

Australia's largest climate protest

Rising Tide protestival blockades Newcastle coal port

by Chibo Mertineit

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: "2023 is a year of reckoning. It must be the year of game-changing climate action. "We need disruption to end the destruction. No more baby steps. No more excuses. No more greenwashing. No more bottomless greed of the fossil fuel industry and its enablers."

With this in mind, I went down to Newcastle for the four-day festival starting on Friday 24th November, the 'People's Blockade' of the world's largest coal port.

What an amazing gathering! There were people from Cairns, WA, over a hundred from Adelaide, Melbourne etc and quite a few flood victims from the Northern Rivers.

This was a hands-on, volunteer-organised festival with great workshops from kayak training, media training to 'non-violent direct-action training' on Friday. When I checked in for my volunteer shift and armband, I heard that the organisers had negotiations with the police for months and just three days ago the police agreed to the 30-hour blockade of the harbour from 10am on Saturday 'til 4pm on Sunday.

The protestival was set up in a little park right next to Horseshoe Beach in Mulloobinba/Newcastle. There was a growing tent village and a lot of people slept in their campervans, station wagons or just in their cars.

Good to see so many young

people, that's under 40 for me, but I was so impressed by the amount of older folks, that's over 60 for me, travelling a long way and doing it for their grandchildren and great grandchildren, making a stand, as they told me. Some people had never before been to a political rally, demonstration or action.

On Saturday morning we heard some great speeches, and the last speaker was Bob Brown who said that this movement, Rising Tide, was being compared to the Franklin campaign 40 years ago.

"They had all political parties, the newspapers and all other media against them, but they won because of committed people from all around Australia," he said.

"And that is what I see here now. We will stop the ships because you are here. I believe this will be bigger than the Franklin. Good to see so many young people between all the grey-haired ones. The young people are on the move like in the sixties. Don't get depressed, get active!"

To the sound of Midnight Oil, the crowd went to their kayaks and took to the water. There were so many people on the water and on the beach, what a beautiful energy.

There were people organising shifts for the night, because they wanted to have around 50 people always on the water. Some were organising shifts to have people there to feed the night paddlers.

It was an amazing atmosphere; like Bob said a few times in his speech, we are on the move.

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Valerie Thompson and MJ Johnston in kayaks prior to their arrest. Photo: Chels Hood Withey



Photo courtesy Rising Tide



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