



THE GARDEN CLUBS OF AUSTRALIA INC.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2023

In February 2019, the Committee of The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. considered a proposal to establish a planning Sub-Committee to manage an ongoing program to develop a strategic plan for the GCA and make proposals for its implementation.

The Sub-Committee initiated a simple survey of our 718 affiliates to collect information on age and gender profiles of affiliate members, their gardening experience and the location of their gardens.

The survey also collected information on affiliates' major activities and a general impression of their financial strength. Collection of the information closed on 31st May and a report prepared.

While the data collected from the survey was by no means comprehensive in describing significant details about our affiliates, it did provide a useful picture of the membership of affiliates and their gardening involvement. Having completed the survey, the Sub-Committee is now more confident in developing an initial Strategic Plan.

In the original documentation considered by the Committee of the GCA in February 2019, attention was drawn to the absence of any previous strategic planning having occurred in the almost 70 years since Garden Clubs of Australia was established.

The Sub-Committee believes that it would be reasonable to consider that this first attempt will be somewhat tentative. There are significant challenges to overcome in the relationship between the GCA and its affiliates. A three-year period has been selected to allow both the GCA Committee and its affiliates to understand the proposed directions outlined in this plan and to develop collaborative working relationships at all levels.

THE GARDEN CLUBS OF AUSTRALIA INC. VISION

We will engage with our affiliates to create a national gardening community and develop mechanisms to promote growth and prosperity within that community.

We will act as a national voice and speak publicly on issues that affect and/or promote the interests of gardeners to Government, Corporate Australia and the wider community.

We will form partnerships and deliver programs that enable the quality and spread of gardening interests in the Australian community.

OBJECTIVE

To deliver services, benefits and add value to all affiliates.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

- Engaging and connecting with all affiliates
- Engaging and connecting with significant gardening and horticultural groups at national and state level
- Developing relationships with Local, State and Federal Governments to benefit the gardening community
- Delivering greater member benefits
- Reviewing the structure of the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. to facilitate action on our objective.

With over 700 gardening associations affiliated with the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. (GCA), it should be our objective to provide a range of services to members of that diverse collection of associations while operating within tight budget constraints. Our organisational structure needs to be effective for the purpose of our work in meeting the needs of affiliates.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Currently most affiliates know little of the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. other than its Personal Accident and Public Liability Insurance Scheme. The GCA has been advised that this is the most economic insurance scheme of its type in Australia, but we have failed to communicate that basic information to our affiliates.

Our schedule of formal communication with affiliates essentially exists of four administrative notices (affiliation, membership, magazine subscription and contact details) and these are augmented by occasional notices and requests.

If the GCA is to build a national garden community, these types of communications MUST be a very small minority of contacts that we have with affiliates.

There is an urgent need for the GCA to develop a much enlarged, sophisticated and integrated communication strategy to connect with our affiliates and others; and this must include a simple and effective mechanism for affiliates to communicate with the GCA.

It is only through such a communication system that effective engagement can occur.

Key Actions with Affiliates

- Establish a quality source of information on all aspects of the GCA enterprise in electronic form
- Enhance mechanisms for regular ephemeral information on both the GCA and affiliates to be available, equally accessible by relevant GCA members and by affiliates

- Develop a regular newsletter (perhaps monthly) delivered electronically providing a range of gardening information and news sourced from across Australia and internationally
- Provide regular administrative information electronically with simple response mechanisms
- Develop a plan to expand and enrich the “**Our Gardens**” magazine as the major flagship of the GCA – such a plan might consider adding an electronic subscriptions capacity
- Engage in collaboratively developed assessment strategies to ensure accurate information is available to affiliates and the GCA on the outcomes of initiatives.

Key Actions with Industry

GCA has no formal (or even informal) relationships with any other gardening industry group in Australia. We are self-isolating, even alienating. The development of relationships with a range of groups must be a high priority. These relationships must be seen as of mutual benefit to all.

