Preface

This book has its origins in my research over the past two decades which has increasingly drawn me to focus on the role that values play in politics and policy making. I found existing public policy theory to be unsatisfactory in providing explanatory frameworks for the real world. The tendency to ignore, minimize, or demonize the role of politics in the policy process seemed odd in liberal democracies in which the voting public expects their leaders to be responsive to their preferences – or at least try to be. These preferences clearly have their basis in individual values positions concerning what is right and wrong, what ought or ought not be, and how society should function. Understanding politics as an exercise in juggling societal values led me to consider whether the examination of values, and values conflict, provided a useful lens through which to view the policy process. When Alan joined the project, this element of the argument was well developed and our focus shifted to evaluating existing public policy theory against this benchmark of the inclusion of values and democratic politics in explanatory models.

I would like to acknowledge the involvement of my long-time collaborator, Geoff Cockfield, in the thinking around values and policy that informed this book. This included co-authoring two conference papers that produced some of the main ideas at the heart of this project, and his role as a co-investigator on a research project funded by the Australian Research Council (DP 140100311) that examined the values component of land use conflict in rural Australia. His contribution is most sincerely appreciated.

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