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Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) 2018
PMB No. 3, Townsville MC Qld 4810
Telephone: (07) 4753 4444
Facsimile: (07) 4772 5852

Darwin, Northern Territory
PO Box 41775, Casuarina NT 0811
Telephone: (08) 8920 9240
Facsimile: (07) 8920 9222

Perth, Western Australia
The University of Western Australia Oceans Institute (M096)
35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009
Telephone: (08) 6389 4000
Facsimile: (08) 6488 4585

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Opening message

On behalf of the Council of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, we are pleased to present the AIMS 2018–19 Corporate Plan. This Plan covers the four years 2018–19 through to 2021–22, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act) and s. 16E(1) of the Corporate plan for Commonwealth entities: resource management guide no. 132.

Australia is a marine nation. Our marine estate is the third largest on Earth, with an exclusive economic zone of 10 million square kilometres. This massive area is home to some of the most diverse and iconic marine ecosystems and species on the planet. Eighty-five per cent of Australians live on or near the coast, and the oceans have a special place in our national psyche. Our blue economy, which includes fishing, aquaculture, tourism and the offshore oil and gas sectors, makes a significant contribution of over $74 billion a year to the nation’s prosperity.

Australia’s tropical territories are a global asset with priceless ecosystems (coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses, rainforests, savannas, wetlands and floodplains) and rapidly growing industries that generate more than $50 billion per year in revenue. AIMS has a critical role in helping government and other stakeholders realise the opportunities and manage the challenges associated with the sustainable growth of Australia’s blue economy. Conserving the blue economy is not just about protecting species and habitats for their own sake. It is also about maintaining nature’s capacity to deliver the goods and services that we all need, and whose loss comes at a high price.

To conserve marine biodiversity and maintain the health of our ecosystems, continual exploration, mapping and assessment of the state of our marine estate is essential. In 2015 AIMS established a 10-year Strategic Plan to conserve our marine biodiversity.

Since then, there have been significant changes in both Australia’s marine environment and in AIMS’ operating environment. The pace at which these changes have occurred threatens to eclipse the timeframes within which fundamental research and management processes operate. These processes include peer review and publication, annual budgeting and review, decision-making and consensus-building cycles, and other institutional systems. This is challenging the fundamentals of how we do science and the traditional ways in which we conduct research.

Technologies and our markets are also facing rapid change. Robotics and machine learning will reshape many industries and big data is now a key asset – if we can unlock how to use it. Transdisciplinary thinking promises to bring powerful new perspectives, incorporating the views of non-scientists, end users, policymakers and a spectrum of science disciplines.

In this context of rapid change, AIMS revised the 10-year strategic plan and named the updated version AIMS Strategy 2025.

Elements of this Corporate Plan ensure clear linkages between our revised Strategy and performance statements in the Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) – and raise the level of our ambition for 2025 in our high-performance areas of science and operations. Both plans focus on maximising the environmental, economic and social benefits we deliver (commonly referred to as ‘impact’ – who is better off and why), quantifying that impact and planning for impact from the outset in all that we do.

Our research will continue to deliver the evidence that allows stakeholders to make informed decisions while incorporating a strong focus on developing solutions to the threats and opportunities within Australia’s marine estate.

AIMS is accountable to the Minister for Jobs and Innovation and is governed by a Council that reports to the Minister. The Council, which meets quarterly, sets AIMS’ strategic directions and research strategies and oversees management of the Institute. The CEO is responsible for the day-to-day affairs of the Institute.

The AIMS Council (at August 2018) comprises: Professor Sandra Harding, Dr Paul Hardisty (CEO), Ms Anna Matysek, Dr Stephen Morton, Mr Roy Peterson, Ms Jeanette Roberts, and the Hon Penelope Wensley AC (Chairman).
Purpose and role

Mission and impact

The Australian Institute of Marine Science is a corporate Commonwealth entity established by the Australian Institute of Marine Science Act 1972 (AIMS Act).

The core mission of AIMS is ‘to provide the research and knowledge of Australia’s tropical marine estate required to support growth in its sustainable use, effective environmental management and protection of its unique ecosystems’.

To accomplish its mission, AIMS will deliver the science to help realise three key impacts for the nation (as outlined in AIMS Strategy 2025):

• improve the health and resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems across northern Australia
• create economic, social and environmental net benefits for marine industries and coastal communities
• protect coral reefs and other tropical marine environments from the effects of climate change.

These impact goals are further updates to the vision outlined in the AIMS Strategic Plan 2015–25 and the Portfolio Budget Statements 2018–19:

• a healthy, resilient Great Barrier Reef
• sustainable coastal ecosystems and industries across tropical Australia
• environmentally sustainable offshore oil and gas development.

AIMS achieves its mission and impacts by delivering:

• integrated observing systems and undertaking robust long-term monitoring of key components of Australia’s tropical coastal and marine ecosystems
• strategic and applied research into major gaps in our understanding of the impacts of natural and human pressures on these ecosystems
• effective environmental risk assessment by government and industry through developing decision tools that drive efficiency gains in evidence-based regulatory regimes and marine industry development
• innovative data analysis platforms and underwater sensing technologies
• publicly available data and information bases
• national and international research collaborations to leverage investment, ensure uptake of research and promote outcomes enhancing Australia’s role in supporting regional blue economies
• optimal use of world-class research infrastructure (vessels, ocean monitoring equipment and laboratories) to support research conducted by AIMS and research collaborators.

Delivery is supported by an excellent research infrastructure, valuable and unique datasets, high-performing and diverse teams, collaborations and continually improving technologies and systems.
How we work

AIMS follows a set of core principles that collectively inform and underline our role as a trusted, impartial, collaborative and evidence-based adviser on the opportunities and challenges facing Australia’s marine estate. Below are the principles that guide our research, our internal and external relationships, and our organisational ethos:

- We observe high standards in health, safety and environment. We lead the way in providing safe and low environmental impact marine research.
- We are a trusted adviser. We deliver independent, evidence-based scientific advice to our stakeholders for the economic, environmental and social good of Australia.
- We undertake focused research. We execute focused research plans that have identified pathways to impact.
- We seek to transfer and share our knowledge. We document and widely disseminate our research findings through a variety of mechanisms and formats.
- We strive for excellence and innovation. We undertake high-calibre research.
- We seek a return on investment. We maximise our investment in marine science through collaborations, co-investment and industry-funded research.

