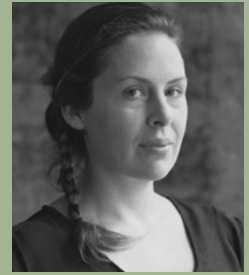




Environmental  
Defenders Office

# Empowering communities by demystifying the law



If someone discovers that an environmentally destructive project is planned for their local community, they can call on the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) to explain their rights and avenues to resist the development. Depending on the scale and urgency of the threat, EDO's community outreach team will talk to concerned locals, hold an online meeting or conduct a series of workshops in their town.

People might not realise it at the time, but this can often be the first small step in a decisive journey to an historic legal victory. It all starts with EDO's outreach team working alongside fearless communities to defend their human rights to a healthy and safe environment through the power of the law.

EDO works with communities right across the Australia Pacific. They are bushfire survivors fighting for a safe climate, First Nations peoples defending their cultural connection to Country, young people fighting for their futures, farmers defending their land from fracking, and environment groups campaigning for nature. In every instance, we exchange ideas, share knowledge and explain how to use the law to navigate the environmental decision-making process.

Jemilah Hallinan, EDO's Head of Legal Education, is responsible for the development and delivery of EDO's community outreach program.

"We know an informed community is in a powerful position to achieve environmental outcomes. Information is power. And when you're talking about the law, that power can be so hard to tap into if you don't have someone to show you the way. And that's what we pride ourselves on in the outreach team – accessible, friendly law.

When you look back from a litigation win, it's easy to see a linear process that culminates in a court case and judgment. However, when you're at the start of that process – such as when a development like a mine has just been proposed – communities have tonnes of potential options available to them and so the path ahead is anything but clear. A huge decision-tree is spread before them. A choose your own adventure. It can be overwhelming and daunting because they need to decide which path to walk down.

My team helps communities by mapping out a legal strategy so they can coalesce around it and focus their energy and anxiety into it.

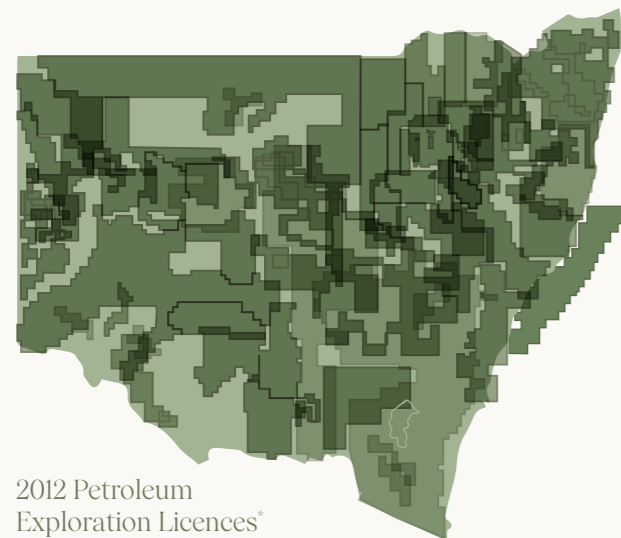
They can still try other avenues, and they should, but we explain up front what a legal strategy would look like and how it will unfold. What and when to do things and what to expect. Then, when it unfolds as we said it would, they come to trust our expertise."

# EDO supporting communities in the long fight against coal seam gas in NSW

Since 2012 EDO's community outreach team has worked intensively with every community in NSW facing a real risk of coal seam gas (CSG) development, from Bentley in the Northern Rivers to Gloucester and Narrabri. If they were in the firing line, we were actively supporting them by ensuring they were fully informed and on the front foot when it came to dealing with CSG companies and government processes. Because of the scale of the problem (with most of the state being covered by titles at one point) the team also worked more generally across NSW to ensure expert legal information was made available to communities not directly threatened, but who might be in the future.

On top of releasing greenhouse gas emissions, coal seam gas extraction can lead to groundwater contamination and depletion. It can damage the health of local communities by polluting their air and water. The extraction process involves drilling thousands of gas wells, encroaching on the surrounding land and putting habitats and biodiversity at risk.

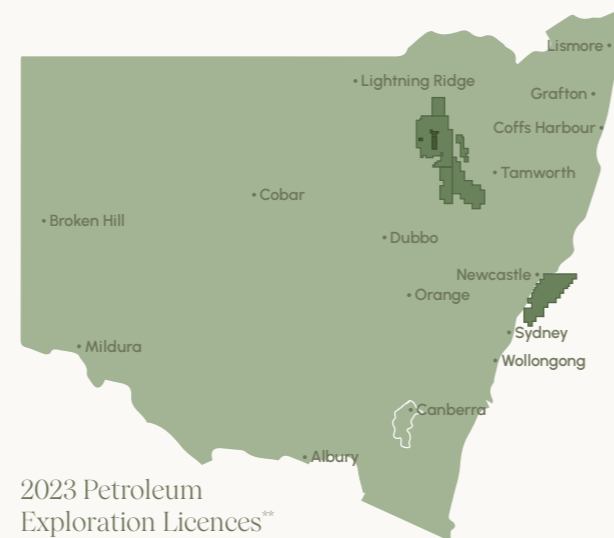
**These maps show a comparison of the Petroleum Exploration Licences (PELs) across NSW before and after EDO's community outreach team worked with communities over a 10-year period.**



2012 Petroleum Exploration Licences\*

"The outcome you can clearly see when you look at these maps doesn't come down to one factor, one action, one person or organisation, but EDO was a lynchpin in the fight against coal seam gas throughout NSW because we provided people with the information they needed to fight CSG development across the state. EDO's resources were key. Part of those resources included a book we produced which mapped out the journey from exploration to mining and everything in between, in terms of people's rights and what action they could take. The book included every community group we were aware of that was dealing with the same problem, and we helped create new community networks that didn't exist at the time. We helped build connections, using our position as a conduit. We were like the eyes in the sky looking down knowing where the problems were, knowing who the community groups were, and then connecting the two."

