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EDO cuts hit hard

On 17th December, the Commonwealth Attorney-General's department notified each Environmental Defenders' Office (EDO) across the country that their funding had been cut, effective immediately.

The four-year, \$10 million federal funding agreement has been terminated only six months into its term. It follows a series of state funding cuts, putting pressure on most of the nine offices operating in each state and territory. Staff and communities are unsure of the path ahead.

EDO NSW executive director Jeff Smith said it was a disappointing decision. "Their local EDO is the only place they can afford to go for expert legal advice when they feel threatened by some major development," he said.

Across Australia, EDOs provide thousands of clients, made up of individuals and community groups, with free legal advice on environmental laws relating to matters such as town planning and development, mining operations, marine protected areas, water, pollution, indigenous and heritage issues.

The EDOs have run a number of landmark court cases for community groups across Australia, including high profile cases against new coal mines, pollution of rivers by power stations, over-development in residential areas and the potential impacts of coal seam gas developments on local water resources.

Access to justice for people who wish to use the law to stand up for and protect their environment will be effectively lost if the EDOs have to close, as defending the environment, community amenity and cultural heritage will become unaffordable.

This decision by the Federal government demonstrates the hostility it has for the Australian communities who choose to use the law to stand up for the places they love, according to Jeff Smith.

"The mining industry lobby has been actively calling for governments to defund the EDOs, and will be breaking out the champagne over this short-sighted decision," he said.

The Minerals Council, which represents the mining industry, has been actively lobbying Attorney-General

George Brandis, accusing the EDOs of conducting "a campaign of economic sabotage".

Environment Victoria CEO Kelly O'Shanassy said it was a clear attempt by the Abbott Government to silence the voice of those communities standing up against vested interests.

"It demonstrates the Abbott Government's utter contempt for those willing to speak up for mother nature," he said.

Australian Greens Senator Larissa Waters, a former EDO lawyer, described the cuts as outrageous.

"The cuts could cripple many EDOs completely, which is exactly what the Abbott Government wants, so that there's nothing to stand in the way of its mining magnate and big business buddies abusing our environment for private profit," she said.

The decision comes at a time when climate action in Australia is being dismantled, coal-seam gas developments are being opposed by threatened rural communities, when the Tarkine is at real risk, the Great Barrier Reef faces unprecedented threats and when the Federal Government is intent on handing back environmental powers to the states and territories.

Fluoride shock for region

by Omega Breakspear

Last month Lismore councillors voted six to five in favor of the fluoridation of the Rous Water supply.

The decision, made on 10th December at a council meeting, has drawn widespread criticism. More than 60 local residents who showed up in support of the No-Fluoride campaign were visibly shocked.

Lismore Greens councillor and science graduate Vanessa Ekins is seeking a review of the 1957 Fluoridation of the Public Water Supplies Act.

MLC John Kaye, the NSW Greens health spokesman, said it was not good public policy to ignore a community which says it does not want fluoride. Dr Kaye has called on the State Government to consider an inquiry into the safety of adding fluoride to drinking water.

Local dentist Andrew Taylor told councillors, "Frankly, there is no difference in dental health and the incidence of child dental caries in both fluoridated and non-fluoridated areas, you wouldn't know if you were in one or the other."

Dr Taylor also said that "severe tooth decay is not due to a lack of fluoride."

He said that the image constantly shown by the Department of Health



Philippe Dupuy, Peter Leyner, Annette and Rowan Freyhold, Moppy and Ray Parry

presenters, of a child with a full mouth of decay, would have been caused by the child being born with genetically defective teeth, low parental education and poverty.

The State Government is offering local councils a \$7 million sweetener to fluoridate, but little or nothing is being done to address the serious problem of child poverty.

Over 18,000 children under the age of 12 are homeless, according to the

Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Australian Dental Association spokesman and Lismore-based dentist Brendan White said councillors had not considered the consequences.

Rous Water is hoping to have construction of the three fluoridation plants completed by early 2015. They will be using the highly toxic fluorosilicic acid, an industrial waste product from a plastics manufacturer in China, for fluoridation.

Council in the frame

The Nimbin Community Centre has secured funding under Lismore City Council's Local Heritage Assistance Grant program.

It will be used to replace an original window on the left side of the Birth & Beyond Building, which overlooks the laneway at 54 Cullen Street.

The sill and frame of the original window are rotten, and are in need of immediate attention. This repair is beyond the current budget of the NCCI, so additional funding was sought to make sure that the work is done to

a standard that maintains the integrity of this beautiful old building.

The building has a lot of historical significance to Nimbin, one of the original buildings in Cullen Street. First a hairdresser, then the RSL Club, in 1973 it became the office for the Aquarius Festival.

After this it was purchased by the local community as a Media Centre, then Birth & Beyond. The NCCI has now recently taken over ownership after a lengthy legal process.

Currently it is home to The



The rear of the 54 Cullen Street community-owned property

Nimbin Apothecary, the Nimbin Environment Centre and a Health Clinic, as well as community meetings such as AA, NA and other non-profit community events such as the Eco Film Club.

The window replacement will give this building some much needed care and attention. The NCCI thanks Lismore Council for helping to fund the maintenance of this well-loved community space.

