



Community Campaigning

Jim Douglas

Jim has been following the Rex Minerals application for mining on Yorke Peninsula quite closely as an environmentalist. Open cut mining so close to the Gulf is obviously a serious problem, and if not dealt with correctly could cause problems forever - his assessment of it. It is also a concern, having some experience the quasi-consultation that you have to go through, to find out at the very end that the government are likely to give approval to go ahead with this.

Today's plan is to offer some strategies for possible next steps and other ways to campaign for those that oppose the mine. Jim's background is in the union movement – a toolmaker by trade, who became very active in unions at a young age, concerned about equal rights and then transferred that into environmental issues.

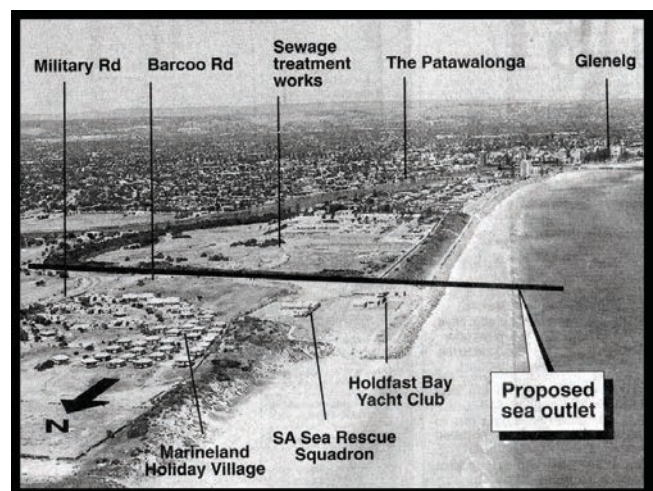
Jim lives at Henley Beach, where there are massive erosion problems, as a result of over-development on Gulf St Vincent and the construction of man-made rock walls, groynes and boat harbours. As a result of these structures, sand that would naturally move northward is impeded on one side. Sand builds up on the southern side of the walls, and the beaches to the north are gradually being depleted.

The story of the West Beach campaign began in 1997. The community was informed that the government had approved a major development, called Holdfast Shores at Glenelg. The development involved two major elements.

The first was cleaning up the Patawalonga Basin, which was the end point for stormwater from five creeks. Stormwater collecting in the basin contained suspended solids and heavy metals, which settled in the bottom, and the overlying water then flowed out to Gulf. The water was discoloured, but most pollutants had settled out. One of the objectives of the project was to install a pipeline through the Glenelg treatment works, called the Barcoo Outlet. It's a huge pipe that

carries the stormwater out to the Gulf. Then they reversed the flow of the Patawalonga so that seawater flows in to the Marina at Holdfast Shores and the basin.

The other element was to construct a new boat harbor at West Beach, consisting of a long rock wall – about 165 metres long – that does a U-turn (acting as a suction or venturi, sucking in seaweed). The new boat harbor and launching facility allowed the relocation of the small boat club, sailing club and surf lifesaving clubs to West Beach.



Major development was also planned to take place at Colley Reserve (which had been given to the community by the Anglican Church – something that didn't seem to worry the government, which took the land out of the hands of the community).

Photos taken before the boat harbor was constructed show that West Beach was a prime beach along the metropolitan coast – with sandy beaches and quite a lot of foreshore adjacent to the West Beach Caravan Park and Holiday Village (which accounts for 10% of Adelaide's tourism). There is a lot to lose if the beach disappears.

A group of residents and others resolved to campaign against this project and got organised as an action group. Then they worked out how to inform the community about the proposal and its ramifications.

These are some of the strategies and actions employed.

Actions, tactic and reactions

- It is so important to be well organised and prepared.
- All action must be non-violent, non-abusive and not physical—but it is OK to be passionate!
- You should expect and accept that some will disagree with you, so expect confrontation and prepare a spirited and persuasive response,
- Debrief after every confrontation and event.
- Don't forget to have some fun along the way.

Publicity and media – Everyone in the area – in three suburbs – was asked to make up a sign for their front yards. Lots of people made banners out of sheets. They had “Save our Beaches” stencils that some residents allowed them to spray on their wheelie bins.

Another thing they did was set up a vigil, putting up a tent near the building site on Military road. Volunteers staffed that every day for seven weeks. At night, someone slept there (in their car) so they could alert the team if the developers brought in equipment to start works.

Other things you could do are make badges, stickers, posters, postcards and leaflets, petitions and surveys and paid advertising.