These are underpinned by our core values:

- Safety – care for others and ourselves in all that we do.
- Collaboration – together we create impact.
- Innovation – vision and creativity to solve big challenges.
- Integrity – transparent, ethical and objective.
- Passion – energy that inspires excellence.
- Respect – treat everyone with dignity, value diversity and support others.
- Environment – minimise our footprint.
Delivering impact

AIMS undertakes applied research tackling problems facing Australia’s marine estate. Each year, the Australian Government and other bodies invest a considerable amount of money in AIMS. The science we produce benefits people, industries and ecosystems. The scale and breadth of these positive impacts justifies this investment.

Our Impact Framework is being introduced across the Institute to consistently plan, monitor, evaluate and report the influence of our research. Measurement of economic, social and environmental benefits is widely practised in a range of industries and government sectors but impacts are often realised years after the research is completed and are typically beyond the researchers’ ability to control. AIMS endeavours to work with the end users of our science to help ensure full and timely implementation and, as benefits are realised, to track, document and communicate the positive impacts that occur over time.

Understanding and measuring these benefits will require AIMS to remain engaged with stakeholders long after our research outputs have been delivered. This, in turn, will enable AIMS to understand better the future research needs of those stakeholders.

![Diagram](image_url)

**Figure 1.** AIMS Impact Framework. AIMS plans to realise impacts at the outset of each project and stay engaged with our stakeholders long after our research outputs are delivered.
Operating environment

Regulatory environment

In addition to obligations under its enabling legislation (the AIMS Act and the PGPA Act), our operations are governed by a range of other Australian Government, State and Territory legislation including:

- health, safety and environment obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- environmental obligations under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 and the Fisheries Act 1994

Under the AIMS Act, AIMS has two primary obligations:

- to carry out R&D in relation to marine science and marine technology, and the application and use of marine science and marine technology
- to encourage and facilitate the non-commercial and commercial application of the results arising from such activities.

The regulatory environment also acts as a strong influence on demand for our research services. Managers and regulators – such as the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority, the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, and the Northern Territory Government – all require the kind of information and tools that AIMS provides. The information and services produced by AIMS, including fundamental knowledge of the marine environment, also contributes to marine industries that require such information to enable informed decision making and to meet regulatory requirements.

Marine science priorities

During 2018, an extensive survey of AIMS’ key stakeholders was undertaken and the feedback used to inform the revised AIMS Strategy 2025. The revised Strategic Plan and Portfolio Budget Statements 2018–19 have been used to develop this Corporate Plan. This Strategy and this Corporate Plan align with and support the priorities below:

- the needs of our stakeholders:
  - as a publicly funded research agency, AIMS is required by its Act to respond to its Portfolio Minister
  - AIMS consults on an ongoing basis with our key stakeholders in government and industry. We also conduct regular surveys of the science and research needs of a broad range of Australian and international organisations. These continue to inform our ongoing strategy
- the nine cross-disciplinary National Science and Research Priorities of the Australian Government: (1) food; (2) soil and water (including marine); (3) transport; (4) cyber security; (5) energy; (6) resources; (7) advanced manufacturing; (8) environmental change; and (9) health. Our core capability and research programs contribute strongly to the soil and water, energy, and environmental change priorities
- the Australian Government’s National Innovation and Science Agenda, the National Science Statement and the Innovation and Science Australia strategy document – Australia 2030: Prosperity through Innovation
- the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy, which helps to fund the capability of our world-class research aquarium, the National Sea Simulator
- the Australian Government’s National Marine Science Plan. AIMS has been a key leader on the National Marine Science Committee since its inception and is a strong advocate of the plan
- the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (in particular, (SDG) 1. No poverty; 2. Zero hunger; 5. Gender equality; 8. Decent work and economic growth; 13. Climate action; and most notably 14. Life below water.
Ensuring the future of the Great Barrier Reef for the benefit of all Australians is a key national priority. Coral reefs are in decline worldwide. Climate change has reduced coral cover and surviving corals are under increasing pressure. In 2017 the Australian Government allocated $6 million for AIMS and joint leader CSIRO to scope out the feasibility for a multi-year reef restoration and adaptation program. In April 2018, further funding of $100 million was announced to ‘harness the best science to implement reef restoration and support reef resilience and adaptation’. AIMS will work closely with Australian and international partners to address this national priority.

Robust decision-making for sustainability, conservation and development requires baseline measurements, dedicated support tools and effective environmental risk assessment. AIMS has spent more than 40 years building a comprehensive understanding of Australia’s tropical marine ecosystems and developing the data services, models and tools required for this knowledge to be translated into national benefit. AIMS will continue to provide the evidence base and further develop support tools to enhance decision making.

AIMS makes particular efforts to reinforce cooperation and build long-lasting partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders (or end users) across government, industry and the not-for-profit sectors to apply the outcomes of its research. Below are listed our priority stakeholders, their needs and how AIMS helps meet these needs.

**Government stakeholders**

**Australian Government**

In addition to the requirements expressed in the AIMS Act, the Institute and its governing Council are guided by the Minister’s Statement of Expectations regarding the quality and focus of our research, our contribution to Australian Government priorities and initiatives, and our governance and communication responsibilities. As the accountable authority for the Institute under the PGPA Act, the Council responded with a Statement of Intent, which expresses our commitment to the Australian Government’s policy agenda and its strong alignment with our revised Strategic Plan.

**Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority & Department of the Environment and Energy**

AIMS undertakes monitoring, research and reporting, and provides advice to address the information needs of the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan, tropical water quality and biodiversity research conducted within the National Environmental Science Program. We also advise on the status, dynamics and vulnerability of habitats associated with Commonwealth marine reserves.

