



## **WESTERN PORT BIOSPHERE RESERVE**



"Showing the way to sustainability"

### Response to Roberts Evaluation report 2010

The Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation Board welcomes the completion and publication of the Roberts Evaluation Report, commissioned by the Department of Sustainability and Environment under the Victorian Government's Biosphere Reserve Policy.

The Board notes that the report substantially recognises the success of the Biosphere, including its positive effects in environmental protection, economic development and social capital. In particular, the report notes the Foundation's work in project areas such as conservation of the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot and integrated catchment management of Watson Creek. The serious constraints imposed by the Foundation's limited resourcing are also acknowledged in the report.

A number of the Biosphere's significant achievements are not highlighted in the report, which focused closely on the State Government's policy criteria. For example, the Foundation has reviewed and confirmed its governance structure, participated in national and international Biosphere forums and contributed to youth development through its Green Corps project. In its treatment of perceived shortcomings, the report does not distinguish clearly between concerns associated with the Foundation's formative years, many of which have been addressed, and those that remain to be resolved.

The report identifies areas in which the Foundation could perform better, especially with regard to communications with members and other stakeholders. The Board acknowledges this and has been working steadily over the past year to improve our engagement with all sectors of the community. In particular this is being actioned through the Foundation's partnership with the Councils, and was addressed at the members' workshop at the 2010 AGM.

During 2010 the Foundation strengthened its engagement with its local government partners, all of whom have committed funds and other forms of support to the Biosphere Foundation. The Councils and the Foundation have jointly identified priority areas for action which they will actively pursue together during the coming year. In particular, the business plan highlights the new operating name of Western Port Biosphere and the intention of the Foundation and its five local government partners to address Biosphere programs and objectives across the whole area of all five Councils.

The Foundation is operating in a unique space, as an organisation with a priority focus on promoting broad-based sustainability, as part of a global network under UNESCO biosphere reserves program, as an organisation engaged with government, business and community but not embedded within any of those sectors and as an organisation with a clear geographical commitment to the Western Port region. The independent review documented in the Roberts Report offers an objective appraisal which, considered in the context of its limitations, represents valuable input to the Foundation's strategic planning and prioritising of key tasks.

The Directors conclude that the Roberts Report makes a constructive commentary on the Foundation's compliance with State Government policy. It does capture only some of the Foundation's achievements and community contributions. The report highlights the need for improved levels and quality of community engagement. This is consistent with the Board's own conclusions and many actions have been implemented recently to address the issues.

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