CUT THROUGH OUR HEARTLAND...

#PROTECTTHEHUNTER

THE IMPACTS OF COAL MINING EXPOSED.
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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Join the AGL campaign: visit dirtyagl.com/take-action/ to join 350.org’s campaign e-list and sign up to volunteer on the campaign.

Join a local action group: support coal affected communities by joining your local group and/or volunteer for Lock the Gate. Visit: lockthegate.org.au/ProtectTheHunter

Join our 100% renewables campaign: http://www.nature.org.au/get-involved/take-action/100-renewable-nsw/

Calendar of upcoming events

DAILY - BULGA:
Vigil to save Wallaby Scrub Rd from Rio Tinto’s Warkworth mine at Bulga. https://www.facebook.com/standwithbulga/

SYDNEY STOP COAL AND GAS VIGIL
When: Every Friday 11:00 - 12:00
Where: 52 Martin Place NSW 2000
Near NSW Ministerial Offices

PITTWATER NANNAS AGAINST COAL VIGIL
When: Every Friday 12:30 - 1:30 pm
Where: 1725 Pitt Water Road Mona Vale NSW 2103. Out front of Planning Minister Rob Stokes Office

16 SEPT: MANLY LOCK THE GATE EVENT
Arts Festival Feat. Reg Mombassa. 6 – 8pm. RSVP at http://www.lockthegate.org.au/calendar

19 - 25 SEPT: FOSSIL FREE AGL COMMUNITY ACTION PUSH
In the lead up to AGL’s AGM join with others in your community to take a photo in an iconic location with a sign that says “[YOUR LOCATION] calls on AGL to go Fossil Free!]. Contact moira@350.org.au to register your interest and receive further details.

28 SEPT: AGL AGM
Join AGL customers, shareholders and community members to expose the company’s greenwash and demand AGL come up with a plan to exit the dirty energy business within a decade.
WHAT: a fun, family friendly action outside AGL’s AGM in Sydney.
WHEN: Wednesday 28th September Time TBC - rsvp to isaac@350.org.au and we’ll send you details closer to the day
WHERE: Sydney Recital Hall, 2 Angel Place, SYDNEY
THE HUNTER

The Hunter Valley, the land of the Wonnarua Nation.

For decades the Hunter Valley has been at the forefront of the biggest battle our world has ever faced - how to prevent runaway climate change. As the supply region for the world’s largest coal port in Newcastle, the Hunter Valley has long borne the harsh costs of Australia’s addiction to coal. As coal mining has intensified, the impacts on the communities of Hunter, the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people, and other industries such as agriculture, wine-making and horse breeding have reached a crisis point.

Yet the community is fighting back and shaping its own vision for the future of the Hunter.

#ProtectTheHunter is supported by the Wollar Progress Association, in conjunction with Lock the Gate, 350.org and the Nature Conservation Council. To donate to support the work of the Wollar Progress Association, please email bevsmiles@bigpond.com.
THE HUNTER VALLEY AND COAL

The Hunter Valley is not simply a coal field. It’s a rich and productive river Valley, home to horticulture, tourism, dairy and beef industries. It is one of only two internationally recognised wine-growing regions in Australia, and has the second highest concentration of racehorse studs in the world.

But in the last ten years, coal mines have grown so large they are threatening the viability of other industries and permanently scarring its beautiful landscape. Land mapped and crucial for the horse and wine industries is being targeted in the next phase of coal mine expansions and leaders in those industries have declared that their very future is in jeopardy.

There are 26 coal mines and mine complexes currently operating in the Hunter Valley, comprising 42 open cuts pits and 15 underground works and producing over 200 million tonnes of coal every year.

Open cut coal mines now occupy over 30,000ha of the Hunter Valley and mining exploration leases cover a further 128,000ha. That’s 64% of the entire area of the Valley floor.

Coal companies own up to 27% of prime farmland in some shires.

Since 2011, income from coal mining has fallen 32%, employment has fallen 13% and royalties collected by NSW have fallen by $300m. Over the same period, volumes of coal exported have risen by 29%.

Coal is in decline, but that doesn’t mean that the Hunter Valley is safe from further damaging mining. Thousands have lost their jobs and all the while the impacts on air quality, water and bushland have intensified.

