

Anglican Commission for the Environment submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning and Environment inquiry into the proposed nomination of the ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The world-wide Anglican Church has identified five marks of the mission of the Church. One of these is "to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to sustain and renew the life of the earth". To this end it seeks to care for creation in three areas:

- within the church as a community of faith
- within the church as an institution
- in the wider community as an influential party in the development of community and government attitudes and policies¹.

In this context the Commission wishes to raise several issues for consideration by the Standing Committee.

The Landscape of the ACT

A critical concept in the establishment of effective biosphere reserves relates to the development and management of the landscape. This should include both natural and human elements, and these should be effectively integrated². In Australia we have been fortunate in having stable and effective governmental programs that concern themselves with the protection of species and ecosystems. In the ACT we see the recent development of plans designed to protect certain habitats, for example, woodlands³ and grasslands⁴. However the protection of such habitats does not of itself constitute effective nurturing of the integrity of nature. This requires integration of management at a level higher than habitats, that of the entire landscape. The Commission would strongly support moves to change the focus of management to this level. The biosphere reserve process provides a vehicle for addressing such a change of focus. Issues that would follow from such a change of perspective include:

- *What kind of landscape do we wish to leave to our grandchildren? Are present agricultural and urban landscapes sustainable in the face of present uses and management practices? Do they include, in the correct proportions and balance, the elements we would see as our vision of a fruitful, sustainable and renewable corner of creation? How do we develop a path to the kind of landscape we envisage for the ACT, rather than one that accidentally results from our behaviour?*
- *Are the natural elements of creation given the space and populations sizes needed for them to continue to respond to a changing world? The biosphere reserve concept normally includes a gradation of usage from protected areas through agricultural landscapes to urban/industrial landscapes. It is easy to claim that the, largely reserved, mountainous regions of the ACT provide these protected areas. However such regions do not consist of the same ecosystems as the remainder of the ACT and it cannot be claimed that they provide the large protected areas of the ecosystems used for agriculture and urban development that are envisaged as necessary in the biosphere reserve system. Such highland habitats are already largely represented in the Kosciuszko Biosphere Reserve⁵. The lowland protected areas are severely fragmented and mostly small. They do not provide effective populations of the size necessary to make evolutionary responses to changing conditions, e.g.*

climate change. Many of the grassland areas for example are to be found in urban areas with no gradation in usage and little protection⁴.

Modern Australian Culture

A key element of the biosphere reserve concept is the integration of local people in the process. The aim is twofold: firstly to draw on the knowledge of local communities in the development and management of the Reserve and secondly to initiate cultural change leading to sustainable perspectives and practice by the associated human community⁵. This intent is usually seen in terms of traditional and indigenous cultures, however the damage in Australia is being done by modern western culture and there is a need to take seriously the task of culture change in our context, that underlies sound Biosphere Reserves. Such changes in culture are difficult to achieve, even in traditional cultures still closely linked to the land. Highly urbanised western culture will provide a far more difficult challenge. However the ACT which includes a small city with a highly educated population could provide an excellent opportunity for promoting such change. Several issues that will need to be explored in such a project include:

- *Issues of the heart* While practical issues of management are relatively easy to identify, their solution often requires changed perspectives on the part of those involved. Sustainable communities come at a short-term personal cost to the individual and are largely the consequence of very large numbers of small, often inconvenient, choices by individuals. To drive such change requires a change of heart even more than a change of mind. The establishment of a biosphere reserve in the ACT would require facilitating such change as central to its success.
- *Spiritual Relationships* In Christian terms the active relationship between Creator and creation and between the different parts of creation, are central and need to be effectively explored. Specifically, the development of a new and deeper relationship between the Australian, largely urban, resource-hungry, human community and the Australian landscape is needed. Similarly, the implications of the moral imperative to love our neighbours, whether they be our grandchildren (neighbours in time, intergenerational equity) or those with whom we share resources (neighbours in space, including towns and farms within and downstream from the ACT, the plant and animal communities of the ACT) also need to be explored and accepted at the spiritual/emotional level.
- *A moral hazard* Moral hazard applies where a chooser knows of a harmful outcome of an option but policies or price structures would reward behaviour or actions that increase the temptation to choose the harmful outcome. For example, the situation where parents can choose to not risk immunising a child because the risk of infection is low because most of the population have immunised their children, constitutes a moral hazard, as the overall level of immunity in the population is lowered by such a choice. In seeking to establish a new set of relationships between the natural world and humankind, it will be necessary to reduce the temptation implicit in establishing a moral hazard by making unchanged behaviour unrewarding through societal pressures and legislative action.

The outworking of such spiritual and emotional imperatives would ultimately lead to the integration of urban and rural communities into a new, modern Australian, natural landscape. Unless ultimately driven by such a 'change of heart', however, an effective outcome is unlikely.

¹ *The Commission for the Environment: An initiative of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn* <http://www.pastornet.net.au/envcomm/> May 2006

² *The Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves.*
<http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/Strategy.pdf> May 2006

³ ACT Government 2004. *Woodlands for Wildlife: ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy.* Action Plan 27.

⁴ ACT Government 2005. *A vision splendid of the Grassy Plains Extended: ACT Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy.* Action Plan 28.

⁵ *Biosphere Reserve Information: Australia: Kosciuszko.*
<http://www2.unesco.org/mab/br/brdir/directory/biores.asp?code=AUL+02&mode=all>
May 2006