

## Conference Presentation Outline

Lawrence Smith AM Landscape Architect  
ARAIA B.Arch (UQ), FAILA GDLA (QIT)

### ***“Challenges always come with Opportunities?”***

This is true personally, but does it apply to botanic gardens? Grasping the **opportunity** that came with several unique personal **challenges** inspired my passion as a landscape architect for more than 50 years, and provided the **opportunity** to be associated with planning more than 20 botanic gardens throughout the bioregions of Queensland and elsewhere.

A conference in 1984 to consider the “Status of native plants in the existing Botanic Gardens of Australia” set a **challenge** by recommending at least 18 new regional botanic gardens were necessary nationally. The **opportunity** for new gardens was readily accepted in Queensland and supported by a network to encourage RBG members to meet, interact and make representation to government, council and corporate sector for assistance.

Without the dedicated input and assistance of a vital and vibrant group of community Volunteers and Friends, most town and regional Botanic Gardens would find it **challenging** to say the least, to achieve the aims and create the **opportunities** for which their gardens were originally planned and developed.

### **QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- **PROMOTION:**  
Queensland NRBG (BGANZQ) prepared a distinctive printed brochure to promote the network – Have you seen it? Is it readily available, useful? What methods are most suited to promote regional botanic gardens? What is the audience? Preference for printed or digital versions?
- **STRATEGIC PLANNING:**  
Is there a need to develop a strategic document to guide optimum planning and management of botanic gardens that will assist all RBG to maximise the physical, scientific, educational and social values of their own facility?
- **SMALL PLANTS FOR SMALL GARDENS?**  
Australia’s population is rapidly expanding, becoming increasingly multicultural, and living on small lots in suburbia. Consequently, garden space is diminishing, as is the appreciation and use of Australian native plants, often overlooked with exotic plants being the first choice. How could Botanic Gardens assist to change this attitude?

*The reverse can also be true . . . .*

### ***“Opportunities come with Challenges too?”***

## ***“Challenges always come with Opportunities?”***

*(Opportunities can come with Challenges too?)*

### **1. My Personal Challenges (and Opportunities)**

“Challenges always come with Opportunities? – if we care to look for them. For me, several personal challenges offered opportunities that changed my life. These all inspired my passion over more than 50 years as a landscape architect, to create botanic gardens throughout the bioregions of Queensland, and specialised major urban parklands. Apparently, this enthusiasm for creating botanic gardens was hidden away in my genes!

**FIRST CHALLENGE:** My father was a master builder and from my earliest years, I always wanted to be an architect to tell him how to design and construct his structures the right way! That was the **first CHALLENGE** I set myself, and it opened **OPPORTUNITIES** that I never expected!

**SECOND CHALLENGE:** I encountered the **Second CHALLENGE**, in the first term of the University of Queensland degree course in Architecture. A very persuasive UQ lecturer Dr Karl Langer, through his lectures convinced me to grasp the **OPPORTUNITY to CHANGE DIRECTION** and become a Landscape Architect! Even though that meant completing the 6 year architecture course, followed by a further 3 years in landscape architecture – nine years of study which opened a world of **OPPORTUNITIES** for me, something I have never regretted.

**THIRD CHALLENGE:** Soon after qualifying as a landscape architect, I set off in 1974 to spend nine weeks enmeshed in the gardens and landscapes of Europe. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, was the obvious first stop, as family history recorded that my great grand uncle John Smith, started work there in 1822 aged nineteen, to stoke the boilers in the Palm House. Several years later he was promoted to Foreman Gardener, and finally appointed as the first Curator from 1841 – 1864. He established the first living collections of Australian plants in these gardens from plants taken back to the UK by our early explorers. What a **CHALLENGE** and a huge **OPPORTUNITY** for me to follow in the footsteps of my relative who gave 42 years of influential service at Kew!

**FOURTH CHALLENGE:** These three challenges automatically led a fourth **CHALLENGE!** That was to learn as much as I could about our native plants. I grasped the **OPPORTUNITY** and joined the Society for Growing Australian Plants (ANPSA, NPQ, APS, etc) in the mid 1960’s and have remained a member ever since, accepting leadership positions at National, State and Local levels. This continuing acquired knowledge is the basis for my planning and design in all the Regional Botanic Gardens, and as well for other major urban landscape projects, such as World Expo 88, and Roma Street Parkland.

