

# When Governments Get It Right: reflecting on policy success



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# An Epidemic of Failure, it seems



- ❖ *Implementation: how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all; this being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by two sympathetic observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes. (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973)*
- ❖ *Great Planning Disasters (Peter Hall, 1982)*
- ❖ *Understanding Policy Fiascoes (Bovens & 't Hart, 1996)*
- ❖ *The Blunders of our Governments (Crewe & King, 2013)*
- ❖ *Why Government Fails so Often... (Schuck 2014)*

## Perverse Distortion



“We cannot properly ‘see’, let alone recognize and explain, variations in government performance when media, political, and academic discourses alike are saturated with accounts of their shortcomings and failures but remain nearly silent on their achievements.”

# A Classic Disaster



# Hall's *Great Planning Disasters*



## PART ONE: CASE STUDIES

1. London's Third Airport
2. London's Motorways
3. The Anglo-French Concorde
4. San Francisco's BART System
5. Sydney's Opera House
6. Two Near-Disasters: California's New Campuses  
and Britain's National Library



# SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC POLICY

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## LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

ANZ  
SOG

# Successful Public Policy: lessons from Aus



- The AIDS campaign
- HECS
- The GFC response
- Livable Melbourne
- The Child Support Scheme
- National Competition Policy
- Gun Control
- GST
- Tobacco packaging
- Water markets

## ... and NZ



- No-Fault accident insurance
- Economic Reform in the 1980s
- Nuclear-free NZ
- Settling Treaty of Waitangi issues
- Fiscal Responsibility Act
- Early childhood education
- KiwiSaver retirement scheme
- Whānau Ora indigenous social policy



# Would you know policy success if you saw it?



Objective or Subjective?

Importance of values and ideology

1. Programmatic performance

Achieved its stated objectives?

- always evident or unambiguous?
- judged as of when?
- multiple potential benefits?
- Perhaps substantive objectives not that important?

2. Political legitimacy

Generally accepted and perceived as successful?

# A Definition



“A policy is a complete success to the extent that (a) it demonstrably creates widely valued social outcomes; through (b) design, decision-making, and delivery processes that enhance both its problem-solving capacity and its political legitimacy; and (c) sustains this performance for a considerable period of time, even in the face of changing circumstances.”

# Keeping Track: archaeology of policy failure



# Bonfire of the Vanities: Sydney's tram system



# Back to the Future



# National Competition Policy 1995–2005

- ‘a landmark achievement in nationally coordinated economic reform’ (PC 2005: viii).
- ‘the most extensive and successful economic reform program in the nation’s history’ (NCC 2005: vii).
- ‘a model for other OECD countries’ (OECD 2005: 11)
- Aimed to reduce cost structure of the Australian economy.
- Opening closed industries and closed markets to competition.
- Measures of success:
  - triumph of cooperative federalism
  - contributed to Australia’s exceptional economic performance



# Programmatic Success of NCP?

 The Productivity Commission judged that:

NCP “has yielded benefits across the community”

It has “contributed to the productivity surge that has underpinned 13 years of continuous economic growth, and associated strong growth in household incomes” (PC 2005: viii).

However, the also said: “it is not possible to draw an explicit link between specific reforms and the recent improvement in Australia’s economic performance ... the timing of specific policy changes over the last two decades is strongly suggestive of a link” (PC 2005: 36)

# Good Process = Good Policy?



- ❖ Not ideologically driven

  - ‘reject policy proposals based primarily on ideology’ (Grossman 2013)

- ❖ Substantial gestation period with extensive research

  - Unilateral decision-making often cause of bad policy (King and Crewe 2013)

- ❖ Good implementation

  - Use, not ride roughshod over, federalism
  - Oversight body
  - Reward payments



## ... or Good Luck?



- Commonwealth had little choice but to cooperate with the States, who, in part, needed the Cwlth to get out of the way.
- NCP inserted into a broader process of liberalisation launched over a decade earlier
- Electricity prices were declining due to power surplus
- Economy was performing exceptionally well, then the mining boom

# Easy Target? No 'wicked problem' here...

NCP did not:



- Intervene in intractable social problems.
- Get caught up in deep and often zero-sum conflicts such as that between industrialism and the environment.
- Involve the risky and controversial business of 'picking winners'.
- Involve the kind of ambitious investment and construction program that has often proven so challenging for governments.
- Involve the rolling out of administratively complex programs.
- Embroil the government in conflicts with powerful private-sector opponents

# International Cases



- Brazil — social program
- Singapore — health care system
- UK — NHS waiting lists; tobacco control
- Finland — comprehensive schools
- Estonia — digital transformation
- US — LA rail corridor
- Denmark — Copenhagen urban planning
- Norway — Petroleum Fund
- Germany — Labor market reform

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