



Mornington Peninsula & Western Port
Biosphere Reserve Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007

MORNINGTON PENINSULA AND WESTERN PORT
BIOSPHERE RESERVE FOUNDATION LTD

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Chair's Report

2006–07 has been another year of consolidation for the Biosphere Reserve Foundation, but a year in which we have now begun to demonstrate our unique role within the community.

From the Foundation's inception, we have had a clear mission to lead and empower the community to become more socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable. We are fortunate that the biosphere reserve is rich in individuals and organisations concerned with various aspects of sustainability. The unique value of the Foundation is its ability to draw together communities, businesses, five local governments, the Victorian Government, and the Federal Government to work towards the internationally recognised objectives of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Program within an internationally recognised ecosystem.

This involves brokering collaborative partnerships, drawing together complementary groups to achieve synergies that would not otherwise occur. It also involves hosting showcase events, so that the community can more easily tap into the resources available to live and conduct business sustainably. A major focus for the Foundation in 2006–07 has been building strong working relationships with relevant organisations to make this happen.

The Foundation has adopted a living strategic plan, or *Living Strategy*. The *Living Strategy* was presented as a draft at the Foundation's 2005–06 Annual General Meeting and made available for comment for a period at the end of 2006–07. It has since been adopted by the board. This report describes the Foundation's activities against the five strategic themes (or key result areas) of the *Living Strategy*.

Theme I: Natural resource and biodiversity conservation

Our iconic Southern Brown Bandicoot recovery effort has gone from strength to strength. The Foundation adopted the recovery of this endangered species as a flagship project in order to raise community awareness of declining biodiversity and the need to live more sustainably.

Within the Biosphere region, the species is now restricted to only one relatively secure site, the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne. Elsewhere, only isolated patches of habitat remain, with none or just a few surviving bandicoots. The conservation of these fragmented populations, on land managed by many private landholders and public agencies, poses a significant challenge.

In October 2006, the Foundation was awarded an Australian Government Envirofund grant of \$34,818 to improve bandicoot habitat at The Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve at Frankston. The Pines population is the only definitively-known Southern Brown Bandicoot population remaining on the Mornington Peninsula. An outcome of this grant was the first forum on the Southern Brown Bandicoot to be held in Victoria. The forum brought together over 50 scientists, government departments and land managers in November 2006 to consider how best to implement a conservation program.

In June 2007, the Frankston Roundtable began hosting a Green Corps training program at The Pines for 10 unemployed youths, in partnership with the Frankston North Community Group. Frankston City Council, Parks Victoria and Chisholm Institute of TAFE are contributing to this program. Participants will gain work experience at Frankston City Council's indigenous plant nursery and complete a Certificate II in Bushland Management. In addition to the obvious environmental benefits, this program will provide a group of young people with much needed pathways to further education and the workplace.

The recovery effort is now expanding to protect remnant bandicoot populations in the Cardinia and Casey regions. Grant applications prepared by the recovery team in April and May 2007 have since attracted funding from the WWF Threatened Species Network Community Grants and Australian Government Envirofund programs. Our bandicoot recovery partner, the Cardinia Environment Coalition, also secured funding for complementary projects.

This year, the Foundation established another flagship project, the Watson Creek integrated catchment management project, to clean up Watson Creek, which drains into Western Port's Yaringa Marine National Park. Watson Creek is one of Victoria's most polluted creeks. This collaborative project involves three local governments (Frankston, Casey and Mornington Peninsula), Melbourne Water, EPA Victoria, Parks Victoria, industry and private land owners.

With initial funding from Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the Mornington Peninsula Shire, a part-time project officer was recruited in February 2007 to bring stakeholders together and gain a commitment to improving the water quality of the creek. The process has uncovered a complex range of issues, ranging from mistrust of government agencies and frustration among landholders, to a lack of understanding about the creek and its environmental implications.

Both the bandicoot recovery and Watson Creek projects have evolved into pioneering attempts to bring together divergent sectors of the community to bring about environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Theme 2: Sustainable development at a regional scale

In August 2006, the Frankston Roundtable partnered with Frankston City Council and the Western Port Greenhouse Alliance to hold a climate change forum attended by over 300 people. This was reportedly the largest climate change event in Victoria prior to Al Gore's visit. Keynote speakers included Victoria's Commissioner for Sustainability, Dr Ian McPhail, former Head of CSIRO Climate Research Centre, Dr Graeme Pearman, and citizen of the Pacific island of Tuvalu, Don Kennedy.

