



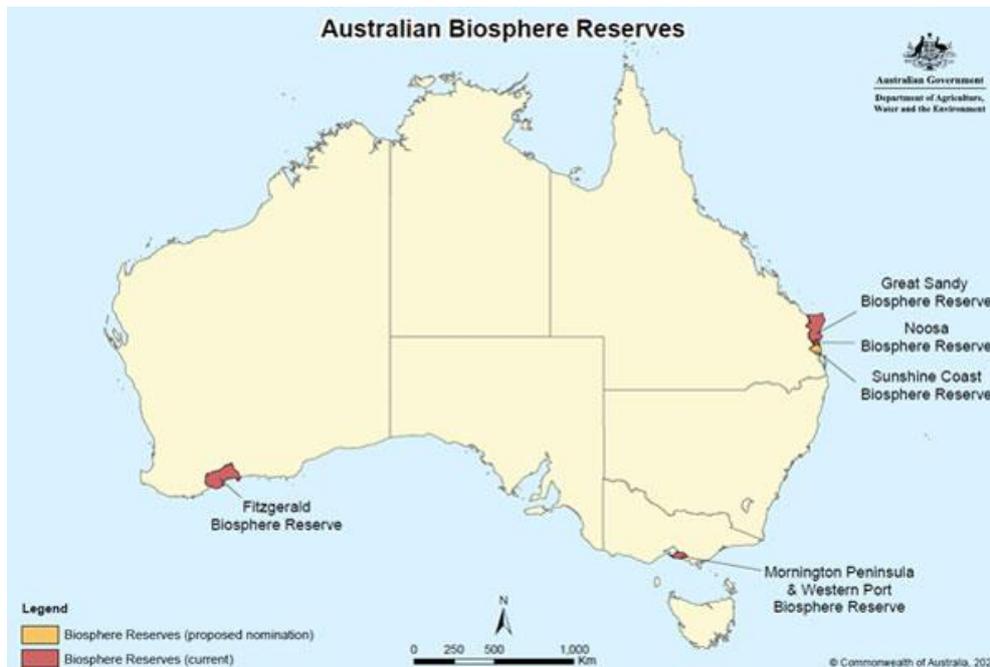
UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme

International Coordinating Council, 33rd Session 13-17 September 2021

National Report Australia

Australia continues to be an active member of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. Australia currently has four active Biosphere Reserves: Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve (Western Australia), Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve (Victoria), Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve, and Noosa Biosphere Reserve (Queensland).

Map 1 Australian Biosphere Reserves



Source: <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/australias-biosphere-reserves>

1 National Activities

Australia's National MAB Committee held virtual meetings in January and May 2021. The Committee is focused on information sharing and the sustainability and promotion of the MAB Programme in Australia. The Committee consists of Biosphere Reserve representatives, a representative from the Australian National Commission for UNESCO, Indigenous and Youth members and is chaired by the MAB Focal Point currently hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

More information at <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/australias-biosphere-reserves>

The Youth member of the committee is leading work on the delivery of an online educational workshop series to educate youth on the topics of environmental governance and the ethics of conservation, our societies relationship with the natural environments we inhabit, and the role of the MAB Programme in maintaining a sustainable relationship with the natural and cultural landscapes we inhabit.

The National Committee will be looking for ways to enhance the sustainable development outcomes from Australia's Biosphere Reserves, building on government and non-government conservation and sustainability strategies. While the Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted the number and nature of activities undertaken, all four active Biosphere Reserves have managed various activities during the period.

1.1 Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve <https://www.fbg.org.au/the-biosphere>

Fitzgerald Biosphere is Australia's oldest functioning Biosphere Reserve, being nominated in 1978. It covers an area of 1.53 million hectares, and with a biologically important (Fitzgerald River) National Park as its core and strong links with Australian Government Landcare Program activities. The Fitzgerald Biosphere Buffer and Transition Zones are made up of a range of conservation and other reserves and Crown lands, extensive private farmlands and Western Australian State waters (to three nautical miles) of the Southern Ocean. The activities of Fitzgerald Biosphere are overseen by the Fitzgerald Biosphere Community Collective (FBCC), which is made up of organisations that manage the many categories of land or support those who do. The group has a strong and dedicated volunteering aspect, alongside partners who play an important role in delivering projects including:

- The *Building resilience in the face of increasing climate variability project (2019-2021)* is working with a range of stakeholders to explore ways of increasing the resilience of farming systems. The workshop series helps farmers build regenerative practices into their farming systems. The project will also collate research on climate change relevant to the area to be interpreted for local use.
- The *Strategic control of priority environmental weeds in Bremer Bay project (2020-2021)*, focuses on the control of several environmental weeds in Bremer Bay, including two weeds of national significance: boxthorn (*Lycium ferosissimum*) and bridal creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*). Community action such as 'weeding bees' are focusing on high priority areas and target species identified as being of greatest concern by residents, including African lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*) and Myrtle-leaf milkwort (*Polygala myrtifolia*), in addition to other weeds of national significance. The project includes a community awareness program targeting residents, businesses, schools, and tourists.
- The *Uncovering Cocanarup-Kundip Ecological Assessment project* provided an ecological survey which was delivered by FBCC member the Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network and was funded by the Western Australian Government's State Natural Resource Management Program. The project investigated the ecological and cultural values of the proposed Cocanarup-Kundip Conservation Reserve, south of Ravensthorpe in the eastern

part of Fitzgerald Biosphere. The project was undertaken during late 2020 and early 2021, and it reviewed existing knowledge and management systems, consulted with the local community on the area's values, and investigated the ecological and cultural values of the proposed reserve through 168 assessment sites and a further 58 points of interest. It uncovered large areas of the Nationally Listed Kwongkan Threatened Ecological Community, new populations and range extensions of conservation significant plant taxa, motion-sensing camera images of threatened fauna including Chuditch (*Dasyuris geoffroii*), Tammar (*Notamacropus eugenii*), nesting sites of the threatened Carnaby's black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*), and Noongar archaeological sites.

