

NSW biodiversity offset fund comes in peace

WILL GLASGOW
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The scheme means miners no longer have to negotiate directly with farmers over land for conservation

NSW Farmers president Fiona Simson said the new system would reduce tensions between farmers and miners.

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FARMERS in NSW will be able to earn money for weeding, fencing and pest control on their land as part of a new "offset" policy for major projects.

The scheme means miners no longer have to negotiate directly with farmers over land for conservation – removing a source of friction in the system.

Instead, miners and major developers will pay money into a "biodiversity fund" – a national first – whose strategic planning will be overseen by the NSW government.

"This will put an end to ad-hoc offsetting practices," said Environment Minister Rob Stokes.

Offsets improve the environment at a site to compensate for the worsening of the environment at another. However, many environmentalists are sceptical about offset policies, questioning whether they can produce "like

for like" protections.

NSW Farmers president Fiona Simson said the new system would reduce tensions between farmers and miners.

New model delivers credits

"We feel it's a step forward," said Ms Simson, who has a crop and cattle farm in Premer in north-west NSW.

She said the present system led to miners buying up agricultural land to fulfil their offsetting obligations – which hollowed out rural communities, reduced the number of ratepayers and left land neglected.

Under the new model, farmers would be eligible for credits while maintaining the use of their land for agricultural purposes.

Chief executive of the NSW Minerals Council, Stephen Galilee, said friction between farmers and miners was a problem with the current model.

Mr Galilee also said that the present system had produced inconsistent offset requirements, citing those at Glencore's coal site Ulan Mine near Mudgee and Whitehaven's Maules Creek project near Gunnedah.

While Mr Galilee applauded the guiding principles of the scheme, he had concerns about specific details, such as the amount of credits given to miners for rehabilitating their mine sites.

NSW Planning Minister Pru Goward said the government will consult with stakeholders over the next 12 to 18 months before implementing legislation that will give full effect to the policy and the fund.

She said there was flexibility to make "minor amendments" to the policy.

NSW landowners will be able to access the scheme from October 1.

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Are we talking another fake market to trade offsets so we can buy and sell parcels of "thin air"? Really!

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[**Joe**](#)

9/09/2014 11:55:11 AM, on The Land

Offsets ensure no mine can ever be rejected, and are a total sham. How about improve the environment on farms where you can and maintain production. Mines that cause too much damage just dont get approved. Im yet to see a mine disallowed on environmental grounds, maybe jabiluka, but thats it. So why would we make the approvals even easier for mines, unless ofcourse the system is corrupted? Only when economically viable mines are occasionally rejected on environmental grounds will we have a decent system.

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14/09/2014 12:06:15 PM, on The Land

omg, you mean the cockies get another hand out for things they should be doing anyway! NOT FAIR what a joke.

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