



Australian Government

Australian National Botanic Gardens

Media Release

1 November 2007

New national role for the Australian National Botanic Gardens

The Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) is undertaking an organisational review in response to three pressing issues: the impact of climate change; the rising costs of water and electricity; and dwindling water supplies.

The Gardens philosophy took shape in the 1930s, long before global warming and climate change threatened Australia's plant biodiversity. Where once the ANBG was the only major botanic gardens focused on living collections of Australian native plants, several other major botanic gardens and numerous regional botanic gardens now have large living collections of Australian plants. The ANBG will maintain its general commitment to grow and exhibit Australian native plants and will continue to generate high quality botanical information. But it is time to reflect these new pressures in the ANBG's national role and priorities.

Today's urgent challenge is to develop strategies for climate change mitigation and adaptation and to assist with the conservation of Australia's plants where they are threatened in the wild. As native habitats vanish, Australia's botanic gardens can offer bio-insurance for the future survival of Australian plants. ANBG is working with all Australia's major botanic gardens to develop a national approach to species conservation in the face of climate change.

The Gardens currently undertakes high quality botanical research through the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research. This is a high priority and will not change. The Gardens will not 'reduce plant propagation to a minimum'. On the contrary, we will be building our horticultural expertise, focusing on propagating and growing native plants threatened by climate change, to support the conservation of Australian species in the wild. Propagation has been reduced this year only, to enable an extensive census of all the Gardens native plants, as part of developing the climate change strategy.

In addition we need to cut our costs because of escalating charges for water and electricity. The price of water has doubled in the last three years, with the bill for 07-08 expected to be over \$600,000. This is despite increasing water use efficiency, through computerised irrigation systems and some recycling, as well as meeting ACTEW water saving requirements. The Gardens electricity requirements have remained the same but electricity charges have increased 140 per cent over the last five years. Recent price rises have increased the annual electricity bill by \$90,000 compared to last financial year. As part of addressing costs, the resource-intensive free Summer concert series will be reduced to two weekends.

There have been no budget cuts. The budget has increased from \$6.88 million in 2001/02 to \$9.169 million in 2006-07 and to \$9.4 million for 2007/2008.

Like all organisations, farmers and householders in the Murray-Darling Basin and around the country, we must address dwindling water supplies. The ANBG is using around 190 megalitres a

year, a significant reduction in the water use of five years ago, and less than one day of Canberra's urban use. Currently we are watering the entire collection. We are applying water for plants to thrive in the rainforest gully and areas within 20 metres of the path. The remaining areas of the gardens are receiving enough water to keep them alive, but not necessarily to thrive. We have ceased watering the Eucalypt lawn, but other lawns are receiving minimal watering, and soil moisture sensors are being installed for further efficiencies. But to address the urgent challenges of climate change and water, we need to prioritise which native plants we conserve. The Gardens will continue to hold an extensive living collection, but where the climate and soils of other botanic gardens are more suitable for the national conservation effort, we may no longer focus on preserving certain plants.

One Wollemi Pine has died probably because of a fungus disease. Soil samples are being sent away for analysis. The two other Wollemi Pines appear to be thriving. If required, replacement Wollemi Pines are readily available in local commercial nurseries.

The ANBG is working in partnership with the National Capital Authority and the ACT government, including ACTEW, to explore all options for supply of non-potable water, and to assist the ACT in meeting its water recycling targets while reducing our use of potable water.

Media Contact: Margot Marshall, 0418 624 847