



**Policy Subject/Title:** Council Capital Works Offset Policy

**Policy Number:** OP/019

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**Responsible Officer:** Natural Resource Management Officer

**Related Policies / Procedures:** ...

**Authorised by:** Somerset Regional Council

**Authorised on:** 8 May 2019 [Doc ID

**Amendments:**

## **1. OBJECTIVE**

To provide community leadership and stewardship by implementing a policy to offset unavoidable environmental impacts associated with the delivery of Council's Capital Works Program.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Under current State and Federal Government legislation, the principle of "offsetting" unavoidable impacts on environmental values (usually associated with development) is now common practice.

In simple terms, "an environmental offset compensates for unavoidable impacts on significant environmental matters, (e.g. valuable species and ecosystems) on one site, by securing land at another site, and managing that land over a period of time, to replace those significant environmental matters which were lost."

In most cases, Council is not required to offset impacts that may result from capital works projects, due to exemptions in State Government regulations that make allowance for Local Government's role developing and supporting community. Increasingly however there is a community expectation that any development (Council or private) consider the environmental impact and footprint that a development may have, and propose a suitable and proportionate response to that impact. Although not explicit, there is an expectation that this will retain the status quo, or no net loss as applied to the environmental values, considered from an arbitrary point in time.

This policy outlines an internal Council position to offset any Council capital works projects, to demonstrate environmental responsibility, and stewardship within the Somerset Region.

## **3. PURPOSE**

To provide a sustainable environmental offset policy position that will allow consistent and repeatable application, and a demonstrable high standard of delivery.

## **4. SCOPE**

This policy applies to Council Capital Works projects only.

## **5. POLICY**

### **5.1 RATIONALE**

Council's policy position is reflected in the following principles, which are to be applied to the greatest extent possible, acknowledging that they may not all be possible concurrently, or in every instance:

- Environmental impacts must first be avoided, then minimised, before considering the use of offsets for any remaining impact.
- Offset installations may be implemented and banked in respect of known future works.

- If unable to be implemented upon the impacted site, offsets are typically located in proximity to the area of impact, and where possible support the strategic intent of the Somerset Region Planning Scheme.
- Offset installation will ensure buffer distances are maintained between the future mature vegetation and existing/planned development, including buffers for asset protection, clearing for maintenance tracks and hazard risk minimisation e.g. bushfire preparedness actions.
- Offsets are secured through Council tenure and trusteeship in the first instance, or other negotiated arrangements to ensure offset investments are protected in perpetuity.
- Where possible, offset installation will reflect the relevant pre-clearing regional ecosystem for the area/s impacted. (Species selected should be based upon local occurrence, appropriateness for the ecosystem being restored).
- Where an offset is not able to be implemented proximate to the area of impact, the receiving site conditions and ecosystem characteristics should be factored into offset design/s.
- Where possible, offset installation will support and enhance habitat connectivity, reduce/minimise edge effects, improve water quality outcomes, and provide habitat for known priority (Endangered, Vulnerable, Rare, and Threatened EVRT) species.
- Collaborative arrangements that support community “ownership” of offset installations should be considered – in such circumstances the community may be subsidised to “adopt” an offset implementation site (Per the accepted “Bushcare” model).
- Vegetation that is not endemic (locally native) to the Somerset region is not required to be offset.
- Offset metrics ensure that the offsets implemented are approximately proportional to the specific matter/s impacted, corresponding to a no net loss principle.
- Offsets are only applied to new capital works projects. To be clear, property accesses, applications for works within road reserve and maintenance activities on existing infrastructure does not require offsetting (ie maintaining road shoulders, drainage maintenance, clear zone sight lines etc.).
- The delivery of existing Council works programs not specifically for offset purposes are not considered an offset – A legitimate offset needs to demonstrate additionality.

## 5.2 APPLICATION

In respect of the principles above, the assessment and deployment of an offset in applicable situations should follow the following procedure, considering any site-specific circumstances in each instance:

- Council’s forward works programme identifies areas where vegetation and habitat will be impacted by Council capital works. Sites are referred for assessment.
- Council officers undertake a desktop audit of impacted sites prior to works being

undertaken to determine the quantum of clearing required. Site based assessment can be undertaken as required.

- Opportunities to offset the impacts are sought in the vicinity of the impact on secure public lands in the first instance. Where a suitable site in the vicinity of the area of impact is not available, the offset obligation may be banked to be deployed at another suitable location in the Somerset Region.
- Upon approval of an appropriate offset site, Council will facilitate offset implementation, and maintenance arrangements. Where a third-party supplier is engaged to undertake Council's capital works delivery, offset delivery may be subcontracted by the supplier under Council direction.
- Perpetual management of offsets will be subject to tenure, and associated use (ie, if leased, grazing may be negotiated to be reinstated within the offset area after plants are sufficiently established).
- Offset costs are nominally attributed to the relevant operational works budget in each instance - where Council works are contracted to a third party, Offset costing/s are to be included in proposal/s.
- A register of Offset requirement and delivery will be developed and maintained.

### 5.3 APPLICATION METRIC

For ease of application, an average of past capital works projects has been used to calculate a standard and representative offset metric that can be applied across the region. The methodology is as follows:

- Impact – Calculated by area, as design standards can be applied to define impacted areas of vegetation (ie known construction setbacks).
- Number of Trees – Average calculated at 300 trees/Ha (10,000m<sup>2</sup>) – indicative of woodland density/dominance over much of the Somerset Region.
- Trees for revegetation will be costed at \$10/tree (per Design Standard inclusions below)

These factors represented in a formula is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Area (m}^2\text{) of required clearing x 300 Trees}}{\text{Hectare (10,000m}^2\text{)}} = \text{Number of Offset trees required @ \$10 per tree.}$$

### 5.4 DELIVERY STANDARD

The following standards shall be applied to each offset application to ensure consistent and repeatable offset delivery:

- All plants utilised for revegetation shall be tubestock size.
- Woody plants shall be staked and guarded in usual circumstances to assist during the establishment period.

- All plantings will receive at least 1 year of maintenance (watering, weed control measures etc) so plants are sufficiently established to be functionally self-sustaining and resilient to normal periodic stress.
- The layout of larger offset installations incorporates ongoing access for vehicles to assist with maintenance activities – eg. slashers, spray vehicle access.
- Offset design and density will be in consideration of the indicative pre-clearing vegetation type on the impact site and receiving site where possible.
- Offsets may incorporate arrangements (such as fencing) to control stock or other animal browse that may inhibit offset establishment.
- Offset implementation includes site preparation prior to installation (such as slashing, spraying).

## **6. DATE OF RESOLUTION**

This policy was approved by the Chief Executive Officer and adopted by the Somerset Regional Council at the Ordinary Meeting of 8 May 2019.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script that is difficult to decipher but appears to be a personal name.

Signed:

Date: 8/05/19