they are part of the social production of knowledge with all its contradictions and conflicts (Beck, 1996, p.5).
Leading up to the Kyoto Conference, the Australian media covered the
debate extensively and Australian politicians became actively involved
in selling their controversial approach (Hogarth, 6/3/97; Stephens,
12/6/97; Woodford, 28/6/97; McManus, 1999). It was widely reported
that Australia was risking “international embarrassment by opposing
legally binding targets to cut pollution” (Hogarth, 6/3/97, p.13) and
others suggested that Australia was being dubbed a “pariah nation”
because of its tough and uncompromising position on greenhouse gases
(quoting Dr. Clive Hamilton of the Australian Institute, Hogarth,
25/6/97, p.4)\textsuperscript{10}. And further

\begin{quote}
Australia was pushing its case against accepting binding targets for the
reduction of greenhouse gases. Most of the rest of the world disagrees
(Woodford, 28/6/97, p.33).
\end{quote}

Australian representatives at Kyoto argued that emissions targets
should be differentiated to reflect the different economic make-ups of
nations, and their different reliance on carbon producing products. The
argument followed, that countries like Australia, who have a heavy
reliance on coal (both for electricity and export markets), would suffer
more economic consequences than other countries who use geo-thermal
electricity, nuclear power and do not export large quantities of coal, if
legally binding undifferentiated standard targets were set. To support
such an position the Government argued that they should be
accountable to the Australian people first, and that the Australian
people would suffer too many job losses, mine closures and economic
costs to make targets viable or responsible in this setting. This
approach was widely reported in the mass media, claiming that
(a)cting on forecasts by its key economic advisers, the Government fears severe losses in jobs, investment and income for Australia if developed nations agree on legally binding targets at Kyoto (Hogarth & Dayton, 24/22/97, p.1).

The comments of senior Ministers were widely reported, indicating the Government’s prioritising of jobs and corporate (mining) well-being over the long-term environmental consequences of climate change. As discussed previously, democracies (discussed in chapter six) tend to make the short-term politically relevant, whilst often jeopardising the long-term (Held, 1996). This is certainly evident in the Australian situation, with all of the Ministers for relevant portfolio’s emphasising industry and employment over the environmental implications of climate change. The following quote is an example of the media reporting on how the Government was prioritising the process:

Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer, said yesterday that Britain was hypocritically suggesting that Australia should sacrifice more jobs, factories, mines than other countries to stem greenhouse emissions (Woodford, 26/6/97, p.8).

This did not occur without being critiqued within the media, with commentators claiming that

(o)ur most senior Federal ministers speak only of the economic costs to Australia; one rarely hears an appreciation of the risks to Australia, a continent that has the wildest swings in climate (Glichrist, 30/8/97, p.5).

The ‘cost’ of greenhouse abatement became an important issue, with the Government claiming that Australia would be financially burdened,

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10 Reflecting on this, it is possible that Australia was more honest than many of the nation’s that agreed to cut emissions but have yet to show any signs of doing so. This does not legitimate Australia’s position but places it in a slightly different light.
unfairly disadvantaged and held accountable for greenhouse gas emissions that did not reflect the nation's 'true' position.

The Howard Government's general claim that the Australian economy would be devastated by internationally imposed cuts on greenhouse gases, and the specific claim that even modest cuts in emissions by 2010 would cost every Australian 22 times more than a European (Gilchrist, 30/8/97, p.5).

And further,

(a)ssuming targets to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by 2010 and achieve a 10 per cent reduction by 2020, ABARE says the cost will be $9000 per Australian (Hogarth, 25/6/97, p.4).

Comments such as this one occurred on a regular basis, but they were not left unexamined within the mass media. The following quote attests to this.

The controversial prediction that every citizen will be financially worse off next century lies at the heart of Australia's official opposition to the push for legally binding uniform targets to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (Hogarth, 25/6/97, p. 4).

The lead up to COP3 saw the construction of an accountability discourse that placed the Government's responsibility to the Australian community largely in terms of financial costs, jobs and lost income, whilst relegating to marginal discursive spaces the serious environmental consequences of climate change and the need to make Australia environmentally accountable for its use of greenhouse gas producing technologies.
7. AUSTRALIA AND THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

Although Australia is a large emitter of greenhouse gases, Australia was one of three Annex I countries (the others being Iceland and Norway) allowed to increase emissions over 1990 levels (by 8%) at COP3 and the Kyoto Protocol recognises this as Australia’s ‘right’. On the 29th of April, 1998 Australia signed the agreement but has yet to make it legally binding through ratification\(^\text{11}\). A newsletter produced by the Bureau of Resource Statistics suggested that the Coalition Government would conduct a Treaty Impact Assessment, involving consultation with relevant stakeholders, providing the basis for whether the Australian Government will ratify the agreement, but this “is unlikely for several years” (Barson & Wright, 1998, www.brs.gov.au/ccs/ccn/10v1.html) and is largely contingent on whether the United States decides to ratify (Hogarth, 6/3/97, p.13; Horden, 17/5/1999). The politics of Australia’s greenhouse gas stance was largely legitimated in the mass media, with Hogarth reporting in The Sydney Morning Herald, that

\[(e)xperts\ say\ that\ getting\ cuts\ of\ up\ to\ 20\ per\ cent\ of\ emissions\ will\ be\ too\ painful\ in\ Austraha,\ (and\ they)\ fear\ that\ any\ gain\ will\ be\ swamped\ by\ growth\ in\ the\ developing\ nations\ (16/3/97,\ p.13)\].

