

HOW TO: CSG FREE COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTHERN RIVERS

We want the whole Northern Rivers declared a coal seam gas (CSG), tight sands gas and unconventional gas mining free zone. We want all current licenses and or leases that allow any such activity revoked, and no such new licenses or leases granted. One of our strategies is the *CSG Free Communities* initiative.

The legal system and governments have failed us. *CSG Free Communities* is an expression of people who recognize this failure, and who know they must stand together in solidarity to fight to protect their region.

CSG Free Communities is a grass-roots participatory process whereby communities declare themselves Gasfield Free. After reaching majority decision, they present Declarations for their Gasfield Free roads to their Mayor. It's important to note that this is not a 'petition' asking for something. It's a community's declaration of intent to defend themselves from an invasive, reckless industry. The wording of the Road Declaration is:

WE PEOPLE OF ROAD

DECLARE THAT THIS ROAD IS GASFIELD FREE – PROTECTED BY THE WILL OF THE COMMUNITY

This decision was made through community consultation and engagement.

"We recognize that our best defence is by standing together. If we detect any activity by gas companies here, we will raise an alert and ask their representatives to leave. We are committed to stopping gasfield industrialization. In doing this, we protect the water, soil and air. We will protect our community from the destructive impacts of the gasfield industry."



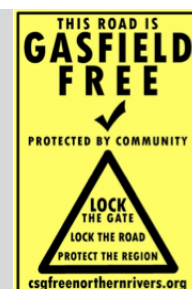
When you describe this strategy to others, take care to say that ***CSG Free Communities is a powerful political action taken by a community.*** This is well beyond 'symbolic' (don't let it get reduced to this). While it does not have formal legal force, it is an authoritative statement from a community, backed up by action. After their Declaration, the community learns about, and organizes for Non Violent Direct Action. They also write to key decision-makers to build the relentless political pressure we need to win back our region. Another *How To* guide will describe this second part of the empowerment process. Watch for this on csgfreenorthernrivers.org, which will be continually updated with resources for this strategy.

This strategy is the 4th commitment in the Northern Rivers Pledge to defend our region. The first step in getting a CSG Free Community is to go online at csgfreenorthernrivers.org to take this Pledge.

CSG Free Communities feeds into our political strategy, and for this we need some consistency. If people want to go **Gasfield Free**, please direct them to csgfreenorthernrivers.org where they can download this guide and other resources.

What's involved - in a nutshell

A community survey is done along local roads. If a majority of people wants their roads and lands CSG Free, they put up *Gasfield Free* road signs. If a whole locality does this, they can invite media to a community celebration in which they present their Road Declarations to their Mayor. At right: the box of Ewingar Road Declarations presented to the Mayor of Clarence Valley Council.



The CSG Free Community Strategy achieves several outcomes. It can

- Raise awareness of the threat in your entire community
- Empower citizens to feel they can act to protect what they love
- Send a strong signal - your community will not tolerate invasive gasfields
- Build political pressure to make the region CSG Free
- Generate media that celebrates community and attracts more people to the campaign. This runs parallel to other more confrontational media. We want the movement to be inclusive of all kinds of people. Our [YouTube video](#) works well to inspire people to get involved.
- After the survey, we organise local networks for Non Violent Direct Action, and pressure decision-makers.

The goal is the *community engagement process* - not the road sign.

It's systematic neighbour-to-neighbour communication. This is what delivers the good outcomes. The sign says '*Protected by Community*'. This means nothing unless there's a strong community to stand behind it. So no shortcuts! Please convey this to people who are enthusiastic about our Gasfield-free Road Signs. We make these available to communities *after* they've done the process, and registered their roads via the website.

How did it start?

On 25/2/12, residents The Channon saw a film, then voted to close their roads closed to CSG. 119 people voted *Yes*. One was *Not Sure*. At the meeting, we organized into road teams to survey the whole community. As they visited each house, they gave the survey flyer and a DVD showing images of a fully-blown gasfield. Outcomes were astonishing. Of 432 respondents, one said *Not Sure*, two said *No*. A whopping 429 said *YES* to household over the next 2 making their roads CSG-free (99.3%). At a separate process in Keerrong, a well-publicised public meeting made a unanimous decision to close Keerrong to CSG. Through this participatory process, 24 roads in Keerrong and The Channon were declared CSG-free by majority decision of residents.



