

Special Issue: New Zealand Media and Environment

Angi Buettner and Geoffrey Craig

In recent years the global concern and debate over climate change and other environmental crises has highlighted how the scientific complexity, the political challenges, and the social consequences of such subjects are communicated through various forms of media, from quality broadsheet newspapers to the latest lifestyle television programme. Issues such as framing and textual representation, source selection and usage, and the range and depth of investigation of issues, help shape the public meanings of the environment. This has led to a growing international academic literature on the subject of media and the environment (see for example Boyce and Lewis 2009; Cox 2006; Lindahl Elliott 2006; Wyss 2008; and journals, such as *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*) that builds on earlier research into the field (such as Allan, Adam and Carter 2000; Anderson 1997; DeLuca 1999; Hansen 1993; and Smith 2000). In Australia, there has also been recognition of the need to understand the significances of mediated representations of the environment and environmental communication more generally (Greenfield and Williams 2008; Hutchins and Lester 2006; Lester 2007; and issues of journals: *Media International Australia* No. 127, 2008; *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* Vol. 22, Issue 2, 2008; *Communication, Politics and Culture* Vol. 42, No. 1, 2009).

There has been some recent research into New Zealand environmental communication (Craig 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; Howard-Williams 2009; Kenix 2008; Russill 2008; 2009), but there remains a wealth of areas to be explored. While environmental stewardship is a global requirement, it takes on a heightened focus in a developed nation that still relies heavily on its primary industries and where the prominent tourism industry has long promoted the country as '100% Pure'. The rhetoric of New Zealand's pristine environmental image has been seriously questioned in recent years as a series of challenges, from genetic engineering to the extraordinary growth in the dairying industry, increasingly undermine the quality of the environment. Additionally, lack of progress over any comprehensive political response to climate change, at either a national or global level, also threatens long-term sustainability.

It was, in fact, just prior to the Copenhagen climate change talks that the New Zealand Media & Environment Forum was held in Dunedin last year. The Forum, jointly sponsored by the Department of Politics, the Centre for Science Communication and the Political Communication, Policy and Participation Research Cluster at the University of Otago, was prompted by the belief that dialogue between news media professionals and environmental stakeholders is necessary to enhance the quality of public debate and public understanding about New Zealand environmental issues. The Forum brought together a diverse range of scientists, politicians, activists, journalists, and media academics, featuring prominent speakers such as Jim Salinger, Metiria Turei, Rod Oram, Peter Barrett, and Don Nicolson.

This journal edition grew out of the Forum and it seeks to address in a small way the ongoing task of directing research attention on the subject of the relationship between the media and the environment in New Zealand and the wider Australasian region. In the opening article, Geoffrey Craig offers an analysis of the campaign management and news media reportage of two New Zealand environmental campaigns, the 350.org campaign and the Wild Rivers campaign. While both campaigns had a national focus, the campaign events were primarily organised by local groups of volunteers who had a high degree of autonomy. Unlike many environmental campaigns that highlight conflict and revolve around forms of protest, the campaigns analysed by Craig primarily framed the environment as a site of celebration where local community formation can occur. As such, the 350.org and Wild Rivers campaigns mainly sought, and attracted, local print media reportage. Craig discusses the 'soft news' treatment of the campaign events and finds that such coverage did not preclude articulation with the broader national and global environmental politics that informed both campaigns.

David Williams examines the reportage of climate change in the Christchurch newspaper, *The Press*, and considers the influence of government in such reportage. Williams, one of two environment reporters on *The Press*, finds that political sources are the dominant sources in climate change reportage and that the Government perspective is privileged twice as much as the perspective of opposition parties. Williams shows that the news media mainly reflect the government policy frameworks in climate change reportage, presenting the issue mainly in economic terms. He also finds that reportage of climate change diminishes after the election of the Key government at the end of 2008, in accord with the Government's relegation of the issue in its overall political management. Williams' study also offers comparative data on climate change reportage across three of New Zealand Fairfax-

owned metropolitan newspapers, and notes that variation in results suggests that the corporatisation of newspapers has not completely undermined editorial and journalistic agency within particular publications.

Verica Rupar investigates the newspaper coverage in New Zealand of genetic engineering when the issue came to national prominence over the period of 2001 and 2002. Rupar examines the news reportage and opinion articles of three metropolitan newspapers: the *New Zealand Herald*, *The Dominion Post*, and *The Press*, and analyses how differences in reportage in these individual newspapers are partly determined by the newspaper's relationship to their particular communities and the local impact of the introduction of genetic engineering. Adopting the community structure model, Rupar divides the coverage into three phases of policy formation: expectation, evaluation and anticipation. She finds that the newspapers paid cyclical attention to the issue of genetic engineering and that all three newspapers published more news stories in the early stage of policy formation (the expectation phase) and more opinion articles in the final or anticipation stage of policy formation. Rupar argues, however, that the press still has a strong desire to influence policy, noting that all three newspapers published more editorials in the initial stage of policy formation.

Moving on from studies of news media, Leon Gurevitch offers an analysis of how popular film franchises and related advertising campaigns use images and discourses to promote the global tourist consumption of antipodean ecological space, and also how representations of the indigenous cultures in those texts work to guarantee and provide access to the commodified purity of such presented landscapes and cultures. Gurevitch outlines historical representations of antipodean ecology before arguing that *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Baz Lurhmann's *Australia*, as well as the *100% Pure* and *Come Walkabout* advertisements, are modern examples of the process of positing antipodean space within logics of imperial ecological domination. He then extends his analysis with an account of the ecological racism that occurs when the figure of the native in such texts becomes both part of, as well as the vehicle through which access can be gained to, a commodified virgin ecology.

In the final article Angi Buettner examines the media and public strategies of climate change deniers and the nature of their news media reportage. Focusing on the noted climate change denier, Australian Ian Plimer, and his debate with *Guardian* journalist George Monbiot, Buettner unpacks Plimer's status as a celebrity climate change

sceptic, noting his cultural capital, his aggressive and skilful courting of the media, and his provocative argumentative style. Such a persona, Buettner argues, acts in accord with media logics that together undermine comprehensive and incisive reportage on climate change. The news media's over-reliance and lack of scrutiny of single-source 'experts', the desire for balance that inhibits investigation of scientific complexity and misrepresents the overall distribution of opinion, and the need for dramatic and conflict-based performance, as a form of media spectacle, are all factors that prevent comprehensive public understanding of climate change. Buettner concludes by arguing that more analysis of climate change reportage needs to focus on the 'logic of noise' that drives media coverage, as well as the 'logic of networks' that bring together particular sources, opinion columnists, and related economic and political interests.

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Dr Geoffrey Craig is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Canberra, Australia. He has published several articles on New Zealand environmental communication. He is also the author of The Media, Politics and Public Life (Allen & Unwin 2004), co-author of Slow Living (Berg 2006), and co-editor of Informing Voters? Politics, Media and the New Zealand Election 2008 (Pearson 2009).

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