Recent decades have seen a growing consensus among scientists and the public that climate change is real, posing significant economic and social challenges (see IPCC 2007; CSIRO & BoM 2007). Over the same period policy debates have increasingly focused on market mechanisms to address the emissions that cause climate change. The rise of environmental concerns has coincided with a move towards market-based approaches to policy making more broadly (Pusey 1992; Manne & McKnight 2010). While climate change is widely acknowledged to result from market failures associated with the externalisation of environmental costs, recent policy debate has focused on mechanisms to internalize those costs, and correct the market (see Stern 2007; Garnaut 2008), rather than to displace market approaches to environmental management.

Support for market trading schemes to address climate change has not been universal. Some economists and environmentalists have argued that the growth-orientated nature of market economies is itself incompatible with environmental sustainability (e.g. Trainer 1996; Jacobs 1999). Despite considerable support within the mainstream economic and policy communities, market solutions to environmental challenges, even beyond climate policy, have yet to be widely implemented, suggesting these approaches face greater political resistance than alternative approaches (see Keohane, et.al. 1998).

In this paper we begin to explore an emerging debate that examines potential similarities between the development of social policy and future climate policy. Like the issues of climate, social policy involves managing risks, decommodifying what Polanyi (1944) termed ‘fictitious commodities’ and involves substantial change to large sectors of the economy. Thus, social and climate policy challenges have a number of similar features that may suggest similar policy responses. At the same time, there are important differences. Climate policy involves different types of risk, longer time horizons and more global action.

While a full interrogation of these issues is beyond this paper, here we begin by asking whether there is a potential political constituency that might be mobilized behind a climate policy more reflective of traditional social policy approaches. This is an important question because it is clear that a key obstacle to effective mitigation policy is political resistance (see Hamilton 2007; Pearse 2007). Social policy is one of the few historical examples where policy change that involved large-scale economic reform in opposition to established economic interests proved successful.

Building a constituency for mitigation policy is complex. This paper only takes a preliminary step by focusing on public opinion data. We ask what attitudes those that prioritise environmental issues have towards the welfare state – the central institution of social policy. In other words, is there evidence that those that might drive environmental policy forward are likely to be receptive to an approach that expands the role of the state. We recognize that this is only one component of a broader question about mobilizing the resources necessary to achieve policy change. In the
final part of the paper we offer some speculation about how this potential constituency might be mobilized through existing political institutions.

Two Peas in a Pod? Social policy and climate change mitigation policy

There is growing recognition of the links between social policy and climate change. Although an ‘ecostate’ or ‘ecological state’ has yet to materialise, the still limited empirical evidence suggests that countries with more extensive welfare states have had more success in implementing policies to mitigate climate change (e.g. Dryzek 2008). After briefly surveying the major implications of a social policy approach to mitigating climate change, we conclude that a ‘double dividend’ approach that simultaneously supports social and ecological goals holds promise.

The potential for social policy to mitigate climate change, or at least contribute to mitigation, stems in part from the similar goals of the two sets of policies (Gough 2008; Meadowcroft 2005). At a conceptual level, social policy and climate change mitigation policies both manage forms of social risk, which entail those risks that have social rather than individual causes. In its various forms, social policy manages those risks that impact wellbeing over the life course, particularly the risks of poverty and ill health (Barr 2001). Mitigation policies manage the risks associated with climate change, including: direct risks from environmental disaster; indirect risks from increasing competition over resources; and risks arising from policy responses, such as their distributive consequences and threats to carbon intensive economic activity (Gough 2008: 325). The goals of these two sets of policy are similar in that they manage social risk, involve distributive issues and are intrinsic to societal wellbeing.

