

Building community action against fracking

Thom Oommen is with the Inverness County chapter in Nova Scotia. The chapter has an active campaign against fracking. PetroWorth, an oil and gas company, has secured fracking exploration and development rights to 383,000 acres near Lake Ainslie in Cape Breton. We spoke with Oommen recently about the chapter's local campaign.

How did you find out about the fracking project in Inverness?

We saw a statement on PetroWorth's website stating that hydraulic fracturing will make onshore eastern Canada the new frontier for oil and gas exploration. We found out that PetroWorth, which has had an agreement with the province for ages, was going to start seismic testing in our area. We gathered information and came to the conclusion that fracking is a risky deal for Inverness County, so we decided we

wanted to take action on this. We have worked hard to provide information to our community on the risks of fracking, have participated in a government process, and have increased pressure at the municipal and provincial levels for a ban on fracking.

What are some highlights of your campaign against fracking in Inverness?

We are a small rural area. Pulling out 150 people to a PetroWorth open house, and consistent attendance at meetings, are highlights. We are hosting screenings of Gasland, an influential documentary on the risks of fracking, across the province. We keep getting more and more requests as the province keeps opening up new areas for oil and gas exploration. We also gave a great presentation to our municipal council proposing a resolution against fracking. Our resolution passed, which made us

very happy. Our MLA formally submitted a petition with 1,000 signatures to the provincial legislature calling for a provincial ban on fracking.

Any advice to others across the country who oppose fracking?

The key is to get out in front, before the development happens. Don't wait until companies are in production – be proactive, not reactive. In Nova Scotia, we only had one well fracked near Windsor, so we can still stop this.

In your experience, what message resonated with people in your community and galvanized their opposition to fracking?

The message about the risks fracking poses to water resonates in our community. Fracking poses a risk to Lake Ainslie, the largest freshwater lake in Nova Scotia, and to our groundwater. People here have a direct link to water. We live off our wells, kids drink the water, we swim in the lake, we fish there. We can't risk that.