

INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY OF THE NSW BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS SCHEME

Organisation: Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group Inc
Date Received: 31 August 2021



SUBMISSION TO THE NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY
into the
BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS SCHEME

The implementation of the Biodiversity Conservation Scheme via the introduction of BioBanking sounded the 'death knell' for the critically endangered ecological communities (CEEC) of Western Sydney. With a reported 10% of Cumberland Plain Woodland (CPW) remaining at the time, the legislation permitted the removal of 50% of extant vegetation allowing for the retention of the other 50% (eg developers could clear one patch – but preserve a patch in another area). This has worked exactly as anticipated – with expert estimates of around 5% of CPW now all that remains. In fact, an ecological community is considered 'functionally extinct' when more than 70% is lost. In Western Sydney, around 95% is already lost - and the NSW Government continue to 'find ways' to allow the clearing of our critically endangered ecological communities to be undertaken on a DAILY basis.

The rules pertaining to 'offsetting' are soft - so as NEVER to actually prevent a development from proceeding.

This inquiry must consider the **true intent** of an Offsetting Scheme in a landscape where government continues to artificially inflate population growth, triggering infrastructure, residential and industrial development - while at the same time appearing to be 'doing something' (aka biodiversity offsetting) about the extinction crisis which is facing our unique vegetation communities.

What is the premise of offsetting? When a natural asset (such as CPW) becomes so rare that a comparable asset simply cannot be found– then the destruction of that last asset should never proceed? This sounds reasonable? Leave the last bit – for the sake of intergenerational equity? This does not happen. The rules around Biodiversity Offsetting are so obviously tipped in favour of development that salvaging CPW from extinction is all but impossible. We know that the NSW Government permitted the destruction of the only known population of *Hibbertia fumana* to allow the construction of the Moorebank Internodal. Nothing, not even the extinction of a species, stops development.

The economic incentive to protect a diminishing natural asset should INCREASE with the increasing rarity of that asset (this should conversely also produce a financial **disincentive** to destroy that asset). This does not happen with Biodiversity Offsetting. Instead, the NSW Government has introduced ways to actually decrease the economic value of the diminishing natural asset. This is fact – the credit value of CPW under the NSW Offsets scheme has actually decreased over the past 10 years – yet the extent of the vegetation community has also decreased. There is no incentive for private landholders to conserve Biodiversity under this scheme. There is far greater incentive to develop – and hence we sit back and watch as our CEEC CPW heads toward extinction.

Why? Because the NSW Government made the decision to flood the Bio-Credit marketplace with CPW credits by permitting Local Councils to BioBank their parks and reserves. Driving down the offset credits makes developers very happy. Driving down offset credit value also disincentives landowners to participate in the scheme.

With a flood of public parkland being used as offsets for development allows Critically Endangered vegetation to be cleared by a developer, with the ‘offsets’ revenue generated providing **management funds for existing reserves**. Importantly, there is no new areas CPW protected at the expense of another area being destroyed. So, we are left with a net loss of CPW. An example is Noorumba Reserve in Campbelltown. Advocates of biodiversity conservation on the Cumberland Plain have tried to elevate the importance of **additionality**. If one patch is cleared – then another must be protected. By investing in an area that is already protected – there is a net loss of bushland and with only 5% remaining – CPW can no longer afford net loss.

The Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan:

The ‘new rules’ about to be endorsed by the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP) reveal that true intent of Biodiversity Offsetting – which is to assist development at the expense of biodiversity and make this process as simple as possible for the developer. The CPCP is essentially the offsets scheme for FOUR new growth areas across the Cumberland Plain. The CPCP will provide ‘Biocertification’ (equivalent to development ‘open slather’) of 40,000 hectares of the Cumberland Plain. That means ‘site by site’ environmental assessment is not required. Biodiversity certification ‘turns off’ all of the State and Federal protections for Biodiversity. Cutting ‘green tape’ is the reason behind this plan. The ‘Outcomes’ section of the Draft Plan puts Economic outcomes ahead of Environmental outcomes ie the primary outcome of the CONSERVATION PLAN is “Effective delivery of development” – and that says it all.

