A Comparison of the Media Response to the Rio +20 Summit in Canada and Australia

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Abstract

Relevant articles from The Australian, SBS Australia, Courier Mail, The Globe and Mail, CBC News and The Telegram were analysed with regard to their portrayal of the Rio +20 Summit. Canadian media had more bias, fewer stories, and were more likely to portray the conference as a failure and a waste of time than Australian media. The Canadian media’s portrayal of the conference may have been affected by Canada’s lack of participation due to the Harper Government’s disinterest in the environment. The Australian media’s portrayal of the conference resulted from Australia’s participation in it, due mainly to governmental interest in ocean conservation.

Keywords: Ocean; sustainability; Newfoundland; Great Barrier Reef; climate change; fishing

Natasha Livingstone wrote this report as a 2nd year student in the Bachelor of Science program at the University of Sydney, majoring in Environmental Science and Soil Science. The report was written for a 2nd year course in the School of Geosciences, Environmental and Resource Management (Advanced) (GEOS2921). The aim was to critically engage with media reporting of an environmental issue discussed at the Rio +20 Conference.

Introduction

The oceans are in a dire state due to increasing anthropogenic pressures, such as overfishing and global warming (Watson et al 2012). Over 60 per cent of the ocean is outside exclusive economic zones (EEZ) where there is very little regulation, and so is vulnerable to overfishing (Harris 2007). Approximately 80 per cent of the world’s fish stocks are overexploited or depleted (Kalfagianni and Pattberg, 2013). The relative yield of global fisheries is decreasing, despite increasing fishing capacity with advancing technology (Watson et al 2012). Global warming also threatens fisheries by causing the ocean to become increasingly inhospitable to many species (Brewer and Peltzer, 2009). Over 1.5 billion people rely on fishing for their primary source of protein (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2012). The conservation of the oceans to ensure continuing future productivity is essential to allow for the prosperity of future generations.

Ocean regulation and conservation were a priority at the Rio +20 conference (UNCSD, n.d.). The summit was hosted by the UN from the 20-22 June 2012, and aimed to negotiate a global framework to implement sustainable development (UNCSD, n.d.). Sustainable development was defined by the Brundtland Commission as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, 8). There is a general consensus that sustainable development relies on the health of the environment, economy, and social equity (Drexhage and Murphy, 2010). The protection of the oceans is very closely linked to sustainable development, in that it aims to increase fisheries productivity (providing
more food for the disadvantaged and enhancing the economy) whilst reducing stress on the ocean environment.

This paper investigates the media response to the Earth Summit within Canada, compared to Australia. Both countries have large coastlines; Australia’s coastline (including islands) spans 59,736km (Geoscience Australia 2010), whilst Canada’s coastline (including islands) spans 243,792km (Natural Resources Canada, n.d.). As a result of this, both countries have large investment in marine-based industries such as fishing and therefore have much to lose through ocean degradation.

Historically, Canada has witnessed the negative effects of ocean degradation. The Newfoundland cod fishery collapsed in 1992 (MacDonald et al 2009). Australia has not experienced a similar major collapse, yet is faced with the potential collapse of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), an incredibly diverse and ecologically significant reef spanning most of Queensland’s coastline, which is currently under considerable environmental strain (AIMs 2012). The Newfoundland collapse had significant economic and social impacts in Canada (MacDonald et al 2009); a collapse of the GBR is likely to have similarly devastating effects.

This study seeks to investigate whether the media representation of the Rio +20 conference’s outcomes varies between the context of a society that has already experienced a major collapse of a marine-based industry and a society that has not.

It is important to note that the Newfoundland coast (including islands) forms only 11 per cent of Canada’s coastline (Natural Resources Canada, n.d.), and that Queensland’s coast (including islands) accounts for 22 per cent of Australia’s coastline (Geoscience Australia 2010). This study does not examine the full diversity of each country’s coastline or the influence of other areas on policy, both of which are beyond the scope of this research.