A **blockade coordinating committee** structure was established that could be activated to get people down there quickly. There were about 20 on the campaign committee. At the top were the sea eagles, a small group who would keep an eye on what was happening on site, and if it looked like something was going on they got in touch with the owls (the wise ones) who would make a decision, as part of the action plan. The owls activated the phone tree –in those days they only had one mobile phone! The owls phoned the pelicans, who had a list of people they would contact (the seagulls) and down to the blockade everyone would go. The last group was what they called terns – people who turned up to the blockade.

You also need to have a sense of humour!

They heard that David Suzuki was visiting Adelaide, so they contacted him and he agreed to meet a group down on the beach. He spent about two hours there, walking the whole area, with the media all over him. The photo shows him sitting on the rocks at West Beach. Using high profile people is really good for exposure – particularly so if they are as credible as David! Every time he was on radio and TV here he mentioned the campaign.

About 450 people attend a public meeting at the Henley Town Hall.

Age and gender representation was pretty evenly spread.

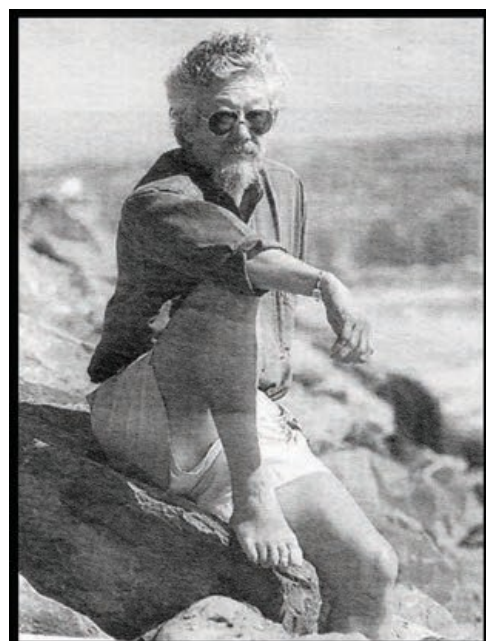
They contacted all the local primary schools and walked them along the beach, explaining what was going on. Teachers used this as a project for making videos. One of the short video projects submitted by the Grange Primary School won a national NRM award.

A local couple who were stage directors painted backdrops, made banners, signs and posters. They arranged the staging of a huge protest on the beach and invited all the local churches – after all the beach is a sacred place.

It was an inter-denominational event with local ministers and, just coincidentally, a couple of dolphins. There was great media coverage, including two helicopters, and made national TV. The staging specialists planned and set up everything at 6am so that everyone would know where they should stand.

One day they were tipped off with information that the police were coming to get rid of them, as the government and developers had had enough. They'd been down there about 20 times and the campaigners had refused to move. On this day they came in force. Some of the protesters were put in paddy wagons, taken a few kms down the road and released - no one was arrested, but they were a bit peeved about having to walk back.

They trained themselves up to stand face to face with the police lining the roadway. It was probably one of the hardest things Jim has ever had to do. But they stood calmly and talked to them about what was happening, and the risk to the beaches and the next generations. They didn't get angry, but stood in front of them and got their concerns of their chests. It was very powerful, and effective and some of the police officers didn't know where to look.



Every time they protested they did something different. Once they carried 10 tonnes of massive rocks and dropped them at the gate, another time they wore gags to show that they felt they weren't being listened to.

It was all non-violent action and resistance. They made up song sheets and chose a song to sing. They wove messages on the fence.

Just after the boat harbor was built, after the first storm event, the dune was cut back and everything that had been predicted happened. There is hardly a beach at West Beach any more.

There is a scientist in Europe looking at places like Holland for ways of restoring some of the beach front, using geotechnical bags and temporary groynes to bring back sand. We need to find a technical way to manage this problem.

If social media such as FaceBook and Twitter had been available back then, it would have made campaigning much easier, so find someone to take this on for your campaign.

It is also important to articulate messages very clearly. When you are excited and under pressure you need to be consistent about the messages going out. Use MPs, local government. Sometimes it is hard. Who are the industry leaders that you need to target? Successful alliances are built on defined issues.

What did you achieve?

This is always the hardest part – when you come to the end, and you have done everything you possibly can, but the government and developers are too powerful, and people then end up with broken hearts. You have put so much of yourself into the campaign and then wonder what have you achieved?

Well you do achieve a lot – it's not always what you wanted and it's sometimes hard to take, but here are some of the things you have done:

- Educated the community – and sometimes the state and beyond
- Exposed the lack of democratic process – decisions taken out of your hands, not being listened to, unfairness, lack of attention paid to the huge amount of work that went into submissions? Minds are made up and the conclusion is foregone, but you have gone through the process.
- You have developed skills
- You have developed friendships that can be lasting
- You have united your community and empowered people through this action

Yoko Ono said “The future is in your hands - it is time for action”



Photos of West Beach, looking north, before (above) and after (below) the boat harbor was built.



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