



# **REPORT ON A SURVEY OF AFFILIATES OF THE GARDEN CLUBS OF AUSTRALIA INC.**

**30<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Garden Clubs of Australia Planning Sub-Committee circulated a survey on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019 to all affiliates by email following the notification published in the February Bulletin.

This is the first time the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. has collected information about affiliates other than that provided at the time of registration.

The purpose of the survey was to collect some general information on all affiliates to confirm or dispel assumptions that may be held about the GCA affiliates.

It is important to acknowledge initially that the design of the survey was based on an understanding of the operation of "Garden Clubs". It became clear, as a result of feed-back from some affiliates that the model of operation of affiliates varies considerably and this survey did not accommodate those who do not meet monthly or regularly (as do most garden clubs) or who are supported by State or National coordinating bodies which are themselves affiliates of the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. Such affiliates include some species-specific groups, some horticultural societies, Friends groups of some botanical gardens and some community garden groups.

Information in this report has been collated from responses received by the end of the second week in May 2019.

Simple questions were asked to derive an understanding of the following areas

- Age profile of affiliate members
- Gender profile of affiliate members
- Levels of gardening experience in years
- Location of where affiliate members garden
- Collection of details of activities of affiliates
- Some broad indication of the financial position of affiliates.

It was clear from the responses that individual affiliates adopted a variety of mechanisms in collecting information.

Some affiliates distributed copies of the survey to individual members and then returned the collected completed forms.

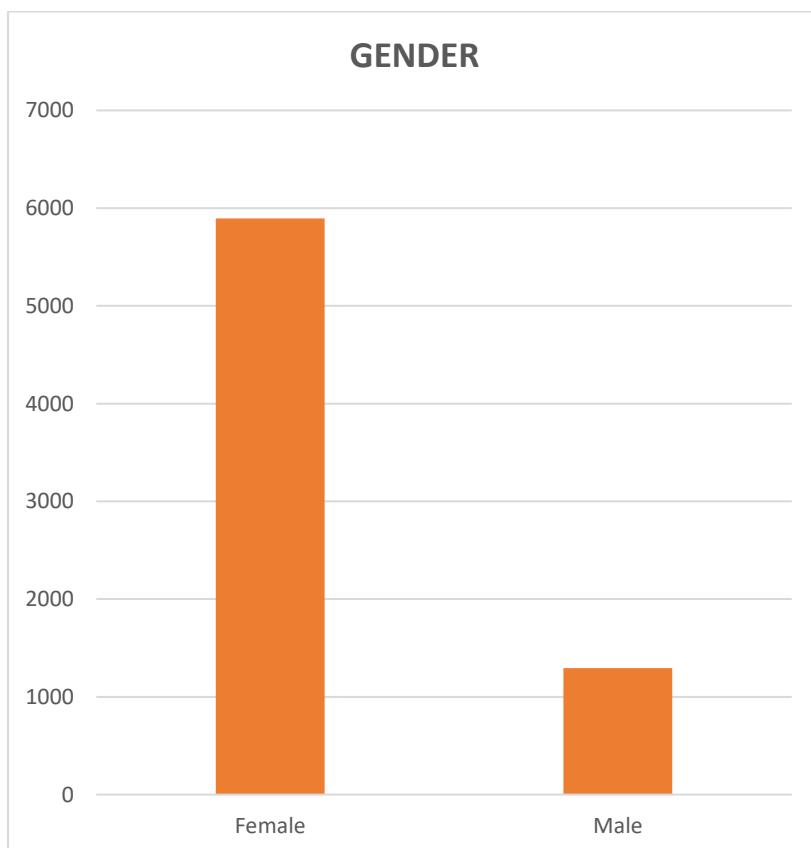
Some affiliates circulated the survey during a regular meeting with members indicating individual responses with a tick.

Some affiliates collected information by a “show of hands” at a meeting and returned that information.

Others appeared to have extracted the information from their club records.

The variety of approaches used will have an influence on the results of the survey, particularly in relation to numbers of individual members, (There may have been only a 40% attendance at the meeting when data was collected.)