The Newfoundland Collapse

Newfoundland was originally settled for its fishing grounds. Subsequently, the fishing industry was the only industry in Newfoundland until the 1890s, after which the building of a trans-island railroad allowed for some diversification (Schrank 2005). By the mid-1900s, fishing only accounted for just over 10 per cent of Newfoundland's labour force, yet it remained the dominant rural activity (Schrank 2005).

Intensive international and domestic overfishing in the mid-late 20th century led to cod stocks declining (MacDonald et al 2009). In 1992, the spawning potential of cod was found to be 2 per cent of historic levels, and a moratorium on fishing in the area was established (MacDonald et al 2009). An estimated 39,000 jobs were lost or damaged (MacDonald et al 2009), costing the government approximately $3 billion (Schrank 2005). The moratorium remains in place today.

The collapse had significant effects upon the Newfoundland economy. Fishing is no longer the dominant industry in the area; oil production began in 1997 and by 2002 contributed 16 per cent of Newfoundland’s GDP (Schrank 2005). The fishing industry has continued, with 2002 having half of the number of fish plants as 1992, yet with the same number of full-time fishermen registered (Schrank 2005). Shellfish, shrimp and snow crab have replaced cod as the dominant products (in terms of tonnes caught) (Schrank 2005). However, fundamental problems remain. Overcapacity in the industry is a major issue, with too many fishermen and processing plants existing for the number of fish being caught (Schrank 2005).
The demographics of Newfoundland also changed after the collapse. Following 1992, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) experienced low birth rates, high death rates and high rates of out-migration (Fig. One; Fig. Two). These factors combined resulted in the population of NL dropping by 12 per cent between 1992 and 2009 (Storey n.d.).

**Figure 1:** The natural population change, birth rates and death rates per annum in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1951 to 2006 (Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance, 2007)

**Figure 2:** Total net migration per annum of Newfoundland and Labrador between 1972 and 2007 (Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance, 2007)
As will be discussed, this report does not examine local media sources, but analyses regional and national media instead. Given the broad nature of the intended audience in both instances, it should be noted that it would be dangerous to assume that the Canadian media is writing with the ‘Newfoundland fisheries’ as specific target audience. The demographics of Newfoundland are presented in this paper to provide historical context, and to compare and contrast the significant features of the region with the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). It is recommended that further research is conducted to analyse the extent to which the media coverage is affected by the differing demographics of Newfoundland and the GBR.

The Great Barrier Reef
The GBR is the largest collection of reefs in the world, and consists of over 2500 individual yet interlinked reef systems (UNESCO n.d.). The system spans northern NSW to northern Queensland and covers 348000km² (UNESCO n.d.). It is listed as a world heritage site for its size, biodiversity, natural beauty, ecological importance, variety and its lack of human interference (UNESCO n.d.). It is widely considered a globally significant ecosystem, and is often viewed as a wonder of the world (UNESCO n.d.).

It is difficult to discuss the demographics of the region near the GBR. The sheer size of the reef and the diversity of industries the reef supports mean that the ecosystem ultimately affects multiple groups of people in largely unrelated trades throughout Queensland, Australia’s second-largest State by area. It would be an oversimplification to refer to a ‘demographic’ of the GBR area; rather, the Queensland coast supports multiple populations with very distinct demographics. Given the diversity of the GBR area, it is assumed that the Australian media outlets did not specifically tailor their stories to appeal to people in the ‘GBR region’, as such a ‘unified’ group does not exist. However, further research is recommended to validate this assumption.

The GBR contributes significantly to Australia's economy. Queensland generated over $4.5 billion in tourism revenue in 2005-06 (Access Economics, cited in Stoeckl 2010). Commercial fishing in the reef contributed $139 million to the economy in 2006-07, whilst recreational reef activities (including recreational fishing) generated $153 million (GBRMPA 2010). Maintaining the health of the reef is incredibly important in allowing for the continuation of these industries; if the reef were to collapse, thousands of Australians would lose their jobs and Queensland would risk losing billions of dollars in economic restructuring and support services.

