



NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

Western Cape Biosphere Reserves 2019 Research Workshop

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Dr Bianca Currie
Sustainability Research Unit
Nelson Mandela University
George Campus

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1. Introduction

The 2018 Western Cape Biosphere Reserves Research Workshop was hosted by the Sustainability Research Unit (SRU) on the Nelson Mandela University, George Campus. Informed by both practitioners and researchers, it constituted an arena to explore an inter and transdisciplinary research agenda for the biosphere reserves in the province. The outcomes of the workshop included the development of several research themes to guide a coordinated approach to research in the Western Cape biosphere reserves. Furthermore, networks were identified during the first workshop as an opportunity for applied research and the inclusion of a diversity of knowledge types in research, as well as a means to improve efficiency by reducing duplication and being more responsive and adaptive in the context of ongoing change. Networks were however also seen to be challenged by co-ordination, governance and communication at multiple levels.

Responding to the challenges brought to light in the 2018 workshop, the SRU hosted a second one-day workshop aimed at developing an inter and transdisciplinary network of working groups for research in the Western Cape biosphere reserves. The 2019 workshop provided a space and process for the coordinated organization of research working groups, based on, but not limited to the themes that emerged last year. The workshop also provided an opportunity for stakeholders at multiple levels, sectors, and disciplines to engage and communicate with one another and to overcome communication challenges across levels, sectors and fields.

In an attempt to build on the results of the 2018 workshop the desired outcomes of the 2019 workshop were to fertilize a collaborative research network for the biosphere reserves in the Western Cape. Primarily the workshop sets out to 1) encourage the formulation of a network of research working groups by bringing together interested and affected parties to form working groups for each theme; 2) elect co-chairs / champions for each working group; 3) facilitate working group dialogues to determine the scope of each working group; 4) provide a space for the development of Terms of Reference (ToR) for the working group and; 5) Nurture a biosphere-based collaborative research network that will be able to source new funding in the years to come.

Participants in the 2019 workshop reflected on the 2018 themes and pointed out that the themes did not include a space for marine and coastal research. Participants also felt that it was a bit premature to establish formalized working groups. Instead participants engaged around what research working groups could contribute to biosphere reserves and what steps need to take place to establish them. This report provides a record of the 2019 workshop process and outcomes. It seeks to capture and document the small group dialogue feedback sessions and the participants' contribution to the outputs of the workshop.

2. Who attended?

The SRU invited committed researchers and practitioners who wish to drive research in the Western Cape biosphere reserves and to be a catalyst for research activities in and on the biospheres. This includes researchers and students, environmental NGOs, practitioners and managers of protected areas and citizen science groups working on and within the Western Cape biosphere reserves. The 2018 workshop attracted 20 researchers and 32 practitioners together with interested and affected parties as seen in Figure 1.

