

# GUIDE FOR MINING FREE COMMUNITIES

If you want to get involved in this grass-roots process, find out if someone coordinates it in your region. They can give you recent resources, forms & spreadsheets that may not be available on our website [http://www.lockthegate.org.au/mining\\_free](http://www.lockthegate.org.au/mining_free). If you don't know who is coordinating it in your region, ask us on [communities@lockthegate.org.au](mailto:communities@lockthegate.org.au).



## 1 BACKGROUND

### 1.1 How it started

The *Mining Free Communities* (MFC) initiative emerged in the Northern Rivers (NSW) as the 'Gasfield Free Communities' strategy. In February 2012, residents of The Channon saw a film, then voted to close their roads to CSG. They organized into teams to survey the community. Of 432 respondents, 99.3% said YES to mayor with Declarations for each of 24 Gasfield Free roads. This strategy launch was captured in the moving YouTube [The People vs CSG. The Birth of CSG Free Communities \(final version\)](#).

This grass-roots participatory process became necessary because the legal system and governments have failed to protect us from invasive mining. *Mining Free Communities* (MFC) is an expression of people who recognize this failure, and who know they must stand together in solidarity to protect what they love.

### 1.2 Where is it happening?

122 Gasfield Free Communities have been declared in NSW Northern Rivers. The region is ablaze with Gasfield Free Road signs, and residents are putting up signs that give the outcomes for their district, in order to 'mark their territory'. In most cases the survey question has been 'Do you want your road and lands Gasfield Free?' A current survey at Yamba asks: 'Do you want your neighbourhood Gasfield Free?' and 'Do you want your neighbourhood Coal Free?'

In the NSW northwest, this grass-roots democracy initiative is active in nearly 40 communities (< 2m hectares). The method has also been adapted for western pastoral zones with large landholdings. As the initiative spreads, solidarity grows. Like the Northern Rivers, there is an effective regional alliance.

In Gippsland, 24 communities are embracing the initiative, with an overwhelming YES response to 'Do you want to declare [your district] Gasfield Free?' The survey question is adapted for districts threatened by coal. The rapid mobilisation of Gippsland has turbo-charged a social movement, caught the attention of Melbourne media, and put enormous pressure on MPs. A regional alliance brings campaign coherence.

MFC strategy is being adapted for coal-affected districts. It is being used in the Hunter, Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Sydney's Water Catchments. Two Queensland communities have declared themselves Coal Free. In the NSW Mid North Coast it has been adapted for communities affected by gold and antimony mine expansions. It has also been adapted in parts of the UK where it was first deployed at Balcome, Sussex.

### 1.3 A note on names

Initially, the strategy and signs were called *Gasfield Free* to cover tight sands & coal seam gas. The word 'Gasfield' is ideal for CSG, tight sands and shale gas mining because all involve invasive gasfields. Bear in mind you'll need to adapt this to your circumstances, such as *Coal Free*, or *Coal & Gasfield Free Community*.



## 2 WHAT CAN MINING FREE COMMUNITIES ACHIEVE?

### 2.1 MFC in a nutshell

A community survey is done along local roads. If a majority wants their roads & lands Mining Free, they put up road signs. The community invites media to a celebration in which they present their Road Declaration scrolls to their Mayor. Then the community organises for action to protect what they love through a regional alliance, and a network of Mining Free Communities. At right – Road Declarations presented to the Clarence Valley Mayor.



### 2.1 How to describe MFC to the media

When you describe this initiative, take care to say that *Mining 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 Peaceful Direct Action. It’s important to note that a Road Declaration is not a ‘petition’ asking for something. It’s a community’s declaration of intent to defend itself from an invasive industry. In the Northern Rivers, the wording on the Road Declaration scroll 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.*

### 2.3 The Mining Free Community initiative achieves several outcomes. It can:

- Raise awareness of the threat in your entire community.
- Empower citizens to act to protect what they love
- Send a strong signal - your community will not tolerate invasive mining. Build political pressure
- Generate positive media. Celebrations attract all sections of society to the campaign.
- After going Mining Free (Stage One), the community can form a local action cell (Stage Two). Such local groups are immensely valuable in our campaign and help build an effective social movement.
- Other campaign strategies (media, political, corporate, peaceful direct action) get traction once Mining Free Communities is running. It removes the illusion of ‘social licence’ for the unwanted mining activity.
- The survey also asks people if they want to get updates from their local group and Lock The Gate. To succeed, we need to build the movement through strong local, regional and national alliances.

