



Gardens Recognised in Port Stephens Business Awards — Robert Beaument



At the Port Stephens Examiner Business Awards ceremony held on 31 October 2018, the Gardens received the Award for Best Tourist Attraction in Port Stephens for 2018. This is a hotly contested award in which the Gardens is in competition with a wide range of commercial tourism operators in the region.

One of the first to congratulate the Botanic Gardens on winning the Award was Scot MacDonald MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for Planning, the Central Coast and the Hunter. Scot has been a great supporter of the Gardens and has made a number of visits during his time as Parliamentary Secretary. Scot is shown above (left) with Gardens representatives, Belinda Blanch, Susie Satorie and Maree and Kevin Worth.

The response to the award has been overwhelming. Messages of congratulations have come from far and wide and it is heartening to know that so many people in the Hunter area and beyond care about the Botanic Gardens and are celebrating with us. It was particularly encouraging to see the support we received from other operators in the tourist industry, who recognise the Garden's place in the region's offering to visitors.

Congratulations also to Belinda who has worked hard on our application for the Award.

HRBG Annual General Meeting

— Robert Beaument



The Annual General Meeting of Hunter Region Botanic Gardens Ltd was held on 13 November 2017 at the Gardens.

Board members and office bearers for 2018 are:

Chairman	Ken Page
Vice-Chairman	Lynda McPherson
Company Secretary	Perri Winkel
CEO/Company Treasurer	Robert Beaument
Directors	Kevin Stokes, Patricia Shearston, Michael Cook, Kevin Riley, Stella Savory, Geoffrey Taylor, Peter Gesling

Special guests at the AGM included Meryl Swanson MP, Federal Member for Paterson, Cr Giacomo Arnott, representing Port Stephens Council and Mr Angus Seberry, Hunter Water's Manager of Environment & Sustainability.

A highlight of the AGM was the presentation of 23 service awards and 4 Life Memberships. The awards were presented by Ms Swanson and Cr Arnott in company with retiring Chairman Kevin Stokes. Life memberships were awarded to: Anne Chaney, Ken Hoy, Tom Woolard and Robert Beaument.



Pictures: Retiring Chairman Kevin Stokes with incoming Chairman Ken Page
Meryl Swanson and Kevin Stokes present life membership to Anne Chaney.

At the Board Meeting following the Gardens' Annual General Meeting for 2018, I had the privilege of being elected as the sixth chairman of the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens since its incorporation in 1985.

My predecessor, Kevin Stokes, has chosen to retire from the Chairmanship. Kevin has held the office of Chairman since 2013, and has been a constant figure at the Gardens since its foundation. From clearing lantana and laying out garden beds in the early days to his more recent administrative roles, Kevin has worked tirelessly to develop and maintain the traditions of the Gardens – its volunteer basis, and its focus on Australian plants.

With Robert Beautelement as CEO, Kevin has established a structure for administering the Gardens which shares responsibility and provides for a high level of consultation and cooperation across the organisation where the work and opinions of all volunteers and employees are respected and considered. I believe it is very important that we maintain this approach and show that a volunteer based organisation can continue to be dynamic and innovative and make a contribution to the Hunter Region.

A feature of Kevin's period as Chairman has been that we celebrated the work of the founders of the Gardens through our 30th Anniversary celebrations in 2016, in the recognition of our late technical director, Terry Tame, by the naming of our Herbarium, and not least through the publication of Kevin's book and photographic essay, *The Hunter Region Botanic Gardens, 30 Years Young and Growing*. It was important to celebrate in this way while many of our founders and their families are still able to participate.

Kevin will not be lost to the Gardens. He remains on the Board and is already working on a number of projects to enhance the living collection and its presentation.

I have been fortunate to take up my new role at an exciting time for the Gardens. Over the last several years, and in large part thanks to the effective work of Susie Satorie, Pat Sherston and the Grants Committee, the Gardens has been building up a group of regular sponsors

who have been prepared to support projects at the Gardens. This support has enabled us to undertake a range of projects including paving of the Botanic Walk and other highly used trails within the Gardens, improvement of our irrigation system, new maintenance equipment and the upgrade of the Volunteer area. This issue of *Burrawang* includes stories on a number of projects and new items of equipment obtained through sponsors.

Only last week I met the Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter, Hon. Scot MacDonald MLC, who visited the Gardens along with Port Stephens Councillor and Liberal Candidate for Port Stephens, Jaimie Abbott, to announce a contribution of \$5,500 towards the installation of an electronic notice board at the entrance to the Gardens. This will supplement funding already received from Hunter Water and the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group. The new sign will make the Gardens entrance more visible to passing motorists and will enable us to promote events and encourage new visitors. We are now finalising the design of the new sign and will need to seek approvals from Port Stephens Council and the RMS, but the project should be able to proceed in the next few months.

We have also had some luck with the weather. The first half of 2018, with a hot summer, drought and other adverse weather conditions were difficult for the Gardens both horticulturally and in terms of visitation. Conditions have become much more favourable in the second half of the year, particularly in the spring. The development of our irrigation system and other improvements in horticultural practices are enabling us to maintain the living collection better in tough times. However, it remains no less important to maintain and grow our visitor numbers. Visitors are ultimately the reason we exist, and are the source of the income we need for our day-to-day operations.

There is a lot to do. Fortunately, we are a team and can make progress in a number of areas at one time. Some of the priorities I see going into 2019 are:

- Delivering the projects for which we are receiving sponsorship. Our sponsored projects provide us with a

great opportunity to improve the Gardens and sponsors value and respect our ability to deliver our projects successfully and on time.