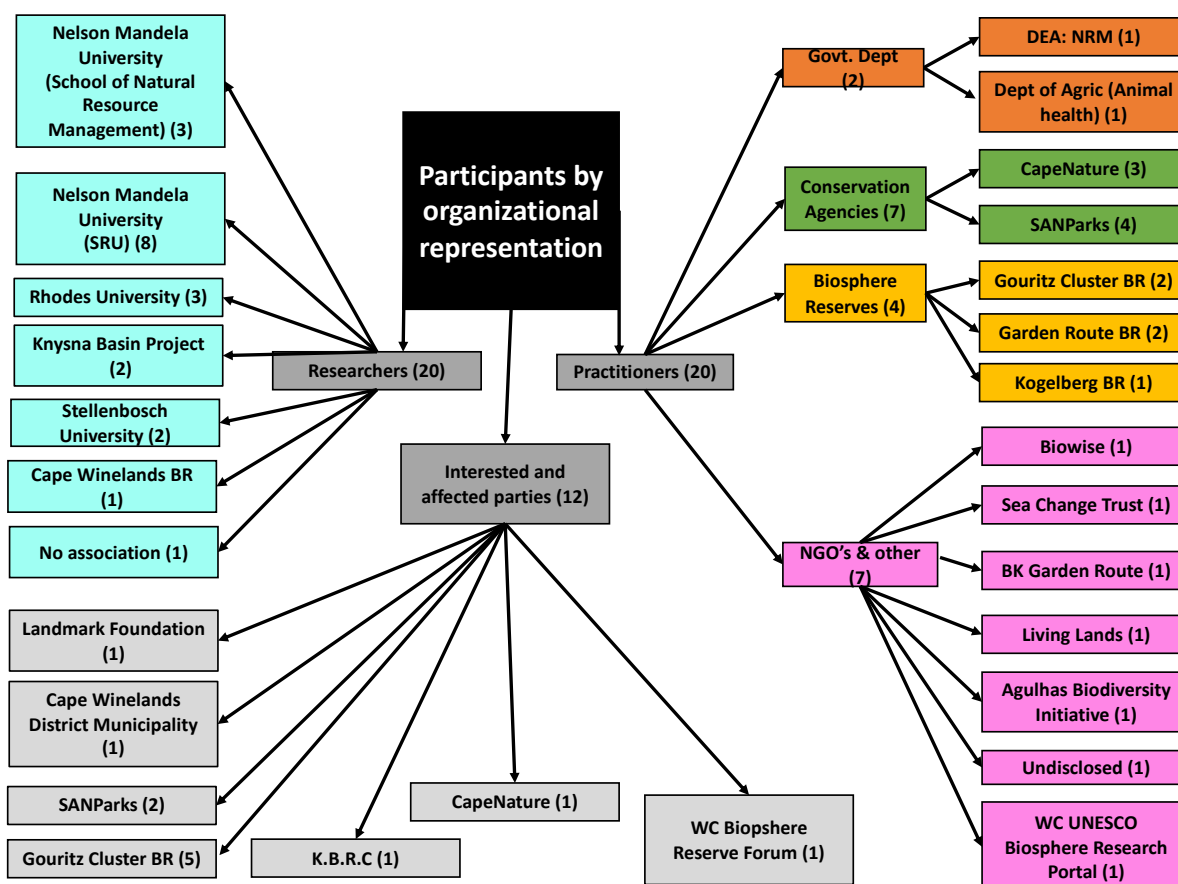


Figure 1. 2018 participant breakdown.

In comparison, the 2019 workshop was mainly attended by researchers (19) rather than practitioners (13) in the field, some of which also identify as both. Find Table 1 which provides a list of the participants (in no particular order) and who they represent.

Table 1. The 2019 workshop participants

Participant	Organisation
Alan Wheeler	Cape Nature Rep – Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve advisory committee
Alta de Vos	Rhodes University
Mandy Lombard	DST/NRF Research Chair: Marine Spatial Planning – Institute for Coastal and Marine Research
Anne Basson	Nelson Mandela University
Bernadette Snow	Coastal and Marine Research -Nelson Mandela University

Bool Smuts	Landmark Foundation
Daniel Basubas	University of Otago – New Zealand
Dick Carr	Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve – Advisory Board
Gabriel Scholtz	Private individual
Gwenith Penry	Nelson Mandela University
Hanna Basson	Nelson Mandela University / Natures Valley Trust
Hannes Muller	Landcare
Herve Fritz	Sustainability Research Unit – Nelson Mandela University
Kaera Coetzer	WITS University
Karen Kotschy	Independent Research Consultant
Keesha Chetty	Sustainability Research Unit – Nelson Mandela University
Lizette Moolman	SANParks
Louw Classens	Knysna Basin Project
Mari Minaar Mc Donald	University of the Western Cape
Mark Brown	Nature Valley Trust
Matthew Zylstra	Research Associate at Sea Change Trust
Matthew Schurch	Landmark Foundation
Myles Mander	Garden Route Biosphere Reserve
Nelsiwe Mpapane	Sustainability Research Unit – Nelson Mandela University
Rachel Fleener	University of Otago – New Zealand
Roderick Juba	LivingLands
Ruida Pool Stanvliet	CapeNature
Samantha McCulloch	Sustainability Research Unit – Nelson Mandela University
Thabo Dlangamandla	Nelson Mandela University
Tineke Kraaij	Nelson Mandela University
Stefan Goets	Landmark Foundation
Chloe Guerbois	Sustainability Research Unit – Nelson Mandela University