Proper assessment of the presence of ecological values and what will be lost as a result of development is far too time consuming. Instead, this plan will provide developers with ‘Carte Blanche’ and do a ‘deal’ to preserve a certain number of hectares of CEEC bushland somewhere else and preferably not in the way of more development. So, instead of protecting important corridors to improve habitat connectivity, or preserving the very best of the remaining CPW, **the CPCP will protect denuded cow paddocks with no current biodiversity value** (called ‘the Confluence’ in the CPCP) which **can’t be developed because of flooding issues**. It will also protect areas west of Gulguer Nature Reserve (which

incidentally is the wrong type of vegetation community – this area comprises mostly Shale Transition Forest - not Cumberland Plain Woodland).

Page 58 of the Draft CPCP: *“The Confluence Reserve Investigation Area (see Case Study 4), in the area of Windsor Downs Nature Reserve, would support the east-west corridor in the existing Londonderry reserve network. This area also includes Agnes Banks, Wianamatta, and Castlereagh nature reserves. The proposal includes restoring up to 365 hectares of native vegetation communities, including those targeted for protection under the Plan, which would make it the **largest restoration project** in the Plan.”* Why not protect extant Biodiversity instead of embarking on a 400Ha restoration plan – which scientifically, will never replicate an ecological community?

The confluence is cleared, flood-prone Cow paddocks – please explain how this can be considered as a Biodiversity offset?

*“Other areas within the strategic conservation area have also been identified for further investigation as future reserves to provide greater landscape connectivity such as **Bargo**.”*

Land is cheap at Bargo -and the State Government realise that they can't afford to offset near the impact eg a new reserve near urban growth areas, so they opt for new reserves an hour's drive away from the urban growth areas. Again, Western Sydney absorbs the urban growth, our biodiversity is plundered but the offsets occur 100Km away. This is unreasonable for our local wildlife and unfair for migratory species and catastrophic for CPW.

Below is the Offsets Delivery Plan for the Cumberland Plain – until 2056. It is confounding that immediately *“20% of offsets can be found outside the Cumberland Plain”*. How is this preserving a CEEC???

The Plan also uses the phrase “alternate offsets can only be used once appropriate steps have been taken to obtain target TECs”. We wonder what are **appropriate steps**? Checking realestate.com to see if there are some nice bush blocks anywhere? – maybe do this twice and the ‘appropriate steps’ have been accounted for??? This is dangerous. If the NSW Government was in any way serious about preventing the extinction of CPW – the offsets would be required ON the Cumberland Plain - and development would not be permitted to proceed until the offset site has been secured. Simple.

For our precious threaten species – it is even worse – if the offset targets “can’t be found” – simply wait 5 years and offsetting is permissible “anywhere in NSW”. And they dare to call this a **Cumberland Plain** conservation plan???

Excerpt from the Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan – a developers dream!

Threatened ecological communities:

1. Alternate offsets can only be used once **appropriate steps** have been taken to obtain target TECs (including all like-for-like credits¹² that make up the relevant TEC)
2. A maximum of **20%** of the Plan's cumulative offset targets for TECs can be **secured outside of the Cumberland subregion** over the life of the Plan (including either like-for-like credits or alternate offsets).

3. Where like-for-like offsets for the impacted TEC cannot be secured, preference should be for plant community types of the same Class first, then of same Formation, to those in the target TEC. Plant community types that make up an alternate offset must also be part of a TEC.
4. Spatial preference should first be the Cumberland and adjacent subregions—then the Sydney Basin bioregion—then anywhere in NSW

Species:

5. Direct acquisition of offsets for targeted species from start of Plan implementation (Year 1). Offsets need to be sourced from within the Cumberland subregion and adjacent subregions
6. If at Year 5, offset targets for critically endangered or endangered species have not been met, the direct purchase of offsets for the same species can be secured from anywhere in NSW
7. If at Year 10, no offset locations for critically endangered or endangered species have been identified, the program can consider the implementation of conservation actions¹³ for these species
8. If at Year 10, offset targets for endangered species have not been met, the direct purchase of offsets for the same species can be secured from anywhere in NSW
9. If at Year 15, no offset locations for endangered species have been identified, the program can consider the implementation of conservation actions for these species
10. If at Year 15, offset targets for vulnerable species have not been met, the direct purchase of offsets for the same species can be secured from anywhere in NSW
11. If at Year 20, the conservation program is still not on track to meet targeted species offsets, the program can consider the implementation of conservation actions for any remaining at-risk species
12. If at Year 30, the conservation program is still not on track to meet targeted species offsets, direct purchase of offsets for any species of the same Kingdom and of the same or higher threat status within the Cumberland or adjacent subregions is permitted

