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### Securing the iconic Fitz

Maintaining the important international status of the Fitzgerald Biosphere is the focus of a new cross-regional project on the South Coast involving community, government and business.

The newly formed Biosphere Implementation Group (BIG), comprising the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group, Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park, Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network, Department of Environment and Conservation and other key agency and local government stakeholders, is working on a renomination application to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 'Man and the Biosphere' program.

With a September 2012 deadline for its renomination, the project has received a timely boost with funding of \$20,000 secured by South Coast NRM from the Australian Government.

Registered as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1978, the Fitzgerald River National Park is a biological icon because of its very high levels of natural diversity and plant endemism (plants found nowhere else).

Project consultant and landscape ecologist Nathan McQuoid explained that since its original listing the Biosphere Reserve criteria had changed, with a greater focus on the involvement of surrounding communities and conservation measures such as landcare and remnant habitat protection.

"A review by UNESCO found that the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve was not sufficiently functional with regards to contemporary biosphere models because the Biosphere Reserve listing was limited to the National Park and did not formally recognise any buffer or cooperation zones," Mr McQuoid said.

"Biosphere custodians must also consider the relationship between land and marine systems, and need to provide information on the rehabilitation of degraded lands in the cooperation zones."

The Park contains around 1,750 known plant species compared to the Stirling Range National Park (1,600+), Mt Lesueur National Park (900+) and the United Kingdom (1,300+). It forms one of the most important parts of the intense nature that makes the greater south west of Australia one of the top 34 hotspots for impacted biological diversity on Earth.

The BIG group met recently to discuss the plan for renomination and further meetings with the wider community and stakeholders will take place in early 2012 before the renomination submission is finalised.

More capacity is required to build on the renomination process and the BIG group is seeking support from a range of parties including the Development Commissions in the Great Southern and Goldfields Esperance regions.

Further information on the renomination initiative can be obtained from Nathan McQuoid on 0439 936 591 or email [nathanm@westnet.com.au](mailto:nathanm@westnet.com.au). Alternatively contact Anne Sparrow, Fitzgerald Biosphere Group, on 9835 1127 or email [anne@fbg.org.au](mailto:anne@fbg.org.au)

## ENDS

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## BACKGROUND

*"The Fitzgerald River National Park is without doubt the most important Mediterranean ecosystem reserve in the world. It stands out for its scientific, conservation and educational values in the same way that the Galapagos Islands do."*

*Baron Dr. Bernd von Droste, Head of World Heritage Bureau, UNESCO Paris. Previously Director of the Division of Ecological Sciences UNESCO.*

In 2010, the Great Southern Development Commission, the Department of Agriculture and Food, and Gondwana Link contracted the UWA Centre for Excellence in Natural Resource Management (CENRM) to conduct an assessment of the current situation of Fitzgerald Biosphere and report on the findings. The findings supported the view that the community wanted to maintain the Biosphere Reserve status and listing.

In November 2010, several community groups met to discuss the revitalisation of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve concept and formed the Biosphere Implementation Group (BIG). South Coast NRM has since engaged consultant landscape ecologist Nathan McQuoid to undertake research and prepare the application on behalf of BIG.