The health of the ecosystem is currently being degraded (GBRMPA n.d. a). A study found that between 1985 and 2012 the GBR lost approximately half of its coral (AIMs 2012). It was estimated that 48 per cent of the loss was caused by storm damage, 42 per cent by the crown of thorns starfish, and 10 per cent by bleaching (AIMs 2012). Ocean warming was the primary cause of bleaching events (AIMs 2012). Whilst the reef may rebound from these losses over time, the recovery is slow. Increases in storm intensity and frequency, coupled with increasing temperatures due to global warming, means these disturbances are damaging the reef faster than the reef can repair itself (AIMs 2012). It is not possible to control the effects of storms and ocean temperatures on the reef, and it is very difficult to manage the crown of thorns starfish. It is therefore a priority to reduce the impacts of other stressors on the reef, to improve the overall health of the ecosystem and therefore improve its ability to withstand disturbance and its recovery times following perturbation.
The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) identified declining water quality from catchment runoff, loss of coastal habitats due to coastal development, and some ecological impacts from fishing as priority issues in reef management (GBRMPA 2010). Declining water quality due to contaminations in catchment runoff negatively affects coral development and other ecological processes (GBRMPA n.d. b). The loss of coastal habitats as a result of coastal development is problematic since such habitats can function as significant breeding grounds, feeding grounds or nutrient filtering systems (GBRMPA n.d. b). Finally, fishing activities disrupt the ecological balance within reef ecosystems (GBRMPA n.d. a). It appears to be likely that these ecosystem imbalances can make an area more vulnerable to invasion by the crown of thorns starfish (GBRMPA n.d. a).

Many programs exist to try and minimise these threats. For instance, declining water quality is managed through programs such as the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan and the Reef Guardians, both of which were established in 2003, which facilitates conservation efforts from local communities through to the federal government (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2009; GBRMPA n.d. c; GBRMPA n.d. b). Fishing is managed through a system of zones established by the GBRMPA, established 1975, which limit fishing and other activities in select areas of environmental importance (GBRMPA n.d. a; Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Cth)). Australia clearly has a long history of ocean conservation independent of the Rio conferences; the GBRMPA was established over a decade before the very first Rio summit in 1992. Despite ongoing degradation, protection of the GBR has been an interest of the Australian government for many years.

**Methods**

The methodology of this study relies upon content analysis, in which the media’s portrayal of the Rio Summit is quantified through analysing the articles selected with regard to specific categories (defined below). The aim of using content analysis in this paper is to provide some sort of quantitative system to compare media outlets, in order to allow for clearer identification of trends in the data. Content analysis has long been recognised as a useful tool in interpreting data in the social sciences (Riffe et al. 2008), although it has been critiqued for examining data in isolation of the context in which the data is found (Klocker and Dunn, 2003). In an attempt to avoid this problem, results were discussed specifically with regard to the regional and national political context in which they were written.

From each country, the media releases of two national news outlets and one regional news outlet were examined. Local newspapers were scoped, but preliminary findings were that there were very few articles covering the Rio conference, and so the researcher did not proceed to an advanced study of local news outlets. From Australia, national news outlets included *The Australian* (conservative), and *SBS Australia* (liberal); from Canada, these included *CBC News* (liberal) and *The Globe and Mail (TGM)* (conservative). The similarities in political persuasions between *The Australian* and *TGM*, and between *SBS* and *CBC*, means that they can be considered as equivalent outlets. The regional papers were the *Courier Mail* (distributed widely in Queensland) and *The Telegram* (distributed in Newfoundland). These publications were selected based upon their coverage and equivalent reputation in each study area.

Online media is becoming an increasingly important media outlet, often being chosen preferentially over conventional print media in areas with access to broadband (Liang and Nordin, 2012). Given the importance of internet media, this study examines text articles
available publicly on the internet (i.e. without subscription) from the aforementioned news outlets.