Meanwhile, plans are progressing for more and more mine expansions. The industry has 16 new mining areas proposed, covering a further 75,000ha of the Valley, much of it covered in remnant bushland or farms supporting the wine, horse-breeding or beef industries.
THE BATTLE FOR BULGA

When you know what the locals know about big coal, what will you do?

The village of Bulga is in a David and Goliath battle against one of the world’s coal-mining giants - Rio Tinto. Theirs is a tale of undue influence, injustice and heroism. Read on for the plotted history of one of NSW’s most notorious coal mines.

2003
Rio Tinto and the Carr Government sign an agreement to protect the Saddle Ridge area near Bulga forever, as an “offset” for the latest expansion of Warkworth coal mine. This should have been the end of the story.

2010
Rio renege on the deal, and put in an application to expand the mine through Saddle Ridge, and close a much-used public road: Wallaby Scrub.

Bulga residents vote unanimously to fight the mine expansion.

2012
The O’Farrell Government gives Rio their mine approval.

Bulga residents challenge the approval in the Land & Environment Court.

They win. This should have been the end of the story.

2013
Rio and the O’Farrell Government appeal to the Supreme Court to reinstate the mine approval.

They lose. Bulga wins. This should have been the end of the story.

2014
Rio submits a new mining application – the same plan rejected by the courts.

The Baird Government changes “biodiversity offset” laws for coal mines, and the environment department rubber stamps Rio’s plans to bulldoze the critically endangered bushland around Saddle Ridge.

The government removes Bulga’s right to challenge a new mine approval in court.

2015
A government-commissioned report recommends giving Rio their mine approval, and warns that Bulga might need to be “relocated” due to the mining impacts.

The Baird Government gives Rio a new mine approval.

2016
Rio Tinto wants to acquire Wallaby Scrub Road (part of the convict built and heritage-listed Great North Road) from Singleton Council. The Council has voted not to sell the road. To date, the Premier has refused to provide an undertaking that the NSW Government will not force Council to sell the road.

Will we let this be the end of the story?
The township of Muswellbrook has been almost entirely surrounded by open cut coal mines since the approval of the Bengalla Mine in 1996, Mt Arthur North open cut in 2001 and Muswellbrook Coal open cut in 2005. Mt Arthur is the largest coal producer in NSW with an output of about 16 million tonnes per annum (mtpa).

Other existing and proposed mines to the west of the township include the Dartbrook underground mine (currently not operating), Mt Pleasant open cut (approved but not yet developed) and the large Muswellbrook West proposal under assessment.

These constitute the largest new proposed mine expansion in the Upper Hunter. The Drayton mine to the south east is due to close down and has been the centre of a controversial campaign to prevent a large mine continuation project, Drayton South.

While Muswellbrook is now predominantly a mining and power generation town, it was once the centre of a diverse and thriving agricultural industry based on the irrigated Hunter River flats. Mining companies now own the majority of this land.

The thoroughbred horse breeding industry is another large employer in Muswellbrook Shire. There has been major land use conflict and severe divisions within the community generated by ongoing mine expansion proposals.

The Muswellbrook economy waxes and wanes with the variability of the coal industry. Major restructures and redundancies has caused an increase in unemployment in the region. Attempts at diversifying through investment in education and aged care facilities have been undertaken by the Council to try to buffer mining industry fluctuations.

There has been underground mining in the Muswellbrook area since the early 1900s. Much of the mining has been for state-owned power generation. However, the scale of the current operations is vast with multiple impacts. The increased size of open cut mining for the export market has had significant environmental and social impacts.
SOCIAL DAMAGE OF MINING

The fair treatment of mine workers health and safety, work and pay conditions is an ongoing issue for many mining communities. Many of the big companies have laid off their permanent workforce and replaced them with contractors on lower pay and conditions. All mines in the Hunter now operate on 12 hour shifts.

This has significant social impacts on families and the community. The number of road fatalities on the New England Highway has increased significantly since the introduction of 12 hour shifts. Fatigued mineworkers travelling long distances home are a danger to themselves and other road users.

The health issues for the general Muswellbrook community affected by the combined impacts from the adjacent mines and power stations are significant and not assessed through any planning process.

The damage to the Hunter River from long-term mining activity and new large expansions has not been assessed for cumulative impact. The proposed expansion to the west of Muswellbrook will see these impacts increase dramatically.

