

To: [Committee, EC \(SEN\)](#)
Subject: Senate Inquiry into Environmental Offsets
Date: Thursday, 3 April 2014 11:48:51 AM

I am a member of the community who is concerned about the misuse of the offset mechanism by vested interests and the loss to our biodiversity as a consequence.

Offsets have always been controversial and an increasing number of scientists, ecologists and conservationists say there are many loopholes and the policy is being manipulated by governments who won't say no to developers.

One of the architects of the scheme ANU's Phil Gibbons, says the theory behind offsetting is very attractive.' A fair-minded person would agree that if a developer destroys some of Australia's natural capital in making a buck, then they should really offset that impact elsewhere,' he said.

'But the devil is in the detail.'

There are examples where governments are cutting corners. Some offsets are not like for like and others are not being properly managed or restored. Some sites have been approved that weren't in danger of being cleared or lost in the future.

'Anything that you do in terms of an offset must be a genuine gain, must be something that would not have happened anyway as under business as usual,' Gibbons said.

'I think what people are doing is getting very creative in finding biodiversity gains when really they are things that would have happened anyway.'

With less and less good quality bush to be found, developers are putting up old cattle paddocks and mine sites as offsets, land which they say will be restored to its original state.

However, according to restoration ecologist Professor Richard Hobbs, those sites can take decades to develop, and there's no guarantee they will be the same as what was cleared.

He scoffed at the idea that Australia's biodiversity will be no worse off under offsetting, and called the practice 'a Faustian pact'.

'We run the risk of trading something irreplaceable for the short term development gains with the mirage of having a good conservation outcome in the future through the activities of the offset.'

All mapping should be independently reviewed on site to make sure that the claim being made is accurate and any company found to be making false or inaccurate offset claims should have a criminal investigation launched, with severe penalties for that company. That will be the deterrent needed to ensure that only accurate claim are put forward. If this cannot be done then the whole system of offsets should be withdrawn as it is clearly not functioning as it should.

Yours truly,

Anne Makhijani