PROTECT FARMLAND AND WATER
NO NEW COAL OR COAL SEAM GAS
The Greens’ plan to protect land, water, climate and communities

Coal and coal seam gas mining is making global warming worse, destroying valuable farmland, damaging our precious water resources and putting pressure on regional towns.

The rapid and destructive expansion of mega coal mines and the coal seam gas (CSG) industry across much of Australia demonstrates what happens when governments put big mining companies ahead of caring for local communities, the environment and our long term future.

The Greens are the only party to realise that supporting our farmers and protecting our prime agricultural land and water is vital for our future food security.

> THE GREENS PLAN TO STOP NEW COAL AND CSG MINING

Only the Australian Greens are prepared to stand up to the big coal and CSG mining companies and act to protect our climate, precious farmland and regional communities.

The Greens are fighting for:
- no new coal or CSG approvals;
- the right for farmers and other landholders to say NO to coal and CSG on their land;
- no new coal or gas ports along the Great Barrier Reef;
- protection of our precious water resources including the Murray-Darling and Great Artesian Basins from overuse or contamination by coal and coal seam gas mining;
- independent measurement of methane emissions from CSG so we can understand how polluting CSG really is; and
- stronger environmental laws to better protect our natural environment.

> PROTECTING VALUABLE FARMLAND AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

The Australian Greens stand firmly on the side of Australian farmers. We want farmers to have a right to refuse access to mining companies on their land. Currently, under state, territory and federal laws, most landholders have no right to refuse mining companies access to explore and then later, mine their land.

> COAL AND CSG THREATENS OUR LAND AND WATER

There are many risks to our underground and surface water resources from coal mines, and CSG mining risks doing long term damage to our precious water resources on which much of our farmland relies.

The National Water Commission has stated that CSG development represents a substantial risk to sustainable water management given the combination of material uncertainty about water impacts, the significance of potential impacts, and the long time period over which they may emerge and continue to have effect. Drilling CSG wells through aquifers to access coal seams risks creating connections between the two, potentially lowering, as well as contaminating, the water table. Extracting CSG often also requires hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) - the high-pressure injection of millions of litres of chemically treated water, then sucked out again along with hyper-salty water from the coal seam, creating huge problems for storage and risking further water contamination.

A recent poll showed that 75% of New South Wales voters oppose CSG exploration on agricultural land. This follows a 2011 poll showing 68% of Australians want a stop to coal seam gas until it has been proven to be safe for our environment and rural communities.

Every coal mine and CSG well reduces rural communities’ access to land and threatens water resources. Coal and CSG mining simply cannot co-exist with farming.

> CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

It is environmentally and economically disastrous to expand fossil fuel industries as the fossil-fuel age comes to a close.
Rather than expanding our dirty industries, Australia should be rapidly transitioning to renewable energy.

The burning of coal for electricity generation is a significant driver of climate change. We cannot sustainably continue burning coal at current rates, let alone continue to expand the coal industry.

Industry claims that the greenhouse emissions from CSG use are around half that of coal. However, this does not count the fugitive emissions — methane that leaks into the atmosphere from wells and pipes. After questioning and pressure from the Greens, the CSIRO is finally undertaking a study on the fugitive emissions from CSG, including on-ground measurement. CSG could in fact be just as bad for the climate as burning coal.

> GREENS’ TRACK RECORD ON COAL & COAL SEAM GAS

The Greens have been a strong critical voice against the coal and CSG industries and we intend to continue our campaign alongside community campaigns like Lock the Gate to bring a halt to the destruction across rural and regional Australia.

In 2013, the Greens, Country Independents and the community forced the Government to introduce legislation giving the federal government the power to approve or refuse coal and coal seam gas projects that are likely to have a significant impact on water resources. Under Greens pressure, the Government also provided that these new federal water powers (‘water trigger’) could not be handed off to the States. Without the community-backed campaign of the Greens and Country Independents, these changes to protect our water would never have occurred.

In 2011 the Greens introduced legislation to allow farmers to lock the gate against coal seam gas. The Landholders’ Right to Refuse (Coal Seam Gas) Bill 2011, required farmers’ written consent before any exploration and drilling can occur – and a farmer could refuse that consent. The bill was debated on 22 September 2011 and was not supported by Labor, National or Liberal parties.

The Greens have also been campaigning for strong environmental laws that protect farmland, national parks and water resources from mining. Business interest groups have been using false claims about duplication to lobby for watering down of environmental protection.

> WHERE DO THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES STAND?

The Labor government has never rejected a coal mine or coal seam gas project, and most recently approved the NSW Maules Creek and Boggabri coal mines.

Tony Abbott also stands side-by-side with the coal and gas companies. For brief 24 hours in 2011, Tony Abbott backed the rights of landholders to say no to mining companies on their land. When asked further about this the next day, he retracted his previous support for farmers.

The National Party – once the party that represented the interests of farmers – has staked its claim on the side of the mining companies like Origin, Chevron, Santos and AGL.

Coalition state governments along the eastern seaboard are also supporting the expansion of the CSG and coal industries, but with occasional gestures that in no way hinder the rapid roll-out of new wells.

Federal and state governments, both Labor and Coalition, have been facilitating the mining industry with minimal regulation in the interests of quick profits ahead of the health and wellbeing of regional communities. To the extent state and federal governments are prepared to act on CSG, it is limited to outer suburban areas (often marginal seats) like Western Sydney, leaving regional communities in the lurch.

Labor and the Coalition have truly misjudged the community’s views on the rapid expansion of the coal and coal seam gas industries. Only the Australian Greens are prepared to stand up to massive resource corporations and act to protect our precious farmlands and regional communities.

> WE HAVE VIABLE CLEAN ENERGY ALTERNATIVES

Unconventional gas like CSG is a resource Australia does not need for domestic use. Australia’s energy use is declining thanks to improving energy efficiency and rapid update of rooftop solar. The real driver of CSG expansion is the attraction of lucrative overseas markets. Profit, not necessity, is driving the proliferation of the industry that threatens the long-term viability of Australia’s farmlands.

Numerous government and independent reports show large scale renewable energy could replace our reliance on coal fired power – and create more jobs.