



# Danish appropriations of the Precautionary Principle

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Examples from chemicals  
regulation  
(work in progress)

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# Received comments



- Why discourse coalitions and not other types of more robust types of alliances?
- The newspaper analysis hits the many and various cases at very different moments in their development. This may may confuse the discourse analysis
- My own comments:
  - Precaution may be conceived as probably the first concept used by authorities that incorporate a (social) constructivist perspective on regulation, i.e. that nature and society (science and the social) cannot be taken apart.

# Danish appropriations of the Precautionary Principle



⌘ My approach to the PP and theoretical considerations

⌘ Outlining the Danish appropriations of the precautionary principle

⌘ One example: What happens when the PP 'returns' to Denmark?

# Basic approach

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- ⌘ I conceive of the precautionary principle as an boundary concept that potentially:
  - ☑ Enables a critical rather than a positivist approach to technology
  - ☑ Enhance the legitimacy of a wider range of knowledge as relevant
  - ☑ A Trojan Horse; that possible may help change the system from within

# Analytical approach I

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- ⌘ Discourse analysis inspired by Hajer's "The politics of environmental discourse"
  - ⊞ Discourse co-determinating for how social reality takes form;
  - ⊞ Social stability and change thus has an linguistic 'condition d'être'
- ⌘ Discourse as a condition
- ⌘ Discourse as a strategic possibility

# Analytical approach II

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⌘ Discourse especially important with complex and ambiguous problems...

⌘ Two central concepts from Hajer:

- ☒ Story lines

- ☒ Discourse coalitions

# Analytical approach III

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## ⌘ Story lines

- ☒ facilitate the reduction of the discursive complexity of a problem
- ☒ rationalises or constructs the problem as *coherent*
- ☒ allows actors to expand their own understanding and discursive competence of the phenomenon

# Analytical approach IV

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## ⌘ Discourse coalitions:

- ☒ A set of story lines, which is the 'cement' of the coalition
- ☒ The actors who utter these storylines through discursive activities,
- ☒ Finally, the practices in which these discursive activities are based



# Analytical approach...

## ... applied

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- ⌘ Mapping story lines in newspapers
- ⌘ Concentration on specific cases

