

# **REVIEW OF ALICE SPRINGS BOTANIC GARDENS**

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*MP to speak to André*

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**B** People consulted during the Review February – March 2005

**C** Chronology of key events in the history of Olive Pink Botanic Garden

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# **REVIEW OF ALICE SPRINGS BOTANIC GARDENS**

## **Executive Summary**

Olive Pink Botanic Garden, OPBG, was established on the eastern side of the Todd River in Alice Springs in 1956. It was named after the anthropologist and botanical artist Miss Olive M Pink who was honorary curator from 1956 until her death in 1975. It covers an area of 16ha of which 6ha are developed with planting and irrigation. The balance is in the main rocky hillside supporting native flora and fauna.

The role of OPBG is to establish and maintain a representative collection of Australian native plants collected within 500km of Alice Springs for botanical science, education, conservation and public enjoyment.

It is managed by a voluntary Board of Trustees appointed by the Minister. In 2003-2004 the total cost of running the Garden was \$140,000 derived from a grant of \$126,000 from the Territory Government, and from funds raised by the Board. The grant is administered by the Regional South office of the Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs.

Alice Springs Desert Park, ASDP, opened in 1997 and occupies 1300ha with a core area of 52ha. Further development is planned. It adjoins the West MacDonnell National Park and is 10km from Alice Springs.

ASDP is a Biopark designed to provide an introduction to the desert environment of Central Australia. Environmental management includes aviaries and a nocturnal house to ensure that visitors see native animals. ASDP is a major tourist attraction wholly funded by the Territory Government with offset funding from entry fees and concessions.

Both OPBG and ASDP have counterparts in Darwin in the George Brown Botanic Garden and the Territory Wildlife Park.

This review of OPBG and ASDP has found that the two institutions have different objectives. OPBG is plant species oriented while ASDP is habitat based. Both interpret their collections for visitors and fill important educational roles. Both have tourism and community roles with tourism being dominant at ASDP.

The review found that it would be more appropriate for the grant to OPBG to be administered by a department which is able to advise the responsible Minister on issues related to the science and operations of a botanic garden. This means transferring responsibility from the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment.

The level of community involvement and community ownership including volunteers must be maintained and increased at OPBG. It is generally believed that this would be prejudiced if OPBG were transferred to a line responsibility in a government department. It is therefore recommended that the honorary Board of Trustees appointed by the Minister be retained.

Present staffing at OPBG is a Curator, a permanent part time horticulturist and three casuals giving a total of 1.28 full time equivalents. If Olive Pink Botanic Garden is to continue to contribute to the national network of regional botanic gardens, to maintain its status on the Register of the National Estate, maintain its heritage values and contribute to the cultural and botanical life of the Northern Territory and Alice Springs it should have two full time equivalent horticulturists and some capacity to increase the casual employment to cover for recreation and sick leave and meet peak workload. This would mean a minimum full time equivalent staff of four.

Sources of funding should recognize these roles and be provided by a partnership of the Territory Government and Alice Springs Town Council on the basis of two to one. The Board should be encouraged to raise additional funds but entry should remain free.

Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation supports a better development framework for the future of the Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Lhere Artepe supports the recommendations arising from this review

## **Introduction**

This review of Alice Springs botanic gardens was commissioned jointly by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment (which is responsible for the Alice Springs Desert Park through the Bioparks Division of the Conservation and Natural Resources Section) and the Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs (which administers a grant to the Board of Trustees appointed by the Minister for Local Government to manage the Olive Pink Botanic Gardens).

The aims of the review are:

To report to the Northern Territory Government on the current role, functions and activities conducted by the respective institutions;

to identify each institution's place within the Alice Springs community, within the Arid Zone of the Northern Territory and within the Territory as a whole;

to recommend strategic directions that:

- Ensure clear and distinct roles for the two institutions;
- Maximise the areas where the two institutions complement and support each other;
- Minimise any areas where there might be competition or duplication of roles and functions by the two institutions;
- Maximise the appeal of the institutions to visitors and residents;
- Maximise the benefits that the institutions can provide in respect to the advancement of botanic knowledge, conservation, education and recreation for visitors to and residents of the Northern Territory;
- Enhance the capacity of the institutions to comply with common law or statutory, domestic or international obligations.

These terms of reference together with process, other issues to be considered, stakeholders and intended outcome are presented in Attachment A.

## **Methodology**

There were three phases to the methodology.

- Literature review including documents
- Interviews with stakeholders and professional contacts in Alice Springs, Darwin and interstate ( Attachment B).
- Field inspection of the Alice Springs Desert Park and Olive Pink Botanic Garden and related institutions in Alice Springs such as the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct and

Memorial Cemetery where Miss Olive Pink is buried, Telegraph Station and Blatherskite Park (Showground).

## **Aims of the Review**

### **Aim 1**

**To report to the Northern Territory Government on the current role, functions and activities conducted by the respective institutions;**

#### **1.1 Olive Pink Botanic Garden**

The Olive Pink Botanic Garden has its origins in gazettal of an area of 16ha as the 'Australian Arid Regions Native Flora Reserve' in 1956 with Miss Olive Pink as Honorary Curator. Miss Pink lived on a small occupation lease in the reserve until her death in 1975. The garden was opened to the public in February 1985 as the 'Olive Pink Flora Reserve'. In April 1996 the name was changed to Olive Pink Botanic Garden. The garden was placed on the Register of the National Estate on 30 May 1995.