Legal win for protestors

The long-running legal battle between NSW police and lawyers for the protectors of the Northern Rivers reached a remarkable conclusion in Lismore Court in December.

Magistrate David Heilpern dismissed charges against eight people who were charged during protests in January against gas exploration company Metgasco.

This follows his decision in October to stop prosecution against two other protestors charged with similar offenses. Most were charged with attempting to obstruct traffic and /or hindering police.

Steve Bolt and Ben Cochrane, legal representatives for the political activists, successfully argued that the prosecution had no reasonable likelihood of getting a conviction against these 10 people because police had failed to follow correct procedures when making arrests at Glenugie, south of Grafton.

The ten people are Jarred Fordham, Bob Kershaw, Nigel McKee, John Medland, Binnah Pownall, Brad Rankin, Alan Roberts, Ruth Rosenhek, Rodney Sharp and Daniele Voinot.

Magistrate Heilpern awarded costs to lawyers for Alan Roberts and Bradley Rankin whose charges were changed without proper notification. The court agreed that proceedings against Rankin and Roberts was to be a test case.

"Even so, protestors are delighted to have the matters resolved," said president of the Northern Rivers



Outside Lismore court house on 9th December

Guardians, Scott Sledge.

"Residents are preparing to prevent Metgasco from continuing with plans to establish an industrial gasfield here. Metgasco recently announced their intention to drill near Bungabee Road, Bentley only 14 km from Lismore. Local residents will oppose this insanity."

Daniele Voinot was one of the individuals who had charges dropped today. She said, "It's unfair for the police to be used for political purposes and put in a position where they have to protect wrongdoing."

"The real crime is not those who stand up to protect the future for our children

and grandchildren, but those who intend to wreck our area for the sake of a quick buck."

Speaking on behalf of Lock The Gate Northern Rivers, Scott Sledge said, "The police were used by the NSW state government to impose a destructive industry into a region which doesn't want it."

"As a taxpayer, I am opposed to police being used in this way and now the costs include more than \$15,000 in legal fees in addition to all the expenses of sending the Riot Squad from Sydney and for subsequently prosecuting people who are not criminals."

Bentley battle stations



Photo: Melissa Hargraves, echonetdaily

Residents around Bentley, backed by anti-coal seam gas 'protectors', are preparing for upcoming blockades against the proposed drilling of a gas well operated by CSG miner Metgasco.

Over the weekend, men and women used brushcutters and ride-on lawnmowers to prepare campsite areas surrounding the drilling site Rosella E01, 12km north-west of Casino.

As well as opposing CSG mining on environmental grounds, the locals also say the proposed site access off Bentley Road is dangerous with the entry point on a 100km speed zone, just after a crest.

Scott Sledge of the Northern Rivers Guardians (NRG) said the dangerous lack of visibility for the proposed road in both directions has a lot of locals

concerned.

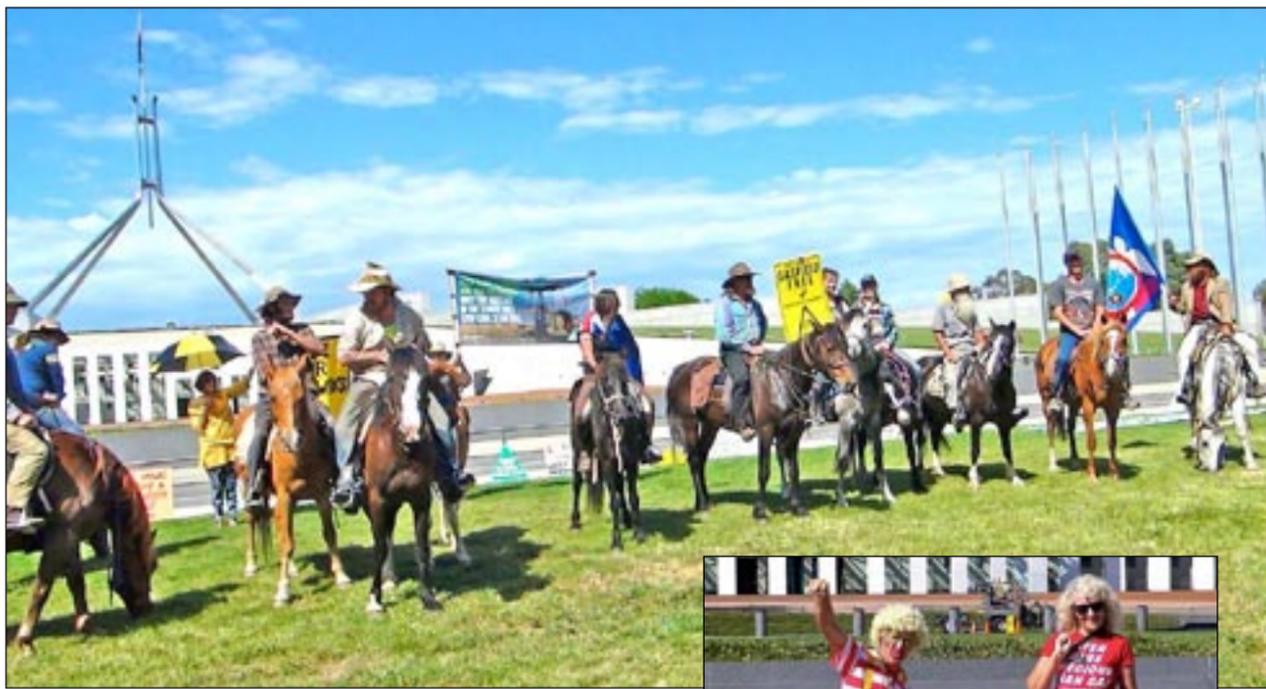
"If they persist with that access it will take a lot of work to make it safe, there is no room for trucks to turn, and trucks would not have enough time to cross with cars speeding at low visibility both ways," Mr Sledge told echonetdaily.

