



**ANNUAL REPORT
2007-2008**

**MORNINGTON PENINSULA AND WESTERN PORT
BIOSPHERE RESERVE FOUNDATION LTD**

ABN 15 107 484 408

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Chair's Report

Since taking on the position of Chair of the Biosphere Foundation, I have had the pleasure to witness slow but steady growth in the organisation's capacity to deliver against the objectives of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere program. For many the rate of our development has been too slow; however, with the improved and improving engagement of our local government partners on our shared sustainability agenda, in parallel with a slowly expanding resource base and strategic development plan, we are beginning to be able to offer valuable services and are becoming an important component in strategic programs with many stakeholders.

The past year has seen a number of positive outcomes for the Biosphere Foundation. Perhaps the cornerstone achievement has been the move to our new office in Victoria Street, Hastings. We now have a tangible identity in the community, a place to meet and a place from which we will continue to grow.

The Board's focus has been on advancing the Foundation and importantly, to securing funding to facilitate future programs. Development of our Tactical Business Plan is almost complete and this will provide a higher level platform from which we will expand our funding avenues to include both the corporate sector and supportive philanthropic organisations.

Our key projects, Watson Creek and Southern Brown Bandicoot Recovery Program, are progressing well and have served to raise the profile of the Foundation. Our proposed Mass Balance project with CSIRO's Division of Sustainable Ecosystems is in the final stages of development. This is a very exciting project, it is ground-breaking in design and will further serve to expand the awareness of the Foundation and improve the capacity of our local government partners to work collaboratively to implement and manage sustainable practices across the Biosphere region. Our Research Committee is to be congratulated on bringing this initiative forward.

In parallel, we are establishing a Reference Group which will serve to assist the Foundation to take a lead role in achieving a sustainable future in a region with a complex mix of social, economic and environmental issues. The challenge that our Biosphere offers to design a global showcase in socio-economically and ecologically sustainable practice is great, but we believe we are capable of developing that vision and, over the next few years, of taking significant steps to delivering it with the support of the business, government, education and community sectors.

As we move into this new phase in our development and towards meeting our potential, we invite you to learn more about what we do and what we can do, and look forward to your continued involvement and support.

Rob Gell
Chair

Executive Officer's Report

This year has seen a focus on the internal operation of the Foundation and development of procedures and reporting models to enable us to better deal with requirements of the organisation. As the Chair has reported, our Tactical Business Plan is near completion and this will provide a higher level platform and expand funding avenues.

The 2007-2008 Financial Reports have been prepared in line with full disclosure Standards.

I would like elaborate on a couple of items in these reports by way of clarification.

Interest Received

Changes to the banking arrangements have a generated higher return on monies deposited.

Note 7 - Unearned Income

These figures represent grant monies for projects that have been received but not yet fully expended as the project is ongoing.

- Watson Creek funding has been split into Enviro Fund 10 and contributions unexpended from non government sources.
- Contributions in advance represents invoices raised for 2008/2009 Council contributions.

I have now been with the Foundation for nearly a year and during this time I have seen the Foundation working to develop and expand awareness of its operations and place in the region to take a lead role in achieving a sustainable future.

Cecelia Witton
Executive Officer

Research Committee Annual Report

The Research Committee has had another active year. The Committee has met regularly during the year, usually once a quarter. The meetings are open to the public and all are welcome to attend.

The Biosphere was awarded two Envirofund grants for bandicoot conservation works worth \$52,000, including a Landscape species grant worth \$5,000 for mapping and planning and a Threatened Species Network Community grant worth \$15,000 for fox control.

Substantial improvements were made to the existing database of resource material that was originally prepared by Ms Barbara Porter. The updates were compiled by Mr Joseph Mungere, a Masters student of Dr Sharron Pfueller's at Monash University. The Biosphere is grateful to both Mr Mungere and Dr Pfueller for this excellent work. It is now available on the Biosphere's website.

The Committee continued to improve its Strategic Plan in response to the changing needs of the Biosphere Foundation. The Strategic Plan now covers the Southern Brown Bandicoot, energy and greenhouse, biodiversity, modelling of key species, environmental indicators, accreditation, revisiting the Shapiro study and social research. We have had important presentations on biodiversity opportunities (Ms. Gidja Walker) and landscape assessment (Mr. Dennis Williamson), to improve our Strategic planning.

