

Submission
No 52

**INQUIRY INTO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
AMENDMENT (BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS SCHEME) BILL
2024**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

Submission to Parliament on the Biodiversity Offset Scheme

Overview

The Biodiversity Offset Scheme has notably underperformed, as highlighted by the NSW Audit Office's criticism of its transparency, planning, and effectiveness (Audit Office of NSW, 30 August 2022). The scheme, intended to prevent habitat loss, has instead overseen the destruction of about 100,000 hectares of habitat annually. The recovery of these habitats could take decades or even centuries, with irreversible damage to complex ecosystems.

Key Issues

The scheme's practice of using existing protected lands as offsets, such as those in the North Tuncurry Urban Release area, undermines its effectiveness. The Henry Review criticized the scheme for failing to achieve its goals and proposed 58 strategies to address biodiversity loss. The Minns Government has pledged to implement 49 of these strategies, acknowledging the ongoing biodiversity crisis (NSW Government Statement, 17 July 2024).

Recommendations

Halt Habitat Destruction: Immediately stop habitat loss and align the NSW Conservation Act with national and international standards.

Prioritize Conservation Laws: Reevaluate the statutory role of conservation in land management to ensure environmental protection takes precedence.

Strengthen Protections: Implement strong legislative safeguards for ecologically critical areas.

Revise Offsets: Reform the Biodiversity Offset Scheme to ensure offsets are effective and not merely greenwashing.

Enhance Transparency: Improve the scheme's transparency with clear goals, performance metrics, and public reporting.

Increase Incentives: Offer greater incentives, like tax benefits, to encourage landowner participation in conservation efforts.

Boost Funding: Allocate sufficient resources for conservation programs, including staffing for the Biodiversity Conservation Trust and pest species control.

Implement Review Recommendations: Adopt all recommendations from the Henry Review and follow best practices for biodiversity conservation.

Rebrand the Scheme: Consider renaming the scheme to better reflect its conservation goals, such as 'The Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme.'

Immediate action is crucial to reverse biodiversity loss and safeguard our natural heritage for the future.