

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** CSIRO  
**Output Group:** - CSIRO

#### **DEST Question No. E533\_04**

Senator Carr asked on 5 November 2003.

#### **Question:**

Why are you now proposing to close the Herbarium at Atherton?

What research benefit will accrue from that decision?

#### **Answer:**

CSIRO has provided the following response.

#### *Atherton Herbarium*

The rainforest herbarium in Atherton forms part of the Australian National Herbarium, which has been developed and is managed by CSIRO Plant Industry. CSIRO believes that there are now very sound scientific and economic reasons for relocating the Atherton herbarium back to the main Australian National Herbarium in Canberra.

Transfer to Canberra will place the collection in an environment well staffed by professional systematists and other scientists with strong taxonomic research interests, with inputs from a large number of visiting scientists. Provision of the level of support available in Canberra is not possible in Atherton, nor would a transfer to another location in northern Queensland provide the appropriate physical environment for this unique and scientifically important collection.

Nonetheless, CSIRO is exploring options for an ongoing herbarium presence in north Queensland. Selected specimens from the herbarium have been placed in a Reference Collection, which will remain in Atherton and will be available to researchers working in or visiting north Queensland. The Atherton herbarium has also provided the base material for the development of an interactive software package covering all species of the rainforest. This key will be unique in the world, and we are currently aiming to complete it in December 2004. It will improve the accessibility of taxonomic information on rainforest species and it will meet the majority of needs of ecologists and field biologists, particularly when coupled with access to the Reference Collection.

Discussions regarding the future of the rainforest herbarium are ongoing and are underpinned by CSIRO's desire to see such developments in research infrastructure being both cost-effective and likely to result in enhanced quality of science in the national interest.