3. Method of engagement

The programme for the workshop began with two presentations. The first presentation was given by Dr Ruida Pool-Stanvliet, Conservation Scientist CapeNature and Dr Kaera Coetzer-Hanack, Lecturer at the Global Change Institute, Wits University. Drs Pool-Stanvliet and Coetzer-Hanack presented on Innovative implementation of the UNESCO MAB Programme in South Africa towards the advancement of sustainable landscapes and introduced the World Network of Biosphere Reserves global study on governance. The first presentation was followed by a second given by Dr Karen Kotschy, Research Associate, with the Association for Water & Rural Development (AWARD). Dr Kotschy spoke to the participants about the role of monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning (MERL) processes in enabling research and learning in landscapes.

The presentations set the scene for important dialogues aimed at reflecting on how working groups can drive research in the Western Cape biosphere reserves. The second dialogue intended on defining the roles and operations of working groups. It was hoped that terms of reference and a research approach and strategy would be developed for each of the interdisciplinary themes that emerged from the 2018 workshop. During feedback sessions

after each dialogue table representatives summarized the conversations that took place at each workshop.

4. Dialogue outcomes

The feedback sessions from each of the dialogues were voice recorded and notes from the recordings were generated. A content analysis was performed on the dialogue notes using Atlas.ti software which provides the ability to code notes and allows for the identification of trends. This section of the report provides the outcomes of the content analysis.

4.1 Dialogue 1 - Benefits of working groups

Dialogue 1 aimed at reflecting on how working groups could drive research in the Western Cape. The conversations discussed the numerous **benefits of working groups** such as an opportunity to **share knowledge and resources**, and to **facilitate access to sites**. Participants saw the value in collaborating and felt that research should involve people on the ground and should reflect the diversity of people all the way down to the bottom. The working groups should be a **place for a two-way conversation between management of the biosphere reserve and the researchers** to identify the gaps and needs of the reserve, and finding synergies in the landscape, between biosphere needs and the research proposed. A working group **network** could improve the value and connectedness of research. The network can focus the **research around common goals** and objective and facilitate **inter-disciplinary** studies. The network can also be used to **leverage funding** and **unlock capacity**.

Participants did however feel that working groups for the Western Cape biosphere reserves are premature and forced and that organizing them around themes is inappropriate. **Working relationships** were suggested as a better approach. It was highlighted that research groups arise from funding applications and, common research problems. It was suggested that engagement should take place around **key questions** rather than themes. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the themes that emerged from the 2018 workshop did not include marine and coastal nor were they place based; whereas the research taking place on and in biosphere reserves should focus on addressing problems on the ground which are specific to the biosphere reserves, **place based responsive research**. Suggestions were made to review, improve and adapt the 2018 themes. It was felt that the 2018 themes should not be used to organize working groups around, but neither should they be abandoned. It was suggested that they be used to guide the bigger picture.

4.2 Dialogue 2 - How biosphere research working groups would look like

In answering what would a working group for the biosphere reserves look like, a dominant question workshop participants engaged around was who should be involved? Participants stressed the importance of the **working groups' make-up**. The 2018 workshop participants and those attending the 2019 workshop were considered and participants asked if they were the "right people in the room?" It was suggested that the working groups be made up of a **diverse representative group** of the people in the landscape with a common interest. Diverse groups with diverse research approaches (top-down and bottom-up) top down approach but with a free flow from the bottom up to help facilitate relevant research. It was also mentioned that diversity was important for resilience and being able to harness the diversity will be of a great advantage, but with increased diversity comes a decrease in efficiency. A balance between diversity and efficiency was suggested.