Moreover, by managing social risks through state institutions, social policy decommodifies social life, at least to some extent, in a way that is complementary to the environmental objectives of climate change mitigation policies. Used by Esping-Andersen (1990) to emphasise how social policy is a state response to the negative effects of commodifying labour, the concept of decommodification refers to the process through which individual wellbeing is decoupled from labour market position. In a similar vein, climate change mitigation policies represent a state response to the negative effects of commodifying natural resources and loosen the market values that have become affixed to the environment (Gough 2008: 327). According to Gough (2008: 327), the common thread here is that social policy and mitigation policies can be construed as state responses to the consequences of artificially commodifying what Polanyi (1944) famously declared the ‘fictitious’ commodities of labour and land (or nature), which were not created for exchange like other commodities but are necessary for survival.

This relates closely to yet a further linkage between the two sets of policies, that is, both social policy and mitigation policies provide public goods and represent state interventions in response to market failure (Meadowcroft 2005: 7). Through the provision of public goods such as health services, public education and housing, social policy has responded to market failure to provide affordable services at sufficient levels to cater for the population (Block 1994: 693). Similarly, climate change mitigation policies provide public goods such as investment in cleaner energy.
production and schemes that lower carbon emissions to reduce the negative externalities that stem from many forms of productive economic activity. Thus both problems require some form of state intervention to correct market failures. There is growing recognition that even ‘market’ solutions involve similar forms of state action to other ‘regulatory’ interventions (Driesen 1998; Block 1994), although their distributive and social consequences may vary. Taken together, these parallels between social policy and climate change mitigation policies have fuelled perceptions that both sets of policies could be applied to achieve complementary goals (i.e. Fitzpatrick 1998).

However, in their existing form, social policies have real limits as devices to combat climate change. According to Fitzpatrick (1998: 9), the core ecological critique of social policy is that its potential to mitigate climate change is undermined by its reliance on the ‘logic of industrialism’, which refers to the conviction that ever greater levels of economic growth are required for societal wellbeing. From this perspective, social policy is viewed as the product of early industrial capitalism and its success is predicated on both high levels employment and open-ended economic growth (ibid: 9). This calls into question the possibility of a mutually reinforcing relationship between social policy and climate change mitigation policy, because the dependence of social policy on economic growth is likely to conflict with the goal of mitigation policies to achieve sustainable levels of consumption in an ‘ecologically finite world’ (Dryzek 2008: 334).

Furthermore, the parallels between social policy and mitigation policy have been challenged by arguments about the qualitatively and quantitatively different nature of the risks addressed by the two sets of policy. While social policy insures against risks that “are individually unpredictable but collectively predictable… those [associated with climate change] are collectively unpredictable” (Gough 2008: 327). The risks associated with climate change are also likely to be more distant in time and thus less immediate than those addressed by climate change (ibid: 327). And, the risks associated with social policy can typically be addressed (however imperfectly) at the national level, whereas the risks stemming from climate change are global in origin and require supranational responses (ibid: 327). These differences between the natures of social risk addressed by the two sets of policy has cast further doubt on the appropriateness of utilising social policy to reduce the threat of climate change.

Nonetheless, the principal rationale for adopting a social policy approach to mitigate climate change is the existing intersections between the two policy domains. These intersections include the potential for: the transition to a low-carbon economy to be eased by reallocating social expenditure; victims of climate change, such as climate refugees, to increase the call on social policy; the poor to be disproportionately disadvantaged by mitigation policies; and, economic restructuring to a low-growth or green industry model to require compensation for those structurally unemployed (Dryzek 2008: 334). The extent of these intersections suggests that treating social policy and climate change mitigation policies as two distinct domains will increase the social, as well as economic, cost of transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

Just as significantly, the arguments that call into question the potential for social policy to be used to mitigate climate change rely on an overly static conception of the welfare state. As Meadowcroft notes, the welfare state represents “a continuing
adjustment of governmental activity to long-term processes of economic, social, and political development” (2005: 8) and thus there is potential for it to be adapted to ecological goals. This is not to claim that the welfare state does not have limitations, nor that the reconfiguration of social policy required is insubstantial, but to point to the promise of what Torres (2008: 276) notes as a ‘double dividend’ – the potential of policies with social and ecological goals to reinforce each other.