The garden is managed by a volunteer Board of Trustees appointed by the Minister for Local Government. The Board is, by statute, a body corporate and employs a small number of staff who, together with volunteers, maintain the Garden. The Garden is largely funded by an annual grant from the Northern Territory Government and a small amount of funding is obtained from donations and fund raising activities. Entry to the Garden is free. The total budget for 2003-2004 was \$141,000. A chronology of key events in the life of Olive Pink Botanic Garden is presented as Attachment C.

The role of the OPBG is to develop and maintain a representative collection of Australian native plants collected within a 500km radius of Alice Springs for education, conservation and public enjoyment.

The functions and activities carried out to perform this role include horticulture, labelling, record keeping, preparation of leaflets and brochures, maintenance of a visitor centre, leading guided walks, provision of a kiosk, toilets, shade and parking.

In 2002 the Board of Olive Pink Botanic Garden developed a Ten Year Plan.

"The Vision" is that:

*In ten years, the Botanic Garden will be:*

- 1. Widely recognized as an important arid zone botanic garden*
- 2. Among Australia's best regional botanic gardens*
- 3. Well-known and well patronized by a high percentage of Alice Springs residents and their visitors*
- 4. A well-promoted Alice Springs tourist attraction*
- 5. A place of excellence for the horticulture of Australian arid zone plants*
- 6. A major education resource, including for regional indigenous groups*

## 7. *A focus for arid zone plant conservation*

### **1.2 Alice Springs Desert Park**

The Alice Springs Desert Park has a much shorter history than Olive Pink Botanic Garden. It was opened to the public in 1997 and occupies 1300ha of which 52ha are the core area. Further development stages are planned. Management is the responsibility of the Bioparks Division within the Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. All employees of the Desert Park are Government employees. There are some volunteers.

The Desert Park is wholly government funded but is obliged to generate income through fees payable for entry to the Park and from concessions.

The role of the Desert Park is to provide an introduction to the desert environment of Central Australia for residents of Alice Springs and tourists.

The functions and activities performed to fulfil this role include the development and management to the highest standards of plant and animal husbandry a series of habitats showing the range and diversity of Central Australia's deserts.

Recognizing that many desert animals are only active at night a nocturnal house has been constructed so that visitors may view these animals in natural settings. In similar recognition of bird movement and migration a series of large aviaries house a range of bird species which are difficult for tourists to see in the wild.

Demonstrations of Aboriginal life and culture, interactions of plants and animals, a birds of prey exhibit supplemented by informative labels help to make the park active in education. A teacher is seconded to the Desert Park from the NT Education Department to assist in the educational role.

Visitor services include toilets, food outlets, a gift shop, shelters and portable sound tapes. Low sound level vehicles are available to transport people who have difficulty walking through the Park.

The Alice Springs Desert Park Long Term Plan 2000-2006 includes the Vision '*To be the main reason for increased tourism in the Alice Springs region by being the world's best biopark*'. The Mission is '*To attract visitors through the presentation and interpretation of the Australian arid environment and to contribute to the conservation of arid zone flora and fauna.*'



The values statement for the Alice Springs Desert Park states:

*“The Desert Park presents and interprets the Australian desert environment and its inhabitants, and contributes to the conservation of Australia’s desert flora and fauna. The accuracy, authenticity and appropriateness of its presentation and interpretation and the quality of its scientific work are essential.*

*The Park’s Master Plan, Interpretation and Long-term Plan provide direction for the Park’s operation and development.*

*We want visitors to leave our Park with an increased desire and ability to Respect, Enjoy and Look After the Australian desert environment and its inhabitants.*

*These three key values therefore underpin everything that we do at the Park.*

*We aim to Respect, Enjoy and Look After:*

- *Our local environment*
- *Our global environment*
- *Our work mates*
- *Our Park*
- *Our community*
- *Our visitors*
- *Our business partners.”*

## **Aim 2**

To identify each institution’s place within the Alice Springs community, within the Arid Zone of the Northern Territory and within the Territory as a whole;

### **2.1 Olive Pink Botanic Garden**

Olive Pink Botanic Garden has a significant place in Alice Springs due to its;

- Display of regional flora, including a permanent waterhole displaying desert palms
- Inclusion of Tharrarletneme, the northern ridge of the reserve, known to Europeans as Annie Meyers Hill which is of great significance to the Arrernte people
- Native birds, mammals and reptiles attracted by the plants and the natural setting
- Proximity to the city
- Free entry
- Historical association with one of the NT’s memorable ‘characters’
- Café and gift shop with good food at acceptable prices
- Rammed earth building as an example of desert architecture
- Pleasant and safe relaxing environment

Olive Pink Botanic Garden has a significant place within the Arid Zone of the Northern Territory due to its;

- Documented and labelled collection of arid zone flora
- Examples of rare and threatened plant species

Olive Pink Botanic Garden has a significant place in the Northern Territory as a whole due to its;

- Contribution to greater understanding of the Territory's natural resources
- Listing on the Register of the National Estate (1995) in the Indigenous Class for its Aboriginal and botanical importance