This 'loosening' of offsetting obligations serves only to guarantee the extinction of an entire vegetation community – one of the most biodiverse on the planet. It also serves to encourage developers to clear a CEEC – knowing that if they don't look too hard for an offset -they can easily find one 10 years later in a regional area. Looking regionally for offsets offers huge financial incentive for developers as well. Property values on the Cumberland Plain are over-inflated – so securing offsets in the Capertee Valley would provide a massive financial incentive for any developer. This is unacceptable and the basic premise of offsetting needs to be observed if the scheme is to be successful – ie a like for like offset in the same (x) Km radius. If an offset can't be found the development cannot be proceed. This is the underlying principle of offsetting – not waiting 5 years then finding an offset far from the impact. **That will not rescue our CEEC CPW.**

Landowner abuse of the BioBank Scheme:

- The Biodiversity Offsets Scheme was introduced to Western Sydney a decade ago.
- There has been no measurable improvement in the amount of native vegetation as a result (refer the community compiled State of the Cumberland Plain Report 2018). In fact, our native vegetation continues to decline despite this singular solution to biodiversity loss.
- This is leaving the management of our most important remnants of habitat and critically endangered bushland in the hands of the disinterested and the uneducated. Many BioBank Managers (aka private landholders) – are second tier owners ie they have purchased an existing BioBank site. They have not reaped the benefits of the 'lost development opportunity' payment – which can equate to millions of dollars. The incentive to conserve biodiversity has already left – with the previous owner that set up the BioBank Agreement. Instead, these owners have purchased a

BioBanked property because of the lure of acreage in Western Sydney. They are seeking a lifestyle – not a long-term management responsibility they have continued to challenge the rules pertaining to access and use of the conservation area on their property.

- Some BSA landowners in Mulgoa use their BSA area for recreational shooting (Eastern grey kangaroo found dead on BioBank site in Mulgoa - with gunshot wound). There were at least two other carcasses noted at the same time and on the same BioBanked property. A complaint to the BCT simply stated that the owners would be 'reminded of their obligations'. BioBanks **do not** offer sanctuary for our wildlife.



- Other BSA property owners (again in Mulgoa) have undertaken mechanical clearing (ie with bobcat) and underscrubbing, then conducted pile burns (with the ASSISTANCE of the local RFS).



This photo was taken in 2018. The site was BioBanked in 2013. After 5 years, there is a complete loss of biodiversity values and habitat under the BioBank Scheme. The area was 'mechanically moonscaped' of ALL biodiversity –there was no compliance action from the Biodiversity Conservation Trust. (except another letter to the property owner 'reminding them of their obligations').

Herewith, yet another BioBanked property in Mulgoa – with cattle grazing – a common issue! And once again except for community watch dogs this type of ‘BioBank management’ is ignored by the BCT.



Properties which have a Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement – are sold by real estate agents with promises which include “super wide four-wheel driving trails, ideal for walking, biking, lifestyle pursuits” like this one in Mulgoa.



Many property owners purchase acreage (regardless of the conservation status of that property) to undertake recreational activities such as riding dirt bikes. Note the circular track for dirt bikes created on this **BioBanked property** in Mulgoa (below: in front of house with grey roof) – an even worse example of dirt bike use on BioBanked land was reported in Nepean Gorge Drive, Mulgoa. Once again, except for the efforts (and subsequent vilification) of community watch dogs – such abuse of BSA sites would not come to the attention of the BCT who only undertake annual audits for compliance and vegetation management plans.



Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements have little to no oversight, there is no compliance, just letters issued by the BCT “reminding owners of their obligations”, and there is little to no education of the landowner on how to manage a BSA site. Once these property owners sell – the next owner will try all the same tricks to undermine the principles of the BSA scheme. The BCT are left to manage this with a ‘stick’ approach – because the ‘carrots’ all left with the original owner who set up the BioBank. Each time a BSA property changes hands – the new owners will need to be educated and supported – in perpetuity! That’s a very long time and at ongoing expense. Weeds will always need to be managed on these biodiversity offset sites – they will not magically disappear after 20 years (a fact which I can personally endorse after 25 years of Landcare in Mulgoa). Many will try to ride their motorbikes or horses, they may undertake recreational shooting of native wildlife, they might try grazing stock and they will probably try to undertake their own hazard reduction measures when they realise that they have bought the dream home in the flame zone. Few, if any, of these landowners hold conservation as a priority.

