

**ARTICLE**

# **Analysis of the Causes of Australia's Attitude towards Kyoto Protocol—From Howard to Rudd Government**

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ABSTRACT

As the country with the highest per capita carbon emissions in the world, Australia's government, represented by Howard, refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol due to various factors, however, this attitude has undergone a great transformation after the government represented by Kevin Rudd took office, not only to comply with the trend of the times, but also by other factors. This paper will analyze the reasons for the Australian government's attitude toward the Kyoto Protocol during the Howard and Rudd periods, in order to make some contributions to the environmental protection of other countries.

## **1. Introduction**

In response to today's increasingly serious environmental problems, countries around the world signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1998, however, the Australian government, represented by Howard, refused to sign the agreement for various reasons, which had a serious negative impact on Australia's international reputation. As time has entered the new century, the new government has come to power, and the Australian government's attitude toward global climate issues has also changed dramatically. The government represented by Kevin Rudd has adopted various aspects of the Kyoto Protocol. The reason behind this is not only its trend of adapting to the times, but also the influence of other factors.

## **2. Overview of the Kyoto Protocol**

On May 22nd, 1992, the world's countries signed the first

international convention on the control of greenhouse gas emissions in the history of the world - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The fundamental purpose of the signing is to maintain greenhouse gas emissions in the global atmosphere within a stable range to prevent damage to the climate system caused by human activities, thereby protecting the homeland on which people depend for their livelihood. The Kyoto Protocol, which was supplemented by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, was opened for signature in 1998 and became mandatory in 2005. There are clear treaties that require States parties to control their carbon emissions based on their 1990 greenhouse gas emissions, at the same time, it also shows that developing countries including China have not been able to control the carbon emissions of these countries due to economic factors. In addition, developed countries can reduce their carbon emissions by their own countries by

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transferring or purchasing emission permits from developing countries. Although fundamentally speaking, the Kyoto Protocol is not a mature agreement, not only because it does not have a clear punitive measure, so that some countries do not fulfill the agreed content in accordance with the standards of the Kyoto Protocol. It also scorned the fundamental issue of controlling carbon emissions because it stipulated that it could transfer emission permits, and could not make the Kyoto Protocol achieve its due role. It is precisely because this series of problems cannot be effectively resolved, which ultimately leads to the United States refusing to “block” the “Kyoto Protocol”, which will harm the interests of the country, Australia and Canada subsequently withdrew from the agreement for various reasons.

### **3. Reasons Why the Howard Government Has Resisted the Kyoto Protocol**

In the late 1980s, Australia was one of the leaders in international climate change, but in the mid-to-late 1990s it became a laggard. After entering the new century, it became a major burden of climate change. The root cause of this change was caused by the refusal of the Australian government represented by Howard to sign the Kyoto Protocol, which not only seriously damaged Australia’s international reputation, but also caused its international status to decline, which also attracted widespread criticism from its domestic citizens.

Since the introduction of the “Kyoto Protocol”, it has been “under a difficult circumstance”. First, the Bush administration of the United States has ignored the opposition of the whole world and insisted on “blocking” the “Kyoto Protocol” and refused to recognize the main causes of climate change in the United States, and clearly stated that it will not join the Kyoto Protocol within 10 years. The non-participation of the United States also affects the confidence of other countries that are uncertain about the Kyoto Protocol. As one of the former leaders of climate change, Australia has followed the US decision on joining the “Kyoto Protocol” and refused to join the “Kyoto Protocol”, even more clearly stated: “After the United States joins, Australia will ratify the protocol.” Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard has repeatedly stated that the “Kyoto Protocol” is not in Australia’s interests. In fact, the Australian government, represented by Howard, was able to make such a decision, and it was also affected by many factors:

(1) Australia is a net exporter of energy. Its national economy is very dependent on fossil energy, agriculture and energy-intensive industries. Only fossil energy and

agriculture account for more than 30% of Australia’s total export revenue. In addition, Australia is known as “the country sitting on the mine car”, and its various mineral resources are abundant in the country, which makes the fossil energy such as coal in the country extremely low. More than 77% of the country’s electricity and energy comes from fossil energy. The low cost of fossil fuels such as coal also makes Australia’s electricity prices very low. This low price of electricity has also promoted the overall development of Australia’s manufacturing industry to a certain extent. Among them, 14% of the energy-intensive industries in the country’s manufacturing industry rely on Australia’s cheap electricity for rapid development. The over-reliance of fossil fuels such as coal has kept Australia’s per capita carbon emissions staying at a high level, which makes the former Australian government represented by Howard and I believe that after the entry into the “Kyoto Protocol”, controlling the national carbon emissions will inevitably cause a serious blow to the domestic energy-intensive industries, which will lead to huge economic losses and is not conducive to the future development of the country. Furthermore, the Australian government at the time also believed that: Unless all developing countries have clear carbon emissions regulations in the Kyoto Protocol, it will not only be detrimental to the protection of the climate, but also cause Australia to be polluted by carbon emissions from other developing countries, causing damage to Australia’s interests. Coupled with the carbon emissions of Australia at the time, it will be punished by all parties after joining the Kyoto Protocol, therefore, the government represented by Howard at the time even foresees that Australia’s withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol would damage Australia’s international reputation and status, however, for the sake of domestic economic development and avoiding punishment from various quarters, after many weights, they finally chose to follow the footsteps of the United States and refused to join the Kyoto Protocol.

