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Policy Instruments for Sustainable Consumption: A Comparison of United Kingdom and Australian Initiatives

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Abstract

At the 1992 Earth Summit, countries identified sustainable consumption and production (SCP) as a core part of the sustainable development agenda. International negotiations on appropriate policies and programs since then culminated in agreement at the 2012 RIO+20 Conference on a ten-year framework of programs. Despite a collective commitment to SCP at the UN, analysts report only limited national progress to date. In this paper, I set out a framework of policy instruments available to governments to implement an SCP agenda. I then compare progress on national implementation in the United Kingdom (a global leader) and Australia (a global laggard). I conclude that the UK claim to leadership may be overstated because, while it has established a formal SCP program unlike Australia, the policy mix in both countries is quite similar.

Keywords

Sustainable Consumption, Policy Instruments, Australia, United Kingdom, United Nations

Introduction

There is now ample evidence that high levels of consumption contribute to resource depletion, ecosystem degradation, global warming and other environmental problems (e.g., EEA 2013; UNEP 2013). Consequently, many governmental, business and civil society actors are recognising that the pursuit of sustainability must include inculcating more sustainable consumption patterns across the world, especially in the rich countries of the global North (e.g. UK Government 2003; WBCSD 2012). In the two decades since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCED), the issue of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), has moved steadily up the international agenda and featured in the recent 2012 Rio+20 outcome, *The Future We Want*. In this paper, I compare how two national governments, Australia and the United Kingdom, have engaged with the SCP agenda. To make the comparison, I develop a list of policies that could be used to deliver SCP and locate them along a sustainability spectrum from 'weak' to 'strong' based on whether they are informational and voluntary on the one hand or

regulatory and mandatory on the other. I then review the policies and programs that Australia and the United Kingdom have implemented, choosing the latter country because it is a recognised global leader in SCP. I find the UK's claim to SCP leadership to be exaggerated as most of its policies cluster towards the weak pole of the sustainability spectrum and do not differ greatly from those implemented by Australia.

Sustainable Consumption and Production at the United Nations

Two decades ago at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil world leaders took the first faltering steps towards institutionalising SCP. Agenda 21 contained a chapter on *Changing Consumption Patterns* that stated: 'the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances' (United Nations 1992, 4.2). At a follow up symposium in 1994 in Oslo, Norway, SCP was defined as 'the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations' (quoted in Fuchs & Lorek 2005). Fuchs and Lorek claimed the definition captured a 'strong' notion SCP because it focused on concepts like 'basic needs' and 'quality of life', and on minimising natural and toxic material use over the life cycle (2005, p. 261). They noted that SCP contained two components: a techno-efficiency component, whereby supply-side improvements in production enabled the same product to be consumed with less environmental impact; and a socio-behavioural component, whereby consumption patterns are altered to achieve less, and 'greener', consumption levels. Fuchs and Lorek also noted that the overwhelming emphasis was placed on the supply-side, techno-efficiency component, and that the socio-behavioural component had been neglected. In a recent review Barber (2010) also notes limited progress. Entitled *Still Waiting for Delivery*, Barber's analysis highlights how conferences, meetings, workshops and symposia on the topic of SCP have not translated into strong action, especially in support of the diverse array of civil society initiatives being implemented across the globe.

Last year's 20-year UNCED anniversary conference, branded Rio+20, offered a renewed opportunity for countries to commit to SCP. The Preamble to the Conference's outcome document, *The Future We Want*, states that: 'We recognize that poverty eradication, *changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production*, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development' (UN 2012, para 4, emphasis added). The Rio+20 meeting also approved a 10 Year Framework of Programmes

on sustainable consumption and production (10YFP). The result of almost a decade of negotiations that commenced in Marrakech, Morocco, in 2003, the 10YFP contains the following provisions:

- The 10YFP runs from 2012 to 2022;
- Developed countries should take the lead;
- National programs should be flexible and tailored to national circumstances;
- Programs adopted should conform to the provisions of international trade law;
- UNEP should serve as the Secretariat;
- Programs supported by the 10YFP are to be voluntary (UN 2012, 10YFP, para 8).

