

Submission
No 57

INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY OF THE NSW BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS SCHEME

Organisation: Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition Inc

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Inquiry into the Integrity of the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a community group based in the Clarence Valley in the NSW Northern Rivers. Formed in 1988, the CVCC has been involved with environmental issues – both locally and further afield – since that time. Having an ongoing interest in biodiversity protection, the CVCC is increasingly concerned about the crisis which biodiversity is facing across the nation.

Australia has a very sorry record in relation to extinctions in the last two centuries. Unfortunately the lessons of the past have not been learnt because currently many species and endangered ecosystems are either under increasing threat or actually sliding towards extinction either locally or across the landscape generally. Loss of habitat, bushfires and the growing impacts of climate change are major factors contributing to what is undoubtedly a biodiversity crisis.

What is making this situation worse is that biodiversity protection has been impaired in recent years by government action. This includes the weakening of land-clearing legislation (in the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016), the watering down of regulations for forestry operations and the recent backdown which led to the diluting of the new badly-needed koala protections. It appears that the NSW Government, like other governments in our nation, does not understand how dire the situation is in what little of our natural world still survives.

And the Biodiversity Offset Scheme which is the subject of this Inquiry is not going to turn this situation around. The scheme is basically a cosmetic approach which promises improved outcomes for biodiversity but is basically flawed. It was designed to expedite development. Net biodiversity loss has been inevitable. We have either massive habitat destruction for developments such as urban expansion or mines or, in smaller areas, the cumulative destruction often referred to as “death by a thousand cuts.” The belief that you can destroy biodiversity and then re-create it somewhere else (like for like) is nonsense. And that is leaving aside the issue of the time re-creation or improvement of the replacement site is bound to take – which of course limits its immediate to mid-term value as well as creating questions about how long a site will remain as an offset.

Given that the NSW Government is unlikely to abandon its Biodiversity Offset Scheme, the existing scheme could be improved by creating no-go zones for developments in areas of significant biodiversity. This would mean that destruction of threatened species habitat and endangered ecological communities would not be permitted. Obviously if this change was implemented there would need to be well-resourced, proper assessment of the values of such areas by fully qualified, ethical practitioners at arms-length from developers.

Leonie Blain
Hon Secretary