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

Some people are inclined to rush and miss this most important point. This process is about systematic face-to-face communication. The sign says ‘Protected by Community’, but this means nothing unless there’s a strong community to stand behind it. So no shortcuts! This neighbourly process involves conversation. Please convey this to people who are enthusiastic about Mining Free Road Signs, which should only be made available to communities *after* they’ve done the process.

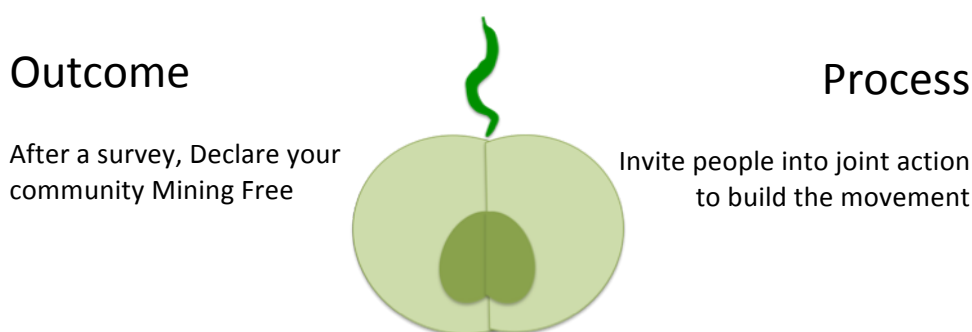


## 3 KEY LEARNING (SO FAR)

### 3.1 If you want a successful campaign, pay attention to the PROCESS

To win, we need to build a strong social movement. By now it is clear that the *way people go about* MFC makes a big difference to how engaged people are in the campaign after the Declaration. If you are anxious about the mining threat, you may have an impulse to rush the first steps, and miss establishing a Seed Group ...to do it all yourself. But while you might get a survey going, and a Declaration, you might not have an engaged community afterwards. People may not have discovered ‘the thing that they can do’, or exercised their ‘action’ muscles. As you read this Guide, pay attention to the kinds of processes that invite other people into joint action. This is the most important job for us all...to help others find *‘the thing that they can do’*.

MFC is like a seed with two sides. One side delivers **Outcomes** – it contains the means of getting a survey done, and a Declaration. The other side delivers a **Process** – a way to build a social movement from engaged communities. Grow your Mining Free Community with attention to both sides of the seed.



### 3.2 Adopt Action Learning to get more out of this strategy

To get the best outcomes, adopt an Action Learning approach in a Working Group. Working groups are like social learning laboratories. The MFC strategy was developed this way. Each time we deployed it, we asked ‘*What did we learn? How can we adjust this?*’ When MFC is expanding well, this Action Learning loop is alive and well. When it stalls, or becomes ineffective, the learning loop tends to be absent. Form a working group in which you can learn together, and provide guidance to new communities. If you want to know more about how to do this see the [Tip Sheet on Action Learning](#), or contact [communities@lockthegate.org.au](mailto:communities@lockthegate.org.au).

### 3.2 Consistency is helpful to your campaign

To add value to your campaign, aim for consistency as the initiative spreads. Coherence can be achieved by:

- Getting training in your region, so a number of people understand the strategy.
- A MFC Working Group can ‘midwife’ new Mining Free Communities, share learning and bring cohesion.
- Someone in a coordination role could provide linkage, give people the survey form & spreadsheet template, and collect data in a consistent way.
- Direct interested people to [Mining Free Communities](#) to download this guide.

To build a social movement we need strong local groups PLUS a strong national alliance. Encourage people to join [Lock The Gate Alliance](#). LTG can complement local groups via:

- Rapid analysis of proposed laws & policies
- Coordinated Calls to Action to pressure politicians
- Strong media & social media reach
- Production of [high quality films](#)
- Provision of training in MFC, mentoring & speakers for road trips in new regions
- Production of [Fact sheets](#) & other resources
- LTG Regional Coordinators can amplify the impact of local groups

## 4 HOT TIPS ON HOW TO DO IT

When people do this with their whole community (rather than just an individual road) there is much more community engagement. Citizens watch the movie **together**. More people step into active roles. We've 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.

The skill of movement building is to invite people to become **active**. So don't do it all yourself, otherwise that won't happen!