The loss of community members, loss of agricultural industries, increased conflict over land use planning and threats to community and worker health are outstanding issues for the communities of the Hunter. The Government has failed to provide safety and long-term planning for these communities.
Wendy Bowman, resident of the Camberwell area, has been fighting coal mines for nearly 30 years and was a founding member of Hunter Minewatch, which formed to give advice to local communities.

Wendy’s first property on Bowman’s Creek was a successful dairy farm until underground mining cracked the creek and removed her water supply.

Her second property, ‘Granbalang’ was surrounded by the Rix’s Creek Mine. She was forced to move from the heritage homestead with only 28 days notice.

Wendy’s third property, ‘Rosedale’ on Glennies Creek, is adjacent to the Ashton Mine. This mine commenced in 2002 with a large opencut pit right next to the Camberwell Village.

The noise and dust drove most of the Camberwell community away. A small number of stalwart families remain to fight for their rights. Ashton South-East Opencut, proposed in 2009, covered ‘Rosedale’ which contained 60% of the predicted coal reserve.

Wendy steadfastly refused to sell her property to Yancoal, owners of Ashton. She considered the opencut mine a major threat to Glennies Creek which provides all the water supply to the lower Hunter River. Glennies Creek corridor is also important for wildlife movements. Many threatened native species have been pushed out as the surrounding mines expand and continue to clear bushland.

The Ashton South-East Opencut went to the first Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) held in the Hunter. This PAC rejected the mine. The decision was appealed with support from the Department of Planning and a second PAC approved the mine.

The community had merit appeal rights at the time, so Hunter Environment Lobby appealed the second PAC decision through
the Land and Environment Court in 2012. The final decision was that the mine could not commence until Wendy sold ‘Rosedale’ to Yancoal. This she will never do.

Other mines in the vicinity of Camberwell include Rix’s Creek, Integra, Glendell, Mt Owen and Ravensworth complexes. The cumulative impact of these large operations has been significant and far reaching. Particularly impacts on creeks and groundwater systems and the natural environment, as well as the loss of people through property acquisition by mining companies.

The Mt Owen mine to the north-west of Camberwell was approved to destroy over half of the Ravensworth State Forest in 1994. This was the largest extent of remaining bushland on the floor of the Hunter Valley. An extension of the mine in 2004 allowed the destruction of areas put aside to offset the initial loss of bushland. Another large extension, bringing the mine closer to Camberwell, is currently in the planning system.

The loss of community, loss of water, loss of air quality, loss of biodiversity, loss of dairies and other food producing industries along with increased noise, traffic, light pollution, stress and health problems has had a major unassessed toll on the people of the Camberwell and Singleton area.

The Singleton Healthy Environment Group was formed to highlight the health impacts from mine dust. As a result, an extensive regional air quality monitoring system has been set up.

Wendy’s courageous battle continues.
When you know what the locals know about big coal, what will you do?
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When you know what the locals know about big coal, what will you do?

Nationally, our energy system is geared to continue burning fossil fuels long into the future and to hold back our clean energy future. Australia’s energy grid is dominated by ageing and inefficient coal-fired power stations that produce far more power than we need, sending wasteful and polluting emissions into our atmosphere, damaging our land and water and harming our health.

If that wasn’t enough, this coal power is also crowding out the space that could be filled by abundant and safe renewable power from the sun and the wind.

As Australia’s largest carbon emitter, AGL has a unique role to play in bringing government, workers and communities together to drive this pivotal energy shift. But instead, they have a plan to continue propping up dirty coal power for the next 3 decades, until 2050.

More than 4 million Australians are AGL customers and the company has a massive public profile. This presents us a wide range of opportunities to build pressure on the company.

AGL in the Hunter
AGL owns three of the eight dirtiest coal fired power stations in Australia – Loy Yang A in Victoria, and Liddell and Bayswater here in the Hunter. Liddell, at 44 years old has already surpassed its technical life span of 40 years – making it one of the dirtiest power stations in the country. Bayswater has a capacity of 2640 MW, making it the largest coal-fired power station in NSW.

Bayswater and Liddell combined burn approximately 12 million tonnes of coal annually, producing 23 million tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere each year. That’s huge.