The time frame for this study ranges from 6 June 2012 to 6 July 2012, that is, two weeks before, including, and two weeks after the three day Rio +20 Summit. This time frame was chosen to incorporate the conference itself and related announcements immediately surrounding it.

The articles that were selected were required to engage directly with the proceedings, the setting or the content of the Rio +20 summit. There were many articles which would briefly mention the summit whilst examining issues of biodiversity or politics (for example); these were not included in this study.

Each article was individually examined and ‘categorised’ within five criteria:

1. **Main focus of the article:**
The main focus was defined as the topic covered by more than 50 per cent of the article. Topics were separated as being 'outcomes of conference' or 'other'. Examples of 'other' categories include national politics and descriptions of conferences proceedings.

2. **The percentage of the article stating facts and/or quotes:**
A ‘fact’ was defined as any fact provided, regardless of topic. Quotes were defined as being a quotation (either direct or paraphrased) from a named source. Quotes from unnamed collective groups (e.g. “Critics say…””) were not included. In each article, all facts/quotes were highlighted. The percentage of facts/quotes in the article was determined by ‘eyeballing’ the relative size of highlighted section to the size of the article.

3. **Percentage of article with obvious bias:**
Obvious bias was defined as any point where the article was portraying any ‘side’ (regardless of topic or stance) through the use of techniques such as emotive language and hyperbole. Bias within facts/quotes presented was included. The amount of bias was determined by highlighting the sentences containing bias, and determining their relative proportion within the article.

4. **Percentage of biased portion of article portraying the conference as a failure:**
The conference was a ‘failure’ if it was portrayed as not achieving what it had set out to achieve (a set of international goal and frameworks for sustainability). This, again, was determined by highlighting the sections portraying the conference as a failure, and comparing the length of these sections to the total length of the biased portion.

5. **Portrayal of the conference as either a worthy cause or a waste of time:**
This refers to whether each article implied that the conference’s goals were a good idea and their success would benefit humanity, or whether its goals were considered potentially detrimental and their success should not be sought after.

It is possible for the conference to be portrayed both as a success and a waste of time, a failure and a worthy cause, or any combination of these. For example, it could be implied that the conference had achieved its goals by setting up global standards. Yet it could also be implied that this is worrying, and it would argue that these global standards would not benefit
humanity and are not the 'right way to go'. In this example, the conference is a ‘success’ and a ‘waste of time’.

**Results**

**Table 1:** Summary of the categorisation of articles from each news source within the following groups: the focus of the article, the percentage of the articles stating facts/quotes and percentage of the article with obvious bias. Refer to methods for a detailed description of categories. Each asterisk represents one article. Asterisks in red symbolise ‘other’ articles, whereas asterisks in black symbolise ‘outcomes’ articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Outlet</th>
<th>Focus of Article</th>
<th>Percentage of the article stating facts/quotes</th>
<th>Percentage of Article with Obvious Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes of Conference</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>&lt;40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Globe and Mail (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Telegram (regional)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS News Australia (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Courier Mail (regional)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>****</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Summary of the categorisation of articles from each news source within the following groups: percentage of the biased portion of the article portraying the conference as a failure, and portrayal of the conference. Refer to methods for a detailed description of categories. Each asterisk represents one article. Asterisks in red symbolise ‘other’ articles, whereas asterisks in black symbolise ‘outcomes’ articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Outlet</th>
<th>Percentage of biased portion of article portraying conference as a failure</th>
<th>Portrayal of Rio +20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>&lt;40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Globe and Mail (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Telegram (regional)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Australian (national)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS News Australia (national)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Courier Mail (regional)</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of the study are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2 (refer to Appendix 1 for detailed categorisation of the articles studied). As an overall comparison of Australia and Canada, Australian news had more stories on the Rio Summit.

Australia had a greater proportion of ‘other’ articles. In both countries, ‘outcomes’ articles all dealt with the conference in a general sense; none of them referred specifically to ocean conservation. The majority of the ‘other’ stories were either non-biased fact-based explanations, giving information on what the Rio Summit is, or they were political stories more specifically related to their nation’s role in the summit as opposed to the summit as a whole.