### 4.1 CONSULT WITH THE PERSON WHO COORDINATES THIS STRATEGY IN YOUR REGION

They will give you the survey form and excel spreadsheet template for collecting data. Please use this template. If there is not yet a person who coordinates this in your region, email [communities@lockthegate.org.au](mailto:communities@lockthegate.org.au)

### 4.2 FORM A SEED GROUP

Gather together some local people who care about this issue, to help organise a community meeting. One way to find concerned people is to look for LTG signs in your locality and invite those people to meet in your home.

### 4.3 DECIDE ON SCALE OF YOUR PROJECT

This strategy works well in rural areas. Start small. Work out which roads you're targeting. Small projects can be surveyed quickly, then Declared. This builds momentum and other communities will copy you. The strategy is more likely to go viral in your region if you start with small chunks.

### 4.3 SHARE PREPARATION TASKS IN THE SEED GROUP

One or two people will need to coordinate the project, but everyone can help with:

- Booking the hall. If there isn't a hall, a spacious farm shed would do (if it can be darkened for the film)
- Promote the MFC Community Meeting in a way that gets *local people* along. This is **not** a general information meeting ... while it's good to have a few from neighbouring districts, the meeting won't work if it's too full of people from other places. Publicity should be reasonably neutral and appeal to different kinds of people. Remember, you don't know what the community wants until they state their opinion in the public meeting. Simple hand written road signs (*Gasfields Here?*) are effective & cheap, along with local posters and newsletters.
- Someone takes charge of afternoon tea to raise money...a separate role
- Someone takes charge of hustling for donations to cover all expenses for the project
- Arrange data projector, screen, and powered speakers (essential as the movie impact depends on sound)
- Gather survey resources (DVDs, survey flyer, survey forms, survey tip sheets, spreadsheets, LTG signs)
- Your team arrives 1 hour prior to the meeting to get everything working. This is a workshop-type meeting so have the room set up with the names of the roads you are targeting on the walls.
- As your local coordinator for a Meeting Plan, or go to the [Gasfield Free Northern Rivers](http://Gasfield Free Northern Rivers) site for this & other resources. To end up with everyone's contact details, and survey teams, this meeting needs planning.



Simple signs on local roads attract your neighbours. Locally-targeted promotion ensures the meeting has that 'local feeling'. Right photo shows meeting of Jiggi valley residents.



#### 4.4 THE COMMUNITY MEETING

This is not a general information meeting, so don't fill it with speakers. It's a special kind of meeting to see if people want to get a MFC community survey underway. Communicate the purpose, otherwise people will think it's a discussion group and want to talk forever about mining, instead of getting active. By the end of the meeting, you aim to have:

1. **A decision** to go Mining Free, and to initiate the survey
2. **A team for each road, with a coordinator**, their names and contact details.
3. **Next meeting organized** for surveyors to get their survey kit
4. **A fund to cover costs** of flyers, DVD duplication, Road Signs

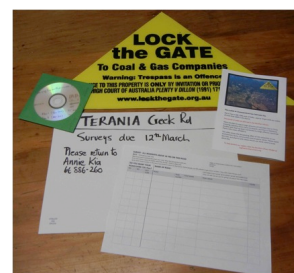
This process is all about engaging people. Your job is to draw people into active roles.

- Start with afternoon tea to raise money. It soaks up time when people arrive late.
- Show one of the [LTG films](#) on gasfields or coal. This builds community as people watch it together.
- Tell them how other communities have gone Mining Free. Explain you'll be putting a proposal that this community goes Mining Free (or Gasfield Free), and they can raise their hand for YES, NO, or NOT SURE.
- Explain what going Mining Free means. Answer a few questions but don't get bogged down in discussion.
- Map the room: 'How many from x road?' 'How many from y road?' Note if someone's from a neighbouring district. If so, get their details, so you can link them to guidance on how to do this.
- Put the proposition: "Do you want your neighbourhood Gasfield Free?" or "Do you want your neighbourhood Coal Free?" You may have to put both propositions. Tell them that all responses are OK. Count number Yes, No, Not Sure.
- If a strong YES response, say: "This is a strong response. But not everyone is here. Other communities have declared themselves Gasfield Free after doing a survey. We could do the same here. Are you willing to help with doing this?" – note how many people said they would be willing to help.
- Get them into Road Groups - the most important step - see the meeting plan for how to do this.
- Ask them to report back. Collect the contact details of Road Coordinators.
- Ask for a show of hands for "Are you willing to help make this happen?" then invite them all to the follow-up meeting to get their survey kit.
- You may want to inspire them by showing the 5min film from [The Channon launch](#), (it's on the LTG DVD). It's important that people feel they can make a difference.

