

**Submission
No 53**

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY OF THE NSW
BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS SCHEME**

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Submission to the Inquiry of the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme:

The current systems in place for protecting the environment are failing. Extinctions and habitat loss continue, almost unabated. It is critical that this trend is rapidly halted and reversed.

The Biodiversity Offset Scheme is largely responsive to development. It needs to be rewritten to prioritise nature (or scrapped entirely). People and the economy rely on nature. It is short sighted to assume that we can continue to destroy it and not pay the economic price for it at some stage. The current scheme is not sending the message to developers that if it is too expensive to offset, then it should not be destroyed in the first place! Subsequent reviews of the scheme and tinkering around the edges with similar schemes like the CPCP have just made further habitat destruction cheaper, and stripped value from ecologically important areas eg those currently preserved in some areas of farmland.

I do not believe that destroying habitat in one place, even when preserving it in another place (where it wasn't currently under threat) is an effective measure to prevent habitat loss. It just enables the destruction of habitat. The CPCP is also not preserving habitat, it is another enabler of habitat destruction. There seems to be further erosion of supposed preserved (offset) areas when they then become isolated from linking habitat by further construction of roads etc - thus devaluing the habitat that has been offset as it becomes an island of extinction itself, although supposedly preserved!

We need more ambitious plans to recognise that restoring natural systems and achieving sustainable development is what will keep global warming to 1.5 to 2 degrees. This limit is required to avoid catastrophic change. Government must commit to halt and reverse the loss of nature, and restore it to more sustainable levels. Everything we do must change. We can't just develop the way we always have - yet this is what the Biodiversity Offset Scheme enables, it enables the status quo of "continue as you were boys!". Not good enough. Change must be rapid to save what is left. Change is needed now.

To do this, environmental regulation must be shifted from a process responsive to the demands of developers into a process that is proactive and supportive, with fundamental goals to:

Protect

Conserve

Restore

Promote sustainability

Diversity

Resilience

Adherence to the overall objectives must be maintained.

These goals must extend across regional boundaries.

The environment must be put back at the top of the planning tree, it must be the main influencer on planning, not the other way around.

Government and developers must be made accountable. Weak government laws, overly focused on the needs and viability of Developers, combined with government inaction to date, have made Australia a world leader in extinction and deforestation. This must be halted, right now, and reversed.

It is vital to the future of us all.