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

Coal, coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas mining are making global warming worse, destroying valuable farmland, damaging our precious water resources and putting pressure on our 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.

With destructive plans starting to take shape for shale and tight gas as well, it’s time for our politicians to stand up for what matters.

> GREENS’ PLAN TO STOP NEW COAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL GAS MINING

Only the Australian Greens are prepared to stand up to the big coal and unconventional gas (coal seam, shale and tight gas) mining companies and act to protect our climate, precious farmland and regional communities.

The Greens are fighting for:

- no new coal or unconventional gas approvals;
- the right for farmers and other landholders to say NO to coal and unconventional gas 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 unconventional gas mining;
- independent measurement of methane emissions from unconventional gas so we can understand how damaging they are to the climate; 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.

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.

> COAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL GAS THREATEN OUR LAND AND WATER

There are many risks to our underground and surface water resources from coal mines, and unconventional gas 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 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, shale and tight gas regularly requires hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) - the high-pressure injection of millions of litres of chemically treated water deep underground, to force the release of gas. Each type of gas extraction brings its own potentially significant risks such as reducing the quality or quantity of our groundwater, as well as earth tremors and surface subsidence, and alienation of good farming land.

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.

Coal mines and unconventional gas wells reduce rural communities’ access to land and threaten water resources. Coal and unconventional gas mining simply cannot co-exist with farming.
> **CLIMATE CATASTROPHE**

It is environmentally disastrous and economically short-sighted to seek to expand fossil fuel industries as the fossil-fuel age comes to a close. Rather than expanding our dirty industries, rich countries like Australia should be leading the global transition 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 Government has finally tasked CSIRO with studying the fugitive emissions from CSG, including on-ground measurement. CSG could in fact be just as bad for the climate as burning coal. There are also serious questions to answer about the carbon footprint of shale and tight gas.

> **GREENS’ TRACK RECORD ON COAL & UNCONVENTIONAL COAL SEAM GAS**

The Greens have been a strong critical voice against the coal and unconventional gas 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 pressure from the Greens, 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. The Greens also pushed for this water trigger to apply to shale and tight gas — but the old parties refused, leaving protection for our water from these new fossil fuel industries to the states.

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. During parliament’s consideration of the new water trigger the old parties refused to support Green amendments to give landholders the right to say no to coal, coal seam gas, tight gas and shale gas activities, and underground coal gasification on their land.

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 very controversial NSW Maules Creek and Boggabri coal mines.

Tony Abbott also stands side-by-side with the coal and gas companies. For a 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 have been prepared to act on coal seam gas to date, 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 unconventional 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 is a resource Australia does not need for domestic use. Australia’s energy use is declining thanks to improving energy efficiency and rapid uptake of rooftop solar. The real driver of the unconventional gas 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 how renewable energy can rapidly and affordably end our reliance on coal fired power and gas—and create more jobs.

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1 National Water Commission CSG Position Statement (updated 2012)