# Precaution in Denmark

## Content and/or label

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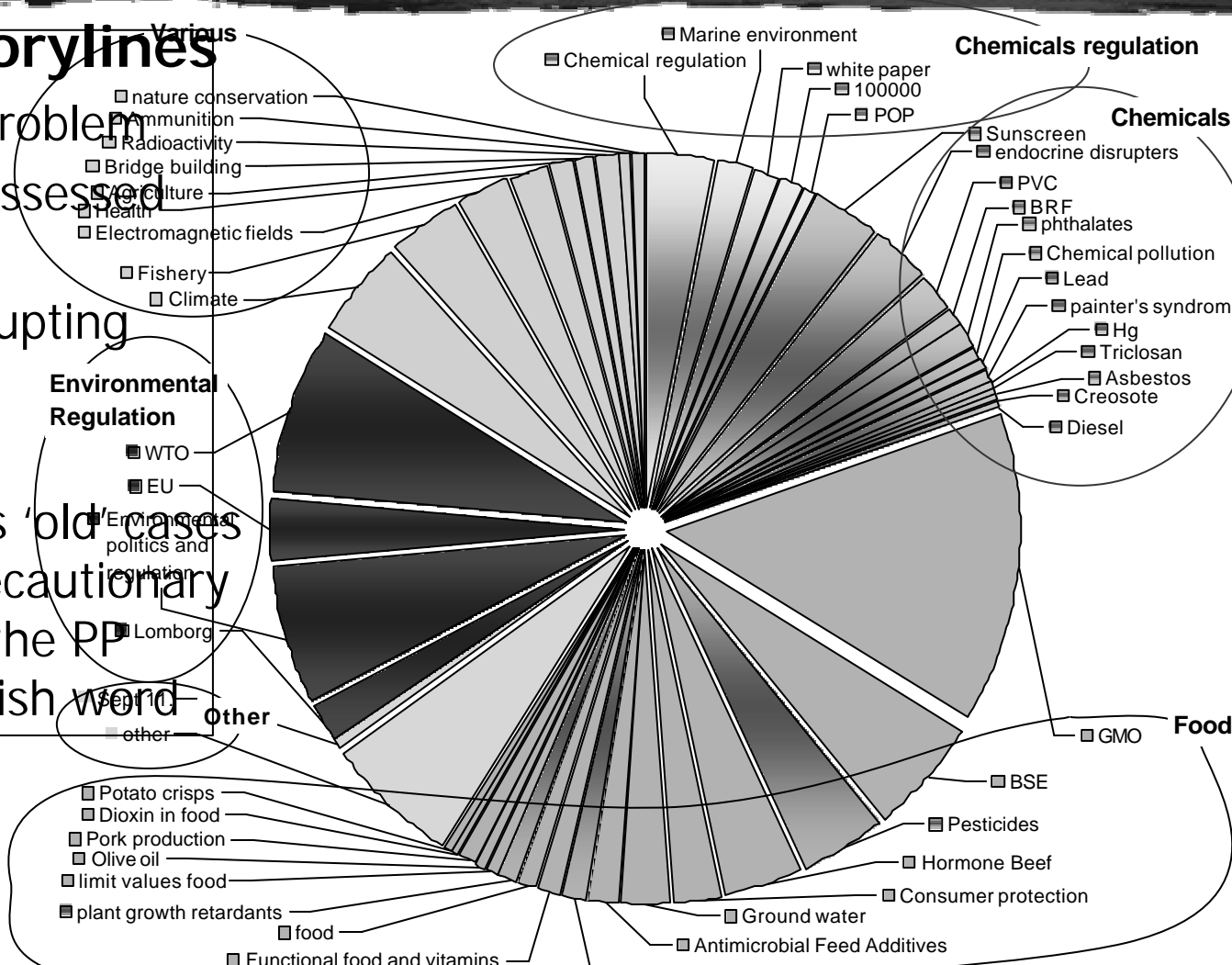
- ⌘ 1970's: precaution-like practise in specific areas  
(No specific concept relates precaution to environment in Denmark)
- ⌘ 1980's: Denmark pushes for precaution and precaution-like measures internationally
- ⌘ 1990's: The precautionary principle returns to Denmark primarily via the Rio Declaration; precaution is perceived as a 'new' concept



# The variety of issues relating to the explicit PP

## 8 Important storylines

- ☒ Pesticides as problem
- ☒ 100,000 non-assessed chemicals
- ☒ Endocrine disrupting chemicals
- ☒ The two first is 'old' cases that had a 'precautionary touch' before the PP became a Danish word



# First Domestic use of the explicit principle - 1990

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⌘ A Friday in July 1990...

... The Environmental Minister banned Plant Growth Retardants! (straw shortening chemicals)

☒ Two discourses are distinct (and straightforward):

☒ A 'traditionalist' around **'sound science' and protection of economic interests**

☒ A 'reformist' around **precaution, wide appliance of science, and consumer-protection**

# First Domestic use of the explicit principle - 1990 II

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⌘ But the discourse coalitions around them are new...

⌘ Ministry for Health

⌘ Established testing regime

⌘ Agrochemical Industry

⌘ Major bread industry  
Kohberg

⌘ Ministry for Environm.

⌘ Agricultural feeding experiments

⌘ Pig-breeders

⌘ Major bread industry  
Schülstad

# First Domestic use of the explicit principle - 1990 III

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⌘ The prohibition was forced to be withdrawn.

⌘ Environmental Minister Lone Dybkjær concluded:

☒ "This is a bad decision seen from the environmental perspective. It show that our legislation is outdated" ...

☒ "The precautionary principle has to be invoked into the environmental legislation"

# Endings



- ⌘ Tradition of precaution-like practise in isolated fields; Push for precaution internationally
- ⌘ Reintroduction from the international perspective; 'learning' leads to wider use of the PP.