The main campsite for protestors is being set up on Bungabee Road off Bentley Road which will have a camp kitchen, cafe, information stall, composting toilets, hand basins, water, parking and camping.

NRG member Daniele Voinot said the majority of neighbours are on-side, and have opened their farms up for campers.

She said the protestors had learnt from previous actions. "We had no warning with Glenugie and Doubtful Creek, but this time we do."

Saying 'neigh' to coal seam gas



by Omega Breakspear

The Franklin horses left Grafton on 21st September on the Woop Woop March to Canberra, to let the polliens know they have no social license to allow CSG mining in the Northern Rivers.

Mick and Donna Franklin and their horses spent nearly three months riding through sometimes harsh conditions, including storms and bushfires, and arrived at Parliament House on 3rd December (pictured above).

For the last stage of their ride, they were accompanied by five Canberra equestrian locals.

They were met by

supporters, including the Knitting Nanas and Clowns Against Gas (pictured, left), a number of No-CSG activists, and Glenugie locals.

Despite all parliamentarians being invited, only the Greens and Bob Katter came out to meet them.

"I'm proudly behind the Lock the Gate movement," said Senator Larissa Waters, Greens spokesperson on mining (pictured, right, with Senator Lee Rhiannon).

She said she had moved legislation in Parliament to give landholders the right to say no to CSG mining.

All nine of the Franklin horses are now back at their home in Glenugie.



New weapon in CSG struggle

CSG-Free Northern Rivers has welcomed new laws introduced by NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell to allow the government to cancel or refuse mining and petroleum licences on public interest grounds.

The group is calling for the state government to cancel gas exploration and production licences throughout the Northern Rivers in recognition of the overwhelming public opposition, and negotiate an exit strategy with Metgasco and companies in the region, such as Dart and Red Sky Energy.

The Mining and Petroleum Legislation Amendment (Public Interest) Bill was swiftly passed by both houses.

The amendments were designed to allow the Government to cancel coal exploration licences which have been found to be corrupt by the ICAC, but according to Ian Gaillard of CSG-Free Northern Rivers, the legislation is much broader, covering gas and coal.

Mr Gaillard (pictured) says this provides a unique opportunity for the state government to act on the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the region.

"There are certainly ample public interest grounds for ending the entrenched conflict between the Northern Rivers community and the embattled exploration



Photo: David Lowe

company Metgasco," he said. Mr Gaillard says there is no social license for the establishment of industrial gasfields in the Northern Rivers and so it is not in the public interest.

"Their quest for a social license in this region is simply dead in the water, but this also applies equally to the other companies."

"The vast majority of the region is opposed to the establishment of invasive industrial gasfields here and we know the devastating impact these would have on our farming, tourism and other industries.

"Unless the state government applies a circuit breaker in this region, we can expect Metgasco to attempt to re-establish their operations near Bentley."

"While the new legislation would allow the government to cancel gas licences without compensation, we would be happy to see a more suitable exit strategy negotiated for the embattled companies."

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BURY THE GAS HATCHET

by Aidan Ricketts

At a time of peace and goodwill (the summer solstice) it's appropriate to reflect on the best way to resolve the stand-off between Northern Rivers residents and the embattled resource speculation company Metgasco.

Resource speculation is by nature a high-risk enterprise in which shareholders gamble on boom or bust stakes in the hope of making large profits.

That can fall flat. The case for Metgasco to seek a dignified exit strategy from the Northern Rivers has become overwhelming.

Community opposition is only part of Metgasco's problems. The share price has taken a beating and the change of federal government only served to deliver a very temporary boost of confidence for investors.

Then there is evidence that the gas resource in the Northern Rivers is not as extensive nor as valuable as they had hoped.

Coal beds in the Northern Rivers are based upon ancient riverbeds rather than large geographically extensive swamps and basins and so tend to be less extensive, less geographically continuous and less productive than in other areas.

The lack of social license has exacerbated Metgasco's problems.

Metgasco is faced with a devil's choice, back out and

Greetings card we'd like to see:



Metgasco would like to apologise to all Northern Rivers residents for ever having been foolish enough to think that we could impose a gasfield on your beautiful region.

Maybe next year...



face shareholder wrath or push ahead into Bentley and face the wrath of the entire region.

