

GUIDE FOR FRACK FREE COMMUNITIES

If you want to get involved, find out if someone is already coordinating it in your region, ask us at frackfreewa@lockthegate.org.au. They can give you recent resources, forms & spreadsheets and advice on how to do this in a way that maximises campaign power.



1 BACKGROUND

1.1 How it started

The Frack Free or *Gasfield Free Community* process emerged in the Northern Rivers NSW. In 2012, residents of The Channon saw a film, voted to close their roads to coal seam gas (CSG), then organised teams to survey every house in the district. Of 432 respondents, 99.3% said YES to going Gasfield Free. In a moving ceremony, they presented Declarations for each of their roads to their mayor - captured in [The People vs CSG: the birth of CSG Free Communities](#).

1.2 A note on names

The signs were called *Gasfield Free* to cover tight gas & coal seam gas. The word 'gasfield' is ideal for CSG, tight sands and shale gas because it conveys the invasive nature of unconventional gas. Bear in mind you'll need to adapt the name to your circumstances, such as *Coal Free*, or *Oil & Gasfield Free* or *Fracking Gasfield Free Community*. Shale and tight gas are what we have in WA, and has to be fracked, so many communities use Frack Free. We also have oil in the Mid West and Kimberley.

1.3 Where it's happening

In the Northern Rivers, 147 communities declared themselves. In most cases the survey question was *Do you want your neighbourhood Gasfield Free?* The region was ablaze with Gasfield Free road signs, and signs that gave the survey outcomes for each district - to 'mark their territory'. The engagement process contributed to mass-movement dynamics, and the region achieved victory after the historic Bentley Blockade. It spread from there. In Victoria, the state campaign skillfully leveraged community power from 75 Gasfield Free communities to achieve a permanent ban on unconventional gas development – a huge victory for grassroots campaigning.

Communities around Australia have adapted the process to their context in other parts of NSW, QLD, SA, WA and Tasmania. The Northern Territory also now has a Fracking Gasfield Free community, Borroloola. In WA, we now have 27 Gasfield or Frack Free communities. Here is a [video of one of the most recent declaration events in 2020, Woodbridge in the Shire of Gingin](#).

This grass-roots participatory process became necessary because governments failed to protect us from invasive gas mining. It's an expression of people who know they must stand together to protect what they love.

Around Australia, over 450 communities have declared themselves Frack Free, Gasfield Free or Coal Free after comprehensive door-to-door surveys.



2 WHAT CAN THE FRACK FREE COMMUNITY PROCESS ACHIEVE?

2.1 Frack Free Community process in a nutshell

A community survey is done along local roads. If a majority wants their roads & lands Frack Free or Gasfield Free, they put up road signs including at entrances to the community. The community invites media to a celebration in which they present their Road Declaration scrolls to their Shire President. Then the community organises to protect what they love through a network of Action Groups and a regional alliance. The permanent road signs on the outskirts of the community help build momentum in the region, and show passing gas company representatives and politicians that locals are serious.



2.2 Outcomes of Frack Free Community process

Frack Free Communities is a community strategy. All other strategies get better traction when there is strong community engagement. Frack Free Community process does many things at once. It:

- Raises awareness of the threat at every house, engaging people of every political affiliation.
- Empowers citizens to act, to protect what they love.
- Generates a sense of hope and defiance. This is important to counter resignation and withdrawal.
- Invites people into the movement – the celebrations attract all sections of society to the campaign.
- Encourages self-organised groups. Local groups get to practice doing their own media and organising.
- After declaring themselves, the community can form an action group to continue working together regionally.
- Other campaign strategies (media, political, corporate, peaceful direct action) get traction once Frack Free Communities is running.
- It demonstrates that there is no social licence. If companies bring fracking gas rigs into Frack Free communities, the frame becomes ‘they are invading an unwilling community’.
- 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.

2.3 How to describe Frack Free Communities to neighbours and the media

When you describe this initiative, take care to say that *Frack Free Community process* 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 what else they can do to protect their community, for example 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.

2.3 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 Frack Free Road Signs, which should only be made available *after* they’ve done the process.



3 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. 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!



3.1 FORM A SEED GROUP & CONSULT WITH A LOCAL COORDINATOR

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.

A local coordinator 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 frackfreewa@lockthegate.org.au

3.2 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.

Decide if you want to have a local Community Info meeting to kick things off, or your seed group is big enough to start surveying. If you'd like to have a Community info night with a short film, your local coordinator can help make this happen.



3.3 MEETING FOR SURVEY TRAINING

This should happen within days of the community meeting (if having one). It's a short, practical meeting to get the survey underway, but it can also serve to bring the community together. It can happen at someone's house, or in a hall.

Your local coordinator can help you with the following:

- Sort out who is doing which roads, or section of roads.
- Walk everyone through the survey form so everyone is clear how to use it - a new row for each person. Ask everyone to read the question to people each time (mistakes can happen if surveyors do not read the question).
- Walk everyone through the survey Tip Sheet and discuss any questions they have about the survey process
- Work through a Q & A sheet on the proposed gas exploration or field in the area.
- 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.

3.4 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. Ask them how they're going with asking the survey question, and the second question 'Do you want updates...?' Find out if they are writing in contact details of those who want updates. If there are problems – best to find out early on in the process.

3.5 COLLATE THE DATA

Collate data for your locality/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 local coordinator (if there is one), or make contact with frackfreewa@lockthegate.org.au. Remember that the surveys contain private information such as names and addresses, which should never be made public. They must be kept in a safe place.

3.6 PUT UP A SIGN WITH YOUR OUTCOMES, THEN CELEBRATE

Publicise your survey outcomes on your main roads. It's important to leave this up for every passing politician, media person, shareholder, and gas industry representative to see. Then erect your Fracking Gasfield Free road signs. Organise to present your Road Declarations to your Shire President and local MP, and get publicity. Print a Road Declaration scroll for each road (A4 card of 210 gsm thickness works well). Ask your Shire President to keep these in their mayoral office. Your regional coordinator can help with this event, to make it big! We have a separate guide for this phase.



4 NURTURE YOUR ACTIVE, FRACK FREE COMMUNITY

Congratulations! You've Declared your community Frack Free via grassroots democracy. Your neighbours now talk about the fracking gasfield threat. Many gates now bear the *Lock The Gate or No Fracking* triangle. You've entered survey data in the spreadsheet template and sent it to your regional Lock The Gate coordinator. You've presented your Shire President, councillors and local MPs with Declaration scrolls for your Frack Free roads.

But this will not be enough to save us from irresponsible fracking gasfields. We're up against petroleum corporations that use wealth and connections to control policy. Governments of all stripes have shown they prioritise these companies above our water, farmlands and communities. This is a distortion of our democracy. History shows that 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 state of Victoria and the Northern Rivers region of NSW were saved from invasive unconventional gasfields.

To win our struggle, we need many, many local groups. This is when we go beyond Declaring ourselves Frack Free, and form action groups. Remember, even a small group is a valuable starting point. Such groups are rewarding because they are supportive, and they're local. Together, regional alliances and state alliances come up with strategies to ban fracking regionally and state-wide. Your local coordinator can help again with this next phase and link you up with our networks.

