

How to influence policy formulation

The following is based on a posting by Peter Shmigel, Director Sustainability, Parker & Partners Public Affairs, to [Greenleap](#) on 26 November 2007.

Engagement with mainstream political parties is absolutely critical to sustainability progress and there are currently great opportunities across the spectrum. Having been “on the dark side” at various points (as a ministerial adviser, campaign manager, and candidate), I can assure you that policy doesn’t magically happen. In my experience and that of other colleagues who’ve been in the game, there are some key ingredients to policy influence (and, no, they’re not about the size of your cheque book).

In the first respect, it’s about having relationships of credibility and trust with decision-makers.

This comes from providing good and understandable data, putting forward concrete suggestions and not just whinges about what’s wrong, showing you work with other stakeholders, and delivering on what you promise. Access is relatively easy – it’s what you do with it that will or won’t produce results.

Once you’ve cleared some of the above thresholds, your odds go further up if you develop policy actions / ideas that – whether we like it or not – are politically realistic. Here’s a check list – or think of it as the kind of risk management exercise some minder might apply to your idea – and they do.

- Will policy action deliver a political benefit to the government, eg, be popularly supported?
- Will policy action enhance the position of the politician(s) directly associated with it?
- Is there a “burning platform” or strong genuine need for policy action?
- Is there likely to be general acceptance by environmental stakeholders of policy action?
- Would policy action produce broader benefits and does it have a larger societal justification?
- Will policy action have an insignificant impact on the government’s budget?
- Can policy action’s budgetary impact be configured in a non-recurrent or one-off fashion that still achieves a significant outcome?

Some of you may not like what you see above, but it’s honest.