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WHAT IS A BOTANIC GARDEN & THE FUTURE OF PROVINCIAL BOTANIC GARDENS

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The horticultural industry is worth \$2.5 billion dollars for Australia and employs a large number of people. While the nursery and amenity horticulture is only a proportion of this sum, the vast majority of Australians have a direct relationship with this component. Australians have amongst the highest private ownership of homes, and gardens, in the world and gardening is listed as one of our most popular hobbies. The success of Australia's Open Garden Scheme, which now attracts thousands of visitors to a wide variety of gardens, highlights our interest in gardens.

It has been estimated that there are about 1,500 botanic gardens in the world, and about 27 in Australia. There are about the same number in Victoria which are referred to as provincial botanic gardens and were established last century. While each of these Gardens fulfils the role of a Botanic Gardens to various degrees they are all-important depositories of the world's flora and major tourist attractions.

In the past Botanic Gardens primarily focused on plant collections, often arranged according to families or genera, and the associated herbarium researched plant taxonomy and classification. These important functions continue, but it is likely that Gardens will also be involved in ecological research and plant conservation programs. Botanic Gardens have four primary roles, recreation, education, research and conservation. While the emphasis on these roles may vary between Gardens, it is for these reasons that Botanic Gardens differ from Public Parks.

Each of the capital cities in Australia set aside land early in their settlement for a Botanic Garden. In addition, the major provincial towns reserved land for botanic gardens and public parks, especially in Victoria (Geelong, Portland, Warrnambool, Hamilton, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Ballarat, Malmesbury, Koroit, Port Fairy, Colac, Kyneton, Ararat and Beechworth), but also in New South Wales (Albury, Wagga) and Queensland (Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Cairns). In Victoria, new Botanic Gardens have been created at Gisborne, Berwick, Cranbourne, and at Colaraine; the Points Arboretum.

While it has been debated whether or not the provincial botanic gardens in Victoria are Botanic Gardens, it was certainly the intention of the early curators, the Acclimatization Society and the Government Botanist, Baron Ferdinand von Mueller to grow a wide variety of plant species in these public reserves. Some of the reserves also displayed animals as part of their acclimatization role. Botanic Gardens were created on land reserved for Public Gardens (eg. Hamilton and Buninyong) and Botanical Gardens (eg. Castlemaine).

Mueller encouraged citizens to commence parks and botanic gardens in their own locality. He imported and exchanged many plants into Australia and distributed seeds, cuttings and seedlings around Victoria as part of the acclimatisation experiments. In 1870, Mueller forwarded to the Public gardens at Koroit, 190 plants; Kyneton 100 plants; Daylesford 264 plants and Castlemaine Botanic Gardens 775 plants (1870). Daniel Bunce, curator of the Geelong Botanic Gardens also imported plants and formed an extensive collection of species, and distributed plants to other Gardens. Bunce helped lay out the Gardens at Colac and Camperdown.

In their quest for developing Botanic Gardens, local councils who managed the reserves, sought the expert advice from William Guilfoyle, Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Guilfoyle

designed (or redesigned) Gardens at Warrnambool, Horsham, Koroit, and Camperdown. Just as he was doing at Melbourne, Guilfoyle prepared a layout that included botanical collections of plants in a picturesque landscape. The 1881 plan for the Hamilton Botanic Gardens, shows Guilfoyle proposed beds for Australian natives, perennials, roses, New Zealand plants, medicinal, palms heaths, native and exotic, and other plant collections.

Today these Gardens are highly valued by the community and form an important function in the open space network of regional towns. Just like other public institutions, art galleries, museums and libraries, they offer an important tourist facility. A survey between 1993-1995 by Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that 44%, 5.6 million of the Australian population over 15 years old (not counting overseas tourists) visit at least one botanic gardens each year. Botanic Gardens are the second most popular cultural venue attended, cinema is the first. Of the visitors 36.7% visit only one a year, 26.2% twice and 16.8% more than five times.

