



BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS

EIANZ Position Statement

The focus of this position statement is on biodiversity offsets only. We emphasise that offsetting is the last sequential step in the [mitigation hierarchy](#).

The EIANZ:

1. believes biodiversity offsets play an important part of ecologically sustainable development in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, by seeking to address a project's residual impacts on biodiversity values.
2. has identified key themes where biodiversity offset frameworks must be improved:
 - the use of the mitigation hierarchy in biodiversity offset frameworks;
 - guidance around ethical considerations in biodiversity offset delivery; and
 - integration of biodiversity offsets with carbon markets and between different jurisdictions.
3. acknowledges that the relationship and governance between biodiversity offsets and carbon offsets is developing. Engagement with offset regulators and carbon market institutions, facilitation of improvement through codes and guidance documents, and provision of training for offset practitioners is required. We have engaged with agencies and recognise the mutual benefits of the synergies between biodiversity and carbon offsets.

Biodiversity offsetting is a system used in environmental planning and regulatory systems to compensate for residual impacts to biodiversity (such as on native vegetation and species habitat) arising from development. Offsetting should be the final stage in a mitigation hierarchy whereby biodiversity impacts must, in strict order, be avoided and then minimised before any remaining impacts are offset.

There are a variety of statutory biodiversity offset frameworks in jurisdictions across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, some of which are internationally regarded. Nonetheless, there remains significant room for improvement in the way biodiversity offsets are included in the project design and assessment cycle and then (where warranted) planned, assessed and delivered.

The EIANZ has reviewed various offset frameworks across Australia and internationally, and recognises the complexity, differences and evolving nature of legislation and policy. The EIANZ has led discussion on offsets through events including the National Biodiversity Offsets Conferences in 2019 and 2022, and supports special interest groups that promote and facilitate the reform of biodiversity offset frameworks.

Through its actions, the EIANZ has identified areas where biodiversity offset frameworks can be improved. As biodiversity offset frameworks evolve and new issues emerge, these improvement areas will evolve and therefore require periodic review.



Role of decision makers

Environmental planning decision makers have a crucial role in reviewing, or developing and implementing, biodiversity offset frameworks and integrating these into biodiversity conservation and assessment processes. The following, sometimes overlooked principles, are important components of biodiversity offset frameworks:

- True avoidance of biodiversity value impacts comes with fully considered land use planning at a regional scale.
- Biodiversity protection is a priority. Care is necessary to ensure biodiversity offsets are not inappropriately emphasised or prioritised.
- The mitigation hierarchy adopted should clearly demonstrate and articulate how projects must fully exhaust avoidance and minimisation.
- Biodiversity offsets are to be agreed, secured (including all necessary funding), initiated and committed prior to the loss.
- Offsetting should protect biodiversity values for the timeframe of the impact (usually in perpetuity). Alternative offset arrangements such as broad-scale predator control programs or research are limited to circumstances where such arrangements provide greater benefit to impacted biodiversity values.
- Delivery of 'like for like' biodiversity values and clear definition by regulators is encouraged, while noting that this should also be balanced with achieving a functional and practical scheme and biodiversity offset market.

- The absence of suitable offsets with 'like for like' biodiversity values generally should mean a project does not proceed.
- Monitoring, data gathering, and transparent data sharing is necessary to ensure that the measures taken are achieving the outcomes sought.
- There needs to be transparency with regards to demand and supply in biodiversity markets, and offset trades (or sites).
- Facilitation of ethical biodiversity market practices is required through regulation, policy, guidelines, and training.
- Adequate regulatory resourcing and fit for purposes systems need to be in place to allow biodiversity offsets to operate effectively and to achieve their intended goals.
- There needs to be the provision of simple, accessible, and transparent guidelines for the public, practitioners, and other decision makers.

Role of offsets practitioners

The EIANZ encourages its members and all biodiversity offset practitioners to:

- provide sound, evidence-based advice on biodiversity offsets;
- follow jurisdictional assessment processes and provide feedback on these processes to policy makers where appropriate; and
- act ethically with regards to biodiversity offsets. The EIANZ intends to develop more guidance and training in this area.



Policy into practice

The EIANZ is committed to environmental protection, sustainable development and maintaining objective and professional standards as we address the risks and opportunities of working with biodiversity offsets.

We will work to improve the capability, technical excellence and ethical practice of environmental professionals. We see the current key focus areas being ethical practice, integration of carbon markets and biodiversity markets (including clarity on voluntary conservation arrangements), and reinforcing the biodiversity protection hierarchy.

The EIANZ will:

Provide training opportunities

- Deliver ongoing learning opportunities for members and other practitioners including seminars and forums.
- Continue the national dialogue on biodiversity offsets, through continued delivery of our biennial

National Biodiversity Offsets Conference. We will continue to review the risk and opportunities facing the sector and identify ways in which the EIANZ can continue to facilitate ongoing improvements in biodiversity offset frameworks.

Engage with stakeholders

- Engage and work with regulators and other stakeholders on improving biodiversity offset frameworks.
- Work with regulators to provide a platform for continuing professional development.
- Collaborate with organisations involved with carbon markets.

Facilitate improvement

- Develop guidance notes around ethical practice.
- Support EIANZ Special Interest Sections and Communities of Practice regarding biodiversity offsets.

The EIANZ is a not for profit, professional association for environmental practitioners from across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The Institute has a certification scheme that recognises ethical and professional practice which assures government, industry and the community of practitioners' professional standing. It is represented by jurisdictional Divisions, a New Zealand Chapter and supported by Special Interest Sections covering climate change, heritage, contaminated land, ecology, environmental accounting, and impact assessment. Its membership is drawn from all areas of environmental practice, and includes practitioners with industry, government, community and academic careers.