

Fracking campaign 2022 evaluation

I. Background

In April of 2022, then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Kwasi Kwarteng asked the British Biological Survey to assess the impact of fracking. This sparked concerns over a potential overturning of the moratorium set in England in 2019, thanks to tireless campaigning by communities across the country. In response, communities and campaigning organisations, including Friends of the Earth (FoE), started to prepare a response to the potential government announcement in favour of fracking. The campaign went full scale when then PM Boris Johnson resigned on 7 July based on the belief that any successor would strongly consider overturning the ban.

In September of 2022, new PM Liz Truss announced her desire to review the 2019 decision to ban fracking in England, stating that it would help alleviate energy cost concerns amplified by the invasion of Ukraine. Truss had stated that fracking would only go ahead with local communities' consent but didn't outline how this would be sought.

This campaign against fracking ended with a clear win on 26 October 2022 when new PM Rishi Sunak announced he stood by the 2019 decision to ban fracking, effectively reinstating the moratorium that Truss had lifted.

This evaluation looks at the role of FoE in the campaign against fracking. It was written based on feedback from Friends of the Earth local action groups, other community groups and Friends of the Earth staff members

II. Findings

a. Campaign strategy

- Given the reactive nature and fast pace of the campaign, there was no formal strategy or objectives set for the campaign within FoE. The staff team prioritised responding to opportunities and producing the most impactful outputs.
- Those involved in the campaign, both FoE staff and campaigners on the ground, produced a huge amount in a relatively short amount of time including press comments, petitions, open letters, political briefings, council motions and much more. There had been a good amount of prep work done before the announcement by key stakeholders including impacted communities and relevant NGOs so that things were ready to go as soon as the ban was lifted. This enabled the campaign to be launched at very short notice and to make initial interventions fast.

- A more refined policy ask on renewable energy would have been useful for things such as media interviews to help put forward an alternative solution to the energy crisis.

b. Support for local action groups and other community groups

- In terms of resources and support provided by FoE to community groups, they were generally found to be useful. When asked how useful the resources provided were, all who responded to the survey responded positively, with one group describing them as “high standard, accessible, well evidenced”. The “how can we campaign to stop fracking” webinar and one-to-one support from FoE staff members were the most used by respondents to our survey. One group mentioned they’d have liked more materials to support them in awareness-raising around the issue, such as video content or presentations.
- FoE also played a supporting role to communities by providing tailored resources such as a guide on how to influence your council. This was particularly strategic given the government’s stance that it would not allow fracking to go ahead without community consent. Groups were positive about FoE’s intervention, calling it “pivotal”, mentioning its role in coordinating the movement and communicating about the issue to various audiences while providing support and ‘encouragement’ to groups. One group said they were “blown away by how everyone pulled together immediately”.

c. Friends of the Earth’s place in the movement

- All those who took part in the evaluation felt FoE occupied the right place in the movement, which was a balance of leading and supporting. FoE played a key role in convening the anti-fracking movement, including communities on the frontlines of fracking and various NGO actors including CPRE, 38Degrees and Frack Free United. FoE led coalition meetings which fostered collaborative working and joint outputs such as an open letter and enabled key information and resources to be exchanged. This leading role contributed to raising public awareness around the issue, thanks in particular to great media coverage. We also convened a space for activist peer-to-peer support and sharing of expertise through a webinar on 29 September 2022.
- Maintaining relationships with previous allies and partners from the 2019 anti-fracking campaign, particularly communities on the frontline of fracking, was key to the success of the campaign. These relationships enabled FoE to keep its finger on the pulse and respond meaningfully to the needs of those directly affected by the threat of fracking.

- Navigating the volatile political context was however identified as one of the biggest challenges for the campaign, making it highly reactive and fast-paced. This meant difficulties making plans and last-minute changes of plans.

Recommendations

- Ensure proper resourcing – with relevant expertise to support the campaign strategy – is in place when forming reactive campaign team. If this isn't available in-house, consider how coalition working can help fill gaps.
- Consider producing resources to support groups in raising awareness in their communities, especially if community mobilisation is important to win.
- Put together policy asks about viable alternative energy sources in our communications to support calls for an end to fossil fuels.
- As much as possible centre the voices and experiences of frontline communities in campaign messaging and work alongside activists and community groups in campaign planning and delivery.