



HOW WE STOPPED A QUARRY

We had the numbers.

Having a large vocal community support base of swinging voters is THE key to ultimate success. Nothing else comes close. Quarry companies will use their money and lobbying influence but we were perceived to have the numbers to swing the vote and as a result our group had a better chance to win the battle.

Firstly, we demanded to know if our local politician (council, state and federal) was on our side. At every opportunity (especially public meetings) we made politicians openly commit their support for our cause. If they wavered, or continued to be ambivalent, we announced with as much fanfare as possible why we did not support them, and we made everyone aware that our group only supported a party that supported us. Even when we were sure of their support we still entered a dialogue with opposition representatives - we gained some great ideas from them.

Once our local member(s) openly supported us we asked for their advice and possible wording when marketing to media. If they are truly on our side we figured that they would give us excellent political advice but we did also chose to ignore their advice sometimes. BUT, we never EVER, trusted them completely - ie: we continued to question everything. We know that politicians are keen to know what we were planning and they desperately want to know how our actions would impact on them personally.

The closer we got to election time the hotter our issue became. Nothing focusses a politician best than an up and coming election.

We were organised and planned strategically at all times.

It was vital that our group quickly developed a strategic plan of attack. This task was left to "strategic think tank" of 2 skilled persons who were very capable of an unemotional but robust exchange of ideas. We expected the strategic plan to change regularly as new information was incorporated. Under no circumstances did we allow any internal discussions to be publicly available - just the key/core outcomes.

Our group leader ensured that committee members were elected to the committee because each possessed a particular skill. Each were then given a particular responsibility or a specific issue to tackle and it was made clear that each know they are responsible for an action plan (working with their own group), the progress of which was reported back to the committee regularly. Our sub committees comprised such areas as - strategic planning, legal, environmental, funding, marketing, events, web site. The environment portfolio was then broken down into sub groups tackling things like dust, noise, flora and fauna, traffic, legal responsibilities, water quality, etc.

We ensured that we had a designated spokesman who was very articulate, unemotional and able to succinctly get our key points across. This was THE person who was responsible for all media and public announcements. We knew that a succinct strategic facts document summarising all the issues (and our countering arguments) was

paramount because it showed everyone was singing from the same song sheet. We knew that without a strategic summarising document the linkages between issues can become very disjointed and ultimately confusing to the public. Because this document went through many changes we keep tight version control and let members know where to go to obtain the latest version (usually the web site).

We ensured that a secretary had control over a central repository of notes, reports, papers, chronicles, records, agreements, certificates and all relevant documents so that they could be easily accessed and quickly passed on in communications (usually digital).

We limited our legal liability.

We set up under a not-for-profit public entity which helped protect members from legal liability - particularly important when fighting against a large quarry corporation. The charter of our organisation dictated how we operated - we used a sample charter and made changes to suit. We also make sure we had a spokesman (and media person) who understood the legal liability and how, when and what, to make public. We were meticulous to ensure that membership records were kept up to date at all times and formal meeting procedure were followed. Large corporations have skilled people whose job it is to gather all sorts of information about you and will use this when appropriate for them. We kept records of conversations and filed them away strategically because we expect to use them in the future. We also were aware that sometimes these notes could be requested and used against us.

We had “real” science supporting us.

We proactively engaged and commissioned experts to write reports on each of the issues. We did not wait for the quarry company or the government to release their reports - we beat them at their own game. We kept sending all our reports to the government showing alternative views. Skilled reports by legal, regional planning, ecological, water, dust monitoring, blast and sound, traffic, visual amenity, integrated planning act and needs analysis experts, added weight to our arguments and would be useful later at appeal time.

The quarry application had ecological and environmental reports which needed to be analysed in minute detail - preferably by experts. We expected the quarry would try to show the best case scenario - it was your role to show the worst case scenario based on real science. We kept building our case and made our response known publicly as well as sending these to as many relevant government departments as possible. We knew we had three levels of government to pressure - each with their own rules and regulations.

Behind each skilled expert we had a dedicated band of community members who were willing to meet regularly, discuss ideas and help the experts (eg: count species, photograph plants, find research reports, speak to other experts such as university professors, etc etc).