Policy Tools for Sustainable Consumption

Given the recent recommitment of governments to SCP at Rio+20, it is timely to review the policy tools available to them to take action. A list of governmental policy instruments that could be deployed is presented in Table 1. The list has been developed from the literature on policy instruments (see, for example, Howlett *et al.* 1995; Jordan *et al.* 2007; Lascoumbes & Le Gales 2007; UNEP 2013) and covers a wide range of possible options. Four broad types of policy instruments are identified: regulatory, economic, informational and infrastructural, which each work in a different way. Regulatory instruments are traditional ‘command and control’ arrangements, where governments mandate actions of a particular type that are backed by fines and penalties. The setting and enforcing of regulatory standards for energy consumption and pollution is a good example of this approach. In contrast, economic policy instruments aim to create market incentives to guide consumer action. Taxing carbon intensive goods illustrates this approach. Under the heading ‘informational policy instruments’, a range of measures can be taken to inform the public about the environmental and social consequences of their purchases. Certification and labelling schemes that provide consumers with more information about the energy efficiency of their purchases illustrate the approach. Finally, infrastructural policy instruments tackle some of the well-known constraints on consumer behaviour imposed by ‘socio-technical regimes’ (Seyfang 2011). Policies to build a network of bike-lanes to foster cycling to work are an example.

The question arises as to which instruments have been most used, and which least, in the pursuit of SCP over the past decade in national programs and on whether the policy focus has been on regulating producers or consumers. From a political economy perspective, the expectation would be that policy would favour instruments that are compatible with the current neoliberal global order—i.e. instruments would

not be deployed if they are perceived to be incompatible with private property rights, free markets, and individual choice. Likewise, it would also be expected that policies and programs would be directed towards production efficiency rather than to constraining consumer demand.

Table 1: Sustainable Consumption Policy Instruments

Regulatory Policy Instruments	Economic Policy Instruments	Informational Policy Instruments	Infrastructural Instruments
Advertising regulation (e.g. junk food, tobacco, alcohol)	Taxation (e.g. increase cost of carbon intensive goods)	Eco-labelling schemes (e.g. Germany's Blue Angel scheme, EU Ecolabel);	Urban design (e.g. high density housing)
Licences and prescriptions (e.g. pharmaceuticals, firearms, motor vehicles, aircraft)	Subsidies (e.g. offset costs of solar installation, home insulation, public transport);	Certification and labelling schemes (e.g. Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council)	Public transport (e.g. cycle lanes, high-speed rail)
Age limits (e.g. bars, casinos, movie theatres)	Market creation (e.g. emissions trading schemes);	Information schemes (e.g. 'buy local', 'buy organic', 'live sustainably')	Telecommunications (e.g. NBN)
Quotas (e.g. water use, fishing)	Deposit-refund schemes (e.g. beverage bottles)	Voluntary green procurement (e.g. Australian governments green procurement guidelines)	
Standards (e.g. building standards, fuel efficiency standards, etc);	Mandatory green procurement (e.g. UK Government's timber procurement scheme)	Roundtables to promote stakeholder dialogue on sustainable consumption and production;	
	Credit controls (e.g. regulations on private lending; credit card limits; interest rates) ;		

Sources: Howlett *et al.* 1995; Jordan *et al.* 2005; Lascoumbes & Le Gales 2007; UNEP 2012.

The policies listed in Table 1 can be located along a sustainability spectrum from 'weak' to 'strong'. Weak SCP policies would be expected to be voluntary rather than mandatory in terms of obligations imposed; vaguely rather than precisely stated in terms of the actions required; narrowly rather than broadly targeted; and with a focus on production efficiency rather than consumption 'sufficiency' (Princen, Maniates & Conca 2002). Strong SCP policies on the other hand would be expected to be the obverse. They would be mandatory rather than voluntary, precise rather than vague,

and widely rather than narrowly targeted. For illustrative purposes, the location of some of the policy options set out in Table 1 along the weak-strong sustainability spectrum is set out in Figure 1 below. This schema for ranking SCP policy instruments will be employed in the case studies below to assess where individual schemes are located along the weak-strong spectrum.