Canadian articles, on average, had fewer numbers of direct facts/quotes, more bias, and were more likely for that bias to focus on displaying the conference as a failure. All Australian news outlets studied portrayed the Rio summit as a worthy cause, whereas not all Canadian news outlets did so.

**Discussion**

Canada had comparatively far fewer articles on the Rio +20 Summit than did Australia. In determining why Canada had so few articles, it could be possible that the researcher simply did not find all articles available to the public (which is unlikely, given rigorous searching). Otherwise, it could be that few articles were published and released into the public sphere in the first place. This could imply a lack of media interest.

The lack of Canadian media interest may have occurred because the Canadian Government did not engage to a great extent with the conference. The Prime Minister Stephen Harper remained in Canada, sending the Environment Minister Peter Kent as a representative (Waldie 2012). The Canadian Government was also given the ‘Fossil of the Day’ award during the conference, for playing an obstructionist role in decision-making and discussions (The Canadian Press, 2012). The lack of activity from the Canadian government during the conference could be reflected in the lack of stories released by the Canadian media. It could be that, in terms of conference news directly relating to Canada, there wasn’t much for the media to comment on, and consequently few stories were released.

Given the history of the Newfoundland fisheries collapse, it is very surprising that Canada would not learn from past mistakes and participate more fully in the summit to ensure greater marine protection and regulation. It is important to note that Newfoundland is a relatively small area in Canada, with a small population and minor productivity; it could be that these factors have led to Newfoundland having negligible political sway and hence its history and issues are being somewhat overlooked by Canada’s federal government. However, Canada is still strongly invested in its fishing industry in regions other than Newfoundland. As of 2011, 75 per cent of Canada’s fishing industry relied on capture fishing, with the total fishing industry worth over CDN $5 billion per annum, providing over 130,000 jobs (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2011). The fishing industry as a whole in Canada is large enough to be politically significant, and it is therefore curious to see the Canadian government refuse to commit to ocean conservation to any significant extent.

Since gaining office in 2006 (Heard n.d.), the Harper Government has been characterised by a disregard for the environment. For example, the Harper administration has pushed through law reforms that led to the *Canadian Fisheries Act* (one of Canada's strongest environmental...
laws) being significantly weakened (Goldenberg, 2012); it cut funding for significant research stations such as P.E.A.R.L., the closest climate research station to the Arctic (Bagley 2012), and formally withdrew Canada from the Kyoto protocol in 2011 (Global Times, 2011). As a result of these changes, former UN advisor on water and chair of the Council of Canadians, Maude Barlow, said “The Harper Government is the most environmentally hostile one we have ever had in Canada” (Goldenberg, 2012). Furthermore, the 2013 Climate Change Performance Index listed Canada as the worst climate performer in the western world (Climate Action Network and Germanwatch, 2012). Harper has been accused of aiming to undermining environmental scientists in Canada in order to undermine opposition to Canada’s oil sands industry and oil exploration in the Arctic (Bagley 2012). This attitude goes a long way in explaining Canada’s disinterest in the Rio Summit. As this negligence appears to be characteristic of the Harper government specifically, it could be that Canada’s lack of interest in the environment is a time-dependent issue, which may be resolved when another party comes into power.

Australia’s comparatively abundant media coverage of the conference could be due to greater media interest in the area. This may be because the Australian Government was more involved in the Rio Summit than the Canadian Government. Australia’s Prime Minister at the time, Julia Gillard, attended the summit (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2012). In addition to signing ‘The Future We Want’, Gillard announced the establishment of the world’s largest marine protected area in the GBR and other areas (WWF Australia 2012a), $8 million to the Coral Triangle Initiative and up to $25 million to the Pacific Oceanscape Framework (WWF Australia 2012b). In short, Australia had more announcements to make related to the conference; therefore more stories relating to Australia were available for the Australian media to comment on.