# Danish appropriations of the Precautionary Principle

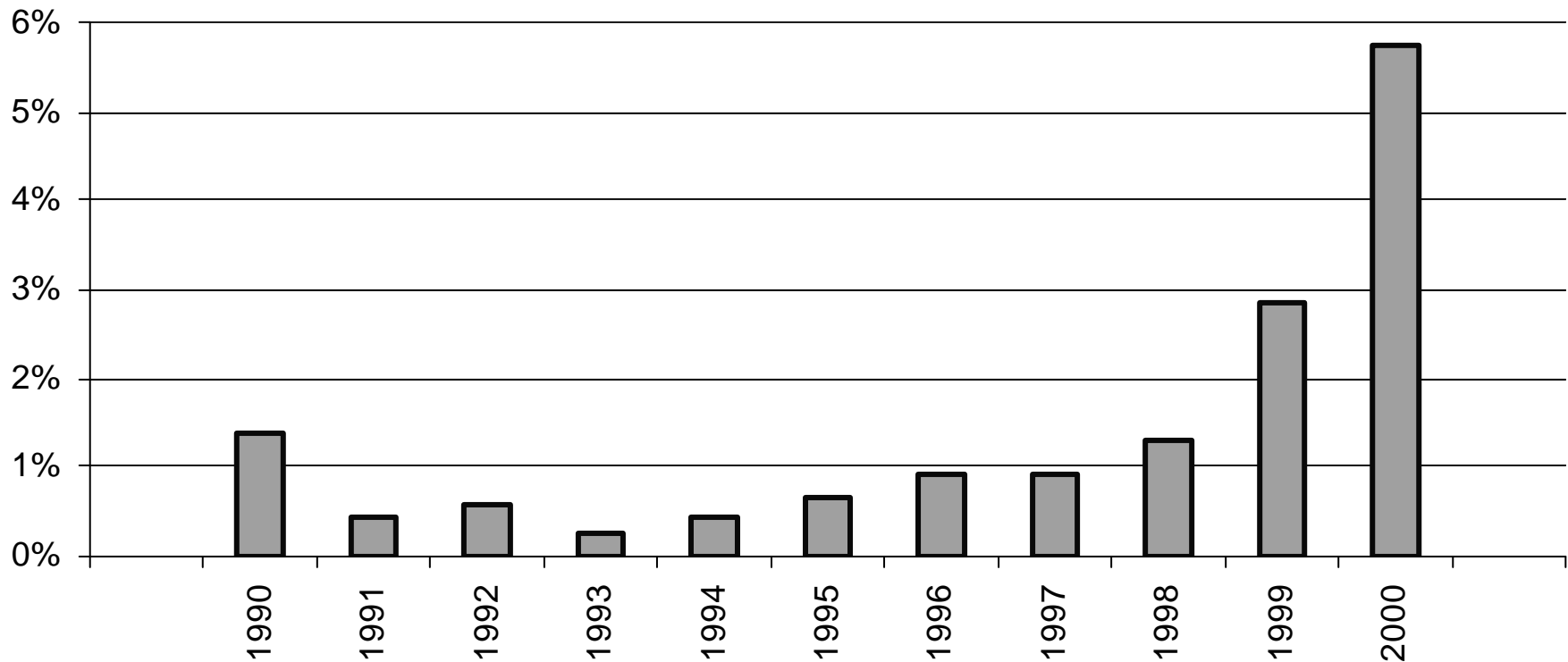
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# 'Precaution' in newspapers II

