



TITLE: Climate activism and the neoliberal turn: whatever it takes?

Author/s: Vanessa Bowden

Affiliation/s: University of Newcastle

With the dramatic disintegration of climate mitigation policy in Australia, environment groups have implemented a number of creative strategies for targeting greenhouse intensive industry. Nationally, the prominent anti-mining group Lock the Gate works with landholders to resist the encroachment of mining, gaining support from such unlikely personalities as Alan Jones, while the group 350.org are leading a fossil fuel divestment campaign. In the Hunter region of New South Wales, the Hunter Community Environment Centre has campaigned on the health impacts of the coal transportation chain in an attempt to mobilise residents to prevent the approval of further coal loaders. While such strategies might be seen as an example of what Beck (1997) calls subpolitics, with groups working in unlikely alliances to prevent one of the major causes of climate change, they are also a decidedly neoliberal approach to social change. This paper suggests that these strategies, while yielding some success, have limited applications in terms of dealing with the broader issue of climate change, privileging concerns for self-interest at the expense of the need for engaging the general public or pushing for ambitious leadership to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.