

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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Attention: News Editor

### **Biosphere status celebrated**

Outstanding biodiversity in the south coast's Fitzgerald Biosphere has been reaffirmed by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program.

The Fitzgerald River National Park was listed as a Biosphere Reserve in 1978 but recently underwent a review based on new criteria for biosphere status.

Elected members, scientists and community members gathered in Hopetoun on Friday 23 March to celebrate the renomination of the Fitzgerald Biosphere, retaining its status in a network of 669 reserves across the world.

A review funded through the Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC) helped to trigger the renomination process, conducted through the Biosphere Implementation Group.

GSDC Chief Executive Officer Bruce Manning said the Commission's support recognised the extraordinary nature of the Fitzgerald area, along with the value of the human activities that take place there.

"The Fitzgerald Biosphere has intrinsic value because of its amazing biodiversity," Mr Manning said.

"Continuing the listing in the Man and the Biosphere program will contribute to ensuring that people continue to have the opportunity into the future to experience and appreciate one of the world's hotspots of biodiversity."

The Fitzgerald Biosphere takes in the Shires of Jerramungup and Ravensthorpe and includes the main townships of Jerramungup, Ravensthorpe, Hopetoun and Bremer Bay.

Some 1,665 species of plants can be found in the area, many of which are rare, restricted or endangered.

Fauna found in the reserve include tammar wallaby, red-tailed wambenger, mallee fowl, western bristlebird and western whipbird and the park has been identified as



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one of the top three areas of importance for threatened species in southern Western Australia.

The Biosphere Implementation Group was formed in 2010 to drive the renomination and delivered its submission in 2015, after years of work supported by organisations, agencies and community engagement.

In June, 2017 approval by the MAB International Coordinating Committee at UNESCO was granted.

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## Background notes

GSDC has had a long association with the initiative and the Biosphere Implementation Group. Currently we are stakeholders in the 'Fitzgerald Biosphere community collective'. A brief timeline as follows:

1978 – Fitz listed as a Biosphere Reserve.

The GSDC was involved in a few planning projects including Tourism Marketing Strategy, Fitzgerald Biosphere Marketing Association and FB Interpretive Centre.

1996 Seville review and new criteria, Fitz no longer complied. There was a risk it would be delisted.

2009 (Dec) Agencies discussed the status of the Fitz Biosphere including Dept AG, South Coast NRM, UWA/CENRM, Dept Environment and Conservation, GSDC, D Indigenous Affairs, Dept Planning. Following that, GSDC put funds into a review of the Biosphere, status and functions (written by Julia Fry).

2010 (Nov) Facilitated meeting at Bremer Bay with community organisations and agencies working in or living in the Biosphere. Agreement to establish a group to drive the renomination of the Biosphere (the Biosphere Implementation Group). This was attended by GSDC, who continued to attend BIG meetings and have input as required as a stakeholder.

2011 – South Coast NRM provides a grant to support a consultant's work to develop the renomination. BIG (driven by the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group – a farming/production group in Jerri) also secures funding from the Australian Government Dept Foreign Affairs and Trade UNESCO division to develop a Fitzgerald Biosphere Action Plan to complement the renomination.

GSDC provided \$1,650 for a Biosphere educational brochure as part of the engagement of the community.

2013 – GSDC provides \$5,000 (matching SCNRM) to support further consultation for the renomination.

2015 – Renomination is submitted to Dept Parks and Wildlife > WA Cabinet > Australian Government Department for Environment > Dept Foreign Affairs and Trade > UNESCO International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves > Man and the Biosphere International Coordinating Committee

2016 – Review from UNESCO re buffer zone design. Renomination resubmitted.

2017 – June approval by the Man and the Biosphere International Coordinating Committee (UNESCO). GSDC provides \$3,000 to support launch of the Biosphere.

