



## **ANBG DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2011-2021**

### **Friends of ANBG comments**

#### Key Issues for the Friends

As indicated in the submission on the Management Plan submitted in March 2009 the Gardens should be an ever growing world class collection of Australian native plants, a centre for research into native flora and a place where people can learn about and experience Australian plants. The Gardens should play a central role in coordinating the efforts of botanic gardens and researchers around Australia and their links to other institutions overseas.

Areas of the Gardens that are not well developed should be developed in line with the overall objectives of the Plan.

Major infrastructure projects are vital. With the water problems resolved and the development of the old nursery site under way attention must also be given to projects such as a new visitor centre in a more accessible location, new display glasshouse facilities, especially for the orchid collection, an alpine centre carrying forward the work of the alpine seed project, a world class seed bank, a children's garden, an area dedicated to plants of the southern tablelands and an area dedicated to information and research on the potential for native plants for food, medicinal and other uses.

The basis of decision making of the Gardens should be broadened with an Advisory Council with clear terms of reference to be established as a high priority. In the longer term the Gardens should be restructured as a statutory body under the CAC Act in its own right.

To achieve the major developments that are identified in the Plan significant additional funding will be needed. While strong and growing Government financial support is essential in view of the vital role of the Gardens in contributing to major environmental and other issues, it is inevitable that a much greater level of non government funding will be needed. For that reason it is essential that the Gardens develops an effective strategy and process to tap into philanthropic and business based funding for the future.

The Friends should be recognised as a vital part of the future of the Gardens and should be supported by the Gardens to carry out their role. This includes helping to achieve the major objectives listed above and that needs to be strongly recognised in the Management Plan. In particular, the Gardens needs to again take the major responsibility for training the voluntary guides.

Some key priorities should be seeking to increase the number of visitors to the gardens and ensuring they enjoy the experience and learn something about Australian plants and why they are so

important. The summer concerts and other such events are a key part of that strategy. Signage in the Gardens is still far from adequate and further efforts are needed to improve this aspect. The resources devoted to education of younger people need to be significantly increased and this should be one of the highest priorities after maintenance of the living collection and increased research. Finding ways for greater involvement of younger people in the activities of the Gardens and the Friends is an important priority.

The previous Management Plan had a large number of worthy proposals but much was not delivered. There were many reasons for that but it is very important that the same does not happen with this Plan and that will take long term political commitment and more effective tapping into outside resources. Having said that, it must be underlined that outside resources should be seen as adding to the resources available to the gardens and not replacing government funding.

#### Issues coming from the draft plan

The draft plan measures up well in relation to most of the above priorities of the Friends. Some specific references are highlighted below.

- Recognition of Friends as essential support group for the Gardens
  - This is covered in general terms on p7
  - S. 4.3 deals specifically with the Friends
    - It is hard to argue with these points, which recognise the importance of the Friends and pledge continued Gardens support to the Friends and their activities
  - S. 8.2 recognizes the support of the Friends and their activities by the Gardens
  - S. 4.3.2 mentions maintenance of a volunteer program. The Friends would underline that such programs should ideally work through or in conjunction with the Friends as far as possible. This is also mentioned under S. 8.1.11.
- The Plan notes that ANBG is a Commonwealth reserve and is managed to achieve the purposes for which it was decreed. These are set out on page 125 of the draft Plan and it is noted that the first principle is Community participation. This indicates that management arrangements should, to the extent practicable, provide for broad and meaningful participation by the community, public organisations and private interests in designing and carrying out the functions of the reserve.
  - This is in line with the view of the Friends that ANBG needs an Advisory Council at the very least. This is covered in Section 9.5.6 of the draft plan but in terms that are vaguer than we would like to see. The Friends would like the Plan to indicate that an Advisory Council will be established and the longer term statutory basis of the Gardens will be reviewed by an expert group.
  - S. 8.1.3 also recognises role for an Advisory council to contribute specialist skills and knowledge on specific matters related to implementation of the Management Plan

