



# *Friends of Grasslands*

*supporting native grassy ecosystems*

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Dr Hanna Jaireth  
Secretary  
Committee on Planning and Environment  
ACT Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601

20 June 2006

Dear Dr Jaireth

## **ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**

I refer to your request to Friends of Grasslands (FOG) on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment to participate in its inquiry into the proposed nomination of the ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

FOG supports the ACT Government applying to UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) to have the ACT accepted as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The ACT meets the objectives for biosphere reserves, under the *Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves*, namely:

- To foster sustainable economic and human development,
- To preserve landscapes, ecosystems, species, and genetic resources, and
- To support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, and research and monitoring related to local, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

FOG believes that there would be a number of advantages to the ACT, if it were to become a biosphere reserve. FOG believes that the ACT has provided leadership in Australia in attempting to integrate economic and social development while ensuring good environmental outcomes with a particularly strong focus on biodiversity. The creation of a biosphere reserve would provide some international recognition of the ACT for its efforts, and more importantly encourage the ACT to continue in this direction. We believe that the ACT, as a biosphere reserve, would be attractive to both investment and tourism with an environment and biodiversity theme.

There would be a cost to the ACT both in submitting the nomination and meeting its ongoing obligations. FOG believes that, if declared a biosphere reserve, the ACT should actively participate in the MAB program. This could take the form of establishing a committee of Commonwealth and ACT government, industry (including rural), education and, and community (both environment and non-environment) stakeholders to meet say twice a year. The committee should examine how the ACT might support the MAB program, make recommendations to government (consistent with MAB objectives) that further economic, social and environment objectives, initiate research consistent with these objectives, promote MAB objectives within the community, and gain advantage from being a biosphere reserve. The committee would need secretarial and other support.

Concerning some particular issues raised by you, FOG's answers are as follows:

### **Management of the nomination process**

FOG believes that the nomination should be organised by the ACT government. However, government should ensure that there is broad bipartisan and community support.

### **The status and possible boundaries of the core, transition and buffer zones**

In FOG's view, the core areas should include representation of all vegetation communities, especially threatened communities such as grasslands and woodlands, as well as Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, high quality riparian ribbons, high quality areas in Canberra Nature Park, and special areas such as Horse Park wetland. Buffer and transition zones should include woodland and riparian corridors, hills, ridges, drainage lines, grazing leases, open spaces, etc. The higher quality areas should be assigned to 'buffer', and lower quality areas to 'transition'.

### **Funding needs and sources**

FOG believes that modest funding is required to fund the application, ongoing participation in the MAB project, and to promote the ACT as a biosphere reserve. Local business might be prepared to sponsor such a project. The committee established as part of the project should seek funding for research and other projects that might further the MAB objectives.

### **How local stakeholders should be engaged in (a) planning, (b) education and training programs, and (c) research and monitoring activities**

The establishment of a broadly based committee with good contacts amongst stakeholders should be capable of tackling these issues.

### **Communication strategies and activities**

The communication strategy should aim to ensure that the project has clear aims and strategies which should be targeted to international, national and local stakeholders and communities. This should be built on across the board support in the ACT.

### **Timeframe and viability of the proposed nomination**

The year 2008 has been suggested as a good time to bring the biosphere into being. This would mark the centenary of initial investigations of the Yass-Canberra area as the site for the national capital. FOG supports this.

The viability of the nomination and its continued existence will depend upon clear bipartisan and community support for the reserve and a broadly agreed strategy to implement it. A biosphere reserve must bring something of substance to the ACT both in terms of proactively implementing the aims of the *Seville Strategy* and obtaining advantage from it. From FOG's perspective it should facilitate a greater understanding of and commitment to our threatened ecological systems.

Yours sincerely

Kim Pullen  
President