

## **Western Port Biosphere 2013 Chair's Report**

As we move into the second decade of the Western Port Biosphere I have pleasure in reporting that our biosphere's activities continue to be valuably acknowledged by the community and local government and importantly now by the Victorian Government. We are financially stable through the support of our local government partners and some valuable grants and in particular the Federal government funding received for the "Growing Connections" project under the former Federal Government's Clean Energy Future Biodiversity Fund. We continue to focus on the delivery of our Living Strategy in accordance with both our own Constitution and UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere objectives with which we are required to fulfil and report against.

The foundation's success with obtaining major grants and partnerships has enabled us to significantly increase our on-the-ground conservation works and community engagement activities. Whilst these grants do cover administration on-costs they do not provide the discretionary revenue critical to developing the core capacity of the foundation.

It is critical here to reinforce that the core support from the councils continues to provide the critical "revenue core" from which we have leveraged the \$2.267m.

Critical to that objective is the need to build supporting relationships with our broad stakeholder community both our achievements and the opportunities that engagement with and support of the Western Port Biosphere offers. We are slowly improving our capacity in these areas but we still have a lot of work to do.

Following a strategic path towards increased engagement with the scientific community, our Research Committee held a valuable workshop at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Cranbourne in June. This has generated interest in a number of research projects that will create new partnerships. The biosphere has also been approached by a scientist working on Biospheres in South Africa to use Western Port Growing Connections Project as a case study. These programs fulfil for us a critical role essential to all biospheres around the world. I wish to thank the Chair of the Research Committee Dr Sharron Pfueller for her leadership in expanding the horizon of our cooperative research.

A critical focus for the organisation this year has been a detailed review of our governance arrangements and Constitution. At the end of 2012 a subcommittee of the Board prepared guidelines for the consultancy company to confirm the most appropriate model for the delivery of both our vision and UNESCO Man and the Biosphere objectives together with improved engagement with the community and key stakeholders. Long standing members will be aware that this question has been investigated on previous occasions. Kevin Love Advisory (KLA) was appointed to undertake the review on behalf of the Board. KLA consulted widely and presented its report to the Board at its meeting in September. The Board has resolved to provide details of the report to the Annual General Meeting of members.

The report focuses on strategy, culture and operations and identifies that recommendations from previous reviews have not been fully implemented and that further fundamental matters need to be addressed, whether by the current board or a new one. Different models for the structure of the Board are considered as well as the nature of representation on the Board and terms for members. In particular a smaller, "skills based" Board is under consideration as well as alternative models for local government representation.

It is important that the membership of the biosphere understands that the Board is intent on continuing to improve the way the organisation is governed and the capability of the organisation to engage with the community and key stakeholders. This is difficult task for an organisation with limited resources, a very small staff and a number of dedicated volunteers that represent

stakeholders over a large area with a very diverse range of interests, ideas and views on what the biosphere should or might endeavor to do. Critically it is important to understand that Board members cannot be expected to be responsible for engagement with the wider community.

The Biosphere Foundation is sometimes criticized for poor performance in educating the community and raising awareness about the Biosphere and the role of the Foundation. (There is also a dichotomous view that the Board is somehow unnecessarily controlling of the organisation.) I can understand how this view might form, however, I have difficulty in reconciling the apparently conflicting view, held by some, that the Biosphere's community Roundtables have been or are ineffective and that stakeholders want more capability to engage with others, have information made available and increase communication around sustainable development. My response lies somewhere close to utilising President John Kennedy's speech, "My fellow American's, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

The biosphere model is a very exciting one, with enormous scope for a biosphere structure in this region to deliver substantial gains in the community's collective understanding of what ecological sustainable development is but success in that objective will require a higher level of understanding of the opportunities available than are demonstrated at present.

After 10 years as Chair, I am still, being engaged by local government to explain what the biosphere does despite the fact that our five local governments, with the community, are the proponents of this organisation. Many of the programs being undertaken and delivered by our local governments match the objectives of the biosphere. A higher level of understanding of biosphere objectives would deliver beneficial outcomes at a range of levels across the wider biosphere community.