In November 2006, the Mornington Peninsula Roundtable secured a Community Water Grant for \$15,329 to install water-saving equipment in 22 schools across the Mornington Peninsula. The project will save one million litres of water a year.

In June 2007, the Foundation held a thought-provoking event, "*Western Port in 2025: Feeling the Heat*", organised in partnership with the Department of Sustainability and

Environment. In the hypothetical format made famous by Geoffrey Robertson QC, participants looked forward to 2025 to grapple with climate change, population growth and other challenges for Western Port and its catchment. Almost 150 people attended the event, which was a great success according to audience feedback. This feedback identified population growth, water and biodiversity conservation as priority issues of concern for the Western Port region's community.

During the hypothetical, the Foundation launched its long-awaited web site, biosphere.org.au, which we hope will become an information portal for sustainability issues within the biosphere reserve region.

Theme 3: Logistical support

In 2006–07, the Foundation chose to pursue two new flagship projects as a matter of priority:

- Development of a suite of sustainability indicators with which to measure success against the objectives set out in the Foundation's charter. This is a major priority for councils within the biosphere reserve.
- Development of sustainability accreditation schemes for different sectors of the biosphere reserve community. Evaluation of the Bass Coast Roundtable's pilot business sustainability recognition project demonstrated that business interest in accreditation services is strong.

The Foundation further developed its research strategy this year. Further details are available in the research committee's report.

Theme 4: Man and the Biosphere Program

In March 2007, the Foundation hosted an ACT parliamentary committee to assist its inquiry into the proposed nomination of the ACT as a biosphere reserve. Following the visit, the committee commented on the need for a national network to promote linkages among biosphere reserve stakeholders.

Theme 5: A strong, dynamic and flexible Foundation

In May 2007, the Foundation appointed Executive Officer, Graham McLennan, following the resignation of Lynette Wilks. I wish to place on record the Foundation's appreciation for the additional contributions by Secretary, Jack Krohn, and Treasurer, Libby Anthony, to keep things running smoothly during the period that we were without an Executive Officer.

Graham brought strong executive, strategic, and communication skills to the biosphere reserve. He produced an ambitious "major projects" plan, including concepts to better engage with the business community. Graham also vastly improved the Foundation's strategic networking and communication with stakeholders, particularly councils and roundtables. We are now working closely with like-minded organisations, such as the Western Port Greenhouse Alliance, South East Development, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Vox Bandicoot, Earthwatch, Centre for Sustainability Leadership, and Bass Coast Landcare Network, to name just a few.

Sadly for the Foundation, Graham will be leaving at the end of October 2007 to return to Scotland with his family. Graham has made an outstanding contribution in his short time with the Foundation and his efforts will yield great benefits over future months and years.

The Future

Looking ahead, priorities for the year to come include:

- Developing and implementing our new flagship projects, sustainability indicators and sustainability accreditation.
- Building our network, consolidating key partnerships, and better involving business.
- Better communicating with members and stakeholders.
- Reviewing our strategic and business plans to position us to pursue a stronger funding base.

In the meantime, I'm proud to be able to say that the Foundation now supports a diverse range of conservation and sustainability projects and partnerships, with benefits for communities across the biosphere reserve. Our ability to broker partnerships and our growing network have positioned the Foundation as a unique catalyst for sustainability in the region, enabling us to address issues that span public and private land and the marine and freshwater environments.

Our international linkages confirm that the world will need to find new partnerships and collaborations to address the enormous environmental challenges facing all of us. Our biosphere reserve's network of participating organisations and individuals represents this new form of cooperation, and it will serve us well into the future.

Rob Gell
Chair

RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT

The Research Committee met four times during 2006-07.

During the year, the Research Committee formulated the Research Strategy. This strategy is designed to be a sub-component of the *Living Strategy* of the Biosphere Foundation. It is a live document which can be updated and improved at any time, consistent with the overall philosophy of the Living Strategy approach. Currently, the Research Strategy has six elements to it:

1. Basic inventory of biodiversity across the Biosphere, especially the identification of biodiversity hotspots
2. Bandicoot research and management
3. Predictive capability for impacts of global climate change
4. Undertaking a mass balance of the Biosphere for; Energy, Water and Recyclables
5. Developing indicators to determine the progress of the Biosphere towards environmentally sustainable development
6. Developing new research proposals to respond to emerging priorities

BANDICOOT RECOVERY

The southern brown bandicoot is a nationally endangered species. It was common across much of the Biosphere; today it locally extinct in much of the Biosphere, however there are relic fragmented populations, many on private land. The recovery of the bandicoot population is a major biodiversity project of the Biosphere. There is willingness by individual land owners and recognition by scientists that recovery is achievable.

