

Celebrate people and nature

Biosphere nomination for the Sunshine Coast



Frequently asked questions

What is a biosphere?

A biosphere is an international site of excellence, recognised by UNESCO as an area of natural beauty where people live and work. Biospheres are places, just like our region, where active conservation sits alongside responsible development and people living sustainably.

Australia has nine biospheres, and across the world there are more than 680 UNESCO Biospheres in over 120 countries. [Learn more about the UNESCO biosphere program on the UNESCO website](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme) <www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme>.

What does this mean for me (i.e. residents and businesses)?

A biosphere reserve is non-statutory. This means that as long as people are following local, state or federal laws then nothing needs to change. People can continue to operate their business or enjoy the outdoors as they currently are, although continuing to adopt sustainable practices will be encouraged.

There are many benefits associated with being a biosphere that Sunshine Coast residents can take advantage of. A biosphere credential, coupled with harnessing these benefits, will ensure our region adapts to change, while maintaining our special natural areas and our unique lifestyle.

Why do we want to be a biosphere?

Across our region, people are committed to finding the 'sweet spot' where sustainable development and active conservation are aligned. A biosphere credential aligns to our values and assets and enables us to continue as we are with a focus on making sustainable, future-focused change.

International recognition through the UNESCO Biosphere program brings opportunities to the Sunshine Coast. It provides a competitive advantage to facilitate sustainable growth along with a range of benefits to our natural environment, our lifestyle and economy.



What might a Sunshine Coast Biosphere look like?

Our proposed biosphere will have areas that are clear, simple and easy to understand. The areas apply to the land in the local government area and the sea out to 3 nautical miles. They align with council's existing Planning Scheme, state and federal planning policy and legislation. This ensures consistency and allows businesses, land and sea users to carry on, without change.

Live and Work Area

- Multiple land-uses where people live and make a living.
- Sustainable development and resource management practices are promoted and developed.
- Green spaces, parks, waterways and beaches are key natural assets.

Manage and Care Area

- Rural lifestyle and living areas where primary producers use the land for business.
- Care is taken to manage land and sea activities, minimise impacts on Protect and Enhance Areas and to connect Protect and Enhance Areas with Live and Work Areas.
- Manage and Care Areas must surround Protect and Enhance Areas but can stand alone.
- The width of the Manage and Care area must be at least 500 metres whenever possible to buffer the Protect and Enhance Areas. The 500 metre buffer width sits inside the Protect and Enhance Area (where there is a Live and Work Area immediately adjacent).

Special Manage and Care Area

- These areas are highly valued, small protected areas that are surrounded by Live and Work Areas.
- These areas will continue to be legally protected areas and managed accordingly.

Protect and Enhance Area

- A legally protected area that is publicly owned and devoted to long-term conservation.
- It is of sufficient size (over 20 hectares) to meet conservation objectives.
- Examples: larger national parks, part of some marine parks and council's environment reserves.

What activities occur in the biosphere areas?

A biosphere status is non-statutory. As long as you're following local, state or federal laws you can continue as you are. Nothing needs to change.

The biosphere status is not intended to place restrictions upon business or industry. Rather, it is a recognition that our residents live, work and play within our beautiful natural environment. It will also allow residents and businesses to take advantage of the benefits and opportunities associated with a UNESCO Biosphere credential.

If a biosphere is non statutory and nothing changes, then why are we doing it and what is the value?

Sunshine Coast Council has a clear vision for what we're hoping to achieve for our region. A UNESCO Biosphere credential will support us to protect and enhance our environment, culture, lifestyle and economy for future generations. It aligns with our vision to be Australia's most sustainable region – Healthy. Smart. Creative.

We have nominated the local government area for biosphere designation to leverage the benefits and opportunities that come with international recognition from a well-known and credible program, such as UNESCO's biosphere program.

Refer to list of benefits and opportunities.

What are the benefits and opportunities?

Benefits and opportunities include:

- Assisting to recognise and preserve our outstanding natural assets for current and future generations.
- Further enhancing the national and international reputation of the Sunshine Coast and being able to leverage the benefits and opportunities that come with international recognition.
- Helping to leverage economic opportunities including providing a significant point of difference for our agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism sectors.