- S 2.2.4 mentions a site development plan and this is strongly supported by the Friends. The Friends should be represented in this process, which should also involve the proposed Advisory Council.
- S 2.3.4 mentions that research and monitoring will be managed to increase knowledge of Australian flora and the issues in this section identify climate change as a major issue. This priority is supported and it is felt that a long term plan should be developed to collect time series data on the plants within the Gardens (eg flowering times, seed setting etc). It may be that the Friends could assist in collection of this data.
  - Expanded research at the Gardens is strongly supported but the balance between funding for research and the improvements in infrastructure at the gardens will need to be carefully managed on the basis of a broad spectrum of advice.
- S 3.1.15 proposes that the Public Art Committee be reconvened. The Friends strongly support this initiative. In view of the fact that funding of at least some of the art works will in all likelihood come from the Friends it is expected that the Friends will be given the opportunity to nominate at least one qualified person to that Committee.
- S 4.1.3 mentions indoor and outdoor exhibitions. It is agreed that the program of exhibitions should be increased but it is noted that indoor space is limited. It is suggested that one addition to the proposed site development plan should be additional indoor exhibition space, possibly in conjunction with a new Visitor Centre. Some further thought could also be given to site development for outdoor/temporary exhibition space. This could not only raise the profile of the gardens but also provide additional revenue. It is noted that S. 4.1.10 mentions an exhibition working group, which is a good idea and something the Friends would be happy to contribute to.
- S 4.2 covers education. The Friends strongly support enhanced delivery of education programs but it is felt that the proposals in the Plan will need significantly more resources than are currently allocated. It is suggested that an implementation plan that identifies the necessary resources and how they might be accessed should be part of the Actions in this section.
  - S 4.2.21 proposes specific programs for interstate schools and this is supported. The Gardens should be one of the key national institutions that is included in the programs of interstate schools coming to Canberra and it is felt this needs to be further developed
  - The policies to expand education programs towards people with special learning needs and to collaborate more fully with aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people are supported
  - Expanded involvement of volunteers to support the education services should be pursued
- S. 4.5 covers Interpretation, which the Friends agree is an important aspect of the gardens.
  - Signage in the Gardens is mentioned in Issues and in S. 4.5.2. The Friends feel that the Gardens is still significantly lacking in sufficient interpretative signage and would like to

see the Plan recognize that by proposing a program to develop more signage in accordance with themes such as those mentioned in S. 4.5.3

- The Issue mentions the balance between signage and aesthetic values. While this is relevant the Friends feel there is a long way to go before signage reaches the level that might compromise aesthetics. Accessible information is a major element that distinguishes the Gardens from other areas .
- S.8.1 covers staffing. It is very worrying to note the statement that efficiencies have not made up for staff reductions during the life of the previous plan. This seems at odds with the first Aim, which says there is an adequate staffing structure and expertise to manage the ANBG as a national institution and support the role of CANBR. It is suggested that a key action for the organisation review mentioned in 8.1.4 should be to identify the level and structure of staff resources need to deliver the key aims of the plan.
- S. 8.2 deals with Revenue and Financial Management. The Friends strongly support the proposals to actively seek funding outside Government to assist delivery of key objectives in the Management Plan. In particular the ideas briefly covered in S. 8.2.15 touch on what is needed but do not go far enough. A formal structure to identify what funding is needed for and how it might be attracted and managed is needed. This is central to delivery of many of the new objectives for ANBG identified in the Management Plan.
- S. 9.1.7 Identifies potential infrastructure related projects and the Friends agree with those listed as a high priority. We would add development of an area dedicated to the plants of the Southern tablelands and ACT region.

#### A final word

In the main the actions and goals of the plan are worthy and the Friends support virtually all of them. The real test will be to prepare and act on an effective implementation plan. It is recognized that some serious and difficult prioritisation will need to be part of that. However, it is vital that the Government, in adopting the Plan, recognizes that it is also committing to doing everything possible to see the key objectives are fulfilled over the Plan period.

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Contact : David Coutts, President  
[dmcoutts@bigblue.net.au](mailto:dmcoutts@bigblue.net.au)  
62588840/0412678682