**As illustrated in these maps, EDO supported communities to hold off the CSG projects in their areas.**



2023 Petroleum Exploration Licences\*\*



In Gloucester NSW, the community fought and won a campaign against coal seam gas exploration.

"Our work is grounded in the community and is focused on early engagement in rural and regional areas. We go where we are needed, where people often don't have access to legal advice. We engage early before a decision has been made, before there's any sign of the need for litigation.

It's about building relationships and trust with the people whose lives are going to be negatively affected. It's soft skills lawyering. If we're not warm, engaging, encouraging, and supportive then people are not going to move to the next step. There's a huge amount of work that goes into building those relationships quickly. We know many of the communities so well now that we can often anticipate the questions they're going to ask. We do our research ahead of time so that we're familiar with who we're talking to, and we tailor everything to them.

The power of our program is our networks. One lawyer could provide advice to one person on a mining issue, specific to their circumstances, or I could stand up and deliver a comprehensive two-hour presentation to 100 community members. That's huge value and a real strength of our program, because then the community has every piece of information that the one person would have received, they just need to apply it to their own circumstances. They get the whole framework presented to them and materials to take home. They know they can come to EDO if they need more. It builds up a huge bank of knowledge in the community, which is enduring and continues to be shared."

"Essentially, it's a transfer of power. We're trying to move the power to the community and get them on the front foot."

Jemilah Hallinan  
Head of Legal Education,  
Environmental Defenders Office

\*Source: 121012 Mining and the law\_text only.pdf EDO publication

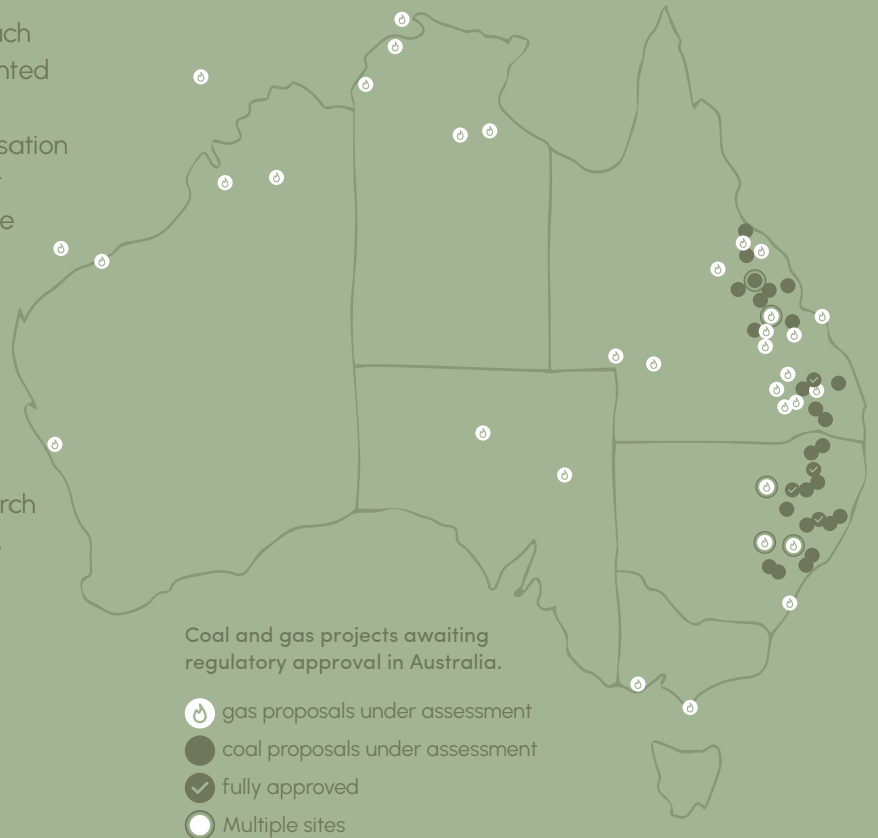
\*\*Source: MinView | Regional NSW | Mining, Exploration and Geoscience. [www.minview.geoscience.nsw.gov.au](http://www.minview.geoscience.nsw.gov.au)



# Tracking our work against emissions kept from entering the atmosphere

Since early 2022, EDO's community outreach team has actively monitored and documented all Australian fossil fuel projects in the approvals pipeline. We are the only organisation conducting in-depth fossil fuel tracking for coal, oil and gas projects nationally and the only organisation analysing this data to make evidence-based decisions when developing legal strategies to combat the fossil fuel industry.

Although this information is publicly available, it can be extremely difficult to find and a time-consuming process to search government gazettes, newspaper articles, and government and proponent websites across state and federal jurisdictions.



As the only organisation in the Australia Pacific tracking the impact of our work against how many emissions we keep in the ground, EDO continues to lead the fight against Australia's biggest climate polluters.

In the past two years EDO's successful legal interventions have abated 163.55 Million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by stopping fossil fuel projects from proceeding, and halted 709.987 Mtpa GHG's from entering the atmosphere.