Developing a performance measurement framework to track progress towards sustainability may assist to further develop the benefits and opportunities that a biosphere will bring to the region.

What is the timing of the nomination process?

The application process for obtaining a UNESCO Biosphere credential takes many years.

Consultation with the community and key stakeholders to test the proposal to nominate for a UNESCO Biosphere was undertaken from March to June 2019, with key stakeholder engagement continuing through to August 2019. Feedback indicated that the proposed nomination was generally well received by the local community, business and government.

To support the finalisation of the Sunshine Coast Biosphere nomination, a Community Reference Group was established to provide critical advice and insights, and ensure that community views and needs were represented and incorporated.

In October 2019, Council endorsed the nomination to be forwarded to the State Government, and pending State Government endorsement, forwarded to the Australian Government. The Australian Government will assess the nomination and then submit it to UNESCO for their consideration in September 2020. UNESCO will notify Sunshine Coast Council of the outcome of the nomination in June 2021

How will our biosphere be different to other biospheres?

There are more than 680 biospheres around the world, including 9 in Australia. Each region that applies for biosphere status develops a nomination that is consistent with UNESCO's biosphere program purpose and principles. Their nomination must reflect the values, credentials, challenges and outcomes specific to each individual region. No two biospheres are the same. A

biosphere for the Sunshine Coast local government area is intended to be fit-for-purpose for our community, culture, natural assets and economy.

Will it be a stand-alone biosphere?

Yes, in a geographic context, the proposed nomination is only for the Sunshine Coast local government area.

However, the UNESCO Biosphere program encourages and offers the opportunity to collaborate with, learn from and share knowledge with the Australian and global network of biospheres. Taking advantage of these opportunities and working together with other biospheres will help us protect and enhance our liveability, environment and economy for future generations.

What will the proposed governance model be?

To foster ownership and balance, an effective governance team should have strong community involvement and ongoing support from council. Through consultation with key stakeholders we plan to understand what they value to inform the development of a governance model that might be applied if the nomination should be successful.

It is intended that the governance model for the operation and management of a proposed biosphere on the Sunshine Coast will be fit-for-purpose for our people, our natural assets, our economy and our region.

Were the community involved in developing the nomination?

We adapted some of the world's best practice models to suit the Sunshine Coast context and set up a reference group with community membership to provide advice for the region's biosphere nomination. The reference group's focus was on social, cultural, economic and environmental values and assets. Members were leaders of the environment, aquatic environment, youth, social, tourism, agricultural, construction and property development sectors.

Will the community be involved in planning for becoming a biosphere?

Yes, a Community Reference Group will be formed to provide advice in planning for becoming a biosphere. This group intends to have balanced representation of a range of interests and industry sectors.

The community will also be kept updated on the progress of the biosphere through our communication channels.

Is this going to limit development / growth on the coast?

A biosphere designation is non-statutory and does not over ride existing planning policy and legislation at any level of government. However, what a biosphere could do is assist to ensure that development and growth occurs in a responsible and sustainable way. The intent of UNESCO's Biosphere program is that responsible and sustainable development sits along-side conservation and that is what we could achieve if the nomination is successful.

Does the proposed biosphere override the Planning Scheme?

No, a biosphere does not over-ride the Sunshine Coast Council Planning Scheme 2014.

If successful, there is no need for council to amend our biosphere areas as land use changes. Council will keep track of how our areas change and report it to UNESCO at our 10-year review.

What is council's role?

Strong leadership and support from government is a critical success factor in the world's best practice models for the governance of biospheres.

Council took a leadership role by developing a biosphere nomination, on behalf of the community, and sponsored the submission of the nomination to the Queensland and Australian Governments. It's the Australian Government who will submit the nomination to UNESCO. In June 2021, we'll learn of the outcome of our nomination from UNESCO.

In parallel to the nomination process, we will commence planning for becoming a biosphere. We'll be seeking to set up a reference group, which may include community membership, to support planning for becoming a biosphere. The purpose of the reference group would be to provide advice to council to guide the development of a management and performance measurement framework and branding in preparation for becoming a biosphere.

It is intended that the reference group might have residents along with representatives from key business sectors. We're especially calling for leaders of the environment, youth, tourism, agricultural, construction and property development sectors to be part of the reference group.