



Friends of Grasslands

supporting native grassy ecosystems

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Secretary
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
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Dear Hanna

Inquiry into the Proposed Nomination of the ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

In response to Mick Gentleman's request for answers to specific questions about the nomination of a biosphere reserve, Friends of Grasslands responds as follows:

- **Should the Committee advise the Assembly that 'by December 2008' should be the timeframe for the lodgement of the nomination form for the proposed ACT Biosphere Reserve with UNESCO?**

Yes. In our previous submission, FOG stated that "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."

- **What additional environmental, social and economic benefits could be delivered to the ACT and region following the designation of the proposed UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, beyond those being pursued or delivered under existing laws, policies and programs?**

Essentially, the ACT would receive international recognition for its leadership on the issues mentioned in this question and this would encourage the ACT to continue on this road. Being seen as a leader in integrating economic, social and environmental policy would attract both investment and tourism with a biodiversity and environment theme.

In our earlier submission we stated:

"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.”

- **Should the proposed Biosphere Reserve include negotiations with NSW about possible cross-border zonation?**

FOG would not be opposed to such negotiations. However, it would not want such negotiations to hold bringing up the creation of the biosphere reserve until after 2008.

One suggestion is that the ACT would be combined with the NSW alps, essentially combining Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) and possibly towns along its border, with the ACT, especially as KNP is already a biosphere reserve. FOG would not favour this approach because it would combine alpine areas in the ACT and NSW together with tableland areas in the ACT. In its first submission FOG argued for the incorporation of all vegetation communities, especially grassland and woodlands, which are threatened ecological communities. It stated:

“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’.”

In FOG’s view, if NSW is included then careful consideration should be given what geographic areas and vegetation communities should be included. Several concepts could be pursued, e.g., the area of the South Eastern Highlands bioregion, the Southern Tablelands, or the Capital Region. Each is somewhat different. FOG would be happy to provide any further explanation.

- **If there is broad community support for the proposed nomination, should the ACT Place Names Committee invite stakeholders to participate in the process of selecting a name for the proposed Biosphere Reserve?**

FOG would not oppose this, but some in FOG believe that an appropriate name would either be “Ngunnawal”, or several names reflecting the various aboriginal people associated with this region, or a name chosen by elders of these communities.

- **Should the issue of a Biosphere Reserve nomination be raised with the City of Nara, Japan, with a view to forming a thematic sub-network relationship with the proposed ACT Biosphere Reserve?**

FOG would not oppose this, but this should not hinder the timing of the introduction of the biosphere, nor should it allow the nature of the proposed reserve to be change substantially from what is currently being considered.

- **Should the Committee recommend to the Assembly that a Biosphere Reserve nomination is viable?**

Yes.

- **Which stakeholder groups and/or range of expertise should be represented in an organisation established to progress the nomination of, and/or to manage the proposed ACT Biosphere Reserve?**

FOG believes that the broadest groupings should be represented, included Commonwealth and Territory Government, education institutions, business, tourist industry, rural lessees, and environmental and non-environmental community groups. This list should not be seen as exhaustive. As stated in our previous submission: "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."

- **Should stakeholder groups establish an incorporated association to progress the proposed nomination?**

This may have merit. Clearly, the ACT government and broader community should make the nomination. Membership should largely comprise government and educational entities, corporations, and non profit groups. The ACT government should have a strong association with whatever entity is proposed.

- **Should governments and the private sector be asked to support the holding of a national meeting of volunteers supporting Biosphere Reserves in Canberra before 2007?**

FOG would not oppose this suggestion, but it is not clear what purpose this might serve.

Yours sincerely,

Kim Pullen
President

Emailed 31 August 2006
Janet Russell,
Secretary