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## Offset policy 'hands bushland to coal industry on a platter'

The NSW government's [new offset policy for major projects \(http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/biodivoffsets/biooffsetspol.htm\)](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/biodivoffsets/biooffsetspol.htm) is a major step backwards and will condemn the remnant bushland of the Hunter Valley, according to anti-CSG campaigners.

Lock the Gate says the government claims to be giving landholders the opportunity to secure stewardship payments to protect important bushland, 'but no such fund is actually established'.

'This is a major step backwards for NSW. We are frankly shocked that given the mounting conflict in regions affected by mining, the government is again weakening protections and handing the landscape to the coal mining industry on a platter,' alliance spokesperson Georgina Woods said.

'As usual, the coal industry thinks money solves all problems and the Government has given them just what they wanted – an option to buy their way out of responsibility to protect important bushland and wildlife habitat,' she said.

'We support giving landholders the option of financial support to look after the bush, but that's not what is happening here: this is just a policy to allow the coal industry to drive our woodlands to extinction.'

Lock the Gate says the major problems with the policy are:

- Instead of establishing clear 'no-go' areas for irreplaceable bushland and wildlife habitat, there will be a process of 'further consideration'. Instead of clearly outlining that projects that have unacceptable impacts should not proceed, the government will be able to 'consider if there are other factors that might allow the project to proceed with these impacts. This could include consideration of social and/or economic benefits of a project and if the impact can be appropriately ameliorated through additional conservation measures.'
- The policy abandons the need for offsets to be the same biodiversity as the stuff being lost "where a proponent has demonstrated that they are unable to locate like-for-like offsets, offsets can be targeted to a similar or higher conservation priority" except for critically endangered species and nationally listed species.
- The policy allows companies to claim offsetting credits for the future and uncertain rehabilitation of mine sites. Beautiful remanent and irreplaceable bushland and wildlife corridors will be able to be cleared on the future promise of regrowing bushland decades into the future.

'For the last ten years, offset requirements for coal mines in the Upper Hunter have been messy and compromised: the terrible history of the failed offsets for the Maules Creek mine, and the conflict and angst it has caused is the most obvious example,' Ms Woods said.

'Instead of fixing that, the government is giving up on our bushland. It's frankly appalling.'

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