So, I reiterate words from my report to the 2012 Annual General Meeting:

"As the Western Port Biosphere continues to develop its capacity and influence, attract support, develop programs that meet our Living Strategy and engage with the community, we all have a role in communicating the need for improved systems and alliances that will enable us to assist in keeping the Western Port region a "special place". We need to build our communications capacity as a priority and I appeal to all of our stakeholders to understand how the work you are doing within the region meets the objectives of biospheres and contributes to the integration of our knowledge rather than the fragmentation process that so often works against our joint objectives."

The next twelve months will doubtless see further improvement in our capability, program delivery, organisational effectiveness and in the awareness of our community of the excellent work that is being done. I am also looking forward, for the first time, to engagement with the Victorian Government in supporting our work. I also look forward to continued dialogue with our Federal member for Flinders, the Honourable Greg Hunt MHR, Minister for the Environment. Greg has long been a supporter of the Western Port Biosphere and we will explore a range of opportunities for Federal Government engagement with our work.

As we go the Annual General Meeting I wish to thank our Board of Directors who have been extremely dedicated to their task of governing the biosphere over the last twelve months, and on behalf of the entire organisation sincerely thank our dedicated Executive Officer Cecelia Witton for her tireless work.

Rob Gell

Chair, Western Port Biosphere.

20 October 2013

## EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT - 2013

The past twelve months has seen growth of the Foundation and its activities with the Growing Connection project now in full flight with on ground works being completed and more being assessed for roll out in the coming months.

With this project have come opportunities for the Foundation to build its capacity in both resources and governance. Small changes have taken place with upgrading of our office facilities and equipment to improve the working environment.

Over the years the Foundation has struggled to secure a sufficient level of core funding to enable it to resource the building of capacity to deliver its objectives, this is an ongoing issue, not only experienced by the Foundation, but other not for profit organisations.

The Board continue to explore avenues to secure an increased level of core discretionary funding for the Foundation. With the implementation of recommendations of the recent Constitution and Governance review, recently undertaken, it is anticipated that more positive outcomes will be achieved in the future.

During the last twelve months the Foundation has participated in a number of activities including Schools Environment Week, World Wetlands Day at Tootgarook, conducted the second Biosphere Bird Search day.

The Foundation has successfully completed the implementation of several small grant programs during the year. With funding for projects we have carried out planting days in Koo Wee Rup, community events about the Southern Brown Bandicoot, developed education tubs for use with schools and at community events, developed a series of 13 cards with the Connies highlighting Ramsar values.

This year was the final year of the Ramsar Protection Program facilitated by Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority with Caring for our Country Funding. A collaborative effort with the aim to reduce threats to Ramsar sites including pest plants and animals, raise community understanding of the importance of these wetlands and the need to protect them.

The project has been very successful and has secured funding that will see it continue for a further five years with the Foundation continuing its involvement. As stated a major strength of the program is the cooperation and sharing of information between all involved and a focus of community participation.

Participation in the Mornington Peninsula Shire's Best Bites Program continues to grow and is expanding into other municipalities.

The coming year will provide challenges, but also many opportunities for the Foundation.

Cecelia Witton

Executive Officer

October 2013

## **BIOSPHERE RESEARCH COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2012 -2013**

The current composition of the Committee is Dr Terry Coates (Royal Botanic Gardens – Cranbourne Annexe), Mr David Nicholls (Chisholm Institute), Mr Garrigue Pergl (Mornington Peninsula Shire Council), Dr Sharron Pfueller (recently retired from Monash University), Mr Ian Stevenson and Dr Peter Woodgate (Cooperative Research Centre for Spatial Information). Gillian Collins has attended regularly as a welcomed observer. Members attend as individuals and do not represent any organisation at the meetings.

Over the last year, many questions about the role and membership of the Research Committee have been addressed. This has resulted in a final revision of its Terms of Reference and development of a skills matrix. When the skills already represented on the Committee had been defined those that were desirable, but missing so far were identified. These included social research, indigenous matters, art and culture, energy, waste, communications and coastal and marine ecology.

In order to gain Committee representation of those skills and stimulate research involving the Biosphere, a Research Day was held at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Cranbourne, facilitated by Andrew Silcox, Blue Frog Marketing and to which approximately 50 people involved in research in tertiary institutions and government organisations were invited. It was attended by 37, of whom 23 were external to the Biosphere. Attendees suggested a range of recommended actions for the Biosphere and many ideas for research projects and collaborations emerged. Twelve people indicated a willingness to have further association with Biosphere research.