- Maintaining our standards of presentation in the Gardens. This steady hard work does not always receive the accolades it deserves, but it is recognised by visitors and is essential to our success as a destination.
- Continuing to undertake projects to improve the living collection. Improvements such as the new plantings in the Succulent Garden and the development of water features in the Rainforests are noticed by visitors and give people reasons to regularly return to the Gardens.
- Encouraging group visits. Group visits are financially beneficial to the Gardens and enable us to provide a more exciting visitor experience. As Chairman, I am retaining the role of Community Education, and will work with Belinda Blanch, our Manager of Fundraising and Events to focus on groups visits from educational institutions, the aged care and disability sector, and the tourism industry. There is also scope to encourage gardens clubs, social and business groups to use the Gardens as a venue for events.
- Successful fundraising events. From the Autumn Fair to sausage sizzles and plant stalls, these events both encourage visitors and make a real difference to the Gardens ability to carry on. We all need to support Belinda to make these events exciting and successful.

On a sad note, I need to record the passing of one of our life members, Alison Woolard. Alison and her husband Dr Tom Woolard have a long history of volunteering and supporting the Gardens. Alison was a volunteer for more than 25 years and is missed by her many friends here. Her memorial service was held at the Gardens.

I would like thank everyone who has congratulated me on my election as Chairman and expressed their support. I believe we can continue to work together as a community of volunteers to maintain and advance the Gardens we love.



Rainforest plants especially from warmer climates, typically flower more in response to rainfall than at fixed seasonal times. Here are some interesting and beautiful plants that responded to the rain received in October.

Randia moorei, the spiny gardenia, (left) comes from the basalt soils on the far north coast of NSW. It is found in subtropical dry rainforest as an understory plant under hoop pine and brush box. Much of its habitat has been cleared for urban and agricultural development. It is an endangered species found in only around 6 locations in the wild. The plant is a sprawling shrub which blooms profusely with flowers that turn from cream to yellow after opening. The flowers are followed by small orange fruit.

The Gardens' specimen is located in the Rare and Endangered Plants Garden.



Graptophyllum ilicifolium, the Mount Blackwood holly, is found north of Mackay, Qld and was introduced to cultivation by the Mackay Branch of the Australian Plants Society.



Icomanthe sp. *Roaring Meg* comes from the rainforest of Far North Queensland and is cultivated for its spectacular pink flowers.



Sloanea australis, Maiden's Blush, is a large rainforest tree found in NSW and Qld. The name relates to the colour of the timber and young leaves.

Five Gardens Highlights for Overseas Visitors

– Ken Page

International visitors often see our Gardens in quite a different way from our local visitors. Australian flora brings a whole range of surprises, often from things which are very familiar to those who grew up with it.

The tour groups who visited the Gardens from cruise vessels earlier this year included gardeners from North America and Europe. Here are some of the highlights that they saw and asked about.

- Pink gum trees. Eucalypts are grown in many parts of the world, but overseas visitors are amazed by the variety found in Australia. The pink bark and sinuous forms of *Angophora costata* caught the eyes of many visitors. Other eucalypts with dramatic bark such as the flooded gum, *Eucalyptus grandis*, also drew attention.
- The Ghost Gum. Many visitors were aware of the ghost gum, *Corymbia aparrerinja*, as an iconic tree of inland Australia, and those who were not going on to visit the inland were excited to see the specimen in the Arid Garden.
- Southern conifers. Visitors familiar with the coniferous forests of the northern hemisphere are interested in the rare and ancient conifers of the southern hemisphere. The story of the Wollemi pine, *Wollemia nobilis*, is of great interest.
- Ferns. Bird's nest ferns, staghorns and elkhorns are unfamiliar to many visitors, and those who have seen them know them only as greenhouse specimens rather than growing in their natural forest environment.
- Casuarina species are naturalised and regarded as a feral plant in parts of the southern United States and visitors were interested to see the variety of forms of Casuarinaceae found in their native habitat.



Corymbia aparrerinja

Upgrade of the Volunteer Area

- Ken Page



The Gardens have received a grant of \$5,000 from the Tomago Aluminium Foundation for an upgrade of the Volunteer area.

Our canny and capable maintenance team have been able stretch these funds to provide for an expansion of the covered area to provide more shelter for volunteers and visitors, a greatly improved kitchen area, and painting — a remarkable job now close to completion.



New Machinery and Other Sponsorship

- Ken Page

The Gardens has been fortunate to receive a donation of a Caterpillar Skid Steer Loader. This will significantly enhance the capabilities of our maintenance team for landscaping and garden maintenance.

We have also received significant grants from the Australian Orchid Foundation for a new shadehouse for orchids (currently at an advanced stage of construction), and from the NSW Government Community Building Partnership program to extend paving of our pathways. These project will be completed in the new year.



What's Happening?

- 2 Dec** - Giant Christmas Plant Sale
- 24 Dec-1 Jan** - Christmas Closure
- 23 Mar 2019** - Sausage Sizzle at Bunnings Heatherbrae
- 14 April 2019** - Autumn Fair

Gardens volunteers ran sausage sizzles at our neighbours, Bunnings Heatherbrae, on 7 October and 11 November.

These events not only raise valuable funds, but also promote the Gardens in the local community.

Keep an eye out for special events happening in the Gardens throughout the year

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