BSA size.

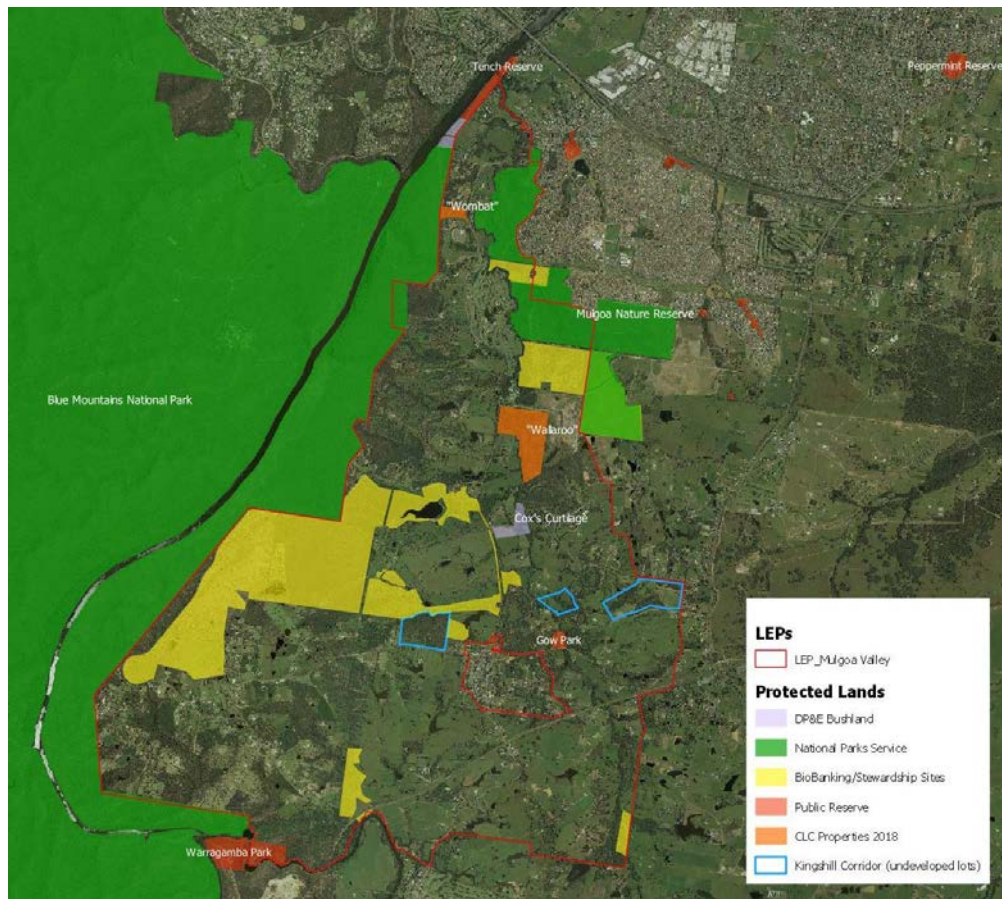
More recently, the BCT have implemented changes to the minimum lot size that can be considered for a BSA. Most property owners in Mulgoa are no longer eligible to apply for a BSW as the ‘new standards’ require a minimum of 20Ha. Most properties in Mulgoa are 10Ha.

There is far greater incentive to 'over stock' a 10Ha property under a 'primary producer' status, than there is to consider biodiversity conservation. Genuine primary production is rare in the Mulgoa Valley - yet many landowners over stock with the required 20 head of cattle to obtain tax relief. Yet 20 head of cattle will overgraze and destroy a property within a few months – and landowners again turn to deceitful practices to remain eligibility for the associated concessions (eg running the cattle on a neighbours land). Could a similar scheme be more effective than a BSA Agreement where there is a 'carrot approach' instead of the 'stick approach' now required to ensure compliance with property owners. The Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group has long advocated for Rates relief as an incentive for Biodiversity conservation on all acreage properties. It is as simple as opting in or out. If an entire property is managed for biodiversity conservation, then that owner should receive 100% rates relief. If only 1 hectare out of a possible 10 hectares is managed for biodiversity then a 10% rates relief is provided. This could be another 'tool in the box' for Biodiversity Conservation and once again we encourage a pilot program in the Mulgoa Valley.