**National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environment Management Authority**

AIMS provides advice regarding environmental information needs, including the appropriate scale and scope of environmental baseline studies and impact assessment of a substantial oil spill.

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade & Department of Industry, Innovation and Science**

AIMS undertakes research and provides facilitation and advice regarding coral reef restoration and adaptation, (marine) science diplomacy, regional marine blue economies and the role of innovation in sustainable development.
State and Territory governments
AIMS undertakes monitoring, research and reporting, and provides advice to State and Territory governments addressing the information needs of the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan; the impacts of the development and operations of specific ports; and the impacts of contaminants introduced into marine systems through shipping, processing facilities and other sources adjacent to coastal ecosystems.

Industry stakeholders

Offshore oil and gas (and other resources) sector
AIMS provides advice on environmental status and risk, baseline habitat mapping, monitoring and research to underpin the development and implementation of project proposals and environmental management plans required by regulators. We also provide targeted studies investigating the impacts of known and emerging contaminants introduced into marine systems through shipping, processing facilities and other sources adjacent to coastal ecosystems.

Ports
AIMS provides assistance in developing improved frameworks to support decision making relating to development projects, port expansions, dredging and other investments that pose environmental risks.

Tourism
AIMS is a key provider of research to develop science and engineering solutions that will help Australia’s coral reefs survive the pressures of climate change and other environmental impacts. We conduct targeted projects focused on crown-of-thorns starfish control, marine health monitoring and advice on marine estate management strategies.

Traditional Owners
AIMS has partnered with a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and individuals across northern Australia to deliver marine science solutions for land and sea managers. We will continue to engage meaningfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to build reciprocal capacity and conduct research that supports the sustainable management of land and sea country for future generations.

Not-for-profit sector
AIMS undertakes research in a number of areas in collaboration with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to maintain and improve the state of the reef. We have a representative on the Foundation’s International Science Advisory Panel and will continue to work with the Foundation to deliver effective science for the reef.

Our other research activities in the not-for-profit sector include the Global FinPrint project, funded by Vulcan Inc., the engine behind philanthropist Paul G. Allen’s network of organisations and initiatives. Global FinPrint brings together an international research team and collaborators from around the world to assess the diminishing number of sharks and rays (elasmobranchs) in tropical oceans. Our research also examines shark and ray movements to determine how far and where individual animals move in order to inform shark conservation and management decisions in Australia.

The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation also funds the Australian component of AIMS’ pioneering work into human-assisted evolution of corals. The aim is to develop stocks of reef corals bred to be resilient to the effects of climate change on ocean conditions (warmer and more acidic).
Growing a sustainable blue economy – supported by marine science

The AIMS Index of Marine Industry shows that Australia’s blue economy continues to grow more rapidly than other sectors of the national economy.

The industries making up this sector include tourism, ports, transport, shipbuilding, mining and offshore oil and gas, aquaculture and commercial and recreational fisheries. Collectively, the sector made a direct economic contribution to Australia’s economy in 2013–14 of $73.1 billion.¹

There is strong potential for further growth and our mission is to assist the sustainable development of this highly valuable sector. Opportunities in biotechnology, wind, wave and tide energy, and other innovations, will also contribute to the nation’s future prosperity.

Australia’s marine science community will continue to work together to implement the seven ‘grand challenges’ identified in the National Marine Science Plan that are associated with the sustainable development of Australia’s marine estate. AIMS contributes the marine science underlying many of the grand challenges and particularly to the following three challenges:

- biodiversity, conservation and ecosystem health
- urban coastal environments
- climate variability and change.

¹ The AIMS Index of Marine Industry, December 2016
Research environment

The key drivers for investment in marine research include economic growth, environmental stewardship and community expectations for sustainable development. In Australia, the key investors in marine research are government and industry, with other sectors such as environmental and conservation non-government organisations making small but growing contributions.

Geographic scope

Our primary research focus is on domestic priorities (from local to national scale) largely across the tropical north from Exmouth to Gladstone. This geographic specialisation is not mandated but a result of focusing efforts on key tropical marine issues and opportunities. AIMS also has a competitive advantage gained from geographic location – the Townsville headquarters adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef; Perth, at the hub of marine-based industries on the Western Australian coast and Timor Sea; and Darwin, close to neighbouring countries and development activities in the Arafura and Timor Seas region.

AIMS also leverages international capability to assist with national challenges. Investment in international research is through Australian and international research foundations, and directly with Australian Government departments such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Environment and Energy.

Scientific scope

AIMS has a strong track record in field and experimental research with particular strengths in coral reef ecology and coastal oceanographic modelling. We also have expertise in microbiology and genetics, mathematical modelling and decision-support capability aligned with evolving stakeholder needs. Our end-to-end research capability extends from the ocean, to the laboratory, to data analysis and modelling and, ultimately, to the development of products for direct use by end users.

In terms of science excellence, AIMS has maintained its position as the top-ranked research organisation in Australia, and second globally in the field of marine and freshwater biology (Clarivate Analytics InCites).

Collaboration

The complexity of the national and international challenges associated with achieving sustainable development across Australia’s north and neighbouring region, the geographic scale and connectivity of marine systems, and the multidisciplinary nature of marine science means that no single institute can provide all of the capability and science required.

Where our capability and research foci provide an advantage or ‘niche’, we take a leadership role, bringing partners into projects and programs as required. In other contexts, we provide specialised capability for projects led by others.

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2. Ranking based on category normalised citation impact of journal articles published in the Web of Science journals, between 2012 and 2017, within the field of Marine and Freshwater Biology and restricted to research institutes that had published more than 200 papers during that period.
As a leader in tropical marine science, AIMS collaborates with a number of Australian research organisations and centres that have complementary capability including:

- CSIRO.
- Geoscience Australia.
- Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation.
- Australian Research Council Centres of Excellence (e.g. Coral Reef Studies; Mathematical and Statistical Frontiers).
- Universities (Australian National University (ANU), Charles Darwin University (CDU), James Cook University (JCU), the University of Queensland (UQ), Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and The University of Western Australia (UWA)).
- State-based agencies (e.g. departments of environment, primary industries and fisheries, and natural resource management agencies).

