

**Facilitating the
Development of the
South Australian
Nursery Industry**

Geoffrey Fuller
Nursery & Garden Industry,
South Australia

Project Number: NY02023

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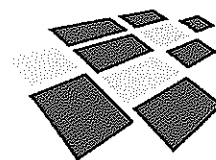
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development of the South
Australian Nursery
Industry

July 2002 to 30 June 2003.

Geoffrey Fuller, et al.
Nursery & Garden Industry South Australia (NGISA)

Project Number: NY 02023

NY02023

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The project "Facilitating the development of the South Australian Nursery industry" commenced in June 2002. The role is a part time 20 hours per week and this report has been compiled to provide an overview of the activities and achievements of the project through to June 2003 when the project was redeveloped in accordance with the N&GI, HAL partnership agreement.

The project acknowledges the support of Horticulture Australia Ltd (HAL) and the Nursery & Garden Industry South Australia.

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Final Report

Project NY 02023

Facilitating the development of the South Australian Nursery Industry

July 2002 to 30 June 2003.

Geoffrey Fuller, Project Leader

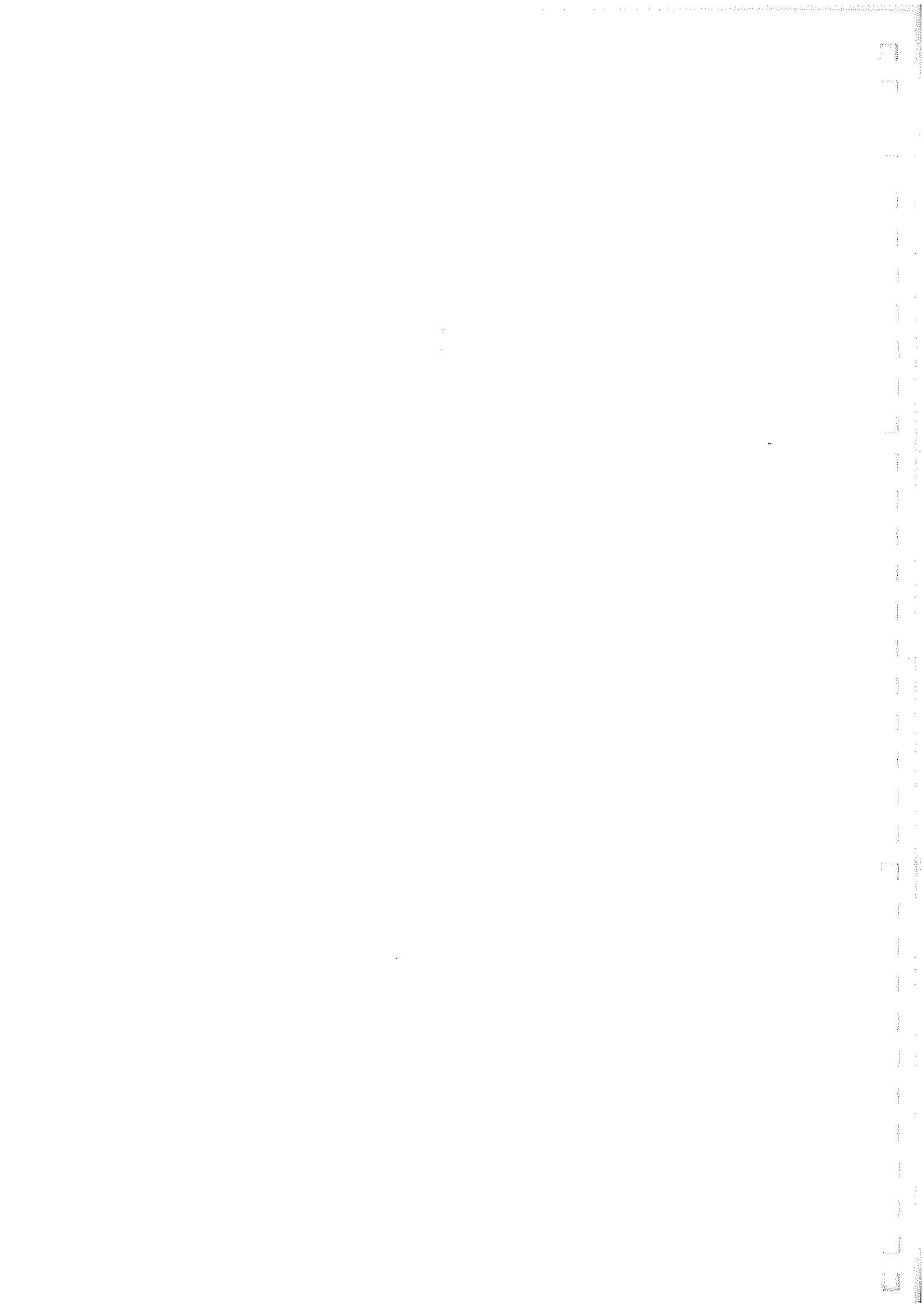
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Media Summary