In Search of a Constituency

Despite the promise of a double dividend, governments are unlikely to direct social policy and mitigation policy toward joint goals unless they perceive voters support this approach. So, are Australian voters likely to warm to such a strategy? An increasing number of Australian voters prioritise the environment (and climate change) as an election issue. However, environmental issues are often thought to have different electoral dynamics to materialist and economic issues, such as taxes and government spending. Here we explore the relationships between these two sets of attitudes drawing on data from the Australian Election Study (AES) – a survey of 2000 voters undertaken after each federal election.

Evidence suggests that although the priorities of Australian voters initially shifted away from the environment after the ‘green’ election of 1990, an increasing number of voters have prioritised this issue since the low-point of 1998. This is borne out in Table 1, which shows the proportion of AES respondents who selected the environment as their most important issue in each election from 1990. Table 1 reveals support declining from 1990 to 1998, but then rising to a record high of 15.1 percent in 2007.

Table 1. Australian Voters Who Chose the Environment as the Most Important Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voters Who View Environment Most Important Issue (%)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>15.1^^</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Question does not refer to specific period
^ Question refers to last 12 months
** Question refers to election campaign
^^ Includes respondents who selected both ‘the environment’ and ‘global warming’

Source: Australian Election Study (various years)

Some qualifications should be made here. This data refers to a question on the environment, not climate change, as the time series uses this question. Also, the series is only available since 1990. And the question asks for an ordinal response, and does not indicate strength of response. While important to take note of, these qualifications do not detract from the main conclusion.

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1 Italics in original.
2 Question: ‘Here is a list of important issues that were discussed during the election campaign. When you were deciding about how to vote, how important was each of these issues to you personally’,
To empirically examine whether voters, or at least a constituency, prioritises both social policy and mitigation policy we compare how respondents answered two questions in the AES 2007. The first question asks whether respondents would prefer taxes to be cut or spending on programs like Medicare and public education to be increased, while the second asks respondents to select the issue that they prioritise from a list that included global warming. For each questions, binary dummy variables were constructed for the pro-spending and climate change responses, respectively.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of voter priorities for social spending and climate change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro-spending</th>
<th>Top-Issue Climate Change</th>
<th>Sample Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square = 30.24**

* n is 1816.
** Significant at \( \leq 0.01 \) level.

Source: AES 2007

The cross-tabulation of these two dummy variables are presented in Table 2. It shows that 62 percent of the respondents who prioritised action on climate change supported social spending, whereas only 44 percent of those who did not prioritise action on climate change also supported social spending. This indicates that respondents who selected climate change as the issue they prioritised were more likely to support social spending than those who did not. Undertaking a chi-square test confirmed that these results are statistically significant. So, this initial analysis suggests that there is a constituency, although still relatively small, prioritises both social policy and climate change mitigation policy.

Who is the Emerging Constituency?

Concern for the environment is increasing amongst voters, and those voters are also more positively inclined towards the tax and spend policies that underpin the welfare state and social policy. Thus, there appears to be some, at least superficial, link between the post-materialist politics of the environment and the older materialist politics of the welfare state.

These results, however, do not suggest causation; an alterative explanation might suggest that both result from a common cause, the partisan nature of politics. This is particularly true of the 2007 election. The Labor Party, the party most responsible for the development of Australia’s welfare state, placed considerable emphasis on its commitment to policies on climate change – signing the Kyoto Protocol and establishing an emissions trading scheme (ALP 2007). The Greens, the party most identified with environmental issues, also campaigned against the Coalition’s

Questions: ‘If the government had a choice between reducing taxes or spending more on social services, which do you think it should do?”
WorkChoices laws and in favour of expanding public services funded through higher taxes (Australian Greens 2007). Thus, at an institutional level, party partisanship would appear to reinforce the overlap between environmental and welfare state attitudes.

