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Visiting Fellow

Mr M Gentleman MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
Canberra 2601

Dear Mr Gentleman,

ACT as Biosphere Reserve

Thank you for your letter inviting participation in the inquiry into the proposed nomination of the ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. I am pleased to offer the following comments and to enlarge on them at any future hearings.

- Whilst supporting the nomination, which I hope will proceed, I am bound to indicate that I believe that a nomination for Canberra as a UNESCO World Heritage site should take preference. I realise that this action is connected with a possible National Heritage List nomination, I still believe it ought to be the priority. A number of cities are listed as WH sites and new nominations are under discussion, for example Buenos Aires. Canberra's position as an internationally renowned example of city planning makes it an ideal nomination, and one that would be welcomed internationally by experts in the field.
- The basis for a Biosphere Reserve nomination must be the landscape setting of the city and its surrounds. Landscape idealism was the *raison d'être* for the concept of a federal capital, the site choice by Scrivener, The Griffin plan, The innovative work of Charles Weston followed by Lindsay Pryor and then NCDC's city in the landscape and ratification of the NCOSS (National Capital Open Space System) covering the hills, ridges and valleys of inner and outer Canberra.
- Canberra and surrounds represent a remarkable fusion of culture and nature where the city and its setting benefit from the landscape framework. It (ie the ACT in total) is a cultural landscape that is unique in terms of a city setting. There is no other city like it. The landscape reflects cumulative layers of landscape making through time from Aboriginal occupation through to European occupation. It is imperative that this fact is recognised in any Biosphere Reserve nomination which should not be reduced to over emphasis on the idea of the landscape as a quasi national park. In this regard I am of the opinion that the term 'Canberra Nature Park' for the NCOSS is misleading. It is for much of its area part of a multi-use urban open space.

- With the approaching centenary of the Canberra a number of landmark years leading to 2013 would be appropriate as target dates for a nomination. Two examples are 2008 when the Yass-Canberra area was the final selection and (February) 1909 when Scrivener reported that the Limestone Plains was the best.
- Boundaries of core, transition, and buffer zones should not be difficult to determine if the NCOSS is taken as a guide. For example the core area could correspond with the city area and inner open space system, the transition zone with part of the outer hills/ridges/valleys, the buffer zone with the remainder of the outer hills etc and the fringing mountains and bushland.
- Management and nomination could be handled with an Advisory Group consisting of community and professional representatives working with small core of public officials. Options for Advisory Group to assist in developing the nomination in an honorary capacity could be investigated.
- Existing management of the core, transition and buffer zones should be capable of being incorporated into a nomination.

At a UNESCO-IUCN forum in Tokyo last year looking at the relationship between people and nature in associative cultural landscapes I mentioned to Mr Oviedo (formerly with IUNC, now with UNESCO) about the possibility of a Biosphere nomination for Canberra and ACT. He was warmly receptive, particularly as this would be the first city and surrounds in the world to be so nominated.

Yours sincerely

Professor Ken Taylor