The project NY 02023 has funded a part time nursery industry development officer (NIDO) to facilitate the adoption of best management practices by South Australian nursery businesses. The project was initially developed to be carried out within a three year period, but was terminated after the first year so that the national nursery industry development network could be aligned with a new partnership agreement between HAL and the Nursery & Garden Industry Australia.

The performance and professionalism of the South Australian industry has been improved through communications resourced within the project. The industry is kept informed on key issues via weekly technical updates and best practice information delivered in the NGISA weekly email/fax to members.

On site nursery visits have been integral in the success of the communications program as one on one information exchange has been effective for increasing adoption of best practice and new technologies. The visits have included NIASA audits as well as providing on-site technical information and extension of current activities.

A training program has been offered to industry that has addressed gaps in information or skill levels. The program has included training in costing plant production, Use of Chemicals, First Aid, Occupational Health Safety and Welfare (OHS&W), customer service and has also utilised skills recognition opportunities for long serving nursery operators to be assessed and rewarded for life skills.

The NIDO has actively participated in, reviewed and commented on projects relevant to the nursery industry being undertaken by SA Government departments EPA, PIRSA, SARDI, & Department for Environment and Heritage, and other industry (HAL) funded project teams.

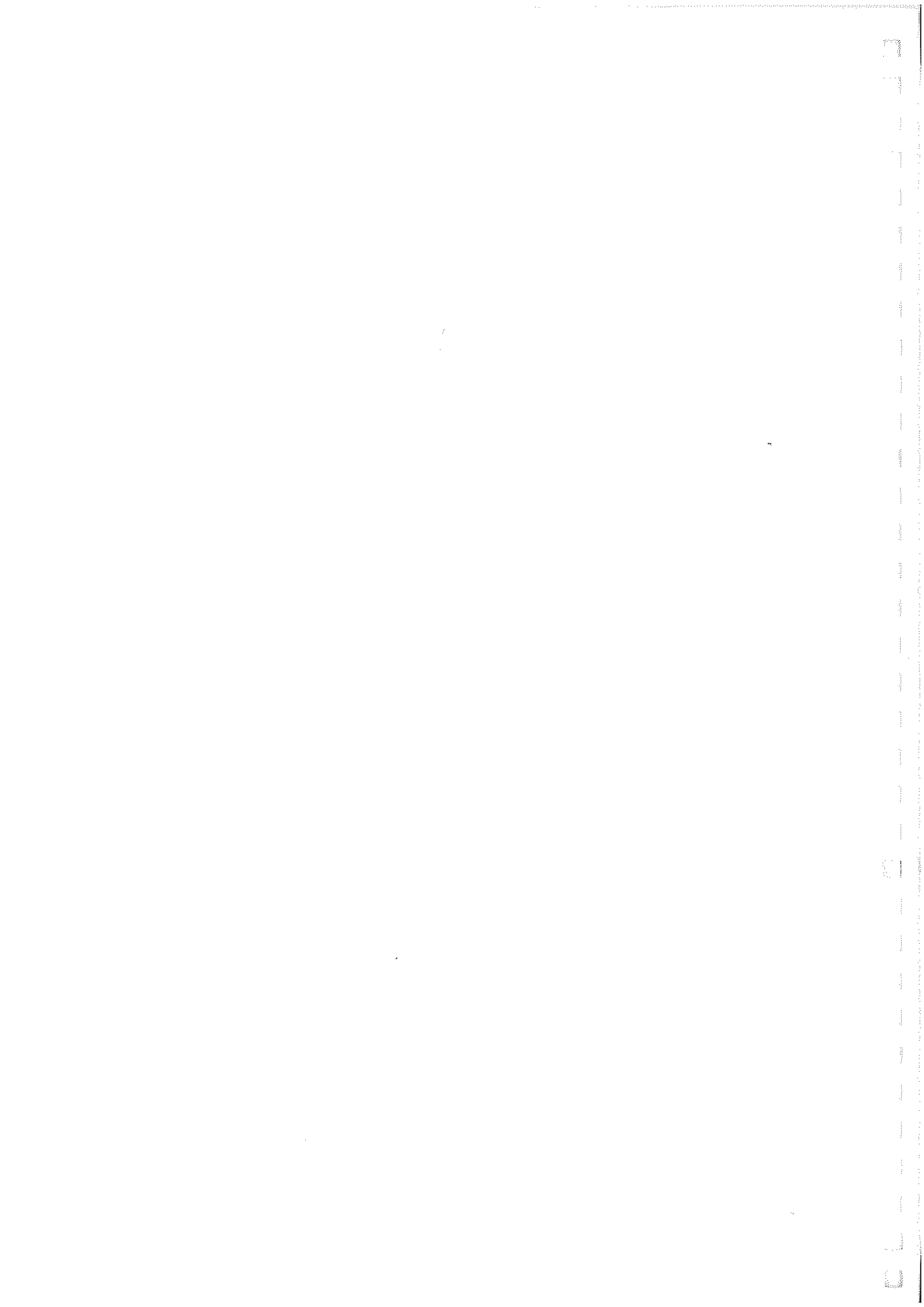
The NIDO has worked closely with the GCDO under the guidance of the NGISA Industry development committee (IDC) to develop stronger links within the industry especially in the development of the two accreditation programs Australian Garden Centre Accreditation scheme (AGCAS) and the nursery industry accreditation scheme Australia (NIASA).

