

# **Interest Group Advocacy: An Analysis of Greenpeace Australia Pacific and the Minerals Council of Australia's Advocacy Strategies**

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*ABSTRACT: This article examines the advocacy strategies of two prominent interest groups in the Australian political landscape, one being a highly active environmental group and the other a mining lobby group. Whilst one enjoys a high public profile and is classified by many as an outsider group, the other is considered an insider by virtue of the way in which it strategises influence. It argues that their choice of strategy is what dictates their status as effective insider and outsider groups respectively.*

Greenpeace Australia Pacific (Greenpeace) and the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) are two highly active Australian interest groups. Both groups have been campaigning for some time on the issue of whether coal mining should continue in Australia. These interest groups employ different strategies to influence government decision makers on this issue. This essay will examine their advocacy strategies with respect to social media, activities in parliament and traditional media. Their choice of strategy is what dictates their statuses as effective insider or outsider groups respectively. As an 'outsider' group, Greenpeace's strategy is largely centred on the use of social media to influence decision makers. In contrast, the MCA focuses on using its 'insider' status to lobby politicians directly, as can be seen in parliamentary proceedings. Both groups also employ more traditional forms of media to supplement these main advocacy strategies.

Before engaging in substantive matters, it is important to define the key terms and set out the scope of this essay. An interest group can be defined as a collective, non-partisan, member-based organisation that aims to influence and shape public policy (Smith, et al. 2012). The classification of interest groups as either 'insider' or 'outsider' is widely used in academic literature (Maloney, et al. 1994). This analytic classification is determined by the policy makers that interest groups attempt to influence and reflects their level of legitimacy amongst these decision makers (Maloney, et al. 1994). Interest groups that employ strategies that engage directly with decision makers in the development of public policy are considered 'insider' groups (Halpin & McKinney 2007).

Whilst access to decision makers can sometimes be difficult to obtain, some interest groups employ strategies that necessitate their exclusion from policy engagement (Halpin & McKinney 2007). Groups that are considered excluded, or have excluded themselves, from this engagement are termed 'outsider' groups (Maloney, et al. 1994). Whilst they have a limited ability to directly influence policy because of this, outsider groups can successfully influence decision makers indirectly by running high profile campaigns that build public pressure on policy makers (Maloney, et al. 1994). Baggott (1995) argues that groups can also be categorised as 'thresh-holder groups;' that is, groups that oscillate between insider and outsider status. Whilst interest groups utilise various media as part of their advocacy strategy, the scope of this essay is limited to social media, parliamentary proceedings and traditional forms of media. These are the main media forms utilised by Greenpeace and the MCA.

The MCA and Greenpeace are both interest groups active on the issue of whether coal mining should continue in Australia. The MCA is nationally recognised as the peak interest group of the minerals industry in Australia (Deegan & Blomquist 2006). With a membership comprising large mining companies, it aims to engage with key government decision makers to provide direct input into public policy agendas (Minerals Council of Australia 2015). Greenpeace describes itself as an independent campaigning association that engages in non-violent direct action to expose environmental problems and to 'force solutions which are essential to a green and peaceful future' (Greenpeace Australia Pacific 2012). The remainder of this essay will discuss and evaluate the different advocacy strategies used by these groups. The reason behind choosing these two interest groups with strategies was that they on face value had advocacy strategies that were clear examples of insider and outsider groups. They are useful case studies of insider and outsider groups because they are ideal typical insider and outsider groups. The methodology used in this essay involved analysing the social media profiles of both groups, as well as how often they were mentioned in mainstream Australian news media articles and the Australian Parliament's Hansard in a set period of 8 months. The strength of this approach is that it takes a pure quantitative approach to measuring the output strategies of each group. Additionally, some qualitative research was undertaken as a reference point throughout this process to flesh out and corroborate the quantitative research. The inherent weakness of this approach is that by looking at a particular time

period the trends might not be an accurate representation of other time periods. Nonetheless, it still gives some valuable insights into the strategies of both groups.

