



MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

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OUR GOLDEN WATTLE COMES OF AGE

Environment and Heritage Minister Peter Garrett today led celebrations marking the 21st anniversary of the declaration of the golden wattle as Australia's official national flower.

At the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra, Mr Garrett joined former Governor-General Sir William Deane to open a new exhibition *Celebrate Our Wattle*. The exhibition documents the place of wattle in Australian art, botany, history and culture, with a particular focus on the use of wattle by Indigenous Australians.

"Twenty-one years ago today, Mrs Hazel Hawke planted a golden wattle in these national botanic gardens, proclaiming the wattle Australia's national floral emblem," Mr Garrett said.

"The wattle has long been valued by Indigenous Australians and it has been part of Australia's identity ever since Sydney first declared Wattle Day on the first day of spring in 1901.

"After Prime Minister Andrew Fisher incorporated the wattle into our Coat of Arms, it soon became a symbol of remembrance with Australian mothers sending small sprigs to their sons serving overseas in World War 1 to remind them of home.

"It has been a poignant symbol of loss and respect at ceremonies mourning the young Australians who died in the Swiss canyon disaster and later, the victims of the Bali bombing.

"The wattle features on our highest national ward, the Order of Australia, and the green and gold have been our official national colours since 1984."

It is said that a wattle was the first plant to bloom in Hiroshima after the atomic bomb was detonated in 1945. To mark National Wattle Day, Hiroshima's Acacia Appreciation Society sends the Gardens hundreds of yellow ribbons as a gesture of friendship. Visitors are encouraged to take ribbons home and attach them to their favourite trees.

The *Celebrate Our Wattle* exhibition features an embroidered sculpture of golden wattle, commissioned by the Friends of the Gardens and created by embroiderer Lynne Stone, who lost her home in the devastating Marysville fire in February this year.

"The original sculpture Lynne was working on was destroyed in that terrible fire, along with most of her possessions, so her beautiful golden wattle sculpture is a moving symbol of loss and recovery," Mr Garrett said.

Celebrate Our Wattle runs at the Australian National Botanic Gardens until 11 October.
For more information visit www.anbg.gov.au/anbg/