This project has successfully promoted the benefits of industry best management practices as published in the NIASA guidelines. NIASA has been promoted through presentations to nurseries, government officers, gardening groups and students. The industry has been kept informed via nursery visits, trade day displays, seminars etc about best practices with the result being a broader and more comprehensive awareness and understanding of NIASA and its benefits within the industry. The project has facilitated the increase in membership to NIASA in SA from 6 to 10 businesses, with a number of additional businesses working steadily towards accreditation.

Industry has a wider appreciation of best practice standards and has improved access to advice, guidance and help in adopting those standards and practices with the implementation by the NIDO of the NIASA operating plan that has been developed by the national NIASA committee.

The NIDO has maintained communications with state NIDO's and the national industry development manager (IDM) to ensure consistent interpretation of the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia (NIASA) guidelines.

The NIDO has been able to work proactively with government officers and the community to raise awareness of the nursery industries commitment to environmental responsibility through involvement in initiative such as “Weed Busters” week (providing community information on thugs, garden escapes and the safe disposal of garden waste) and “Water Wise” promotions. The industries commitment to sustainable water use was further promoted through the introduction of a new Irrigation Award of Excellence that was developed, judged and awarded in conjunction with the Irrigation Association of SA.



Introduction

The Nursery and Garden Industry in South Australia, whilst substantial in overall size comprises primarily small to medium businesses. Many of these have evolved from family operations established two or more generations ago. In the course of this development, the industry has generally moved forward through the advances of individual businesses and the far greater leverage available from a co-ordinated industry development has not been realised. Additionally, many of the operators within the industry have no direct access to or are unaware of the support and resources currently available as they are not members of relevant industry organisations.

