In anticipation of the mine expansion, Wollongong Coal has recently erected new signs, prohibiting public access to the escarpment along the Lower Escarpment Trail. Individuals are threatened with prosecution if found on “their land” because it is “an operational mine site”. By erecting these signs Wollongong Coal has blocked public access and amenity to a beautiful and well-used part of the Escarpment in the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area.

This section of the Lower Escarpment Trail is part of the “Illawarra Moist Corridor”, which extends south from the Royal National Park to Budderoo National Park. With Its spectacular scenery and rainforests, and the diversity of its wildflowers and native birds, the Lower Escarpment Track is ideal for recreational activities such as bush walking, hiking and trail running. In fact, the Lower Escarpment Trail has been used extensively by residents and visitors to the Illawarra over the years for numerous outdoor pursuits. These pursuits can enhance the physical and mental health of local residents and visitors through their participation in physical activity in such a stimulating environment.

The Lower Escarpment Trail also serves as a wide fire trail, allowing fire trucks and other emergency services access to that area of the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area. Given that the Lower Escarpment Trail needs to be maintained and open for fire services, it is reasonable to assume that the trails should also be able to safely support people walking, hiking or running along the wide pathway.

**Recommendation:** If the mine expansion is to be approved, it should be stipulated that a condition of the approval is for Wollongong Coal to allow public access along the Lower Escarpment Trail.