



Adrian Parsons, Managing Director of Helix Australia, is among the vibrant waxflower hybrids bred in collaboration with Kings Park & Botanic Garden.

'BREEDING A WAXFLOWER TAKES NINE YEARS... PROTECTION MAKES IT WORTH IT'

In the sun-hardened fields of Western Australia, a waxflower revolution began. Adrian Parsons turned patience and persistence into a model for protecting and promoting Australia's native floriculture from field to florist. When *FloraCulture International* caught up with Parsons, his straight-talking, warmth made the complex world of plant breeders' rights sound refreshingly human.

AUTHOR: RACHEL WAKEFIELD

"Patience, patience, patience," says Adrian Parsons with a wry laugh. "It's a long game with no short-term outcomes."

He's talking about breeding *Chamelaucium uncinatum* — waxflower — a hardy Australian native that, in his hands, has become one of the world's most sought-after filler flowers. But it's also a metaphor for the patient capital, layered partnerships, and intellectual property protection that underpin modern floriculture. When Parsons and his business partner Craig Musson founded Helix Australia in 2008, they weren't just starting another breeding company. They were attempting to create a sustainable, royalty-funded model in a sector where innovation is often undervalued and enforcement uneven. "Breeding takes nine years or more," Parsons explains. "If you don't protect it, you're just pouring your money away."

THE LONG GAME OF BREEDING VALUE

Helix Australia was born from a breeding portfolio acquired from Brian Jack of Western Flora, later expanded through a formal collaboration with Kings Park &

Botanic Garden (KPBG) in Perth. "KPBG gives us access to both wild and cultivated genetic pools," says Parsons. "They use sophisticated, often cellular-based hybridisation techniques that deliver exciting, commercially viable results."

'IT'S NOT ABOUT SCARING PEOPLE OFF. IT'S ABOUT RESPECT FOR THE WORK BEHIND EACH VARIETY'

Detailed view of a Helix Australia-bred waxflower, illustrating the fine floral structures and distinctive colour traits safeguarded under international PBR protection.



'IN THE END, IT'S
COMMUNICATION
AND TRUST
THAT MAKE THE
PBR SYSTEM
WORK – NOT
BUREAUCRACY'



It's a partnership where scientific precision meets marketing instinct; a rare balance that keeps innovation anchored to real-world demand. "Market feedback drives commercially successful breeding outcomes," he adds. "Our background in the cut-and-thrust of flower import and export means we can read market signals, spot gaps and feed that data straight back to the breeders."

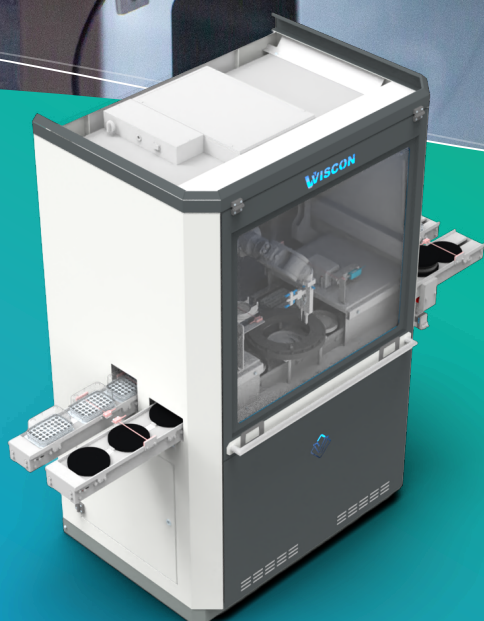
Today, Helix Australia's waxflower hybrids bloom across Australia, South Africa, Israel, the USA, Peru, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The company also collaborates with KPBG on *Boronia* hybrids for both the cut-flower and pot-plant markets. This expansion demonstrates how science, trust, and timing can create commercial traction.

'Dee's Delight' is protected under PBR for its pink-white bicolour blooms.

Data-driven precision in somatic embryogenesis

INNOVATION BY

VISCON
plant technology



Viscon's AI-powered Embryo Picker is a robotic unit that combines advanced imaging and AI to identify and select the most viable somatic embryos, callus, and seeds up to 3 mm. By analyzing size, shape, and developmental stage, each specimen is scored, ranked, and securely logged in a traceable database for full data integrity.