This increase was criticised heavily within the mainstream media, within the minor political parties and also by non-government organisations such as Greenpeace, The Australian Conservation Foundation and The Wilderness Society. Senator Meg Lees of the Democrats claimed that the Government’s stance on greenhouse gases was “superficial at best and negligent at worst” (11/97, Media Release 97/847). And further, that the Kyoto Protocol left the Government “with

\(^{11}\) As of the 9th of April, 1999, 84 countries had signed the Kyoto Protocol and only 8 had ratified it.
a licence to violate the environment” (Lees, 12/97, Media Release 97/912).

As such, the significance of the Kyoto Protocol on the environmental policies invoked by Australia is questionable and many have suggested that COP3 may have little impact on national energy strategies and policy formation (Easterbrook, 1997; Hodel et al, 1997; Cooper, 1998; Dunn, 1998; Jacoby et al, 1998). It has been argued that instead of producing commitments to reducing greenhouse gases, the conference provided an opportunity to pay ‘lip service’ to the issues without ‘real’ results (Dunn, 1998; Jacoby et al, 1998). However, some initiatives have been undertaken, including the establishment of the Australian Greenhouse Office, with corresponding efforts to maintain a National Greenhouse Gas Inventory, develop a National Carbon Accounting System, and implement the Federal Government’s National Greenhouse Strategy (1999).

Significantly, the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, failed to acknowledge any statutory responsibility to abate the effects of climate change. In light of the Kyoto Protocol, the seriousness of the Government’s commitment to meeting the objectives of the agreement would have to be in question because the Act did not consider climate change to be on the list of national environmental responsibilities. As Connor wrote

there is only a promise of a consultation process for adding climate change to the list of national environmental responsibilities (1999, p.8).

This aside, the actual meeting was surrounded in controversy. Some of the issues that have been raised include a lack of public consultation (Hogarth, 25/6/97; Woodford, 28/6/97; Hogarth, 29/10/97), the inequitable lobbying power of the coal, steel and non-renewable energy
industrial sectors of the economy (Hogarth, 6/3/97; Gittens, 28/6/97) and the general reluctance of the Coalition Government to take environmental issues seriously (Glichrinst, 30/9/97; Woodford, 13/11/97; Hogarth & Dayton, 24/11/97). The ABC\textsuperscript{12} quoted the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard as saying “we should not have got on this particular truck in the first place at the Rio Conference” (ABC, 18\textsuperscript{th} of August, 1997).

Leading up to the conference, the general reluctance of the Australian Government to approach the climate change debate as an ‘environmental’ issue rather than a strategic economic concern was widely reported. The national media were running daily stories on climate change, greenhouse gas policies and Australia’s general stance. Much of this was highly critical of the Government, running headlines like “Global Outcast” (Sydney Morning Herald, 28\textsuperscript{th} June, 1997, p. 33), “Too Much Hot Air” (Sydney Morning Herald, 30\textsuperscript{th} August, 1997, p. 5), “How the Climate Sceptics Got to Howard” (Sydney Morning Herald, 24\textsuperscript{th} November, 1997, p. 1), “Australia is an Aggressive Outsider in a Strong Field” (Sydney Morning Herald, 24\textsuperscript{th} November, 1997, p. 5) and “PM out of Step on Greenhouse” (Sydney Morning Herald, 26\textsuperscript{th} November, 1997).

A public discourse emerged, suggesting that Australia’s greenhouse gas policy was out of step with the rest of the world, this also suggested that Australia wanted to shirk its responsibility to become internationally accountable for their contribution to global climate change.

\textsuperscript{12} Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
8. CONCLUSION(S)

In this chapter I have attempted to show how the Australian Government's emphasis on the economic costs of climate change abatement framed the operations of discourses of environmental accountability. In this sense, notions of international environmental accountability have been dominated by the totalising claims of free-market economics, with its emphasis on continued growth and development. As a result, the environmental consequences of such discourses were largely effaced from the debate. The Australian Government's policy was founded on ABARE's economic model, with dubious assumptions and funding arrangements. The ability of an economic model to accurately depict the economy, let alone the effect of climate change abatement (or non-abatement) on the economy went largely unchallenged within the discussions that I have cited.

To illustrate this I have drawn on some of the statements made by the Ministers from relevant portfolios and also alternative political voices (including the minor political parties and non-government environmental organisations), all of which absorbed the assumption that an environment policy is only acceptable if it does not damage the economy. Such an approach assumes that a 'value' can accurately be placed on nature in order for such assessments to be made. To do this the dynamic, ambiguous and contested dimensions of the meaning of 'nature' are expelled from the discussions and the modelling arrangements, attributing arbitrary and disembodied values (like the ability or willingness to pay, the cost of shifting to more environmentally benign technology, the cost of job losses from environmental policy and so on).
In this context the Australian Government agreed to an 8% increase target in greenhouse gases above 1990 levels. By signing the agreement they agree to exchange accounts of their attempts to meet this target in discharging their accountability. At this stage the Kyoto Protocol has still not been ratified by the Australian Government, so as yet it has no legal significance. Not only is this true, but the accountability that has been facilitated by this arrangement is only fractional to the interpretation discussed within this thesis and as I have shown in this chapter there has been little discussion of the moral or ethical dimensions of the environmental accountability process. This is even evident in the two non-government environmental groups discussed in this chapter (Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace), who both followed the dominant discourse in order to enhance their public credibility but in so doing have re-inscribed the centrality of the discourses of procedural and technical accountability that have been privileged in mainstream debate.