Dirty secrets
Behind AGL’s greenwash the company hides many ‘dirty secrets’. AGL has a history of blocking climate action, for example by attacking the Renewable Energy Target and calling for the carbon price to be axed. A recent Melbourne Environment Institute report revealed that AGL have also gamed the electricity market in South Australia, contributing to price hikes which have been incorrectly blamed on renewable energy. Not to mention the many environmental breaches at AGL’s power stations - such as the release of fly ash and allowing 6000 litres of sulphuric acid to be discharged from its Bayswater coal-fired Power Station into the adjacent stormwater drains and nearby Tinkers Creek earlier this year.

Visit dirtyagl.com/take-action/ to join the campaign e-list and sign up to volunteer on the campaign.
When you know what the locals know about big coal, what will you do?

MINE REHABILITATION

Not a single large open cut mine in the Hunter Valley has yet been closed and rehabilitated. The question is: will the coal companies do right by the region and restore the Valley they’ve cut up?

Not unless we fight for it.

The NSW Government doesn’t require open cut mines to back-fill all the pits they dig and restore the land to what it was like previously - this needs to change. So far in NSW, a total of 45 legacy pits, or final voids, covering 6,050 hectares are planned or already approved to be left behind, most of them in the Hunter Valley.

And that’s not the only problem. Spoil piles can leach acid and heavy metals into waterways. Creeks have been diverted, soils destroyed, bushland cleared. There’s not enough money held in bonds by the Government to fix the problem if mining companies walk-away from their responsibilities to clean up after themselves, and there’s no guarantee that retrenched mine-workers will be offered clean-up jobs first.

Without tougher regulation to lift the bar for mining companies before they begin, and during their operations, the communities of the Hunter will be paying the price for the short-term coal bonanza for hundreds and thousands of years.

What the Hunter needs is a region-wide, fully-funded plan to coordinate the rehabilitation of coal mines across the Hunter, developed in partnership with affected communities, unions, councils, business and Traditional Owner. Surely that’s not too much to ask for a region that has sacrificed so much.

Can you help us make them deliver it?
A FAIR AND RAPID TRANSITION BEYOND COAL

Though some may be unwilling to admit it, it’s hard to dispute that a major transition away from coal isn’t already happening across Australia.

The falling price of coal has seen mine operators in New South Wales reassess their workforces. In the Hunter thousands of miners have being sacked over the recent years and coal mines and power facilities are struggling to remain viable.

With approximately 1,000 jobs set to vanish from coal mines in the Hunter Valley in 2016, coal companies continue to sack workers, such as the announcement in March 2016 that BHP was to cut 290 workers from their Mt Arthur mine.

We must recognise the need for the transition away from coal to be ‘just’ and fair for communities who currently depend on the coal industry. A ‘just transition’ means replacing the jobs and energy that fossil fuels currently provide, and ensuring that workers and communities currently dependent on the coal industry are not thrown on the scrap heap. Plans must be put in place for a staged transition - leaving closure to chance means leaving workers and communities in the lurch.

A current Hunter Valley door-knock program undertaken by a community group shows that Muswellbrook residents, many of whom work in the industry, almost unanimously agree that a post coal plan needs to be urgently developed for the region.

We need to ensure the transition beyond coal happens rapidly and fairly. There must be opportunities for workers and communities to shift to alternate industries well before projects close.
BYLONG VALLEY: A NEW COAL FRONTIER

The Bylong Valley – perhaps best known for agriculture and horse breeding - has outstanding natural beauty, fertile soils and good water.

**Mining and exploration:** The entirety of the valley is covered by exploration licences, mostly for coal.

Over the last 10 years the valley has seen exploration for various minerals and gems (including rubies, sapphires and rare earths), for coal seam gas and for geothermal hot rock. The western half of the valley is still covered by a portion of the much larger coal seam gas exploration licence, PEL 456, currently held by Hunter Gas.

Mt Penny is probably the most (in)famous mining project in the Valley, connected with the Obeid family and a number major mining industry figures. The licence was found by the ICAC to be “so tainted by corruption” that it was extinguished. It has now been reabsorbed into the larger EL6676, known as the North Bylong tenement (which could still be released by the NSW Government for a future coal mining project).