Over the next four years, our key national research partners will include the ARC Centre of Excellence in Coral Reef Studies, the CSIRO, CDU, JCU, QUT, UQ and UWA.
Expanding scope and new opportunities

In response to a range of emerging pressures and developing opportunities, AIMS will seek to grow capability in three key areas over the duration of this Corporate Plan, subject to resolving staffing level constraints (see ‘Resources risk’ in Table 2). These areas are restoration and adaptation science, integrating Indigenous science knowledge and international engagement.

1. Restoration and adaptation science

Climate change is the number one threat to coral reefs globally. Like reefs around the world, the Great Barrier Reef is under severe pressure from the cumulative impacts of rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, pollution, declining water quality and outbreaks of the crown-of-thorns starfish. In the past, our research and monitoring has focused on understanding and measuring natural recovery and adaptation. However, we now recognise that active interventions need to be considered as additional management strategies.

In January 2018, AIMS and the CSIRO received $6 million in Australian Government funding to lead the scoping phase of the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP). This program focuses on the Great Barrier Reef and aims to develop technologies that could be applied to reefs around the world in order to make them more resilient to change, and to help them recover more quickly from perturbations that cause significant loss of coral.

In April 2018, the Australian Government announced $500 million of new investment for the Great Barrier Reef, including $100 million for reef research. The current RRAP investment case will help inform how the new funding will be invested.

As a leader in reef research, AIMS anticipates taking a prominent role in the next phase of R&D activities. This includes program management and leading areas of core expertise (e.g. assisted evolution and aquaculture-based interventions and coral ecology research). We will also undertake a strong role in assessing other intervention concepts (and how these might be scaled up) and in underpinning functions such as modelling, decision support and stakeholder engagement. The National Sea Simulator located at Townsville is expected to play a key role in accelerating the development and delivery of solutions.

2. Partnering with Traditional Owners to create new shared research that integrates Indigenous knowledge of sea country with other sciences.

In February 2018, AIMS and project partner Charles Darwin University published the Northern Territory Marine Science and Coastal User Needs Analysis. The study brought together the Territory’s government, industry and community end users of marine and coastal systems science in a process that:

- articulated in detail the strategic, policy and operational challenges and opportunities faced by sectors that interact with the marine environment
- defined the nature of decisions that pertain to those challenges and opportunities
- established the precise marine science oriented knowledge that is required to support those decisions
- confirmed the form and function in which decision-makers require that knowledge.

This groundbreaking report will inform industry and government and help AIMS implement plans for greater Indigenous community engagement in northern Australian marine research activities.
AIMS is also a key partner in the Indigenous-led Traditional Owner Aspirations Project that is being delivered under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. The Project is working directly with Traditional Owners to understand their aspirations for the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef, and the requirements to deliver Indigenous actions and Traditional Owner commitments under the Reef 2050 Plan.

3. International engagement

The continuing loss of biodiversity around the world demands concerted international action. AIMS will continue to foster international engagements at both institutional and individual researcher levels. In particular, the Sino–Australian Centre for Healthy Coasts will continue to provide a strong focal point for AIMS’ engagement with China over the duration of this Corporate Plan. The lead Chinese partner in the centre is the Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (IOCAS).

Together with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, AIMS will host the Secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) with Monaco and Indonesia between July 2018 and June 2020. AIMS will take a lead role in implementing elements of the Australian Government’s reef agenda articulated in the ICRI Plan of Action, particularly the reinvigoration of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.
Research planning

Our organisational priorities and goals were set out in a 10-year Strategic Plan, which forms the basis for all of our research and business planning as well as providing the foundation for shorter term corporate plans. The AIMS’ Strategic Plan 2015–25 was reviewed in 2017–18 to take account of the changes that have occurred in Australia’s tropical marine environments since its release in 2015. As part of the review process, AIMS consulted more than 200 of its key stakeholders to understand better their challenges and how AIMS can contribute to developing solutions that deliver positive economic, environmental and social impacts for Australia. This not only ensured a transparent decision-making process, but helped to build interest and support for the Strategy among a wide range of different sectors of society.

The revised document called AIMS Strategy 2025 remains the cornerstone of our corporate, business and research planning. This annual Corporate Plan links directly to the performance measures in the Strategic Plan and Portfolio Budget Statements by providing the shorter term tactical responses required to deliver on our longer term strategies.

Adaptive management processes are incorporated in our planning framework, enabling periodic reviews and realignments of our research portfolio. Annual research plans for teams within our research programs are adjusted based on the latest research findings. This ensures alignment with emerging strategic issues, the closure of knowledge gaps and, in the case of externally funded projects, the needs of end users. This iterative process is shown in Figure 2.
Current year (2018–19) annual research priorities

The Institute’s annual Portfolio Budget Statements provide the Australian Government with information on how AIMS will use its allocated resources to achieve government outcomes over the current budget and forward years. PBS Outcome 1 commits us to the ‘Growth of knowledge to support protection and sustainable development of Australia’s marine resources through innovative marine science and technology’. Below are the focus areas for our research during 2018–19.