Recreation is the most popular reason for people visiting Botanic Gardens, a place for relaxation, entertainment and peace. A visitor survey of visitors to the Kew Botanic Gardens in 1989 showed that almost 80% of the visitors came to sit on the grass for relaxation. Recently the entertainment potential Gardens have to offer have been extensively developed and now a number of outdoor theatre activities, plays, music and movies are staged. Not only does this bring in important revenue but it encourages a section of the public that may never have been to the Gardens, and may return to other activities, and even become Friends. Outdoor movies are not a new activity and occurred in the Hamilton Botanic Gardens and Queen Victoria Park in Beechworth in the 1920s.

The success and future development of Botanic Gardens relies very much on developing partnerships with key stakeholders. It is no longer viable to see the Garden as an isolated resource from broader tourism and economic development. It must be viewed more than a beautiful Garden with a collection of plants and as a venue for other activities. The Garden is a major asset to tourism and the town economy, but unlike a museum or art gallery it does not directly financially benefit from visitors, and may in fact suffer if the public are not carefully managed.

Major events offer an opportunity to increase public interest, and revenue, and justify public money spent on the maintenance of the Garden. The "blockbuster" exhibitions at the National Gallery, while very expensive, have raised the profile of the Gallery and brought in revenue and sponsorship. It has been estimated that the well-established Ballarat Bogonia Festival raises in excess of \$5m for the Ballarat economy. The Festival is staged with \$500,000 in-kind sponsorship (equipment hire, advertising and promotion in the media), expenses of \$450,000 and there is a cash donation of \$50,000. The Festival is the main tourist event and costs the City of Greater Ballarat of \$140,000, an expense they are willing to accept. As part of this year's Wine and Food Festival, the Botanic Gardens was the venue for the popular "longest lunch", held amongst the Prime Ministers Avenu. Special events also occur in other Gardens, the Rose Festival at Benalla, and during Heritage Week and other festivals, the Friends provide additional Gardens tours. There is an enormous opportunity to stage joint activities with other institutions, especially the Art Gallery and Museums to promote the Gardens.

The success of the Tourism Victoria's "Jig-saw, every piece of Victoria" program is now widely acknowledged. Considerable attention is placed on the connections between the tourist destinations and to encourage visitors stay longer. The formation of partnerships between similar public institutions, museums, and galleries should be developed as part of an overall tourism strategy. Even today the important role of Gardens and other public institutions to tourism is not promoted. The Warrnambool and Hamilton Internet site makes no mention of the Botanic Gardens or Art Gallery, while the City of Albury includes extensive WebPages on the Botanic Gardens, and Friends. The co-operation with other business, food, retail and accommodation outlets should be explored and all are potential sponsors. A few regions have developed Gardens, food, and bed and breakfast packages for the tourist trade.

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Since about 1970 there has been renewed interest in Botanic Gardens, particularly their important heritage and botanic collections. While the plant collections were extensively developed at the beginning, by the First World War, the emphasis changed and the intensive horticulture that had previously occurred was gradually reduced. Changing fashions, fewer staff and new equipment all helped change the type of management and garden designs. Other recreation facilities were demanded and soon sports fields were developed on part of the land. Many of the reserves are very large and not all of the area was used for botanical purposes.

However after the Second World War a major change occurred to the Garden Reserves when due to increased demands for active recreation and camping, a number of the Reserves were re-reserved to include recreation, camping and tourist uses. This occurred at Kyneton, Port Fairy, Koroit, Horsham Camperdown and Castlemaine. The 1950s saw further recreation facilities formed and the inclusion of tennis courts and swimming pools.

