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# Final Report

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**NY07009**

**Management and Administration - Nursery Industry Accreditation and Awards**

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## **Management and Administration – Nursery Accreditation and Awards**

### **Final Report**

**HAL Project: NY07009**

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**The aim of this project was to provide a mechanism for the management and ongoing development of the Nursery Industry's accreditation and awards schemes to ensure the provision of tools relevant to all businesses through an administratively well structured program that is accessible to whole of industry.**

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#### **~ Disclaimer ~**

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## Summary

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Accreditation and awards schemes are important mechanisms for rewarding and recognising industry operators who lead the industry in terms of best business practices.

The schemes covered by this project are:

- Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme (NIASA) – an accreditation program for growers
- Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS) - an accreditation program for retailers
- Nursery & Garden Industry Awards – recognises and promotes leaders within the industry, particularly those demonstrating best practice within their businesses

The aim of these projects is to provide businesses with a benchmark to become recognised providers of a standardised level of quality. These projects provide processes to business to help them continue to improve and measure best business practices while developing themselves and ultimately the industry as a whole.

To enable and facilitate industry guidance and input into the Awards and accreditation programs relevant committees were established for each program. This structure ensures effective management of the programs and industry buy-in.

The NIASA Committee and AGCAS Committee had two levels: the Technical officers Group (those delivering the program) and the National Committee (made up of representatives from each state plus the technical officers). These committees met twice a year to review the program and the activities undertaken by Nursery & Garden Industry Australia on their behalf, suggest and recommend improvements and participate in at least one mock audit to ensure consistency in the delivery and assessment of businesses involved in both AGCAS and NIASA nationally.

The NGI Awards program was also overseen by a committee of industry representatives. This committee met four times during the course of the project to review the previous year's Awards program and recommend changes /modifications required for the following years' program. This project also covered the employment of an external party to facilitate the Awards program. To facilitate and ensure the future development of the Industry, investment into our up and coming Young Leaders was seen as a major component of the awards program and therefore warranted its own methodology so outcomes could be measured and reported.

The outcomes of the project have been mixed across the two years however future direction and needs have been identified. NIASA and the Industry Awards continue to receive strong industry support demonstrated by the growth in participation. AGCAS, despite being re-launched in March 2008 did not realise the growth in retailer participation budgeted. The AGCAS Committee including Technical Officers believe strongly in the need and value of an accreditation program for the retail sector, however the existing program is not working. Industry will continue to support accreditation for the retail sector while we investigate a workable and effective solution.

## Introduction

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The project, NY07009 Management and Administration – Awards and Accreditation is a continuation of NY06018 Management and Administration – Awards and Accreditation. This project came from an amalgamation of project elements that previously fell under the AGCAS and NIASA projects and the Partnership Agreement.

The Industry strategic objective behind this project is: ***To achieve business sustainability by facilitating a change in business culture and improved business practice.***

### **Accreditation**

Accreditation is a pathway for continual improvement and the tool used by the nursery and garden industry to facilitate improved business practice. It is highly valuable in focussing industry attention on standards and measurement ultimately resulting in industry growth and development.

We have two accreditation programs, ***Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS)*** for Garden Centres and ***Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA)*** for production nurseries.

Both accreditation programs provide guidelines on processes and business practices believed to improve the processes undertaken in the production and sale of green-life.

NIASA has been far more successful than the AGCAS program to date. It is envisaged that the poor performance of the AGCS program is a combination of the promises initially made to retailers about what the program could do for them and the challenge with monitoring and measuring processes in a retail environment. NIASA has been more successful because industry has been able to demonstrate significant advantages to businesses such as reduced costs, reduced losses, better stock performance and compliance with quarantine and stock movement requirements. The program has evolved with a further two modules addressing best practice environmental issues (EcoHort) and Biosecurity best practice (BioSecure HACCP). The industry take up of the programs has been steady and will continue to grow as market drivers such as interstate quarantine transfer laws come into effect.

In addition to the market drivers, there is a need to raise awareness of NIASA amongst growers selling the benefits to their business as well as the benefits to customers of buying plants that have been grown under NIASA Best practice Guidelines.

Marketing programs to date have not raised the profile sufficiently within the marketplace. For the next term of this project the marketing activities will need to be more focused and have greater impact to reach the targets for business involved in the program.

### **Awards**

The Awards program was developed as a measurement and recognition tool to assist businesses as they journey on the path to “best practice” and industry leadership. The Awards program has undergone consistent measurement and review to ensure it is both engaging to industry and provides a vehicle to demonstrate the growth and development of the nursery and garden industry.

