

Biodiversity offsets process: decision support tree

This decision support tree illustrates current good practice process to assess whether a no net loss biodiversity offset could be proposed or achieved for a development project. Using this decision tree will not necessarily ensure that a no net loss biodiversity offset can be achieved on the ground, as this will depend on the biodiversity features and values impacted and an assessment of limits to offsets (e.g. Pilgrim et al. 2013). An ability to demonstrate that impacts are avoided and/or minimised, that stakeholders were consulted and their concerns addressed, and that a biodiversity offset is potentially possible, can improve the possibility of obtaining a resource consent.

The decision tree summarises the offsetting process in a series of flowcharts. While flowcharts are linear in nature, in real situations, several aspects may need to be considered simultaneously. For example, assessing an offset site’s suitability, consideration of the site’s key biodiversity features and whether management techniques are demonstrably capable of achieving gain, can occur concurrently. The decision support tree is intended to be used alongside an assessment of offsetability following the Pilgrim et al. (2013) framework.

This decision support tree can be used when developing a proposal that requires a resource consent under the RMA. However, it should be made clear that it is designed specifically for a developer who wishes to develop a biodiversity offset consistent with the Guidance on Good Practice Biodiversity Offsetting in New Zealand.

How can this decision support tree help decision makers?

Encouraging project developers to follow a process such as that outlined in this decision support tree can increase the probability that sufficient burden of proof is presented with a consent application to make informed decisions. This can help stream-line the consenting process, facilitate dealing with outstanding issues and probably make the process less contentious. A less contentious process can also mean that a decision made at a local or regional level is not contested at a higher decision level (such as the Environment Court or High Court).

How can this decision support tree help developers?

Following the steps in this tree, especially early desktop assessments and stakeholder consultation, can reduce the cost and time required to obtain consents. The decision tree assists with making an informed assessment in the early stages of project development. It will help a developer avoid, remedy and mitigate impacts so that significant residual effects are reduced to the smallest level possible (where they can be offsetable) or decide whether to consider an alternative project location or to proceed with the development. It will also guide a developer through the decision-making process for development and whether or not to offer up a biodiversity offset (or, indeed, whether an offset is appropriate) and thus lead to a more comprehensive and defensible development package that can be presented to decision makers.

Key decision steps