The people of the Northern Rivers have already done all they can in peaceful and democratic ways to make it clear that Metgasco's industrial invasion is not welcome. There is simply no social license and there never will be.

I don't think anyone wants to see 2014 turn into the ongoing saga of the battle of Bentley. This is not a new year that any of us in the Northern Rivers can look forward to. Metgasco's

plans to force its way into Bentley are environmentally and politically reckless, economically questionable, and constitute a real threat to public safety.

It is time for community leaders to collectively urge Metgasco to abandon its plan.

Metgasco may be able to secure the bare legal approvals from a compliant state government, and it may have contractual rights to access some farms in the region, but to what end?

Socially, politically and commercially, it can't end well and it's time for an exit strategy.

The people in the most difficult position are landholders who signed up to access agreements with Metgasco.

In the interests of finding a peaceful way forward it's important not to demonise these people. Some signed up years ago, before many

people understood the scale of a gasfield. Some landholders even felt under pressure because the law gave them few options to resist the companies.

We need to find ways to help landholders to extract themselves from access agreements that they have signed and may now regret.

If Metgasco does not agree to release landholders from their obligations, governments, local politicians and community leaders will need to broker a solution.

Metgasco can always choose to proceed, and spend its remaining cash reserves on forcing its way into Bentley.

The only thing that the battle of Bentley would not be is socially divisive, make no mistake Metgasco, the community is united on this one.

Let's envision a positive outcome and let's then take action.

Laird forest to be cleared after court dismisses challenge

by Jon Walter, www.edonsw.org.au

On 20th December, the Federal Court dismissed challenges to the approvals, by the former Federal Environment Minister, of two coal mines in north western NSW, which will clear critically endangered forests containing endangered plant and animal species.

Northern Inland Council for the Environment, represented by community legal centre EDO NSW, appealed the Federal Environment Minister's approval granted earlier this year of the two coal mines in the Leard State Forest, near Boggabri.

The new Maules Creek mine, owned by Whitehaven Coal, will produce 13 million tonnes of coal per year for 21 years. The other proposal is an expansion of the existing Boggabri Mine, owned by Idemitsu, which will allow the mining of 7 million tonnes per year.

The mines will result in the clearing of over 600 hectares of the critically endangered Box Gum Woodland, as well as loss of habitat for the endangered Swift Parrot, the endangered Regent Honeyeater, the vulnerable Greater Long-eared Bat, and the endangered climbing plant species *Tylophora linearis*.

The Federal Court found that there was no error in the decision-making process. The Court also found that Minister had the power to approve the clearing of the Leard State Forest before biodiversity offsets have been established.

The judge noted "this would undoubtedly be undesirable from the perspective of the environmental protection and preservation..." but was nevertheless permitted by the law.



Photo: Benny Zable

EDO principal solicitor Sue Higginson said: "This decision, amongst other things, confirms that the process for establishing biodiversity offsets under our Federal environmental laws fails to protect places of high environmental value."

Local Action

During January, climate change group 350.org in collaboration with local Lock the Gate Alliance groups, will be hosting information sessions about the blockade to stop Whitehaven Coal's Maules Creek coal mine.

- The events will be held at:
- Nimbin at Birth & Beyond at 54 Cullen Street, 6pm Tuesday 7th January
 - Lismore Workers Club, 6.30pm Thursday 9th January
 - Murwillumbah Red Cross Hall, 6pm Friday 10th January
 - Mullumbimby Civic Hall, 6pm Saturday 11th January

War for water underway



Pilliga group

Photo: Brigid Prain



Blockading the front gates of Santos CSG mining operation in the Pilliga
Photo: Benny Zable

by Brigid Mary Prain

We all know that some of the things money can't buy are the right to clean air and water, so WTF is going on right now?

The abuse of the underground water system in Australia has been going on for years. One case is that of Cliff Wallace.

His farm, Wando, in Maules Creek, NSW, is named after the protected, 500-year-old myrtle trees in remnant forest on Cliff's 1000-acre farm.

This is about corporate negligence and the corruption employed to smokescreen the culpability exposed by history of use.

Mr Wallace, 61, recounted the battle to ensure his bore pumped freely after water contamination by organisations including the Department of Land and Water Conservation.

"Bring it on," says Wallace to the department. "Complete your action to sue me because now you are going to allow the pollution of the country's water resources and it's time your corruption was brought to light."

About 15kms from Wando, in Leard State Forest, protestors are camped near one of the gates to the Boggabri Coal Mine.

Boggabri Coal Mine is one of three coal mines proposed for the forest, an action that will destroy flora and fauna and threaten the health of the

underground water system.

Murray Dreschler and Cliff Wallace instigated the camp over a year ago, doing all they can to stall the mine and raise awareness about the issue.

And 17 kms from Narrabri, other protestors camp in the Pilliga Forest.

Santos has plans for a gas project that would include 1,100 coal seam gas wells and 1,000km of pipelines across 850 square kilometres of forest. It would involve wells drilled on a massive grid, every 500m, as well as access tracks, pipelines, water treatment facilities and compression plants.

Already there has been a major spillage of saline water, leading to tree deaths, the clearing of vegetation without federal environmental approval, overflow from contaminated drill ponds, leaking gas pipes and water drains bubbling with methane.

