

Research with CASPR

Honours and research degrees with the Climate and Sustainability Policy Research Group, Flinders University



Climate and
Sustainability
Policy Research
Group

Join the Climate and Sustainability Policy Research Group

CASPR is committed to advancing evidence-based policymaking for the environment and sustainability. Our work supports decisionmakers and practitioners in a variety of domains and applications, including defence, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation in the Indo-Pacific. Systematic and well-focused evidence-based policy research responds to rapid social and environmental change, and is crucial for good practice.

Based at Flinders University in South Australia, our group assists government and private sector stakeholders to achieve greater accountability, effectiveness and innovation. We welcome enquiries from prospective honours and higher-degree students who would like to work on the following themes:

- > environmental policy
- > climate policy
- > climate adaptation
- > climate resilience
- > climate security
- > coastal sustainability
- > policy analysis
- > evidence-based policy
- > cultural values.

The following pages showcase the projects of some of our higher degree research students.

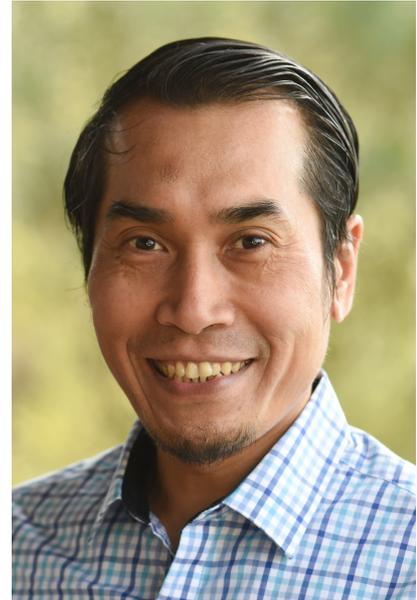
If you're interested in being part of our research team as a research student, please email caspr@flinders.edu.au

Rakhmindyarto

PhD student (under examination)

Formulating policy in Indonesia: Perceptions of key stakeholders on the conditions for the introduction of a carbon tax

Carbon taxes can effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Indonesia is the fourth largest greenhouse gas emitter worldwide, and a carbon tax has been recommended as the best climate mitigation policy for that nation. However, Indonesia does not have a carbon tax on its national policy agenda. My research investigated why Indonesia was not actively considering a carbon tax, and asked under what conditions such a tax could be introduced. I conducted in-depth interviews with key Indonesian stakeholders and identified three key factors that had prevented the introduction of a carbon tax: (1) a conflict between climate mitigation efforts and current national policy goals; (2) business stakeholders' influence; and (3) endemic corruption. I concluded that three key conditions would be required for the effective introduction of a carbon tax in Indonesia: (1) mainstreaming climate policies into the national policy agenda; (2) the introduction of complementary economic policies; and (3) improvements to government and public sector accountability and transparency.



Laura James

PhD Student (current)

Civil society agency in climate change adaptation policy processes and outcomes in global cities

My research is looking at the intersections of 'politics' and political influence in the formulation of policy. I will be comparing players involved in the development of climate change adaptation policy in three English-speaking cities – London, Melbourne and New York – between 2009 and 2019. I will be focusing on the factors that facilitate and constrain civil society engagement in policy formulation. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of civil society influence and agency in democratic processes such as policymaking. In addition, this research will contribute to a more nuanced appreciation of the relationships between political actors in civil society, and between civil society and policymakers, for ownership of issues in policy processes and outcomes. This will improve understanding of decision-making challenges for twenty-first century policymaking.



Komalee Nadeeka Damayanthi Mahamadachchi

PhD student (current)

Challenges of effective policy implementation in a devolved context: An investigation into waste management policy in Sri Lanka

Every day about 3.5 million tons of solid waste are generated globally. Waste management is complex, and if mishandled, it can have negative effects on humans and the environment. Waste management is therefore a high priority for countries around the world, but most countries find it challenging to effectively implement waste management policies. Focusing on Sri Lanka, my research is analysing the waste management policy implementation gap. My fieldwork has comprised semi-structured interviews with public officers, elected representatives, researchers and entrepreneurs. I have also used focus group discussions with civil society organisations and content analysis. Drawing on this data, my research has identified potential measures for better execution of waste management policy in Sri Lanka and further afield.



Ros Wong

PhD student (under examination)

Fatally flawed public policies: The cruel optimism of self-employed women's retirement planning

There is a significant gender gap between the retirement savings of men and women in Australia. Women, who tend to earn less than men and move in and out of paid work in a way that men do not, are strongly disadvantaged by a system linked to paid work. Consequently, for many women, retirement is a time of poverty and financial hardship. Focusing on self-employed women in Australia, my research argues that flawed policies perpetuate the gender gap when it comes to these women's retirement planning. I developed a multilevel model of retirement planning that showed that female entrepreneurs trying to save for retirement are impacted in complex and intersecting ways at macro, meso and micro levels. Policies that continue to reflect a breadwinner model of saving will not only create further gender inequality in the superannuation race, but also push many women into a life of abject poverty in old age.



Lorraine MacIntosh

PhD student (completed)

The effects of economic crisis on climate change policy decisions

Following the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC), I began researching elite discourses to determine how they were related to and influenced climate change policy decisions during this time. I conducted interviews with elites in three countries affected by the crisis: Australia, Spain and New Zealand. I applied three ecopolitical theories to analyse the data. In my completed PhD I found that although interviewees generally felt that the GFC had little effect on decisions made at the time, it was evident that climate change had not become an imperative for governments. Since completing my doctorate, I have been involved in start-up projects for renewable energy and am currently a member of an expert advisory group for the environment and energy with the political party Ciudadanos in Spain.