Figure 1: SCP Policy Options Ranked Along Weak-Strong Sustainability Spectrum

Comparing Sustainable Consumption Initiatives: UK and Australia

In evaluating national programs for SCP, useful distinctions can be made between official government-sponsored programs and programs sponsored business and civil society organisations. Furthermore, government programs can be distinguished between those that emphasise ‘efficiency’ (achieving more outputs with fewer inputs) and those that emphasise ‘sufficiency’ (reducing the volume and type of consumption taking place). The way national SCP policies are developed can also be distinguished, with ‘deliberative’ approaches involving widespread discussion and ‘bureaucratic’ approaches typically limiting input to government agencies (see Princen *et al.* 2002; Berg 2011; and Seyfang 2011).

Building on Agenda 21, the Oslo Symposium and the 2003 Marrakech Process, some countries became early adopters of SCP. The UK and Japan both launched programs in 2003, followed by Sweden (2005), France (2006), and the European Union (2007) (Barber 2010). Today, a range of initiatives are in operation around the world (UNEP 2012). Since a comprehensive analysis of these initiatives is beyond the scope of this paper, I focus instead on comparing the UK’s program, regarded as a leading example in Europe, with Australia’s efforts in terms of policy instruments and policy focus.

The United Kingdom

The UK was one of a handful of countries to respond quickly to the call for action on SCP. In 2003, it released a document entitled *Changing Patterns: the UK Framework for Sustainable Consumption and Production*. *Changing Patterns* set out a framework for action built around the principles of (i) decoupling economic growth

from environmental degradation; (ii) targeting policy to the most important environmental impacts of resource use; (iii) increasing the productivity of material and resource use (i.e. improve efficiency); and (iv) encouraging active and engaged consumers to practice more SCP (UK Government 2003). To achieve these outcomes, *Changing Patterns* focused on life-cycle analysis, market-compatible action, integrating SCP into policy decisions, appropriate policy design, and stimulating innovation. The document located the lead agency as the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and tasked it to get more out of existing sustainable production programs, review procurement policy, establish collaborative projects, foster the SCP debate, and work on indicators for sustainable development (UK Government 2003).

Shortly after releasing *Changing Patterns*, the UK Government also released its Sustainable Development strategy, *Securing the Future*. Chapter 3 of this document sets out a 'One Planet Economy: Sustainable Production and Consumption' agenda. This document states that the goal of SCP 'requires us to achieve more with less' (UK Government 2005, p. 43) and notes that the key sectors of concern are household energy, water, food, travel and tourism. The document commences with a focus on product design—'cutting out problems at source' and production efficiency (UK Government 2005, p. 47), before discussing other dimensions of SCP. It notes that 'there will also be a need for households, businesses and the public sector to consume more efficiently and differently, so that consumption from rising incomes is not accompanied by rising environmental impacts or social injustice' (UK Government 2005, p. 51). The document emphasises the social and cultural influencers of consumption and calls for the building of an evidence base of the environmental impacts of household consumption.

In a recent review of the UK program on SCP, Berg (2011) makes two key findings. These are firstly, that the origins of the program were based around a strategy of deliberation, which involved a large number of groups in government, business and civil society; and secondly, that the content of the program was largely weighted towards efficiency measures. For Berg (2011, p. 16), the UK program 'highlights unsustainable trends but fails to push consumers to reduce their consumption', signalling a weak sustainability approach. In another evaluation, Flanagan and Weatherall (2013) examine some of the major government-backed SCP initiatives underway in the UK.¹ They identify eight government-supported activities that range from the *Green Carbon Hub* and the *Voluntary Retail Initiative for Televisions* to the *Love Food Hate Waste* and *Every Action Counts* campaigns. An analysis of the policy content of these initiatives is provided in Table 2.

¹ Curiously, the authors exclude a major government initiative to mandate the green procurement of timber products using eco-certification and labelling schemes raising questions about the review's comprehensiveness. See CPET 2014 for scheme details.