The rate and effectiveness of technology transfer to the industry, the relatively poor uptake to-date by the SA industry of best practice through accreditation programs such as the NIASA scheme, the skills gap and the absence of a comprehensive training program structured to meet the needs of the industry in SA, are the key issues that were to be addressed in order to raise the level of skill and professionalism in the industry in SA.

The industry must also respond responsibly and effectively to the growing number of environmental issues confronting it. The issues of effective and optimal water use and water quality management are particularly and increasingly important in SA due to growing problems with the cost, supply and quality of water in this State and to the increasing focus of the community and government on the issue. Environmental management and in particular water management have been identified as a priority for the industry.

Over the past several years, significant progress has been made in effecting technology transfer and raising standards in SA via the HAL supported project NY98006 (SA NIDO). The outcomes have however, not surprisingly, been limited as is usually the case when new standards, philosophies and issues are introduced.

This project is able to progress the industry to a new level and focus on delivering the outcomes in a more structured and comprehensive manner than was possible under the previous arrangement. The primary focus can be summarised into three areas. To:

- Enhance communication and information dissemination to the industry on best practices, new innovations in research and development, current trends and pertinent issues
- Raise the level of skill and professionalism in the industry utilising NIASA best management practice guidelines and
- Ensure industry responds to community environmental concerns such efficient water use, by demonstrating a commitment to the development and implementation of appropriate environmental strategies and practices.

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Industry Development Outcomes

Communication & Information Dissemination

An integral part of the project was ensuring that information being generated by and for the nursery and garden industry was being disseminated through technology transfer activities and through a comprehensive training program to improve business efficiency and enhance industry professionalism.

This has included providing regular updates on current issues via the NGISA Nursery Notes weekly email/ fax publication, articles in industry publications, community media exposure, visits to regions and individual operators' premises, seminars and workshops, the conduct of training programs, liaison with key state, national and local government authorities.

Links to the National Nursery NIDO network were maintained throughout this project formally through attendance at national meetings and national conferences and informally via telephone, fax and email as required ensuring that information of national significance was presented consistently across all states.

Site visits to nursery and media manufacturers provided valuable one on one extension services to the South Australian Nursery industry. The visits included conducting NIASA audits, providing information exchange and technology transfer on technical issues such as irrigation management, best practices, pest and disease management, Chemical handling and storage and Integrated Pest Management and have resulted in a wider appreciation of best management practices. The on-site visits have also meant that businesses have improved access current issues and can provide feedback on initiatives and projects relevant to their business.

The quarterly NGISA trade days have also been a valuable tool in providing information to the industry as a large proportion of the states growers and retailers attend the day.

The NIDO has been proactive in liaising with government agencies including EPA, PIRSA, SARDI, & Department for Environment and Heritage, and with other HAL project teams in participating in, reviewing and commenting on projects covering industry specific needs to ensure relevance to the industry.

Through working together on the Industry Development Committee this project has enabled a strong working relationship to develop between the SA GCDO and the NIDO which has led to better general awareness of the AGCAS and NIASA schemes.

Training

A training program was coordinated through the NIDO that addressed the needs of the industry as identified via telephone survey. The provision of training in SA has been in collaboration with the National Nursery Industry Training Manager and with the TAFE Centre for Horticulture, Urrbrae Campus and Maxima Group Training.

A Skills recognition program was run that allowed ten prominent production nursery owners to enrol, complete and be assessed for the skills developed on the job over the course of their careers.

The program was run in conjunction with Urrbrae TAFE. Actual face to face learning was offered that provided additional training in First Aid, Occupation Health Safety and Welfare, and Nursery Best Practice. The participants were presented with their diplomas at NGISA's awards of excellence night on 15 November 2002.

ChemCert certification course was run in conjunction with Urrbrae TAFE in December 2002 and was attended by 9 producers.

Plant Costing Systems Workshop, "Prepare and monitor budgets and finance" presented by Industry training manager, Greg McPhee to 20 participants. At least 8 of the production nurseries that attended the workshop have implemented direct changes in their business as a result of this workshop.