We question the validity of a portion of BioBank Agreement 112 on the heritage property Fernhill (located in Mulgoa and now in public ownership). There is a section of this BioBank which is a thin strip of pasture running beside a major arterial road (Mulgoa Road) that was approved to be a BioBanked. Any ecologist would be aware of 'edge effects' and this thin strip, despite being an offset for the loss of high-quality habitat elsewhere, will never deliver the biodiversity and habitat outcomes expected of a scheme like this. We ask the inquiry to examine how and why this might have been approved.

In the photo below, the thin yellow line near the words "Cox's Curtilage" (centre of map) is part of the BioBank on Fernhill. As a Biodiversity Offset – this is shameful. The developers who used Biobanking and an economic windfall at Fernhill benefited to the amount of \$23 Million in total – and were permitted to BioBank areas such as this completely useless thin strip of land to create their wealth. It remains in poor condition and will likely be 'un-BioBanked' to allow for community entry and exit to Fernhill as it transitions to public parkland. And the taxpayer will fund the means of doing this while Angus Securities (previous landowner) get to enjoy the rewards of BioBanking this 'useless' offset. The reasons behind this bizarre BioBanking 'deal' requires closer examination. If you calculate the value of that thin strip of BioBank, at 20m wide and 1000m in length this equates to 2Ha of Bio-credits. This thin strip of 'biodiversity' (in horrendously poor condition) yielded the property owner \$500,000 – yet it will never conserve habitat and will likely be dismantled to permit community access to Fernhill – but the previous landholder gets to keep their cool half Million dollars.

Just a small example that outlines the rotting of the system...



The Biodiversity Offsets Delivery Plan for the Western Sydney Airport is the single largest manipulation of the Biodiversity Offsetting scheme and has been undertaken by the Federal Government and supported by the State Government.

The biggest biodiversity offsets rort in the history of the Cumberland Plain is the 'Biodiversity Offsets Delivery Plan' approved to mitigate the loss of 400Ha of critically endangered CPW at the Western Sydney Airport site.

- In 2007, both Federal Labor and the Federal Coalition committed to the permanent conservation AND MANAGEMENT of the 1370 Ha of Commonwealth Heritage Listed (CHL) Lands at Orchard Hills, owned by the Defence Department. (please see the attachments at the end of this submission)
- In 2018 – a decade later – the Coalition Government decided to 'regift' this land as the **primary offset for the Western Sydney Airport**. This is unacceptable – the same land can't be committed for a conservation future **twice**.
- The NSW Government has refused to intervene or demand appropriate levels of offsetting for the impacts on our native vegetation communities of Western Sydney as a result of the construction of an international airport. Why? It is reasonable to assume that neither the NSW Government nor the Commonwealth Government wished to be competing in the same market place for the same available biodiversity credits. That would simply drive the price of credits up for both levels of government. The NSW Government was secretly pleased that the Federal Government cheated and used land that was **already conserved** in their offsets Plan

– because it leaves more available CPW for the State to offset their own infrastructure projects.