**KEPCO’s Bylong Coal Project:** The greatest and most immediate threat to the valley currently is KEPCO’s planned Bylong Coal Project, which would supply coal for electricity generation in South Korea.

KEPCO bought the coal leases from Anglo American for a whopping $403 million in 2010. Since then, literally hundreds of holes have been drilled for exploration.

KEPCO wants mine 124Mt of coal over 30 years. Operations would be 24/7. KEPCO estimates an average operations workforce of around 315 (about 15% local hires).

**Water Impacts:** KEPCO’s project will have a major impact on local water resources. Water in the Bylong Valley water sharing plan is already severely over allocated, although this has largely not been much of a problem since all use had been agricultural and farmers used, on average, far less than their entitlement. KEPCO, however, will want to have access to water 24/7 every day and will be drawing it from a far more concentrated area. Simply having enough licences to cover this isn’t enough – the water may not physically be there (or be there reliably enough) to allow the mine to operate as planned. KEPCO’s water demand will be comparable to – if not somewhat greater than – that of Shenhua’s proposed Watermark project on the Liverpool Plains.

**Agricultural Soil Impacts:** The impacts on Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) – our best farming soils – are considerable. A total of 595Ha of BSAL has been identified within the project’s planned disturbance boundary (compared with 96Ha for Shenhua’s Watermark), with 320Ha to suffer “direct and permanent” impacts.
When you know what the locals know about big coal, what will you do?

*Where It’s At Now:* The Environmental Impact Statement for the project has been exhibited and KEPCO’s responses to submissions published. The project is currently being assessed by the Department of Planning, but that assessment is on hold as the Department seeks further information. We’re expecting Planning to issue its assessment report and recommendations sometime in the next two to three months, with Planning Assessment Commission hearings perhaps in late 2016.

Recent developments in Korea have seen some question marks raised about the future of the project. There is talk that KEPCO may exit the Bylong project and hand over responsibility for it to different coal fired power generators, which are to be partially privatised. Just how appealing a new greenfields mine project will be to private capital, given the major changes in market over the past 5 or more years and the greater general availability of thermal coal, remains to be seen.

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**COAL (EXPLORATION, MINING APPLICATIONS AND CURRENT MINING) - Bylong Focus**

- KEPCO EXPLORATION LEASES
  - Two adjoining areas (A287 and A342)
  - Mining Lease Application Area as a subset (darker cross hatching – running SW to NE)

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**THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE HATCHING IS EXPLORATION LEASES, MOST OF WHICH ARE STILL HELD BY THE GOVERNMENT**

(i.e. identified as coal bearing – to be further explored and considered for potential future release)
WOLLAR VILLAGE AND PEABODY’S WILPINJONG MINE

Until about 12 years ago Wollar district had a very close-knit and vibrant community of 300 – 400 residents on large scale farms, smaller hobby farms and in the Wollar Village. The school was well attended, as were both Anglican and Catholic Churches, the Wollar Bushfire Brigade had a large, well-trained membership, the CWA Branch was strong and regular social functions such as dances, fairs, cricket, tennis and general fundraising events were organised by the Wollar Progress Association and various other committees.

All this changed when the Wilpinjong coal mine proposal appeared. Properties where the key coal resource was were purchased first, before an exploration licence was even granted.

The key purpose of the mine was to secure supply of domestic thermal coal to Bayswater and Liddell Power Stations. The deal had virtually been sealed before the mine was assessed for its environmental impact.

Wilpinjong was approved in 2006 to produce 9.5 million tonnes of coal per annum (mtpa) for 21 years. This included a contract to supply 7mtpa to the Upper Hunter power stations for 19 years and 2.5mtpa for export. It was purchased by Peabody Energy US, then the world’s largest private coal company.

The operation of the mine immediately caused severe impacts on neighbours through unpredicted noise pollution. The 24 hr/day, 7days/week mining activities with bulldozers, excavators, large haul trucks and other large diesel machines along with the coal crusher, train loading and train movements changed the nature of the quiet rural area that the community had enjoyed.

Seven subsequent approved expansions of the mine over the last 10 years has seen an increase in coal production up to 13mtpa. The mine cannot comply with its noise conditions so Peabody has run a very aggressive property purchase campaign, and has now purchased 70% of local properties. The result is a loss of 90% of the Wollar population and still falling.

