



Communiqué

National Biodiversity Offsets 3.0 From offsetting to nature positive

SUMMARY

Biodiversity offsets play an important role in ecologically sustainable development in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, by seeking to address a project's residual impacts on biodiversity values after impacts have been avoided and minimised as far as practicable.

However, there remains significant opportunity for improvement in the way biodiversity offsets are included in the project design and assessment cycle and then (where warranted) planned, assessed and delivered.

In July 2024, the [Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand](https://www.eianz.org) (EIANZ) held its third National Biodiversity Offsets Conference, 'From Offsetting to Nature Positive', to discuss the latest developments and, importantly, areas for improvement, in biodiversity offset legislation, policy and delivery. The event, attended by close to 400 environmental professionals from across Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, also provided a timely opportunity to discuss the role of biodiversity offsets in a nature positive future.

This communiqué outlines key takeaways from the event and makes recommendations for action to policymakers and regulators.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Attendees heard from many leaders in their fields over the three-day event. Our keynote speakers shared important messages, including this from **Professor Martine Maron**:

"Offsets at the moment result in net losses. Getting [them] up to scratch will be hard work. To get them to align with nature positive will be harder still."

Professor **Hugh Possingham** echoed and built on Professor Maron's message:

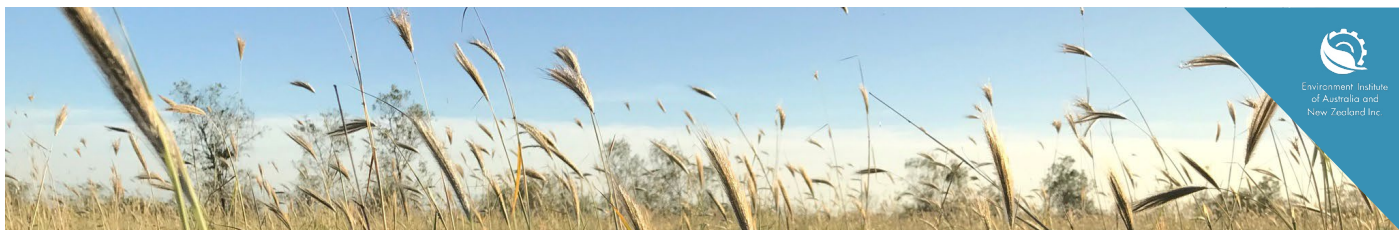
"If we are serious then we have to do target-based offsetting, invest five billion [dollars] a year, encourage philanthropy and business, and tighten/enforce legislation".

The conference program was designed to lead into an interactive workshop that drew on the views of conference delegates. Importantly, the workshop was attended by representatives from all Australian mainland states and territories as well as from Aotearoa NZ and included input from multiple disciplines and leaders in their fields including but not limited to consultancy services, government, landholders / land managers, academia, legal services, finance / financial services and industry (e.g. mining, energy, development). The diversity of attendees reflects the multidisciplinary approach required for the planning, delivery and regulation of biodiversity offset and nature positive projects.

Participants were polled on a series of questions. Ninety-nine per cent of workshop participants believe that current policy settings of 'no net loss' are insufficient to achieve nature positive. Overwhelmingly, attendees also responded that the primary goal for biodiversity management should be nature positive, seen as critical to reverse biodiversity decline.

Attendees were also asked to rank which of the key messages from conference sessions were most important. In order of importance these included:

1. Outcomes (investment) should be guided by a conservation strategy or plan and sound science.
2. More investment in protection and restoration [is needed].
3. The metrics should be right [i.e. scientifically defensible] (with a clear baseline) [for both biodiversity and nature positive projects].
4. Stakeholder consultation is important, particularly landholder and [Indigenous Peoples'] involvement.
5. Business and government should transition to undertake nature related reporting and disclosures, identifying their dependencies, impacts, risks and opportunities.
6. Compliance and greenwashing remain a concern.



To achieve these outcomes, delegates were also asked to nominate specific areas for improvement according to priority (see **Figure 1**). The top three responses were:

1. Increase in restoration activities.
2. Improved provisions for protection of nature in development and agricultural regulations.
3. Increased recruitment of skilled people in the industry (consultants, land managers, etc.).

These results indicate that more is needed in the way of biodiversity offset reforms and that greater action is necessary if we are to have a nature positive future. While there have been restoration efforts in Australia for many decades, this has not been sufficient to halt biodiversity decline and so more investment is required in restoration. This is entirely consistent with one of the key findings of keynote speaker **Professor Graeme Samuel's** 2020 Independent Review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act*.

The results also suggest that improved protection mechanisms and compliance actions are also required, and industry have clearly voiced a need to be consulted in any policy and legislative reforms.

To meet future challenges, the profession has identified a need for far greater recruitment of skilled individuals – to achieve this, support will be required from governments, universities and other training institutions.

EIANZ therefore calls on policymakers and regulators to:

- Continue legislative and policy reform to improve the delivery of both biodiversity offsets and nature positive outcomes
- Address biodiversity decline by increasing restoration activities, including through biodiversity offsets, development of a meaningful Nature Repair Market, and other measures
- Improve regulatory provisions for the protection of nature in development and farming activities
- Increase recruitment of skilled people in the industry (such as consultants, land managers, and restoration practitioners) and facilitate training to improve the skills-base
- Ensure there are meaningful and measurable linkages between biodiversity and carbon markets to enable adequate supply and facilitate transparent corporate reporting.

In summary, EIANZ recognises that urgent and significant improvements are needed in the legislative and policy frameworks to deliver better protection and restoration of our region's unique environment. Biodiversity offsetting is an important tool in addressing true ecologically sustainable development and, if delivered to the highest standard, will contribute to building a nature positive future.

FIGURE 1 – Identified areas for improvement

