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## WHAT MAKES THE TIME 'RIGHT' FOR A POLICY?

# The policy window

### What is a 'policy window'?

John Kingdon argues in the *Multiple Streams Approach* that a policy window for significant policy change can open only – and then briefly - when 3 separate streams come together.

1. The **problem** must be well understood by government and experts, and the broader community
2. The **solution** needs to be available and feasible
3. Above all, the **political will** has to be forthcoming at the right time.

### How 'policy entrepreneurs' can help to open the policy window

- Public servants in concert with politicians and others (such as academics and interest groups) can act as **policy entrepreneurs** by having policy solutions ready before problems hit the headlines
- Elections, crises (such as natural disasters and pandemics) and institutional events (such as the annual budget cycle) can serve to open a policy window
  - but sometimes it opens unpredictably!

*[Policy entrepreneurs] lie in wait within and around government with their solutions at hand, waiting for problems to float by to which they can attach their solutions, waiting for a development in the political stream... (Kingdon 2011:165)*

### What's a practical example of a window being successfully opened?

In 2021, a policy window opened up that led to a new government initiative to manufacture messenger RNA vaccines for Covid-19 in Australia:

- **Problem** – Australia's vulnerability in not having certain manufacturing capabilities for vaccines

- **Solution** – Commonwealth Government could intervene in the market to ensure future vaccine supplies, through co-investment under its Modern Manufacturing Strategy
- **Political will** – Prime Minister Morrison announced on 14 December an agreement between Moderna, the Commonwealth and the Victorian Government to build an mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility in Victoria, to eventually provide up to 100m doses a year.

### How can the policy window concept be employed by public servants?

The policy window does not offer an end to end process, but it can test if the time is 'right':

- In drafting a new policy proposal for your Minister, you can test whether the proposal fits the policy window criteria (clear problem; solution to hand; political support)
- The policy window concept can help you to understand whether a program that is up for review is likely to continue (or has a sunset clause)
- Look out for emerging issues to investigate – those clouds on the horizon – both to understand them and to scope any possible solutions
- These opportunities may come and go over extended periods, so keep your work in your virtual filing cabinet till the time is 'right'!

## References

J. W. Kingdon, *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (Longman, 2011)

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