In addition, OPBG has a place in an Australian network of over fifty regional botanic gardens many of which concentrate on plants native to their region

## **2.2 Alice Springs Desert Park**

Alice Springs Desert Park has a significant place in Alice Springs due to its;

- Positive role in local tourism
- Wow factors such as the Birds of Prey display, Nocturnal House, Changing Heart movie
- Engagement of indigenous people in planning, management and interpretation
- Attraction to residents as another and different place to visit and to bring visitors
- Contribution to local employment through 50 full time equivalents
- Purchase of goods and services locally
- Contribution to other organizations through the sharing of facilities eg Desert Knowledge, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens

Alice Springs Desert Park has a significant place within the Arid Zone of the Northern Territory due to its;

- Display of arid zone habitats which are interpreted to increase understanding and appreciation of arid environments
- Role in encouraging tourists to visit other areas in the arid zone

Alice Springs Desert Park has a significant place in the Northern Territory as a whole due to its;

- Contribution to Northern Territory tourism
- International standard of landscape and physical design

- Complementary nature with Darwin Wildlife Park in displaying the Territory's biodiversity

In addition, the ASDP supports national and international research involved with captive breeding of rare species and desert animals' adaptations and physiology. It is participating under contract with the Millennium Seed Bank Project based at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Wakehurst UK.

### **What is a botanic garden?**

There are various dictionary definitions of 'botanic gardens' however the most appropriate in the context of this review is presented in *The Botanic Gardens Conservation Strategy 1989* endorsed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, (IUCN), World Wide Fund for Nature, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, United Nations Environment Program and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. (IUCN definitions have been adopted in the Territory Parks and Wildlife Act).

The Botanic Gardens Conservation Strategy provides the following criteria that may be met in part or whole by any institution that is considered to be a botanic garden:

- A reasonable degree of permanence
- An underlying scientific basis for the collections
- Proper documentation of the collections, including wild origin
- Monitoring of the plants in the collections
- Adequate labelling of the plants
- Open to the public
- Communication of information to other gardens, institutions and the public
- Exchange of seed or other materials with other botanic garden, arboreta or research institutions
- Undertaking scientific or technical research on plants in the collections
- Maintenance of research programs in plant taxonomy in associated herbaria.

### **Comparison of the two institutions**

**The question has been raised, 'Why are there two botanic gardens in Alice Springs?'**

**Olive Pink Botanic Garden** is a conventional botanic garden in the sense that it has a labelled collection of plants, many of known origin and some with herbarium vouchers.

Unlike most botanic gardens whose collections are cosmopolitan, the OPBG collection is derived from an area within about a 500km radius of Alice Springs.

The establishment of the garden in 1956 as a place to grow and display native plants was visionary preceding the environmental movement of the 1970s by more than a decade. Olive Pink joins people like Thistle Harris (1902-1990), working at the wildlife sanctuary called Wirrimbirra in southern NSW, as women before their time in promoting the cultivation of Australian plants. Olive Pink was also a botanical artist.

It is traditional for botanic gardens to provide the setting for casual recreation and relaxation in a safe and peaceful environment and OPBG does this superbly. Olive Pink Botanic Garden is only a few minutes from central Alice Springs but nothing of the nearby city is visible from within.

Education about plants and the relationships of one species to another are also an important part of OPBG. Local botanists stated they learnt to identify rare species there before looking for them in the field. The effectiveness of that education depends upon the quality and diversity of the living collection.

Olive Pink Botanic Garden also has the significant associative value of its founder's professional contribution to the study of anthropology and students from the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne visit the site each year as part of their studies.

Birdlife is abundant in the Garden and dependent on the plants for food and shelter. The Garden is the closest place to town to see a Euro or occasional Perentie in the wild. A fauna checklist records 64 species of native birds, 3 native mammals, 2 frogs, 8 lizards and 4 snakes.

The stone steps leading to the summit of (Annie) Meyers Hill within the Garden were installed with the approval of the Aboriginal custodians of the sacred site. The view from the summit is rewarding and considered by many people to be better than the view from Anzac Hill .

The café, opened in 2001, attracts many local residents and tourists and has contributed significantly to the increase in annual numbers of visitors. The annual visitation from 1986 to 2004 shows an increase from 11582 in 2000 to 20649 in 2004. Table1 provided by Clarry Smith and Connie Spencer, Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

The Alice Springs evening temperatures are conducive to life outdoors for most of the year. The Garden is a preferred location for events organized by like-minded organizations

including the Australian Plants Society, the Field Naturalists Society and the Threatened Species Network. In February 2005 a new book *The Vegetation and Plant Species of the Alice Springs Municipality Northern Territory*, edited by botanists David Albrecht and Brenda Pitts and published by Greening Australia NT Inc and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, was launched in the Gazebo.

Musical recitals are also held at the Garden and in 2004 a concert organized by St Phillips College attracted over 120 people. The view was expressed that minor improvements to lighting and wind protection would assist performing conditions.