As can be seen from Table 2, the programs listed aim to improve the efficiency of specific types of products (e.g., houses, boilers, TVs), reduce waste in some sectors (e.g. household food consumption, household energy use), and promote sustainable living in advertising campaigns and using community-based monitors. Three broad policy instruments are utilised: regulation (via setting new efficiency standards), economic incentives (via subsidising industry or consumers to undertake the desired action), and information (via campaigns to inform industry and/or consumers about the environmental consequences of different purchasing decisions). These policies have focused both on altering production and consumption behaviour. The impact of these various efforts has been mixed. According to Flanagan and Weatherall (2013, p.3), 'there is a complex interaction between campaigning for consumers to change behaviour and promoting policy change at local, national or European level... Perhaps the clearest conclusion from this mix is that an effective policy environment in tandem with powerful consumer awareness and engagement initiatives is vital if we are to see sustainability come fully to the forefront in citizens' consumption choices'. A provisional evaluation of each initiative in the final column indicates that 6 of the 8 fall towards the 'weak sustainability' pole of the 'weak-strong' sustainability spectrum and only two can be considered 'moderate sustainability'.

Australia

In 2003, Hobson (p. 149) noted that 'sustainable consumption has failed to become a political or public issue in Australia'. This conclusion appears to be based on the fact that, unlike the UK, Australia did not have or intend to develop an explicit SCP policy or program. However, the absence of a clearly defined program does not mean that Australia was not taking any action. In 2004, UNEP produced a document entitled *Tracking Progress: Implementing Sustainable Consumption Policies* that included a case study on Australia as 'one of a group of countries that has taken a leadership role in supporting and facilitating international work on changing consumption and production patterns' (UNEP 2004, p. 30). *Tracking Progress* observed that one early Australian initiative was the publication of a 1996 booklet, *More with Less: Initiatives to Promote Sustainable Consumption*, by the-then Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories (DEST 1996). *More with Less* stated that a 'key element of moving to achieve a sustainable world is changing the consumption patterns of the world's people', which in industrialised countries meant 'learning how to have an acceptable quality of life while substantially decreasing current levels of demand on the earth's resources and environment' (DEST 1996, p. 2). The booklet contained a compendium of actions being taken in support of SCP by governments, industry and civil society. Of the 29 initiatives listed, six involved the Australian federal government.

Tracking Progress inventories the 'numerous other programs have been established' since the publication of *More with Less* (UNEP 2004, pp. 30-31). In addition to listing a range of new initiatives the report notes that a major focus of Australia's work on

SCP is assisting the OECD with its Work Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production and Increasing Resource Efficiency (UNEP 2004, p. 31). It also stated that Australia has worked to embed life-cycle analysis in production, promote national recycling schemes, strengthen consumer regulation, employ economic measures in support of SCP, provide public information, support impartial testing of products, promote research on consumer behaviour to make consumption patterns more sustainable, and engage in green procurement.

Despite the favourable account of Australia's engagement in SCP in *Tracking Progress*, the country barely features in a recent UNEP report entitled *Global Outlook on Sustainable Consumption and Production Policies*. In the report's Asia-Pacific section, the only Australian governmental program mentioned is the Australian National Packaging Covenant which aims to reduce packaging waste and increase recycling which was negotiated in 1999 (UNEP 2012). The paucity of information about Australia's SCP initiatives in this document could be because, rather than undertaking an inventory of what individual countries are doing, it is assessing globally significant responses to SCP. It is notable, however, that the report cites several UK examples of SCP, devoting a full page on the UK's 'comprehensive framework on SCP', a box on the UK's Sustainable Clothing Action Plan, and full details of its EU-directed Market Transformation Programme.

The absence of an official program on SCP coupled with no recent formal inventory of Australia's actions makes it somewhat harder to compile a list of project comparable to those of the UK's. *More with Less* was compiled in 1996 and combines federal government programs with state and local government programs as well as those initiated by industry and civil society. In contrast, while *Tracking Progress* is somewhat more recent, it includes a range of initiatives that Australia is undertaking to achieve the broader objective of sustainable development rather than SCP per se. To obtain a list of current Australian federal government initiatives in the field of SCP, therefore, I have used a mix-methods approach that combines those programs clearly related to SCP listed in *More with Less* and *Tracking Progress* with those listed in UNEP's *Global Outlook*. The list of initiatives generated by this approach appears in Table 3 coupled with an evaluation of their location along the weak-to-strong sustainability continuum.

