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**Both Sides Now – Weltanschauung  
and Offset Mitigation.  
Environmental Decision Making in  
New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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*“I’ve looked at life from both sides now,  
From win and lose, and still somehow,  
It’s life’s illusions I recall,  
I really don’t know life at all”*

*(Mitchell, 1967)*



## ABSTRACT

Nature and natural systems are characterised as a complex and poorly understood web of interrelated functions, beset with uncertainty. Many of the ‘services’ that nature provides to humans depend on the totality of these functions in a way that defies attempts to analyse their components. To attempt to define a view in terms of ecological functions would be akin to defining Turner’s seascapes in terms of the quantity of pigments used. Nature, natural systems and ecological concepts are then seen to be based on, and understood in terms of, social rather than biological systems. Widely differing views are also held on the ethics and desirability of basing economic growth on the use of natural resources by humans. It is no surprise then, that when these two subjects combine, as they do when considering the allocation of natural resources, the situation can be seen to have all the characteristics of a messy problem.

The concept of sustainability underpins New Zealand’s Resource Management Act 1991. This principle is operationalized through the terms and conditions on resource use consents granted by local authorities. Despite efforts to avoid or mitigate negative environmental impacts, outcomes are frequently perceived as inequitable, and detrimental to the natural environment. An attempt to alleviate this has been the use of the concept of offset mitigation, where an unavoidable ecological loss at one site is compensated for by an equivalent gain elsewhere. To date this technique has not been widely used in New Zealand, but where it has, the perception of inequity remains.

The thesis considers the hypothesis that perceptions of inequality in the process, and outcome, of resource consent applications involving offset mitigation, derive from a failure to incorporate the *Weltanschauung* of all actors. The existence of divergent *Weltanschauung* between actor classes is postulated, and the implications of this for problem solving and consensus building considered. Resource consents involving offset mitigation over the last ten years were identified. All actors involved in these applications were surveyed. Their experience and perceptions relating to the environment, the use of natural resources, and citizen participation in the process was sought. Results obtained suggested a qualitatively different *Weltanschauung* is held by submitters opposing the consent, from those of other actor groups. The results also

indicated that submitters had a quantitatively different opinion of the equity of the process. The conclusion is drawn that the current resource consent process, by failing to incorporate the different Weltanschauung of all actors, cannot achieve an equitable exchange in cases of offset mitigation.

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