#### 4.5 FOLLOW-UP MEETING FOR EVERYONE HELPING DO THE SURVEY

This should happen within days. It's a short, practical meeting to get the survey underway, but it can also serve to bring the community together.

- Sort out who is doing which roads, or section of roads.
- Walk them through the survey form so everyone is clear how to use it - a new row for each person. Ask them to read the question to people each time (mistakes can happen if surveyors do not read the question).
- Walk them through the survey Tip Sheet and discuss any questions they have about the survey process
- Walk them through a Q & A sheet on the proposed mining, if you have this.
- Provide a large envelope with the name of each road written bold. This is for completed survey forms.
- Set a survey deadline of 4 weeks (important to aim for early closure). Write this date on the survey collection envelopes, along with the name and phone numbers of those coordinating.
- Give your road coordinators and all helpers their Kit: printed survey forms, flyer, DVDs, survey tip sheet.
- Provide them with LTG signs to sell to people who want them. The survey is an ideal time to get these up.
- Ask if there is a reliable person/s to enter data into the excel spreadsheet. This job might suit someone.
- Explain that it's important to ask the question 'Do you want to receive updates from your local group & Lock The Gate?'. To win, we need strong local groups **plus** a strong national movement. We need to be connected, hence we need contact details of those who want updates.



#### 4.6 DISCOVER YOUR INNER, FRIENDLY SHEEPDOG

A bit of 'rounding up' may be needed. Create an email group for your Road Coordinators. Remind them of the deadline. Your job is to bring closure. It's helpful to gather everyone together to discuss progress, to fill gaps in the survey team, and to discuss how it's going. It's worth checking how they are going with asking the survey question, and the question 'Do you want updates....?' Find out if they writing in contact details of those who want updates. If there are problems – best to find out early on in the process.

#### 4.7 COLLATE THE DATA

Collate data for your district using the spreadsheet template that matches your survey question. This will automatically add up and calculate percentages. Keep a copy for your local records. Send your completed spreadsheet to your Mining Free Communities coordinator (if there is one), or make contact with [communities@lockthegate.org.au](mailto:communities@lockthegate.org.au). Keep hard copies in a safe place.

#### 4.8 PUT UP A SIGN WITH YOUR OUTCOMES, THEN CELEBRATE

Put up your survey outcomes on your main road/s. It's important to leave this up for every passing politician, media person, shareholder, and mining industry representative to see. Then erect your Mining Free road signs. Organise to present your Road Declarations to your Mayor, and get publicity. Print a Road Declaration scroll for each road (A4 card of 210 gsm thickness works well). Ask your Mayor to keep these in their mayoral office.



*After your Declaration, it's time to focus on building a campaign through a network of engaged Action Groups and Mining Free Communities.*

*The next section gets you started on this important process.*

*Once again, it's all about inviting people into joint action.*

## 5 NURTURE YOUR ACTIVE, MINING FREE COMMUNITY

Congratulations! You've Declared your community Mining Free via grass roots democracy. Your neighbours now talk about the mining threat. Many gates now bear the *Lock The Gate* triangle. You've entered survey data in the spreadsheet template and sent it to your regional Lock The Gate coordinator. You've presented your mayor with Declaration scrolls for your Mining Free roads.

But this will not be enough to save us from irresponsible mining. We're up against corporations that use wealth and connections to influence politicians. Governments of all stripes have shown they prioritise these companies above the need to preserve our water, farmlands, communities and ecology. This is a distortion of our democracy. History shows that non-violent social movements can win when citizens get involved in a big collective effort. Eventually, the pressure on government becomes irresistible. Gandhi and Martin Luther King taught how to grow nonviolent social movements for a fair go. This is how women got the vote, and how civil rights were won in the US. It's how the Franklin River was saved.

To win our struggle, we need many, many local groups. This is when we go beyond Declaring ourselves Mining Free, and form action groups. This section is about how to foster a group in your newly-hatched Mining Free Community. Remember, even a small group is a valuable starting point. Such groups are rewarding because they are supportive, and they're local.

### TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE STAGE TWO COMMUNITY

After launching your community as Mining Free, call a meeting in your home or pub. Make sure these meetings are satisfying. See Tip Sheet 2: [Healthy Action Groups](#). Avoid too much bureaucracy, formality is important in a soccer club, but can stifle action when you're building a social movement. We need to be nimble and responsive.

