



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Overview of the Australian Nursery Industry – April 2013

Size of Market:

As the following picture shows, Australia is a large continent with a population of only 23 million. The majority of the population are located in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Perth, Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart are smaller cities with local supply issues being centred on State regulations.

Nursery production is focused on the East Coast which covers a range of climatic types.



Perth to Sydney = 3293 kms; Brisbane to Melbourne = 1371 kms; Cairns to Hobart = 2890 kms

Australia is 7,706,168 sq kms compared to Europe (as pictured) 3,483,006 sq kms

A big place without to many people.

Biosecurity Issues:

Being such a large landmass with range of climatic zones one of the major issues for industry is Biosecurity relating to plant movement between States. The Nursery Industry Association has invested in programs for growers, and is working with Government at Federal and State level on programs that will enable growers to self audit for plant movement. This will reduce the need for clearance charges before shipping.

A key issue for the industry in both internal biosecurity and management of potential invasive species is the availability of agrochemicals that can be utilised in the production system. Australia has a minor use program for use of products that do not gain the support of manufacturers for full label claims.

Water Issues:

Australia has issues with droughts and floods, both have caused major impacts on the nursery industry in recent years. The Industry has invested in water efficiency programs and developed industry best practice guidelines for irrigation of container stock. These are utilised by growers and many businesses are almost self sufficient in water use without relying on expensive town water supply. All water from irrigation of container crops on most properties is collected and reused post treatment for pathogens etc. Water treatment is a critical part of our industry best practice scheme.

Growing Media:

There is very little peat used in nursery production, with most growers utilising composted bark based mixes. The security of this material long term is a concern to the industry with some investment in alternatives. Cocoa fibre is utilised to improve water holding capacity.

The industry has invested in the development of standards for media use, and manufacturers undertake regular testing and auditing.

Labour costs & Automation:

Australia is at a major disadvantage compared to other nursery producing countries in terms of the cost of labour for semi-skilled and un-skilled horticultural work. In many cases our workers, are paid - on an hourly rates basis excluding superannuation - 1.5 times more than a worker in New Zealand, three times more than a US worker, ten times more than a South American and twenty times that of a South African. Our industry is covered by minimum wage rates and while not unionised there are issues regarding hours of work etc.

This is driving innovation but the businesses are not of a size that can readily adopt automation as seen in some businesses in Europe or America.

Industry Research, Development and Extension:

The Australian Nursery industry has a levy system in place which generates funds for R,D&E for the sector. Industry receives matched funding from Government to support this and have been fortunate enough to utilise these funds in a range of programs. Data is communicated to growers via Industry Development Officers and electronic communications- www.ngia.com.au

As with all horticultural sectors we are facing a shortage of suitably qualified researcher that understand the sector. We are focussing on different research related to the value of plants – ie vegetation as critical infrastructure for solving climate change impacts; Improvements in public health and wellbeing from exposure to plants in the built environment.

Industry Promotions:

The key focus of industry based marketing activity has been on communicating the value plants make to creating sustainable and liveable communities throughout Australia. This is important as the changing demographic of home owners have so many other items to spend money on. Plants are not a luxury item but a necessity. Details of our programs are found on the following sites: <https://www.facebook.com/plantlifebalance> and www.plantlifebalance.com.au . Industry is also very involved with other sectors in promoting more green life in the Urban Environment.