Partisanship is an important influence on political behaviour. Voters’ attitudes may be reflective of the platforms of the parties they identify with (see Duverger 1954). It may be that the correlation between supporting tax and spend policies and prioritizing the environment simply reflects the influence of party programs on the attitudes of the parties’ supporters.

There is evidence for this. Support for tax and spending policies is higher amongst both Labor and Greens voters than it is for other voters. Likewise, Labor and Greens voters are more likely to nominate climate change as their top policy priority. In both cases this is particularly pronounced amongst Greens voters, as Table 3 shows.

| Table 3. Percentage of ALP and Green Voters that Prioritise Climate Change and Social Spending |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
|                                  | ALP voters  | Green voters | All other voters |
| Climate Change Top Issue         | 15.8        | 50.3        | 9.4           |
| Favours Social Spending over Tax Cuts | 56.7        | 62.7        | 37.4          |

Source: AES (2007)

Of course, these figures do not indicate causation. We test this further by attempting to control for party allegiance when examining the relationship between pro-welfare and pro-environment attitudes. We developed a logistic regression model using variables from the 2007 Australian Election Study. We take our prioritising climate change variable (placing climate change as the number one issue influencing the respondent’s vote) as the dependent variable. We test for a relationship between this environmental variable and a number of demographic, voting and attitudinal variables. Our demographic variables include sex, age, income and education. Each of these has been associated with post-materialist and pro-welfare attitudes. By placing these variables in the model we can test whether the relationship between pro-environment and pro-welfare attitudes is an artifact of demography.

Next we include variables for voting behaviour. We separately include those who report voting for Labor in the House of Representatives in the 2007 election and those that report voting for the Greens. Including these variables controls for the potential effect of party platforms on voter attitudes. Finally, we include two attitudinal variables. The ‘Pro spending’ variable reports respondents’ to the earlier question on taxes versus social spending. The ‘Pro redistribution’ variable reports respondents’ attitudes to redistributing wealth and income towards ordinary working people.4

4 Question: ‘Please say whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of these statements.’ The statements include: ‘Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary working people’. Variable coded along a five-point scale.
Table 4: Logistic Regression Model for Prioritising Climate Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Sig. (two-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher individual income</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>1.056</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor voter</td>
<td>2.516</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens voter</td>
<td>12.961</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro spending</td>
<td>1.755</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro redistribution</td>
<td>.874</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted R square 0.170.

** ≤ 0.01

As expected, there is a strong statistically significant relationship between prioritising the environment and voting for either the Greens or Labor. The effect is particularly strong for the Greens. There is no significant relationship found with any of the demographic variables. However, our Pro spending variable does show a strongly significant relationship, even once voting patterns have been accounted for. This is not the case for the Pro redistribution variable.

The results suggest that attitudes to taxing and spending remain independently related to attitudes to the environment. It is useful to take a moment to explore the implications of this finding. While Greens and Labor voters may be more likely to both favour social spending and prioritise the environment, our analysis suggests that those Greens and Labor voters that favour social spending are even more likely to prioritise the environment than are their fellow party voters who do not. It also suggests that the association between pro-welfare and pro-environment attitudes is not only the product of party advocacy.

It is also interesting for understanding the constituencies of both Labor and the Greens. Within both constituencies we might imagine the post-materialist thesis holds greater weight. That is, Labor and Greens voters that prioritise the environment have less predictable attitudes to materialist issues like tax and social spending than other Labor and Greens voters who perhaps have a more broadly social democratic value set. Yet, amongst left party voters, strong environmental attitudes are more often combined with strong pro-welfare attitudes.

