

Biodiversity offset program



Australian Government

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WOOLGOOLGA TO BALLINA UPGRADE

Biodiversity offsetting provides an opportunity for landowners to receive a guaranteed long-term income stream in return for managing some or all of their land for native vegetation communities and wildlife – by setting up protected conservation areas.

The land management plan and payment rates are worked out between the owner and Roads and Maritime Services. The scheme is entirely voluntary.

What is biodiversity offsetting?

When building roads, sometimes land available for wildlife (biodiversity) is lost and needs to be compensated for. If Roads and Maritime cannot provide enough compensation for biodiversity at the site of the development, then it may be 'offset' in a different place. This may include parcels of land put forward by landowners.

A standardised system is used to measure the environmental value at both the development site and compensatory site to ensure the same or better environmental value, and overall environmental gain is achieved.

Landowners who create or restore wildlife habitats can receive an income by nominating land to be put under a protected conservation area for in perpetuity protection.

Land where income is received to create or restore habitat as part of an offsetting scheme is called an 'offset' site.

How is an offset site chosen?

Offset sites are chosen if they have the right sort of habitat and plant and animal species.

What type of vegetation is preferred?

Roads and Maritime is looking for a variety of native vegetation types, such as good quality eucalypt forests, floodplain forests and mangroves.

Is there a minimum size for a land offset?

Preference will be given to larger areas of land to ensure greater biodiversity outcomes and better cost efficiencies, due to economies of scale. However, smaller areas of high conservation value will also be considered.

Opportunities for landowners

Income for protecting, improving and creating natural features on your property – landowners who wish to manage all or some of their land for native vegetation communities and wildlife can now receive long-term guaranteed funding. Offset sites can be created on land of any type and size where good land

Woolgoolga to Ballina upgrade

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management can create environmental benefits. You may also be eligible for a conservation management incentive which considers impacts to property value.

Control over long-term management – the main focus of biodiversity offsetting is long-term replacement of land lost to road development, and land accepted into the scheme would need to be managed and protected in the long-term.

Assistance is given to landowners to develop a management plan which sets out how land will be managed, by whom, over what period and at what cost.

Guaranteed long-term funding – when a biodiversity offset is agreed on all or part of a property, the management plan will set out the steps to be taken to improve the land. The cost of management will be paid to the landowner, in pre-agreed installments, over the duration of the plan. Payments for management actions such as fencing and weed control are standardised, based on contractor rates. You will be paid at these rates even if you choose to do some or all of the work yourself.

Access and ownership – Offsetting does not create any extra obligations for public access apart from the land management contract, nor does it affect the ownership rights in any way. The management plan will identify third parties who may from time to time need access to the offset site, such as ecologists and contractors.

Biodiversity offsetting – the process

- ✓ Complete an expression of interest form (EOI) to let Roads and Maritime know you are interested in becoming an offset provider (registration does not commit you to any further action)
- ✓ If the land you propose seems suitable you will receive a phone call from Roads and Maritime to organise a time to discuss your application and to collect any further information you may have such as, surveys of threatened species and vegetation communities that have previously been carried out.
- ✓ Information collected will be assessed and you will be notified of the outcome.

If your property is selected as a biodiversity offset

- ✓ Roads and Maritime will develop a management plan in consultation with you to show how the site will be conserved, along with the price to deliver it.
- ✓ Sign the legal agreement that attaches the conservation area to the title of your property and ensures the management plan will be followed and the land used for conservation. This agreement must be signed by all of the registered landowners of the property.
- ✓ Receive payments as implementation and monitoring of the management plan commences.

If I am not successful what happens to the information about my property?

The information you provide is for the sole purpose of determining a property's eligibility for the biodiversity offset program. Roads and Maritime is subject to the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 ("PIPP Act") which requires that we comply with the Information Privacy Principles set out in the PPIP Act.

All information in correspondence is collected for the sole purpose of assisting in the assessment of this proposal. The information received including names and addresses of respondents may be published in subsequent documents unless a clear indication is given in the correspondence that all or part of that information is not to be published. Otherwise Roads and Maritime will only disclose your personal information, without your consent, if authorised by law. Your personal information will be held by Roads and Maritime Pacific Highway Office, 21 Prince Street, Grafton NSW 2460. You have the right to access and correct information if you believe that it is incorrect.

Land use

Will I be restricted on what I do with my land if I sign up for biodiversity offsetting?

Generally, activities such as grazing, logging, subdivision, resource extraction, commercial firewood collection etc. are not permitted in the parts of your property protected as conservation areas.

Are activities restricted on my land adjoining the conservation area?

No, there will be no restriction to activities carried out on adjoining land.

Legal

Are conservation obligations tied to me or the property?

Conservation agreements are placed on a property's title so remain regardless of any change in property ownership.

What third parties will be allowed to access my property?

Access terms and conditions and monitoring obligations will be defined and agreed as part of the management plan. Property access may be required for ecologists and contractors involved in management activities, such as weed control or fencing installation.

If I change my mind how do I reverse the agreement?

Only in extreme and highly unusual circumstances will a conservation management area be removed. In such cases, a Minister must agree to the removal of the conservation area.

Can I still be involved if there is a mortgage on my property?

If you have a mortgage or any other interests over the property, you should first talk to your bank or mortgage provider before entering an agreement. Some banks may not allow a conservation management area on a property while it is mortgaged.

Income

Will I be compensated for changes in land value?

Landowners may be eligible for a conservation management incentive which considers impacts to property value.

How much money will I receive?

The amount of money paid will vary depending on the size of the conservation area and management activities outlined in the management plan. Payment amounts will change each year depending on the work carried out.

Is this income taxable?

Capital gains, income tax and GST may be applicable should you receive payments under the offset program. Roads and Maritime advises you to seek independent advice regarding the taxation implications of participating in the program.

Will Roads and Maritime purchase my property?

If you are interested in selling your property discuss this with us. Land with exceptionally high conservation value may be considered for purchase for transfer to the National Parks estate.

Contact

If you have any questions please contact us on 1800 778 900 or email W2B@rms.nsw.gov.au