- Work with State and Australian Government agencies (and other research organisations) to coordinate and design a fully integrated monitoring program for the Great Barrier Reef that:
  - incorporates AIMS’ inshore and shelf reef monitoring data
  - provides situational awareness of the condition of the reef
  - informs both the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report and implementation of the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan.
- Investigate and develop potential mechanisms for assessing and controlling crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks.
- Investigate the potential for, and the mechanisms underpinning, acclimation and adaptation in key coral reef taxa to develop tools for reef restoration and resilience.
- Collaborate with industry and research partners to build baseline knowledge of the biodiversity and ecology of Australia’s north-west region to:
  - facilitate management of Commonwealth marine reserves
  - develop predictive habitat models
  - understand natural and anthropogenic drivers of change, including marine noise.
- Investigate and develop potential mechanisms for assessing and controlling crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks.
- Use the state-of-the-art capability provided by the National Sea Simulator, in combination with targeted field studies, to investigate the individual and cumulative effects of global (elevated sea temperature, ocean acidification) and local (nutrients, sediments, light, pollutants) pressures on the health, thresholds, adaptive capacity and resilience of key components and processes of tropical marine ecosystems in order to enhance our capability to predict and manage impacts.
- Systematically investigate the potential for, and the mechanisms underpinning, acclimation and adaptation in key coral reef taxa in order to develop potential tools for reef restoration and enhanced reef resilience.
- Examine the impacts and thresholds of dredging-related pressures on key tropical marine organisms and critical ecological processes to establish water quality guidelines and better predict and manage impacts.
- Build on our observation and modelling capabilities to link hydrodynamic processes with fundamental marine processes (e.g. primary production, respiration, calcification, nutrient cycling) and to investigate the influence of agricultural, urban and industrial development on coastal marine systems.
- Develop and apply ecotoxicological methods to investigate the environmental risks and acute and chronic impacts of known and emerging contaminants entering the Great Barrier Reef and other tropical coastal marine ecosystems.
- Determine the status, movement and habitat use of key megafauna species, the influence exerted by coastal development and industry activities, and implications for conservation and management.
- Draw on the outcomes of monitoring, fieldwork and experimental work to develop effective decision support tools to help management agencies evaluate and maintain the health and resilience of tropical marine ecosystems.
- Develop autonomous technologies and platforms to expand the type, geographic range and quality of marine observations.
- Develop automated data and image analysis pathways to enhance operational efficiencies.
- Deliver the 34th year of AIMS’ Long-term Monitoring Program, and leading the development and implementation of a comprehensive design for a Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program to support the Reef 2050 Plan.
Decision criteria

Actions foreseen under this Corporate Plan reflect key decision criteria that are designed to deliver an optimal annual portfolio of research projects. Below are our key decision criteria:

- Projects should close important knowledge gaps and achieve research objectives.
- Project duration and schedule should be time-bound.
- Links and dependencies between projects (i.e. outputs from one project delivering to another project) should be encouraged.
- The level of priority for projects should be established.
- Aspects being researched by other organisations and opportunities for collaboration should be identified.
- Stakeholder interests and availability of external funding should be identified.

Excellence in research

AIMS’ reputation, capability and business are based on scientific excellence that consistently delivers outstanding returns. Our stakeholders must have confidence that AIMS’ advice is well founded and that our findings have passed the scrutiny of peer review for validity, significance and originality.

We measure research excellence both by the quality of work that we do and by the effective use of our data, information and expertise by end users. The multiplier of these outputs delivers impact nationally and internationally, and drives the outcomes set out in our strategic plan.

AIMS performed very well in the most recent independent rankings of research organisations in the field of environmental, ecological and animal science. Findings by Clarivate Analytics InCites, which queries more than 12,000 journals in the Web of Science, testified to our quantifiable impact as demonstrated by a high citation rate. Results of the analysis of AIMS’ citation impact in marine and freshwater biology – our core area of expertise – strongly endorse our research approach. For the five-year period from 2012 to 2017, AIMS ranked number one nationally and number two internationally. Our goal is to maintain this level of scientific excellence and, during the next 10 years, to build our capacity and reputation to achieve recognition as the world authority on tropical marine science.
Research translation, communication and extension

It is clear that biodiversity conservation cannot be achieved without the widespread engagement of society as a whole. The active involvement of stakeholders, key policy sectors and the public will therefore be fundamental to the success of AIMS’ strategy. In particular, the translation of research to benefit government, industry and the wider community is vital. Much of our work is focused on ensuring the sustainable use of goods and services (e.g. healthy coastal and marine habitats and ecosystems) that support the market economy (e.g. tourism and fisheries). We ensure sustainability through influence on demand and productivity and in the reduction of environmental risk for industry. We also leverage our research into areas that create value for industry, such as environmental monitoring equipment to provide data inputs to operational systems.

To maximise the return on research investment, AIMS has committed to making our research results widely available. All AIMS research has clearly defined impact pathways for delivery to end users including data provision, published findings, knowledge synthesis reports, data visualisation, risk assessment, decision support tools and direct engagement.

AIMS enhances Australia’s future capabilities in marine science by contributing to post-graduate training. We also undertake leadership roles in a number of major national and international collaborative initiatives such as membership of the National Marine Science Committee and the Integrated Marine Observing System; and key roles in National Environmental Science Program hubs, Reef 2050 technical and advisory committees, and a number of expert panels.

Our output constitutes an important consideration for policymakers, reporters and the public when weighing up research claims and debates about science. In support of our existing public profile and noting the need to communicate effectively with an expanding stakeholder base, over the next 12 months AIMS will refine our corporate branding, public information and stakeholder engagement strategies and mechanisms (such as the AIMS website). Through all of these activities, we will continue to maintain our role as an independent trusted adviser, providing expert advice to government, industry and the public through formal mechanisms including media releases and participation on expert panels, advisory committees, boards and national and international delegations.
Performance measurement

AIMS sets clear objectives and key actions to be carried out and measured across the organisation. The performance criteria outlined in the Portfolio Budget Statements link to our Strategic Plan and help us to assess progress towards achieving our strategic goals. The performance measures in the Corporate Plan cascade into operational, research and business planning processes. Additionally, the key performance indicators (KPIs) in the Plan combine with the Portfolio Budget Statements to provide a full set of performance measures that are reported against in our Annual Report.

