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Thousands urge European Commission to ditch biodiversity offsetting

By [Kevin Smith](#), 17 October 2014

As the European Commission concludes its consultation on biodiversity offsetting, almost 10,000 people and nearly 60 organisations (including us) have signed [a letter](#) urging the Commission not to pursue policy related to biodiversity offsetting (BO). 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 location A with the replacement of nature in location B.



Advanced biodiversity offsetting systems show that offsets have a low certainty rate of success, have long time lags and leads to a net loss of biodiversity. 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 commodifies nature 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.

Nick Dearden, director of the World Development Movement, a signatory organisation of the letter said:

“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.””

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.

Xavier Sol of Counter Balance, a signatory organisation of the letter, said: *“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.”*

Photo: Aiden Mahoney, Flickr

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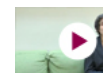
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