## GENDER PROFILE



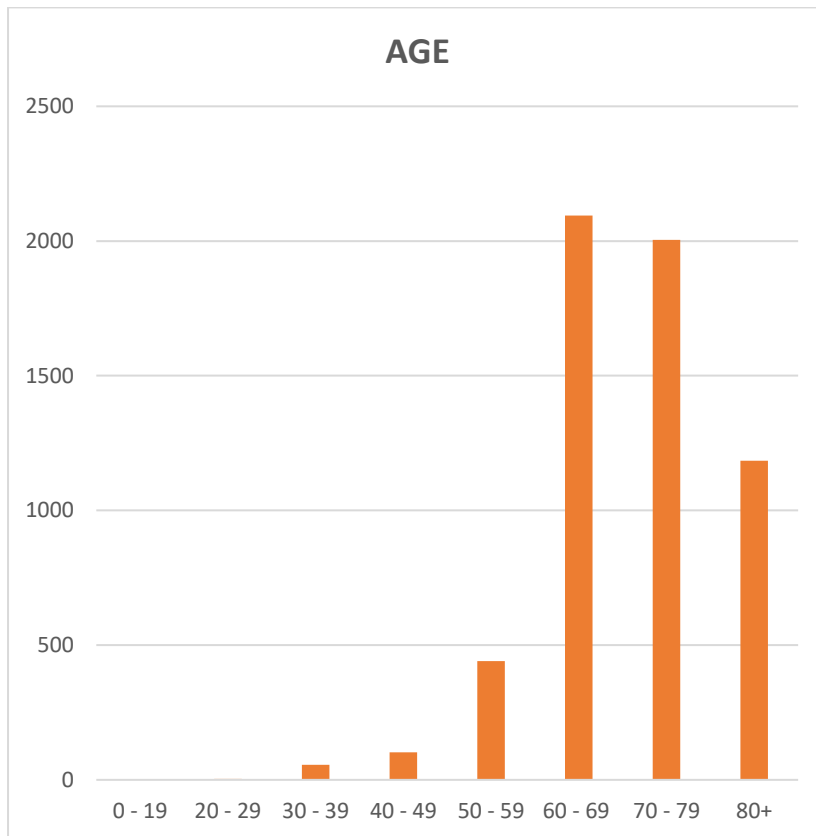
Female members of responding affiliates outnumber male members by a factor of 4:1.

In only one case of more than 230 responding affiliates did male members out-number female members. This was a ‘specialist interest’ club with a relatively small membership.

In a number of instances responses from affiliates showed only female members.

In spite of the differences noted above in the way affiliates compiled information, we can be confident that **females dominate membership of affiliates of this association.**

## AGE PROFILE

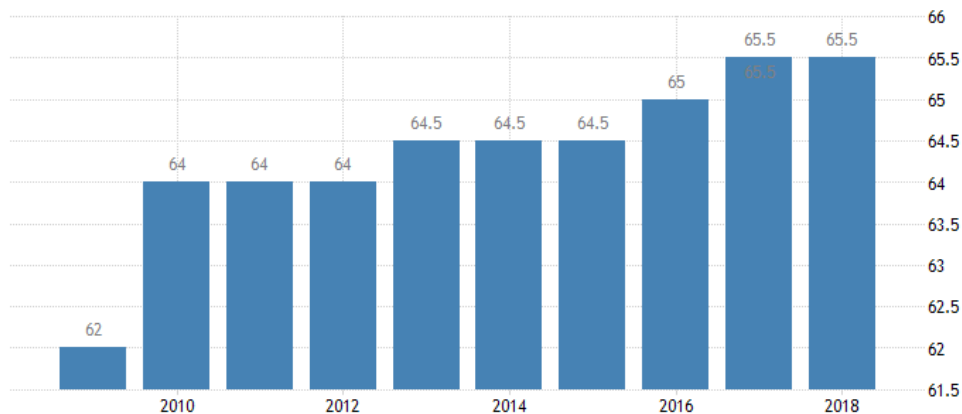


Respondents in the 60 – 79 age groups constitute 72% of members; respondents in the 60 – 80+ age groups constitute 81% of members.

