

Our Call to Country

Together, we share this one continent that holds us safe. An island home as vast as it is diverse, as wild as it is beautiful, from its red heart to its golden beaches. Our place of endless summers and easy laughter, of hard work and happy chances.

It is an old country, with ancient traditions, home to the oldest living culture on earth and the backdrop to all our hopes and dreams. It is a place where fresh water is our saviour, mateship is our creed and our home is, always, our castle.

But all is not well. The big coal and gas corporations have their eyes on our prize, this beautiful country, and now nothing is sacred and nowhere is safe.

They want to under-mine our water catchments, digging under creeks and rivers, mining for both coal and gas in the drinking water supply area for 4.3 million people in Sydney. They want to drill and mine in our iconic food-bowls: the Darling Downs, Gippsland, the Liverpool Plains, the Gunnedah Basin and the rich farmlands of south-east South Australia. They want to gouge new open-cut coal pits in the Hunter valley where our champion Australian racehorses are raised.

They hope to scour and drill, to clear and devour, to destroy our natural and cultural jewels, our international tourism icons - the Kimberley, the Ningaloo hinterland, Western Australia's Wildflower country, the Lake Eyre Basin, the Simpson Desert, and Arnhem Land.

They will bring with them their railway lines, their dams, their pipelines and their ports. They will despoil the Great Barrier Reef and Kimberley coast with heavy industry, they will dam the Dawson River, they will dredge our estuaries, threaten our fishing industries and damage our coastlines.

They will carve up and degrade our wildlife hotspots, our scenic wonders - the Pilliga, the Gardens of Stone, the Great Dripping Wall, Bimblebox Nature Refuge and Leard Forest.

Our greatest underground water resource, the Great Artesian Basin, will be put at risk; polluted water will be dumped into our rivers, mountains of mine spoil and salt waste will threaten our soils and waterways, creeks will be diverted and wetlands placed in danger. They will leave behind gaping open-cut holes that form toxic dams and thousands of drill holes that will degrade and corrode for generations to come.

They want to drill and mine in our gorgeous green hinterlands where tourists flock; the Northern Rivers of NSW, the Otway coast, south west WA, Queensland's Scenic Rim and SA's Limestone Coast. They want to take their rigs and their trucks and their bulldozers and invade the lands and farms of people across the country.

Already, too many of our good citizens have suffered - those who have been forced to leave their family farm forever, others stranded, living in a gasfield or neighbouring a coal mine - suffering from ill health but helpless as their property values fall and buyers vanish. Communities have been torn apart, and even towns are not safe - open-cut coal mines will encroach on to places like Gloucester, Wandoan, and Jerrys Plains.

We have accepted coal mining in the past, we have recognised its risks but welcomed its contribution. But it's gone too far.

Never before have we seen industries like coal seam gas and shale gas that spread out across such vast areas, threatening so many. Never before have we seen open-cut coal mining on such a scale - mega-mines three times the size of the largest coal mine the country has ever seen. Never have we faced so many dirty new industries - like shale oil, coal to liquids and underground coal gasification.

Never before have so many of our scarce resources been ripped out and shipped abroad to line the pockets of multinationals and their overseas shareholders. Never have we been so sure that we are putting the climate at risk. And never has the community been so disenfranchised - our governments have lost their independence and our planning systems have been corrupted.

But we know that we have the power in the wind and the sun to create our own clean energy. And we know that the sacrifice of this country on the altar of big coal and gas is not a necessity. And it is not a done deal.

Because all around this mighty continent, the people are rising. We have united together in the greatest social movement this country has ever seen, and we are ready to stand up and fight for the future of this great big backyard of ours.

Now, it's time for change. It's time for action.

For too long our Federal Parliament has hidden behind the states. For too long they have shirked their responsibilities to protect this country and its people. Today we are demanding national reforms to control reckless coal and gas expansion across the continent.

We are calling For the Federal Government to use its constitutional powers to -

1. Put in place an urgent moratorium on coal seam gas and other unconventional gas mining.
2. Create no-go zones to protect productive agricultural land, national tourism icons and all residential dwellings from coal and gas mining.
3. Strengthen the Federal environment laws to exclude coal and gas mining from important water sources, cultural heritage sites and sensitive environment areas.
4. Put in place national standards on coal and gas pollution and enforce compliance.
5. Stop using taxpayers' money to provide handouts to big coal and gas corporations and make the miners pay their fair share in taxes.
6. Reject current development proposals for coal ports, mega-mines, dams and unconventional gas wells in significant areas.
7. Conduct research into greenhouse gas emissions from mining and make sure they are properly accounted and fully paid for.
8. Hold a Royal Commission to investigate the management of coal and gas resources by all Australian governments.

www.calltocountry.org.au