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People power, not pollies will keep us gasfield-free

by Aidan Ricketts

The announcement that Metgasco and the state government have reached terms for a buy-out of Metgasco's exploration licences in the Northern Rivers is a cause for great celebration for our region. It has to be said at the outset that this is a people power victory, not a politician's achievement.

In reflecting upon what we have to celebrate, we should pause a moment to remember that Metgasco walks away with \$25m of taxpayers money to ply their dangerous and unnecessary trade somewhere else on our beautiful planet.

We are and always will be the gasfield free Northern Rivers. Just four years ago this outcome looked almost impossible to achieve. Never let political passivity and cynicism get in the way of your resolve to work for a better world. Seriously, whilst we are on this planet, the single most useful thing we can each do from day to day is apply ourselves however we can in big and small ways to bringing about a better future. The take home message for everyone is about the enormous power of social movements. Behind every grand political solution stands a great social movement.

This particular victory is of great historic significance. The accumulated global power of the fossil fuel industry is immense, and the industry has maintained a 60-year stranglehold over Australian political parties and our parliaments. We in the Northern Rivers are part of a nested global movement fighting this great and destructive behemoth. Naomi Klein



Metgasgone celebrations in Lismore's Riverside Park. Photo: David Lowe

in her latest book *This Changes Everything* described "Blockadia" as a place with no geographical boundaries, popping up around the world wherever the humans of the world gather to fight for their collective survival against the lies and denial of the fossil fuel industry. Bentley was one of the largest and most mainstream examples of Blockadia to have ever occurred in Australia and significant even on a global scale. The example our region sets is watched and appreciated around the world.

The credit for our region's success in stopping the gas juggernaut in full flight is everybody's. Social movements create a collective vehicle that facilitates individual participation on a grand and complex scale. Our great movement was given life by every single grain of sand that contributed to the

eventual landslide. Every school student, every simmo, every morning trip to Bentley, every late night meeting, every banner you painted, every conversation you had about it, every letter, every song and every press release that was written. The social movement was able to

pool all of our collective energy and focus it to great effect.

It is always the case that when politicians are dragged kicking and screaming to surrender to a social movement they try to claim the credit. Was it really Bob Carr and not the North East Forest

Alliance who brought about the protection of most of our remaining old growth forests? Of course not. Politicians come in at the end when the movement has already changed the game. That's not to say we don't appreciate it when they do, it's certainly a relief, but let's learn the right lessons here and never again allow anyone to say "what's the point in protesting it never achieves anything?" It's possibly the only thing that ever does.

We have more to celebrate than the end of Metgasco in our region. We can celebrate the unity this campaign has brought to our region. The inclusive relationships between farmers, environmentalists and the Indigenous people of our region showed that ultimately, we all care for this country. These are the enduring things, that we need to carry forward. Our unity, our regional empowerment and our new social networks. Gasfields was only the most obvious existential threat to our region and our planet, there are many lifetimes of work left to be done.

Congratulations to you all, and thank you.



A chilly 'Dawn Service' at Bentley last year. Photo: Sue Stock

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