

INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY OF THE NSW BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS SCHEME

Organisation: Ryde Gladesville Climate Change Action Group
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Ms Cate Faehrmann, MLC

Chair

Inquiry into the Integrity of the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

The Ryde Gladesville Climate Change Action Group comprises over 640 citizens who are greatly concerned about climate change and want to see immediate and definitive action by all levels of government to reduce carbon emissions, rapidly phase out our reliance on fossil fuels in all aspects of the economy and move to 100% renewables by 2030.

Included in our concerns about climate change are the impacts on biodiversity and habitats and the need to strengthen laws and processes to protect our unique flora and fauna and their habitats.

We have major misgivings about the integrity of the Biodiversity Scheme and the flaws in it which currently do not halt or reverse biodiversity loss resulting from major projects in NSW.

In 2019 when we made a submission to the NSW Department of Planning regarding the proposed removal of 796 trees in the Sydney Turpentine and Iron Bark Forest (STIF) located in the Ivanhoe Estate (Ivanhoe Estate SSD-8707) in Macquarie Park which is in the council area where most of our supporters reside. In our submission we referred to a report done by the Nature Conservation Council in 2016 that said *"Biodiversity offsets schemes in NSW are failing to deliver the environmental outcomes governments and policy makers have promised and the design and performance of these schemes is declining."* The Ivanhoe development was allowed to proceed and most of the STIF was saved. However, no information is forthcoming about the compensation for the lost STIF despite it being a requirement for approval. We note the consulting company Eco Logical Australia did the biodiversity offset report for this development. (Eco Logical Australia February 2018. *Ivanhoe Estate Re-development SSD 17_8707 - Biodiversity Assessment Report and Offset Strategy*).

An article in The Conversation 6 August 2021 by Sophus zu Ermgassen and Joseph Bull from the University of Kent (<https://theconversation.com/can-we-really-restore-or-protect-natural-habitats-to-offset-those-we-destroy-121213>) discussed the effectiveness of biodiversity offsets around the world including Australia. They referred to a study done by them that looked at the real-world outcomes of offsetting and No Net Loss (NNL) policies and included three forested areas in NSW in the study. The results were published in Conversation Letters by The Society for Conservation Biology in July 2019 and concluded there was no evidence that offsets applied in forest systems has successfully achieved NNL. <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/conl.12664> They also concluded there is insufficient proof that offsets are enough to achieve NNL of biodiversity from land clearing in ecologically rich and complex forest habitats and called for major changes in the way offsets are conducted and monitored.

A recent study by Roel Plant and Laure-Elise Ruoso from the University of Technology showed that there were two failures in the current NSW scheme. The first was *"financial and information*

barriers create unequal opportunities across landholders” and the second was ‘the scheme doesn’t cater to diverse conservation perspectives.’ They concluded that the scheme required a more equitable model for sharing the costs of the initial ecological assessment and that the scheme is inflexible as far as catering for different perspectives of what conservation involves. They further stated that offsetting should be used only as a last resort. Opening up the scheme so that it is more transparent will prevent the future excessive profit seeking and questionable conservation outcomes as we have witnessed and the cause for this parliamentary inquiry.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26395916.2020.1862914>

We are dismayed at the ineffectiveness of biodiversity offsets and the fact there is no accountability for where and how the offsets are applied. We believe that biodiversity offsets are an unacceptable method for developers and the NSW government to justify the extensive destruction of habitats. We would like to see a much better scheme that places a priority on the preservation of biodiversity ahead of development.

Sincerely

Ryde Gladesville Climate Change Action Group