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Avoid misuse of eco-compensation

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China is piloting a new type of ecological compensation scheme in which developers pay to offset environmental damage. We are concerned that this policy could have the opposite effect. Ecological compensation by developers in northwest Europe must restore natural habitats and resources to maintain ecological functions and services (E. Wolanski and M. Elliott *Estuarine Ecohydrology* Elsevier, 2015). By contrast, ecological restoration is not a priority under China's pilot scheme. Developers may choose to pay government authorities directly rather than opting to restore ecosystems, which is generally more expensive, time-consuming and scientifically demanding. We are concerned that the payment system would be misused and regarded as 'buying' the right to inflict further damage. We therefore urge the government to develop an ecological compensation policy that is conditional on ecological restoration.