Table 2: A Selection of Policy Initiatives Used in the UK's Sustainable Consumption Program

Name (Year Initiated)	Description	Policy Instruments	Policy Evaluation
Zero Carbon Hub (2008)	Promote zero-carbon building construction by 2016	<p><i>Regulation via standards:</i> modifications to UK building code requiring new homes to be more carbon efficient;</p> <p><i>Information via roundtable:</i> Financial support for 'hub' to investigate construction and marketing of zero/low carbon houses;</p>	<p>Mandatory, precise, narrowly production-focused, efficiency initiative: seeks to make new homes more energy efficient by tightening standards but does not limit size of new homes;</p> <p>Rating: Moderate Sustainability</p>
Efficient Boilers Programme (2006)	Promote energy efficient boilers for water heating in homes	<p><i>Regulation via standards:</i> modification to UK building code to mandate use of energy efficient boilers by 2016;</p> <p><i>Industry incentives:</i> government provided training to industry</p> <p><i>Consumer incentives:</i> voluntary incentives for householders to replace old with new boilers;</p>	<p>Mandatory, precise, narrowly production-focused initiative coupled with voluntary component; seeks to promote construction and installation of more efficient boilers by tightening standards;</p> <p>Rating: Moderate Sustainability</p>
Energy Saving Trust Recommended certification and labelling scheme (1995)	Encourage consumers to purchase energy saving household appliances	<p><i>Informational instrument:</i> indicates which appliances fall within the top 20% in terms of energy rating; funded by government until 2010 and transitioned to fee-paying system;</p>	<p>Voluntary, precise, narrowly-focused, informational instrument with consumption focus; seeks to inform consumers about the energy rating of appliances;</p> <p>Rating: Weak Sustainability</p>
Television Voluntary Retail Initiative (2010)	Remove most energy inefficient TVs from the market	<p><i>Government-Industry Cooperation:</i> encourages choice editing to remove least efficient TVs;</p> <p><i>Industry incentive:</i> government supported industry (via Energy Saving Trust) in its voluntary actions</p>	<p>Voluntary, precise, narrowly production focused instrument: aimed to remove least energy efficient TVs from the market via choice editing;</p>

		via marketing and PR support;	Rating: Weak Sustainability
Love Food Hate Waste (2007)	Reduce waste in the food industry	<i>Informational instrument:</i> government funding for Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to run publicity campaign on consumer waste in the food industry;	Voluntary, broad, consumption focused informational instrument: awareness campaign over food waste Rating: Weak Sustainability
Every Action Counts (2006)	Encourage sustainable practices energy, travel, shopping, resources and localities	<i>Informational instrument:</i> government funding for voluntary groups to train community champions to promote sustainable consumption;	Voluntary, broad, consumption focused training and informational instrument: building community capacity on sustainable consumption practices Rating: Weak Sustainability
Pro-Environmental Behaviours (2007)	Support policy development in Defra and other agencies	<i>Informational instrument:</i> aims to improve knowledge base for government policy on sustainable consumption;	Broad, informational and research, efficiency and sufficiency oriented policy instrument; build government SCP capacity Rating: Weak Sustainability
Energy Saving Trust (1992)	Support for consumers to reduce household energy requirements	<i>Informational instrument:</i> Government funding for energy efficiency advice centres to advice households on ways to reduce energy use;	Voluntary, broad, consumption focused, informational policy instrument: provide consumer advice on ways to reduce household energy use Rating: Weak Sustainability

Source: Flanagan & Weatherall 2013.

Discussion

A comparison of SCP governmental initiatives in the UK and Australia reveals a number of interesting results. First, it is clear that despite not having an official SCP policy or program, the Australian federal government is undertaking a range of not dissimilar actions to those undertaken in the UK. The UK's *Changing Patterns* program may have given more public prominence to the ideas of SCP, but many of the actual programs and policies appear common across both countries, with a focus on tackling household energy usage, promoting production efficiency in specific sectors, and providing public information to encourage people to reflect on and address their consumption patterns.

Secondly, not only do the programs have the same broad focus, but the dominant policy instruments used in both jurisdictions—consumption side information policies supplemented with production-side regulation to establish and/or tighten standards—appear similar. A lot of programs in both countries provide information to interested consumers on how to engage in 'green' consumption via booklets, websites and community champions. In the UK, this took the form of campaigns like *Love Food Hate Waste*, *Every Action Counts* and *Energy Saving Trust*; parallel programs in Australia are *Your Home*, *Shop Smart*, *Living Greener* and *E3*. These initiatives enable interested consumers to get tips and information concerning how to reduce their energy bills and household waste and select the most efficient electrical appliances.