**Alice Springs Desert Park** was called 'Desert Wildlife Park and Botanic Garden' in the early planning phases. 'In moving to the current name the "Alice Springs" part was required by the NT Tourist Commission for the purposes of marketing, and Desert Park was a move to be all-embracing.' (pers comm. Dr Ken Johnson, CEO Desert Knowledge Australia, March 2005). Alice Springs Desert Park provides an introduction to the Australian desert environment through a series of habitat displays. It is not a conventional botanic gardens any more than it is a conventional zoo. It is a biopark where the emphasis is on habitats in which plants, animals, soils and climate interact largely as they do in the wild. It also contains certain Aboriginal cultural elements.

There are multiple specimens of some plant species as the displays attempt to simulate distribution patterns in the wild. Desert Rivers, Sand Country and Woodland habitats are presently displayed and Gorge, Range and Mulga habitats are planned to be constructed in stages. Informative labelling of plants is discrete and non-intrusive.

Habitats are managed to the extent that the site is irrigated, different soils have been imported and bird enclosures constructed so that visitors will be assured of seeing birds. There is a strong conservation message and visitors are able to see in four hours what would take many weeks to see in the wild. Even then they would not see desert animals, most of which are resting by day. One contact said he had camped in the desert for 20 years and never seen most of the animals he saw on a day visit to the Desert Park!

The Birds of Prey demonstration and the Nocturnal House are impressive and the big screen movie with its surprise ending which reveals the grandeur of the West MacDonnell Ranges is a fine introduction to the Desert Park.

The Desert Park is very strong in interpretation through staff presentations on topics such as Aboriginal food and medicinal plants. Aboriginal involvement is evident in presentations and adds authenticity to the message.

It is inevitable that events are tightly scheduled to meet the demands of group visits and coach schedules however people are also free to move through the Park at their own pace. A

minimum of four hours is recommended to experience the Park fully. Transport in open-sided quiet vehicles is provided for people who request it.

The sense of arrival is full of anticipation as the road off Larapinta Drive winds through 'natural' bushland with no sign of buildings. The short walk from the parking area or coach drop off point passes over a bridge which gives the sense of having arrived. Intensive and conventional horticulture is evident inside the entrance. This is changed seasonally at some cost.

Elsewhere in the Park conventional horticulture does not exist. One horticulturist advised that when you join the Desert Park you throw what horticulture you have learnt 'out the window' and learn new skills. A plant which dies may be left as habitat for an animal whereas it would be removed and replaced in a conventional botanic garden. Branches may be 'pruned' by breaking to simulate what happens in the wild rather than using secateurs.

The cost of operating such a large facility means that an entry fee is charged whereas entry is free at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. This means that local residents regard the visit to the Desert Park as an outing not a 'drop in'. The cost of getting to the Park and the entry fee may inhibit some potential visitors. Some concessions are available and the entry fee includes free access to portable headphones and all talks and demonstrations.

Record keeping has a high priority at Alice Springs Desert Park as it does at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Some of the record keeping at the Desert Park is driven by requirements resulting from membership of organizations involved in captive breeding where known parentage is essential.

Good animal husbandry is essential in maintaining displays of healthy animals. There is no resident veterinarian but facilities exist for minor operations, blood testing and tissue sampling. Bird population management in enclosures is practiced. For example, male and female budgerigars are separated to prevent overbreeding with only selected males being placed in the cage of females on occasions when numbers are declining.

It is clear therefore that Olive Pink Botanic Garden and the Desert Park have different objectives and go about achieving these in different ways. One is plant species oriented, the other habitat based. Both interpret their collections for their visitors and fill an important educational role. Both organizations hope their visitors leave contented and more aware of the unique character of the Australian desert than when they came.

### **The Olive Pink Factor**

‘Some people pass on and are soon forgotten. Miss Pink’s memory goes on and gets stronger. She is a vital part of Central Australian History.’ (Des Nelson, quote from a talk delivered at Olive Pink Botanic Garden). ‘

Olive May Pink was born in Hobart on 17 March 1884 and died in Alice Springs in 1975 aged 91. She studied art at Hobart Technical College and anthropology at the University of Sydney. She arrived in Central Australia in 1930, and lived with the Aboriginal people in the Tanami Desert. She studied the Arrernte and Walpiri people and was a great advocate of Aboriginal rights.

Olive Pink moved to Alice Springs and in 1956 became Honorary Curator of the ‘Australian Arid Regions Native Flora Reserve’ on the eastern side of the Todd River. Here she continued her painting of desert plants and started the botanic garden which now carries her name.

Olive Pink’s love of arid zone plants is expressed in the following extract from a letter she wrote to a friend in Tasmania.

*I ‘worship’ trees and flowers. And especially the ‘gallant’ ones of the arid regions of Australia. I love doing [the work on it], and it is the most beautiful spot in Alice Springs... it is for future generations!! (A Peace and beauty spot for the public in years to come).*

Quoted in *The Indomitable Miss Pink* by Julie Marcus UNSW Press 2001.

In March each year her birthday is celebrated with afternoon tea of Madeira cake, Bickfords lime juice and sherry which was the fare she offered to invited guests.

Outside Alice Springs her name was commemorated in the Olive Pink Society and in 2002 a street in the suburb of Banks in Canberra was named in her honour. In June 2005 she will feature in an exhibition on Alice Springs in the Tangled Destinies Gallery of the National Museum of Australia. The exhibition will run for about two years.

The biography *The Indomitable Miss Pink* by Professor Julie Marcus published in 2001 and *Yours truly Olive M Pink* by the same author provide fascinating insights to this remarkable woman.

