



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT
MICK GENTLEMAN MLA (CHAIR), ZED SESELA MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), MARY PORTER MLA
MEDIA RELEASE

BIO SPHERE RESERVE GETS GREEN LIGHT

The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment has recommended that the ACT be nominated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve by December 2008.

It also recommended that the ACT Government develop and implement an effective communication and consultation strategy so that stakeholders better understand the aims of biosphere reserve listings.

“One aim of the strategy would be to secure support for the proposed nomination from stakeholders such as the traditional owners of the ACT (the Ngunnawal), young people, and the broader community. There are still highly variable levels of understanding about biosphere reserves in the ACT community,” Committee Chair, Mr Mick Gentleman MLA said on Thursday (18 October 2007).

The Committee supported the nomination and listing for various reasons:

• biosphere reserves recognise landscape scale land use planning which helps sustain ecosystem services and ecosystem resilience under climate change;

• the Griffin vision for a sustainable Canberra, and Canberra’s modern urban planning, warrant international recognition;

• it could encourage Canberra to become a more sustainable city and to respond to the challenges created by climate change;

- it may help to grow the educational institutions, agencies and companies working on sustainability issues in the region; and
- it might promote greater respect for Indigenous heritage values, and other positive outcomes for the local Indigenous community. An exciting opportunity exists for the attribution of an appropriate Indigenous name to the proposed ACT Biosphere, just as we see in Barkindji, Croajingalong, and Uluru Kata-Tjuta Biosphere Reserves.

“The Committee found high levels of support for the proposed nomination amongst many community organisations and three of the four universities in the Territory. This is very significant considering that it was not the Committee’s role to promote community engagement with and awareness about the proposal,” Mr Gentleman said.

The Committee also called for a national review of biosphere reserves.

The report can be accessed at

<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=55&inquiry=226&category=19>

For interviews, photo opportunities or further information please contact the office of Committee Chair, Mr Mick Gentleman MLA on 050131, or the Committee Secretary Hanna Jireth on 050137 or 0415 144283.

Background to the Committee's inquiry:

- In September 2007 there were 529 biosphere reserves in 105 countries, including 14 in Australia. Mornington Peninsular and Western Port Biosphere Reserve in Victoria, and Noosa, include an urban component, as is proposed for the ACT.
- In relation to the management of biosphere reserves that have already been designated in Australia, the Committee recommends that a national review be undertaken. The inquiry found that biosphere reserves are a relatively low profile, even neglected component of Australia's suite of policy responses to the sustainability challenge. The Committee made a range of recommendations which suggest that this situation should be redressed.
- A designation of an area as a Biosphere Reserve does not 'lock up' land for conservation in any sense. Many biosphere reserves include substantial human communities
- Biosphere reserves aim to:
 - foster sustainable economic and human development
 - preserve landscapes, ecosystems, species, and genetic resources, and
 - support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, and research and monitoring for sustainable development.
- The issue of a possible nomination of a biosphere reserve for the ACT was raised in the 1986 *Namadgi National Park Management Plan*. More recently, Nature and Society Forum Inc has been advocating the nomination, which they regard as consistent with their vision for healthy people on a healthy planet. The 2006 Report of the Centenary of Canberra Task Force recommended that Canberra should bid to become a Biosphere Reserve by 2013.
- UNESCO documents on Biosphere Reserves and other information can be accessed at <http://www.unesco.org/mab/BRs/offDoc.shtml>
- The 3rd International Congress of Biosphere Reserves will be held in Spain in early 2008 where many of the issues currently being debated within UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program will be discussed and clarified. These include the concept of Biosphere Reserves as 'learning laboratories', urban biospheres and zonation generally, the world network of biosphere reserves, and country-to-country and city-to-city networking. The conference will also review and update the 1995 Seville Strategy which guides the implementation of Biosphere Reserves