Thirdly, both governments have used economic policy in the form of subsidies and taxation to promote SCP in discrete sectors. The UK Government subsidised consumers to retrofit their homes with more efficient boilers after 2009 and the Australian government has subsidised consumers by partially offsetting the cost of installing solar energy in recent years. Both governments have also subsidised producers to improve productive efficiency. The UK Government subsidised the costs incurred by companies installing new boilers and retailers engaged in choice editing out inefficient TV sets; and the Australian government obliged importers to pay a levy to offset the costs of recycling oil at the end of the supply chain and subsidised research and develop in the packaging industry to reduce waste.

Fourthly, in neither jurisdiction have measures been deployed to directly reduce consumption by reducing consumers' disposable income. Income reductions could be achieved by manipulating by manipulating income tax, interest rates, and consumption taxes and by introducing luxury and inheritance taxes. While these economy-wide measures would likely exert a powerful impact on the general level of social consumption and, properly targeted, could create significant price incentives to shift away from energy inefficient and carbon- and resource-intensive goods, to date they have not been employed as policy options by either government.

Table 3: A Selection of Policy Initiatives Used in Australia to Promote Sustainable Consumption

Name	Source	Description	Policy Instruments	Policy Evaluation
Energy Rating Labelling of Electrical Appliances (now E3 for Equipment Energy Efficiency website)	<i>More with Less and Tracking Progress</i>	Star rating of energy efficiency of electrical appliances	<i>Information instrument:</i> public information about the energy efficiency of consumer appliances using a six star rating system	Voluntary, consumption focused, narrow, information instrument: provides information to consumers on energy efficiency of household electrical appliances; Rating: Weak Sustainability
National Recycling Plan Targets (recently supplemented with National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme)	<i>More with Less</i>	Establish national targets for recycling	<i>Industry regulation:</i> industry targets for waste recycling; updated for e-waste from TVs and computers.	Voluntary, production-focused, narrow, targets development; aims to tighten standards for waste production; Rating: Weak Sustainability
Excise tax on leaded petrol	<i>More with Less and Tracking Progress</i>	Increased cost of leaded over unleaded petrol	<i>Economic instrument:</i> excise tax on leaded led to rapid decline in demand and eventual phase out	Mandatory, consumption-focused, targeted, economic instrument; increased price of leaded over unleaded petrol; Rating: Strong Sustainability
Solar Hot Water Subsidies (updated/ supplemented with Small-Scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES))	<i>Tracking Progress and Google search</i>	Encourage consumers to install solar (and alternative) household energy systems	<i>Economic instrument:</i> consumer subsidy for installing solar and alternative household energy systems;	Voluntary, consumption-focused, targeted, economic instrument; subsidy to households to partially offset cost of installing solar and alternative energy systems; Rating: Moderate Sustainability
Your Home, Shop Smart, Living	<i>Tracking Progress and</i>	Booklets/websites providing information on how to live	<i>Information instrument:</i> booklets and websites providing information on how	Voluntary, consumption-focused, broad-based information instrument: provide

Greener, etc	<i>Google search</i>	more sustainably	to live more sustainably	information in the form of guides on how to live more sustainably; Rating: Weak Sustainability
Waste Oil Product Stewardship Levy	<i>Tracking Progress</i>	Producers and retailers of oil products pay levy to subsidise cost of recycling	<i>Economic instrument:</i> levy on oil importers to subsidise costs of recycling borne by recyclers;	Mandatory, production-focused, targeted economic instrument; ensure costs of recycling waste oil are internalised within supply chain; Rating: Moderate Sustainability
Australian National Packaging Covenant	<i>Global Outlook</i>	To reduce packaging waste and increase recycling	<i>Government-Industry-Civil Society Cooperation:</i> ANPC funded by government and industry; <i>Industry incentive:</i> ANPC provides project funding to reduce packaging waste;	Voluntary, production-focused, targeted, economic instrument; aims to reduce packaging waste in industry; Rating: Moderate Sustainability
Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) scheme	<i>Global Outlook</i>	Regulates some water using devices to ensure water minimisation;	<i>Government Regulation:</i> establishes regulatory requirements for some water using devices (like showers, toilets, taps) to conserve water;	Mandatory, production-focused, targeted, regulatory and standards instrument: aims to improve efficiency of water using devices by tightening standards; Rating: Moderate Sustainability

Sources: DEST 1996; UNEP 2004; UNEP-EU 2013.