Clearly the Olive Pink factor is deeply embedded in the Garden which bears her name and is unique in the Northern Territory and Australia.

### **Areas of potential overlap**

No major areas of existing or potential overlap were identified during the visit. Two areas where overlap could occur are:

Habitat displays  
Home garden plants

Some attempt has been made at OPBG to manipulate the environment to show habitats. The space available for this is very small and the Desert Park is able to do it better. In fact it is the main task of the Desert Park.

It would be better for OPBG to modify the soil environment only as much as necessary to grow an individual species.

The Desert Park places some emphasis on plants suitable for home gardens in Alice Springs.

It would be more appropriate for this to be a major function of OPBG. In fact, several interviewees recommended that the demonstration garden which was constructed on the Power and Water site, but has now become neglected, should be reinstated at OPBG in a way which is useful for home gardeners. It would show how plants can be pruned, mulched and fertilized to achieve maximum horticultural effect with minimum use of water.

The Register of the National Estate citation indicates that the OPBG has been the venue for 'Gardening Australia' programmes and the addition of a demonstration garden using local arid zone plants would encourage more radio and television programmes to be based there.

### **Sharing resources**

There is already some sharing of resources. For example, the Desert Park has excellent plant nursery facilities and is able to provide assistance and facilities to the Olive Pink Botanic Gardens' Growers Group for the propagation of plants at no perceptible additional cost.

The Herbarium now located on the Desert Park is able to house voucher specimens for both Olive Pink Botanic Garden and the Desert Park removing the need for plant taxonomists to be employed at either institution.

Sharing resources and expertise is a part of life in Alice Springs where organizational rigidity is not the norm.

### **The Hard Facts**

The hard fact is that Olive Pink Botanic Garden has struggled on a very low budget. The annual funding and special purposes grants from the NT Government have kept the Garden alive but have never allowed it to develop its potential. The fact that it has achieved what it has is a credit to the voluntary Trustees, dedicated but underpaid staff and community support.



It was described by one interviewee as a 'key but unknown icon' and 'we need to unlock its potential'.

The present funding allows for the employment of only a part time horticulturist to care for the Garden. This is totally inadequate and may well be in breach of occupational health and safety requirements as horticulture involves heavy labour and use of machinery. Recognizing that peaks of activity occur due to seasonal conditions a minimum of 2 fulltime equivalent horticulturists is required in addition to the Curator and three part time rangers.

### **Initiatives**

Initiatives for both the Desert Park and Olive Pink Botanic Garden are constrained by limited funding. Although this observation is made after only a six day visit, there appears to be little if anything which is currently being done which could be dropped to take on new proposals.

In interview, it was said that whilst funding might be obtained for capital works to establish additional habitats such as Gorges, Ranges and Mulga at the Desert Park, it will be difficult to obtain funding for recurrent management without visitor numbers increasing substantially.

Without this commitment it would be professionally irresponsible to proceed knowing that maintenance standards overall would fall and visitor numbers decline. There are sufficient examples where standards in privately run animal parks have declined to the point where environmental and animal welfare issues have become highly political. This must not be allowed to happen at the Desert Park.

A similar situation exists at Olive Pink Botanic Garden where its horticultural potential can never be achieved under the present level of funding which allows for only a part time horticulturist.

If this position changes there are three horticultural initiatives which could be made. The first would be to establish a demonstration garden which showed the native plants most suitable for home gardens in Alice Springs and how they should be managed. The second would be to contribute to the Millennium Seed Bank project by growing some of the species which will be collected but which are not yet in the Garden. The third would be to use the recent report *The Vegetation and Plant Species of the Alice Springs Municipality Northern Territory* to enhance the living collection of local species.

The Garden is open 10.00am to 6.00pm 364 days per year. Three part time rangers are employed to maintain these opening hours. It is highly desirable to have the capacity to

extend these opening hours seasonally to provide the opportunity for early morning and evening walkers to enjoy the climb up (Annie) Meyers Hill at the best time of day.

Innovative programmes such as 'Breakfast with the Birds' and sunrise walks to the top of (Annie) Meyers Hill would provide additional opportunities for residents and tourists to visit the Garden.

### **Horticulture at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**

It is acknowledged that the visit was made under drought conditions and in mid summer. It is also acknowledged that most botanic gardens show seasonal effects. For example, a visit to Edinburgh Botanic Gardens in mid winter when many trees and shrubs are leafless and the ground is blanketed in snow is not as rewarding as one in mid summer.

It must also be emphasized again that only a part time horticulturist is employed at present.

Nevertheless, with additional staff, there is room to increase the density of plantings at Olive Pink Botanic Garden and plant a wider range of ephemerals and ground covers. It may also be possible to strengthen the driveway planting to enhance the sense of arrival.

The temptation to introduce barbecues, as suggested by one interviewee, to increase visitor numbers should be resisted. It would impact on the existing café concession. Australians seem unable to enjoy a barbecue without wanting to kick a football around and there is not appropriate space to do this at OPBG.

The value of a sensitive landscape architect working with horticulturists is evident at the Desert Park. It is strongly recommended that consideration be given to engaging a landscape architect to work with the Board and the staff to prepare a landscape master plan for OPBG, that will support the botanical collection plan.