Australia cannot be accused of only creating the marine park to look good for the conference. Whilst the timing of the announcement may have been deliberately set up to align with the summit, Australia has a history of fairly comprehensive marine protection by the Federal Government (under both the Liberal-National and the Labor Parties). As has already been discussed, significant protection of the GBR has occurred since the establishment of the GBRMPA in 1975. Other instances of marine protection include the establishment of Australia’s Ocean Policy in 1998 and the South East Regional Marine Plan in 2004 under the Howard Government (Vince 2006). Marine conservation appears to be seen as an important issue by all significant federal parties in Australia; therefore, Gillard may have created the marine park regardless of the conference.

Indeed, it would appear that the ocean environment is valued throughout Australia. Management of the marine environment is divided between the State and Commonwealth governments; the States control coastal waters from the mean low water mark to 3 nautical miles offshore, whilst the Commonwealth legislates from 3 nautical miles offshore to the edge of Australia’s EEZ (McNeill 1994). Examples of Federal management of the marine environment have already been discussed. However, there are also many instances of State legislation for marine protection, such as the Queensland Fisheries Act 1976-82, South Australian Fisheries Act 1971-82, and the Fisheries and Oyster Farms (Amendments) Act 1979 in NSW (McNeill 1994). Legislation for marine conservation exists in all States and Territories in Australia (McNeill 1994). Australia’s good history of oceanic protection across multiple scales of government and society implies that marine conservation is valued by the Australian population. Australia’s establishment of extensive ocean protection initiatives at the Rio +20 Summit are therefore not necessarily indicators of a political ploy.
So why is Australia so interested in marine conservation, especially with regard to the GBR? It is possible that Australians are simply more aware of issues of oceanic degradation. One of the primary industries supported by the GBR is tourism. Consequently, the GBR is well-known throughout Australia, and as a result, the threats facing the reef are also well-known. The inclusion of the GBR as a world heritage site would also have contributed to raising the reef’s profile, both nationally and internationally (UNESCO n.d.). Finally, the industries the GBR supports are vast and lucrative. A demise of the reef would ultimately mean the demise of industries which rely upon the reef. Therefore, there is also a strong economic incentive amongst Australians in the region to minimise damage to the ecosystem. It is clear that there are many reasons as to why protection of the GBR is a priority for the Australian people, and therefore the Commonwealth. Perhaps if Newfoundland had been equally well-known, vast and lucrative, the fisheries there would have been more effectively managed prior to the collapse in 1992.

Australian media had less bias than Canadian media. It could be that Canada’s lack of involvement in the summit meant that there was a limited amount of information regarding Canada that the media could include in each story, so that each article had to be ‘filled out’ with non-fact-based opinions on the conference. It is also possible that, as a result of the Canadian government not participating in (and even obstructing) the conference proceedings, the media responded with more opinionated articles in attempts to either justify or decry this disinterest. Conversely, the Australian government’s extensive activity at the conference gave the media many facts to comment on; as a result, the articles did not have to be ‘filled out’ with opinions.

All Australian media outlets portrayed the summit as a worthy cause. The government was seen as actively engaging with this cause; it therefore made sense that the goals of the summit were worthy of attention and effort. On the other hand, only two of the Canadian media outlets portrayed the conference as a worthy cause; TGM portrayed the conference as a waste of time. This could be an attempt by the news outlet to justify why the Canadian government hadn’t made attempts to commit more fully to its proceedings. The stance of a media outlet on the conference could therefore have been driven by their government’s degree of participation in it.

Canadian media was also more likely to portray the conference as a failure than Australian media. This could simply be a direct result of Canada’s lack of participation (and even obstructionism) in the conference; as Canada achieved less, it was more of a ‘failure’. The Australian government, on the other hand, not only participated fully in the conference but also made further announcements towards marine conservation; more was achieved, and so the conference could be seen as less of a ‘failure’.