### **Management Committees**

To enable and facilitate industry guidance and input into the programs and to ensure effective management of the programs, relevant committees were established for each program. These committees are comprised of industry members who have the passion, time and desire to see to the success of the programs. Each committee is chaired by a NGIA Board member who reports to the NGIA Board on the performance and progress of the committee and ensures the programs are meeting the needs of whole of industry.

## **Method & Activities**

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The following activities have either been completed or are scheduled for completion in order to achieve the objectives of this project.

### ***Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS)***

Two AGCAS Committee Meetings were held annually. Copies of Minutes for these meetings were provided in Milestones #105, #104, and #103.

In the last round of HAL funding requests levy funding for the AGCAS program was rejected. Consequently the purpose of the AGCAS meeting held August 6 2009 (Agenda and Minutes attached) was to discuss the future of AGCAS and develop an action plan, if appropriate for moving forward. The outcome of this meeting was the appointment of two Technical Officers as the project coordinators to put together a proposal outlining a revised retail accreditation program to be submitted at the next intake of HAL funding requests.

### ***Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA)***

During the term of this project NIASA meetings were held twice a year. Minutes and Agendas for all previous meetings have been supplied in the milestone reports #105, #104, and #103. Attached are the Agenda and Minutes from the meeting in Adelaide June 24/25 2009. This meeting was attended by both the Technical Officers Group and National NIASA committee members. Mock audits were held as part of this meeting inline with program guidelines and requirements. The new quarantine laws being introduced by PIRSA into South Australia and the future marketing of NIASA were the main agenda items of this meeting. As a consequence of the growth and development of the 'market garden sector' the committee also resolved to introduce NIASA certification for this sector of industry and the requirements were discussed and agreed.

### ***Young Leaders***

Young Leaders were identified through the 2009 National Awards program. All states except Victoria and Western Australia had a State winner who received a free trip to National Conference and the Urban Greenscapes Symposium. All finalists were judged by a panel of three industry leaders. From the finalists the National winner, Simon Reid of Tims' Garden Centre New South Wales, was chosen and announced at the Awards Gala Dinner. As part of the vision for this person to be a future industry leader, throughout their 12 months of "reign" they will be exposed to National Board Meetings, IAC meetings and other events of National significance. The objective is to broaden their knowledge of Industry and raise their profile amongst industry leaders.

The 2010 National Awards Program has seen a 115% increase in Young Leader submissions with every state represented except Tasmania. The judging for the State winners will occur between October and December 2009 with the national judging and winner announcement occurring in Darwin at the NGI Conference in the same manner as described above for Canberra.

### ***The Nursery & Garden Industry Awards Committee***

The outcomes of the 2009 NGI Awards were reported on in Milestone #104.

In response to feedback from the 2008 Awards program about the poor quality of media secured for Award Winners, the PR component of the program was outsourced to Beyond the Square.

This resulted in triple the coverage for the 2009 Awards over 2008. A summary of the media coverage achieved is attached.

In March surveys were sent to all Awards entrants, judges and State Awards Primary Contacts to solicit feedback on the 2009 Awards Program. The Awards and Accreditation Committee met in April 2009 to review the feedback and consider recommendations for the 2010 Program. The Agenda and Minutes for the meeting are attached along with the review document developed from all the feedback.

The modifications recommended as a consequence of the meeting and the feedback provided was:

1. The entry kit was simplified to provide an overview of the awards, the value of entering and the categories available for the 2010 Awards program. This information then directed the potential entrant to our purpose-built Awards website ([www.ngiaevents.com.au/awards2010](http://www.ngiaevents.com.au/awards2010)), where they could download the entry criteria. Alternatively they could complete the attached entry form indicating which categories they were interested in entering. The criteria were subsequently returned via post, fax or email as per the entrant's request.

This two step process not only simplified the entry documentation but it also enabled us to monitor those who had requested information and those who hadn't. This gave the Awards Primary Contact the information needed to follow-up and encourage potential entrants while offering support and advice to those who did enter.