- The Western Sydney Airport Offsets Delivery Plan was one of 30 conditions required to be approved before construction of the new airport could commence. There was substantial pressure to have the BODP in place – therefore there was no community consultation – just consultation with the Biodiversity Experts Group. This group was comprised of representatives from local government, state government, indigenous groups and a few community stakeholders. The BEG was advised at the very first meeting that it would be impossible for the Federal Government to locate sufficient offsets – so enormous was the number of credits required to mitigate the destruction on our Cumberland Plain Woodland.
- And yet, at the eleventh hour, the Federal Government advised that Orchard Hills land that was
 1. already owned by Federal Government,
 2. had its own environmental manager and conservation plan for more than a decade,
 3. had been listed on the Commonwealth Heritage Register and
 4. was deemed CEEC CPW
 5. was zoned E2 Environmental Conservation by the NSW Government in 2010 and
 6. was promised a conservation future back in 2007had suddenly become the primary offset for the airport. NO NEW CONSERVATION LAND has been protected as a consequence of the overwhelming annihilation of the biodiversity values at the airport site.
- But it gets worse. The federal government will spend \$70 million ‘improving’ the vegetation at Orchard Hills Defence Establishment – an area which has been managed for its Biodiversity values for more than a decade and is already in excellent condition.
- The federal government will use some of that money to fence an active military base under the guise of a ‘Rewilding Project’
- And it still gets worse. The offsetting legislation required the offset to be in place for the duration of the impact (ie **forever** in the case of an airport). But the only mechanism for ‘conservation in perpetuity’ is non-legally binding agreement between two government agencies that expires in 20 years – or can be terminated sooner by either agency. **How can that be conservation in perpetuity?**
- Finally, not even the full 1370 Ha of CHL land is protected by this abhorrent destruction of CEEC CPW. Only 900 hectares is protected – and to rub in the salt - the Department of Defence will fence this area into two small islands of 450Ha each – causing immeasurable loss of connectivity and edge effects as a result of the fencing. The CHL area has been adversely affected before the BODP is even implemented. And the NSW Government has failed to ask a single question about this horrendous abuse of our CEEC CPW by the Federal Government. APPALLING.

In a more ‘complex to navigate’ concept, the Federal Government have also claimed that this non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding provides a 100% “Averted risk of loss” for the Orchard Hills site and makes absurd claims that 100% of the site could be permanently destroyed by an ‘intensification of Defence uses, and claims that – with regard to Grey Headed flying Fox habitat – without active management that ALL (ie 100%) of the bushland would degrade to the extent that “ALL HABITAT RESOURCES AT THE SITE WOULD

BE LOST WITHOUT ACTIVE MANAGEMENT”. This needs to be investigated. The Federal Environment Department dared to question this – no response from infrastructure was provided. Likewise, for Swift Parrot foraging, the Infrastructure Department claimed that the risk of complete degradation due to climate change, eucalyptus dieback and weed infestation would result in 100% loss of foraging in 20 years. This is astounding that no one has dared to challenge this bizarre claim. A claim that has cost the biodiversity of Western Sydney dearly. Small changes in the ‘averted risk of loss’ calculations actually result in much larger on ground offsetting requirements.

Again – I claim that this has been the single largest offsetting rort in the history of the Cumberland Plain. This should be a national embarrassment that the Federal Government has contributed to the decimation of an already critically endangered ecological community– and instead of setting the benchmark in offsetting – they have led the way in undermining this scheme to conserve Biodiversity. The Federal Government have completely shirked their responsibilities, fudged the numbers and pushed this through in a Liberal-Liberal political environment. The ONLY reason that there hasn’t been a broader outcry is that the offsetting scheme is very difficult of the average person to understand – and therefore it is difficult to get media uptake of this story. And unless media cover this story, the bureaucrats and the politician know they will ‘get away with it”. In fact – they confess as much...

In an email which was provided under FOI, they consider the information I provided them regarding the FACT that the land at the Orchard Hills site was secured for a conservation future in 2007.

“Hi Greg (Manning)

It is useful that Garth (Taylor- from Department of Infrastructure and chair of the Biodiversity Experts Group Meetings) has made us aware of this information, however nothing we need to engage with at this stage. A simple “thanks, much appreciated” type response is all that is required if anything at all. I expect it would be very unlikely that Minister Price would receive representations/correspondence about this issue in the first instance’ ...‘ it is unlikely to generate much community interest”. The bureaucrats confess that they knew my emails and opposition to the BODP would never reach the Federal Minister for Environment (a community member cannot ever simply email a Federal Minister and expect a response), and they also knew the complexity of the issue would not make the mainstream media. They felt assured that their scam would never be questioned – and so I implore this inquiry to question the Federal Infrastructure Department, their consultants and the Environment Department – ensure they are accountable for this rort, ensure independent evaluation of the rigor and validity of the Western Sydney Airport Biodiversity Offsets Plan and **ensure the Federal Government is made to rectify this injustice.**

The Biodiversity Offsets Scheme is so broken that it is having the reverse effect on biodiversity. The scheme is abused – with the worse example of this abuse occurring at the highest level – the Federal Government. This is followed in a close second by the State Government who fail to ensure correct implementation of the offsets scheme (by all levels of Government), and finally by individual landowners who will continue to seek ways of avoiding their obligations, in particular the ‘second tier’ private owners who have no interest in Biodiversity conservation and are simply after large lot rural lifestyle properties.