John Tons

PhD student (completed)

Global justice: A Rawlsian perspective

Any theory of justice will refer at some point to John Rawls's theory of justice. Rawls claimed that the views of political philosophers are shaped by their particular political and social worlds, their circumstances and how they saw the problems they considered. To understand political philosophers' works, then, we must identify those points of view and how they shaped the way questions are interpreted and discussed (Rawls, 2000, p. 104).

In the 21st century, a central question is how to reconcile the demand for national sovereignty with the need to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. My argument is centred on the idea that the reality of the Anthropocene provides a compelling reason for all nations to cooperate. I demonstrate that an understanding of Rawls's theory of justice provides us with the tools to reconcile national sovereignty with our responsibility to live sustainably.

Since completing the PhD, I have been working on my book, *John Rawls and Environmental Justice: implementing a sustainable and socially just future*, which will be published by Routledge.



Clare Phillips

PhD student (completed)

A cross-disciplinary study on formulating child health policy with a focus on the social determinants of health – An Australian perspective

Health is influenced by how we live, work and age, and the systems that shape our daily lives.

Collectively, these conditions are referred to as the social determinants of health (SDH). Child health inequities are directly linked to SDH, and policy action is sorely needed. Focusing on Australia, my research highlighted the limited policy action in this area. To better understand this issue, I explored an emerging field of cross-disciplinary research combining political science and public health theories. I applied this approach to better understand the politics of the agenda-setting and policy-formulation process when developing child health policy that adopts an SDH approach in Australia. I found that early childhood development, health equity and child rights were motivators for change. The main facilitators were existing networks of actors, supportive guiding institutions and community engagement in policy. The main barrier was neoliberal policy measures preferencing individualised healthcare and/or behavioural strategies. In addition, I identified a range of tactics policy actors use to successfully navigate this environment to secure an SDH policy agenda. My research provided insight for policy actors on how to promote policy ideas that run counter to government ideology and established neoliberal agendas. Since completing my PhD, I have secured a full-time balanced position as a research fellow/senior public health lecturer at Torrens University Australia.



Paige Fletcher

PhD student (current)

Effectiveness of NGO influence on policy formation: A case study of women's organisations and domestic violence policy

On average, one woman is murdered every week by her current or former partner. Nongovernment organisations (NGOs) play an important role in supporting women through domestic violence and can also influence domestic violence policies.

Working with feminist organisations, my research examines the effectiveness of NGO influence on policy formation. I am particularly interested in whether 'insider'/'outsider' status affects feminist organisations' influence on and contribution to public policy. The three public policies I will examine are *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*, *Family Violence Rolling Action Plan (Vic)*, and *It Stops Here (NSW)*. My research will provide important insights and suggestions about how NGOs can work with government to produce effective policies to address domestic violence.



Cole Williams

Honours student (current)

Big business and sustainable development

In an era where the role of government has been reduced and corporations are given ever-increasing power, is big business compatible with sustainable development? Or will big businesses be responsible for increasing levels of environmental degradation and climate change? Governments and environmental organisations now regularly engage in partnerships with business on environmental issues. Large companies' 'corporate social responsibility' activities mean that they appear to be acting in more ethical ways, and more ecologically sustainable products are produced than ever before. However, considering the profit motive of businesses, trusting them with environmental protection may be unwise. My research is exploring whether the market and technology alone can provide a path to sustainable development. In addition, I will investigate whether a transformation may be required that challenges the idea of continued economic growth generally, and the hyper-consumption of rich countries in particular.



Maddie Hand

Honours student (current)

Understanding household recycling attitudes and practices in the City of Mitcham

One of the barriers facing local governments in managing municipal solid waste is households incorrectly sorting waste items. Mitcham Council and East Waste are responsible for kerbside collection of waste and recycling and provide various educational resources. However, despite the provision of information about the importance of recycling and how to do it, many householders still place items in the wrong bins. My research will identify challenges associated with household recycling, and will assess the effects of government policies on people's perceptions and practices in relation to recycling and waste. In addition, I will analyse the influences on individuals' recycling practices and how perceived barriers can be overcome. Understanding public perceptions of education strategies and their effects on recycling behaviours will assist councils to convey information to the public in the most effective ways possible.



Student testimonials

'I've done both my Honours and my PhD with CASPR. CASPR fosters a deeply supportive environment that allows you to grow into being a great researcher and form lasting friendships with the other students. Through weekly lab meetings, journal writing workshops and a cheer squad of other students supporting you at each milestone or speaking event, you do not feel isolated and alone in your PhD journey. At CASPR, you are supported to achieve your best.' Paige Fletcher

'CASPR HDRs [higher-degree researchers] benefit from student-centred support networks, which include weekly lab meetings, writing groups and workshops on international opportunities and scholarships. Ongoing professional development opportunities include regular engagement with senior academics as well as seminars from leaders in a variety of social and natural sciences.' Laura James

'As an international student, I feel I am so lucky to be a member of CASPR. I am away from my relatives, country and everything familiar to me, but I never feel lonely or isolated. Faculty members and other CASPR students frequently catch up, support and encourage each other. If you are a member of CASPR, you will achieve the goals of your academic journey because of the strong, helpful and understanding group you are working with.' Nadeeka Damayanthi Mahamadachchi

'I have chosen to write my honours thesis with CASPR as I am interested in critically investigating sustainable development in the neoliberal era. I have a passion for environmental issues more broadly due to a deep personal connection with the ocean. At CASPR, I have found a brilliant supervisor, Associate Professor Cassandra Star, and I hope to continue on to do a PhD with CASPR.' Cole Williams

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