



Telling the Bentley story

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After a recent screening in a community hall in Stroud, Gloucestershire UK, a well known local with a warm Scottish accent described Brendan Shoebridge's *The Bentley Effect* as "one of the most important films of the century". The speaker was none other than Polly Higgins, renowned barrister, award winning author and international environmental lawyer.

Polly is a big thinker and in fact she has taken on the world's biggest client, Planet Earth itself. For many years now she has been immersed in a mission to make ecocide the fifth international crime against peace.

So why does a low budget documentary about a rural community's response to the gas industry seem so important to someone like Polly Higgins?

From the very beginning, by setting a historical context, *The Bentley Effect* asks an important philosophical question: do we have the right to release an ancient fossilised substance back into the world that has been safely stored away by the planet for millennia? Is unconventional gas a true life Pandora's Box that, once mined and brought to the surface will forever wreak havoc on the world?

The Bentley Effect story itself begins like many others, very small. We see

a handful of characters hoping CSG is the clean green solution it was once thought to be. "Maybe it will be cheaper, and local" they say... but then the horror begins. As large convoys of machinery arrive in peaceful valleys with no warning and the dirty truths are revealed, the community must face the threat at their door.

There are enormous public marches, an array of endearing musos, self-declared gasfield-free communities are born and spreading like wildfire and of course then, as Dr Wayne Somerville says in the film, "the campaign brought out the big guns – the Knitting Nannas!" Presto, a mighty social movement is in full swing and strengthening by the minute before our eyes.

These in themselves don't come along every day, but such colourful and successful ones captured in full HD are rare indeed.

Our heroic community's journey continues as we see the scale of the threat to their precious water and the newly dubbed 'protectors' filling in a waste-water pond. The opposition rallies too and new approaches are needed.

Our hero (the local community) turns the tables on a hapless panel of industry experts by stealing the microphone at a spectacularly rowdy City Hall meeting and then "decides to give them an education".

There are tests of strength such as the dramatic protests at a CSG site in the region called the Glenugie Blockade. Setbacks occur and cause perceptions of failure such as at another CSG site, Doubtful Creek. At last the line in the sand is drawn and the ultimate test begins at

the CSG site at Bentley, seven kilometres from Lismore: the Bentley Blockade.

The hero again faces doubts and fears as police numbers skyrocket. But in response, the gates to the drill site are barricaded and a mighty tent city rises from a nearby cow paddock. Here in a once peaceful valley unlikely alliances are revealed. At last we see truly conservative farmers and deep green progressives standing together, side by side!

No, this is not clever CGI. What we see on screen is a whole-of-community response, a people united against the fossil fuel industry, vested interests and their political allies, akin to the forces of Mordor. But yet more difficult challenges and obstacles stand in their way with enemy forces escalating, until at last a conclusion is reached and a historic precedent is set.

For Winston Churchill, whoever told the best story won.

Maybe Polly Higgins agrees. Maybe she foresees a growing, unavoidable need for strategic, light hearted civil disobedience en masse. Maybe Polly sees hope and a historic global tipping point beginning in those misty Bentley morning scenes. Or maybe, like all of us, she just loves it when the good guys win. ▲



Go to
thebentleyeffect.com
for screening details