



A review of the status of stormwater quality offset collection and implementation in Queensland

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Overview

Stormwater quality offsets provide a mechanism whereby local governments collect voluntary payments from developers in lieu of complying with stormwater quality management objectives on site. These local governments are subsequently responsible for utilising these funds to implement stormwater solutions that achieve a better or equivalent outcome external to the site.

To augment the appropriate collection and implementation of stormwater quality offsets within Queensland, the Department of Environment and Science (DES, formerly the Department of the Environment and Heritage Protection) on the preparation of the Draft Implementation Guidance for Off-site Urban Stormwater Management – Alternative locally appropriate solutions, supports achieving the outcomes of the State Planning Policy State Interest Water Quality 2017 (the guideline).

As outlined in Section 7 of the guideline, appropriate evaluation, monitoring and reporting should be undertaken for the collection and implementation of voluntary financial water quality contributions. This could include the following items:

- Reporting the value of collected stormwater quality offsets
- Reporting the location and type of off-site solutions delivered

Whilst several Councils within Queensland collect stormwater quality offsets, it is our understanding that no reporting has been provided by any of these Councils detailing any of the above items (or other potential items in the guideline).

The purpose of this study is to establish a 'baseline' in relation to the status of stormwater quality offset collection and implementation within Queensland.

Study authors asked all Councils within Queensland collecting stormwater quality offsets a range of questions related to stormwater quality offsets, including the following:

- Whether the Council currently collects stormwater quality offsets
- The value (\$AUD) of stormwater quality offset contributions received and Council's cumulative pollutant load reduction obligation (by catchment).
- The value (\$AUD) of projects implemented using stormwater quality offset contributions to date. This should include those projects partially funded by offsets with distinction between proportion funded by offsets and other funding mechanisms.

- Details of projects implemented using stormwater quality offset contributions, including:
- Key learnings for future offset collection and implementation.
- Key findings from our assessment include the following:
- Several Councils within Queensland collect stormwater quality offsets (although several have chosen not to)
- For Councils where stormwater quality offsets have been collected:
 - Significant funds have collected in stormwater offsets
 - The value of stormwater offsets implemented is significantly lower than the value collected for all Councils
 - The water quality benefits of solutions implemented with stormwater quality offset funds is significantly lower than would otherwise have been provided with on-site treatment (with compliance with State Planning Policy pollutant load removal targets)
 - Councils typically have insufficient resources to appropriately implement solutions to achieve a better of equivalent outcome relative to on-site treatment

The current status of stormwater quality offset collection and implementation is unacceptable and should be immediately resolved. It is our recommendation that Councils that are unable to comply with the recommendations outlined in the guideline should immediately cease stormwater quality offset collection.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to establish a 'baseline' in relation to the status of stormwater quality offset collection and implementation within Queensland.

Method

Study authors asked all Councils within Queensland collecting stormwater quality offsets a range of questions related to stormwater quality offsets.

Results

Key findings from our assessment include the following:

- Several Councils within Queensland collect stormwater quality offsets (although several also have chosen not to)
- For Councils where stormwater quality offsets have been collected:
 - Significant funds have collected in stormwater offsets
 - The value of stormwater offsets implemented is significantly lower than the value collected for all Councils
 - Councils likely have insufficient resources to appropriately implement solutions to achieve a better of equivalent outcome relative to on-site treatment.

Conclusions

This study has shown that the current status of stormwater quality offset collection and implementation is unacceptable and should be immediately resolved.

It is our recommendation that Councils that are unable to comply with the recommendations outlined in the guideline should immediately cease stormwater quality offset collection.