### Social Media

Greenpeace's effective strategy of extensively using social media in its campaign against coal mining shapes its status as an outsider group. Maintaining a highly active media profile is a priority for many modern environmental groups; Greenpeace is no exception to this (Maloney, et al. 2004). Its social media strategy can be broken down into two key stages. Initially, it coordinates high profile public campaigns aimed at engaging its members and others to put pressure on decisions makers. It is clear across all three social media platforms that Greenpeace carefully manages its presence to maximise reach and achieve this goal. Once its campaign has sufficient traction, Greenpeace's aim is for government decision makers to be forced to implement anti-coal reform or fear political repercussions for not doing so. As Maloney, Jordan & McLaughlin emphasise (1994), this strategy is in accordance with Greenpeace's historical strategy of not publicly negotiating with business groups or government. Its large supporter base helps it to spread campaign content, and so reaching this base is clearly imperative.<sup>1</sup> Greenpeace has focused on developing this presence from an early stage. Its Facebook presence dates back to 2007, whereas the MCA's Facebook account was only made in 2012. To examine how Greenpeace uses social media to influence public opinion regarding coal mining, an analysis of their Facebook activity over a one-month period was undertaken. A tally was taken of the number of posts made overall, and those specifically related to coal mining. The same was done for the MCA for comparison's sake. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 - Facebook activity of both groups between 12/5/2015 and 12/4/2016

Name of Interest Group	Greenpeace Australia Pacific	Minerals Council of Australia
Total number of Facebook posts	119	16
Number of Facebook posts made in relation to Coal Mining	49	4

<sup>1</sup> For data comparing the followers of Greenpeace and of the MCA, see Table 2.

This data demonstrates how attempting to achieve high penetration campaigns is a fundamental part of Greenpeace's strategy, as compared to insider groups like the MCA. Instead of engaging directly with decision makers, it works to build public pressure to influence government decision makers. This exemplifies how Greenpeace's status as an outsider group requires it to perpetuate its advocacy strategy. Greenpeace claims that, in response to this campaigning, late last year the Queensland government passed legislation that prevents coal companies from dumping dredge spoil on the Great Barrier Reef (Greenpeace Australia Pacific 2015). It is difficult to determine the degree to which the campaign contributed to this outcome. However, given that the start date of the campaign was several months prior to the passage of the legislation, it is likely that it did contribute to the political pressure on the government. It is because of this effective strategy that decision makers consider Greenpeace an outsider group.

The modest presence of the MCA in mainstream social media platforms contrasts significantly to that of Greenpeace, suggesting that maintaining a high profile presence is not a priority for them. As an insider group that prefers to lobby government directly, it is much less important that the broader community is aware of their campaign messages. It is also arguably in their interest to lobby 'behind closed doors' to avoid publicity. One could argue that they are able to leverage decision makers privately and so can afford to place emphasis on their public activities. This comparison inherently displays how the MCA's strategy is a privately based one whereas Greenpeace's strategy is centred on the public dimension. Its Twitter account is fairly active, sharing news articles that discuss the benefits of coal. Interestingly, it also shares statistics that claim that renewable energy sources like solar and wind farms cause environmental damage. Where it does refer to the benefits of coal, a link is provided to a website that is solely focused on the positive aspects of coal, and this has no visible link or branding to the MCA. This is perhaps a strategy by the MCA to put space between its own brand and its coal campaigning. It appears more willing to share stories written by well-known and politically aligned newspapers like *The Australian* that discuss the economic benefits brought about by the coal industry. Instead of using social media, as a successful insider group the MCA's advocacy strategy is largely centred on direct contact with decision makers.

