



Australian National Botanic Gardens Looking to the Future

**Report on a Forum
Australian National University
9 December 2009**

This Forum was convened by Senator Kate Lundy with the support of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG). Some 130 people attended to participate in two sessions led by distinguished speakers. This Forum is the second in a series, following the first Forum held in October 2008

In opening the Forum Senator Lundy explained that it was intended to give the community the opportunity to play an active part in shaping the future of ANBG through discussion on the national significance of this largest living collection of Australian plants and on the role that ANBG can play in telling the story of Australia's native flora and leading research into the challenges faced due to climate change and other environmental factors

The Forum had two subject areas, with a panel of invited speakers in each case. The Panels and speakers were

Panel One – The New Managerial Plan : Key Directions

Dr Judy West – Directions towards the Future

Alan Munns – The Priorities of the Friends of ANBG

Prof Sue Serjeantson – An Advisory Board and Funding Opportunities for ANBG

Panel Two – Building New Audiences

Dr David Headon – Building on a Rich Past

Donald Hobern – ANBG and the Atlas of Living Australia

Gary Watson – Identifying Opportunity : Australia's Schoolkids

Pia Waugh : A Collaborative Agenda

A key theme coming from the Forum was that after some difficult times a note of optimism is emerging for the future of ANBG, although there is still much more to do. It is expected that the new Management Plan will set the course but finding the resources to implement the key elements of the Plan will be a major challenge

The key messages from the Forum are on the following page, with some more detailed notes on the speakers in the attachment.

KEY MESSAGES

- There is optimism for the future of the Gardens, after some difficult times in recent years
- ANBG is a vital national institution that must be dedicated to the preservation, study and community understanding of Australia's native flora
- This vision goes back to the time of Federation but has not yet been fully achieved
- Staffing levels have not been maintained in recent years and this is essential to the future of ANBG
 - The budget delays and uncertainties in recent times must not continue
- In these times of environmental challenges such as climate change ANBG must take a leading role nationally on research on native plants
 - The science base of ANBG should be strengthened and expanded
- Conservation and study of rare and threatened species should have a higher priority
- The living collection has unique value as the major ex situ collection of Australian native flora and their genetic material
- ANBG should take a lead role in unfolding the story of Australia's native flora to visitors from all over Australian and internationally
 - There is a strong need to take the lead in developing partnerships with other institutions to enhance the research and information base on Australian flora
- A key priority should be connecting with schoolchildren who visit the national capital institutions
 - Australians as a whole need to understand the importance of native flora and the key role of ANBG in their conservation, research and use
- Traditional Government funding may be inadequate to achieve these objectives and outside funding needs to be much better tapped into, possibly through establishment of a Foundation
 - Some changes to the management structure should be considered, including appointing an Advisory Board with a meaningful role and moving ANBG towards a statutory authority
- It is important to reach out to younger people, especially using modern social media techniques

Speaker and Discussion Notes

The New Managerial Plan – Key Directions

Dr Judy West : Directions towards the Future

- ANBG has significant national value and must be seen as a national icon
- The vision should include national leadership on plant science and conservation
- The existing science base must be further developed
 - The living collection is the core
 - Rare and threatened species need to be given a priority
- Partnerships are vital to achieve national goals in conservation of native species
 - Centre for Plant Biodiversity research (CPBR)
 - Herbarium
- Future projects should include
 - A national approach to seedbanking using new technology and coordination between Gardens and other institutions
 - This should move forward quickly
 - The Australian alpine seed project is a major first step, in a partnership between the Gardens, the Friends and the ANU; it covers seedbanking, ecology and climate change
- Visitor and other facilities should help tell the Australian plant story
 - More interstate students should visit the Gardens
 - Public programs should be expanded and work in collaboration with other national institutions
 - The international year of biodiversity holds some opportunities
 - The forthcoming Go Green festival in March 2010 is a good step
- Expanding communications
 - A new website is coming
 - Social media approaches must be developed
- Environmental management
 - Approval of access to lake water – this should be available for summer 2010/11
 - Extension of the rainforest fogging system

Mr Alan Munns : The Priorities of the Friends of ANBG

- Welcome the appointment of Dr Judy West and the added emphasis on science and research that this gives
- New directions are looked for in the forthcoming management plan
 - Frustration at things being on hold for so long while awaiting the new plan
- Implementation of the priorities of the new Plan is the key
 - The previous plan had many good proposals that were never implemented
- The lake water project is an important priority, as is the redevelopment of the old nursery site

- The lake water should help get the nursery back to full operation and bring the living collection back to strength
- The living collection is the heart of the Gardens and must be maintained and strengthened
 - There are concerns about the current review of the living collection and the Friends would like more consultation on this
 - The plants need to be considered in the context of landscapes – mature and developing landscapes should be identified for nurturing and maintenance
 - The basis for how the collection is maintained is important
 - Aesthetics are a valuable component
 - Rare and iconic plants should be looked after and given some prominence
- The new nursery is not being effectively used due to under-resourcing
 - Plant outs in the Gardens are very low – only about 15% compared to 10 years ago
- Plant records are also under-resourced and that needs to change
- Adequate staffing is essential
 - There has been a significant decline over the past 20 years
 - The priorities cannot be implemented without adequate and professional staff
- An Advisory Council with a clear and agreed role is most important
 - This has been received positively by Parks Australia for some time but no action
- Greater budget certainty and transparency is vital
- As Government funding is always likely to fall short there is a need for outside funding through sponsorship and philanthropy