We found endangered and rare species on surrounding area and on the land in question. We contacted locals with an interest in nature who had expertise. We also contact local universities to see if there were any students/teachers looking for research ideas.

We contacted local, regional, state and federal flora and fauna related associations and let them know of our plight - most were very sympathetic, gave advice on technical matters and helped market our cause. Many were able to exert influence on our behalf at the highest level in government and at a national association level at conferences and committee meetings.

We used the Freedom of Information Act belligerently.

There is lots of information that levels of government have that is not always openly provided for you. We spent a lot of effort and time in working out what documents we needed and requested to see them - there is a cost to view some so we had to be strategic in any demands.

We built an extensive data base.

We continued to appeal to our local community for help and we, from day one, carefully planned that any data base information of people and skills was captured only once and not duplicated. A central data base of email addresses (for rapid news dissemination) is just as important as a note alongside each person about skills they possess. Some of the key people we eventually got on board were:

lawyers, environmentalists, public servants (who know government processes and/or are knowledgeable about the various government Acts or understand the SEQ regional plan etc), speech writers, web site developers, people skilled in Google searching, project managers, marketers, people willing to stand for hours outside supermarkets handing out pamphlets, retired persons willing to lend any helping hand, high profile sports or public figures, graphic designers/artists etc etc. You may need a specific person at a moments notice.

We kept building a fighting fund.

We quickly realised that the cost of fighting a quarry was high. We did not underestimate what we needed short and long term. We knew the larger the fighting fund the better - so we got in early and kept asking for funds. This is where the strategic plan came in handy. People give willingly but they, quite rightly, demanded to know how the money would be used.

One would think that opening a quarry close by is something that most people would abhor because the value of property in their local area would suffer. But like many similar situations everywhere, a small percentage of people remained amazingly complacent and there is not much we could do about that. Some argued that the "well healed community members" with "more to lose" could more afford to swell the coffers. We therefore had people in our group that willingly confronted affected householders and put pressure on them to chip in money for the cause. We soon realised that most people will show their commitment and put their hands into their pockets once they are exposed to the facts and can see the benefits of fighting the cause (ie: stop land values from declining, or less dust and trucks and mining). The committee had numerous arguments about whether it was better to extract \$10 from 10,000 people or \$1000 from 100 people.

All this meant is that our fund raising sub group worked actively on strategies. We had to work out how much money needed to be raised, when the money would be needed, the best way to raise it and how to collect it as quickly as possible. It also meant that our executive initially put up their own money to pay for first costs and trusted that others would do so at a later date which they did. Many were spurred when they found out that others had chipped in money already.

We raised a large amount of money in a very short time when the quarry company did raise a final appeal against the council's decision (with us being co-repondents in the appeal). We had, prior to the appeal, calculated what financial resources were needed for such an appeal, and our "fund generating sub committee" then quickly implemented the plan we had in place. We implemented a personal face to face strategy with landowners that were most affected and extracted funding pledges to cover the legal and other costs

we knew we had to pay for. We did not expect every landowner to offer a pledge so we had easy to read handouts that clearly outlined the issues and what the money we were seeking would be used for (mainly to pay specialists to develop arguments to support our case and to cover administration costs). We were fortunate to have a number of legal experts in our midst who were willing to give some of their time for free when the case went to appeals court. We did have a Plan B if there was a funding shortfall but on the whole people did come up with the pledge total we required. We then called in the pledges as we needed them - as invoices arrived.

We updated our information constantly.

Regular updating to our data base of people was fundamental. The feedback we received was that it helped people to feel involved. Email was the most cost effective and most rapid way to do this. A very effective way was to put up a large permanent notice board outside our local supermarket - we approached the supermarket and they were happy to offer assistance. We pinned up basic information and ALWAYS directed the reader to our web site to see more detail. Our web site always showed the latest breaking information.

We kept up our appeal to the data base to contribute ideas, photos, newspaper cuttings and videos, even songs and posters. We did get some inside information and some excellent photos for our files.

Our web site had every piece of information that had been made public during the course of our fight. It impressed viewers and it was very helpful because there were times when a copy of an old document was required and easily downloaded from the web site. We put together some videos to demonstrate more vividly the issues and objectives of the group. These videos were shown at a number of community meetings with great effect. They were also handed on on DVD to community members to show at other community events. Videos are a great resource and can easily be put together using standard laptops and home computers.