Under the leadership of David Nicholls and Terry Coates, the Research Committee has continued to give a high priority to activities that support the sound management of the Southern Brown Bandicoot. These included publishing, in book form, the papers from our major workshop on the Bandicoot of November 2006, and completing a paper for the *Victorian Naturalist* by Terry Coates on its distribution in southern Victoria. Much effort has gone into researching the present conservation status of the bandicoot. The grants support on-ground conservations, an activity that has required extensive practical works, community engagement and cooperation with government agencies (at all three levels) and NGOs involved with bandicoot and biodiversity management, thereby giving substance to the role of the Biosphere in bringing people together.

The Committee welcomed three new members to the Research Committee: Dr Sharron Pfueller, a leading social researcher from Monash University; Mr Garrique Pergl, Environmental Planner with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council; and Mr Ian Stevenson, Manager of Sustainability at Cardinia Shire Council. These join the existing members of: Mr El Bruzzese, former Director of the Keith Turnbull Research Institute; Dr Terry Coates (Royal Botanic Gardens); and Mr David Nicholls (Chisholm Institute). All are to be thanked for their continuing support for the Biosphere.

The Committee would also like to thank: the Biosphere's Executive Officers, Ms Cecelia Witton, Mr Graham McLennan; the Chairman, Mr Rob Gell; the Foundation Board; Ms Yvonne Reifenberg, the Biosphere's Administration Officer; and Chisholm Institute for their great support and help during the year.

Finally, the Committee would like to thank the dedicated efforts of Mrs Jane Inall for her minute taking, preparation of meeting papers and handling most correspondence for the fourth year in a row.

Peter Woodgate, Convenor, Research Committee

Watson Creek Integrated Catchment Management Project Annual Report 2007-2008

The Watson Creek Agreement was launched in June 2007, with the underlying intent to emphasise a no blame and equal responsibility approach to this project. The Agreement was signed by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, City of Casey and Frankston City Council, local schools, community groups, Landcare, the Vegetable Growers Association, Inghams Chickens, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria, and has begun to build a solid foundation of trust and strong partnerships with market gardeners and landholders within the catchment.



The Watson Creek ICM Project has received funding support from Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and the City of Casey, to help fund its part-time Project Officer.

In December 2007, the Biosphere Foundation farewelled Virginia Richardson as she and her family went off to travel Australia and welcomed a new project officer for Watson Creek, Janet Borley.

In December 2007 also, the Watson Creek Project was awarded \$28,834 from Envirofund Round 10 to "Engage with the rural landholders in order to improve the water quality of Watson Creek". This included funding for facilitated meetings and workshops, field days, a boat trip to Yaringa Marine National Park, water testing along Watson Creek and underwater photography of Yaringa Marine National Park.

These events and activities encourage rural landholders to:

- Recognise the values of the Watson Creek catchment and the receiving waters of Yaringa Marine National Park
- Understand the contribution of rural landholders to water quality within Watson Creek
- Identify practices that can be undertaken by rural landholders that will result in improved water quality in Watson Creek

Water Monitoring

In the 1990s, a nine year study conducted by Melbourne Water along the entire creek line, identified areas where nutrient levels were very high. Since then, Watson Creek had not been tested and new, accurate, data is critical to drawing landholders into acknowledging the impact of their activities on water quality. To expand on this work, each season throughout 2008, a series of water tests were conducted at 11 sites along the length of Watson Creek to measure nutrient levels.

Water monitoring has proven to be an excellent tool to engage landholders and after viewing test results, many have recognised that their activities contribute to the problem, leading them to ask "What can we do to improve Watson Creek?"

When faced with these issues, one major market gardener has undertaken on ground works by installing settling ponds at his property to reduce farm run off into Watson Creek, and is also researching the use of fertilizers that are more environmentally friendly.

Underwater Photography

A photographer was engaged and the 10 underwater photography images, taken of Yaringa Marine National Park, are being used to convince landholders that Yaringa is too precious to lose. When shown these images, the majority of landholders admitted that they were unaware of the amazing creatures that have made this marine park their home.

These photographs will also be displayed at the Landholder Public Meetings and used in the media.

Future Activities

In the October/November 2008, rural landholders will be invited on an educational boat tour around Yaringa Marine National Park to receive a “whole catchment” perspective from Parks Victoria.

The boat tour will be followed up with a field day on which landholders will be invited to visit rural properties that have undertaken sustainable land management practices, to view demonstrations of best practices for water quality improvement and protection.

