

Agenda-Building on Global Warming

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INTRODUCTION

ONE of the most intriguing areas of policy analysis is agenda building, how issues are recognized (or reframed) as problems and then placed upon the agenda to be discussed. Problems need to be recognized as such before any sort of policy can (or will) be constructed to address the situation. As with any aspect of policy (or politics more widely), it is important to note that sometimes *nondecisions* can be as pertinent, if not more so, than actual decisions. Whether something is a “problem” that needs to be addressed or is a “natural” or perhaps “unproven” issue that requires “more study”; or whether an issue is discussed at all within the political realm are all potential outcomes in the agenda-building arena.

This paper details the efforts of the South Pacific island nations to place the issue of global climate change onto the international political agenda. An issue of great import for the South Pacific islands for nearly a decade now, the issue of global climate change reached its greatest visibility with the 1992 “Earth Summit” in Rio. Efforts to make the promises of Rio a reality continue today, most recently with the Berlin Summit. This paper reviews the literature on agenda building, and also details the issue of global climate change and the special interest that the small island states have had in that issue. Then, it uses the case of Vanuatu, a leading force among the South Pacific island nations, and focuses upon Vanuatu’s efforts to bring the issue of global warming to the discussion table for not only the small island states, but also the advanced industrialized states as well.

In the following case, the agenda-building framework will be used to explain how the island states were able to put the issue of global warming onto the formal agenda at Rio. Kingdon’s agenda-building model allows us to separate the stages of the process and to examine how the three “streams” intersected to allow the island states to advance their views. Although Kingdon’s model was originally conceived with the United States