

THE GREAT SANDY BIOSPHERE - A SIMPLE EXPLANATION

What is it?

The Great Sandy region includes Fraser Island, the Great Sandy Strait and surrounding areas including the cities of Hervey Bay, Maryborough and Gympie. In May 2009, it was accepted into the *Man and the Biosphere* Program, and can now be called a “Biosphere Reserve”. The program gives recognition to important conservation areas and encourages local communities to live more sustainably. Put simply, it helps maintain a healthy environment. There are 529 Biospheres across the world.

Why do we need it?

Many people choose to live in the Great Sandy region because of its great climate, lifestyle and clean environment. But no-one wants to see the area over developed. The rapidly expanding population presents a challenge for planners – how do we manage development so that it is truly sustainable? The Biosphere program helps deal with that challenge.

How will it work?

Biospheres have no rules or regulations. A successful Great Sandy Biosphere will work by co-operation between government, business and community groups. There will be a committee or board to plan and co-ordinate activities.

What's in it for me?

We all benefit from a healthy environment, but the Biosphere program can have other benefits.

- Increasing tourism. Biospheres attract more tourists, but also help develop new markets, such as ecotourism.
- Developing new industries, for example Bioprospecting. This is where natural chemicals found in nature such as coral reefs and rainforests are developed into useful products like pharmaceutical drugs.
- Giving international recognition and a status that will help secure international funding. An international conservation group has already provided funds to help protect fauna and flora in the Biosphere
- Developing a marketing brand for locally made products which then attract premium prices.

What kinds of projects are planned?

Suggestions are needed for projects which will support the Biosphere program, and how they can be carried out. The following have already been suggested, and these will be refined over time. They all have an overall objective of a healthier and more sustainable future.

- Erecting signs to educate the public about the Biosphere
- Development of a Great Sandy Biosphere brand for local products
- Establish a fauna and flora database to improve land use planning and decisions
- Establish a Biosphere Centre of Excellence for research, ecotourism and environmental education.
- Create new ecotourism opportunities
- Encourage better planning to deliver real sustainable development

Your support is needed

Every Biosphere program around the world is unique and operates in different ways. If the Great Sandy Biosphere is to become more than just a label, or “trophy”, then all sectors of the community need to accept and treasure the region's outstanding natural values. The success of the program will be a test of our cultural, social, educational, tourism and environmental maturity.

WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE GREAT SANDY BIOSPHERE?

A unique natural environment

- The world's tallest and most complex rainforests growing on sand
- 49% of Australia's bird species
- More marine fish diversity than the entire Great Barrier Reef
- 7558 recorded species of fauna and flora, many which are rare or endangered
- The largest and highest perched dune lakes in the world
- Great Sandy Strait wetlands, supporting thousands of migratory shorebirds
- World and National Heritage listed areas, including National Parks
- Species with unusual ways of breathing found nowhere else, such as Queensland Lungfish, Mary River Turtle and White Throated Snapping Turtle
- The world's best observable example of ancient sand dunes
- A region where the Tropics overlaps the Temperate zone, both on land and at sea
- Relatively low pollution levels
- Very agreeable climate with mild winters and summer sea breeze

Human environment

- Beautiful historical architecture in Maryborough and Gympie
- Many buildings protected on Heritage Registers
- A rapidly growing population with an annual growth rate of 3%
- Stable, democratic system of government
- Long term development planning schemes
- Growing environmental awareness under programs like Reef Guardian
- Increased adoption of sustainable farming practices such as trash blanketing, minimum till and constructed wetlands

Profitable business activity

- A diverse agricultural base including sugar cane farming, horticulture, dairying and grazing worth over \$1 billion.
- Internationally known tourism destinations, such as Fraser Island, Mon Repos turtle rookery and Hervey Bay whale watching
- Strong interest in environmental programs like Reef Rescue and Ecobiz which assists business
- Large areas of timber production including plantations of native hardwood and softwoods
- Manufacturing firms in industries such as engineering, food processing and aviation

Strong cultural awareness

- Very long history of Aboriginal occupation (40,000 years)
- Significant archeological sites – middens, burial sites, grinding stones
- New residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds – European, Asian, African
- Popular community celebrations such as Festival of Whales, Bunya Dreaming

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