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Antipodean exception? Theorising the failure of neoliberal climate policy in Australia

Ms Rebecca Pearse¹

¹*University of Sydney*

Conflict over climate policy has contributed to major legitimisation crises for successive Australian governments since the 2000s. And the present moment is an interregnum, where the hegemony of carbon pricing has been challenged, but the Coalition's 'Direct Action Plan' is also hotly contested. This paper asks, what does the failure of climate policy in Australia tell us about neoliberalism? I argue that the Australia case troubles existing Northern social theories of the rise (and fall) of neoliberal climate policy. Dominant explanations of neoliberalisation in climate policy are Eurocentric, focused on the persuasive powers of economists in the global North from the 1970-1990s, and they read too much into the neoliberal promise of low carbon accumulation. Northern theories of neoliberal climate policy do not sufficiently theorise the redistributive impacts and state developmental agendas 'market solutions' serve. Nor do they account for the substantive and political failures of carbon trading *and* alternative policies championed by conservatives. I argue that the failure of neoliberal climate policy in Australia reflects the impossibility of reconciling genuine decarbonisation with the postcolonial state's extractive development strategy. More generally, this Australian case illustrates that neoliberalisation goes hand in hand with developmentalism.