4.5% of respondents are under the age of 50 years while 15% are under 60 years of age.

While some academic research suggests that gardening is undertaken at a time of life when couples move from renting a home to purchasing and when the activities of managing a family and children’s activities diminish, these results would suggest that **participation in garden clubs does not coincide with this time.**

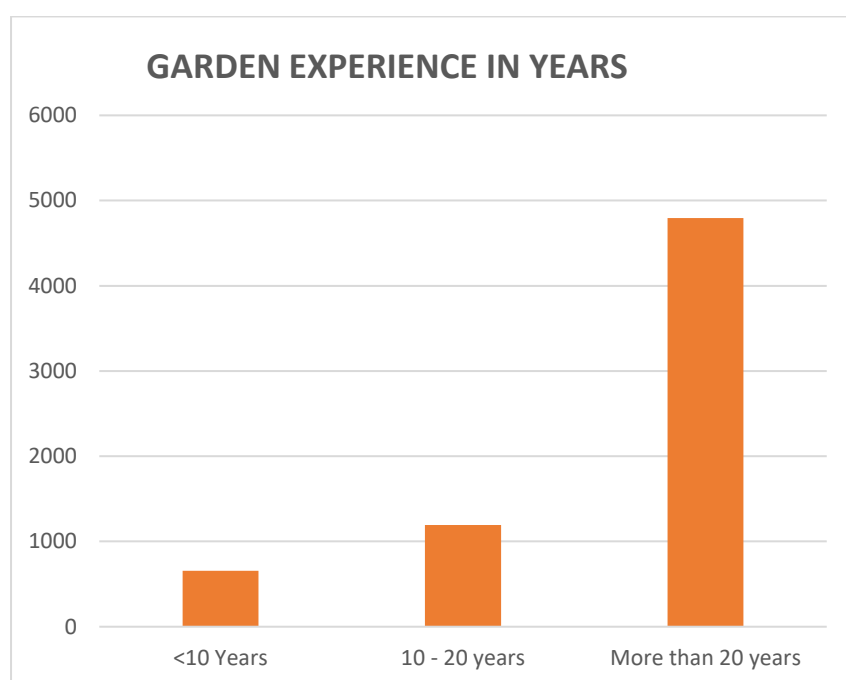
The following graph from the Taxation department showing average retirements age for women in Australia would seem to have a closer relationship to garden club membership than family circumstances.



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

## GARDENING EXPERIENCE

Clearly respondents as a group are highly experience gardeners. “less than 10 years” represents 12% of respondents; “10 to 20 years” 16%, while “more than 20 years” is 71% of respondents. This might suggest that gardeners who join affiliates have had some years of gardening experience prior to joining a garden club. While this might raise questions as to the motivations of people joining garden clubs, this survey did not seek to answer such questions.



Gardener’s experience in gardening and their motivations for gardening cannot be underestimated. Research<sup>1</sup> suggests that practice acquired earlier in life or under the influence of a significant person (modelled behaviour) and which are successful are unlikely to change unless they are perceived to be necessary. Change in anticipation is not likely to be embraced easily or permanently.

Gardeners have demonstrated that learning in a social context as well as by experience is a favoured mode. They tend to adopt the approach to their gardening that family or friend’s advice is the most reliable source of information.