One thing needs to be kept clearly in mind. Much of the charm of Olive Pink Botanic Garden lies in its simplicity and relaxed atmosphere. While there is much which can be done, and needs to be done, it must never be at the expense of these values or its scientific integrity.

Scientific integrity includes maintenance of existing practices that minimize the potential for the unwitting introduction of weeds into the Alice Springs region and beyond, as a result of its activities. Further, Olive Pink Botanic Garden should continue to ensure that its botanical collection plan avoids the potential for the establishment of hybridized taxa within the Alice Springs region.

### **New administrative arrangements – options**

The Olive Pink Botanic Garden is managed by a board of trustees appointed by the Minister under Section 79 of the Crown Lands Act. The Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs (DCDSCA) provides funds by way of a grant to manage the Garden. Botanic gardens are not core business of the DCDSCA and it is not able to advise the Minister responsible for the grant on policy issues in this field.

The need for a change to this arrangement was endorsed by a number of people interviewed. A range of alternatives was discussed with those who would be responsible for initiating and managing any change.

One suggestion was to place OPBG in the Bioparks Division of the Conservation and Natural Resources Section of the Department of Infrastructure Planning and the Environment. The Bioparks division includes the Territory Wildlife Park, Alice Springs Desert Park, George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens and Windows on the Wetland.

The OPBG would fit logically with these organizations and if employees of OPBG became Northern Territory public servants their career prospects could be enhanced.

A major objection to this arrangement is that it would see the abolition of the management board of trustees. The view was expressed strongly by several people that if OPBG became another government agency there is a considerable risk that its sense of community ownership could be severely weakened.

Another arrangement would involve the Alice Springs Council assuming responsibility. Many regional botanic gardens are managed by local government. The closest example to Alice Springs is the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Gardens which is funded to the extent of \$500,000 each year by the Corporation of the City of Port Augusta with a resident population of 15,000. This is a large commitment justified in part by the fact that the Botanic Gardens is the major tourist venue in the city attracting 50,000 visitors a year.

A comparison of Olive Pink Botanic Garden with four other arid regional botanic gardens appears in Table 2.

The Alice Springs Council employs two horticulturists but the advice is that they are fully employed and do not have the skills to develop and manage a botanic garden.

After considering these options carefully, the conclusion has been reached that the Olive Pink Botanic Garden should be managed by a volunteer Board of Trustees including a representative of the Town Council and a representative from the Conservation and Natural Resources section of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment. The Garden would appear in the Bioparks division for the purposes of administering the annual grant. Funding would consist of an annual grant from the Territory Government and a grant from the Council in the proportion of two to one. The Board of Trustees would be encouraged to supplement grant funds through various fund raising activities but not an entrance fee.

The Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation believes the Olive Pink Botanic Garden contributes to the cultural life of Alice Springs and supports a better development framework for its future. The Corporation supports the recommendations arising from this review. (Anthony Pilkington pers comm. after discussion with Betty Pearce, Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, April, 2005).

### **Conclusions**

- 1) **The Olive Pink Botanic Garden** is a fine example of a regional botanic garden which concentrates on the cultivation and display of Central Australian arid zone plants.
- 2) It is a valuable resource for quiet relaxation in a safe bushland environment close to Alice Springs
- 3) It is a place of learning for residents and tourists interested in desert flora
- 4) The 'Olive Pink factor' gives the Garden something unique and long lasting with a hint of mystique
- 5) Olive Pink Botanic Garden has 'community involvement and engagement which people do not want to lose'.
- 6) It contributes to conservation through the cultivation of rare and threatened plants of Central Australia
- 7) **Alice Springs Desert Park** is a biopark designed to attract, accommodate and satisfy large numbers of visitors. It is upmarket and heavily targeted to tourism
- 8) The design of landscape and buildings is sensitive to the desert environment and the sense of arrival from Larapinta Drive is exciting
- 9) The standard of maintenance, display and interpretation is high
- 10) When the next three stages are implemented the Desert Park will provide, in one place, an experience of the diversity of Central Australian desert habitats
- 11) The Desert Park contributes to national and international research on desert environments

### **Recommendations**

#### **It is recommended that:**

- 1) The Olive Pink Botanic Garden and the Alice Springs Desert Park be acknowledged as two distinct institutions which both make significant but different contributions to the cultural life of Alice Springs.
- 2) The operational funding for Olive Pink Botanic Garden be increased by an amount to cover the cost of two additional staff (including on costs for superannuation, sick leave, insurance, accommodation, tools and equipment including a work vehicle) through a partnership agreement between the Northern Territory Government and the Alice Springs Town Council.

- 3) The Northern Territory Government grant to Olive Pink Botanic Garden be administered through the Bioparks Division of the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment rather than the Department of Community Development Sport and Cultural Affairs.
- 4) The Garden continues to be managed by a voluntary Board of Trustees which includes a representative of the NT Government and a representative from the Alice Springs Town Council and community interests.
- 5) The Board of Trustees be eligible to apply for special purpose grants under various Commonwealth, Northern Territory and other programmes eg Desert Knowledge Australia.
- 6) The Board of Trustees be encouraged to raise additional funds through donations, bequests and other innovative programmes such as the existing Plant Sponsorship Programme
- 7) Priority be given to engaging a landscape architect to work with (existing and additional) horticulturists and the Board to develop a landscape masterplan which will enhance the sense of arrival and boost the horticultural content of the Garden.
- 8) In relation to the Desert Park, the Northern Territory Government be encouraged to fund the further development of the Park and ensure that such development is matched with adequate operational funds to ensure the current standards of maintenance are maintained.
- 9) Olive Pink Botanic Garden be encouraged to re-write its Ten Year Plan in the view of these findings.