Not even ants, live on the spill zone.

The government bodies approving these mining companies activities are negligent. Damage to the environment is not sustainable.

The winners here are a very small minority of people who have massive vested financial interest in selling our limited resources offshore.

The single most important issue in all of this is humanity's duty of care towards our water resources.

The second most important issue is recalibrating the cost to our future and developing renewable resources.

In the grand scheme of things, water is at its best when collected from springs or aquifer basins. The purity of the water at these places is due to the natural processes of evaporation, precipitation and filtration which renew this limited resource.

Beneath the Pilliga and Leard State Forest are vast underground water systems feeding into the Great Artesian Basin, the nations' largest inland water source.

The Pilliga sandstones are an important recharge area for the Basin, crucial to the quality and volume of water on which so much of inland Australia relies.

The surface streams of the Pilliga form part of the Murray-Darling Basin, running north into the Namoi River and thence into the Barwon-Darling system.

Whitehaven Coal Mine predicts the Maules Creek Coal Project will create a zone of depressurisation around the mining area and cause an average groundwater seepage rate from the fractured and porous rock aquifers of 550 ml/year with a peak of about 1,064 ml/year.

It's time to step up and make a difference. If enough of us realise the significance of our water resources enough to stand with traditional owners, farmers, ecologists, and environmentalists, nothing will stop us.

Pilliga Protection Camp Protocols

Story and photo by Ursula da Silva

My gaze sweeps over the array of tents dotted amongst the crisp cypress pines. This is the Pilliga Protection camp, set in serenity designated to become gasfields.

Its founder, Matthew Draper, is of Gomeri heritage. This man has dedicated his life to stopping CSG mining in the Pilliga State Forest. His thoughtfulness and caring touches everyone in the camp.

Matthew's primary concern is getting everyone in the community.

"Our goal is to unite people of all cultural backgrounds so the barriers of racism can be broken down," he said. "As a proud Gomeri person, I feel we should all be united together to raise issues on mining and the destruction of our rivers and basins."

Yet protestor camps are often established without Aboriginal consultation.

Is this a cultural insensitivity?

"The Old People think people are stabbing us in the back," said a Gomeri Rivers Man "...It's the way it feels to be with people you don't know - what do you stand for?"

Most mornings Matthew purifies the Pilliga Protectors with a traditional smoking and a meeting is held. Culture is a way of realigning the collective intention that is Australia's only saviour against the detriment of mines.

Areas of interest to both mines and protestor groups are close to the hearts and spirituality of the Aboriginal people. Often they contain many sites of huge cultural significance.

To then set up a protestor camp without consulting the Originies (a word I was told by Gomeri man Billah, referring to the fact that it is "Originies until you trade something - not traditional owners, because we haven't traded anything").

Byron CSG activist, Jim Beatson, travelled to the Pilliga earlier this year with a view to supporting the camp and said, "It never occurred to me. But now you have asked me, I realise in



Pilliga Smoking Ceremony

future I will have that responsibility."

When asked the same question, CSG Free Byron Bay Co-Coordinator Suzie Deyris said, "I read on the Pilliga Mouse Facebook Page, 'the Gomeri people as well as the local community are welcoming people to become Pilliga Protectors'.

"It was one of the motivators that led to the trip. In retrospect, once on the Gomeri land I could have asked if there were any cultural observances we needed to adhere to."

The steps involved in unifying will heal our land and old wounds. Billah believes people need to "stand up and accept that their forefathers did atrocities to us".

"It is the only way they can heal themselves. These people today know the stories and they need to acknowledge it. If the Government hasn't got the morals to say we are truly sorry and compensate us properly, this acknowledgment can only make footsteps towards a better future."

To ask permission to set up a camp is a basic acknowledgment. Contacting the NSG Crop or the local Lands Council is "the culturally appropriate, right way to conduct business with the Originies of Country."

Until then we will be fragmented allies in the fight to defend our country.

*Some names have been withheld or changed for privacy reasons.

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Letters

CSG phone survey

I was contacted by an unnamed survey company last week and agreed to give eight minutes of my time to answer their questions. I was a bit suspicious when asked if I was a councillor, employed by council, or worked in the media, but decided to go ahead.

I found the questions to be very ambiguous and confusing. I had to ask for some questions to be repeated. In one instance, I asked what the question meant, but the interviewer couldn't tell me!

I believe that the questions are so ambiguous that they can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the agenda of the body, company or person paying for the survey. As the interviewer refused to say who commissioned it, that calls into question the whole credibility of the survey, maybe even it's legality.

When the interviewer came to the question, "If it was proven safe would you be in favour of CSG?" I said, "How can you ask such a question?" It is not only a hypothetical and misleading question, it is the same one the Richmond Valley Council was asked to remove in a telephone survey they conducted in April this year.

Earlier in the year (September), I was asked to take part in a similar telephone survey, which was done just weeks before Metgasco gave out a media release saying, "A recent survey shows the majority of Casino residents are for the gas". What was never pointed out was that the question also said, "If CSG was safe, would you be in favour?"