After launching as Gasfield Free, The Channon group started meeting every second Monday between 5-6pm. Permanent signs on roads convey this info. They never go overtime! The group attracts 7-12 people.

If months have elapsed after your community's launch, you'll need to re-gather people and interest. You could promote a public meeting where speakers talk about the mining threat. Remember all public meetings should end with a positive focus on the power of social movements, and propose a next step.

After Goolmangar and Coffee Camp declared themselves Gasfield Free, months elapsed without local action. Collaborating with nearby communities of Jiggi and Rock valleys, they organised a well-attended information night in the local hall. At the end of this, locals were invited to follow-up action meeting in each of these localities. It got momentum going again.

Create resilient systems by having:

- Two convenors for your group
- Both keep copies of the electronic spreadsheet

Both convenors of The Channon group keep the spreadsheet, in case one becomes unavailable.

Create an email group of those people surveyed who said they wanted updates. Having built up all the local contacts, don't let them drift off.

The neighbouring communities of Dorroughby, Rosebank and Whian Whian cooperate closely. They've shared their email contacts and can send a single update to people in their district.

Mark your territory with signs that tell passers-by your survey outcomes. It's important that any shareholders, politicians, media people or farmers tempted by access agreements see the strength of resistance. It is especially important to have outcome signs on thoroughfare roads, so that people visiting from cities wake up to the strength of social movement.





<p>Send pressure letters to every MP in your state, telling them about your survey and your Declaration. Make sure a letter comes from each road, with a photo of locals with their Mining Free road signs. This is to show you are ordinary people, not 'extremists' (initially, the government will try to discount you by calling you names).</p>	<div> </div> <p>People from Wallace Rd sent a hard copy to the Premier &amp; CC e-copies to every NSW MP. Embedded in the text of the letter was a photo showing locals with the road sign.</p>
<p>Find out what people in your group want to do...we all have different skills. It's important that everyone finds <i>the thing that they can do</i>. It may be selling cakes and bumper stickers. It could be having a regular stall in town at which you have the LTG Fair Go petition, and collecting contact details of people who want updates. It could be writing 3 letters per month, every month.</p>	<p>MFC groups are fantastic because they recruit people for jobs that need doing for the regional campaign. A call can go out to the Coordinator of a MF Community and they find the people for the jobs, such as letterboxing or making banners. This works much better than impersonal emails. It's satisfying because everyone finds <i>the thing that they can do</i>.</p>
<p>Organise training so your Peaceful Direct Action is skilful and effective. It's important for people to understand nonviolence, and the role of blockades in a peaceful social movement.</p> <p>Organise a phone tree. Don't try to make it perfect...just get the most active people in a phone tree so you can raise action quickly if needed.</p>	<p>86% of people in Dyraaba &amp; Doubtful Creek said they wanted their road and lands Gasfield Free. Then they organised a Workshop on Peaceful Direct Action. Because a blockade was going to be necessary, this was followed up with another training. Local farmers were empowered and were able to collaborate well with Indigenous and other local groups in a very successful blockade at Doubtful Creek.</p>
<p>For Peaceful Direct Action, practice role-plays in your group in a safe experimental context. Learning together will build confidence so you can help others during protests.</p> <p>Share with others how to do role-plays.</p>	<div> </div>
<p>Ensure your free local newspaper has stories that convey new and useful information about the mining threat.</p>	<p>These local newspapers are always looking for stories. Supply them.</p>
<p>Link up with other groups until you have a network of local groups in a regional alliance. By collaborating we are smarter, and more resilient. A dense network of action groups is harder to beat. Communities can then come to each other's aid in mutual assistance. Eventually this builds an incredibly strong social movement.</p>	<p>As the number of Mining Free Communities grows in your region, it becomes clear that the miners do not have a social licence. The way you frame your media now shifts. A drilling rig that enters a Mining Free Community is clearly invading an unwilling community.</p>
<p>Encourage people to join <a href="http://lockthegate.org.au">Lock The Gate Alliance</a>. We need a strong national movement to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do rapid analysis of proposed laws &amp; policies</li> <li>▪ Coordinate Calls to Action to pressure politicians</li> <li>▪ Strong media and social media reach</li> <li>▪ Produce <a href="#">high quality films</a></li> <li>▪ Provide training in MFC, mentoring &amp; speakers for road trips in new regions</li> <li>▪ LTG Regional Coordinators can amplify the impact of local groups via mentoring, media support, training.</li> <li>▪ Produce <a href="#">Fact sheets</a> &amp; other resources</li> </ul>	<div> </div>