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### **Acknowledgments**

I wish to thank Ms Andre Burgess, Regional Director South, Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs and Mr Gary Fry, Acting Manager Alice Springs Desert Park, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, who supervised the review.

Mr Michael Prowse, Chair, Board of Trustees and fellow Trustees and Mr Clarry Smith, Curator, Olive Pink Botanic Garden kindly provided advice and facilities to carry out the review.

Thanks are also expressed to the wide range of people who gave their time to presenting their views on the Alice Springs Desert Park and the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

Finally I wish to thank my partner Ms Susan Parsons for her assistance in analyzing the responses to over 40 interviews and in the preparation of the report.

### **About the author of the Review**

This review was carried out by Dr Robert Boden for Robert Boden & Associates. Robert was foundation Director of the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra for ten years. Prior to that he was an Assistant Director in the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. He has practiced as a consultant in conservation and natural resource management since 1989. One consultancy was to advise on the future management of George Brown Botanic Gardens in Darwin.

Robert has held statutory positions of Chair of the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee and Tree Adviser to the ACT Conservator Flora and Fauna under the *Tree Protection (Interim Scheme) Act 2001*.

Robert is co-author of *Extinct and Endangered Plants of Australia* and a recent CSIRO/WWF Report *Jumping the Garden fence – Invasive garden plants in Australia and their environmental and agricultural impacts*.

## **Attachment A**

### Terms of reference for a Review of Alice Springs Botanic Gardens December 2004

The Desert Park and the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

The Desert Park in Alice Springs is a major tourist attraction, part Botanic Garden, part Wildlife Park, administered under the Bio Parks division of the Conservation and Natural Resources Section of the Department of Infrastructure Planning and the Environment. All employees of the Desert Park are Government employees. The Desert Park is wholly government funded but is obliged to generate income through fees payable for entry to the Park and from concessions.

The Olive Pink Botanic Garden is small regional botanic garden, reserved pursuant to the *Crown Lands Act* with a volunteer Board of Trustees appointed by the Minister for Local Government. The Board is, by statute, a body corporate and employs a small number of staff who, together with volunteers, maintain the Garden. The Garden is largely funded by an annual grant from the Northern Territory Government and a small amount of funding is obtained from donations and fund raising activity. Entry to the Garden is free.

Aims of the Review:

To report to the Northern Territory Government on the current role, functions and activities conducted by the respective institutions;

To identify each institution's place within the Alice Springs community, within the Arid Zone of the Northern Territory and within the Territory as a whole;

To recommend strategic directions that:

- Ensure clear and distinct roles for the two institutions;
- Maximise the areas where the two institutions complement and support each other;
- Minimise any areas where there might be competition or duplication of roles and functions by the two institutions;
- Maximise the appeal of the institutions to visitors and residents;
- Maximise the benefits that the institutions can provide in respect to the advancement of botanic knowledge, conservation, education and recreation for visitors to and residents of the Northern Territory;

- Enhance the capacity of the institutions to comply with common law or statutory, domestic or international obligations.

Process:

In addressing the terms of the reference the review should;

- Examine the history of the establishment of the two institutions;
- Examine and clearly identify the different ways the institutions are constituted and funded;
- Interview key personnel at both institutions regarding current and planned directions;
- Interview other key stakeholders as set out below;
- Prepare a draft report and submit the draft to both institutions for comment;
- After consideration of comment, prepare a final report.

The Review should also consider the following issues;

- The role of botanic gardens in contemporary Northern Territory, but particularly in the Arid Zone;
- The impact of botanic gardens in Alice Springs on tourism and other economic activity;
- The advantages or disadvantages of community involvement in botanic gardens in Alice Springs;
- Any heritage or historic aspects, particularly in respect to the Olive Pink Botanic Garden, which may have value in addition to the botanic aspects of the Garden.
- The opportunities that the two institutions may have in collaborating on particular projects or in general.
- Any opportunities that either or both institutions currently do not undertake but could take up which would be of benefit to visitors to or residents of the Northern Territory.

Stakeholders:

- Alice Springs Town Council;
- Lhere Artepe (the prescribed body corporate of the Alice Springs native title holders);
- Department of Community Development Sport and Cultural Affairs;
- Department of Infrastructure Planning and the Environment;
- Central Australian Tourism Industry Association;



- Northern Territory Tourism Commission.

**Intended outcome:**

The Review should produce a report which informs Government in order that it might make clear and informed decisions on future structures, funding, management and development of the Botanic Gardens of Alice Springs.