Proportion of articles that refer explicit to the PP

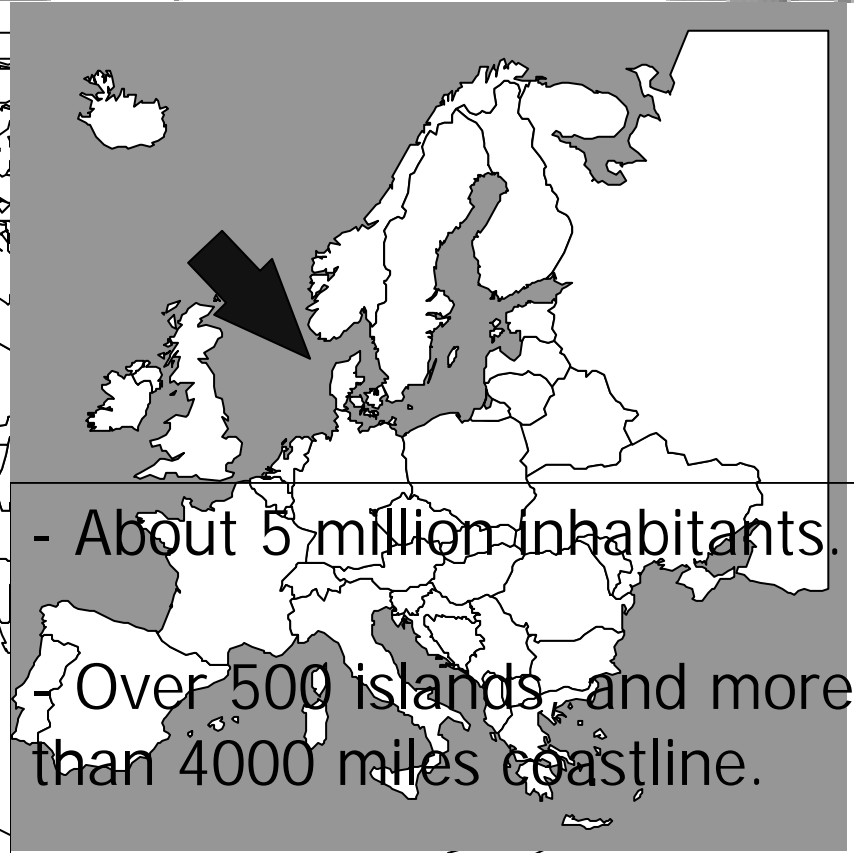


# Denmark...



Intensive agriculture and food processing industries.

Insignificant smokestack industry, incl. chemical industry.



- About 5 million inhabitants.

- Over 500 islands and more than 4000 miles coastline.

- 95% reliance on untreated ground water for drinking.

# Pesticides regulation in the 1970s 1980s

- ⌘ 1970s DDT, dieldrin banned due to persistence & bioaccumulative properties
- ⌘ 1986 1<sup>st</sup> Pesticides Action Plan leads to amendments to the Chemicals Substances Act:
  - ⊞ "Old" Chemicals must be re-evaluated
  - ⊞ Permits are time limited 5 & 10 years
  - ⊞ Substitution Principle with a flavour of Precaution:
    - ⊗ "Approvals can not be given to Pesticides if means or methods with same field of application exists, which - based on investigations or experience - may be expected to be essentially less harmful for health or environment"

# Pesticides regulation in the 1990s

- ⌘ 1987 -> 1994: Pesticides assessed to be unacceptable for health and environment was unhindered sold and used!
- ⌘ Cases was dragged by means of endless rows of complaints and piles of counter evidence from the industry. The purpose was obviously to 'clog up'.
- ⌘ 1994 The pesticide Atracine was found in ground water -> massive media uproar
- ⌘ Following this the Parliament decided to tighten the regulation. Industry had now just 6 weeks to table new evidence

# Pesticides regulation in the 1990s : Cleaning out!

- ⌘ 1994: 20 formulations with 7 active substances banned! (including Atrazine)
- ⌘ 1996: 110 formulations with 12 active substances banned!
- ⌘ 1997: 40 formulations with 10 active substances banned!
  
- ⌘ Beyond this, 550 formulations was withdrawn, due to lacking documentation or re-nomination
  - ⊠ phenoxy acids e.g. 2,4-D, MCPA -> Glyphosat
  - ⊠ Parathione -> Dimethoate
  - ⊠ maneb -> fenpropimorph

# Pesticides regulation in the 1990s : PAP II



- ⌘ 1997 the parliament initiates an independent commission that shall assess the total consequences of a phase-out of pesticides
- ⌘ Four scenarios (the 1997 frequency of spraying was 2,45):
  - ⊠ total stop for pesticides: 0 frequency, 190\$ /Capita /year
  - ⊠ reduced use: 0.5 frequency, 90\$ /Capita /year
  - ⊠ optimised use: 1.4-1.7 frequency, 0\$ /Capita /year
  - ⊠ total change-over to organic: 0 frequency, 240-600\$ /Capita /year

# Pesticides regulation in the 1990s : PAP II

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- ⌘ Based on this, the parliament passes the Pesticides Action Plan II, aiming at the optimised use scenario within 5 to 10 years (1.4-1.7), and a spraying frequency of 2.0 before 2002.
- ⌘ The means is to be information and counselling combined with threat of an increase of pesticides tax by 2002.
- ⌘ Hereto comes the aim of expansion of organic farming to cover about 23% of the agricultural land by 2003