

Partner Search - Briefing Note

This note has been prepared as a basis for **seeking potential international partners** for the Dyfi Biosphere Partnership in Mid Wales. It is addressed to associated bodies in Wales, the UNESCO MAB network and any interested Biosphere administrators, especially in continental Europe. The partnership would be pleased to consider suggestions for international exchanges along the lines set out below.

At present the Dyfi Biosphere is the **only one in Wales**. Currently, it consists only of protected areas (mainly the Dyfi National Nature Reserve, which includes Ynyslas, Cors Fochno and the estuary from Aberdyfi as far up as Dyfi Junction). Afon (River) Dyfi is spelt Dovey on some old maps. Proposals for creating a 'modern biosphere' based on criteria drawn up by UNESCO at Seville in 1995 involve extending the area by creating a transition area.

The definition of the extended area and its zonation are two of the questions being put to local residents, businesses and authorities during an intensive community engagement process. Indeed, the question of whether to ask UNESCO to confirm the area under the Seville criteria is being put to the community.

At the heart of the proposed extended area lies the historic town of **Machynlleth** which has some 70 shops, an industrial estate and an expanding 'eco park' for environmental businesses. **Main settlements** in the Dyfi Valley include rural villages such as Llanbrynmair, Dinas Mawddwy, Talybont and Corris as well as the small coastal resorts of Aberdyfi and Borth. To the south is the university town of Aberystwyth, an important Welsh cultural centre.

The **Welsh language** is widely used in the community and is a significant source of local pride and identity. The Biosphere Partnership itself operates bilingually. In recent years the area has experienced an inflow of English people, many attracted by the 'green' lifestyle associated with the successful Centre for Alternative Technology just north of Machynlleth.

The **redesignation process** is being co-ordinated by a partnership consisting of representatives of local authorities, government bodies, farming organisations, community group and other interests. It is led and funded by the Countryside Council for Wales, a national organisation answerable to the Welsh Assembly Government. It is hoped that the partnership's draft submission will be ready by the winter of 2007, to be forwarded to UNESCO MAB for its summer 2008 meeting.

Full information about the area, its ecology, landscape, economy, our local membership and the community engagement process can be found on the websites of the Dyfi Biosphere and of **ecodyfi**, the regeneration organisation for Bro Ddyfi, the Dyfi Valley, which services the biosphere partnership.

In order for any international contacts to be mutually relevant and practical we feel that prospective partner biospheres may share **some key characteristics** with our community in terms of, for example, location (temperate, coastal), scale (area, population), agriculture (pastoral: sheep, store cattle), strong sense of identity, bilingual culture, low impact tourism, well developed environmental sector and/or a nearby higher education/research institution.

Depending on the level of mutual interest expressed we would anticipate using the following **communications methods**:

- initial exchange of (translated?) emails and attachments suitable for onward transmission to some partnership members and associates
- exchange of documentation – reports, maps and tourist brochures for example which could form the basis of small local displays
- initial videolink contact – though we are aware of its limitations
- possible invitations for specialist guest speakers to our area
- study or exchange visits by partnership members or thematic groups.

In the **short term** we would be interested in sharing information and experiences with Biosphere organisations which have completed the re-designation process from purely biodiversity criteria to Seville criteria, perhaps on issues such as:

- successful community engagement activities and methods
- balancing/reconciling/resolving conflict between competing interest groups
- maintaining the momentum between application and (hopeful) acceptance
- designing the governance framework or corporate structure
- seeking balance between local interests and outside institutions
- staffing levels, responsibilities and funding.

In the **medium term** our interest would be sharing experience in developing research projects and/or 'quality economies' in the following sectors:

- pastoral agriculture and diversification, small scale horticulture, forestry
- sustainable / sensitive / activity / cultural tourism
- environmental products, services, education and training
- culture, language, media and/or publishing in a bilingual context
- arts: visual, literary, performance, participative.

In the **longer term** our interest would be in developing selective joint projects in some of the above sectors, subject to funding from national, European or international sources. These could be operated by Biosphere organisations themselves or by associated bodies such as enterprise agencies and academic or research institutions. Whilst we would be reluctant to be too prescriptive, they could, for example, involve:

- research in social or biological sciences
- economic and community development
- new initiatives in environmental education
- joint projects in the cultural or linguistic sectors
- innovation in tourism marketing
- exchanges involving school and youth groups

We would genuinely welcome ideas from others.

Expressions of interest or suggestions for exploratory exchanges along the lines advocated above should be directed to andy.rowland@ecodyfi.org.uk

From the Biosphere website www.dyfibiosphere.org.uk it will be seen that we have already received advice from and established contact with the Entlebuch and Rhôn Biosphere Reserves.

Several members of the Partnership have already expressed interest in contact with the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve near Gernika in the Basque Country of northern Spain and we have had a preliminary exchange of emails with one of their staff. It is intended to follow up this contact in more detail when we have had some further response to this note.

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