

Thousands urge European Commission to ditch biodiversity offsetting

As the European Commission concludes its consultation on biodiversity offsetting, the number of signatories to [a letter](#) urging the Commission not to pursue policy related to biodiversity offsetting (BO) has reached more than 9,000 people and 67 organisations. They fear it would “harm nature and people, and give power to those who destroy nature for private profit.”

The consultation sought views on the shape of the ‘No Net Loss initiative’, an idea from the EU’s ‘Biodiversity Strategy’, whose headline aim is to halt biodiversity loss by 2020. Its prime focus was biodiversity offsetting. Biodiversity offsetting refers to the destruction of nature in one place with the replacement of nature somewhere else.

Biodiversity offsetting has a low rate of success, long time lags between the destruction and restoration, and often leads to a net loss of biodiversity.ⁱ But organisations signing the letter are worried about more than technical constraints. The letter highlights three key concerns:

- BO provides “a license to trash nature” as it is often used to speed up planning processes and permit infrastructure development in natural sites.
- BO attempts to turn nature into a commodity and sends out a dangerous message that it is replaceable. Biodiversity and ecosystems are complex and unique and cannot be reduced to a system of credits as envisaged by offsetting mechanisms.
- BO brushes aside what nature means for communities, undermining their well-being and right to a healthy environment.

“For communities across Europe struggling to protect nature against private interests, biodiversity offsetting is the kiss of death, because developers can pretend they are delivering “no net loss” says Nick Dearden of the World Development Movement, a signatory organisation of the letter.

The consultation’s end comes against a backdrop of shifting priorities at the EC and grave concerns that environmental policies are being downgraded because of economic pressures.

“We fear Biodiversity Offsetting will play into the hands of powerful project developers. Now is the time to take a strong commitment to protect nature. The new Environment Commissioner should stand firm to protect the Nature Directives rather than waste time on risky offsetting schemes” says Hannah Mowat of FERN, one of the organisations that helped coordinate the letter.

Notes for editors

- 9500 citizens and over 60 organisations have signed the letter <http://naturenotforsale.org/letter2eu/>
- The public consultation ends on the 17 October, and is available here: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/consultations/nnl_en.htm
- See the short mockumentary style film on BO here: <http://naturenotforsale.org/>
- For more details, contact Berber Verpoest (berber.verpoest@counter-balance.org)
- Press release by Counter Balance, FERN, World Development Movement

ⁱ Michael Curran, Stefanie Hellweg, and Jan Beck 2014. Is there any empirical support for biodiversity offset policy? Ecological Applications 24:617–632. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1890/13-0243.1>