## 2. New Regional Botanic Gardens Recommended

In 1984, as a young landscape architect, I attended a conference at the newly developing Coffs Harbour Botanic Gardens. In fact, for the previous eight years since 1976, I had been planning and supervising construction for Tondoon Regional Botanic Gardens in Gladstone, in central coastal Queensland, a twin garden developing in parallel with Coffs Harbour!

**CHALLENGE:** The conference focussed on the report into the *“Collection of Native Plants in the existing Botanic Gardens of Australia”*. At the time there were 55 botanic gardens across the nation. The report recommended that at least 18 new botanic gardens were necessary, each planned to be complimentary to the existing capital city gardens, but established in specific bioregions to ensure a continuing, and comprehensive, scientific coverage of Australia’s flora.

The **OPPORTUNITY** to create individual botanic gardens located within the various bioregions was logical and fundamental to me. As one of few Queenslanders attending the conference, I volunteered to do whatever I could to promote the development of new Regional Botanic Gardens in subtropical and tropical northern Australia.

**CHALLENGE:** So began my career ‘mission’ to promote the expansion of the botanic garden network throughout Queensland by ensuring that there was at least one Botanic Garden in each of the 13 bioregions. Consequently, it was a privilege during my career to have the **OPPORTUNITY** to contribute to the planning and development of 23 Regional Botanic Gardens - most new, but others were existing but in need of replanning and rehabilitation.

One of the most important **OPPORTUNITIES** for a botanic garden is for them to be designed and managed to encourage the development of a “Sense of Place” by demonstrating the potential to use local bioregional species in the parks, streets and home gardens of the host town or city.

**That is what I call . . . “Design With Nature!”**

## 3. Queensland Network of Regional Botanic Gardens - NRBG

Early on as the network grew, a **major CHALLENGE** became apparent - the tyranny of distance throughout Queensland, which hampered easy communication and cooperation between these new, relatively isolated coastal and inland gardens. Obviously, it was necessary to find **OPPORTUNITIES** to bring them together and encourage communication for mutual benefit. Consequently, a three-day meeting was convened in Gladstone Tondoon RBG in September 1994.

The meeting unanimously agreed to form the ‘Network of Regional Botanic Gardens – Tropical & Subtropical Zone’ - with the acronym NRBG. A regular newsletter “Alyxia” kept everyone in touch.

The basic **CHALLENGE** for NRBG was to provide the **OPPORTUNITY** for members to meet, correspond, and importantly to comprise a respected body, which could make collective representation to Commonwealth and State Governments, as well as to the corporate sector, for assistance in various development initiatives, sourcing funding, and potential sponsorship.

### **BGANZ - Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand**

Regular meetings were held throughout the NRBG network over the next fourteen years until the AGM of July 21 2008 unanimously agreed that ‘NRBG Queensland’ be disbanded and reformed

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nationally as BGANZ (Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand). BGANZ is the overall national/international umbrella that has orchestrated so many **POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES** for all our Australian Botanic Gardens.



Early meeting of NRBG members at Mackay Regional Botanic Garden, August 2004

#### **Question1: Promotion Opportunities and Methods?**

The Queensland Network of Regional Botanic Gardens (BGANZQ) prepared a distinctive printed brochure to promote the network of gardens throughout the state.

- Have you seen a copy?
- If readily available, would it be useful?
- What other methods are better suited to promote regional botanic gardens?
- What is the audience?
- Is there a preference for printed or digital versions?

## 4. Six periods of development for Queensland BG

The significant geographical expanse and biological diversity of Queensland has naturally encouraged the wide distribution of botanic gardens across the state.

Brisbane Botanic Garden was the first - commenced in 1855, just 32 years after the first settlement in Moreton Bay in 1823.