Subsequently, Prof. John Barnett and Dr. Sonia Graham have proposed a joint research project on exploring what residents and visitors value in the region encompassed by the Biosphere. The intention is to apply for an ARC Linkage Grant. Negotiations are underway to find the partners who can provide funds to match those from the ARC.

The researchers who showed interest in the Biosphere's research have been invited to the Research Committee meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> October to explore further ways in which they may participate.

The Committee would like to thank the Biosphere's Executive Officer, Ms. Cecelia Witton for her support of the work of the Committee which has, until recently, included the tasks of meeting organiser and minute taker. We are grateful to Alison Griffiths who is now taking a major role in supporting the Research Committee, the Foundation Chair Mr. Rob Gell and the Board for their leadership, Chisholm Institute for continuing to generously provide an office and meeting rooms, and Committee members for their participation.

Dr. Sharron Pfueller

Chair, Biosphere Research Committee

September, 2013.

**Projects as at September 2013**

<b>Source, Grant, Project.</b>	<b>Key Tasks</b>	<b>Project Leader</b>	<b>Funds –Ex GST. Duration</b>	<b>Status</b>
State of Victorian Communities for Nature Grant	SB Bandicoot Habitat improvement over three years. Plus Growling Grass Frog actions	David Nicholls – Gillian Collin  Co-Chairs SBB Regional Recovery Group	~\$145 000  2012 / To be completed November 2013	Nearly complete. Due November 30
CoA. Caring for our Country Community Action Grant 11- 00298	SBB Habitat improvement – community engagement	David Nicholls – Gillian Collin  Co-Chairs SBB Regional Recovery Group	\$20 000  2011-2013	Successful – Jan 2012 to June 2013.  Complete
DSE Integrated Pest Control for SBB –with equal partner <b>Ecology Australia</b>	Develop a plan for pest predators for PS Plans for Melb Growth Areas in the SE Melbourne.	Terry Coates, David Nicholls	\$~38 000  2013	Final draft submitted. DEPI still to publish.
CMA Ramsar Protection – Catalogue of fox control works.	Catalogue and design Database to partition public and private components of fox control projects in the works area of the CMA Ramsar Protection project.	David Nicholls	\$7000 April 2013.	Completed.
Monitoring Southern Brown Bandicoot with a Wildlife Surveillance Camera Trap array  Caring for our Country, City of Casey	A quantitative approach to detect change in pest predators and prey including southern brown bandicoot.	David Nicholls	Funded by Caring for our Country, Biodiversity Fund and others. ~\$30,000 p.a.	On-going
State of Victorian Communities for Nature Grant	Reconnecting the landscape across northern Western Port using the disused rail line (a proposal).	David Nicholls	\$150,000	Funding application Submitted
Landscape Species Approach	A conservation plan for wildlife of the Biosphere Reserve	David Nicholls	Unfunded	On-going

## Growing Connections Project Report

The Growing Connections project has been underway for nearly 18 months with some key outcomes being delivered that will enable the effective and efficient delivery of the remaining 3 and half years of the project.

This period has been about building the foundations of the project and its delivery and outlined below is progress to date and where we are looking to in the future.

The Project Implementation Committee (PIC), was establishment which oversees the delivery of the project, this is essential to ensure the project stays on course and is delivered in the best way possible across the biosphere. The PIC has been meeting regularly and has been providing vital guidance to the project coordinator on matters relating to the delivery of the project. The members of the PIC comprise representatives of each local council, Parks Victoria, The Biosphere board, the Biosphere Research Committee, and the general community.

The single biggest outcome of this project will be the development of a 20 year vision for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the biosphere reserve. The first part of this plan was to develop a biodiversity significance map which is inclusive of the scientific knowledge and models as well as the council plans and strategies and the thoughts of the community in general. To start the process of developing this map was a workshop held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May which was attended by over 70 people representing more than 20 different organisations from across the reserve. The information gained during the workshop gave a great insight into the areas that the community thought were of significance and where there are opportunities to reconnect the landscape. Once this information had been gathered the PIC engaged with the Cooperative Research Centre for Spatial Information and staff from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries to work towards combining the community thoughts with the scientific models and strategies. This was completed in late August and the data will be reviewed on an annual basis. The next part of developing the plan is to go back to the community and to the relevant agencies and find out what is realistically possible to achieve over the next 20 years across the biosphere that is represented on the map. This will occur over the coming months.