Achievements and Actions 2006-November 2007:

- Conservation Actions in the Biosphere. Successful Funding from –
 - **NHT Envirofund** 2006 The Pines with The Friends of The Pines \$35 000. Activities include installation of new gates, surveys of bandicoots and infrastructure and (in preparation) attitudes of Pines neighbours.
 - **NHT-WWF-Threatened Species Network Community Grant** October 2007 Koo Wee Rup with Western Port Swamp Land Care – Fox control \$15 000.
 - **NHT Envirofund** October 2007– Koo Wee Rup with Western Port Swamp Land Care – habitat improvement \$16 090.
 - **DEWR Green Corps** July-December 2007 – a community employment program improving the habitat at The Pines; ~\$100 000.
- Draft Regional Recovery Plan produced identifying tasks and performance criteria. In cooperation with Melbourne Water and Cardinia Shire Council this document is being expanded to a Biodiversity Strategy for Melbourne Water's land and statutory planning documents for Cardinia Shire Council.

- Partnerships and discussions, crucial to the success of the Recovery, include Department of Sustainability (Wildlife Section), Port Phillip and Westernport CMA (Biodiversity Section), City of Casey Council, Cardinia Shire Council, Cardinia Environment Coalition, West Gippsland DSE and West Gippsland CMA, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, Melbourne University, Monash University.
- Publications include; Coates T.D, Nicholls D.N and Willig R.. *The distribution of the Southern Brown Bandicoot in south central Victoria*, (Submitted). *Proceedings of the Workshop on the Recovery of the Southern Brown Bandicoot in South central Victoria (November 2006)* Biosphere publication, And two DSE Internal reports on surveys of bandicoots at Wonthaggi Heathlands (DSE) and Lang Lang region (DSE/Chisholm),
- Submissions to Vic Roads and SEITA on The Pines and Koo Wee Rup proposed new roads and to DSE (through the DSE Bandicoot Technical Reference Group W Gippsland) on the conservation status of the bandicoot, in preparation.;
- Interpretation materials on the bandicoot (in preparation) with DSE. Materials displayed on the Biosphere's web site. Several local newspaper articles.

This list does report success and substantial progress. We must remain focused on increasing bandicoot numbers and that is not yet achieved, nonetheless, there is clear evidence that we know a lot more about their distribution and abundance. We have a network of people working on the tasks that will result in on-ground works and an increase in bandicoot numbers.

This progress comes with some difficulties and costs. We have found it hard to select a coordinator for The Pines *Envirofund* project; the range of skills required is wide and its part-time nature and inadequate funding are challenging. The high standards of probity and integrity that we all aspire to for the Biosphere require explicate procedures and administrative support; these are not yet in place for the multitude of tasks required for the project. There are a very limited number of people that are able and willing to give the time necessary.

The support and encouragement of the Research Committee and the Board and its Executive and Executive officers are gratefully acknowledged. The determination and willingness of the Frankston Round Table has ensured the bandicoot recovery continues as a high priority. The help of partners Parks Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, Friends of The Pines, Westernport Swamp Landcare Group, Cardinia Environment Coalition and supporters Frankston City Council and Chisholm Institute is appreciated.

MASS BALANCE

Under the direction of the Research Committee, CSIRO have developed a comprehensive proposal to undertake a 'mass balance' of the Biosphere. This study is designed to allow us to understand the full cycle of the use of energy, water and recyclables within the Biosphere. This understanding will show the relationship between all three and allow us to develop new ways of sustainably managing our future. By educating people we will be able to help change peoples behaviour. To our knowledge no other Biosphere community has done this before.

