



# **Robyn Parker MP**

## **Minister for the Environment**

## **Minister for Heritage**

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### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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Saturday, 20 July 2013

#### **BOOST FOR BIODIVERSITY**

#### **NEW FUND TO SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT**

A new fund will protect the environment while making it easier for the construction industry to get on with the job of providing vital infrastructure, Environment Minister Robyn Parker announced today.

Ms Parker said that a new biodiversity offsets fund would be established to enable major projects to contribute money, rather than locating and purchasing sites themselves.

“The new fund will see money directed for environmental improvements where they are most needed; while relieving developers of the responsibility to make environmental decisions for the state,” Ms Parker said.

“Connectivity across the landscape and protection of strategically important areas is the goal of the fund.

“A strategic biodiversity fund will enable ecological stewardship payments to be made to farmers who elect to manage parts of their land to higher environmental standards through bio-banking.

“The current system is confusing and ad hoc, delivering inconsistent environmental outcomes and hindering companies which are prepared to invest in our state.

“The NSW Government remains committed to streamlining approvals processes to reduce red tape, and reduce both the cost and time required to gain approval.

“At the same time, we are committed to the protection of biodiversity and the retention of environmental integrity in planning and approvals processes.

“Biodiversity underpins the health of our soils, our rivers, the productivity of our agricultural lands, rivers and oceans and supports future prosperity.

“The reforms I’m announcing today aim to protect the environmental inheritance of future generations, whilst promoting sustainable economic growth.

“The principles seek to apply a cost-effective, strategic approach to biodiversity offsetting in NSW, and provides a framework which would allow accreditation under the Federal *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

“The principles will initially apply to State Significant Development and State Significant Infrastructure, and in future may be extended to other types of development.

In addition to the new biodiversity offsets fund, key features of the reforms are:

- The establishment of a transparent methodology for calculating offsets;
- The introduction of a tiered approach, which includes alternatives to land-based offsets. These will provide businesses with increased flexibility to fulfil environmental requirements by, for example, rehabilitating degraded land, or funding a recovery program for a threatened species;
- The ability for offset calculations to be discounted where significant social and economic benefits accrue to NSW as a result of a proposal. **This transparent assessment will replace the ‘black box’ of discretion previously operating in offset assessments.**
- The establishment of a common set of offsetting principles.

To ensure environmental integrity, and the application of a ‘net-positive’ standard, the following principles have also been agreed:

- Before offsets are considered, impacts on biodiversity must first be avoided and unavoidable impacts must be mitigated.
- Offsets must be targeted to the biodiversity values being lost.
- Offsets remain additional to existing legal requirements, for example, the prohibition on clearing vegetation along river banks; and
- Offsets must be enduring, enforceable and auditable.

“A common set of offsetting practices will now be developed, in consultation with community and industry stakeholders,” Ms Parker said.

“The reforms I’m announcing today aim to protect the environment for future generations, while supporting sustainable economic growth.”

The NSW Government will seek to have its new approach to biodiversity offsetting accredited under the Commonwealth’s *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, to further reduce red tape for developers in NSW.

Details of offsetting practices are now being developed, drawing on best practice from across Australia and internationally.