We kept supporting each other.

Fighting a quarry take a long time. Everyone started off with urgency and passion but as time went on some members of our community became jaded. We likened it to running a marathon backwards - we started off with one or two or three people and we ended up with thousands of people channelling in the same direction. There were times when we lost confidence in what we were doing. There were many setbacks yet there were also a number of high points in our fight. We did expect that some people would fall by the wayside while others maintain a reserved but positive attitude throughout. The group is made up of different types of characters and traits (some more positive while some kept pushing in a more negative way but all were working for a common goal). We needed this diversity to flourish, despite the ups and downs. Ultimately the strong characters prevailed but everyone seemed to need some moral support at some time or other during the fight. It was ok if someone went off for a break for a while to return more refreshed and rearing to go again. We were aware that we needed to "be there" for individuals in our group and we realised that we were simply individuals fighting an unemotional organisation (both government or corporation) only interested in the bottom line (how many votes are in it or how much profit can be made). We enjoyed our "victories" along the way but also kept in mind that our opposition would have many many chances to extend and prolong the fight - which they did. We wanted to stay positive and therefore needed proactive people on our side to win through over a long time.

We remained proactive at all times.

Fighting quarries is about passionate individuals up against big powerful unemotional corporations (and government departments). There are "rules" or processes to follow to

ensure each side has every opportunity to argue its case. We became familiar with what these processes were in advance and this helped our cause. We knew our opposition wanted a compromise position for both parties but we dug our heels in early - we did not want to compromise at all - we did not want a quarry PERIOD.

We thought at first that big business and government had more opportunities to change interim decisions but we soon realised this was not true. Quarry opponents like us have just as many avenues as big corporations to change the outcome prior to the last and final appeal court. We decided that we had to continue to be proactive and anticipate how our opponent would act, and we work relentlessly on how to get to the higher ground before they did.

We knew that many community members/groups sit and wait for decisions to be made because they don't believe they have the right to lobby further. We worked differently. If there was the slightest opportunity that we could influence anyone of importance right up until a report/decision was made, then we needed to get cracking. We found out the exact date when a decision or a report was due, the names of people in government who would be working on this report/decision, what alternative information/view we could provide to them to help them in their deliberations, what issues the quarry company was attempting to argue. Even when we were confident of our position we continued to consider how we could attack (not defend), even when the quarry company or government department placed a moratorium on an interim decision. We approached different government departments and raised issues to help our cause from a different angle (eg: Department of Environment or Department of Climate Change). We approached other local quarry companies that obviously did not relish competition in their area. We built alliances with local housing developers by warning them that unless they offered support then potential purchasers would be "informed" and warned off buying land in the local area (in other words this would impact on land sales because no one wants to live close to a quarry).

We used the Freedom of Information Act to uncover information that would normally have remained secret. We played the government at its own game. Quarries are well known to be very proactive in their attitude and to lobby heavily at the highest levels of government. We knew we had to come up with strategies that would counter their efforts.

There were many more strategies and lots more we can still do even at this late stage in the fight. The important thing is not to sit and wait expectantly for something to happen. Make it happen. Even when we won (when the council and the government finally knocked back the quarry application on environmental and procedural grounds) we kept hammering government for action on other fronts (pressuring for the federal government to declare the area a National Park or for the state government to declare the area an Environmental Park). We knew that the slate would be wiped clean of previous determinations in any final appeal to the appeal court. We knew that would have to put all our issues on the table once again (which has happened). Everything we have won to date has no influence in the appeal case except that the arguments and resources we have gathered are now very useful. We have a bag full of very targeted scientific resources, a handful of very resourceful and passionate experts who are deeply knowledgeable and can argue our case and we have the commitment and we have time (because the longer this fight goes on the more time the community and the local animals are without a bloody quarry)!!

Good luck in your fight to stop the quarry and trust that this document provides some assistance in your fight. We do not claim to know all the answers and we may not have solutions appropriate to your case. We can only advise that you get organised and not give up easily. Go back to the first sentence in this document - "having a large vocal community support base of swinging voters is THE key to ultimate success. Nothing else comes close."