(2) The Australian government, represented by Howard, lacked independence in its bilateral diplomatic relations with the United States during its administration, the government blindly followed all aspects of US leadership and supported various US policies and decisions. Even the then Australian government actively supported the absurd decision of the United States to invade Afghanistan. This shows that Australia’s support for the United States at that time. Coupled with Australia’s withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, it can not only publicly support the decisions and actions of the United States, but also maintain the alliance between the two countries. It is also possible to use the United States to withdraw from the agreement to share

the negative international public opinion and to provide certain protection measures for the international reputation of the country. Therefore, under the influence of many factors, it is not surprising that Australia has withdrawn from the United States after withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol<sup>[1]</sup>.

(3) In addition to the above two reasons, another reason is that the Australian government, represented by Howard, has always been skeptical about whether greenhouse gas emissions can cause national warming. This attitude can be expressed in the following two aspects:

① In the fourth session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1996, The Howard government has summarized various scientific arguments for climate warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions. Finally, it is said that the scientific community has not directly pointed out that greenhouse gas emissions will cause global warming, and even if it has an impact, the greenhouse gas emissions at that time are enough to have a great impact on the global climate.

② After entering the new century, although the IPCC's "Third Assessment Report on Climate Change 2001: Climate Change" has sufficient evidence that Australia has received the impact of global warming, rainfall in most of the regions has shown a declining attitude, which has already had a certain impact on the domestic environment of water supply, agriculture and other species, however, the Howard government is still skeptical about this argument, and is indifferent to the impact of climate change. It has decided to follow the footsteps of the United States and withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol, which also laid the groundwork for the government represented by Howard to lose the people's hearts in the future, and eventually led to its ruling status being replaced by the later Australian Labor Party represented by Kevin Rudd.

#### **4. Reasons for Rudd Government's Change of Attitude towards the Kyoto Protocol**

In 2007, with the official launch of the Australian Labor Party government represented by Kevin Rudd, Australia's attitude towards global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions has undergone a fundamental change. The most intuitive manifestation of his attitude change is that the first official order after Rudd's succession as prime minister was the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and promised that Australia will strictly comply with its emission reduction obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. This approach also shows the difference between the Rudd Government and the Howard Government's attitude towards the Kyoto Protocol, in fact, the change in the at-

titude of the Rudd Government to the "Kyoto Protocol" is not one-step, but also has the following reasons:

(1) The Rudd government and the Howard government have different ideas about global warming, the Rudd government believes that strict implementation of the Kyoto Protocol's emission reduction obligations for Australia will not only affect the actual economic development of the country, but also achieve the transformation and development of the national economy with appropriate policy cooperation. Moreover, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in the Kyoto Protocol can not only enable developed countries to obtain partial greenhouse gas emission standards through carbon emissions trading with developing countries. It also allows developed countries to expand their domestic markets by investing in developing countries. Australia, which is a developed country, can also benefit from it. In addition, as the "Kyoto Protocol" officially began to be enforced, the country's carbon market transaction volume is also rising, and CDM has estimated that the trade volume of the international carbon market in 2007 can reach 23 billion Dollars. After the Rudd Government signed the Kyoto Protocol, Australia can not only participate in the growing international carbon market trade, but also expand the markets of developing countries outside Australia to promote the economic growth of the relevant Australian industries and the overall economic growth of the country. Furthermore, it can effectively compensate for the impact of carbon emission reduction on Australia's domestic energy-intensive industries, and even obtain more benefits. In addition, some countries in Europe that have been affected by global warming have repeatedly prosecuted the World Trade Organization (WTO) for those countries that have not signed the "Kyoto Protocol", hoping to impose trade sanctions on them. For today's global economy, if Australia imposes trade sanctions on Australia because it does not sign the "Kyoto Protocol," then Australia will lose a large number of international markets, which will cause a serious blow to the country's economy.

(2) Because the Howard government has followed the footsteps of the United States and refused to sign the "Kyoto Protocol", Australia's international reputation and status have been seriously affected. A large number of international countries have alienated their diplomatic relations with Australia due to climate issues. And the Howard government stepped down because it refused to sign the "Kyoto Protocol". If the Rudd government still continues the Howard government's refusal to sign the "Kyoto Protocol" and negatively treats global climate change attitudes, then it will lead to dissatisfaction with the international community and the domestic people, which

is more serious than the Howard government. Moreover, when the Rudd government came to power, the fourth IPCC report was released. The release of this report has made the scientific evidence of global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions become unquestionable. If the Rudd Government refuses to sign the “Kyoto Protocol” under the pretext of insufficient scientific evidence, it will make other countries in the world think that it is evading its obligations, which will make the reputation and status of the country, which has already been seriously affected, even worse.

(3) In the final year of the Howard administration, Australia was affected by global climate change, and the worst drought in Australia’s history occurred, causing extremely severe economic losses to the country, which also made Australian nationals aware of the impact of global climate change on their own lives and protested against the Australian government. Due to the pressure of public opinion from the domestic people, the Howard government had to reconsider the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, however, it is too late, and the nationals no longer trust the government represented by Howard and no longer support them. In addition, in the 2007 general election poll, more than two-thirds of Australians believe that Australia should join the Kyoto Protocol because Australian nationals have learned that global warming will have a very serious impact on their lives, therefore, the state should recognize this point and should join the Kyoto Protocol to control

Australia’s carbon emissions and make due contributions to global climate protection, which is also the root cause of the signing of the Kyoto Protocol as soon as the Rudd government took office<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

The issue of global climate change is now a major international issue of general concern to the international community and requires the joint response of all countries in the world, which is not only a trend that conforms to the times, but also a responsibility and obligation for our children and grandchildren to live a better life. Of course, while taking responsibility and obligation, we must also consider the state’s own development level and assume corresponding responsibilities according to the actual situation of the country, so as to avoid the situation of the Australian government represented by Howard.

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