

Power of Country Tour

Launch - Sydney Town Hall - 5th September 2019

Speech by Julie Lyford - Chair Groundswell Gloucester

“It is an honour to be here tonight - meeting on Gadigal land. I pay my deepest respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and to the elders here tonight. I'm privileged to live on Worimi and Biripi Country, where my husband and I have raised our family.

As a past local government councillor and Mayor and now as an activist with Groundswell Gloucester, my experience has been that all levels of government consistently fail and betray our communities with regard to the fossil fuel industries. In 1995, Gloucester Coal (now Yancoal) started their '10 year boutique mine' - they are still digging coal 24 years later.

Lucas Molopo commenced exploratory CSG fracking in 2004 - blowing mud and gas out of old coal bore exploration holes as they went...a mighty bonanza they sold to AGL - who then wasted a purported \$1.2b over a decade on a hydrogeological nightmare. NSW State govt stated the AGL gas-field was urgently needed to supply 15 - 20 % of NSW needs and our protests would lead to quote 'the elderly freezing to death' unquote!

We opposed, we protested, we blockaded. We won. AGL withdrew in February 2016.

in 2009 and 2016, up reared the Rocky Hill coal mine proposal - same valley space - once again affecting the lives of 3,000 people, dividing the community and creating untold stress and anxiety. We opposed, we protested, we won.

Judge Preston, in the Land and Environment Court in February 2019, upheld the State Govt's refusal of the mine due to the huge social impacts and climate change implications. Wrong time, wrong place. The social impacts that would be wrought on Aboriginal cultural heritage featured strongly in Judge Preston's decision.

The ripple effect of the climate change aspect of this judgment is now being felt across the world.

Our little town of Gloucester is now referred to 'The Mouse That Roared' (ABC 7.30 Report Feb 2019).

Lessons learnt from these wins? You need

- Strong teams, good processes, document writers, political advocates, media skills, strong values, resilience.
- Accept help and guidance - we were assisted by 32 different groups. Parliamentarians who supported us were NSW and Australian Greens.
- Essential and crucial to our victories were Lock the Gate and NSW Environmental Defenders Office

We owe deep gratitude to the hundreds who supported, marched, donated, petitioned and were with us in spirit. Their support and advocacy helped save our valley.

We were never alone.

So what kept us going for over 15 years?

The fire of injustice in our belly, the strength in our hearts and the strategy in our heads. Veteran activist Bob Brown has stated 'don't listen to white noise - stay strong on your path'. We say - ignore industry and government criticisms and smear campaigns - instead expose their lies, the risks, political donations and lack of compliance. Document everything.

Explain to those who want this industry that you care about the long-term future for your community and country. Sustainable jobs are the future.

Exposing the Risks - we handed this document (referenced and collated by Groundswell Gloucester's team) to Department heads and politicians. We looked them in the eye and said - "We hold you personally, morally and ethically culpable for the harm you will inflict on our communities if this gas-field goes ahead in Gloucester." It's not a legal threat. It's a human response to protecting your country, communities, culture and ecosystems. No one has the right to betray that protection.

No one gets to hide behind their job, their role in Government or industry. They are people before their role - hold them to account. Continue to expose the systemic failures. Advocate for change. Knock on every door. Every conversation is vital.

We posted this document (Exposing the Risks) to the CEO and board members of AGL, investors and insurance companies. At the AGL AGMs, we turned to the shareholder audience and stated that our communities, clean water, air and environments that we relied upon were far more important than their back pockets. Peaceful protest matters.

Our advice from Groundswell Gloucester?

Be assured of the power and passion of your united voice and actions.

Stick to facts, truth is everything, media is your power, documents are your tools. Stand up to those who try to take control of your community.

- Look after each other - long term stress tests all relationships. Stay focused and united. Take time out if you need it. Take care of yourself.
- Hold them to account. Tell them they are culpable. Be flexible - and as Muhammad Ali said, "Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee" - strategy is always the key.
- Keep that fire in your belly, the strength in your heart - you can win. You have support, love and commitment from many, many people.

Thank you."

End of speech

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