PRESENTATIONS

During the year, the Research Committee received presentations from the following individuals:

- Prof. Markus Reuter, Professor of Sustainable Technology, Dept of Civil & Environmental Engineering, Melbourne University - Biosphere Sustainability and Mass Balance
- Dr. Graham Hemson, Earthwatch Institute - Community linkages and the Biosphere
- Mr. Alex Lechner, PhD Student, RMIT - Habitat suitability for bandicoots.
- Dr. Greg Parry, Victorian Department of Primary Industries - Seagrass in the Westernport area.
- Mr. Garrique Pergl, Mornington Peninsula Shire - Proposed fauna survey

TREASURER'S REPORT

Prepared by Libby Anthony

2006/07 RESULTS

The audited results for 2006/07 show that the Biosphere Foundation is in a financially stable position to commence the 2007-08 year with over \$110,000 in retained earnings and the ability to meet its financial commitments. There is only a small operational loss for 2006/07 of about \$3,000 which is a significant reduction from the loss of the previous year.

Income for 2006/07 was higher due to receipt of a number of grants, increased membership and income from other activities, including the Frankston Climate Change Forum and the Western Port Hypothetical. Four municipalities committed to paying their 2006/07 local government contribution with payments received from the shires of Bass Coast and Mornington Peninsula by 30 June 2007. Cardinia's and Frankston's payments arrived after 1 July 2007.

With the hiring of a part-time project officer for the Watson Creek Project, the MP&WP Biosphere Reserve Foundation became an employer for the first time, and the necessary systems to manage payroll were established. Providing fortnightly wages required a higher level of bookkeeping services, and Office Allrounders was contracted to provide these. The financial software system was upgraded, and the membership database has been incorporated into the financial system to streamline record keeping.

The principal expenses of administration and project management have been constrained in 2006/07, coming to about \$52,000 as opposed to \$64,000 in 2005/06. This is due to a reduction of wage expenses for several months during the recruitment of a new Executive Officer. Members of the Board assumed critical management roles during this time on a volunteer basis. In addition, the Board has continued to reduce its own meeting costs and the Chair has not taken his full allowance. With a number of grants received, project expenses have significantly increased and will continue to do so in 2007/08.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Following the recommendations from the Review of the Biosphere Foundation, terms of reference for an Audit Committee were developed and a Committee formed. Members are Dough Hamilton (Chair), Jeff Weir and Bob Brinkman. Libby Anthony, Treasurer, and the Executive Officers, Lynette Wilks followed by Graham McLennan, attended the meetings in ex-officio capacity at the request of the Committee.

The Audit Committee reviewed the selection of auditor and oversaw the production of the audited Annual Financial Statement. Additional areas of work were the review of the Trustees for the Foundation's Charitable Trust and the streamlining of financial management processes.

2007/08

Several more grants have been received in 2007/08 which will see the Biosphere Foundation continuing to employ a part-time project officer for Watson Creek and also one to facilitate projects for the Southern Brown Bandicoot.

Unfortunately, none of these grants provide funding to cover the costs of the Foundation's management and administration. It is uncertain how many municipalities within the Biosphere will commit to making local government contributions in 2007/08.

To attract and retain the services of a professional Executive Officer and additional administrative support to maintain the momentum enjoyed by the Foundation in 2006/07, an additional \$50,000 to \$60,000 per annum is required. A number of options are being pursued by the Board, including grants, philanthropies and income for services.

The Biosphere Foundation is currently looking for assistance from members to assist with fund-raising. Establishing sustainable sources of funding for the on-going operations of the Foundation will be one of the critical achievements for the Biosphere in 2007/08.

GRANTS 2006-07	AMOUNT
Community Water Grant – Mornington Peninsula Roundtable	\$ 15,329
Eco Footprint Community Grant – Frankston Roundtable	\$ 7,500
Watson Creek Project - Melbourne Water and Mornington Peninsula Shire and Parks Victoria	\$ 15,000
NHT – Envirofund Round 8 - Southern Brown Bandicoots – Pines Flora & Fauna Reserve	\$ 34,818
TOTAL	\$ 72,647
GRANTS 2007-08	AMOUNT
Watson Creek Project - Melbourne Water and Mornington Peninsula Shire	\$ 10,000
- Envirofund Round 10 – Watson Creek Project	\$ 28,835
Southern Brown Bandicoots Recovery Project - WWF Grant Award	\$ 13,636
- Envirofund Round 9 – Koo Wee Rup	\$ 16,909
Federal Govt Volunteer Small Equipment Grant 2007	\$ 3,000
TOTAL	\$ 72,380