During the past seventy years, approaching fifty new botanic gardens, have been developed, at least one in most bioregions. There have been six distinct periods of development – as follows:

### PRINCIPAL BOTANIC GARDENS OF QUEENSLAND – CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

<p><b>Late Nineteenth Century</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1855 Brisbane – City Gardens</li><li>• 1862 Maryborough – Queens Park</li><li>• 1869 Rockhampton</li><li>• 1870 Townsville - Queens Gardens</li><li>• 1875 Toowoomba - Queens Park</li><li>• 1878 Cooktown</li><li>• 1886 Cairns - Flecker Gardens</li></ul> <p><b>Early Twentieth Century</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1925 Brisbane - Sherwood Arboretum</li><li>• 1932 Townsville - Anderson Gardens</li><li>• 1932 Toowoomba - Laurel Bank</li><li>• 1941 Glenmorgan - Myall Park</li></ul> <p><b>Nineteen Seventies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1961 Brookvale Park, Oakey</li><li>• 1970 Brisbane - Mt Coot-tha opened 1976</li><li>• 1971 Atherton Arboretum CSIRO</li><li>• 1974 Bowen</li><li>• 1974 Hervey Bay - Great Sandy</li><li>• 1974 Fairhill Botanic Gardens &amp; Nursery</li><li>• 1979 Gladstone - Tondoon</li></ul> <p><b>Nineteen Eighties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1980 Innisfail, Warrina Lakes</li><li>• 1981 Bundaberg</li><li>• 1983 Tamborine Mountain</li><li>• 1984 Redcliffe</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1987 Emerald – Central Highlands</li><li>• 1988 Townsville, Palmetum</li><li>• 1988 Rockhampton, Kershaw Gardens</li><li>• 1988 Goondiwindi</li><li>• 1988 Gladstone – Tondoon</li></ul> <p><b>Nineteen Nineties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1990 Noosa, Lake Macdonald</li><li>• 1990 Mt Isa</li><li>• 1991 Gold Coast</li><li>• 1991, 2006 Longreach</li><li>• 1992, 2024 Barcaldine</li><li>• 1994, 1998 Maroochy</li><li>• 1994, 1999 Mackay</li><li>• 1995 Townsville - 3 sites upgraded</li><li>• 1997 Redlands – IndigiScapes</li></ul> <p><b>Twentieth Century</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2001 Maroochy - opened December</li><li>• 2003 Mackay - opened May</li><li>• 2003 Gold Coast - opened July</li><li>• 2006 Toowoomba – Peacehaven</li><li>• 2008 Cairns – BG expansion to Centenary Lakes</li><li>• 2008 Airlie Beach - Whitsunday</li><li>• 2010 Brisbane - Mt Coot-tha - Conservation Garden</li><li>• 2016 Chinchilla</li><li>• 2020 Cooktown – 250<sup>th</sup> Anniv. James Cook</li><li>• 2024 Barcaldine recommence</li></ul>
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These images have provided a glimpse of forty of the Botanic Gardens of Queensland. The diverse botanic character of each is directly influenced by the specific environment of the bioregion in which the garden is located.

Each one is unique and different, with its own challenges and opportunities

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Tondoon BG Gladstone



Townsville BG Palmetum



Longreach Botanic Walkway



Gold Coast BG

**Question 2: Strategic planning for Regional Botanic Garden design?**

Is there a need to develop a strategic document to guide optimum ongoing planning and management of botanic gardens that will assist Regional Botanic Gardens to maximise the physical, scientific, educational and social values of their own facility?

## 5. BG Friends and Volunteers are ESSENTIAL!

The Extensive network of Botanic Gardens established throughout the regions of every state in Australia is dominantly characterised by community involvement. Without the dedicated input and assistance of a vital and vibrant group of Friends and Volunteers . . . most town and regional Botanic Gardens would find it **CHALLENGING** to achieve the aims, and create the vision for which the gardens were originally planned and developed . . . and with that comes **OPPORTUNITIES!**

- It is interesting to consider the development of the Botanic Gardens of Queensland, which effectively spans across six phases since 1855 - now approaching 50 gardens in total.
- Each garden is defined by the specific **CHALLENGES** and the **OPPORTUNITIES** of its bioregion, and each have differing stories to tell and new inspirations to share, primarily by the Friends and Volunteers who make the gardens tick - this is significantly enhanced by a supportive Council, Curator and botanic gardens staff!
- There is no doubt that every botanic garden offers **OPPORTUNITIES** for special stories and amazing Friends that define the incredible value of community participation.
- However, some gardens are particularly outstanding in how they have made **OPPORTUNITIES** from constraints and consequently inspire others.

