Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Energy

Advanced offsets criteria

Background

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) actions that are likely to have an impact on matters of national environmental significance are referred to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment for assessment.

To compensate for any adverse effects of an action, offsets can be proposed. An offset is a measure that is designed to deliver a conservation benefit to a matter of national environmental significance. Offset proposals are considered during the assessment and approval process and are put in place after the action has been approved.

Advanced offsets are put in place before any impact occurs, helping to increase the environmental benefit of the offset. We encourage you to use advanced offsets where practical.

The EPBC Act does not allow beneficial actions to be taken into account when deciding whether an action is likely to have a significant impact on protected matters. For this reason, the Department will not assess the advanced offset until after the associated action has been referred and deemed to be a controlled action.

Further information on advanced offsets is provided in the Policy statement: Advanced environmental offsets under the EPBC Act.[1] The following advanced offset criteria should be read in conjunction with the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy and the How to use the offsets assessment guide.[2]

Advanced offset criteria

An advanced offset must have the following characteristics:

- The offset consists of one or more sites and/or activities, undertaken for the explicit purpose of protecting or managing a matter of national environmental significance, at any point following commencement of the EPBC Act, on 16 July 2000.
- There is sufficient information to enable a clear assessment of the conservation benefit that has been realised as a result of the offset.
- There is sufficient information to demonstrate that this conservation benefit is additional to existing obligations under other planning regimes, legislation, schemes or duty of care.

Advanced offsets need to be well planned and monitored to demonstrate their conservation benefit. To enable a proposal to be formally considered through the assessment and approval process it must contain the following information:

- a list of matters of national environmental significance (MNES) benefited[3] by the activities that will be undertaken as part of the advanced offset (offset activities)
  - for species and communities listed under the EPBC Act, scientific names must be used. See Species Profiles and Threats Database (www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/sprat.pl)

[1] www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/policy-statement-advanced-environmental-offsets-under-epbc-act

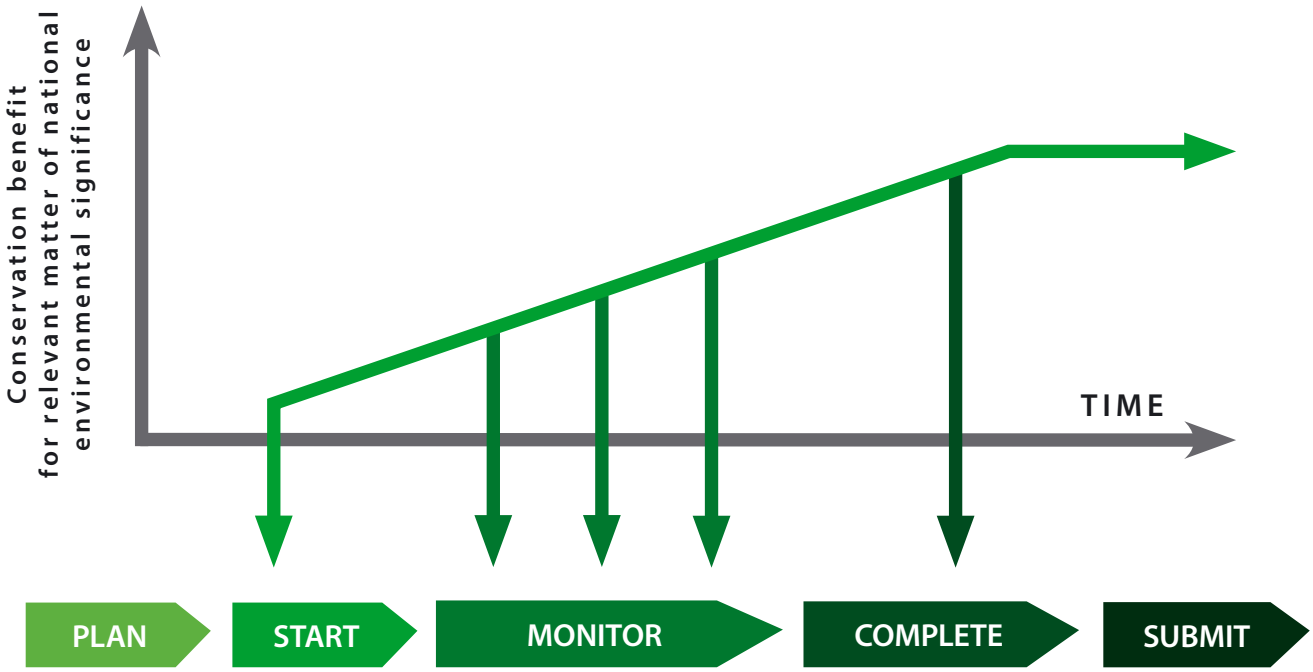
[2] www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/ epbc-act-environmental-offsets-policy

[3] Please note that activities that benefit some matters of national environmental significance may be detrimental to other MNES and that it is important to carefully choose the offset activities you wish to undertake.

