

#Time2Choose: Q & A People's Referendum

Who is behind this campaign?

Lock the Gate Alliance is a network of hundreds of community groups and tens of thousands of individuals around the country concerned about the impact of unconventional gas and coal mining.

In New South Wales, we work with community groups in the city and the country to garner support for protecting people and the countryside from the effects of inappropriate mining.

Lock the Gate Alliance developed this People's Referendum in collaboration with other community groups and individuals.

How did you develop the questions?

This question has been developed taking advice from communities across NSW who have been forced to live with coal and gas mining, and based on the issues which they find most difficult and the changes they need to protect their families, and their land and water resources.

1) Promote health and prosperity through agriculture and reliable clean energy

Coal mining and unconventional gas, including coal seam gas, are both associated with damaging consequences for human health.

In New South Wales, hundreds of people die every year as a result of particulate pollution, and the chief commercial source of that pollution is coal mining.

In Queensland, communities forced to live in gasfields have reported disturbing health impacts and research from the United States has shown that negative impacts of unconventional gas range from low birth weight babies to severe headaches and eye-irritation.

Uncontrolled mining puts agriculture, tourism and a clean energy future at risk. Renewable energy is cheap and reliable, and it doesn't risk land and water resources. Agriculture is Australia's long-term boom industry.

2) Protect communities, including Indigenous communities, and give them legal rights to object to mining

It may surprise you to hear that landholders, including Traditional Owners and Native Title holders, do not have a legal right to refuse mining on their land. In addition, the State Government routinely strips community groups and individuals of the right to challenge the merits of mining approvals in the Land and Environment Court.

There are too few checks and balances on this industry and as a result, people and communities are being stranded, divided and torn asunder, with little recourse to the law.

Large swathes of rural land is being purchased by mining companies in the areas surrounding mines, emptying farms and villages. Mines are being proposed less than 2km from homes and towns. Balance needs to be restored.

3) Protect important farmland, catchments and water resources from risky coal mining

There are some places where mining is just not appropriate. Mining is currently allowed in the drinking water catchments of our coastal cities, alluvial aquifers and recharge areas for the groundwater that is the lifeblood of rural New South Wales.

It is currently allowed on farmland that supports diverse and vital food production, and in areas that are hotspots for tourism and other sustainable rural industries.

Balance needs to be restored and parts of the state where mining is clearly unacceptable must be protected in law. The current NSW Government first came to power in 2011 promising to do this but has failed to deliver.

4) Stop mining and exploration for unconventional gas (including coal seam gas)

Unconventional gas mining (which includes mining for coal seam gas, tight gas or shale gas) consumes huge amounts of water, and poses a risk of depressurising and contaminating ground and surface water.

It usually involves tens of thousands of gas wells, with roads, pipelines, compressor stations, wastewater dams, and other infrastructure. A CSG project can spread across hundreds of thousands of hectares of land.

Unconventional gas is much more expensive than conventional gas and renewable energy. It is driving up the price of electricity and sending manufacturing industries offshore or out of business, risking tens of thousands of jobs.

The coal seam gas near Narrabri has been estimated by independent energy researchers as the most expensive gas on the east coast.

Don't we need coal and gas for energy? Isn't there an energy crisis?

More than 80% of the coal mined in New South Wales is exported and almost two thirds of all gas on the eastern seaboard is exported from Gladstone in Queensland after three LNG export plants were approved there in 2010/11.

Recent analysis from the Australian energy Market Operator (AEMO) reveals that there is no shortfall in gas supply or expected electricity shortfall.

However, export companies like Santos committed excessive volumes of gas to export and are now diverting domestic gas from South Australia and Victoria to feed their export contracts. It is this diversion of domestic gas for export that is the main factor driving up gas prices here.

Mining companies are digging up these natural resources at an unprecedented rate and selling them offshore with no thought for our energy future, or the future of agriculture and our precious water resources.

But the renewable energy industry is coming to the rescue. AEMO identifies 1.5 gigawatts of new renewable energy capacity coming online in the next two years or so.

What will you do with the results of the People's Referendum?

For local areas where there has been concerted collection of votes within postcode areas or electorate boundaries, we will be able to tally the results to present to politicians and candidates to show support for the vision outlined in the People's Referendum.

For this reason, we need to make sure we only collect one vote per person and that all the data is collected by Lock the Gate. That's why we're collecting email addresses, and asking people for their postcode.

In places where action to reform mining and stop coal seam gas are most pressing, local groups will be able to organise accountability sessions with candidates in the lead up to the election in March 2019, after the results of the Referendum in their area have been counted.

We will tally the results across the whole state too, like a petition, and present the results to state political parties.

What will you do with my contact details?

If you vote "yes" and include your email address, your contact details are only going to be used to keep you up to date with this campaign by your local group and Lock the Gate. You will have the opportunity to unsubscribe at any time.

Are you affiliated with a political party?

No. Our aim is to convince all political parties to adopt policies to prevent damage from coal and CSG. That way, the people of New South Wales can be free to choose who to vote for based on other issues, secure in the knowledge that our water resources, food-growing lands and the air we breathe are safe from damage by coal and gas mining.