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Negotiating and re-negotiating climate change in Australia: A case for neoliberal environmental hegemony

Caleb Goods and *Scott Fitzgerald*

York University, Canada & Curtin University, Australia

Abstract

Continuous and alarming scientific research tells us that 2014 was the hottest year ever recorded (Cole and McCarthy, 2015) and that four of the planet's nine ecological boundaries have been crossed (Steffen et al., 2015). These dramatic shifts have led some to argue that the world has entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, where humans are transforming the environment on a global scale through, for example, climate change. To limit or reverse these planetary ecological shifts, Wright et al. (2013) argue that we need to reimagine the socio-economic and political structures of contemporary society. However, this does not appear to be happening; indeed, the dominant response from business, policymakers and organised labour within the Australian context is deeply embedded in the existing, and as we argue hegemonic, political economic framework of neoliberalism. Tracing the history of climate change policy responses from Hawke to Abbott, we highlight how Australian climate policy has been maintained within a narrow spectrum of economic rationalism. Rather than reimagining the socio-political economic structures of capitalism, Australian climate change policy over the last quarter of a century presents a form of neoliberal hegemony.