



# HISTORY & POLICY

Connecting historians, policymakers and the media

## History & Policy Case Study

### Carbon rationing

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From August 2006 to July 2007 I was involved in various projects considering individual carbon trading as a means to reduce domestic CO2 emissions, using my expertise on the British experience of consumer rationing during the 1940s.

In July 2006, David Miliband gave a [speech to the Audit Commission](#), which suggested that the government was considering individual carbon trading as a way to reduce CO2 emissions, and I realised that this was a live policy issue. My wife had just finished reading *How We Can Save the Planet* by Mayer Hillman and Tina Fawcett (Penguin Books, 2004) in which the authors outlined a similar scheme for individual carbon rations, so I was aware of the historical parallels with the British experience of consumer rationing during the 1940s. In his speech Miliband cited a report assessing the feasibility of a carbon rationing scheme produced by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, '[Investigating Domestic Tradable Quotas](#)'. On reading this report, I realised that I could provide a similar assessment of carbon rationing from a historical perspective. I emailed one of its co-authors, Richard Starkey, to see whether he was interested in my views. He was, so I decided to write a paper for History & Policy; [Rationing returns: a solution to global warming](#) as a way to make my research relevant and accessible to a policy audience. I also gave advice on the implementation of carbon rationing to members of the Green Party, who were debating whether rations should be tradable or non-tradable. I had an email exchange about the issue with their Policy Coordinator Brian Heatley, and sent him a copy of my draft paper as it contained a section about the merits of tradable and non-tradable rations.

When my History & Policy paper was published I wrote an op-ed piece; [Enlist the Blitz spirit; get out the carbon ration book](#) which [Mel Porter](#) placed with the *Financial Times*. The paper received a lot of [media attention](#) as it was timed to coincide with the government publishing the draft Climate Change Bill. David Fleming, the consultant behind the front-running carbon rationing scheme, known as [Tradable Energy Quotas](#) (TEQs), contacted me personally asking me to keep in touch. I also wrote [an article for History Today](#), which was published in July 2007. Tina Fawcett, co-author of the book that got this all started emailed me to congratulate me and to see whether we might collaborate in the future. Finally, Mel contacted me to ask if I would submit [written evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee](#) [pdf 77kb] which I did in August 2007.

Amongst social scientists a policy paper or written evidence to a parliamentary committee are well respected research outputs. This is not the case amongst historians. My work in this area will go unrecognised in the current Research Assessment Exercise. A policy paper does not fit neatly into the usual categories of academic book or scholarly journal article, and there is no pigeonhole in which to place written evidence to a parliamentary committee. As such, I did not feel that my fellow historians considered engagement with the policy process to be a worthwhile activity. On the other hand the University Communications Office was enthusiastic and supportive as they recognised the potential for raising my department's profile and regularly handled research-related stories from York's scientists and social scientists.

I would recommend that historians get involved in debates about policy when their research has direct relevance to a current issue that interests them and they have enough time to respond quickly to requests from policymakers or journalists. A quick and relevant intervention in a live debate makes policymakers sit up and listen, but this might be for the wrong reasons. Your work may be used as a spurious precedent to justify a course of action you disagree with. Personally, I found the experience a rewarding one. Momentarily, my research had direct social relevance. It also prompted me to view my research from a different angle which generated at least one new line of inquiry. Without the help of History & Policy my voice wouldn't have been heard. Putting History & Policy in touch with the University's Communications Office helped to maximise the publicity my paper received and I would recommend other historians to do the same.

History & Policy should target academics working outside of the golden triangle defined by London, Cambridge and Oxford. For reasons of geography and prestige, academics from HEIs in these cities have ready access to policymakers and the media if they want to get involved in policy.

### **Lessons for connecting history and policy:**

- Historians wanting a voice at the policy table need to keep up-to-date with policy issues relevant to their work (historians can do this through the [History & Policy network](#)) and make personal connections with policymakers where possible
- Writing a History & Policy paper enables the historian to make his/her research accessible to a policy and media audience, and can help crystallise their thoughts on current policy
- Timing is crucial; publishing a H&P paper to coincide with policy developments and working with History & Policy and the University communications team to maximise publicity can help attract policymakers' interest
- Follow-up activity is needed to ensure the historian remains plugged into policy development and is consulted again in future.

**See also:**

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research's report into ['Investigating Domestic Tradable Quotas'](#)

Mark Roodhouse's History & Policy paper; [Rationing returns: a solution to global warming](#)

The Rt Hon David Miliband MP's speech to the Environmental Audit Commission, on ['The great stink: towards an environmental contract'](#)