After objecting to the same question about CSG in this survey, and the fact that the interviewer would not give me her or the name of the company she was working for, I said I didn't wish to continue. The unfortunate thing about opting out is that all rational answers will probably be disregarded. I am completely against unconventional gas from all sources, but that won't show up in this survey.

Pauline Luethi
Tatham

Phone survey 2

I participated in a telephone survey of residents of the RVLGA recently. I was asked if I was a councillor, council employee or employed in media. Presumably, answering yes to any of these questions would have excluded me from participation.

The topic, as far as I could ascertain, was the planned

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NEXT DEADLINE:
Wednesday 29th January

Email: nimbin.goodtimes@gmail.com or put stuff in our pigeonhole at the Nimbin Community Centre.

development of a hybrid power station powered by some sort of solar array and a (theorised) large reservoir of natural gas, by an unnamed, three party consortium.

It seemed that the major benefits would be diversification of business types, employment (of course), and 'clean green energy'. The feared negatives, it seemed, would be encroachment on agricultural land, air pollution and 'visibility' of the said power station and infrastructure.

I have grave concerns about this whole proposal. I couldn't get the name of the consortium but was assured I could read about it in the local media some time soon.

Further research shows that such hybrid power stations exist in USA, powered by a combination of solar and either coal sourced electricity or 'natural gas'. I am aware that gas from shale, coal seam or tight sand is called natural gas in USA. I am also aware of that terminology being used in Australia recently.

I wish to make my values on the topic quite clear. I would wholeheartedly support the development of truly sustainable power generation in RVLGA. I am totally opposed to the exploration for, and use of, unconventional gas. My research indicates that unconventional gas is totally unsafe, being a serious threat to humans, animals and the environment as a whole.

I found the survey quite confusing and interviewer technique rather lax at times.

I am left with unanswered questions: Who is doing what here? Why the question about my association with Council or media? Who is sponsoring and conducting the survey?

I'll let you draw your own conclusions.

Beverley Crossley,
Tatham

Poisonous posters

Does Metgasco really think the people of the Richmond Valley are that stupid to believe the colourful posters now adorning the shopfront in Casino?

You really need to start listening to the community and realise your toxic

industry is NOT wanted or needed here or in fact anywhere in this region.

Huge numbers of people, not only here but right across the state, are standing proudly together and saying a very firm NO.

There is far too much evidence showing this gas industry is not safe and has the potential to pollute our waterways, land and air. Why, even the Australian Medical Association (AMA) has come out with concern for the health of us, the people, the community, and are asking for the "precautionary principle".

In other words, no. Our health, our water, our land and air is far too valuable to be allowed to be destroyed for short term monetary gain for an industry that has no real answers or real evidence that proves they are not a threat to us or the environment.

Jill Lyons
Casino

CSG and land values

Now that land values are decreasing rapidly because of the proposed gas mining, our land rates, which are tied to land values, will surely decrease correspondingly. That sounds pretty good, because we all think that they are too high anyway.

However, that will mean that councils will not be able to carry out the same services that they do now. First area to feel the effects, I believe, will be road maintainance, a subject dear to our hearts. There will be a flow-on effect through all services for sure.

Another result will be that a lot more farmers will qualify for the pension as their asset value will be much lower. Their land will be unsaleable, as it is at Tara and Chinchilla, and every other area where mining development has been allowed to go ahead.

The Draft Access Laws which the O' Barrell government is trying to push through, mean that mining companies will not need to buy land. Their tactic has been to pay a high price for a farm to get their foot in the door. This, then, lowers the value of the surrounding farms.

As no-one wants to live next to, or in a gasfield, they have

to sell cheaply or just walk away. Those that stay to fight or just plain can't relocate are subjected to a degraded, unhealthy life with a high probability of a painful, early, death.

We must fight and we must win, no matter what the sacrifice. If we go somewhere else, we will have to fight there too. Solidarity and people power can overcome the avaricious greed of these pariahs.

Don Durrant,
Afterlee

Devil's (fig) advocate

Perhaps Triny Roe, you could expand on the apparent contradictory: "Though enjoyed by bats and birds, the fruit and other plant parts are poisonous to animals and humans." (NGT, December 2013) Does Giant Devil's Fig (GDF) feed bats and birds or not? And if it feeds birds, how many of them are native?

On another note, because my paw-paws are in a marginal climatic zone they tend to suffer a fungal disease. How do we know that the fungicide properties of GDF are not here to aid us in the growing of plants that suffer from fungal diseases?

And as usual, why are the white fellas so determined to kill exotic plants that are arguably better plants at supplying biomass and therefore in the long term soil organic carbon? Is it as Robert Bly implies, because we are a society of half-grown adults and we do not therefore have the fuller human ability to consider the long term?

Geoff Dawe,
Byrill Creek

Day trip

As straightsville types, my wife and I enjoyed our recent day trip from Lennox and would like to stay overnight next time. Everyone was friendly and welcoming, even some of the semi-stoned shop assistants.

I was concerned about some stoned people staggering across the road willy nilly, as if the main road was a pedestrian plaza, and may I hasten to add that too much weed can cause schizophrenia. I do hope people know the risks.