This lack of political will reflects both a lack of awareness of what a strong sustainability approach to SCP would entail as well as well-founded fears that such policies would unleash a voter backlash, resulting in the loss of political power at the next election.

The recent Australian election is a salutary lesson in the politics of sustainable consumption and production as the Opposition Liberal Party under Tony Abbott campaigned against a very modest carbon tax proposal put in place by the minority ALP Government. While it is true in part that the Opposition was able to exploit the issue as another ALP 'broken promise', there is little doubt that the tax was very unpopular with many in the business community who experienced increased costs. The almost three-year Liberal assault on the tax was effective: with her personal popularity plummeting in opinion polls, the ALP replaced Julia Gillard as Prime Minister with the former leader Kevin Rudd. However, by then it was too late and the ALP was defeated in a thumping victory by the incoming Liberal-National Party, which immediately introduced a Carbon Tax Repeal Bill. While the Bill was rejected by the Senate, it is likely to be reintroduced when the new Senate sits after 1 July 2014. Overall, this experience with regard to a very modest carbon tax will certainly give many politicians pause for thought. Based on this experience, it seems highly unlikely that any major party would consider basing its policies on a strong sustainable consumption agenda as the tough tax and regulatory measures required to raise the cost of carbon- and resource-intensive consumption and dampen consumer demand would almost certainly provoke a political and popular backlash.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the emergence of SCP on the international policy agenda, identified a range of policy instruments that could be used to implement it, and compared and evaluated a selection of the programs in place in the UK and Australia to better understand what governments are currently doing. While the UK was an early, formal adopter of SCP and launched a policy on the topic in 2003, in fact both Australia and the UK have adopted similar program elements using similar policies to achieve SCP in the past two decades. In both countries, there has been an emphasis on enhancing productive efficiency in discrete sectors which has been coupled with public outreach campaigns to encourage consumers to voluntarily alter their consumption patterns. The majority of the programs lie at the 'weak sustainability' pole of the 'weak-to-strong sustainability' spectrum. Thus, while governments notionally have a large number of policy instruments available to tackle unsustainable consumption, many instruments with broader, economy-wide effects, have not been used. While it is possible that the policy instruments that are linked to strong sustainability have not been deployed for fear of their impact on growth and like voter backlash, further investigation is required into exactly why governments are, so far, desisting from using them.

This study is a provisional investigation into policy instruments and SCP in the UK and Australia and a number of shortcomings should be noted. Firstly, the analysis of the SCP initiatives underway in the UK and Australia has relied on the work of other investigators, whose own studies appear to be somewhat selective. It is clear that national governments are implementing more programs than those listed in public and academic documents. In part, this reflects difficulties in determining the scope of the concept 'sustainable consumption and production' and what initiatives it might encompass. A full, systematic inventory of all of the SCP initiatives underway in both countries is required to reach more definitive conclusions on which is actually exercising leadership. Secondly, the article has not investigated the large number of SCP initiatives being undertaken at the sub-national level by regional and local governments, business, and civil society actors. A comprehensive comparison of the UK and Australia in terms of SCP would need to include the initiatives being implemented by these actors too.

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Biography

Fred Gale is Associate Professor and Director, Governance and Implementation Group, University of Tasmania. His research examines the role certification and labelling schemes play in developing socially and ecologically sustainable supply chains and promoting sustainable consumption. He has completed in-depth studies of the Forest Stewardship Council and Marine Stewardship Council. Recent books include *Setting the Standard: Certification, Governance and the Forest Stewardship Council* (UBC Press 2008), *Pulp Friction in Tasmania: an Evaluation of the Environmental Assessment of Gunns Pulp Mill* (Pencil Pine Press 2011), and *Global Commodity Governance: State Responses to Sustainable Forest and Fisheries Certification* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011).

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