This relationship is not repeated for views on redistribution. We do not have the space needed to fully explore this here. However, a few preliminary observations are justified. As we have noted, welfare state theorists have argued that the potential commonality between social and environmental policy is the desire to decommodify aspects of life. A preference for expanding the role of social policy is consistent with this. However, the welfare state is also associated with redistributing the spoils of growth. We might imagine that this aspect of social policy, while not inconsistent, is less central to the desire for decommodification. In other words, we suspect that these results indicate that the relationship between attitudes towards social spending and environmentalism primarily reflect a broader desire for decommodification, rather than a traditional left commitment to equality.
Developing an Alternative Environmental Response

We began this paper asking whether there was evidence of a constituency that favoured both action on climate change and expanding the welfare state. We argued, along with an emerging literature, that there are important reasons to think that action on climate change might be associated with, and aided by, the traditional politics of building the welfare state. If voters who favour climate action are also sympathetic to this broader pro welfare politics, than this provides a small initial indication that such an alternative approach to climate policy might be politically viable.

An analysis of Australian Election Study data from 2007 suggests there is such a relationship. A growing proportion of Australians see the environment and climate change as a policy priority. Our analysis suggests this growing environmental constituency is also sympathetic to the tax and spend policies that drive the welfare state. Indeed, even when we take account of the potential effect of partisanship, the relationship still holds. The fact that both the parties supportive of stronger climate policy and the voters who prioritise environmental issues, are broadly supportive of the welfare state suggests the potential for a constituency supportive of interventionist climate policies.

Of course, this analysis is only preliminary. It may be that while environmental voters are broadly pro welfare state, they see the market as providing the most appropriate mechanism for addressing climate change. It may also be that voters do not hold strong views on policy mechanisms, only on policy direction. Both Labor and the Greens also remain supportive of market mechanisms, which likely influences their constituencies’ views.

However, there are some initiatives that suggest an approach that is less focused on market and pricing solutions might gain greater public and institutional support. We have already speculated that the overlap in attitudes between the environment and social spending might reflect a deeper desire for decommodification. While more work is needed to explore this thesis, if this is partly the case, then a policy approach such as emissions trading that explicitly commodifies the environment appears ill-judged.

Beyond voter attitudes there is also some evidence for an alternative approach from institutional actors. In the United Kingdom, unions have developed a 1 million climate jobs campaign, based largely on an interventionist policy approach (Campaign Against Climate Change 2009). In Australia the South Coast Labor Council has taken a similar approach with academics at Wollongong University (see Rorris 2009). Both programs attempt to address mitigation and the social risks of unemployment and insecure employment generated by environmentally inspired economic restructuring. Environmental group Beyond Zero Emissions and Melbourne University academics have created a blueprint for direct investment to achieve 100% renewal stationary energy in Australia within 10 years (Wright & Hearps 2010).

Internationally there is evidence that while market approaches have strong support amongst policy elites, they are less likely to garner the political support required for policy implementation. Market approaches are typically more difficult to explain and
less certain in their effects on specific industries, regions or individuals, meaning they may be more difficult to promote electorally (see Keohane, et.al. 1998).

Achieving effective mitigation policies requires a combination of effective policy development and building and mobilizing constituencies capable of promoting those policies. Climate change policy faces significant barriers. The issue is complex, policy is not confined to national borders and the time horizons are extended. In addition, any effective policy requires large scale economic restructuring away from carbon intensive energy sources. Such initiatives face significant resistance from powerful interests (Hamilton 2007; Pearse 2007).

Given these challenges we have argued that it is useful to explore different approaches to achieving effective mitigation policies. We have focused on the potential complementarily between climate policies and social policies. Both attempt to manage risk, both involve substantial economic restructuring and some argue both require us to reassess the effects of what Polanyi termed ‘fictitious commodities’.

This paper has taken only a small step in addressing this question. It has started to explore the potential to mobilize a political constituency behind climate policies that are more reflective of the politics and tools of the welfare state. Our preliminary investigation has been positive, suggesting further work to explore the nature of public opinion, of potential policy instruments and of institutional support is needed. Understanding how environmental goals align with other policy goals, and broader values orientations may helps us to develop policy that is more effective at mobilizing the constituencies, both voters and institutions, that are needed to overcome the resistance of powerful economic interests.
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