

## Experiences with Accreditation under the National Scheme

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### INTRODUCTION

Accreditation schemes have existed in at least four States of Australia for a number of years. More recently, those individual schemes have been brought under the umbrella of a National Scheme called the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia (NIASA) to enhance the effectiveness of the accreditation process.

Accreditation is a well established business concept that has been used to attract markets and increase levels of consumer confidence for many years. It is a voluntary process, no one is obliged to join. The decision to seek accreditation must be based on an individual study of its economic relevance to your business. There has to be a clear recognition that adhering to the accreditation guidelines will either improve your productivity or your marketing performance or both.

Accreditation is available to all categories of nursery business and to some allied traders, e.g. growing media suppliers.

In the case of Narromine Transplants the process of accreditation was seen as a necessary step towards quality management and the eventual goal of accreditation under the Australia/New Zealand Standard (ISO 9002).

This paper endeavours to demystify the process leading up to accreditation under NIASA and to distinguish its place in the quality pathway.

### THE PROCESS

The NIASA is administered by the National Accreditation Committee and each state has a designated Technical Officer. It is through these Technical Officers that the first approach is made to seek accreditation. An excellent booklet has been produced by the Australian Horticultural Corporation on the subject as well as a 12-minute video. Both these aids should be purchased before entering into the process.

It is important to understand the place of accreditation in the overall scheme of quality management :

No formal quality management	Low quality output	Low credibility
NIASA	Better quality output	Better credibility
Aust/NZ ISO 9002	High quality output	High credibility

NIASA is not a quality-assurance programme, it is a step towards quality assurance embracing crop hygiene, regulatory requirements, crop management practices as they pertain to nutrition, environmental control, and site appearance.

As our operation is a reasonably sophisticated containerised seedling nursery many of the practices required under the scheme were already in place.

Of particular importance is that all growing areas are above ground and that the media components used—peat, vermiculite, and polystyrene (provided they are well stored)—are generally free of pathogens.

Compliance with state environmental laws, particularly as they apply to irrigation runoff, is essential and will become a more important part of the scheme as more emphasis is placed on water management by Environmental Protection Agencies.

Attention has also been paid to washing facilities, container storage, weed control, the prevention and control of insects and other invertebrate pests, and crop protection programmes in general. Complete records are kept of all chemicals used, including the rates and dates of application as they apply to each individual crop.

A great deal of attention has also been paid to irrigation practices and the reduction of runoff water. The water supply in our case, from underground, is also pathogen free and is of exceptional quality.

Our growing medium has been carefully formulated so that it has a suitable range of physical properties, in terms of water-holding capacity and aeration, to cope with our environment and watering regime. Tests are carried out weekly on media both new and old and on the water supply to ensure consistency.

Low humidity at Narromine excludes us from many of the diseases experienced in environments of 85% relative humidity or greater. Greenhouse design allows good airflow and root pruning for cell-grown seedlings. Windbreaks and greenhouse side curtains minimise wind damage and reduce the possibility of disease transmission from dust.

The nutrition of container-grown seedlings is relatively complex and requires careful management to ensure the end product will survive field conditions. Programmes are specific to genera in many cases and are changed on a seasonal basis. The assessment of the nutritional status of plants ready for sale is a major consideration for the Technical Officer at the time of examination. Testing also takes place for the incidence of *Phytophthora* at points around the nursery, particularly wet spots caused by runoff. The tests must show the disease is not present.

Examiners will also assess the site to ensure it is visually attractive, tidy, and has a professional appearance. Buildings, fences, roadways, and parking areas should be appropriate for the purpose and in good repair. Gardens and display plants need to be in immaculate condition.

## CONCLUSION

Accreditation for our nursery has meant participation by all staff. It has given them a sense of achievement and a set of criteria by which they can gauge themselves for management. It is a powerful tool which can best be demonstrated as follows:

- Improved consistency
- Improved outputs
- Improved management
- Improved profits
- Improved quality
- Lower production costs
- Lower labour costs
- Less waste and rework
- Less disease

**Acknowledgements.** Use has been made of The Handbook, the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia available from the Nursery Industry Association of Australia; and "Profits in Quality", a video on the subject of Nursery Accreditation available from the Australian Horticultural Corporation.

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## Practical Experience with Total Quality Management

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper does not claim to be a "how to" guide in the preparation of a Total Quality Management (TQM) system, but aims to give an insight into the basic guidelines that must be followed when embarking on TQM. The process is still in its infancy at Plant Growers Australia (PGA) and from our experiences I will attempt to recount the processes and problems encountered to date.

There is growing world-wide recognition of the importance of the relationship between quality, productivity, and competitiveness. TQM can improve all three of these key business areas. TQM was first instigated in the USA but has been further refined and developed in Japan over the last four decades. Companies in Australia and the U.S.A. have been slow to take up this management approach but the process is now starting to gain momentum. According to business experts, TQM will be a requirement of all businesses that wish to remain competitive both in Australia and internationally.

The main objectives of TQM are economic production, service, and customer satisfaction.

To achieve these objectives the following are considered as vital elements when introducing TQM.

**Principles of TQM.** The fundamental management principle of TQM is to gain continuous improvement in the quality performance of all processes, products, and services of an organisation. Managers must focus on the entire process to ensure consistency and improvement of the final output. The message at the core of this principle is that maintenance of quality throughout the organisation will lead to higher returns.

The concept of "total quality" is the vital element and conveys that an organisation-wide improvement effort is required. This involves every person regardless of their position or function using their individual skills and experience to improve all processes and their outputs. Total quality is about leadership, clear goals, plans, and benchmarks in an on-going pursuit of improved performance.

For TQM to succeed, it must be driven by and have the total support of the top management. When managing and improving processes TQM favours the gradual approach where management and staff are equally involved in managing and improving processes that serve the customer. People are the key to a successful enterprise and TQM relies on people to make it work.