

# **How botanic gardens change the world – institutional arrangements & policy influence in plant conservation**

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## **What drives success in plant conservation programmes?**

Successful plant conservation depends on a range of partnerships between government, industry, NGOs and the community. The influence of botanic gardens in plant conservation depends as much on their relationships with regulators, developers, educators and communicators as on their intellectual and genetic resources. Cutting-edge plant conservation science is genuinely effective when translated into successful plant conservation programmes. However, this translation is dependent on effective policy influence. Botanic gardens can do a great deal to facilitate successful plant conservation outcomes through analysis and application of national and local conservation policy frameworks, and careful attention to integration with key partners to facilitate policy change.

The balance between conservation research, policy influence and conservation programmes will reflect the environment that a botanic gardens operates in. The location of a botanic gardens within a particular sector - for example, in government, within an educational institution, or privately supported through volunteers or endowments has a significant impact on the charter of a botanic garden, as well as on the nature of cross-sector relationships. However, policy influence can be achieved from any location through a careful analysis of the policy environment, a commitment to effective policy integration and an investment in relationships.

## **What is policy?**

What is policy? Policy is challenging to define – policy is the instrument of governance that directs resources in a particular direction. Policy is the outcome of the competition between ideas, interests and ideologies that impel political and cultural systems (Bridgman & Davis, 2004). The challenge of changing policy has been described by Peter Shergold, the Secretary of the Australian Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet as ‘*a contest of ideas*’ (Shergold, 2006). Contestability is a fundamental issue – in-house policies are only forged by a limited internal contest. A key challenge in conservation policy is to ensure that the ideas developed through conservation research can be delivered through successful conservation programmes on the ground. In this context, the challenge is to invest in the broader policy contest regionally, nationally and even internationally. How often have ideas established through research been neglected in conservation programmes in the field? Such failures in translating research into action are sometimes seen rather simplistically as a failure in communication. However, such failures may also be seen as failures in policy influence. The complexity of communicating in complex cultural and social environments comprising communities, industries and government can be daunting. In essence, investing in policy is a way of finding the most effective path to communicate, and in turn, to influence outcomes.

## **Case study – Botanic Gardens of Adelaide**

In South Australia the State’s botanic gardens, although managed by an independent Board, are within the Department for Environment & Heritage. In this context the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide are well positioned to influence the discussion on nature conservation policy locally and nationally. However, this position doesn’t provide any assurance that the Gardens’ advice will be taken! The Gardens must work collaboratively through existing policies and programmes to establish an effective link between conservation research undertaken by the Gardens and conservation programmes delivered by the Department and other sectors of Government, by industry and by the community and NGOs.

The Botanic Gardens of Adelaide, together with other Australian botanic gardens, endeavoured to achieve greater recognition for the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (CBD Secretariat, 2003) targets nationally. The Gardens found a voice by promoting a national working group on biodiversity decline within the context of the Natural Resource Ministerial Council (NRMMC). While conservation agencies nationally didn't see their aspirations as adequately served by the GSPC framework, they recognized key ecosystem-wide threats (- habitat loss & degradation, invasive species & climate change) and have identified the importance of reviewing the national biodiversity strategy. This review provides an opportunity for botanic gardens to contribute to national policy. However, botanic gardens are often unwilling to contribute substantially to policy debate as priorities in conservation research and on-ground conservation programmes are seen to have a significantly higher priority. This policy investment has informed both a South Australian draft biodiversity strategy (Department for Environment & Heritage, 2006), an unpublished report on biodiversity decline in Australia under the auspices of the NRMMC that has in turn has driven a current review of Australia's biodiversity strategy.

## **Institutional arrangements**

Policy only has three levers to effect change – education, regulation and economic instruments such as grants, subsidies and levies. Botanic gardens' conservation research and conservation programmes are likely to be most effective when a reasonable connection is made to these levers. While that connection can be achieved if a genuine endeavour is made to engage policy makers, there are opportunities for structural change to achieve policy integration. The nature of governance arrangements amongst cultural and scientific institutions such as universities, museums, zoos and botanic gardens, and their relationship with government and non-government organizations deserves considerably more exploration than there is time for in this paper. Suffice to say that governance is more often historically-driven than goal or values driven.

## **Future directions**

A dialogue within botanic gardens about the development of policy and investment in policy capacity is worthwhile. Few botanic gardens make such an investment and in some cases might even confuse investments in compliance with regulations such as CITES with genuine policy capacity. If policy investment can effectively influence the translation of conservation research to conservation programmes such an investment may pay significant dividends.

Botanic gardens have changed the world in the past and have the potential to change the world in the future. In the past botanic gardens have profoundly influenced medicine, the nature of our relationship with the natural world, the establishment of empires and economies and the diaspora and commodification of plants.

Botanic gardens intellectual and genetic resources represent an incredibly powerful resource for change. Botanic gardens are currently involved in conserving and harnessing the world's flora to address issues such as dryland salinity, water management, biomass production, carbon sequestration and plant conservation. On the face of it, this is the greatest challenge botanic gardens have ever faced. An engagement in policy development and with policy makers will be critical to botanic gardens achieving success.

## **References**

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