

Gloucester, with its population of 5,000 is located 250 kms north of Sydney. It is set in a picturesque valley flanked on the western side by the beautiful Bucketts Mountains and on the east by the Mograni Range, one hour's drive from Taree and one and a half from Newcastle. For the past few years the population and economy have shown growth due to a healthy balance between:

❑ **Tourism.** Tourism is the fastest growing industry now contributing over \$28 million to the local economy per annum. In addition to its intrinsic beauty Gloucester is the gateway to the heritage listed Barrington Tops National Park. The World Heritage rainforests of the Barrington Tops, the Bucketts Range and river systems provide a unique visitation combination. Gloucester is considered to have the most reliable river system outside the Sydney basin, making it a perfect destination for canoeing and kayaking.

❑ **Agriculture .** Gloucester's industry base has historically been made up of beef, dairy and timber production and these still play a major role, however there is now a significant and growing economic contribution which comes from people seeking a lifestyle change and settling in the area on smaller acreages.

❑ **Commercial and Industrial.** Gloucester has many diverse small to medium sized businesses which have chosen to locate here including furniture makers, cheese-makers, engineering and metal fabrication, a boat builder, a lift manufacturer, camper trailers, wilderness adventures, and numerous farm-stays and B&Bs.

❑ **Coal mining.** For the past 10 years Gloucester Coal has operated the Stratford mine which is located 15 kilometres to the south of Gloucester. They also operate the Duralie mine which is located in Great Lakes Shire close to Stroud. Both mines are open cut operations producing coal for export and domestic markets. Direct mining activity and service sectors in the Gloucester area account for in excess of 100 jobs and are an important part of the economy.

❑ **Gas extraction.** Exploration by AGL has been completed and will move to production in late 2009.

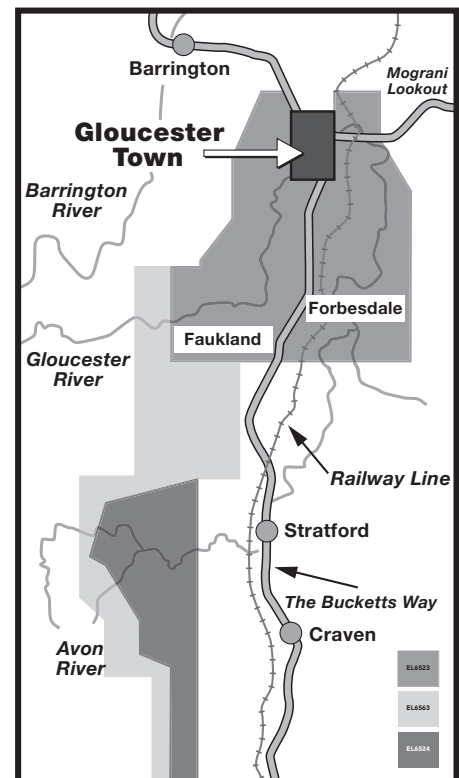
The community seeks to foster this ongoing balanced development, however this is now being threatened by the activities of a company called Gloucester Resources Limited (GRL and previously Gunnedah Resources) who in early 2006 were granted three coal exploration licences (EL6523, EL6524 and EL6563). These licences cover an area that extends from the Stratford Mine, north to the town of Gloucester on both sides, and south beyond the Gloucester Shire into Great Lakes Shire.

It should be pointed out that Gloucester Coal had previously conducted extensive exploration in these areas and chose to relinquish any claim for exploration or mining to this area. We are led to believe that this was due to the absence of economic deposits of coal and the close proximity to the town itself.

Concern in the town and the areas included in these coal exploration licences was at a fairly low level as residents believed that the area had been thoroughly assessed by Gloucester Coal and therefore there were no deposits of coal of any commercial value. This was referenced by the fact that in the three years that have passed since the granting of these licences there has been no observable activity such as seismic and/or core testing by GRL.

Just before Christmas 2008, GRL purchased at least six properties totalling over 2500 acres. Four of these properties are within 5 kms of the centre of the town with one property being adjacent to one of the town's recent housing developments. Another property recently bought abuts the town's railway station and is adjacent to the town itself.

As soon as it became knowledge that GRL had purchased these properties, a special meeting of Gloucester Shire Council was convened and the Councillors unanimously passed a motion to seek the permanent removal of the three coal exploration licences. The main reasons supporting the motion were the inappropriateness of further coal mining so close to town and closely settled areas, and the negative effect on tourism, agriculture and the environment. The presence of coal mining activities would adversely affect a large number of people as well as have very negative economic implications for the town and Shire. It should also be pointed out that Gloucester Council do not oppose the current activities of Gloucester Coal. Council accept the proposition that Gloucester is a town with a mine but strongly oppose the notion of Gloucester becoming a mining town.



At the request of concerned citizens a hastily arranged public meeting was convened by Council on 22 December 2008. This meeting was only advertised by word of mouth and informal emails. An estimated 260 people crowded into the council chambers endorsing the council's actions. As an outcome of the meeting a steering committee was formed to represent the voice of the community and establish an association to seek the permanent removal of the three coal exploration licences held by GRL. This association has been established and is known as **Gloucester Residents in Partnership – (GRIP)**. Office bearers have been elected and it is now in the process of seeking incorporation. **GRIP** has one sole objective: ***That coal exploration licences 6523, 6524 and 6563 are not renewed and/or are permanently removed so that no coal mining occurs in those areas.***

GRLs lack of observable activity prior to Christmas 2008 had not been greatly perceived as a worry but now the reality of its presence has galvanised the town and the areas concerned. As a consequence **GRIP** has convened a **public meeting** to be held at the Recreation Centre in Gloucester on Monday 9th February at 6.00 pm. Judging by the early feedback, this will be a very large rally by Gloucester standards. We seek media support in promoting this community rally and welcome any media attendance.

Last Monday 19th January, Gloucester Council sent a delegation to the Minister of Primary Industries (the Hon Ian MacDonald) requesting the removal of the exploration licences from GRL and that they not be renewed in March this year when GRL will need to apply to have them extended.

Unfortunately, the State Government doesn't appear to be listening to the Gloucester community. Their various responses have included such comments:

- Mining contributes \$12 billion a year to state revenue compared to agriculture which contributes just \$4 billion
- If there's a resource (coal) there we will harvest it
- If you don't like coal then move

What is needed is for the right balance to be struck, where a sustainable long-term vision and plan is put in place for Gloucester. This will involve meshing together all the industries that support and contribute positively to the economy and social prosperity of this wonderful region. We need support and vision from our State Government. At present they appear dismissive to our community's pleas for help.

What rights do the local community have when it comes to charting a future for itself? Surely there are some areas that shouldn't be mined irrespective of how much black dirt is in the ground? We believe that beautiful Gloucester is such a place.

Gloucester still has a bright future but there's going to be one hell of a big fight to secure it!

JOIN US. Contact **GRIP** on 02 6558 9835 or email gripgloucester@gmail.com



*The photograph below highlights the area covered by Exploration Licence 6523
Misty Morning Sunrise – looking northwest across the Avon Valley to the Bucketts Mountains.
Gloucester Town is in the mist.*

GRIP

Gloucester Residents in Partnership

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