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Climate calculus:
Does realist theory explain the Howard Government’s decision not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol?

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Social Policy

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Benjamin Paul Dempster

2008
ABSTRACT

Climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions has the potential to cause widespread damage to the environment. As scientific and political consensus converged on the necessity to take action, a large number of countries negotiated the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1997, with the goal of limiting these emissions.

Australia under the Howard Government initially played an important part in these negotiations, but refused to ratify the Protocol. The government cited the lack of binding targets on developing countries and the potential for harm to the Australian economy as the reasons it rejected the agreement.

International relations theory studies large-scale political forces and analyses their interplay in the global political system. Realism is a model of international relations that views countries as self-interested, security-driven bodies that exist in a state of international anarchy.

This study examines whether realist theory offers a satisfactory explanation for the Howard Government’s decision not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The study focuses on six realist ideas and examines the evidence for each. Based on thematic analysis of textual data taken from official political archives and newspapers from 1998–2004, it suggests that realist theory does provide an adequate explanation of the Howard Government’s rejection of the Kyoto Protocol.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Christine Cheyne and Robin Peace for their supervision on this research project. Their intellectual rigour and inspirational guidance have taught me a lot about the research process. Through the engaging supervision sessions we have had over the past year, I have grown intellectually and I am indebted to them for that. They taught me a lot about project management, the ability to take criticism constructively, and to have confidence in myself in the academic world.

I must thank my current employer, the University of Melbourne, for being flexible enough to let me take time off sporadically to complete this thesis, and for giving me access to their abundant information resources. Countless thanks also to Aimée for her support in writing this thesis.
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABARE</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Conference of the Parties (i.e. parties to the UNFCCC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPCC</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFCCC</td>
<td>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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