One Letter to the Editor did disappoint me, as she refused to vote in protest at the political system. Try living in Syria or Iran and you'll give an arm and a leg to be able to vote in the best country and democracy on God's earth – irrespective of who is the leader.

Enough grizzling, keep up the good work and keep the place quaint.

Rick Doran,
Neutral Bay

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Fixed wireless fandango

I'm responding to Jane Jennings' article "What safety limit for radiation?" (NGT Dec13), where she stated: "I'm horrified to hear that the Nimbin Environment Centre has voted not to pursue the issue of towers. They obviously have no idea what is at stake".

"Hear that" are probably the only two true words in this. Code for "someone said".

I write this, not intending to represent the views of the whole NEC committee or members list, though yes, I'm serving as NEC treasurer, and would have thought that I'd know about this stance by NEC on towers, if such a stance exists. However to my knowledge it doesn't.

Further, as far as I know, there's no checklist kept where NEC rules in or out the issues being pursued. Items that come up on our agenda are dealt with on a basis of what active volunteers are able to do.

The issue of fixed wireless towers and potential health risk from radio frequencies (RF) they emit, is an alluring one because people can take it on without the inconvenience of cars, 4WDs, filling the tank, camping gear, banners and blockades. You can basically do tower opposing from the comfort of a lounge chair, delving to the limits of internet file downloads and blogs. It does require people's time: researching, using accurate information, then organising friends and neighbours. I say go for it, if that's where you want to put your effort.

The NEC is not a matri/patri-archal plutocratic incorporated association. It does not sit atop a pyramid, dictating which issue is to be followed up or not, but neither does it have unlimited human resources. It encourages everyone to be active if they are concerned about any environmental issue, including concern about RF and the safety of broadband fixed tower RF.

At the NBN community information session in the Town Hall last May, I put in my two cents worth as an individual citizen by asking if the fixed wireless towers were even necessary, as my internet speed was already quite satisfactory. It transpires though, that the further houses are from the centre of the village, the slower the internet speed becomes. The NBN proposes many times higher than current internet speeds and intends to create a fixed wireless network in the bush that will end this "tyranny of distance... for rural and remote Australians".

Some are insisting that NBN provide everybody with fibre-optic cable to the home. Whether the NEC ought to support another machine-intensive trenching of the landscape to lay the cables around Nimbin, is yet to be placed on the NEC agenda. Some cannot currently access broadband except via a dongle or mobile phone, and an interest in fixed wireless was revealed in comments from many people in Nimbin's valleys. Should NEC alienate those who would like to

Shopping Spree

(tune – Jingle Bells)

CHORUS

Oh! Shopping spree, shopping spree
Laughing all the way
Oh what fun it is to spend
All my hard earned pay. Hey!
Shopping spree, shopping spree
It's what polities say
Will bring our country back
on track,
So I shop night and day

VERSE 1

Dashing to the mall
in a one horse power ute,
If I find a parking space
Wouldn't it be beaut,
Bells on cash registers ring
making wallets light,

Oh what fun it is to sign
ten credit cards tonight.

VERSE 2

I love to do my bit
to help the economy grow
Although I need to spit
the dummy 'cos I know
My credit card's a fright
and things are getting tight,
Guess I'll just pretend
everything's all right
And keep shopping day and
night!

VERSE 3

A day or two ago
I thought I'd take a ride
With my pension cheque
Tucked in at my side,
The cheque looked clean and
neat

But misfortune seemed its lot
The teller said can't give you
cash
'cause the government credit's
shot.

FINAL CHORUS

Oh, sorry mate, sorry mate,
You cashed your cheque too
late
Forget about your shopping
spree
Or food upon your plate, hey!
Sorry mate, sorry mate
We have to tell you true,
The credit crunch has gotten
worse
No more shopping sprees for
you.

– Barbara Brewster
© Wollumbin Whacky
Warblers, 2012

access broadband by fixed wireless but can't yet because of political and health concern-generated delays? These questions should be considered.

Sure, we must sift through every query and concern, but even if we are finally assured of the safety, there's still a mountain of opposition in some minds that fixed wireless represents the final installation of "big brother" infrastructure; the next step to control by tyrannical digital overlords.

However, when I look around Cullen Street on an ordinary day there are many who carry in their pocket a mobile phone device, a dirty magnetic-electrical zapper of any living cell in a 3-metre radius. If we are serious about ending all RF and big brother control, do we let go all these wireless devices and swear to never utilise them again?

The bees and the flowers and the health of today's children must be protected, but do we want to mistakenly push out of reach the potential benefits of info-tech availability?

I for one on the NEC committee wish to see protecting of bushlands, the closing down of fossil fuel use and cutting off trade in fluoride and "agrochemical" biocides as priorities before placing my energy into fighting fixed wireless towers.

That said, I have total respect for those dealing with a complex fixed tower siting issue that is affecting them, and am not against them providing input at NEC and their working to resolve a problem arising from public utility broadband.

Peer Barnyngoz,
Nimbin

Keeping the mind ajar

Writing this was inspired by reading two articles in recent issues of the GoodTimes – the "Conspiracy Theory #432" article by Brendan

Hanley (November issue) and the "Chemtrails" article by the same author (September issue).

