

Biosphere Reserve Submission by Nature and Society Forum

Introduction

The Nature and Society Forum (NSF) strongly supports the proposal that the ACT be nominated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The designation of ACT as a Biosphere Reserve would make a very significant contribution to the move toward the long term ecological sustainability of the region. It would also have other advantages for the Territory and the nation (see below).

Biosphere Reserves

The UNESCO Biosphere Reserves were initiated in the 1970s to reconcile the conflicting goals of conserving biodiversity, promoting economic and social development, and maintaining cultural values.

At first, Biosphere Reserves were wilderness areas with little or no human habitation. However, in 1995 a major international conference to review the Biosphere Reserve program took place in Seville, Spain, and this led to the so-called 'Seville Strategy' which expanded the concept to include areas with significant human populations that provide models of 'active' sustainability, and especially to consider urban areas and their hinterlands. It highlighted the importance of biosphere reserves as models for land management and experimental approaches to sustainable development.

Biosphere Reserves are places where local people, scientists, and government decision-makers cooperate to achieve sustainable development – that is, to achieve an integration of ecological, economic and socio-cultural elements in planning that takes into account the needs of future generations.

Biosphere Reserves are nominated by national governments participating in the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Program. There are about 500 Biosphere Reserves worldwide in about 100 different countries. This network gives individual reserves a profile and an opportunity to share experiences and best practice.

Despite the usual meaning of the word 'reserve', the Biosphere Reserve concept is dynamic, flexible and future-oriented. Biosphere Reserves do not 'lock up' land or exclude human activity.

The ACT as a Biosphere Reserve

The ACT is an ideal candidate – as a planned National Capital with a significant urban population adjacent to large areas of natural habitat, and located on the upper reaches of one of Australia's major inland rivers. If designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, it could be the first national capital in the world to attain this status – although we understand that there are moves afoot to propose both Paris and Rome as Biosphere Reserves.

The potential benefits for the ACT community would include:

- Identifying and promoting the natural, cultural, and human assets of the region
- Monitoring progress towards long term sustainability
- Showcasing the National Capital to the world as an ecologically sensitive region on the path towards long term sustainability, and thus generating regional and national pride, encouraging tourism, and perhaps the marketing of local products

- Providing the opportunity for community members to establish an enriching life-long skill of ‘reading’ the ACT landscape, and providing ‘space’ for residents to reflect on their community and region, identifying ‘common ground’.

The designation of ACT as a Biosphere Reserve would demonstrate national leadership in the transition to an ecologically sustainable society and it would capture imaginations nationally and globally.

An essential feature of the ACT Biosphere Reserve would be its dependence on a collaborative partnership between Government and components of the business sector, educational and research institutions and community groups.

The nomination process

The nomination should be prepared by a suitably qualified Project Officer engaged by the ACT Government, for a period of some months. This person would work in collaboration with:

- a Biosphere Reserve Advisory Panel of individuals including representatives of the different partners in the project and scientists with the appropriate expertise
- interested community groups (e.g. Nature and Society Forum, which has already done work on the nomination that could be useful starting point for the Project Officer).

The reports of the ACT Commissioner for the Environment should be drawn upon as a source of information for preparation of the nomination.

The successful nomination to UNESCO proposing Mornington Peninsula in Victoria as a Biosphere Reserve would be another valuable guide in preparing the ACT’s own nomination.

NSF recommends that:

- 1 a suitably qualified Project Officer be engaged by the ACT Government to prepare the nomination
- 2 a Biosphere Reserve Advisory Panel with wide expert representation be established to oversee the nomination process
- 3 the reports of the ACT Commissioner for the Environment and work previously done by Nature and Society Forum be drawn upon in the preparation of the nomination
- 4 successful Australian nominations to UNESCO for Biosphere Reserve status also be drawn upon for the ACT’s own nomination.

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

This issue will, no doubt, be resolved following considerable thought and discussion.

NSF provisionally suggests that:

5 the following classification be considered for the Biosphere Reserve zones:

Core area	Namadgi National Park
Buffer zone	Murrumbidgee Corridor, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Nature Parks, forests (plantations), grazing farmland
Transition area	Built-up area (residential, commercial, industrial, cropping farmland et. and the associated ecological resources including corridors, vegetation, hydrology and micro-climates).