Participants went on to discuss who should be involved, this included individuals who are affected by the research and those who influence or enable research. A mixture of individuals from **different organization and disciplines** with an ear to the ground and holding local knowledge of the system should be sought. University and independent scientists, decision makers, conservation organizations and practitioners in the landscape, communities, NGOs and the government sector (regional and national) were mentioned as important working group members to consider. It was mentioned that members are to have credibility and legitimacy in terms of their research status/ reputation/ experience. It was also felt that biosphere reserves should not be gatekeepers and that these working groups are like a bus for people to use for research. If a group of researchers in the biosphere reserve want to do something, then they can. A question that arose was should the group be made up of people working in the landscape or can people from other areas also join in?

Some participants recommended starting with **core group** of passionate and committed people who can form a larger group. Get the people in the room who want to work together and start doing things to make it happen yourselves. Others felt the core team could fulfil a specialist advisory role and must be enthusiastic (fire in their belly/ committed and dedicated) because success hinges on them. The core team should be fixed, and they should go on to identify who is needed. Members need to be influential enough to get things done but also flexible in terms of having enough time to commit to the research group. Members need to have the time to focus on the working group especially developing the human resource capacity and resources to start projects.

Participants felt that the working groups should work around common goals and objectives. These should be based on the **common biosphere reserves goals** which are (1) to conserve genetic resources, species, and ecosystems, (2) act as sites for scientific research and monitoring, (3) and promote sustainability in communities and local regions surrounding the biosphere. Furthermore, the objectives could guide measures of success or failure. It was also felt that the working groups should concentrate on user inspired / bottom up inspired research.

Participants also felt that the working groups should be guided by the **TRUST principles** (transparency, robustness, uncertainty management, sustainability and trans-disciplinarity) and that time for reflection should be included in the working group processes. It was also felt that a flexibly system and process which provides freedom to continue without being dependent on the presence of all the members was needed. Resource allocation should be transparent, and anyone should be able to apply. Some felt that incentives and deadlines are also needed to ensure productivity.

When it came to roles to be considered in the working groups, participants felt that working groups should be led by a general all-rounder / **coordinator** who undertake “fire in the belly” research with **champions** to keep a diverse group motivated. There is also a need for people to do **fundraising** and communication. Groups should be able to do fundraising in order to be sustainable and to be able communicate the outcomes of the research. There is a need for **scientific communicators** who can translate between the stakeholders and to have someone that is good at proposal writing and fund raising (coordinator).

4.3. Dialogue 3 - Next steps

In considering the next steps to be taken participants predominantly felt that undertaking a gap / situation analysis was the first step to take. There after working group objectives and a research plan including a MERL process should be developed. Fundraising for working group activities should also be undertaken. Each of these steps are further described.

Gap / situation analysis

Participants felt that the working group is there to respond to the needs of the biosphere reserve and its needs should be identified by the management authorities or the existing research being undertaken. Considering the biosphere objectives, an inventory of the research and engagements with stakeholders to identify research needs and gaps would be the first steps.

- Develop an **inventory** of researchers and what topics of research are currently being undertaken
- **Identifying and engage with the key actors** and interest groups to find out what management problems and research needs there are
- Make a **quick assessment** to see what research is needed and to whom it will be relevant
- **Seek synergies** and link to existing institutions and custodians of long-term data to see how their work can fit into the biosphere
- Consider **who** is going to do the research and groundwork?

Formulate working group objectives

Participants felt that the working group objectives need to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound). If we don't set them up SMART then we cannot see how well we have done and where we are going. We need to set up our objectives clearly and apply MERL.

