

**Describe your story idea for a 25 minute feature or documentary.**

The rural Queensland town of Kingaroy and its surrounding communities are quite a cultural anomaly; the hometown of notorious ex-premier, Joh Bjelke-Peterson, one of the few electorates in Australia to survey a majority against same-sex marriage, and, in the last federal election, the highest first-preference count for a One Nation candidate in Australia.

And yet, by some cosmic irony, this hyper-conservative township is home to one of the strongest and most successful grassroots environmental movements in Australia, critical to the ban of Underground Coal Gasification (UCG).

When I was 15-years-old, living on a property near Kingaroy, a geologist knocked on our door to explain the exploration for coal used for UCG, occurring right underneath our feet.

Less than one year later our aquifer was found to contain traces of known carcinogens.

These events thrust the township of Kingaroy, my hometown, and its surrounding communities into the public eye, elevating Australians' concern for the regulation of fossil fuel exploitation, and triggering changes in government environmental impact management at a state and federal level. The closure of this site, a Queensland-wide ban on UCG, and subsequent withdrawal of mining operators was considered a victory for the local environmental movement.

It has been almost a decade since, encompassing an ombudsman into the event and numerous court cases, but now the same company culpable for polluting the local aquifer has proposed an open-pit coal mine on the same contaminated site.

How could this have happened?

Much to the concern of locals and those involved in their past environmental campaigning, this proposed mining development has passed exploration and mine-planning phases, and now awaits approval by the federal government for 2019.

This has triggered a new generation of alarm in the region, and raised questions regarding the culpability of past practices, and the motivations of fossil fuel operators in the region.

In the years since, I've become a geologist myself in the field of coal geochemistry, and am now in close contact with researchers, regulators and operators whom I count as my colleagues. As an 'insider' to the fossil fuel industry, it is still unclear how the events of almost 10 years-ago came to happen. What is even more unclear is how the imposed regulations by the state and federal governments have allowed further development in an already contaminated region, by the same parent operators.

My aim for this documentary is to carry the listener through the unique personal stories and views of those impacted by the events of the past environmental crisis, but also hear from professionals and fellow academics as to how such fundamental failures in the regulation of groundwater and mining activities even occurred in the first place, and the concerns they have for the future of the region.

Ultimately, are we doomed to repeat history for the sake of Australia's fossil fuel future?

## Who are the main characters and voices of your story?

Nikola will act as journalistic 'narrator' interviewing three principle 'outside' voices through the series of events influenced by UCG and mining interests in the region from 2009 to present.

The 'outside' voices within the documentary are as follows:

- Local community: represented by the O'Sullivan's, my neighbors and family friends, farmers, they live directly on the contaminated site and new proposed mining lease. They have been involved in forming the Kingaroy Concerned Citizens group represented by spokesperson John Dalton, and protesting against mining developments in the region over many years.
- Government and research professionals: represented by Prof. Joan Esterle, my colleague and research supervisor. She is currently acting as a member of the Australian Federal Government's IESC, formed as part of regulatory reforms that occurred after the Kingaroy aquifer UCG contamination.
- Operators: represented by Garry Leblang, the chief geologist and acting manager at the time of the Kingaroy aquifer UCG contamination, and other geological consultants whom came to work for the operator in question. He and his colleagues were sub-contracted during this period by Cougar Energy Ltd. whom operated exploration and pilot development of the site. He personally consulted with landowners during this time.

## Who will you interview?

[confirmed] Neralie O'Sullivan / Damien O'Sullivan: local land owners and farmers, members of the KCC (Kingaroy Concerned Citizens), Damien also works as an agricultural scientist at the CSIRO (ph. 07 41625108)

[confirmed] John Dalton: Spokesperson of the Kingaroy Concerned Citizens Group (KCC) (ph. 0428621991)

[confirmed] Prof. Joan Esterle: Professor in Coal Geosciences at the University of Queensland, acting member of the Australian Federal IESC (Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development) (ph. 0458333096, j.esterle@uq.edu.au)

Garry Leblang: previously exploration manager for Cougar Energy and acting geologist on Wandoan and Kingaroy UCG (underground coal seam gasification) projects, currently Director/Manager of Coalsearch Consultants.

## What alternative interviews could you do if your primary contacts fall through?

Peter Crosdale: colleague and geological consultant previously contracted by Cougar Energy.

Garry Tessman: President of the Kingaroy Concerned Citizens group (KCC)

Engel Van de Wetering: local land owner, retired electrical engineer from Tarong Power Station.

Prof. James Underschlutz: Deputy Director, Centre for Coal Seam Gas (CCSG), University of Queensland

**What sources of information will you use? (list specific resources/contacts you can access)**

The Underground Coal Seam Gasification Report, September 2012, Queensland Ombudsman, Brisbane, QLD.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development) Act 2012, No. 145, 2012, Australian Federal Government

Court Transcript: Cougar Energy Limited v Debbie Best, Chief Executive Under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 [2011] QPEC, delivered 21 December 2011, Planning and Environment Court of Queensland, 31818/11, Brisbane, QLD.

Walker, L. (2018). The Development of UCG in Australia, *Underground Coal Gasification and Combustion* 6, pp. 175 – 212.

Moffat, K., Pert, P., McCrea, R., Boughen, N., Rodriguez, S. and Lacey J., 2018, Australian attitudes toward mining: Citizen Survey – 2017 Results, EP178434, CSIRO.

JORC Report: MRV Tarong Basin Coal, December 2015, Moreton Resources, Brisbane, QLD.

'Underground coal gasification now prohibited in Queensland', 24 August 2017, Media Statements, Queensland Government.

Mandatory company reporting and exploration documents accessed from QLD Mines Online mapping software and publically available QDEX exploration database.

Community correspondence collated by 'Kingaroy Concern Citizens' (KCC) group.

**Describe the type of person that will be interested in this story.**

Any Australians interested in grassroots environmentalism, and how the actions of these groups impact government policy and industrial practices. Those interested in the 'inner workings' of mining exploration and operation which occur in standard practice all over the country.

**Inspiration #1**

Story Collider ([storycollider.org](http://storycollider.org))

**What element of this are you inspired by and why?**

Story Collider is unique in that it effectively merges both personal stories and anecdotes with scientific information. Rather than relying on sensationalizing or 'hying' scientific elements of their narrative, they instead use personal connections narrators have to their research to connect with their listeners. In science it is often difficult to 'straddle the line'; to effectively communicate facts that resonate with a chosen audience, and I believe using a personal connection with the audience is a clever and engaging way to tell an ultimately educational message.