

Environmental Policy, Australian Practices in the Context of Theory. Ian Thomas. The Federation Press (Australia), March 2007, 512 pp. ISBN: 1-86287-603-7; ISBN-13: 978-1-86287-603-3

Environmental Policy, Australian Practice in the Context of Theory is a comprehensive and well researched text book. The book works through the various areas of policy making, agenda setting, formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review. It provides a good balance between theory and practical examples. It is aimed at university level environmental students, but could be equally useful to those working in the area of environmental policy development and implementation. Thomas has managed to make the almost 500 page book both interesting and engaging through the use of relevant and practical examples from all areas of Australian environmental policy.

The book is divided into four parts - Part A Introducing Environmental Policy, Part B Breadth of Environmental Policy, Part C Policy Theory and Part D Influences on Policy. Each section contains an introduction which gives a good lead into the topic and allows the reader to easily move around the book without missing information.

In the first section (Part A), Thomas works through the complexities of environmental policy and its relationship and interconnectedness with other areas such as politics. Policy is about creating changes and making decisions, and there will always be a role for politics in policy. The implementation of policy, particularly environmental policy, generally requires a redistribution of resources and wherever this is required there is competition for resources resulting in politics.

Thomas goes on to explain that environmental policies are different from other policies in that they often address issues that transcend physical and political boundaries such as climate change, air and water pollution. Environmental policies also overlap and challenge other policy areas. It is difficult to define what the environment is and what it is not, and the interconnectedness of many environmental issues make it difficult to separate one issue from another and one policy from another. Environmental issues usually involve many stakeholders who have different views and objectives adding to the complexity of environmental policy development and implementation.

In the second section (Part B), Thomas works through international, federal, state and local government policies in Australia giving several examples. He also includes environmental policies of private organisations and businesses which I believe is an important area to cover as we move into the future. The inclusion of information on relevant background issues assists the reader in understanding the role of environmental policy and its development, implementation and evaluation. Throughout the text book, Thomas uses examples that most people can relate to, such as the Landcare and Natural Heritage Trust programs to demonstrate particular issues. Website details are also included so that the issue can be followed up by the reader.

The theory of policy is the focus of Part C. I found the information on monitoring, evaluation and review to be interesting and relevant as I feel that it is an essential area that is often an afterthought or brushed over. Thomas defines the role of evaluation as being to provide information that will determine if a policy is working. All policies have different aims and objectives and therefore different approaches to evaluation are needed to measure the success, failure or progress of the policy in meeting its aims and objectives. Thomas emphasises that evaluation is a complex component of policy that needs to be well thought out and planned in the policy planning and development

phase. Some simple information that I found useful, and seem to remember, is that when dealing with complex policies, simple approaches to evaluation that don't allow time and resources for comprehensive data, are of little or no use.

I found the final section (Part D) to be quite thought-provoking and engaging, and found myself questioning my own values, actions and influences.

The visual layout of the book is a little boring and off-putting. There are large chunks of text broken up only by tables and boxes of text. Perhaps more use of figures, illustrations and other visual representations would make it more attractive and inviting to the reader. However, bearing in mind the intended audience is primarily university-level environmental students, there is probably no need to over-do the graphics.

The book is specifically focused on the Australian situation which makes it very relevant and practical, however, it also covers international and global issues. The book is well structured and a comprehensive table of contents allows specific information to be easily located. I found this particularly useful for finding information without having to read through a whole lot of other text.

Generally it is a well researched, comprehensive text book that contains useful and relevant information for environmental policy development in the Australian context.

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