2. The production category was further segmented to include two new categories – Best Propagation Nursery and Best Government Nursery. It has been the opinion of industry for some time that Government Nurseries had a distinct advantage over commercial nurseries as they were not making decisions based on profit objectives. Propagation Nurseries also have very different requirements to Production Nurseries as they are usually only looking after a plant for a very short time. These two changes were well received by industry as indicated by the 90% increase in submissions across all five categories for growers.
3. The benefits for entry winners were also reviewed and increased to give entrants better value for the effort undertaken to enter. In addition to the logos, trophies, and recognition at conference, on the NGIA website and through industry publications, the additional benefits include a \$1000 training voucher for each National winner, greater exposure at the conference through a DVD showcasing winning garden centres and production nurseries, a commemorative booklet for use in their own marketing activities and a Winners Dinner at conference where experts will advise the finalists how they can use their win to grow and develop their business.
4. The third party awards convenor, Awards Absolute, received a large amount of criticism in the evaluation process for poor performance, poor communication and contributing to issues throughout the judging process. Consequently their involvement was reduced by 80% for the 2010 Awards program.

## Evaluation

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The following outcomes have resulted from this project:

- The objective for AGCAS was to achieve a 10% increase in manuals sold and 30% increase in accredited businesses. This was not achieved. Throughout the three quarters July 2008 to March 2009 there were 75 businesses audited. A complete summary of activity is attached in the national quarterly reports as supplied by each state office. This result reflects the fact the program in its current format is not valued by the retail sector. It further supports the decision by the IAC not to levy-fund this project from July 1, 2009.
- The results for NIASA show an increase of 6% in accredited businesses over the first three quarters exceeding the target of 2% significantly. A total of 24 manuals were sold during this period. There was an increase of 16% in the number of businesses who are now EcoHort certified indicating a strong commitment from NIASA businesses to reduce the environmental impact of their systems and processes within their business.
- The 2009 Nursery Industry Awards attracted 71 businesses. This was a decrease of 21%. The reasons for the decrease were a combination of factors, namely: due to delay in sponsorship procurement distribution of the marketing materials were delayed. Many businesses would not use the information on the internet and therefore felt there was insufficient time to prepare their entries. Secondly the State Offices were asked to promote and support the program however there is no evidence this occurred. And finally many felt the impact of the global financial crises on their businesses restricted their enthusiasm and focus to enter the awards. The 2010 Awards addressed these issues plus some that had been expressed previously. The result in the program for 2010 was a 70 % increase in submissions which categorically negated the 21% decrease in 2009.
- The media coverage for the awards in both mainstream and industry media in the first year of the project did not meet expectations due to the suitability of the provider to achieve this outcome. The selection and employment of an experienced media company in the second year addressed this issue with triple the media coverage achieved. All three industry publications, Australian Horticulture, Hort Journal and Greenworld dedicated significant coverage to the Awards with Australian Horticulture featuring the Awards on the front cover of their April Issue.
- The increase in Young Leader submissions and the inclusion of the National Young Leader of the Year in high profile Industry meetings demonstrates the value industry places on cultivating our leaders of the future.
- The number of businesses who enter the awards and are accredited continues to be a strong indicator of business improvement. In the 2009 Awards 70% of the National Winners were businesses with either NIASA or AGCAS accreditation.

## Recommendations

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### **Industry Accreditation & Recognition Programs:**

#### ***Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS)***

The existing AGCAS program does not have a tangible bottom-line business benefit the majority of retailer's desire, particularly in times of economic uncertainty and stress. However, as the issues of biosecurity and quarantine come under greater scrutiny by governments the opportunity to develop a retail program addressing these issues may become a necessity and to offset compliance be positioned as an attractive alternative for industry

#### ***Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA)***

South Australia's new quarantine laws and the increased interest in NIASA demonstrate the power of a market driver in getting more businesses to adopt NIASA accreditation.

For some businesses the costs of becoming NIASA certified outweigh the perceived benefit. The objective of the future marketing is to increase the tangible benefits of NIASA so the cost /value proposition is more equitable.

A 2009 Strategic plan has been developed and attached in the Appendix. This plan will focus on developing bottom-line benefits for NIASA, raising the profile of NIASA accredited businesses, re-branding NIASA and the modules EcoHort and BioSecure HACCP under the umbrella Farm Management Systems and identifying market drivers for the program.

#### ***Young Leaders***

The Young leader program will again be an integral part of the 2010 Award program. The National Young leader program will continue to evolve to provide exposure and learning opportunities for the reigning young leader. It is envisaged this philosophy will be extended to the internal state opportunities for the State Winners also.

#### ***National Awards Program***

The changes to the 2010 Awards program are already paying dividends with increased participation nationally. The Awards program as a business improvement tool in itself needs to remain contemporary and relevant for industry. Feedback is sought at the conclusion of each year's program. It is important we monitor/measure the impact of the changes introduced in the 2010 Awards and adjust cement accordingly for the 2011 Awards project.