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Rally a great display of direct democracy

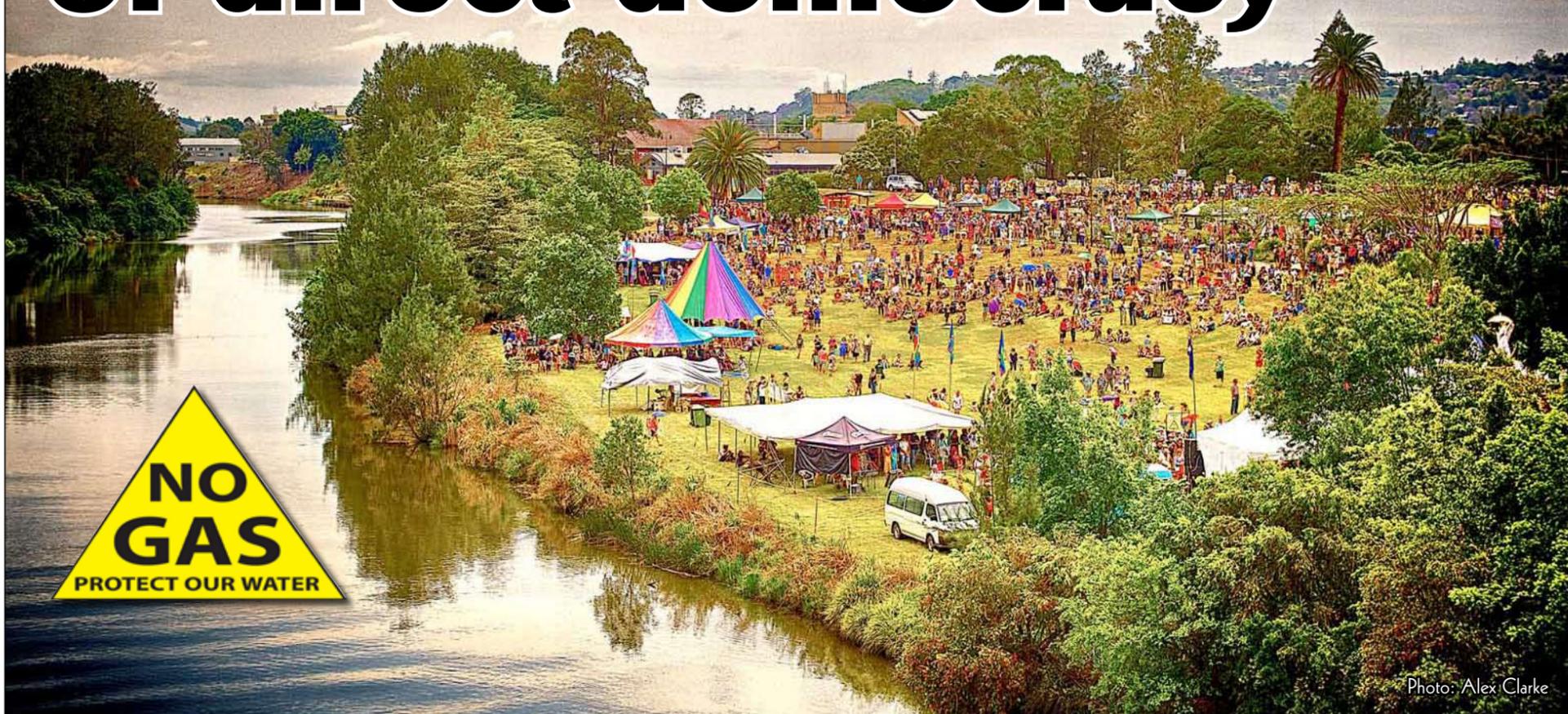


Photo: Alex Clarke

by Aidan Ricketts

The Northern Rivers regional community came out in force once again on Saturday 1st November to assert our determination to remain a gasfield-free region.

Estimates of the crowd varied, but judging by the way the march filled the city centre, the crowd was at least 8000 – more than the 7000 who marched in 2012 when the prospect of impending gasfields first galvanised our remarkable region into action. That's one seventh of the population of Lismore. If that level of engagement occurred in Sydney it would see a march of 642,000 people, contemplate that for a moment.

As the head of the march completed a full circle of two blocks of the city centre, the marchers at the front had to pause to allow

the tail of the crowd to pass by. There were very few bystanders left on the footpaths, and those who were, watched patiently or offered support to the marchers.

In true Northern Rivers style however, it was very much more than your standard march and rally. The purpose of the day was to declare the entire region (the catchments of the Clarence, Richmond/Wilsons and Tweed rivers and everything in between) 'Gasfield-free: Protected by Community'.

What is so powerful about that declaration is the way it demonstrates a community that is prepared to grasp its own future with both hands, have a vision and enforce that vision regardless of the dodgy deals that governments and corporations concoct for us.

Too often people remain passive in the face of corruption and destructive policies,

and go cap-in-hand to politicians begging for small concessions. We know this doesn't work when there are big corporate dollars at play, and there are times when a community is faced with a choice to step up to its place in history and make the change we want to see in the world. Our region has stepped up once again. At Bentley we stared down the threat of overwhelming state force, and on 1st November we nailed our manifesto to the doors of the building, metaphorically.

The idea of the Northern Rivers as a gasfield-free region has grown from a slogan into a movement, from a movement into a mass movement, and from a mass movement into a realistic political claim on behalf of the region. Already we have the support of between 85% and 95% of the community, based on a range of consistent data (including

the Lismore Poll, SCU research in the Page electorate, the results of surveys in over 140 gasfield-free communities). Local government across the region is supportive, and now even the State Labor opposition has agreed to protect the region (including Clarence) if they form government next year.

Clearly we cannot wait for politicians to lead us, we must lead them, and so at the rally four huge signs were officially launched and dispatched to the four arterial gateway roads into our beautiful region to welcome people to our gasfield free region. We have drawn a line in the sand for the government. Of course we know it's not all about the Northern Rivers, but if one community can resist the corporate state, then others can too, and we do our best by creating an inspiring example for others.

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