



Senator the Hon Robert Hill

Leader of the Government in the Senate

Minister for the Environment and Heritage

VIRTUAL HERBARIUM GETS SIX MILLION PLANTS ON LINE

Australia's entire collection of scientific plant specimens will be computerised and the information made available online through a \$10 million project involving the Commonwealth and State governments and the private sector.

Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill said the cooperative project to create Australia's Virtual Herbarium was the most ambitious computerisation of botanical collections undertaken anywhere in the world.

"No other country has undertaken such a project, to develop a universally accessible, integrated flora information system," Senator Hill said today.

"Australia's collection contains six million specimens, dating from 1770 and spread across eight main herbaria, and it continues to grow with Australian botany still in the discovery phase.

"Australia's Virtual Herbarium has the potential to improve the identification of the gaps in knowledge of our vast continent. It will preserve our botanical records, enabling the remaining 60 per cent of current records to be computerised and future discoveries to be added to this database.

"The information contained in the Virtual Herbarium will be important in helping to design revegetation projects, threatened species recovery plans and other land restoration activities and research projects.

"Plant names, geographic distributions, colour images and associated information will be readily available for research, education and environmental decision-making by government, private land holders and managers, and community groups.

"Australia's Virtual Herbarium will allow the development of sophisticated early warning modules, such as plants posing threats as weeds, that can save the Australian community millions of dollars, and assist in monitoring the health of the country's biodiversity.

The Commonwealth Government has committed \$4 million to establish Australia's Virtual Herbarium and the governments of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia have committed another \$4 million combined. Private bodies will make up the balance of the funds, with some of this private sector funding already committed.

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Australia's Virtual Herbarium is a long-term cooperative project supported by the Australian National Herbarium in Canberra, the State Herbarium of South Australia, the Queensland Herbarium, the Herbarium of the Northern Territory, the Tasmanian Herbarium, the National Herbarium of Victoria, the National Herbarium of New South Wales, the Western Australian Herbarium and the Australian Biological Resources Study in Canberra.