Designed for high-efficiency performance and full automation, the Embryo Picker streamlines workflows across both petri dishes and embryo trays. We collaborate closely with you to support your automation ambitions and help future-proof your propagation pipeline **for a thriving tomorrow.**

embryopickr



Explore the full solution

scan the QR-code or visit www.viscon.eu/embryopicker

+31 (0) 78 673 9898

info@viscon.eu

www.viscon.eu

WHEN ROYALTIES MEET REALITY

Protecting that value has meant building an entirely new kind of relationship with growers. “Our model is a little bit unique,” Parsons admits. “In many crops, royalties are charged only once — at the point of sale for the plant material. But for us, a royalty on a plant is inadequate. There’s just no return on investment. We needed an ongoing royalty stream to make breeding viable and to give us revenue to continue.”

Helix’s model typically includes a royalty at planting and an end-point royalty per stem or as a percentage of the farm-gate price. “It’s new, and growers aren’t doing cartwheels,” he says with a smile. “But it’s a fair way to balance breeder, grower and market interests.”

That balance, he insists, is fundamental to long-term success. “Everything we make goes straight back into breeding and PBRs. We pay our way, but we’re investing for the future.”

GUARDING THE GENE(I)US

As Managing Director and Horticultural Sales & Marketing Strategist, Parsons has built enforcement and trust into Helix Australia’s daily operations with growers across multiple continents. “South Africa and Australia, our two biggest markets, have very good collection processes and full transparency,” he says. “In South Africa, we get an annual report listing stems sold and average farm-gate price. In Australia, we do it monthly, working closely with my former company, Wafex. There’s no issue of traceability.”

He tells one story that captures both the vulnerability and resilience of small-scale enforcement. “We recently had an infringement in America on a protected variety. It turned out to be an uneducated planting by a grower. We wrote to him, agreed on compensation for plant and harvest royalties, and he kept the plants under licence. It was a win-win — and a reminder that most breaches come from lack of awareness, not bad faith.”

Parsons says strong relationships are just as critical as paperwork. “In California, that infringement

was only caught because one of our trading partners called to tell us,” he explains. “We wouldn’t have known otherwise — the product would’ve slipped through the system. The PBR system only works when there’s communication and trust through the chain.”

He also has a vivid analogy for the deterrent power of protection. “A patent lawyer once told me, ‘We can put a sign on your fence that says ‘Beware of Dog’. People don’t know if that dog’s a Rottweiler or a French poodle — but the warning is what matters.’ That’s exactly what PBRs do: they make people think twice.”

THE COST OF PROTECTION

Behind that deterrent is a staggering logistical and financial burden.

“We have to do it [licence] in every country of relevance,” Parsons says. “We’re doubling, tripling, quadrupling costs. Every application — South Africa, Israel, Europe, Australia, Peru — adds up fast. Each time it’s five to ten thousand dollars per variety, multiplied across five countries. It’s killing us.”

Securing PBRs means paying for national trials, licence administration, and ongoing renewal fees for each protected variety — costs that quickly mount across multiple jurisdictions. Yet Parsons accepts them as part of responsible business.

“It’s the price of safeguarding nine years of breeding work,” he says. “Without that protection, there’s no guarantee of return.”

What frustrates him most is duplication. “If Europe’s PBR inspection results could be used elsewhere, that alone would save years and tens of thousands,” he adds. “In this digital age, why are we still repeating the same trials country by country?”

COLLABORATION, NOT COMPETITION

Despite the hurdles, Parsons believes the key to enforcement lies not in bureaucracy but in human networks.

“In California, the infringement was only caught because one of our trading partners called to tell us,” he says. “We wouldn’t have known otherwise — the product would’ve slipped through the system.”

He keeps similar relationships



Helix Australia’s royalty-funded breeding model supports both cut-flower and pot-plant hybrids for global markets.

across Europe. “I’ve got friends in the Netherlands who’ll ring and say, ‘Adrian, such-and-such is selling this at the auction.’ That’s what makes the system work — communication and trust.”

For him, PBR isn’t about punishment but partnership. “We’re not out to scare people off,” he says. “We just want respect for the work behind these varieties. When growers understand that, everyone wins.”

LESSONS IN PATIENCE AND PARTNERSHIP

Parsons’ advice to smaller breeders entering the global market is as pragmatic as it is heartfelt.

“Patience first,” he says, “but also understand the distribution chain. You have to know how your product moves — from importer to wholesaler to retailer. Know how bouquet makers use the shorter stems, how prices shift across grades. A breeder must understand how the industry will use their product.”

And, crucially, know your season. “It’s no good developing an orange flower with black stripes that peaks in December when the world only wants red and white for Christmas,” he adds.

That realism — sharp, grounded and unsentimental — is what has carried Helix Australia through the tough years of enforcement, adaptation and patient growth. “Our model works because we’re focused,” says Parsons. “We have the right breeding partners, we understand our markets, and we protect our genetics. It’s not easy. But nothing worth doing ever is.”