The interpretation of the results in this study is limited by inadequate category design in Table 1. It was expected, before beginning research, that a much higher percentage of the articles would be focused on the conference outcomes, and that the ‘other’ articles would be in such a minority as to not interfere with data interpretation. This led to the development of what (in retrospect) could justifiably be considered overly simplified categories. The result of such simplification is that very little information can be retrieved from Table 1 about the contents of the ‘other’ articles, limiting the potential for data interpretation.
In addition, it was expected the conference was either going to be portrayed as a ‘failure’ or ‘success’. Hence, it was predicted that the articles whose bias did not display the conference as a failure must by default display it as a success, and that subsequently only one category related to bias was required. However, this was not the case. There were instances in which articles contained bias that was not related to the perceived success of the conference (for example, The Telegram’s article ‘Canada awarded dubious distinction at Rio talks for sustainable development’ had bias exclusively relating to Canada’s participation in the conference). Hence, the information from Table 1 cannot be a reasonable measure of forms of bias other than displaying the conference as a failure. Overall, the design of Table 1 is limited in that it does not display adequate information on types of bias or ‘other’ focuses in the articles to allow for fully comprehensive data interpretation.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the degree of participation of a government in the Rio +20 summit may have a direct influence upon the number of stories reporting the summit in that nation. Increased government participation may also lead to less bias and more diverse reporting of the conference in the media. The Newfoundland fisheries collapse does not appear to have enhanced Canada’s environmental awareness or encouraged Canada to participate more fully in the Rio +20 Summit. Australia’s high degree of involvement in the summit may be driven by concern for maintaining the GBR system, to protect environmental and economic benefits and international reputation.

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References


Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Commonwealth)


Appendix 1
The following shows in detail how each article was sorted into relevant criteria.

CBC News:
Canada criticised for weak draft at Rio summit
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Rio +20 summit concludes with few commitments
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause

The Globe and Mail:
A mighty wind blows in Rio
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, waste of time
Environmental summits lose value as past pledges go unmet
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, waste of time

The Telegram:
Canada awarded dubious distinction at Rio talks for sustainable development
‘other’, >95% facts/quotes, >60% bias, 0% conference a failure, worthy cause
Massive 20th anniversary earth summit struggles to find its meaning
‘outcomes’, 60%-95% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause

The Australian:
Julia tells Rio it’s easy to be green
‘other’, 40%-60% fact/opinion, >60% bias, 40%-60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Sustainable dreams fade as demands become vague goals
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% fact/opinion, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Follow our lead to fight poverty: PM to world
‘other’, 60%-95% fact/opinion, 40%-60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Gillard praised, talks down Rio outcome
‘outcomes’, >95% fact/opinion, 40%-60% bias, 40%-60% conference a failure, worthy cause
SBS News Australia:
Rio ends with weak text: critics
‘outcomes’, 60-95% pact/opinion, 40-60% bias, 40-60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Rio +20: Don’t forget the environment
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Factbox: Rio +20 conference
‘other’, >95% facts/quotes, <40% bias, 0% conference a failure, worthy cause
Comment Rio +20: ‘take science seriously’
‘other’, 60%-95% fact/opinion, 40%-60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause

The Courier Mail:
Spotlight on Rio
‘other’, >95% facts/quotes, <40% bias, 0% conference a failure, worthy cause
Gillard jets in for Rio +20 summit
‘other’, >95% facts/quotes, <40% bias, 0% conference a failure, worthy cause
Rio leaders walk the sustainability talk
‘other’, >95% facts/quotes, <40% bias, 0% conference a failure, worthy cause
Gillard in Rio for environmental summit
‘outcomes’, >95% facts/quotes, 40%-60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause
Green groups dismayed at Rio summit
‘outcomes’, 40%-60% facts/quotes, >60% bias, >60% conference a failure, worthy cause
PM commits Australia to green jobs
‘other’, 60%-95% facts/quotes, <40% bias, 40-60% conference a failure, worthy cause