Table 1. 2018–19 Corporate Plan KPIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance criteria</th>
<th>Portfolio Budget Statement (PBS) performance targets</th>
<th>KPIs (Corporate Plan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific excellence innovation and impact is maintained or increased</td>
<td>Maintain acknowledged domestic and global high standing in relevant fields of research and confidence of key stakeholders in research outputs</td>
<td>• Maintain ranking within the top three institutes in the world in relevant research disciplines measured using traditional academic metrics • Maintain high stakeholder confidence in AIMS’ scientific outputs gauged using a net promoter score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful delivery of strategic and applied research and monitoring that addresses national research priorities and stakeholder needs</td>
<td>Maintain or increase the amount of stakeholder commissioned research</td>
<td>• Calculate and articulate at least $10 million in environmental, social and economic net benefits attributable to AIMS’ research • Increase net external revenue generated through stakeholder commissioned research by 2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research advice and data/knowledge products are critical for stakeholders to assess the impacts of natural and human pressures on sensitive marine ecosystems</td>
<td>Maintain or increase the number of peer reviewed publications, datasets and derived knowledge products that are used by stakeholders and are publicly available</td>
<td>• Maintain annual journal publication rates in excess of 200 papers per year • 100% of journal articles published are made open access • 100% of datasets collected using public monies are made publicly available within one year of collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased research capability, capacity, impact and science diplomacy through participation in formal national and international collaborations, joint ventures, partnerships and strategic alliances</td>
<td>Maintain or increase the number and scale of domestic and international research partnerships, collaborations, joint ventures and strategic alliances Maintain or increase participation by AIMS on advisory panels and committees</td>
<td>• Maintain the proportion of collaborative research projects that involve AIMS scientists above 70% • Maintain the proportion of published papers and reports that include collaborators above 80% • Contribute to 100% of advisory panels and committees that are relevant to AIMS business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimal use of research infrastructure assets</td>
<td>Maintain or increase usage of research infrastructure – specifically the RV Solander, the RV Cape Ferguson and the National Sea Simulator</td>
<td>• 90% utilisation of major research assets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The AIMS Annual Report 2017–18 will provide a comprehensive assessment of the Institute’s performance for the 2017–18 financial year. Overall performance and performance against research goals will be reported in detail. (The report will be available on the AIMS website at http://www.aims.gov.au/ at the end of October 2018.)

Figure 3 illustrates the linkage between the AIMS’ planning process and how performance is evaluated and reported to government.
Figure 3. AIMS planning, evaluation and reporting process
Corporate capability

Financial

Funding and revenue

Core funding for AIMS is provided through Australian Government annual appropriations. These are identified in the 2018–19 Portfolio Budget Statements, Budget Related Paper no. 1.13A, Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio, pp. 65–86.

External revenue comes from industry and a range of state and Australian government agencies, beginning in the 1980s. This external revenue stream has become increasingly important as a means of supporting AIMS’ capability and extending the research outcomes we can deliver. External revenue contributes approximately 35 per cent of AIMS’ operational budget (based on 2018–19 data). Below is a breakdown of our external revenue sources (based on 2016–17 data):

- **34%** from Australian Government competitive programs such as the National Environmental Science Program, the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS), and the Marine Monitoring Program under the Reef 2050 Plan.
- **37%** from industry, including key stakeholders (the North West Shelf offshore oil and gas sector and coastal industries such as the mining and ports sectors).
- **14%** from state government competitive programs and issues-driven research projects (including collaboration with universities).
- **15%** from foundations such as the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and international philanthropic sources.

External revenue and AIMS’ co-investment model

Since the 1980s, AIMS has implemented a strategy of extending the range and impact of our research through collaboration and by contracting the delivery of research to a wide range of customers. These external relationships range from commercial contracts, where the customer funds the full cost of undertaking the research, to collaborative arrangements, where AIMS and the customer co-fund the research. These collaborative arrangements, termed co-investment research, are typically based on a 50:50 split in funding the costs of the project. The majority of research currently undertaken by AIMS occurs with external contributions under this model, with the net result that AIMS’ overall operating budget has increased by 40 per cent (over and above appropriations funding), resulting in a substantial increase in research capability and outputs.

In implementing the co-investment model, AIMS takes care to ensure that the public (government appropriation) investment in projects is aligned with national Science and Research Priorities and that it provides national benefit. When contracting with customers, AIMS will continue to meet criteria that are designed to ensure the appropriateness of ongoing investment of public money and the protection of AIMS’ reputation for the provision of independent, impartial and high-quality science. Below are our criteria for co-investment:

- The research must advance strategic government objectives as reflected in our strategic plan in addition to meeting customer needs.
- The quality of research is appropriate to achieve robust outcomes.
- AIMS retains intellectual property access.
- AIMS is not inappropriately restrained from presenting the findings to government or correcting any misrepresentation of its findings.
- AIMS charges commercial rates and does not co-invest when the research is for the direct commercial gain of an organisation or company.

Operating costs and revenue

Maintaining capability increases our annual operating expenses as most costs to the business keep pace or exceed increases in the CPI. For more than 10 years, AIMS has targeted and achieved efficiency improvements across the full operation (including by outsourcing where functionally and economically viable). This program of continuous improvement is expected to partially offset projected cost increases.

Indexation increases to AIMS’ Australian Government appropriation will provide a further partial offset. We intend to fund the residual gap with increased net external revenue earnings. In the event that the required growth is not achieved, then capability will be reduced and research programs and goals will need to be reviewed and adjusted accordingly.
Capital investment

All major assets are subject to a capital replacement program to ensure lowest life cycle cost, maximum ROI and tight alignment with our current and future research needs. During this plan, capital investment is expected to average $10 million per year. The program comprises:

- routine replacements (e.g., motor vehicles, computers and science equipment)
- ongoing facility maintenance and refurbishment
- technological development associated with new autonomous monitoring equipment
- upgrades to the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system
- installation of a 1000 kW solar panel array.

No major (i.e., greater than $20 million) developments or acquisitions are planned. Capital purchases are made using the Institute’s government appropriations.

Operating result forecast

The Institute plans to balance the cash budget across the next four years, although annual variations in external revenue may result in annual variations in total revenue. Depreciation expenses will result in AIMS incurring a non-cash operating loss during each year of the Plan.

