

Lessons Learnt from Industry: Achieving Net Gain Outcomes for Biodiversity

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Abstract : Development plays a major role in stopping biodiversity loss. But the 'silo species' protection of legislation (where certain species are protected while many are not) means that development can be 'legally compliant' and result in biodiversity loss. 'Net Gain' (NG) policies can help overcome this by making it an absolute requirement that development causes no overall loss of biodiversity and brings a benefit. However, offsetting biodiversity losses in one location with gains elsewhere is controversial because people suspect 'offsetting' to be an easy way for developers to buy their way out of conservation requirements. Yet the good practice principles (GPP) of offsetting provide several advantages over existing legislation for protecting biodiversity from development. This presentation describes the learning from implementing NG approaches based on GPP. It regards major upgrades of the UK's transport networks, which involved removing vegetation in order to construct and safely operate new infrastructure. While low-lying habitats were retained, trees and other habitats disrupting the running or safety of transport networks could not. Consequently, achieving NG within the transport corridor was not possible and offsetting was required. The first 'lessons learnt' were on obtaining a commitment from business leaders to go beyond legislative requirements and deliver NG, and on the institutional change necessary to embed GPP within daily operations. These issues can only be addressed when the challenges that biodiversity poses for business are overcome. These challenges included: biodiversity cannot be measured easily unlike other sustainability factors like carbon and water that have metrics for target-setting and measuring progress; and, the mindset that biodiversity costs money and does not generate cash in return, which is the opposite of carbon or waste for example, where people can see how 'sustainability' actions save money. The challenges were overcome by presenting the GPP of NG as a cost-efficient solution to specific, critical risks facing the business that also boost industry recognition, and by using government-issued NG metrics to develop business-specific toolkits charting their NG progress whilst ensuring that NG decision-making was based on rich ecological data. An institutional change was best achieved by supporting, mentoring and training sustainability/environmental managers for these 'frontline' staff to embed GPP within the business. The second learning was from implementing the GPP where business partnered with local governments, wildlife groups and land owners to support their priorities for nature conservation, and where these partners had a say in decisions about where and how best to achieve NG. From this inclusive approach, offsetting contributed towards conservation priorities when all collaborated to manage trade-offs between: -Delivering ecologically equivalent offsets or compensating for losses of one type of biodiversity by providing another. -Achieving NG locally to the development whilst contributing towards national conservation priorities through landscape-level planning. -Not just protecting the extent and condition of existing biodiversity but 'doing more'. -The multi-sector collaborations identified practical, workable solutions to 'in perpetuity'. But key was strengthening linkages between biodiversity measures implemented for development and conservation work undertaken by local organizations so that developers support NG initiatives that really count.

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