

Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy

In 2008, the Queensland Government released the Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy (QGEOP). Environmental offsets are used to replace the value of environmental features unavoidably lost due to development.

The QGEOP guides the appropriate use of environmental offsets based on the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD). The Queensland Government defines ESD as protecting Queensland's environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.

QGEOP

The purpose of the QGEOP is to provide:

- the framework for environmental offsets in Queensland
- the principles for using environmental offsets
- guidance on when offsets should and should not be considered.

The QGEOP is based on seven principles that direct how offsets contribute to ESD. These principles must be followed when applying offsets, and underpin any Queensland specific-issue offsets policies. The seven QGEOP principles are:

- Offsets will not replace or undermine existing environmental standards or regulatory requirements, or be used to allow development in areas otherwise prohibited through legislation or policy.
- Environmental impacts must first be avoided, then minimised, before considering the use of offsets for any remaining impact.
- Offsets must achieve an equivalent or better environmental outcome.
- Offsets must provide environmental values as similar as possible to those being lost.
- Offset provision should minimise the time-lag between the impact and delivery of the offset.
- Offsets must provide additional protection to environmental values at risk, or additional management actions to improve environmental values.
- Offsets must be legally secured for the duration of the offset requirement.

What are the specific-issue offset policies?

The QGEOP provides principles and guidelines for environmental offsets and guides the content of specific-issue offset policies to reflect the QGEOP objectives and detail the delivery of environmental offsets.

Four specific-issue offsets policies have been developed by the Queensland Government to support the QGEOP and address specific environmental issues:

- Policy for Vegetation Management Offsets
- Mitigation and Compensation for Works or Activities Causing Marine Fish Habitat Loss
- Offsets for Net Benefit to Koalas and Koala Habitat
- Queensland Biodiversity Offset Policy.

Figure 1 shows how the QGEOP and specific-issue policies relate.

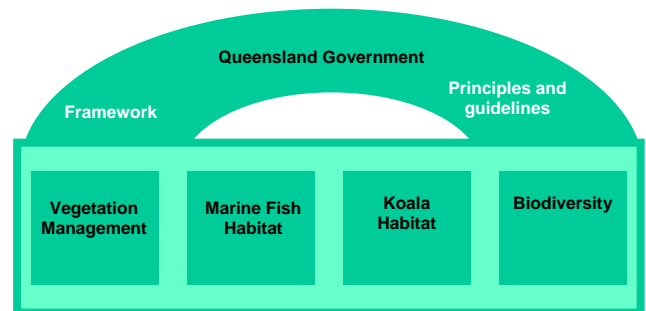


Figure 1: Relationship between the QGEOP and specific-issue offset policies

Scope of the QGEOP

The scope of the QGEOP is limited to Queensland Government-led assessment of impacts to environmental values—where a State Government agency is the decision maker (granting approval for a development to proceed) or concurrence agency for specified issues.

The QGEOP applies to decisions on development approvals under a range of approval processes. In the context of the QGEOP, development approval and development condition include approvals and terms, conditions or requirement for all developments under the:

- *Environmental Protection Act 1994*
- *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*
- *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971*
- *Fisheries Act 1994*

- *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*
- *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
- State Planning Policy 1/11, Protecting Wetlands of High Ecological Importance in the Great Barrier Reef Catchments.

QGEOP also applies to Transport and Main Roads administrative processes. It does not apply to tenure change such as revocation of protected area.

The QGEOP promotes coordination of any Australian Government, Queensland Government and local government offset requirements. The Australian Government applies offsets under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Local government applies offsets as required by planning scheme provisions under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* and the *Local Government Act 2009*. Regional Plans identify the need for offsets where there are impacts to areas of high ecological significance and the need for a coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of state and local government environmental offsets.

Equivalent or better environmental outcome

To contribute to ESD, environmental offsets must provide an equivalent or better environmental outcome. The environmental outcome must be relevant to the environmental values impacted, and be achieved in a way that ensures long-term viability.

Environmental metrics

The scope and size of the offset needed to meet the environmental outcome can be determined using a metric. An environmental metric is a tool or methodology applied to indicate the amount and types of environmental values lost due to impact, and the gains that will be provided with an offset.

The QGEOP recommends using an environmental metric to measure the current condition of the environmental values to be lost. This can then be compared with the values located at the site provided as an offset. Having a metric ensures this process is consistent, transparent and defensible.

Offset delivery options

The proponent has a number of offset delivery options where identified by the relevant specific-issue offset policy. These range from:

- directly providing and managing an offset
- engaging a third party to provide the offset on their behalf through an offset transfer
- establishing an advance offset

- providing an offset payment to an offsets fund (where this option is available).

Packaging environmental offsets

Offset requirements may be met by providing an offset package that includes one or more offset actions. An offset package may include direct and indirect offsets, as indicated in the applicable specific-issue offsets policy.

Legally securing land-based environmental offsets

A land-based offset is legally secured if protected via a legally binding mechanism, such as:

- gazettal as a protected area under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, such as nature refuge
- declaration of an area of high nature conservation value under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*
- a covenant under the *Land Title Act 1994* or *Land Act 1994*
- statutory declaration of a Fish Habitat Area or fish habitat inclusions to an existing Fish Habitat Area under the *Fisheries Act 1994*
- other mechanism administered and approved by the State.

Further information

For further information on the QGEOP contact your nearest DERM business centre or refer to the following documents:

Available from the DERM website <www.derm.qld.gov.au>

- Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Policy
- Policy for Vegetation Management Offsets
- Offsets for Net Gain of Koala Habitat in South East Queensland Policy
- Queensland Biodiversity Offset Policy
- Guide to Environmental Offsets in Queensland

Available from the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation website <www.deedi.qld.gov.au>

- Mitigation and Compensation for Works or Activities Causing Marine Fish Habitat Loss

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For general enquiries contact the
Queensland Government call centre 13 QGOV (13 74 68)
or visit www.derm.qld.gov.au