

Abstract:

The protea industry has exhibited dynamic changes in the past 60 years. Originally it was a wild flower gathering operation of indigenous plant material in South Africa and Australia. Frank Batchelor established the foundations of commercial protea cultivation in the Cape of South Africa, in the 1940s to 1970s. Marie Vogts published "Proteas, Know Them and Grow Them" in 1958. South African Protea Producers and Exporters Association (SAPPEX) came into being in 1965, and Walter and Ruth Middelman of Honingklip Nurseries soon became world famous as a good source of protea seed collected mainly from the veld. The International Protea Association (IPA) was formed in Melbourne, after a meeting hosted by Peter Mathews of Proteaflora Nurseries in 1981. IPA has met approximately every two years ever since. In 1984, the International Protea Working Group (IPWG) was formed under the International Society of Horticultural Science (ISHS). This group of scientists working on protea has met concurrently with IPA on several occasions, and their papers appear in *Acta Horticulturae*. In 2000, the area under protea cultivation worldwide was estimated to be approximately 6000 hectares. South Africa has the most acres, with Australia, U.S., Israel, Portugal, Spain, Azores, Canary Islands, Central and South America, Japan and China all reporting plantings. An example of the industry's international aspects is *Leucadendron* cv. Safari Sunset. Its parents came from South Africa, it was hybridized in New Zealand, and today, Israel sells millions of stems annually. Protea production has reached a critical point where a larger market segment is needed to absorb future material. The genetic pool offers great potential for new products. The challenge for producers is to identify where to put limited resources in support of short- and long-term goals. An international dispute on the ownership of indigenous genetic material can have a negative effect on the industry. Theoretically it should be possible to double the export potential of a new generation of improved protea if agreements with regard to research, marketing and distribution are reached.