## Attachment B

### People consulted during review February-March 2005

David Albrecht	Botanist, Herbarium
John Baskerville	Executive Director South, Dept. of Chief Minister
Gary Bastin	Australian Plant Society
Ruth Brown	Trustee OPBG, Acting Curator Botany ASDP
Andre Burgess	Regional Director Southern DCDSCA
Charlie Carter	Trek Larapinta, former Trustee OPBG
Craig Catchlove	Central Australia Tourism Industry Asscn.
Sunil Dhanji	Greening Australia, Alice Springs
Gary Dinham	Senior Horticulturist, ASDP
Bev Ellis	Dymocks Bookshop
Peter Fannin	Botanist, Mutitjula Community, Uluru
Paul Fitzsimmons	Publisher local books, Charles Darwin Uni
Franca Fredriksen	St Philips College
Gary Fry	Acting Park Manager, Alice Springs Desert Park
Mike Gillam	Wildlife expert and photographer
Jim Grant	Bio Parks DIPE
Nancy Hall	Craft Group
Rod Horner	Bush foods & native seed dealer, Casual staff OPBG
Ken Johnson (Dr)	CEO Desert Knowledge Australia
Bob Kessing	Trustee OPBG
Fran Kilgariff	Mayor, Alice Springs
Peter Latz	Botanist, Author "Bushfires and Bushtucker"
Greg Leach (Dr)	Wildlife & Biodiversity DIPE
Leslie Lockwood	Co-author "Botanic Gardens of Australia"
Martin Ludgate	Ed Travel, Charles Darwin University
Peter McDonald	Central Australian Todd and Charles River Project Group
Pip McNaught	National Museum of Australia
Geoff Miers	Horticulture Lecturer, Charles Darwin University
Alex Nelson	Naturalist, Casual staff OPBG
Colleen O'Malley	Threatened Species Network, Arid Rangeland Co-ordinator
Betty Pearce	Traditional Owner & Deputy Chair of Lhere Artepe
Graham Phelps	Regional Coordinator Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island
Libby Prell	Trustee OPBG
Michael Prowse	Chairman, OPBG
Mark Richardson	Former Curator Botany, ASDP, Former Chairman OPBG
Anne Scherer	Interpretation Parks & Wildlife DIPE
Elaine Sheridan	The Garden Café & Giftshop, OPBG

Clarry Smith  
Simon Smith  
Stuart Traynor  
Margo Trigg  
John Zwar

Curator, Olive Pink Botanic Garden  
Former Chairman OPBG  
Past Trustee OPBG  
Craft Group  
President, Friends – Aust Arid Lands Botanic Gardens, Port Augusta

## Attachment C

### Chronology of key events in the history of Olive Pink Botanic Garden

- 1956 16 hectares gazetted as 'Australian Arid Regions Native Flora Reserve', Miss Olive Pink appointed Hon. Curator
- 1973 Johnny Jambijimba, Yannarilyi, who gardened at the Reserve for many years, died and was buried in the Alice Springs Memorial Cemetery
- 1975 Miss Ollive M Pink died and was buried in the Alice Springs Memorial Cemetery
- 1985 Garden opened to the public as 'Olive Pink Flora Reserve'
- 1986 Plant sponsorship scheme started
- 1994 Olive Pink Flora Reserve placed on the Commonwealth Register of the National Estate
- 1995 Name changed to 'Olive Pink Botanic Garden'
- 2001 OPBG accepted to Register of Significant Trees, National Trust & Greening Australia NT
- 2001 Café opened
- 2002 New entrance signage installed

Table 2  
COMPARISON OF OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN WITH FOUR OTHER INLAND  
REGIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS

	Olive Pink Botanic Gardens	Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden	Australian Inland Botanic Garden	Burrendong Botanic Garden & Arboretum	Myall Park Botanic Garden
Locality	Alice Springs NT	Port Augusta SA	Mildura Vic	Wellington NSW	Glenmorgan Qld
Local population (a)	28000	15000	65,000	9000	4000
Management authority	Board of Trustees appointed by NT Minister	Corporation of the City of Port Augusta	Community	Burrendong Arboretum Trust	Non-profit company
Date established	1956	1996	1989	1964	1941
Total area ha	16	250	120	164	132
Area developed ha	5	100approx.	48	144approx.	90
Number of paid staff	1.3	2 f/t, 6 p/t + (b)	6	3	2
No of volunteers	5-10	12	30-50	15	30-50
% of plants labelled	100	98	50	65	25
% of Native Australian Plants	100	98	80	100	100
Threatened Plant Program	Yes native	native	Native and exotic	Yes, over 100 species	native
% of collection vouchered	10	none	none	100	none
Annual operating budget	\$140,000	\$500,000 approx. incl. Visitor Centre	\$252,184	Less than \$150,000	\$50,000

Annual no of visitors	20,649 (2004)	50,000approx.	20,000approx	8,000approx.	465-2004 945-2003
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(a) Local population within one hour's drive of gardens

(b) Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden: Parks & Garden help when required

With thanks, for updated data from the various botanic gardens, to:

Michael Anlezark, Burrendong Botanic Garden & Arboretum,

Pauline Hedger, Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden

Peter Johansen, Australian Inland Botanic Garden

Carol McCormack, Myall Park Botanic Garden

and thanks for original data from the

"Directory of Australian Botanic Gardens and Arboreta"

to the editors Jan Wilson and Murray Fagg, ANBG

Terms of reference for a Review of Alice Springs Botanic Gardens  
December 2004

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