



Chairperson Statement, 2021

I share the sentiment of a colleague who suggested to me that ‘2021 has been a hectic decade!’ I am not sure of the terminology we may use about 2020 but these are two years that seem light years away from how we were before the COVID-19 pandemic. Our ways of being in the world have changed radically. Many of us have lost family, friends and work colleagues to COVID-19, or have ourselves experienced its health, economic and psychological impacts. The pandemic has underscored a sharpened awareness of the global nature of our world and the major environmental, economic and human challenges arising all around us. And yet, it is our local worlds that remain critical to us. In this respect, The Garden Route Biosphere Reserve is home to a number of these local worlds. Communities whose livelihoods continue to depend on the ocean and waterways of the reserve, those farmers, industrialists and communities finding greater competition for quality water resources in their neighbourhoods and catchments; the poor for whom natural resources have become ever scarcer, whose livelihoods disappear like desert mirages, and whose access to nature becomes ever more difficult.

It is in the context of these biosphere ‘families’ that the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve has found a renewed energy and purpose in its role as a collaborator, facilitator and champion for landscape scaled appreciation of the beauty, opportunity and challenges facing all of us who call the Biosphere Reserve home. The Board of the biosphere reserve, for the first time, has been able to appoint a highly skilled Chief Executive, Dr Bianca Currie, who has wasted no time in giving energy, direction and input into projects and work that establishes the reserve as an active agent on the ground, and ensures that we are now in a position to strongly fill the three key roles of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO): contributing to conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and species and genetic variation; economic and human development that is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; and provision of support for demonstration projects, educational, scientific and monitoring and evaluation roles that promote conservation and sustainable development. As you pursue the companion Annual Report of the Chief Executive, you will gain a sense of the operational work we are undertaking, the partnerships we are creating, and the family of communities we work with or intend to work with, to ensure our work leads to greater equity in access to the benefits of the Garden Route. I would particularly like to mention WWF which has become a key intellectual and financial partner, and to the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve senior management and staff who have willingly shared their expertise and experience with us, as we have begun to work across the two biospheres, which together cover a terrestrial area of over 4 million hectares and a marine territory of considerable scale and growing importance.

I am pleased to report that we have continued to manage the governance affairs of the biosphere reserve through a dedicated and astute Board of Directors, to whom I express my sincere gratitude, for giving time for pro bono work of excellence. To Peet Joubert, Glenwin Sefela, Ewayne Le Roux,

Japie Buckle, Wentzel Coetzer and Hennie Swanevelde, thank you. We have received a clear audit from our auditors, our legal requirements have been monitored and our position on many contentious issues, steered with excellence by the Board. In addition I am delighted with the compliments we have received from the Department of Environment and Development Planning (DEADP) and the WWF for our monitoring and reporting related to our commitments and partnership with them. The Board is also talking seriously of its transformational agenda and adding members from relevant communities we have yet not reached.

From the side of the Board we wish to say a special word of thanks to Luzanne Visagie, who has managed the biosphere administration most adequately, and who leaves the administrative position at the end of the year. A marriage in January suggests a new set of enjoyable administrative and other tasks on the horizon. Our best wishes to you and your family, Luzanne. Finally, there comes a time when board members have to relook at commitments to family and work. If I were to single out one of our most diligent and insightful board members who has helped me understand so many issues that relate to the work of the board, then that would be Wentzel Coetzer! Wentzel is Biodiversity Stewardship Facilitator at the prestigious Conservation Outcomes as well as a Director of the GRBR. At this time his and his wife are looking to expand their family and Wentzel has asked for me to accept his resignation so that he can spend more time with his young and growing family. I am sorry we have to accept Wentzel's resignation and we thank him for his considerable expertise and contribution to the work of the GRBR. We will, no doubt, continue to work with Wentzel and to draw on his experience and advice. Our best wishes to you and your family, Wentzel

Finally, I am reminded of the poster in my youngest son's bedroom, the text and image of Martin Luther King and his 'I have a dream' vision. Against that vision, is a thought about the new variant of the Covid virus which signals how volatile the future is likely to be. Against history and looking positively to the future, I am aware how often it is our communities and spiritual leaders who give us a vision for renewal. So, against that backdrop, to our stakeholders and communities, I hope you have a restful and peaceful break at the end of 2021 and will be ready to start 2022 and to share your diverse dreams with us for what is likely to be a challenging future.

Professor Robert Fincham

Chairperson

Garden Route Biosphere Reserve

November 2021