So much destruction of biodiversity in Western Sydney – all around us, every day. But where are these magical offsets? No one knows. There is no public register. There is no transparency. Swathes of native bushland are cleared for shopping centres and urban expansion, road and rail projects - so where are all these offsets? there is no way of ever finding out what was protected in lieu of that loss. Offsets are proposed for mostly the Picton and Razorback areas? Why??? NOT because this is good quality bushland worthy of protecting – but because the gradients of the land there is too steep for development. Offsets area being permitted on already conserved land, offsets are being permitted on flood prone land. But NONE of the offsetting is strategic and visionary – it is designed to assist further plundering by development whilst pretending to protect a CEEC. Another example of immense loss is the upgrade of the Northern Road – realignment, widening and the loss of thousands of ancient hollow-bearing trees. Transport for NSW fail to provide transparency regarding where all the offsets have been purchased – we don't even know IF the offsets have been purchased - perhaps the NSW Government will allow themselves enough time to wait until no more CPW is left on the Cumberland – then purchase offsets in the Hunter Valley - very cost effective!!! This is NOT about Biodiversity – it about development proceeding in the face of the extinction of an entire ecological community. Development will proceed at all 'costs' – and managing the 'costs' of this smoke and mirrors campaign is what the NSW Government is focussed on. The Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan needs to be independent of Government – or it simply will never work. The NSW Government is by far the worst offender in the extinction trajectory of Cumberland Plain Woodland– but they are their own judge and jury and they are accountable to no-one.

I am aware of an example of offsets funding that has been invested into the Western Sydney Parklands. A developer paid into the 'BCT slush fund' which allowed the destruction of high quality and critically endangered vegetation. This funding employed a team of contractors to undertake **two years of restoration work on a bushland area** of the Western Sydney parklands. Within 12 months of this 'offset money' being spent, that bushland was cleared to make way for a tree-tops style adventure park. That offset money has been completely wasted, vegetation destroyed at the expense of development and no additional area protected, just management of an existing park – with those gains then destroyed as well. There is NO REGISTER and no transparency regarding where offset funds are being invested.

Finally, the offsets scheme promises 'conservation in perpetuity'- it leaves us all feeling secure that our native vegetation will be there forever. But even that is a lie. A BSA can quite easily be undone. This is the danger – that in 30 years from now a developer persuades the Minister of the day that a BSA must be 'undone' to deliver a 'vital project'. But in 30 years from now – there will be no CPW left to offset on the Cumberland Plain. No problem – because the offsets are permitted to occur 'elsewhere in NSW' – and that is what will happen. The 'piece by piece' destruction of our unique native woodlands will continue – regardless of this scheme.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my disgust with the Biodiversity Offsets Scheme
Sincerely
Lisa Harrold, President, Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group

APPENDIX 1

MEDIA RELEASE

Peter Garrett MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Heritage

David Bradbury

Labor candidate for Lindsay

LABOR TO HELP PROTECT WESTERN SYDNEY'S CUMBERLAND PLAIN WOODLAND

A Rudd Labor Government will work with the NSW Government, local Councils, private land-owners and community groups to protect the threatened Cumberland Plain woodland areas of Western Sydney and invest up to **\$15 million to help secure a new conservation corridor**.

Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Heritage, Peter Garrett and Labor candidate for Lindsay, David Bradbury made the announcement today.

"A Rudd Labor Government will invest up to \$15 million of National Reserve System funding to create a new conservation corridor for Western Sydney through possible land acquisitions and proper management and preservation of the heritage listed areas of the Commonwealth land at Orchard Hills and Shane's Park" Mr Garrett said.

"It's great to see these sites finally getting the protection they deserve." said Mr Bradbury.

"Today's commitment will give these threatened ecological communities a better chance of survival. These woodlands have a special place in the hearts of the local community. We should be protecting them for our children and grandchildren."