## **Parliament**

The MCA's highly active advocacy presence in Federal parliament is a fundamental part of its powerful lobbying strategy as an effective insider group. Decision makers make numerous positive references to the MCA. Except for occasional accusations of harmful lobbying, these government ministers often portray the MCA in a positive light. For example, during debate of the proposed China Free Trade Agreement, a number of senior government leaders quoted MCA data, statistics and even one executive's opinion. These all occurred during debate in both houses of parliament. This evidence suggests that the MCA enjoys direct and persuasive engagement with government decision makers. And one could assume that the MCA uses its close connections with these decision makers to advocate for coal mining. It also demonstrates that the MCA is regarded as an insider group by policy makers. It is apparent how this close relationship with decision makers might be beneficial for the MCA. It also points to how the MCA is effective in using its insider status to influence decisions. Whilst it is quite difficult to provide examples of where the MCA has successfully lobbied the federal government, evidence of this can be found elsewhere. In one senate debate, a Greens party senator accused a senior government minister of 'buying the spin of the minerals council' in relation to the benefits of coal mining (Commonwealth Senate Hansard 2015). It is significant there are accusations within both newspaper articles and parliamentary proceedings that the MCA holds significant power over key decision makers in government. It seems conclusive that the MCA does lobby key government decision makers effectively. Greenpeace is rarely mentioned in proceedings, as its outsider strategy does not involve this. Both groups make occasional submissions to various parliamentary committees. Over a 9-month period, MCA was mentioned 21 times, usually in a positive capacity, whilst Greenpeace was mentioned on nine occasions. For both these groups, few of these mentions originated from a representative from each organisation. This evidence indirectly supports the contention that the MCA is highly active within parliament and thus is an effective insider group. This is in contrast to the Greenpeace strategy, which seeks to influence decision makers more indirectly. With the exception of its CEO's submissions at a committee hearing, all other references to Greenpeace portrayed it in a negative light during parliamentary proceedings. This ranged from government MPs criticising Greenpeace's anti-coal campaigning during an election to an MCA executive complaining how Greenpeace members enjoy a tax deductible membership fee. Perhaps yet another

explanation of Greenpeace's negative appraisal within parliamentary committees is that it is commonly associated with minor environmental parties like the Greens. In several committee hearings, though, Greenpeace was singled out as an interest group that encourages reckless and illegal activity. One could make the argument that these statements are in retaliation to Greenpeace's high profile criticisms of the government in public forums. This is also presumably fuelled by the fact that Greenpeace does not engage directly with the government on public policy development. Hence, it is perceived by decision makers as an outsider group. The MCA's direct contact with key decision makers earns it the label of an insider group. However, in addition to their main forums of influence, the MCA and Greenpeace both also rely to some extent on traditional media to influence policymakers.

### **Traditional Media**

In advocating for and against coal mining, the campaign strategies of both the MCA and Greenpeace is supplemented by the use of traditional forms of media, namely newspapers and television advertisements. Despite its status, as part of its advocacy strategy the MCA uses traditional forms of media to push back against the public pressure created by groups like Greenpeace. This is reflective of Greenpeace's 'protest' model of advocacy that generates media coverage, as opposed to the MCA which is simply representing an industry's interests. It does this by both questioning the legitimacy of rival groups and disagreeing with their campaign content. The MCA is not mentioned in as many news articles as is Greenpeace. However, where it is mentioned, the MCA is generally the main feature of the article. An example of this is an article written in *The Australian* on June 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, entitled 'Miners give ACF scorecard a zero' (Maher 2016). The article featured numerous quotes from Greg Evans, the MCA's executive director of coal, rebutting a report by an environmental group that detailed the potential negative effects of coal mining in Australia (Maher 2016). Evans referred to the potential loss of jobs and tax revenue as a result of stopping coal mining, as well as the materials required to construct renewable energy infrastructure.

The MCA is also occasionally subject to criticism in newspapers. In a noteworthy example *The Saturday Paper* printed a scathing criticism of the MCA and the influence it wields over the federal government (Secombe 2015). The article included several

quotes from the CEO of Greenpeace, who was critical of the MCA's lobbying in the coal sector. The author of the article also suggested that coal industry interests are over-represented on the MCA's board (Seccombe 2015). As evidenced by this this article, journalistic messages can be difficult to control. As such, newspaper coverage can be harmful towards the MCA and its campaigns. This is likely part of the reason why it is not the centrepiece of their strategy.

