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## Rewards, Awards, Challenges & Trade-offs: The water quality offsets journey

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### **Biography:**

*Ben is an environmental scientist that has spent the better part of a decade working with urban stormwater. He is currently a waterway improvement officer at Ipswich City Council where he maintains strategic oversight over all things Water Sensitive Urban Design. In recent years this has included managing the implementation of Council's water quality offsets program, from site identification through to on ground delivery of water quality offset projects and program review. Delivering outcomes that provide benefits to the community beyond water quality are his professional driver and he looks forward to contributing to a future where stormwater plays a critical role in enhancing the liveability of our cities and where waterways are enhanced and valued by the wider community.*

### **Abstract:**

Challenges associated with water quality infrastructure delivered by the development industry have led to the emergence of water quality offsets schemes across Queensland and beyond. Ipswich City Council was an early adopter of this approach and are now well advanced in the implementation of their offsets scheme.

This journey has been characterised by internal challenges and constant questioning what we are doing and why. What are the problems? What are the solutions? Can offsets solve these problems and what are the trade-offs? For a number of years Council has been grappling with these questions, often without a definitive answer. Without doubt offsets schemes are characterised by potential trade-offs, however the jury is still out as to whether they provide value over and above what is traditionally being delivered on development sites.

Ipswich City Council has been successful in meeting its obligations with regards to pollutants required to offset. It has successfully implemented some landmark projects including the Small Creek Naturalisation Project and the first phase of the Franklin Vale initiative. The former has achieved outcomes well beyond a simple water quality improvement project, and successfully brought the residents along for the ride. The latter has aimed to promote a stewardship ethic in landholders that will provide benefits for generations to come, while providing a highly efficient means of meeting our targets in the long term.

Despite these successes, some fundamental challenges remain. Questions arise as to whether we can continue to deliver the standard of project that we have successfully delivered to date under current arrangements, and considerations must be made for how the program may be modified in the future. However such options including reducing the rate of offsets acceptance may fundamentally alter the ability of Council to deliver some of these superior outcomes, presenting yet another trade-off.