

Proteaceae/Myrtaceae



The International Protea Association (IPA) hosted a hugely successful combined conference in Perth, Australia, in August. For the first time, a joint symposium was held between New Ornamentals and Protea working groups; both scientific sections of the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS).

Protea and New Ornamentals groups hold combined conference in Perth

Perth was chosen as the venue to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Kings Park and Botanic Garden; the largest city park in the world, which showcases over 3,000 species of Western Australia's unique flora. Many of these flower in late winter and spring, making August the ideal time to visit.

Intense debate

At any horticultural conference, delegates expect to hear the latest news on propagation advances, developments in production techniques, post-harvest updates, and market trends. The delegates from 14 countries were not disappointed. What made the IPA Perth conference exceptional, though, was the additional interest of discussions and commercial assessments of as-yet unknown products, ranging from novel native flora to deliberate

hybrids and selections of unusual forms. Naturally, this led to intense debate on benefits and mechanisms of plant variety protection.

State of the industry

A significant part of every IPA conference programme is the presentation of industry status reports by representatives of the 15 recognised IPA member countries or regions. Each report is an update on the area under production, the main varieties cultivated, marketing strategies and grower-based research initiatives. Some regions report a growth phase, such as California, South Africa and the Azores, whereas others, such as Australia, Chile and New Zealand, have only remained relatively stable by changing their marketing strategy from predominantly export to domestic focused.

Kings Park

The conference programme included a behind-the-scenes tour of the Kings Park advanced plant breeding facilities. Digby Grown, Senior Plant Breeder, delighted the audience with a glimpse of hybrid Grevillea selections shortlisted for trialling by Kings Park's international and local commercial partners. "Our breeding programme aims to produce free-flowering, compact, hardy cultivars for use in home gardens, flowering pots and public landscapes," explained Digby. III

Conference proceedings have been collated and will shortly be published as a volume of Acta Horticulturae (watch the IPA website for release updates, and details of the next conference www.ipa-protea.org).

by Audrey Gerber