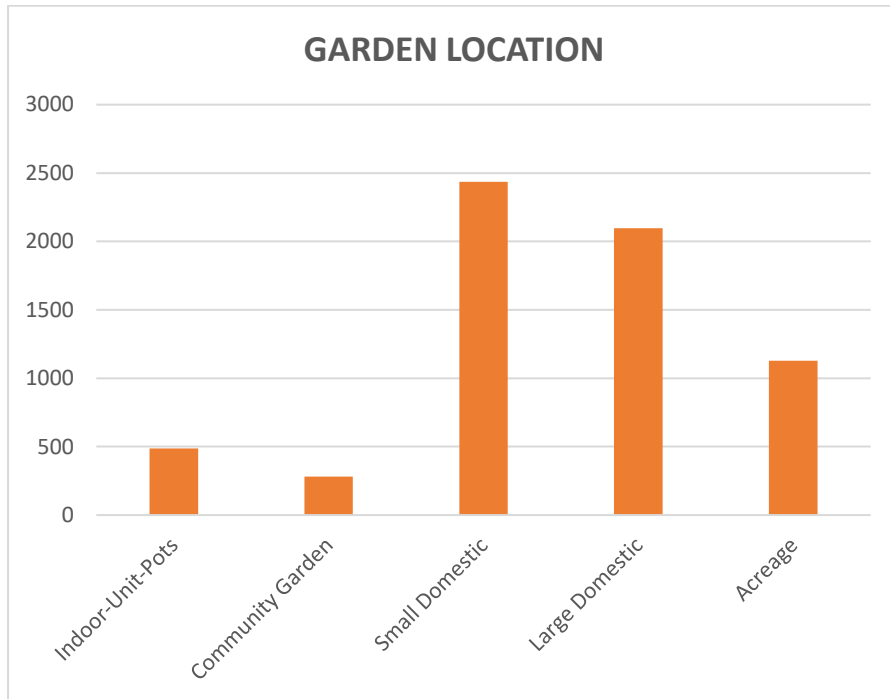
## GARDEN LOCATION

Clearly residential blocks are the most common location for gardens among respondent at this time. Acreage was noticed as a frequent response among returns from larger rural communities which is not unexpected.

While responses indicating ‘indoor’, or ‘communal gardens’ were relatively low, it should be remembered that community garden affiliates in general found the structure of the survey unsympathetic to their mode of operation as a group.

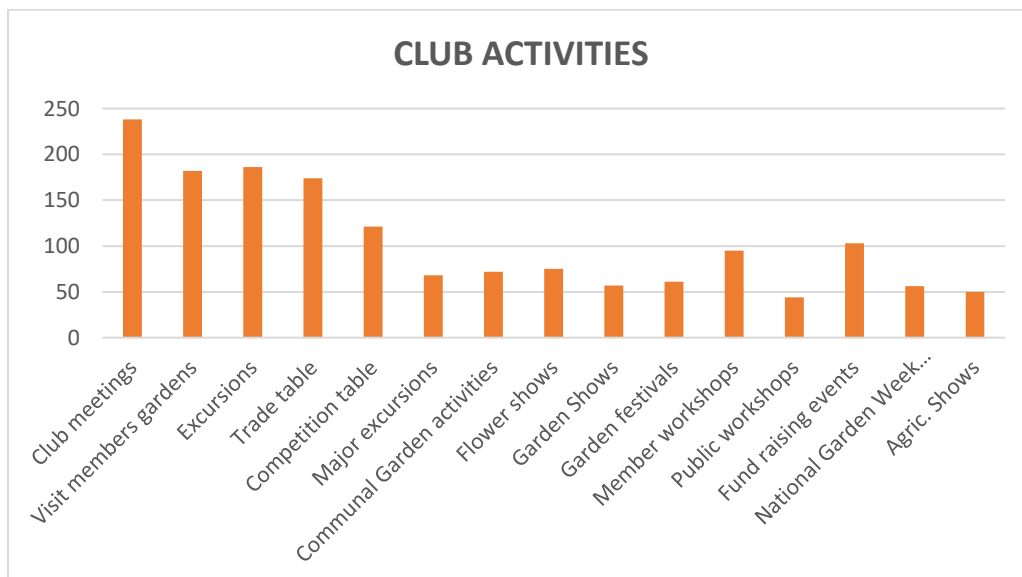
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<sup>1</sup> A Phenomenological Study of Gardening Practices and Invasive Plant Management in the Sydney Basin. Ikutegbe, Victoria.U Doctoral Thesis. University of Woollongong. 2016



## CLUB ACTIVITIES

Affiliates were given a set of options which described the activities they undertook with members during the year. They were asked to indicate which of the activities they engaged in and to list any others specific to their club.