1.2 Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve

<https://www.biosphere.org.au/>

Designated in 2002, the Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve covers 214,200 hectares and encompasses the entire Western Port Ramsar site as well as the surrounding coastlines and hinterlands of five local government areas.

The Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation is committed to aligning its work to support the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the wider recognition of the Bunurong people as the First Nations People of the region.

Key activities of the Foundation are water stewardship, conserving the Ramsar site of Western Port, and threatened species conservation. The Water Stewardship program promotes sustainable water use by landowners and public-land managers. The Western Port Ramsar site is the heart of the Reserve. Recent work has involved engaging with the recreational fishing community to minimise their environmental impact while maintaining all the positive social and economic benefits of this very popular, outdoor activity. Terrestrial programs focus on threatened species and habitats. For instance, the Biosphere Reserve acts as the secretariat for the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot's Regional Recovery Group.

Increasingly, the Biosphere Reserve Foundation is working with its constituent authorities on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

1.3 Noosa Biosphere Reserve <https://noosabiosphere.org.au/>

First designated in 2007 the Noosa Biosphere covers 150,000 hectares. The Noosa Biosphere Reserve has been awarded the 2021 UNESCO MAB Michel Batisse Award for excellence in biosphere reserve management. The award highlights the Noosa community's dedication to improving and conserving their environment and is an example of how the Landcare Program, combined with the objectives of Biosphere Reserve, is making a real on-ground difference.

The award is for the *Keeping it in Kin* project, an erosion remediation project improving agricultural productivity, waterway health and water quality within the Noosa Catchment. To receive this award in the 50th anniversary of the MAB Programme is a special honour.

The Noosa Biosphere Reserve is working with the local government, university and conservation groups to deliver the *Glossy Black Cockatoo Bioacoustics Monitoring* project. Monitoring of the Glossy Black Cockatoos will commence in January 2022 during the breeding season. The project will

use bioacoustics sound recording software to identify nesting sites, provide data on viable populations and family groups. This work will inform the Glossy Black Resilience Action Plan and develop new research technology that may be able to be replicated across vocal species.

As part of the UNESCO MAB Programme's 50th anniversary celebrations, in 2021 the Noosa Biosphere Reserve Foundation will launch the inaugural *Biosphere Awards for Sustainability Excellence* at their annual gala. All funds raised at the event will go towards continuing koala conservation research in the Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

1.4 Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve <https://greatsandybiosphere.org.au/>

Designated in 2009 the Great Sandy Biosphere encompasses 1.416 million hectares of land and sea country and includes the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area and the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

At the 26th meeting of the International Advisory Committee (IAC) for Biosphere Reserves held in March 2020 the Committee accepted the submission of the *Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve management plan 2019-2024* acknowledging the high quality of the plan and commending the management group on the vision, mission, objectives, strategies and actions identified.

The Great Sandy Biosphere is partnering with stakeholders including First Nations People to conserve sites that support significant breeding populations of endangered loggerhead turtles and vulnerable green and flatback turtles. Conservation measures include reducing residential light pollution through installation of shade screening on the beach, removal of marine debris and the restoration of turtle nesting habitat.

1.5 Proposed Sunshine Coast Biosphere Reserve

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council is seeking to nominate Australia's fifth Biosphere Reserve for decision at the 34th International Coordinating Council (ICC) meeting in 2022. The proposal has been endorsed by the two First Nations People that have Country in the proposed Biosphere Reserve, the Kabi Kabi People (who also are present in the Noosa Biosphere Reserve) and Jinibara People. A Sunshine Coast Biosphere Reserve would complement the Great Sandy and Noosa Biosphere Reserves.

Planning activities to become a biosphere are being undertaken, as the nomination progresses through the assessment process. This includes:

- investigations to determine an appropriate governance model and
- development of a management and performance measurement framework to provide both guidance and to track progress towards achieving the proposed biosphere's objectives.

The draft framework considers and integrates with Sunshine Coast Council's existing long-term strategies, including the 2020 Banksia Award winning Environment and Liveability Strategy, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, and other social, economic and environmental policies at all levels of government.

Engagement with First Nations People, key stakeholders and the community to prepare to become a biosphere will continue until a formal decision is received from the 34th ICC in 2022.

More information about the nomination can be found at

<https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/Council/Planning-and-Projects/Major-Regional-Projects/Nomination-for-Biosphere>

2 Withdrawal of Australian Biosphere Reserves

In accordance with UNESCO's request that all Biosphere Reserves unable to comply with the revised criteria outlined in the 1995 Seville Strategy and Statutory Framework withdraw from the Programme by 2020, Australia has withdrawn 10 Biosphere Reserves from the programme.

The new criteria require all sites to include: (1) one or more legally constituted core areas, devoted to long-term protection; (2) adjacent buffer zones; and (3) an outer transition area where sustainable development is promoted and developed by public authorities, local communities and enterprises.

In 2018, following a thorough assessment, five Australian Biosphere Reserves withdrew from the Programme: Wilsons Promontory, Hattah-Kulkyne/Murray-Kulkyne, Yathong, Prince Regent and Barkindji Biosphere Reserve. In 2020 the 26th session of the IAC confirmed the voluntary withdrawal of the final five Biosphere Reserves identified through the assessment process: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Croajingolong, Riverland, Kosciuszko National Park and Mamungari Conservation Park.

In Australia withdrawal from the MAB Programme does not affect the legal protection or conservation outcomes for protected areas located within Biosphere Reserves.