Federal Labor will implement a four point plan to better protect the remaining Cumberland Plain Woodland in Western Sydney. A Rudd Labor Government will:

- Protect and manage the Orchard Hills Defence Establishment and Shane's Park sites as conservation reserves.
- Work with the NSW Government and the Western Sydney community to identify opportunities to secure a Western Sydney 'Conservation Corridor' to protect the remaining tracts of threatened Cumberland Plain Woodland. This will include: consultation with key stakeholders and the local community; investigating further land acquisitions and voluntary partnerships with private land owners; and co-operative arrangements with the NSW government and local Councils.

- · Fast-track the development of a recovery plan for the remaining Cumberland Plain Woodland under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act in line with their status as a threatened community.
- · Seek scientific assessment to determine whether the Orchard Hills and Shane's Park sites should be listed as Critical Habitat under the EPBC Act to provide greater protection under the EPBC Act.

Cumberland Plain Woodland is listed as a Threatened Community under the EPBC Act and the 2002 Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment made it clear that: "the threatened communities [of Western Sydney] are inadequately reserved."

At the time of European settlement, Cumberland Plain Woodland covered 107,000 hectares of the Sydney Basin. Today, only about six per cent of the woodlands remain, scattered in small fragments on the plains west of Sydney.

The Orchard Hills Defence Establishment has been described as "the least disturbed and largest remaining remnant of Cumberland Plain Woodland".

"David Bradbury has been a tireless campaigner for the environment in Western Sydney," said Mr Garrett. "He has been campaigning for the protection of the Orchard Hills site since 2000, particularly in his role as the Mayor of Penrith.

"He should be congratulated for securing these funds and a commitment to ongoing protection for the remaining precious Cumberland Plain woodland."

"If elected, I look forward to working with the local community and all levels of government to develop a network of protected areas within the Conservation Corridor," Mr Bradbury said.

For further information contact:

Ryan Heath (Garrett) 0449 141 398 Justin Koek (Bradbury) 0400 126 939

19 November 2007

APPENDIX 2

16/11/2007 14:36

NO. 281 0001



MEDIA RELEASE

Malcolm Turnbull MP
*Minister for the Environment
and Water Resources*

Karen Chijoff
Liberal Candidate for Lindsay

16 November 2007

MAJOR CONSERVATION RESERVES FOR WESTERN SYDNEY

The Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberal Candidate for Lindsay, Karen Chijoff today announced that a re-elected Coalition Government would invest up to \$15 million to create two new conservation reserves on Commonwealth land in Western Sydney.

The two largest remaining areas of the threatened Cumberland Plain Woodland in Western Sydney will become part of the National Reserve System, as a major contribution to a broader community proposal to build a Cumberland Plain Conservation Corridor. Over 1,350 hectares of Cumberland Plain Woodland at Orchard Hills Defence Establishment and 550 hectares at Shane's Park will be held in trust, and protected and managed in perpetuity by the Australian Government.

"In the past, Western Sydney has missed out on significant investment in national parks and conservation reserves – this investment will create the largest conservation reserves in the heart of the west," Mr Turnbull said.

"Over the next three years, we will invest up to \$15 million to secure the tenure of these two significant areas of native vegetation and put in place enduring protection and management."

The Liberal candidate for Lindsay, Karen Chijoff said that together with the former member for Lindsay and the Member for Greenway, Louise Markus, she had been working hard to protect these most important parts of the Western Sydney environment.

"I am so pleased that we are able to deliver this important conservation outcome for Western Sydney. For too long we have had inadequate conservation reserves in the area. This is a most significant addition and it is now time for the NSW Government and local government to act and add land in their control to the corridor."

Since 1996, the Coalition Government has invested over \$90 million through the National Reserve System protecting our biodiversity and building the resilience of our environment and our precious natural landscapes, including against the impacts of climate change.

"Under our stewardship, the area of Australia now protected in National Parks and other conservation reserves has grown by an unprecedented 40 percent to cover more than 11 percent of the continent," Mr Turnbull said.

"The protection of these sites demonstrates the Coalition's commitment to conservation reserves to protect all environments wherever they occur including those remaining within the boundaries of our major cities and towns."

Media Contact: Mr Turnbull's office: Brad Burke 0400 337 252
Ms Chijoff's campaign: Kerrie Martin 0423 364 053
Ms Markus' office: Cheryl Pagett 0400 794 966

