

# Letters

## Write to us

- edletters@afr.com.au
- www.afr.com/letters
- Fax: (02) 9282 3137

# Community bullying clouds WA projects

Some organisations, primarily resource companies and governments, are crossing the line of appropriate development, opportunities and jobs, into the destructive practice of community bullying in Western Australia.

Australia is seeing a huge rush to develop iron ore, gas and other resources. It's the perfect setting for hubris, egoism and narcissism. This opportunistic rush has developed a certain wild west attitude of get in, grab what you can, and take no prisoners. Well-resourced hard-nosed negotiating tactics, legal entitlements and spin, are used to ambush and threaten individuals, and small communities, to put these and the environment under immense duress.

We are seeing the destruction of

economic values of small enterprises; rapidly escalating housing and living costs; population dislocation; major social disharmony; and pushing of the legal envelope, without appropriate consultations, restitution, mitigation or compensation.

Community bullying goes beyond collateral damage of an insignificant and unintentional kind. Community bullies are aware of their actions and consider all is fair in the fight to control, and to develop projects.

Organisations, whether corporate or government, are a group of people who subscribe to a particular culture and value system, which can be constructive or destructive. Organisations tend to reflect the character and

personality of their leaders and senior managers. Destructive leadership focuses on self-importance, self-entitlement and self-empowerment, at the expense of others. Some governments are willing accomplices and participants in this process.

Narcissism is about "me and my entitlement" and the belief that everything can be managed and, if not, then the fallout can be managed. In crossing the line, these organisations have become destructive to others and the environment, and the brakes have to be applied. Across Australia communities are saying enough is enough, and a massive dose of empathy is needed.

For over four decades, I have been involved at many levels as a

chartered accountant, in several resources booms in the Goldfields, Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia.

I've seen a number of organisations that are constructive community builders. They are the ones that have a meaningful empathetic relationship with locals and the environment.

Some organisations are taking this more seriously than others. Resource companies such as BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto are showing some constructive leadership in the Pilbara. Local governments tend to be more empathetic, but usually have little real power due to state legislation.

**Gary Sleet**  
Karratha WA