The NIDO also attended the "Why Service Matters", evening workshop delivered by TAFE lecturer Pam Stratford to 35 retail garden centre managers and staff and relayed the relevant information to production nurseries to enable them to better service their own customers.

NIASA

A key role of the NIDO was to promote and implement the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia (NIASA) to the South Australian nursery production sector. This involved gauging industry interest and impediments to uptake, conducting nursery visits, promotion and providing appropriate training to improve technical expertise of nursery operators.

The NIDO conducted the annual NIASA audits for the scheme in SA, outlining where improvements could be made, and then, if and when appropriate, recommending Accreditation through the NGISA Industry Development Committee (IDC). The NIDO liaised extensively with the IDC, the National Accreditation Committee and interstate NIDO's to ensure that the scheme was being administered in compliance with the national standards. The NIDO also liaised with the NGISA GCDO to ensure cross linkage between NIASA and AGCAS.

The NIDO has attended all relevant national NIDO and NIASA meetings through the length of the project to further develop the IDO network and ensure national consistency in providing recommendations, to provide input into the enhancement of the NIASA guidelines and to the development of a NIASA Operating plan. In order to ensure national consistency within NIASA joint visits were taken with the WA and Vic NIDO's as well as the National Industry Development Manager and contact with the interstate NIASA technical officer's network is ongoing.

Through this project there has been a significant increase in the number of businesses accredited in SA from 6 to 10. There are many other businesses now working steadily towards the goal of NIASA for their businesses.

Environmental Issues

A Draft Code of Practice was developed with PIRSA to meet industry, community and legislative needs, for nursery water management including use, reuse and environmental compliance. The code will be further developed to be utilised as a simple "how to guide" that could be easily

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implemented by small and large operators. The key objective is to improve compliance with current legislation and standards.

Support and promotion of the industries commitment to sustainable water use was achieved through the introduction of a new Irrigation Award of Excellence that was developed, judged and awarded in conjunction with the Irrigation Association of SA, and through the development of a strategic partnership between NGISA and SA Water in negotiations on water exemptions for our industry and in Water Wise campaign and responsible water use.

The NIDO was also involved in the promotion of NGISA's commitment to raising awareness of potential environmental weeds. This was achieved through collaboration with PIRSA and state coordinators for "Weed Busters" Week where the NIDO worked to maintain a strong NGISA presence in any relevant activities and presented information on garden thugs, garden escapes and the safe disposal of garden waste at the opening of the event.

Recommendations

- Continue to provide publicity and exposure of NIASA and its benefits in NGISA and industry publications ranging from the weekly Nursery Notes emailed and faxed to members and selected non-members through to an industry-wide quarterly Newsletter, as well as targeted information advice and materials promoting the benefits of NIASA with cross linkage to the benefits of AGCAS and the NGIPP.
- Provision of an annual State Conference with a key focus on continual improvement in the levels of professionalism and expertise in technical and non-technical areas and promotion of national initiatives.
- Delivery of an effective state-wide industry training program, in conjunction with the TAFE Centre for Horticulture at the Urrbrae Campus, and incorporating national initiatives in IPM, water management and financial skills that enhances skills and expertise and meets the requirements of operators.
- Completion of a practical Code of Practice and “How to” guide for Water Management that meets the requirements of the relevant South Australian authorities and industry best practices.
- Development of promotional/publicity materials targeted at the industry and the community such as media stories and features in support of environmental programs such as the SA Water Wise and Water Care water quality promotional campaigns.
- Identification of other environmental issues and concerns of the industry, the community, and local and state authorities.
- Revision of a draft State OH&S manual to meet the needs of production nurseries.

Acknowledgements

The success of the project has been reliant on input from the following organisations/ businesses:

- NGISA Industry Development Committee
- South Australian Management Support (SAMS)
- TAFE – School of Horticulture Urrbrae
- NIASA members in SA
- South Australian Research and Development Institute – (SARDI) pathology
- National NIDO network
- SA Water

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