To a greater extent than newspapers, television advertisements are a traditional media platform that the MCA employs to exert influence. Whilst it currently only advertises occasionally, it famously spent over 21 million dollars on television ads to lobby against the Resource Super Profits Tax proposed in 2010 by the then-Labor Government (Orr & Gauja 2014). In collaboration with other mining interest groups, the MCA was very successful in this campaign, with the tax all but nullified within a year of the ad blitz (Nicoll 2011). This campaign prevailed over television advertising campaigns run by both the Federal government and by a coalition of environmental interest groups (including Greenpeace) and unions supporting the tax (Vromen & Coleman 2015). This is a notable example where the MCA successfully engaged in large scale, outsider group campaigning. One could infer that the MCA saw the need to do this due to an inability to influence decision makers through its normal 'insider' means. This was arguably because the Federal Government at the time was committed to implementing the tax and so, by denying the MCA insider access, it prompted the group to advocate in the public realm. The success of this campaign points towards how effective the MCA's lobbying can be, and is a rare public example of such.

Whilst Greenpeace rarely engages in television advertisements as part of its outsider campaign strategy, it does utilise traditional news media for advocacy. As noted above, Greenpeace has previously engaged in television advertising campaigns. However, this was in coalition with numerous other environmental groups and unions. Apart from this, Greenpeace is notably present in news articles across various print media. Greenpeace is usually only mentioned once in each article, but is mentioned in more articles than the MCA. In the four-month period chosen, Greenpeace was mentioned in 20 coal-related news stories, compared to the MCA, which was only mentioned in four

articles.<sup>2</sup> In the majority of Greenpeace citations, the publication was a smaller local or specialised publication rather than a major newspaper. The fact that media outlets seek to interview Greenpeace could mean that, despite its status as an outsider group, it is a legitimate stakeholder. This is consistent with Greenpeace's identity as a mass membership, outsider interest group that utilises 'grassroots,' local campaigning. Greenpeace spokeswoman Shani Tager is quoted in many of the articles as arguing that State and Federal governments must do more to stop coal mining developments in Australia. She frequently emphasises the negative environmental impacts that coalmines are having on the Great Barrier Reef, consistent with Greenpeace's social media posts on this. These statements illustrate a widely used Greenpeace strategy to put pressure on decision makers. Occasionally, a major newspaper has quoted Tager, sometimes at great length. An example is *The Sydney Morning Herald* quoting her regarding the purported impact that the Adani Carmichael mine could have on the Great Barrier Reef'. Articles like these could exert pressure on decision makers at both a State and Federal level while reassuring Greenpeace members that the group's leaders are fighting in their interest. Similar to their social media presence, Greenpeace also uses quite adversarial language in many of these statements. It omits to mention any positive steps taken by these companies or indeed the government. Both Greenpeace and the MCA effectively incorporate traditional forms of media into their advocacy strategy for and against coal mining, mainly to supplement their respective major forms of lobbying.

The advocacy strategies of the MCA and Greenpeace are divergent. This is apparent given the status of the MCA as an insider, as opposed to the status of Greenpeace as an outsider. Greenpeace's strategy for its campaign to end to coal mining in Australia centres on an extensive use of social media, supplemented by some coverage in traditional media platforms. Similarly, the MCA also utilises traditional media formats as part of its strategy. Yet instead of social media, as suggested by its status as an insider group, it enjoys direct influence over key government decision makers. Both these groups have the ability to use these strategies effectively to influence public policy. These findings are limited in that they only analyse the strategies of two particular interest groups during a period of a

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that for this analysis, whilst newspapers are referred to as traditional forms of media, research was conducted through the online Factiva search engine, which searches through online news outlets. It is likely though that many of these articles did go to print.



relatively inactive political climate. Obviously if the data was taken over an election year then it is likely that both interest groups would have been significantly more active. This in turn may have seen a change in the strategies of either group. A study that looked at a much larger time period, perhaps even including an election year, would likely expand on the findings in this essay. Other examples of insider and outsider groups would also likely prove useful, namely examining the strategies of many groups. However, the findings are still valid in suggesting that insider and outsider groups are characterised by these strategies in trying to influence public policy.

Table 2 - Social Media 'followers' comparison of Greenpeace and the Minerals Council of Australia

Interest Group	Minerals Council of Australia	Greenpeace Asia Pacific
Number of followers on Twitter	3,500	39,000
Number of 'likes' on Facebook account	13,000	249,500
Number of views on YouTube account	240,000	2,800,000
Number of videos posted on YouTube account	22	249

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