Staff

AIMS employs about 240 science and support staff and another 50 via outsourced functions. Many of our scientists are recognised internationally as leaders in their field. AIMS also maintains a strong educational program, particularly through co-funded postdoctoral fellowships (between 20 and 30) and PhD scholarships and supervision (about 60) in partnership with some of Australia’s leading universities. Core scientific expertise in a range of thematic and disciplinary areas is supported by operational expertise focused on delivery of scientific objectives along with foundation skills such as leadership, project management, stakeholder engagement and research communication.

Research partnerships

Partnerships and collaborations are central to achieving targeted national benefits, requiring the engagement of both national and global marine science capability. AIMS will continue to develop joint ventures and strategic alliances in order to increase the number and scale of collaborative research projects focused on areas of national need.

The Institute’s national R&D collaborative framework includes the Western Australian Marine Science Institution, the Integrated Marine Observing System, the National Environment Science Program, the Collaborative Research Network (with ANU, CDU, and JCU), the North Australia Marine Research Alliance, and the Indian Ocean Marine Research Centre. We also have memorandums of understanding with JCU, QUT, Monash University and a number of international institutes, including the Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the US, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia and the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology in Japan.

In 2018–19, AIMS will implement initiatives under its new Indigenous Partnership Strategy to build reciprocal capacity (through mutually beneficial research) that will support the sustainable management of land and sea country for future generations.

Health, safety and the environment

The health and safety of our people is paramount. AIMS is committed to reducing workplace risks to as low as reasonably practicable and to building and sustaining a positive and active safety culture. AIMS has a comprehensive health and safety and environmental management system that is audited every two years against the requirements of AS/NZS 4801:2012 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems and AS/NZS ISO 14001:2004 Environmental Management Systems. During the period of this Plan, AIMS will maintain an ongoing improvement program, and monitor and report on our safety performance.
Infrastructure

AIMS operates out of three locations across Australia with a research base of 290 staff (including outsourced functions), two major research vessels and a number of significant research infrastructure facilities, including the world class National Sea Simulator laboratory. This enables AIMS to deploy its marine research capability across northern Australia and for selected international engagements.

Our headquarters is 55 km south of Townsville on a 207 hectare, controlled access coastal site surrounded by a national park and a marine reserve. This site comprises research laboratories, experimental aquaria, workshops and offices spread over 23,000 square metres. Two smaller facilities – in Perth (on the campus of The University of Western Australia) and in Darwin (in the Arafura Timor Research Facility) – provide a research base and direct links for research partners and clients in these regions. AIMS also has a small liaison office in Canberra to facilitate interaction with the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, and other government departments and agencies.

A modern research fleet, unique aquaria, sophisticated laboratories, operational workshops, extensive collections, analytical technology and an array of marine observing equipment enables our scientists to examine the most detailed subjects from microbiology through to broad-scale ecology and coastal oceanography, both in the laboratory and in the field. Below is a summary of our national research infrastructure:

- the National Sea Simulator (SeaSim) – a world-class aquarium facility for tropical marine organisms where scientists can conduct cutting-edge research not previously possible. With a reliable, consistent supply of seawater, the SeaSim provides fine control over many environmental variables including light, temperature, acidity/CO₂, salinity, sedimentation and contaminants
- the AIMS research fleet – two large purpose-built ships (the research vessel RV Cape Ferguson and the RV Solander) and a number of smaller vessels – provide unique capacity for researchers to travel to and conduct research in the diverse habitats that make up Australia’s tropical marine environments. The major vessels are specially equipped with winches, onboard laboratories, flow-through aquaria and computing facilities. These allow scientists to sample the physical and biological characteristics of various habitats and conduct experiments at sea. Inflatable tenders and onboard compressors support diving operations from the major vessels
- Other key scientific infrastructure includes:
  - analytical laboratories (more than 20 specialised laboratories across Australia)
  - field-deployed observing and remote-sensing equipment (including weather stations and instrument moorings)
  - engineering workshops (constructing specialised equipment such as underwater sensors, data loggers, sediment traps, weather towers, coral corers and many other devices)
  - Australia’s largest and most significant coral core collection.

AIMS will continue to focus on ways to maintain and, where necessary, replace ageing infrastructure to ensure safe, fit-for-purpose platforms for conducting marine science. During the period of this Corporate Plan, work will continue on improving the application of technology and data science across the life cycle of our activities. This will include enhancing automated data collection, data analysis, curation and storage. By deploying new technology, AIMS will simultaneously improve the quality of that information and the rate at which that information is generated. Finally, we will work to drive down the unit cost of information.

The RV Cape Ferguson will reach its end-of-life in the next 5–10 years. Planning for the replacement of this vessel will commence during the period of this Plan, with particular emphasis on more efficient propulsion, energy management systems and hull design, to reduce operating costs and the vessel’s carbon footprint.

AIMS is committed to maximising the value derived from our portfolio of research infrastructure. We will continue to operate this infrastructure in a manner that results in high availability and use, and allows collaborative access by industry, universities and other research institutions.
Intellectual assets

AIMS possesses collections, observations and measurements containing decades’ worth of information about Australia’s tropical marine ecosystems, extending from the Great Barrier Reef to north-western Australia, and including:

- more than two decades of water quality measurements from the Great Barrier Reef
- more than 30 years of field measurements of coral reef health from the whole of the reef
- nearly two decades of measurements of biodiversity, ecological change and oceanography from the Browse Basin off north-west Australia, with a focus on the Scott Reef system
- two decades of biodiversity sampling from around the continent for taxonomy and bio discovery
- integrated oceanographic models of processes ranging in scale from single reefs to entire ecosystems such as the Great Barrier Reef
- marine cultivation and husbandry techniques developed in the National Sea Simulator.

