

## **Bentley Blockade update 21 May 2014 by Sledge, President, Northern Rivers Guardians**

Yesterday at dawn about 900 peaceful protectors gathered at Gate A, the entry to the land at Bentley where drilling for gas was proposed. While touted by the industry as "only an exploration well" the community was not fooled. We understood this could be the start of a very nasty process to turn the pastoral valley west of Lismore into a sick and sorry place.

As the sun touched the mists, music and singing arose from a throng which felt grateful for the way the community had come together to resist an invasive industry which would have changed the area forever...and not for the better!

The crowd contemplated a very different scenario: one week ago the NSW Police were preparing to assemble a special force of about 900 officers with dogs, motorbikes, horses, helicopters, guns, tasers, pepper spray and water cannon to enforce the "right" of Metgasco to enter the land and to commence drilling a 2000 metre deep hole thru layers of rock and pierce aquifers whose water we rely on for a sustainable future. When crime becomes the law, resistance becomes duty. This was to be the day when an estimated 10,000 residents would come out to demonstrate their support for a gasfield-free Northern Rivers. This was looking like Armageddon, and many were concerned that casualties would result in deep divisions between the local population and the police and their political masters. Arrests were inevitable given the depth of feeling in the community.

The Northern Rivers has a long history of defending the environment. Our continuous campaign finally convinced Sydney that the 90% of NR residents who oppose gas development here have not given Metgasco a "social licence" to proceed.

What changed? Master wordsmith Aiden Ricketts told the crowd it was no one thing, but all taken together: like a balance scale where one side is loaded with power and political privilege and the other has a bucket receiving support of all sorts and sizes dripping in until a tipping point is reached: suddenly last Wednesday night (14th May) the scale tipped. The NSW Minister for Resources Anthony Roberts announced that the approval for Metgasco to drill here was "suspended." It is not important which drip finally caused the change: All the drips are of equal importance. So whether you made a large contribution to the struggle or only a small one, be proud that you helped. We are all just drips!

**Bentley** has already become a byword for popular resistance to political corruption and corporate greed. The police have stood down (Operation Stapler cancelled) and the company has proclaimed that it will get lawyers into the act to force the NSW government to change its mind. Will they succeed? Anything is possible, so we need to stay vigilant and ready. Be a lert: we need more lerts!

I will go out on a limb and say, no: NSW government are not likely to allow Metgasco to drill at Bentley. I believe we are seeing the death throes of a dying dinosaur: **Meta -fiasco** is dead and just doesn't know it yet. And yet we can expect support for this small start-up, never-earned-a-dollar company from the fossil (how appropriate!) fuels industry. The industry survives by political privilege and patronage to the point of widespread corruption. It is time to take back our democracy and control of resources and look forward to a renewable energy future!

**Northern Rivers Guardians Inc** - as part of the Lock The Gate NR Alliance - has played an important role in yet again stopping a damaging development in this region. Hooray!

What is next? Many protectors are tired and will stop to catch up with their usual commitments. Others are energised to take the fight to other region. (Is this why the fossil fuels industry is so keen to challenge our victory?) Word of the Bentley reprieve has already spread around the world and is inspiring a people's revolt. Be glad.

Mining leases cover much of the Australian continent, and drilling will risk damage to the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) which underlies much of the continent. If the GAB water is polluted, life as we know it will not be possible here in future. I believe we will not let future generations down. We will join them in their unequal struggle against power and corruption. We look with compassion on those whose health has been ruined and lives shattered in SE Queensland. Be brave.

Some of the flashpoints around Australia are the Pillaga region and Laerd's Forrest, Gloucester and the Illawarra in NSW, Gippsland in Victoria, Kimberley in Western Australia and around Ulluru in the NT. There may be action required to save old growth forest near Woodenbong soon. Materials from Liberty Camp are being carefully stored and will be available when needed. When the bills are all paid I believe we will have a small kitty for seeding future projects. Those who donated money can be justly proud that you also made this possible. Thanks. Be proud.

A party is planned for Saturday night 31st May at Lismore Workers Club. Happiness is forecast for this event. Be joyous.

So ... good people, celebrate our victory, and get ready for more peaceful struggles to come.

As the song says, "We Shall Overcome." Be content.