Professor Sue Serjeantson – An Advisory Board and Funding Opportunities for ANBG

- Most national institutions have an Advisory Board or Council of some kind
 - To advise the CEO and management
 - To extend the influence and resources of the institution
- Sydney Botanic gardens have a Board with a Chair and 7 Trustees
 - This does not cost a lot of money to run
 - The model of an independent chair and members selected for particular relevant expertise seems to work
- The recent review of the CPBR has recommended that Board should be activated and expanded
 - It should be considered if that Board might be broadened to be the Gardens advisory board as well
- It is most important to extend the reach of the Gardens nationally
- External funding opportunities need to be looked at seriously
 - Sydney gets 60% of funding from Government and 40% from private sources
- There is more potential to tap into ARC linkage grants
- Contractual research and others services should be expanded, given the expertise available through the gardens staff
- The Gardens needs to develop its profile to tap the potential of external funding
- The Public Fund may need to be absorbed into a wider Foundation
- Flagship projects can be most effective in attracting funding

- Such as redevelopment of the old nursery site
- ANBG is a national treasure and must be supported on that basis by government and outside funding sources

Building New Audiences

Dr David Headon – Building on a Rich Past

- ANBG has been through at least 6 periods in its history
- The first period started with Federation, when the need for a national botanical institution was recognised at the Congress of Engineers, Architects and Surveyors, May 1901
- The second period was in the late 1920s, when the importance of the scientific value of Australian natives was starting to be recognised
- The third period started in 1935 when the Dixon report pointed to the present site as a suitable location
 - The fourth period started with the appointment of Lindsay Pryor in 1944
 - Plantings on the site started as early as 1949
- The Gardens opened in 1967 and were formally launched by Prime Minister Gorton in 1970
- The fifth period was the development from 1970 to the present, which established the Gardens as we know them today
 - The latter part of this period had seen some decline for a number of reasons, including lack of resources and some loss of focus on long term priorities
- The sixth period for the Gardens will start with release of the new Management Plan and renewed commitments to the national role of the gardens
 - This may finally give fuller effect to the vision first defined as early as the time of Federation

Donald Hobern – ANBG and the Atlas of Living Australia

- The Atlas is intended to foster more effective use of scientific information on Australia's natural resources, including native plants
- ANBG is very active in developing and managing information on native plants and thus has a key role in relation to the Atlas, for example through
 - The Australian Plant Name Index
 - The Australian Plant Image Index
 - The Living Collection database
 - The Australian Plant Census
- The Atlas aims to harness such scientific resources and provide new and more effective ways to use such information as widely as possible
- Species lists developed by the Gardens will be included, including the National species list and the Threatened species list
- A particular aim of the Atlas is to provide an overview of which plants are grown in which botanic gardens and help identify gaps in the national collection

Gary Watson – Identifying Opportunity : Australia's Schoolkids

- It should be seen as a national responsibility to educate children in Australia's natural heritage, especially native flora
 - Children can discover the national identity by visiting Canberra institutions
- ANBG has not been playing its part in recent years, with only 12000 children visiting, out of hundreds of thousands who come on excursions to Canberra each year
 - The unique nature of ANBG is not understood and has not been sold

- Many visiting students could be drawn to ANBG if marketing is done properly
 - An evening program would be very helpful
- Experiencing a different environment is a selling point and there is a need to tap into Commonwealth programs to support visits by schoolchildren and older students
- The main Federal program of support is being reviewed and the time for ANBG to be better recognised is ripe
 - Ideas such a plants for economic value, flagships, and creating landscapes should be pursued

Pia Waugh – A Collaborative Agenda

- New means of communicating are more and more available through the internet,
 - Giving opportunities for a more collaborative agenda for the Gardens
 - Especially involving younger people
- However older people are also more and more embracing the internet
- Such electronic collaboration can cover areas such as policy, briefings and marketing
- A Wiki can allow interested people to add to papers and text
 - Especially useful for comments on papers and discussion that needs to be in the public arena
 - Videos and audio of key messages can be posted
- Flickr can be used for photos and graphics editing and sharing
- Twitter can be used for short updates and exchange of information on a proactive basis
- There are a number of event management tools
- These media can be used for things such as member registration and updates

Discussion

- Sustainability and climate change were not adequately addressed in the talks
 - Agreed that these are major drivers of future directions for the Gardens
- Far too low a number of schoolchildren go through the Gardens
- The education programs offered by the Gardens need to be expanded and better resourced
- There is inadequate signage to the Gardens on the main roads
- ANBG needs more marketing research to know more about the audience and what they want
- Links need to be strengthened with other national institutions in Canberra
- Participation in Floriade should be reconsidered
- The ANPS is concerned about the gardens
 - Needs more funding
 - A statutory authority needs to be considered, particularly to help gain external funding