Food. Water. Life.

Australians uniting to protect our common heritage
WHAT’S AT RISK

Our best farmlands, precious water and wild places are all at risk from the coal and gas mining boom in Australia.

Unconventional gas mining (including coal seam gas, tight gas and shale gas) uses new and untested techniques and spreads out across vast areas. Open-cut and underground longwall coal mining both use massive industrial processes to develop mega-mines unprecedented in size.

This mining expansion is unlike anything this country has seen before: coal and gas exploration licences and applications cover more than half the continent and there are plans to double our coal exports and become the biggest gas exporter in the world.

As the mining juggernaut extends across landscapes, farming communities face an unprecedented threat to their livelihoods, health, and wellbeing.
Only 6% of our continent is arable, yet our best farming regions are targeted for large scale coal and gas developments. From the NSW Liverpool Plains to Queensland’s Darling Downs, from Gippsland to the farmlands of south-east SA, the nation’s food bowls are being sacrificed for short term mining profits. These fertile regions produce grains, oils, fruits, fibre, sheep, beef and dairy cattle. They are vital to the long term food producing capacity of the country, yet proposed mining developments would see them devoured by massive open cut coal mines and carved up and industrialized by invasive gasfields.
On the driest continent on earth, water is our most precious resource.

Despite this, the mining boom is putting at risk our drinking water catchments, our aquifers, and our rivers and wetlands. In Queensland, thousands of coal seam gas wells have been drilled across the Great Artesian Basin, risking contamination and depletion of Australia’s greatest groundwater resource.

Large volumes of polluted mine water are frequently released into the catchment of the Great Barrier Reef and there are plans for at least 8 new coal ports which will require massive dredging and shipping through the Reef. Mining expansion plans include damming of rivers, creek diversions, discharge of waste into river systems and a massive increase in water used in the mining process- reducing supplies available for farmers, urban populations and ecosystems.
Sydney’s water catchment is already damaged, yet more mines are planned.

Five major drinking water catchments provide clean drinking water to over 4 million people in Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the Illawarra. To protect the quality and quantity of water in these important catchments, large areas have been gazetted as Special Areas. Public access is excluded with fines of up to $44,000 for unauthorised access. Yet incredibly, the rules to protect these sensitive sites do not apply to mining: there are 8 underground coal mines currently operating within the Sydney drinking water catchments.

Over 20 years, longwall mining in the catchments has led to major land subsidence. This in turn has caused cracking and draining of rivers, creek beds, swamps, and underground aquifers. Mining in the catchment has also caused cliff falls, fish kills, methane gas bubbling to the surface of creeks and rivers, iron oxide pollution, and the discharge of polluted mine water into local creek systems. Despite these serious impacts, which were confirmed by an official inquiry¹, mining continues to expand in the catchment, with a number of new mines and expansions proposed.

The catchments now face a second threat: proposals for extensive coal seam gasfields. Coal seam gas exploration licences have been granted over the whole or part of five drinking water catchments and an approval for drilling of coal seam gas wells by Apex Energy has been granted within a Special Area. Extraordinary as it seems, and despite promises to the contrary, Sydney’s drinking water catchment which is vital to the health and wellbeing of 4.3 million people is not safe from the rapacious mining boom and its impacts.

It’s not just our agricultural lands and water resources that are threatened: our iconic natural wonders and cultural jewels are also at risk.

International tourism icons like the Kimberley, Central Australia, Arnhem Land and the Ningaloo region are all targeted for invasive gas mining. The last wild places on our continent face an unprecedented industrialization that would see them pock marked with thousands of gas wells and crisscrossed with many thousands of kilometres of roads and pipelines: their silence and solitude destroyed forever by the constant blast of noise and lights from drill rigs, generators and compressor stations.

Exceptional bushland remnants and biodiversity hotspots are also in the firing line - the beautiful Gardens of Stone, Bimblebox Nature Reserve and Leard State Forest are all earmarked for open-cut coal mining.
OUR LIVELIHOODS

Much of the growth in mining comes at the direct expense of other parts of the economy such as agriculture, manufacturing and tourism.

These industries face labour shortages and rising costs caused by the boom and also lose land and assets directly to mining.

In addition, the higher exchange rate resulting from the boom puts further competitive pressure on these non-mining sectors. For example, since the boom began Australia’s rural sector has lost $61.5 billion in export income².

Mining increases housing costs and mortgage interest rates in affected areas and leads to fewer jobs in other sectors – with one estimate putting likely job losses due to mine proposals in Queensland at 20,000³.

OUR FUTURE

Across Australia families and communities are being torn apart as mines and gasfields encroach on rural properties, villages and towns.

Landholders are forced to sell to the miners and leave their family farm forever, or are left stranded, living in a gasfield or neighbouring a coal mine. They have no right of veto over mining activities on their land and watch helpless as their property values fall and livelihoods diminish.

Many Australian towns and villages have already disappeared as the miners move in and push people out. Many more face eradication, disruption and deteriorating health.

Air pollution is leading to poor health outcomes in places like the Hunter Valley, where dangerous coal dust regularly exceeds national health standards, and Tara, Queensland, where more than 20 families adjoining a gasfield have experienced systemic health issues like headaches, vomiting and nosebleeds.

The Lock the Gate Movement: Australians working together to protect our land, water and future.

In a David-and-Goliath struggle of ordinary people against global corporations, rural communities are fighting back to protect our water, farmlands, and biodiversity. The extraordinary influence of the mining industry on governments makes this an uneven contest. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, rural communities are joining together in solidarity; showing extraordinary pluck, integrity and imagination. Against all the odds they are defending our common heritage and building a dynamic social movement.

From the far flung expanses of Central Queensland to the verdant Gippsland region; from the Hunter Valley to Arnhem Land; from one end of this vast continent to the other, we are witnessing an historic coalition of farmers and conservationists, Indigenous Australians and tree changers, of lawyers and doctors, of students and retirees who have been united by their deep love of this country. Together, they are saying that enough is enough, that it has gone too far, and now it is time to put the future first, to protect what we have for generations to come.

Communities across Australia are locking their gates to coal and gas companies and declaring their roads and communities ‘mining free’. All over the country people are attending marches and rallies, and meeting with politicians to demand change. In the tradition of Gandhi, Australians are putting their bodies on the line at protests and blockades. This extraordinary groundswell of opposition has already met with success - in the last year alone three coal mines have been stopped and three gas companies have been forced to suspend operations.

However, no matter how courageous rural people are in taking on global miners, they’ll never be able to save our common heritage without support. It will take the combined efforts of rural and urban dwellers to protect the country we all love from reckless coal and gas expansion. Find out how you can get involved with the Lock the Gate Alliance at www.lockthegate.org.au