Serious thought and effort need to be devoted to the mechanisms through which engagement with the gardening industry can be achieved, and we need to recognise that a relationship with almost 50,000 Australian gardeners will be attractive to a number of groups. (It will also depend on a quality relationship between the GCA and those 50,000 gardeners.)

Industry groups that should be targets for the GCA are:

- Nursery and Garden Industry Association – at local, state and national level.
- Horticultural Media Association
- Horticulture Innovation Australia Inc.
- Australian Garden History Association
- Centre for Invasive Species Solutions
- CSIRO
- Australian Garden Council
- Australian Institute of Horticulture.

There are approximately 470 commercial/educational/horticultural organisations involved in the *2020 Vision* which aims to increase urban tree cover by 20% by 2020. The project is now ongoing. Other than the Royal Victorian Horticultural Society, there are no garden clubs in Australia listed as supporters of the program.

Horticulture Innovation Australia has produced a report entitled *Metropolitan Urban Forestry* which will define the *2020 Vision* role over the next 3 to 5 years. It claims the *2020 Vision* project is unprecedented in forming key relationships to build, maintain and facilitate the largest urban greening project in Australia. In forming their report, Horticulture Innovation Australia interviewed 23 stakeholder organisations, 25 media representatives, and circulated 554 surveys. No garden clubs were included in the consultation.

We must ensure that this situation changes.

Key Actions with Governments

In the last three years, the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture has consulted widely and produced the following reports (of significance and interest to gardeners):

- *Managing Pests and Diseases of National Significance in a New Way.*

- *Review of the Australian Pest Animal Strategy and the Australian Weeds Strategy.*
- *Draft Pest Risk Analysis for Brown Marmorated Stink Bug.*

There was no consultation with the GCA on any of these issues.

State and Local Governments are constantly engaging in research and policy development which will ultimately impact on gardeners and the GCA and yet the GCA has no existing mechanism for monitoring these developments.

Actions needed by the GCA

- The GCA will establish a mechanism to monitor government actions that impinge on gardeners and gardening
- The GCA will appoint a Committee member to develop an advocacy strategy with Federal, State and relevant Local Governments and to represent the interests of gardeners and gardening.

REVIEWING THE STRUCTURE AND PRACTICES OF THE GCA

From every assessment, the structure of the GCA is inappropriate to undertake the tasks outlined in this plan.

- The number of Committee members and the distribution of roles is highly inefficient and places insupportable pressure on the GCA budget. While the Committee membership is set at a maximum of 20, it is clear that this number is incapable of being an effective group for the introduction of the significant change required to provide the services and advocacy required by the gardening community in Australia. Over time, the number of Committee members has grown to the maximum and this has been paralleled by an unfortunate practice of “finding a job for new Committee members”.
The partitioning of responsibilities within the GCA and the concomitant absence of a corporate responsibility culture has to change, and a thorough-going review of services must be conducted. If necessary, external assistance needs to be engaged.
- The operation of the Zones and the performance of many Zone Coordinators needs to be reviewed. Historically, this arrangement may have been useful for the GCA operations but in a modern technological society there are serious deficiencies in this system.

In the recent survey of 718 affiliates conducted by the GCA, only one respondent made mention of visits by Zone Coordinators or Zone meetings.

In the last two years, the flow of information to Zone Coordinators and feedback on needs of affiliates in the Zones has been almost non-existent. Much of this can be attributed to the above-mentioned absence of corporate culture. There is no accountability by Zone Coordinators and there are no reporting procedures.

In the last two years, the GCA has not arranged or provided any refresher training for existing Zone Coordinators or training newly appointed Zone Coordinators. This is a serious deficiency in the operation of the GCA and would not be tolerated in any modern organisation.

A review and a redesign of the Zone Coordinator volunteer system needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency, again using external sources if necessary.

- There needs to be implemented a budget allocation with strict limits and budgetary accountability by all Committee members.

MOTION: That the Committee adopt this plan for implementation in the period 2020 - 2023