A significant reversal for a number of Gardens occurred in 1983-5 when \$125,000 was obtained from Victoria's 150th Anniversary Committee to rejuvenate 15 provincial Botanic Gardens in Victoria. Mr. Tom Garnott, the gardening editor for the Age newspaper, the owner of St Erth and a passionate gardener, initiated this project. This project had a significant role in reversing the decline of a number of Gardens, raised public awareness, and for the first time, preparation of an inventory of plants in the Gardens. This list was used to label plants, to undertake tree surgery and for the first time since early this century plants from the Royal Botanic Gardens nursery were distributed. In 1996, as part of the Royal Botanic Gardens 150th celebrations many more plants, many never previously grown, were distributed to over 30 Victorian Botanic Gardens and the Albury Botanic Gardens.

This project also saw the formation of a number of Friends groups, and since the mid 1980s Friends have been involve in providing a range of activities, including guided tours, growing plants, arranging events and obtaining finances for the Gardens. Some Friends groups maintain part of the collection and financially contribute to its development. The Friends have been called upon to financially assist in the training of Gardens Staff. At Melbourne the Friends funded the attendance of arborists to a training course and another garden staff member on a study tour to the Kunming Botanic Gardens in China.

An initiative of the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic in 1998 was a Grant for Career Development. Mr Paul Scammell of the Albury Botanic Gardens received the first grant of \$4,500 and the funds are being used to train 15 staff from New South Wales and Victorian regional botanic gardens in plant conservation. Participants include staff from Orange, Wagga Wagga, Benalla, Geelong, Eurobodalla, Hamilton, Galaringi, Ballarat, Coffs Harbour, Warrnambol, Albury, Gisborne & Kyneton, Kuringai, Colac, and Hunter Region.

Another initiative by staff from the Royal Botanic Gardens is a meeting with Garden managers to discuss key management issues. These opportunities to learn and meet with similar groups should be supported at every opportunity. Other initiatives that could be developed include staff exchange programs and formation of regional groups, to increase the horticultural and botanical skills, communication and exchange of ideas. If your Garden is not part of these schemes you should be asking why! While many Gardens have management plans and masterplan, it is the skills of the gardener, and financial and equipment resourcing that will determine the end result.

These staff training initiatives will assist in developing the education, research and conservation role of Botanic Gardens. This is one area, and vital to a Botanic Gardens, where there are insufficient resources being provided. This has long been the situation, and unless these were included in the competitive tender contract, they do not occur. It has often been the interests of an individual that lead to the development of a plant collection, eg Escallonia at Port Fairy, Abutilon at Hamilton. The Roses at Benalla were an initiative of the Rotary Club, or with the Tuberous

Begonia at Ballarat a long tradition that has major tourist benefits. Friends and trained guides are undertaking much of the educational role of provincial gardens. This role needs support from the schools and the opportunity to form partnerships with all levels of educational institutions needs to be explored.

Conclusion:

Much more work, with an emphasis on the important primary roles of a Botanic Gardens should be developed. Firstly there is an urgent need to map and maintain plant records. Many of the plants recently distributed have been collected from the wild, their provenance is known and it is very important that their location is known. With today's computer technology this information is relatively easy to record. This could lead to a listing of all the plants in Botanic Garden in Victoria, and Australia. A Census of Plants exists for the 6 major capital Botanic Gardens (excludes Darwin and Mt Coo-tha), and is a project of the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens.

There is a need to form networks with key Government Departments, including Tourism Victoria, Business Victoria, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Arts Victoria. Opportunities to form partnerships with other local public institutions should be explored so that the Gardens are not viewed in isolation but are part of an overall cultural experience. There are many people who have skills, which could make a significant contribution to the development of the Gardens.

There are also Societies, eg. International Dendrology Society, Society for Growing Australian Plants, Field Naturalists Society, Australian Garden History Society and Landcare groups whose members could, and have made an important contribution to the development of Botanic Gardens. Members have provided plants and many have valuable overseas contacts with other members and societies.

The value and use of the Internet for many Botanic Gardens is under utilised and there is an enormous opportunity to use this medium to promote the Gardens, provide educational material and record features, history, planting and events. It is also important for the Friends to promote their work and obtain members.