Funding needs and resources

Should the ACT's nomination for Biosphere Reserve status be successful, annual funding will be necessary to enable the employment of a suitably qualified Coordinating Officer. These funds might take the form of a Government grant to a suitable organisation (e.g. NSF and, or the ANU Centre for UNESCO). This is the model used for the Mornington Biosphere Reserve in Victoria.

Other funding for specific projects under the auspices of the Biosphere Reserve should be sought from philanthropic organisations, the business sector and government agencies.

There would also be substantial input in kind from volunteers, NGOs and from educational and research institutions and interested community groups.

NSF recommends that, as soon as Biosphere Reserve status is granted:

- 6 a suitably qualified Coordinating Officer be recruited by the ACT Government to coordinate the management of the Biosphere Reserve
- 7 consideration be given to engaging a suitable organization to fill the role of the coordinating officer on a permanent basis.
- 8 consideration be given to seeking support for the nomination and the reserve itself from corporate sponsors, philanthropic organisations and government agencies.

How local stakeholders should be engaged

As the Biosphere Reserve will be overseen by a collaborative partnership involving government, certain interested community groups, elements of the business sector, some professional groups (e.g. architects, engineers) and appropriate educational and research institutions, these same bodies should also be involved in the nomination for Biosphere Reserve status.

(a) Planning

A Biosphere Reserve Advisory Panel, consisting of representatives of the partners in the Reserve, would be able assist the Project Officer in preparing the nomination and eventually the Coordinating Officer in developing and managing the Reserve.

(b) Education and training programs

The Biosphere Reserve will provide a range of attractive opportunities for educational and training programs in the life sciences, environmental sciences, social sciences and for park rangers. It will certainly be utilised by the full spectrum of educational institutions in the ACT

(universities, Canberra Institute of Technology, colleges, primary and secondary schools, and community organisations involved in education such as NSF).

(c) Research and monitoring activities

Relevant departments in the universities and CIT will be interested in contributing to these activities, which will provide excellent topics for student research projects monitoring activities and for Honours, Masters and PhD courses. The Reserve will also provide useful material for research projects at the college and secondary school level.

It will be important that these research and monitoring activities be properly coordinated; a Biosphere Reserve Scientific Advisory Committee would be a suitable vehicle to ensure that this is the case.

NSF recommends that:

- 9 the nomination for Biosphere Reserve status be formally informed by a collaborative advisory panel comprising Government, certain interested community groups, elements of the business sector, some professional groups (e.g. architects, engineers) and appropriate educational and research institution
- 10 the ongoing management of the ACT Biosphere Reserve also be formally informed by a similar collaborative advisory panel
- 11 the nomination for Biosphere Reserve status refer to educational and training opportunities in the life sciences, environmental sciences, social sciences and for park rangers
- 12 the nomination for Biosphere Reserve status also refer to the use of the reserve for ACT universities, the CIT, colleges and secondary schools for research and monitoring activities
- 13 research and monitoring activities be properly coordinated under a Biosphere Reserve Scientific Advisory Committee.

Communication strategies and activities

These are important aspects of the Biosphere Reserve. A Public Relations and Educational Advisory Committee should be established from the start to ensure that the public is kept well-informed of the project and of its benefits to the ACT. This process should also be designed to build up support for the Biosphere Reserve so that the activities of an ever-increasing proportion of our population become more closely aligned with the ACT's Biosphere Reserve status.

NSF recommends that, as soon as Biosphere Reserve status is granted:

- 14 an advisory committee with members drawn from across the community be established to oversee communications and the educational outreach of the Biosphere Reserve
- 15 support be sought from NGOs in the ACT (such as NSF) to promote the benefits of the Biosphere Reserve and what may emerge as a "Biosphere Reserve lifestyle".

Time frame and viability of the proposed nomination

The aim should be to have ACT declared a Biosphere reserve in 2008. This means that work should begin on the nomination as soon as possible, with the aim of submitting the

nomination by June 2007. The ACT should aim to have the Biosphere reserve operational and integrated into Canberra's 2113 centenary.

NSF recommends that:

- 16 a timetable be set to enable Biosphere Reserve status to be granted in 2008
- 17 the timetable be such as to enable the ACT become the first national capital in the world to achieve Biosphere Reserve status
- 18 the timetable also allow the Biosphere Reserve to be a feature permeating Canberra's centenary in 2113.

NSF believes that a well-prepared nomination would stand a very good chance of success.

[Original signed]



Rory Eames
Coordinator
Nature and Society Forum
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Wendy Rainbird
Coordinator
Nature and Society Forum
1 June 2006