CRCSI also undertook a literature review of available methods for estimating the amount of carbon our projects will be capturing through remnant vegetation protection and revegetation. This will allow to meet our agreement with Canberra that we will monitor the amount of carbon sequestered through the project.

On ground works started with partnerships being formed with the City of Casey, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, and Parks Victoria to undertake important revegetation and remnant vegetation protection works across the north and north western parts of Western Port. These works all contributed towards further protecting the ramsar values of Western Port. At the time of writing the second year of on ground works is being assessed with project proposals coming in from various groups across the biosphere reserve.

One of the long term objectives of this project is to set up a biodiversity monitoring program that can be continued long after this round of the project has passed. The cornerstone to this part of the project is a large array of motion sensing cameras strategically placed in areas of the reserve to observe any ground dwelling fauna. While all fauna will be monitored the he program will be mainly focussed on the relationship between the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot and its predators, namely the red fox and cats. This work will also build on the great work being done by numerous people across the reserve using motion sensing cameras to collect data by incorporating their data where it is available and appropriate.

Into the future the project will work towards:

- Refining the specifics of the biodiversity plan
- Rolling out the biodiversity monitoring program
- Delivering significant on ground outcomes
- Building on existing partnerships and seeking to strengthen collaboration with community groups and other organisations in delivering this exciting project.

Chris Chambers  
Project Coordinator

September 2013

## **Watson Creek Project Report 2012-13**

The Vision of the project is to achieve a significantly improved creek environment that is valued by its local communities and managed in a collaborative, responsible and integrated manner.

The Watson Creek Project exists because Watson Creek, one of the most polluted creeks in Victoria, discharges its waters into Yaringa Marine National Park.

Yaringa Marine National Park has great significance as a RAMSAR site for international shorebird species.

### **Outcomes**

Funding for on ground works carried out has been provided through Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority's Caring for our Country **Ramsar Protection Project**.

Parks Victoria and Mornington Peninsula Shire also provided funding which has supported the project officer in continuing community engagement activities.

### **On-ground works**

Rabbit and weed control works were previously undertaken on five properties in the Watson Creek catchment to reduce erosion and enhance native vegetation. This work continued on these properties in 2012/13, and two new properties also participated in rabbit and weed control activities. This work has now been completed.

The Biosphere is currently seeking funding for further on-ground works and community engagement activities in the Watson Creek - Rutherford Inlet area.

### **Community Engagement**

#### **Watson Creek**

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC) has engaged the Biosphere to produce a booklet celebrating the achievements of the Watson Creek project, which is currently underway.

Jacqui Salter, Landcare Facilitator, Mornington Peninsula Shire, is currently recruiting for new members to revitalise the Watson Creek Catchment Landcare Group

We visited the Somerville Secondary College in September 2013 to discuss potential project ideas to continue on-ground works and educational activities at the school wetland. The school and Biosphere will look into various fund sources for continuation of on-ground works and student engagement activities.

#### **Rutherford Inlet**

In early 2012, the City of Casey engaged the Biosphere to undertake a scoping study to scope the possibility of developing an integrated catchment management approach in the Rutherford Inlet area.

A boat trip around Western Port was held in October 2012 to provide insight into the Yaringa Marine Park and the Rutherford Inlet environment attracting 29 participants from Watson Creek and Rutherford Inlet local landholders and agency stakeholders.

A community workshop for Rutherford Inlet stakeholders was also held to discuss values, opportunities, threats and next steps, attracting 11 attendees and providing valuable information for the scoping study.

The Biosphere and City of Casey are currently in discussions with Melbourne Water to set up an Estuarywatch group for Rutherford Inlet following completion of the scoping study.

### **Yaringa Catchment Group**

A stakeholder group for the Rutherford Inlet – Watson Creek catchment area has been established to discuss catchment water quality and associated issues. To date meetings have been attended by representatives of Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, City of Casey, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, and the Dolphin Research Institute, with scope to expand membership to interested landholders in the Watson Creek – Rutherford Inlet catchment.

Clare Millen  
Project Officer

September 2013.