- Formulate **SMART objectives** for the working group
- Establish a **MERL process** to measure success or failure

Develop a biosphere reserve research plan

Participants suggested that the core groups develop terms of reference for data sharing and ownership of information to ensure compatible methods and data and a reserve research plan which should consider the working group goals and objectives, how funds will be raised, how existing resources can be used.

- Develop **data sharing terms of reference**
- Develop a biosphere reserve **research plan**

Monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning

The importance of monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning (MERL) within working group processes was highlighted especially in terms of focusing on long term goals of the biosphere reserves. MERL systems need to be in place to evaluate research progress and can serve as a way of tracking what is happening. It is key in both knowing what is going on and if the research is doing what it is supposed to do and also for communicating what is happening to entice and to leverage funding and investors. In other words, identifying pathways for adaptation and transformation. Participants suggested:

- Development of a **MERL system** to measure research progress
- Apply MERL to data management.

Fundraising

Funding to establish institutional capacity for the working group was highlighted as one of the largest issues working group establishment will face. Without funding and manpower there will be no results or research. Participants suggested:

- **Consider the resourcing needs** to address the identified gaps
- Consider **realignment of resources** (relocate resources)
- Consider new resource needs and to **think beyond a project to a programme** to ensure sustainability
- Identifying existing funded research related to the biosphere and its research needs.
- Collaborate to develop research funding **proposals**

5. Conclusion

Working within biosphere reserves means working at the interface between complex natural and social systems. This unavoidable complexity means that defining working groups for inter and transdisciplinary research within biosphere reserves is unlikely to simply follow a step-wise process. Rather, progress can only be attained through multiple iterations of participation, reflection and learning in a manner akin to ‘two steps forward, one step back. Furthermore, achieving continuity from one workshop to the next is often challenging, especially when there is only some continuity in attendees from one to the other. The 2018 and 2019 Western Cape Biosphere Reserves’ Research workshops have not been immune to this challenge.

The 2018 workshop resulted in themes to guide research in the biosphere reserves and the 2019 workshop set out to establish a network of working groups orientated around the 2018 themes. The intention for the day was to begin formulating Terms of Reference documents (TORs) for the various working groups and to begin discussions on potential topics for research. There was however initial pushback to the themes and establishment of working groups which were perceived as being premature. Organizing the working groups according to the themes was not wholly appropriate, as they were not refined and lacked a marine and coastal component, nor are they a primary driver of research.

The 2019 biosphere reserves research workshop instead focused on how working groups can help drive research within biosphere reserves and what biosphere reserve research working groups would look like instead. The conversations focused on the aims, operations, functions and guiding principles of working groups and who should be involved in the working groups for the biosphere reserves. The outcomes of the 2019 workshop included suggestions related to the working group make-up and representation. It was felt that the working groups should be inclusive of multiple disciplines and multiple sector representation. It was clear that participants felt that the working groups should not be made up of researchers only. If research is to be user-inspired and responsive to the needs of the various biosphere reserves a diversity of stakeholders need to be involved. The outcomes also suggested that the working groups should be guided by common biosphere reserve goals and TRUST principles.

Clear first steps to be taken leading up to establishing working groups was also an output of the 2019 workshop. These first steps included identifying and approaching individuals to establish core groups or working relationships to undertake a gap or situation analysis; the formulation of SMART working group objectives and establishing monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning (MERL) processes to guide working group operations; and lastly to begin formulating biosphere reserve research plans.

Despite the deviation from the original objectives of the 2019 workshop a clear path for the establishment of working groups for the biosphere reserves has been laid out by participants, who left the event with steps in mind. The next 2020 Western Cape Biosphere Reserve workshop will continue to drive a working group agenda for the biosphere reserves in the province. It is hoped that the next workshop can provide a space to show case particular research taking place and if possible, to highlight research opportunities from the gap / situation analyses.