*The following selected examples will illustrate something of how the ‘movers and shakers’ from the Regional Botanic Gardens of Queensland, have made a significant difference, and will likely suggest similar OPPORTUNITIES elsewhere.*

<b>Tondoan, Gladstone</b>	Brent Braddick, Ruth Crosson	<b>IndigiScapes</b>	Redlands Council
<b>Myall Park</b>	Nita Lester	<b>Cooktown</b>	Tony Roberts
<b>Gold Coast</b>	Kate Heffernan, Gene Rosser, Mary Woods, Alan Heffernan	<b>Cairns</b>	David Warmington
<b>Maroochy</b>	Maureen Sheargold, Michael Gilles, Malcom, Cox, Lyn Vlismas	<b>Whitsunday</b>	Scott Hardy
<b>Townsville 3 BG</b>	Helen Paulsen, Chris Cole,	<b>Mackay</b>	Mayor Julie Boyd, Cr Margaret Lane Helen Paulsen Dale Arvidsson Irene Champion Maya Harrison
<b>Bundaberg</b>	Council	<b>Brisbane</b>	Dale Arvidsson
<b>Mt Isa</b>	Jo O’Connell	<b>Barcaldine</b>	Jo Chandler, Jenny Mace, Robyn Adams, Jenny Milson
<b>Longreach</b>	Them Themsen		

## 6.Support that **ONLY FRIENDS** can give

**You are in demand!** Friend, guide or gardener – you obviously make major contributions to the establishment, maintenance and promotion of Botanic Gardens in so many ways, and in the process have a lot of fun!

The following comments have been gleaned over time from personal observations and many discussions with friends and garden staff – no doubt you will be familiar with many of these interactions between Friends and the community.

### INFORMATION SHARING

- **Friends have a crucial role in promoting the value of the botanic gardens to the local community, and for visitors to the region**, on guided walks as they provide information and answer questions about plants, their identification and uses.
- **Botanic Gardens are Outdoor Classrooms and Friends are effectively the teachers, stimulating the minds of children of all ages to learn about the values of the natural world ...** even math's and languages can be taught in this attractive environment
- **Musical & cultural events also attract many people to the Gardens for community celebrations, weddings and other family gatherings. Importantly these events attract people who otherwise may have never considered visiting a botanic garden.**

### EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS

- **Information is distributed through signage, publications, brochures & newsletters** to tell the story of the plants and the natural history of the region, and are major tools in encouraging visitation
- **Promoting species through displays of local native plants**, not previously common in horticulture, but preserved and trialed in Botanic Gardens for their scientific value and to **demonstrate their horticultural suitability for growing in home and town gardens**
- **Artists & photographers find many varied subjects in Botanic Gardens**, and exhibit their works in the visitor centre gallery or throughout the site.

### COLLECTION RECORDS AND EDUCATION

- **Botanic Garden herbarium assists the State Herbarium, and offers important tasks for Friends –** plant identification, mounting specimens, plant record database entry, etc
- **Friends help to maintain the scientific value of the collection** by ensuring accepted botanic standards are followed.
- **Friends learn how to break the language barrier to communicate special 'botanic' words** like pollination, hybrid, petiole, etc to those with limited botanic knowledge?

### OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

- **Green Fingers: There is always lots work for Friends to do in propagation, planting, weeding, pruning and generally ensuring that the collection is maintained in optimum horticultural condition.**
- **Safety and Maintenance:** Friends regularly walk the site as guides and will often see a safety problem in the gardens or plant health issues before gardens staff – always report it promptly!



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- **Security and Wayfinding:** Lost children and possibly older citizens too, need careful assistance to continue and enhance their appreciation of the gardens!

### FRIENDS GENERALLY

- **The role of the Botanic Gardens Friends is to serve, inspire and engage with the community,** in many ways depending on your interest.
- **Friend's groups offer opportunities for people to meet others with similar interests,** and a common desire to share with the wider community, the amazing botanic stories found in the gardens and the regional environment.
- **Successful Friends groups transform strangers into a united friendly team with a shared vision,** and the determination and resilience to work together to share the awareness and value of a botanic garden with the community.

### THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS

- **Most importantly, don't overlook the younger people, they make great 'Junior Friends' and they thrive doing a lot of things that we 'mature Friends' find difficult.**

### FRIENDS LEADERSHIP

- **The leader of the Friends is the key:** to ensure optimum community support and involvement; ideally a person with special talents in leadership, friendly and inclusive, rather than authoritative, and one who shares a love of the natural environment.
- **Successful Leaders keep the Friends group constantly thriving, active,** and use interesting, varied methods of both proven and new ideas to maintain and excite interest.
- **Council Support: A botanic garden is much more than just another town park!** Without continuing support and regular involvement from the Council a botanic garden cannot maintain its significance, particularly if the original vision has been misunderstood or dismissed - Friends can help to change this attitude.



Guiding and interpreting the collection



getting your hands dirty, planting!

**Whatever else you do as a Botanic Garden Friend, you will definitely enjoy . . . the EXPERIENCE, the CHALLENGES, and the OPPORTUNITIES!**

## 7. Anticipating the Future

*“A Challenge always comes with an Opportunity?”*

### **MY PERSONAL VISION!**

The **‘CHALLENGE of CHANGE’** is currently generating one particularly significant **OPPORTUNITY** for botanic gardens. Nationwide our cities are **CHANGING RADICALLY** to accommodate the rapidly expanding population by dozing countless hectares of bushland to be replaced by the spreading lifeless clustering of small lot housing. [we are told that Australia needs to build at least 1.2 million new homes in the next five years! Covering much more than 600 sq km] These countless ‘little boxes all look the same’, and do not provide sufficient realistic open space for gardens that could relieve the monotonous urban sprawl, even if the owners want to get planting.

After 40 years living on a 2 hectare (5 acres) rural property, and developing something of a ‘botanic garden’, we moved to a small residential garden (300 sqm) in suburbia. Now for the first time, I am experiencing small garden design and management personally, as one of those countless thousands of new ‘small gardeners’ across the nation. Consequently, I have discovered that this spreading urban **CHALLENGE** offers a very real **OPPORTUNITY** for **CHANGE** in botanic gardens.

What is the **CHALLENGE**? Most of the native species available through nurseries are shrubs and trees, primarily suited to large lots, revegetation and land care, and not for small residential gardens. It is sad but true, that there is a very limited number of readily available, small, dependable, native plants that are suited to today’s minimal size home gardens. Most likely this is more applicable in tropical areas than in temperate.

Botanic Gardens are ideally placed and qualified to take advantage of this **OPPORTUNITY** - who better to select, research, trial, and plant demonstration gardens that display and promote the most suitable small native species for this rapidly expanding, but poorly serviced market?

Accompany this ‘living advertisement’ in every botanic garden, with plant sales of these species, supported by recommended species lists and information, and you have a win, win situation.

Because of the housing crisis, I see this **CHALLENGE** as the number one priority and **OPPORTUNITY** for all Botanic Gardens, to upgrade and expand their demonstration gardens to encourage new gardeners to select and plant the most suitable native specimens in their small gardens. Obviously, the Garden Friends could accept a major and influential role in the planning and operation of this new initiative.

Further, I consider that this **OPPORTUNITY** will have a flow on benefit, because the ‘big green shed’ and other nurseries, may at last look to Botanic Gardens FIRST, to ensure that they market plants that will actually grow in the soils and environment of the local area!

One other important **OPPORTUNITY** will be that by demonstrating in the local Botanic Garden, unique, colourful native gardens of many characters and requirements, then old and new local residents, as well as recent migrants from many countries, will be **CHALLENGED** to simply ‘choose Australian’ before all else!

Now that is a very **RESPONSIBLE OPPORTUNITY** responding to the **HUGE CHALLENGE of CHANGE!**

### **Question 3: Small Plants for Small Gardens?**

**Australia’s population is rapidly expanding, becoming increasingly multicultural, and living on small lots in suburbia. Consequently, garden space is diminishing, as is the appreciation and use of Australian native plants, often overlooked with exotic plants being the first choice.**

**How could Botanic Gardens assist to change this attitude?**