The Bushfire Brigade has closed down due to loss of volunteers, both heritage sandstone churches have been closed and bought by Peabody and the school is also under threat. Peabody own the General Store and closed down the only mechanical services in a 50km radius.

A new expansion of the mine is currently sitting with Department of Planning to bring it within 1.5km of the Wollar Village. There are still about 30 people left in the district who are hanging in and fighting to keep the community alive and functioning.

Peabody Energy filed for bankruptcy in the United States in April 2016 causing uncertainty around the future of the company and its Australian operations.
MINING IMPACTS ON THE GOULBURN RIVER

The Goulburn River is the most westerly rising tributary of the Hunter River system. The headwaters are within the low rainfall climate of Central West NSW and base flows to the river rely heavily on stored groundwater inflows.

Three large coal mines now operate across the top of the Goulburn River, threatening the integrity of the river system and its unique water dependent environment.

In 1981, a large open cut mine at Ulan was approved, including the diversion of over 4 kms of the Goulburn River. A sustained community campaign over a 20 year period has resulted in the proper rehabilitation of the river diversion which had developed severe erosion problems.

The approval of the large Moolarben Mine in 2007 threatened the integrity of the unique sandstone water dependent ecosystem known as ‘The Drip’ on the river. Again, a sustained community campaign was successful and the Goulburn River National Park was extended to include The Drip, and the Government committed to monitoring of the groundwater system that supplies the drips and stronger conditions for the management of subsidence in the area.

The total area of the three approved open cut mines including the Moolarben and Ulan Coal Mines will create around 75 sq kms of highly permeable land filled with crushed coal rejects and waste rock. These open cuts are located in natural discharge and recharge areas across the headwaters of the Goulburn River. The long-term cumulative impacts of these mines have not been effectively assessed nor evaluated.

Polluted mine water discharge is over 15 million litres per day, masking base flow losses while increasing river salinity. This is predicted to rise to 22 million litres by 2018 adding approximately 12,000 tonnes salt to the river per year.

The possible addition of the Bylong Mine and current impacts from the Mangoola Mine at the end of the Goulburn system near Denman has major ramifications for the long-term health and resilience of the river system in an uncertain climate future.

The long term cumulative impacts of mining have serious implications and compromises the resilience of groundwater dependent systems, exposing the catchment to future climate shocks.
BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING: A LOSS FOR NATURE

The Hunter Valley has an incredible environment yet coal has taken a heavy toll on its plants and wildlife.

Coal mining continues to expand and destroy vital habitat for endangered wildlife like the spotted-tailed quoll, squirrel glider and regent honey-eater. Despite the region making up only 5% of NSW it represents one third of the plant diversity in the state, with between 2,000 and 2,500 plant species. Unless the rights of these plants and animals to exist is respected many species are at risk of being lost from the region.

The Hunter region has 28 threatened ecological communities, including the critically endangered Warkworth Sands Woodland which Rio Tinto has been given approval to destroy to extend the Mt Thorley-Warkworth mine at Bulga. This is just one example of how the interests of mining companies trumps the damage they cause our environment.

Increasingly coal companies are using biodiversity offsets to justify the environmental destruction their mines cause. The concept of offsetting is fundamentally flawed, it relies on a company or Government to permanently protect one area of habitat in exchange for allowing the destruction of another. Offsetting ignores the reality that the Hunter is a finite region with many habitats that cannot be found anywhere else.

The Warkworth coal mine is a good example of how poorly biodiversity offsetting works to protect nature. In an earlier approval Rio Tinto had promised to protect a patch of the Warkworth Sands Woodland forever, in exchange for being allowed to clear habitat to build their mine. A decade later, the Government has allowed Rio Tinto to destroy the area they protected as an offset - meaning the overall result is the destruction of bushland which they promised to protect forever.

Neither the Government nor coal companies can be trusted to protect nature using biodiversity offsets - the remaining bushland in the Hunter is simply too precious and must be made off limits to coal companies.
WHAT YOU CAN DO

www.lockthegate.org.au/protectthehunter

350.org
dirtyagl.com/take-action/

Nature Conservation Council
The voice for nature in NSW

www.nature.org.au/get-involved/take-action/
100-renewable-nsw/