

## **Background information on Great Sandy Biosphere**

### **What is a Biosphere?**

Biosphere reserves are sites recognised under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program that innovate and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development. They serve as 'living laboratories' for testing and demonstrating integrated management of land, water and biodiversity. The program was launched in 1971.

They are endorsed by national governments based on a submission by the community, and remain under sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located, yet share their experience and ideas nationally, regionally and internationally within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. There are 529 sites worldwide in 105 countries.

Each biosphere reserve is intended to fulfil three complementary functions:

- a conservation function, to preserve genetic resources, species, ecosystems and landscapes;
- a development function, to foster sustainable economic and human development; and
- a logistic support function, to support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, and research and monitoring

### **How many Biospheres are in Australia?**

Australia has fourteen Biosphere Reserves. Of these, Noosa and Mornington Peninsula are most similar to the proposed Great Sandy Biosphere.

Barkindji Biosphere Reserve, New South Wales  
Croajingolong National Park, Victoria  
Fitzgerald River National Park, Western Australia  
Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, Victoria  
Kosciuszko National Park, New South Wales  
Macquarie Island World Heritage Area, Tasmania  
Mornington Peninsula and Western Port, Victoria  
Mumungari Conservation Park, South Australia  
Noosa Biosphere Reserve, Queensland  
Prince Regent Nature Reserve, Western Australia  
Riverland Biosphere Reserve, South Australia  
Calperum and Taylorville Stations  
Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory  
Wilson's Promontory Marine Park & Marine Reserve, Victoria  
Yathong Nature Reserve, New South Wales

### **How are Biospheres managed?**

Each Biosphere has its own system of governance to ensure it meets its functions and objectives. UNESCO does not require any change in law or ownership. However, UNESCO stress that the management system of a biosphere reserve needs to be open, evolving and adaptive in order for the local community to better respond to external

political, economic and social pressures, which would affect the ecological and cultural values of the area. It is necessary to set up an appropriate governance mechanism, for instance a committee or board, to plan and co-ordinate all the activities of all the actors concerned, each within their own mandate and competence.

### **How will the Great Sandy Biosphere be managed?**

The Burnett Mary Regional Group believes that its representative Board structure would meet the functions and objectives of the Biosphere program which requires a "driver". As an incorporated, not for profit group, membership is open to everyone and directors are elected directly by members. The 12 directors represent Primary Industry, Local Government, Secondary and Tertiary Industry, Community Catchment, Coastal, Traditional Owners, Landcare and Conservation. However, management options are still being considered, and long term input will be needed from all sectors of the community.

### **Who pays for the management?**

The Biosphere will not be a burden on the public purse. The level of funding depends on the nature and extent of the projects and activities undertaken. Often, additional funding is not needed: existing budgets can be aligned to meet shared goals. Industry, tour operators, charitable foundations, research funding agencies, governments, local municipalities can all help. Continual support from government - even if only moral and technical - ensures good connections with national policy and international efforts related to sustainable development. UNESCO can provide advice and occasionally seed funds to initiate local efforts; these can help broker projects or to set up durable financial mechanisms.

Using the existing structure of the Burnett Mary Regional Group will avoid duplication, and funding received through the biosphere concept could offset any costs.

### **How does it affect development?**

Biosphere reserves are non-regulatory. They do not control or restrict any development.

### **Do any Biospheres include farming land or other industries?**

Yes. The Noosa, Mornington Peninsula and Fitzgerald River Biospheres include agricultural areas. The proposed D'Aguilar Biosphere also includes farming land. Most overseas Biospheres that have been created since 1990 also have agricultural land.

The Mornington Biosphere region contains a seasonal population of 250,000 people. Its agricultural production is more than 3 times the Victorian state average.

### **What are the benefits of biosphere reserves?**

The biosphere reserve concept can be used as a framework to guide and reinforce projects to enhance people's livelihoods and ensure environmental sustainability. UNESCO recognition can serve to highlight and reward such individual efforts. Designation of a site as a biosphere reserve can raise awareness among local people, citizens and government authorities on environmental and development issues. It can

help attract additional funding from different sources. At the national level, biosphere reserves can serve as pilot sites or "learning places" to explore and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development, providing lessons which can be applied elsewhere.

The Great Sandy Biosphere will have several specific benefits

- It will give international recognition and achievement of a status that will help secure international funding
- It will help develop niche ecotourism opportunities and sustainable and emerging industries such as bio-prospecting.
- It will be a conduit for enhanced regional planning
- It will raise awareness locally and internationally of the area's outstanding values.

### **What kinds of projects have been done?**

In the Entlebuch Biosphere Reserve in Switzerland, products such as cheese and timber have been given a distinct marketing advantage through the Biosphere label. 200 goods and services are certified to carry the label, which indicates they are environmentally friendly and locally grown.

In Paraty, Brazil, the Biosphere concept has been used to attract international tourists to a relatively poor country. Fishermen take visitors on boat cruises, while horse drawn carts are provided for tours of the city.

In the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere reserve, long standing conflicts involving tribal, business and private interests are being resolved, with the local economy shifting from dependence on logging and fishing to a more diversified one that includes tourism, aquaculture and production of marine and forest products.

### **Why did the Burnett Mary Group decide to do this project?**

The objectives of the Biosphere programme align with our existing activities and will complement the work that we are already doing to reach our targets for Natural Resource Management.

### **How long did the nomination process take?**

September 2007 Noosa Biosphere accepted, with suggestion of northwards expansion  
February 2008 Burnett Mary Regional Group decides to nominate Great Sandy Region  
March 2008 Project announced to the public  
June 2008 Gympie Regional Council endorses nomination  
July 2008 Fraser Coast Regional Council endorses nomination  
August 2008 Minister Andrew McNamara confirms Queensland Government support  
September 16, 2008 Boundaries altered to remove Bundaberg Council area  
September 30, 2008 Nomination forwarded to UNESCO by Australian Government  
February 2009 International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves holds its fifteenth meeting at UNESCO Headquarters  
May 2009 The 21st Session of the International Co-ordinating Council meets and the announcement made.

**How did the boundaries get decided?**

The boundaries were based on the best representation of allied ecological systems, geomorphological characteristics, natural history significance, cultural site significance and human population settlement patterns. They equate roughly to the boundaries of the Great Sandy Region, as identified by the 1991 Commission of Inquiry to investigate the conservation values of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy area. Future extensions may be possible.

**What is so special about this region?**

It has 40% of world's perched lakes, the majority of the world's complex rainforests growing on sand, the largest unconsolidated coastal sand mass in the world, and unique sub-tropical patterned fens (swamps), the only ones in the world containing vertebrate lifeforms. It is part of a biogeographic overlap known as McPherson-McLeay Overlap, has a concentration of rare, threatened, endangered and vulnerable species, including significant populations of species which have declined elsewhere in Australia; exhibits adaptation of fish, frogs and invertebrates to acidic conditions; is a major transitory point for humpback whales; is recognised as a major feeding and roosting location for migratory birds; supports highly significant dugong populations and seagrass beds; and is a major breeding sites for oceanic turtles in the Pacific Ocean.