This unique data will continue to be leveraged and developed as AIMS implements its research plans in the years ahead.
Technology development

AIMS will continue our in-house program of technology development to support our operations, alongside external partners where beneficial. Below are our key foci for technology development:

- implement a technology transformation project to increase the pace at which information is collected and turned into knowledge
- support the expanding use of the National Sea Simulator
- continue a development program to reduce reliance on diving as a method for collecting field data. This requirement is driven primarily by internal and client concerns about the safety of diving in some environments (e.g. remote locations and in habitats where sharks and crocodiles are abundant).

Technology development has become a priority for the Institute, given the growing requirement for routine monitoring, in situ observations and experimental data across tropical reef and inshore systems. At the same time, AIMS will seek productivity improvements and cost-savings compared with current methods. In 2017–18, we will continue a program to develop underwater and aerial platforms for the collection of visible, hyperspectral and other imagery and data from the field. This is to be supported with a collaborative research program involving selected universities and private sector partners to develop automated image analysis techniques.

Systems and processes

Our physical capabilities are supported by an array of corporate and operational systems and processes. Areas of focus include improving project management systems and assessing alternative methods of corporate function delivery, particularly moving to cloud-based services as part of an overall upgrade of enterprise reporting and planning systems to TechnologyOne CiAnywhere. This platform ensures data being accessed will be instantly available on any device, whether laptops or smartphones.
Risk management

Our comprehensive corporate risk management system includes processes to identify and assess new risks, together with the refinement of existing control measures. It is based on an organisational risk management framework and an associated corporate risk register and control framework. This risk framework aligns with ISO31000:2009 Risk Management and complies with the Australian Government Risk Management Policy.

The control framework includes the AIMS Audit Committee (a subcommittee of the AIMS Council), which helps us to discharge our responsibilities under the AIMS Act and the PGPA Act in respect of financial reporting, performance reporting, risk oversight and management, internal control and compliance with relevant laws and policies.

AIMS’ control framework is designed to ensure the following outcomes:

- **Strategies and goals** – our organisational goals are aligned with national priorities and the needs of stakeholders.
- **Plans** – our plans offer viable solutions for achieving goals and objectives.
- **Resources** – our financial and non-financial resources are sufficient to complete the research and other activities required to achieve our goals.
- **Delivery** – our systems and processes deliver research and other activities within our annual plans in a safe and efficient manner.
- **Communication** – our research outcomes are communicated in a manner that maximises user uptake and value.
- **Principles and values** – all of our activities are undertaken in a manner consistent with our guiding principles and organisational values.

Crown-of-thorns starfish.
*Image: Marie Roman*
Risk summary

Below is a summary of the risks associated with each outcome along with proposed controls.

Table 2. Risk summary (controls are italicised)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Description and controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies and goals</td>
<td>Ensuring that research is aligned with national priorities and stakeholder needs and targeting the highest priority areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIMS’ goals are defined in our Strategy 2025, the Portfolio Budget Statements and the Corporate Plan. In developing these plans, AIMS completed a comprehensive assessment of current and future stakeholder needs. These were integrated with the knowledge of our peers as to current and emerging environmental threats and challenges to develop a set of organisational goals and objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans</td>
<td>Ensuring that all aspects required to achieve goals and objectives are considered and detailed in an appropriate set of plans. This includes research planning (which research projects are required to create the knowledge to achieve goals), capability planning, delivery and communication planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIMS has a comprehensive and adaptive process to develop research programs aligned with information needs. At the highest level, objectives and goals are set within the Strategic Plan. These goals cascade down to five-year and annual research plans. Internal assessment, approval and tracking processes then ensure that only research aligned with these plans is undertaken. Capability and communication plans support the research plans. These plans are articulated to key stakeholders via the Portfolio Budget Statements and the Corporate Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Understanding that the research goals articulated in this plan rely on AIMS maintaining capabilities underpinned by achieving revenue targets. This requires government funding at current forecast levels, achieving budgeted external revenue and the ability to manage multi-year external revenue variability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIMS has developed a strong business development framework to maximise the likelihood of achieving external revenue targets, along with a quantitative risk-based methodology to assess potential external revenue volatility. It uses this assessment to design and implement management strategies where feasible.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additionally, if AIMS is to respond to emerging pressures and opportunities as detailed in this Plan, then capability growth will be required.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In the early years of this Plan, AIMS current average staffing level (ASL) resourcing cap, set in accordance with an APS-wide policy, is likely to be the primary constraint, rather than securing the underpinning revenue. AIMS will work with Government initially to secure agreement to an increase in the AIMS staffing cap, and longer term, to seek a resolution to the resourcing cap that meets the needs of both AIMS and Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>Description and controls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Delivering agreed plans in order to meet goals and objectives, including research projects and the associated operational and corporate functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIMS has experienced research, operational and corporate staff and well-established fit-for-purpose systems and processes. The actions detailed within the plans are within AIMS’ demonstrated capabilities. AIMS has a comprehensive and high-performing safety management system and a strong organisational safety culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ensuring AIMS’ research outputs and advice are in a form relevant and usable by stakeholders, readily available and clearly communicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIMS has formal processes to distribute and advertise research outcomes and ensures that data and reports are freely and easily available. AIMS continues to invest in ‘end user products’ such as decision support tools and knowledge visualisation systems, designed to meet end user needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles and values</td>
<td>Adherence to AIMS’ guiding principles (e.g. the provision of evidence-based, independent and impartial advice) and organisational values (e.g. our core values).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIMS’ reputation is built on these principles and through time they have become well ingrained into the fabric of the organisation. They are discussed (and incorporated into systems and process where appropriate), as AIMS works to express these principles in all actions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TOWNSVILLE
PMB No. 3,
Townsville MC
QLD 4810
Tel: (07) 4753 4444
Fax: (07) 4772 5852

DARWIN
PO Box 41775,
Casuarina
NT 0811
Tel: (08) 8920 9240
Fax: (08) 8920 9222

PERTH
The University of Western Australia
Oceans Institute (M096)
35 Stirling Highway
Crawley
WA 6009
Tel: (08) 6369 4000
Fax: (08) 6488 4585

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