



Gippsland community action training Photo Chloe Aldenhoven

**CREATING
CHANGE
IN
AUSTRALIA**

**IDENTIFYING THE TRAINING
NEEDS OF GRASSROOTS
ACTIVISTS & CAMPAIGNERS**
counterAct
training for action

CASE STUDY: COAL SEAM GAS – LOCK THE GATE – THE ONGOING BATTLE

The struggle between the developers of unconventional gas (coal seam, shale and tight gas), farmers and communities has struck a chord with people all over the country and has rightly been referred to by Lock the Gate as ‘the fastest growing social movement in the country’.

The issue of coal seam gas, and concerns over health impacts and the destruction of healthy farmlands for the benefit of developers has been quite prominent in the east coast mainstream media. This has been highlighted by growing civil disobedience actions from unlikely quarters. Communities at Tara, Glenugie, Doubtful Creek and Fullerton Cove are just a few that have had significant community protests – successfully blockading equipment in many cases, which has given rise to a growing profile for this issue and a growing headache for the companies involved.

Coal and gas licenses cover more than half of Australia*. Yet the growth of the coal seam gas industry has been hampered by a strong community groundswell of resistance. Companies such as Metgasco and Arrow energy have pulled out of their respective projects in New South Wales and Queensland in the face of direct action blockades, corporate campaigning and increased regulation borne from community pressure.

“...along with massive and intrusive resource development has come determined community resistance and, while, of course, much of this involves people who do not want this development in their back yard, when you put together over 100 backyard campaigns around the country, you have a very large slice of the continent affected and the campaign is transformed from a NIMBY (“Not in My Back Yard”) action to one that involves asking fundamental questions about environmental protection, the nature of sustainable economic development and the future of Australian culture itself.” *Drew Hutton – Lock the Gate*

With the CSG moratorium likely to be lifted in Victoria in 2013/14 we will see a new battleground open up – groundwork is already being done by these communities in getting critical mass to survey their communities in order to declare themselves ‘coal and gasfield free’. Direct action training and preparations have commenced. There are also areas of Western Australia, Northern Territory and others where campaigns can build.

Often noted is the unusual allies borne out of this campaign - whether this demonstrates a maturity in the environmental sector in assessing the need to develop alliances with a broad cross section of people, or is simply pragmatic opportunism – the point remains that a distinguishing feature has been the work done to build functional working relationships between farmers, conservative communities who would not traditionally identify as activists, and long term environmentalists.

“Lock the Gate is not, self-consciously, an environmental organisation. In fact, some farmers would object strenuously to its being called that. However, with its capacity to mobilise large numbers, its militancy and its preparedness to take on some of the biggest corporate players, it reminds one of some of our biggest activist campaigns of the past, especially the forest and wilderness campaigns.”

The successful strategy of the ‘Lock the Gate’ campaign is key to the success. This is based on building community power, and demonstrating broad and widespread commitment on the issue via face to face surveys and contact with people in the local area likely to be affected – in combination with bold civil disobedience led by local people. The tactics of this campaign are now being adapted in similar campaigns around the world.

Keys to success:

- Unusual alliances between farmers and environmentalists from all sides of politics, including new/non-traditional activists, and a pragmatic approach to working in coalitions
- Face to face community building and surveying done to engage and encourage a sense of ownership from the local community, and having them ‘lock the gate’
- Experienced activists and trainers willing to travel, and work in collaboration with affected communities as well as put on regular trainings
- Strategic nonviolent direct action (small scale arrests to ensure longevity of a ‘blockade’) combined with strong corporate campaigning and political pressure on rural MP’s
- A strong story of the aussie farmer, and small towns standing up for their local community, deftly illustrated through professional, and easily shareable videography

<http://www.lockthegate.org.au/calltocountry#calltocountrymaps> (half of Australia reference)