On 14th April 2012, a moving ceremony at The Channon launched the CSG Free Community Strategy in the Northern Rivers. See [The People vs CSG. The Birth of CSG Free Communities \(final version\)](#). The process is described in Annie Kia's [speech](#) on our YouTube channel **csgfreennr**.

What we've learnt from the viral spread of this strategy

As The Channon pilot began, the strategy started replicating in neighbouring locations, and jumped to Ewingar, Kyogle and Tweed. This viral spread shows no sign of stopping. So far the survey outcomes are similar, despite the different characters of these communities (Dunoon 98.5%, Goolmangar 97%, North Lismore 93%, Ewingar 97%, etc). We only need a simple majority to declare the roads Gasfield Free.

When a public meeting is held in one locality to initiate the strategy, there's often someone from the neighbouring community, who takes the idea home with them. When you have a public meeting, identify these people, get their details, and link them to this 'How To' guide and other supports. Others feel inspired by the YouTube film, and use resources on the website to replicate it. A working group in Lismore guides people who want to do it (convened by Michael Sterling 0415621443). It is advisable that each Shire has a working group that helps citizens do this process. A few tips can make a **big difference**, and nothing beats personal contact. This '*How To*' Guide is based on what we've learnt.

The two methods

Method 1 is to simply survey *your* road, then register your Gasfield-free road on the website. **Method 2** is to progress your *whole locality* to Gasfield Free, as a 'job lot'. Our observation is that the whole-community approach is very empowering. Citizens watch the movie **together**. More people step into active roles. We have noted a surge in positive feeling as people feel they can act together, get to know neighbours, and feel part of, and proud of their community.

METHOD ONE – get one road gasfield-free

Prepare

- You'll need multiple copies of the DVD (ask you local Action Group). Download the Survey Flyer & Survey Form from csgfreenorthernrivers.org. Right click on the document → save it → then print.
- Get a stack of Lock The Gate signs (see website). The survey is an ideal time to get these on gates.
- If you chose to do the Northern Rivers Petition at the same time as the survey, download it as well.

Survey

- If it's a long road, invite some neighbours to your house to watch the DVD. Ask if they'd help you.
- Visit every house asking if they want their road/lands to be Gasfield Free (ie free of Coal Seam or Tight Sands gas mining). Explain that if the majority says YES to the survey, a Gasfield-free Road Sign will go up.
- Be methodical. If they're not home, leave your name and phone number on the Flyer and try once more to contact them. At Ewingar, they phoned absentee landowners as well.
- If someone declines to participate, or you can't locate them after trying, just note this on the survey form.
- Enter your survey results in a spreadsheet or table, including contact details if you have them. Keep this in a safe place for privacy reasons. Please don't use these contact details for conveying campaign information other than for **Lock The Gate Northern Rivers**. It's important to remain respectful of people's privacy if they don't want to get emails, and also to respect that this campaign is about gas mining.

If doing the Northern Rivers Petition as well

Explain the Petition asks the NSW Government to revoke mining licenses & make the whole Northern Rivers Free of Coal Seam and Tight Sands gas mining. Petitions need signatures. This is different from our survey.

Register your road on the website

- If the majority want a Gasfield Free road, register the road on the website. To do this, you'll first need to take the Northern Rivers Pledge. Now you can buy your Gasfield Free Road Signs (see website).
- Tell your story in your local newsletters. Send a photo to your local action group.

Organise a phone tree for gas alerts, and an email group for other information

There will be another How To Guide on how to create a local networks for Non Violent Direct Action. Watch our website for when this becomes available. If you create a Phone Tree for your road, you become the Gas Warden. You are able to raise alerts, provide information about events. It's important not to overdo information, and to always let people know they can **opt out** of the phone tree and email group. Respectful communication is important.



METHOD TWO - progress your whole community to Gasfield Free

This can end up with a more engaged community, by inviting people to become **active**. So don't do it all yourself, otherwise that won't happen! Before starting to progress your whole community, please phone Annie Kia 02 66 886-260; if in Tweed call Michael McNamara 0418 195 258.

1 -ENGAGE LOCALS - ask local people who care about this issue to help plan the community meeting. Form a working group. Publicity should be non-Political and appeal to different kinds of people. Remember, you don't know what the community wants until they state their opinion.

2 - PREPARATION

Someone has to coordinate this effort in your locality. Work out which roads you're targeting. More than 20 roads?...you may be biting off too much territory. If you're new to this, a smaller number is ideal.