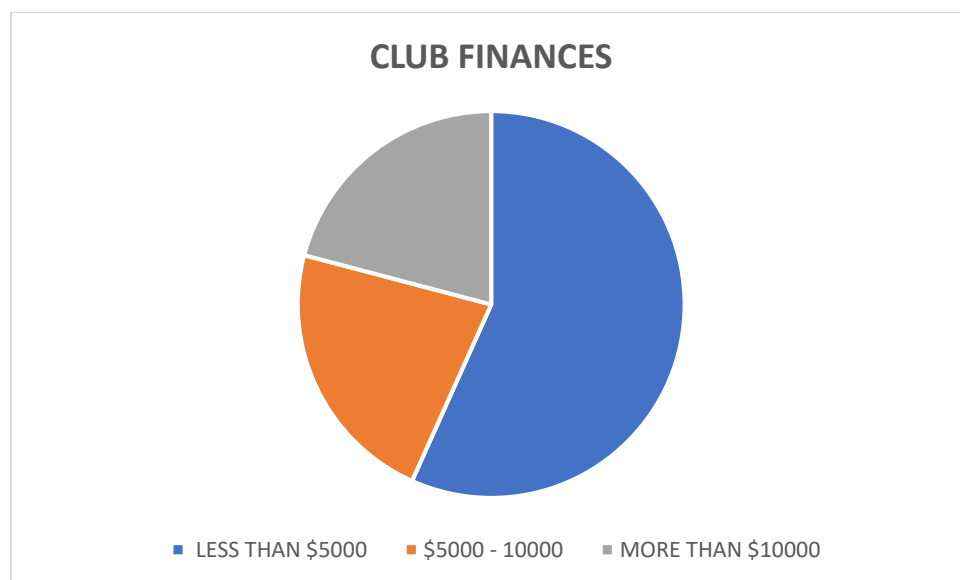
These supplied options either described the majority of activities undertaken by clubs across Australia or influenced the responses to the question so that few additional activities appeared to be undertaken by any significant number of clubs other than participating in local agricultural shows.

It is clear that the dominant purposes for these activities are directed to providing services to club members rather than being more broadly engaged in “community”. There were, of course, examples of “community involvement” activities given by a small number of clubs which should be explored further by the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. if this objective of the association is to be pursued.

## CLUB FINANCES

The second question for clubs sought a general impression of the financial strength of affiliates. This question raised some concern with some affiliates which is understandable given the general low level of engagement with affiliates over some time. Some affiliates chose not to answer the question. No analysis was undertaken to seek a relationship between responses to funding levels and a response to “Fund Raising Events” in the previous question.

Results for the returns are illustrated –



## DISCUSSION ON CLUB MEMBERS SURVEY

Given the objective of this survey was to develop **impressions** of the membership of affiliates of garden Clubs of Australia Inc., it would be unwise to draw too many specific conclusions from the data collected.

However, it is suggested that the patterns of age, gardening experience and garden location leads to the impression that members of affiliates are almost exclusively in the later years of their life and possibly retired from permanent employment. It can reasonably be assumed that the majority of these members join a garden club during this period and bring with them some years of practice as a gardener.

While research into gardener’s practice<sup>2</sup> also suggests that “gardeners develop their gardening skills through practice”, and this may be a continuous life-time process, it also suggests that membership of garden clubs is seen as a reliable source of informed advice about gardening and the mechanisms of absorbing that advice is complementary to their experience prior to joining a garden club.

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

Garden historians have documented the patterns of Australian participation in gardening by gender since first settlement. Historically, gardening is claimed to have been a masculine practice for much of Australia's history. While this may be explained by economic circumstances and the emphasis on vegetable gardening in past years, there is also some suggestion that participation in gardening by females may have gone unreported at earlier times. As the emphasis on gardening practice changed to adopt aesthetic intentions, particularly from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has become clear that participation in gardening as an activity is now decided largely on choice and interest rather than on gender. This would have implications for our understanding of garden club membership.

## **CONCLUSION**

**The general objectives of the survey, to develop a broader set of impressions of affiliates nationally was achieved within any limits imposed by the response rate. (39%)**

**It is strongly believed that the Planning Sub-committee of the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc.is now in a better position to develop an initial Strategic Plan for the association.**