Initially I took them as attempts at satire, but I have since heard people advocating an "open mind" about these claims because "some of it might actually be true". I was tempted to write an article to refute or critically analyse these claims, but I now think this is unnecessary and it is more interesting to focus on the concept of the Open Mind.

To define a little better what we talk about, let us build a scale of open-mindedness.

On the left end we have zero open-mindedness, the "closed mind". Here we find the religious fundamentalists, the political and ideological dogmatists and the occasional scientist.

At the right end of the scale we have the 100% open mind, people here who believe in any absurdity presented to them without the slightest sceptical analysis.

Both extreme positions do have one advantage, and that is that their proponents don't have to think a lot.

As a closed minded person you already know everything. The 100% open mind person just absorbs everything. Absolutely no effort involved.

But of course these particular free lunches do come at a cost. The dogmatist will have to shut out increasing amounts of accepted knowledge or evidence that threaten his or her position.

We can see this effect in some proponents of Intelligent Design Theory who keep raising objections that are easily refuted with only a basic understanding of the Theory of Evolution.

Some Climate-Change Deniers make the same mistake, undermining whatever credibility their side had left.

My guess is that these mental attitudes will eventually be left behind by society in the same way as alchemy has been replaced by chemistry, astrology by astronomy and medieval medical practices by modern medicine.

What compels people into those extremes? Wishful thinking, intellectual laziness, refusal to mature mentally (recent research indicates that the prefrontal cortex appears to be a late developing section of the brain) and lack of sceptical thinking.

Also, people sometimes accept ideas purely because they like them or they support their world-view.

To get out of the corners of our scale we have to leave these motivators behind and replace them with a mindset that could be called "rational scepticism".

Applying this attitude requires some mental exertion and discipline. Statements that sound profound but are actually meaningless or trivial.

(Deepak Chopra: "Consciousness is the driver of evolution. Every time you eat a chicken or banana it transforms into a human.")

Most New Age talk and justifications for alternative medical treatments consist to a large degree of such "deepities". Critically read the advertisements in this issue of the GoodTimes.

Luckily we have some sharp arrows in our quiver, such as Occam's Razor, or the simple test of plausibility. Applied to homeopathy the number of molecules in a litre of water means that the cup of coffee you had this morning almost certainly contained a water molecule that passed through the bladder of Oliver Cromwell and that a sip of transmuted wine at mass actually does contain a molecule of Jesus' blood.

There is also the "vested interest" test. Why would

the author want me to believe his claim? What is in it for them?

Why object to alternative medicine, or religion?

There is always a price to pay. There often is a victim. Rhinos are endangered because of the superstitious belief in the aphrodisiac effect of their powdered horns.

The Open Mind. Is it a good thing? Or how open should minds be? The answer of course depends on our purpose.

Try to get the balance right. Become a rational sceptic.

Juergen Saalmueller,
Blue Knob

Democracy

If democracy is about people power, then how best can people be empowered? How might we organise things so our government can do their job, yet still give voting Australians access to 'some' of the decisions? How can the people and their elected representatives work together in sharing power?

The day-to-day running of our nation needs to be managed by someone. This is what government is for; an infrastructure that serves us. Roads, schools, sewerage, parklands – the basic, functional things we citizens require to live in an organised society.

This is what our taxes are, a joint fund that pays for the trappings of civil life.

For this system to run efficiently, the government has to be at freedom to make decisions. Not everything can be voted on. While government should consult with the community, ultimately someone has to decide what gets done.

Beyond this day-to-day running of the country however, there are bigger, long-term decisions to be made. Should Australia send troops to Afghanistan, for example? Should we remain dependent on fossil fuels, or invest in solar power like other nations do? Should we fluoridate our water supply?

These are big picture issues that should be decided by the whole community, because it is our children who will fight such a war; it is future generations who have to live with our choices.

Democracy can be shared. Sharing something requires participation. Active participation in the democratic process means some decisions are made by all of us - together. This is how we achieve fraternity and equality. This is how we gain liberty from some dude at the top with a god complex!

R. J. Poole,
Lismore

Notices**Open Learning**

Nimbin Community School's Open Learning program will recommence in February, with enrolments on the first Wednesday and Thursday of the month, 5-6th February, and classes beginning the following week.

Nimbin Show Society

Annual General Meeting, Tuesday 4th February, 6pm at the Showground. All members welcome.

Kleenheat Winner

The winners of the Nimbin Mill Kleenheat Patio Heater draw were Tina and Dave Fuller of Tuntable Falls. – Emmalee Rose

Birth & Beyond

The pregnancy group will start again at the end of January, 5-6pm on Wednesday afternoons – come after the Nimbin Farmers Market! Contact: Kirrah@traditionalwisdom.com.au or phone 0429-308-851.

Letters to the editor

NGT welcomes letters by email or post by deadline, usually the last Wednesday of the month. Letters longer than 300 words may be cut. Letters already published elsewhere will usually not be considered. Include full name, address and phone number for verification purposes. Opinions expressed remain those of the author, and are not necessarily those of NGT.