- Book hall - afternoons work well on weekends.
- Publicise meeting via school newsletters, local papers, posters
- Well placed, hand written road signs alert people– cheap & effective
- Hand-written, prominent signs at shops
- Someone takes charge of afternoon tea to raise money...a separate role
- Someone takes charge of donations for Road Signs. Aim for \$200.
- Arrange data projector, screen, and speakers that work with the system (essential - movie depends on sound for impact, a laptop will not have enough sound to fill a hall).
- Start gathering resources (Lock The Gate signs, DVDs, download resources from website)
- Your team arrives 1 hour prior to the meeting to get everything working.
- Use the Meeting Plan from our website to guide your preparation.



3 - PUBLIC MEETING. By the end of the meeting, you aim to have:

1. **Decision** to close the roads
2. **A team for each road, with a coordinator**, their names and contact details.
3. **Next meeting organized** for surveyors to get their kit
4. **A fund to cover costs** of flyers, DVD duplication, Road Signs (\$10 each)

Keep an action focus, otherwise people will think it's a discussion group and want to talk forever about CSG, instead of getting active. This is about engaging people. We've learnt this works:

- Start with afternoon tea to raise money. It soaks up time when people arrive late.
- Show the 49min *CSG Free Northern Rivers*. This film builds community as people watch it together.
- Tell them how other communities have gone Gasfield Free. Show the road sign. Explain you'll be putting a proposal that this community goes Gasfield Free, and they can raise their hand for YES, NO, or NOT SURE. Each response is OK.
- Explain what going Gasfield Free means. Answer a few questions about legal issues etc, but don't get bogged down in endless discussion.
- Map the room: 'How many from x road?' 'How many from y road?' Note if someone's from a neighbouring community. If so, get their details later, so you can link them to guidance on how to do this.
- Put the proposition that they close their roads to Coal Seam or Tight Sands gas mining. Tell them that all responses are OK. Count number Yes, No, Not Sure. Photograph for Facebook.
- If a strong YES response, say: "This is a strong response. Not everyone is here. We need to give everyone a chance to have their say through the survey"
- Get them in Road Groups - the **most important** step -see the meeting plan for how to do this.
- Ask them to report back, collect contact details of Road Coordinators. Tell them time/place of next meeting for Road Coordinators to kick the whole thing off).
- Now inspire them by showing the 5 minute film from The Channon, so they feel they can make a difference.

3 – FOLLOW-UP MEETING FOR ROAD SURVEYORS (soon after the public meeting)

This is when your road coordinators and other helpers get their 'kit'. Clarify the survey: a row for every new person. If long roads, work out how far along they're going. Give them their survey forms in a big envelope. Write on it the name of their road, date survey must be complete (in 2 weeks) + your name & contact details. If you have questions about any of this, call Joanne Hunt 0266 245-014, or Kim Hall 0266 888-003

4 – DISCOVER YOUR INNER, FRIENDLY SHEEPDOG

While most Road Coordinators will leap into action, a little bit of 'rounding up' may be needed. Create an email group for your Road Coordinators. Remind them of the deadline. While you may extend this for a week, you don't want it dragging on unfinished. Your job is to bring closure to the process.

The following seems to work as a method for a locality. Ask them to:

- Create a spreadsheet of their results, including names and contact details. They should keep this, and use it to create their own email group of everyone on their road who said YES.
- Send you their spreadsheet. You'll need to back-up all data safely, in case your computer goes down.
- Give you their envelope of survey forms. You keep this in a safe place.
- If someone is really struggling to finish a road, remind them there's a deadline.

5 – REGISTER THE ROADS, THEN CELEBRATE

Ask your Road Coordinators to register their Gasfield Free road in the website. With locals, plan your next important step – presenting your Road Declarations to your Mayor, and getting some publicity!

- Right-click on the template for the Road Declaration, save it, then print a Road Declaration for each road. A4 card that is 210 gsm thickness works well. They need to look good because you'll ask your Mayor to keep these in their mayoral office.
- If you are organizing an event or publicity, please let us know (Annie Kia 02 66 886-260)



6 – ORGANISE FOR FURTHER ACTION

Being active and engaged is better than being passive. Soon we'll have a *How To* guide on organizing a local network for Non Violent Direct Action. If you need more information and resources to build your confidence for this kind of role there is an excellent publication available called the [Activists Handbook](#). The website will also have details of letters you can write to gain maximum impact from what you have done. Stay posted for developments on the CSG Free Community section of csgfreenorthernrivers.org.