Landholders will be invited to attend formal public meetings to consider project and funding opportunities for water quality improvement within the Watson Creek catchment, and to discuss their own issues in relation to the creek.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire will provide a presentation of Sustainable Land management schemes.

Media

The Watson Creek media and community marketing campaign will continue with an ongoing presence in local newspapers and schools utilising the underwater photographs.

Replication in Other Areas

The Watson Creek ICM Project has shown itself to be an excellent model for successfully integrating and addressing the spectrum of issues associated with repairing polluted waterways, and also seeks to influence catchment management in other regions. The Biosphere Foundation is currently talking with other community groups and local government with a view to implementing this model elsewhere.

Future Goals

The Watson Creek ICM Project will broaden to include a new and strong focus with urban sectors utilising:

- Community Groups - by building rapport, raising awareness, changing perceptions through ICM Project meetings and presentations
- The Dolphin Research Institute's “*i Sea i Care*” Ambassador Community Engagement Programme
- Local Media - to create community awareness and change perceptions of Watson Creek and its catchment region

Community stewardship will also be built through the ongoing engagement of the rural sector, leading towards applications for on ground works.

The Watson Creek Project will also seek to develop and achieve on ground solutions with major market gardeners (including the Vegetable Growers Association) and the poultry industry to improve sustainable farm practices that will improve the water quality of Watson Creek.

*Janet Borley, Project Officer
Watson Creek ICM Project
July 2008*

Bass Coast Roundtable Annual Report

The Bass Coast Roundtable has a small, but diverse and knowledgeable membership, which meets at Newhaven every two months. Roundtable activities this year focussed on three areas:

- Raising awareness of the Biosphere Reserve as a special place with internationally recognised values, how our lives are connected with this environment, and the need to live sustainably.
- Encouraging better collaboration and knowledge-sharing between local organisations to improve sustainability outcomes.
- Offering local knowledge, expertise and views to assist the Biosphere Foundation board.

Raising awareness

In December 2007, the Roundtable held an event to raise awareness about sustainability issues in Western Port. The event was hosted by the Phillip Island Nature Park at Churchill Island. The Nature Park's Dr Roz Jessop spoke about migratory shorebirds. Western Port Seagrass Partnership director and Roundtable member Dr Tim Ealey OAM spoke about mangrove restoration to improve water quality, seagrass survival and biodiversity. The event was attended by approximately 20 people, including non-members, and was a valuable opportunity to raise awareness.

The Roundtable also provided displays for the Phillip Island Community Group Expo on 23 May 2008, the World Environment Day Expo on 29-30 May 2008, and the Sustainable Living Festival on 31 May 2008. The World Environment Day Expo, organised by local environment groups and the Bass Coast Shire, was attended by primary school students from across the region. The Sustainable Living Festival, organised by the Bass Coast Landcare Network, the Phillip Island Nature Park and the Bass Coast Shire, attracted approximately 130 people.

Collaboration and knowledge-sharing

The Roundtable is working with the Phillip Island Bicycle Users Group and other interested stakeholders to support the review of the Bass Coast Shire's Bicycle Strategy. The aim is to encourage the continued development of the bicycle path network, and bicycle-friendly infrastructure and transport linkages; encourage planting of indigenous vegetation; and encourage interpretation of natural and cultural values along the routes, including awareness of the Biosphere Reserve.

In January 2008, the Roundtable commented on the draft Bass Coast Shire Environment Sustainability Plan. In May 2008, the Roundtable participated in an Environmental Stakeholders' Forum that was held as part of the Bass Coast Shire's Visioning Process—a process intended to summarise the community's views on what Bass Coast Shire should be like in 2030.

In May 2008, Roundtable members attended a community consultation session regarding the proposed Phillip Island Nature Park Sustainability Centre. The session was facilitated by Sean Rooney, Director of the CSIRO's Sustainable Communities Initiative. The Roundtable raised the concept of Biosphere reserves as "living laboratories", arguing that the proposed sustainability centre could incorporate this concept.

Local knowledge, expertise and views

The Roundtable has contributed comments to the Biosphere Foundation Board on a number of matters, including the development of sustainability indicators, the review of the Living Strategy, the unique role of the Foundation, and the Biosphere "think tank" proposal. The Roundtable also represented the Foundation during a series of stakeholder focus groups that were held as part of the Environment Effects Statement process for the Victorian desalination project.

Jane Jobe, Convenor and Director, Bass Coast Roundtable, July 2008