- the location of the offset activities, including:
  - size of each offset site (in hectares)
  - coordinates representing the boundary of each offset site (see Appendix A)
  - maps showing the shape and location of each offset site
    - » ensure that any maps provided are of sufficient scale and resolution to enable clear identification of each offset site
- the offset activities undertaken, including:
  - what activities were undertaken
  - who undertook the activities
  - when they were undertaken
  - evidence that the offset activities commenced on or after 16 July 2000
  - evidence that the primary purpose of the offset activities was to explicitly protect or manage a matter of national environmental significance
- if the offset activities included improvement in quality of the offset site for a matter of national environmental significance, provide evidence demonstrating how much the offset activities improved the quality of the offset site for each matter of national environmental significance:
  - use the guidance provided in the document How to use the offset assessment guide[2] to estimate the quality of the offset site. Provide a detailed description of the method you used to calculate the quality of the offset site and a justification for the validity of this method
  - provide monitoring data demonstrating how the quality of the offset site has improved over time. This includes:
    - » baseline data (captured before commencement of offset activities) to demonstrate the quality of the offset site before the offset activities commenced
    - » periodic monitoring data (captured at appropriate intervals from commencement) to demonstrate that the improvement in the quality of the offset site was due to the offset activities. The number and frequency of monitoring data captured should be sufficient to clearly demonstrate any improvement in the quality of the offset site
    - » completion data (captured after the completion of offset activities) to demonstrate the quality of the offset site at the completion of the offset activities
  - provide data to demonstrate and quantify the improvement in quality must include comprehensive field surveys conducted according to the relevant Australian Government survey guidelines
  - provide evidence that suitably qualified personnel with sufficient technical expertise and experience collected and validated any data presented. A suitably qualified person is a person who has professional qualifications, training or skills and at least five (5) years of experience relevant to the nominated subject matters to give authoritative assessment, advice and analysis about performance relevant to the subject matter using relevant protocols, standards, methods and/or literature
  - provide evidence that the offset activities to improve quality were additional to existing obligations under other planning regimes, legislation, schemes or duty of care (when the advanced offset commenced)
  - include a discussion of how the quality of the offset site for each matter of national environmental significance would have changed in the 'without offset scenario'. If relevant, please provide information on measures to maintain into the future the quality improvements achieved by the offset activities
- evidence demonstrating how the offset activities reduced the risk of loss (ROL) of the offset site for each matter of national environmental significance (if relevant):
  - provide an estimation of how much the offset activities have reduced the ROL and a justification for the reduction. Please use the guidance provided in the document How to use the offset assessment guide[2] to estimate the risk of loss of the offset site
  - provide evidence that the offset activities to reduce ROL were additional to existing obligations under other planning regimes, legislation, schemes or duty of care (when the advanced offset commenced)
  - include a discussion of the how the risk of loss of the offset site would have changed in the 'without offset scenario'
- justification of how the advanced offset satisfies the requirements outlined in Section 7 of the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy.[2] Note that in relation to section 7.2.1 (tenure of offsets) that there is no requirement for the purposes of the policy to legally secure the offset site while it is being developed as an advanced offset.

Figure 1: Example timeline for an advanced offset

Note: Figure 1 above provides an example timeline of a hypothetical advanced offsets proposal and indicates the stages at which the required information needs to be collected.



PLAN

» ensure plans allow for collection of information required by the advanced offsets criteria

START

» capture baseline data on 'quality'
» capture proof of commencement date and purpose of offset activities
» capture proof of additionality of offset activities
» capture information to estimate reduction in risk of loss of advanced offset site
» notify Department (epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au). This step is optional

MONITOR

» capture data on progressive improvement in 'quality'. The number of capture points should be sufficient to demonstrate improvement

COMPLETE

» capture end-point data on 'quality'

SUBMIT

» submit advanced offset proposal for approval under the EPBC Act in relation to a referral (at the referral or assessment stage) or an approval (at the post approval stage).

Appendix A

Coordinates

The Protected Matters Search Tool (www.environment.gov.au/epbc/protected-matters-search-tool) may provide assistance in determining the coordinates of each advanced offset site. For each location point, provide coordinates as a pair of latitude and longitude references in the 'degrees, minutes, seconds' format.

Provide waypoints delineating the proposed offset area as either a GPS track or a set of coordinates that define the boundary. Ensure that there are no more than 50 sets of bounding location coordinate points per site. Provide bounding location coordinate points sequentially in either a clockwise or an anticlockwise direction.

Attach an associated GIS-compliant file that delineates the sites in accordance with the GIS Guidelines below.

Geographic Information System (GIS) data supply guidelines

Provide GIS data to the Department in the following manner:

- point, Line or Polygon data types: ESRI file geodatabase feature class (preferred) or as an ESRI shapefile (.shp) zipped and attached with appropriate title
- raster data types: Please provide raw satellite imagery in the vendor specific format
- projection as GDA94 coordinate system.

Provide processed products as follows:

- for data, uncompressed or lossless compressed formats are required - GeoTIFF or Imagine IMG is the first preference, then JPEG2000 lossless and other simple binary+header formats (ERS, ENVI or BIL)
- for natural/false/pseudo colour RGB imagery:
  - if the imagery is already mosaicked and is ready for display then lossy compression is suitable (JPEG2000 lossy/ECW/MrSID). Prefer 10% compression; up to 20% is acceptable
  - if the imagery requires any sort of processing prior to display (i.e. mosaicking, colour balancing etc.) then an uncompressed or lossless compressed format is required.

Metadata or 'information about data' will be produced for all spatial data and will be compliant with ANZLIC Metadata Profile (www.anzlic.gov.au/resources/metadata).

The Department's preferred method is using ANZMet Lite. However, the Department's service provider may use any compliant system to generate metadata.

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