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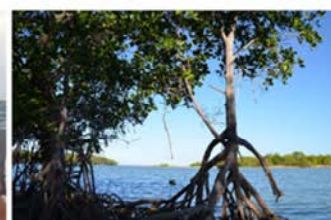
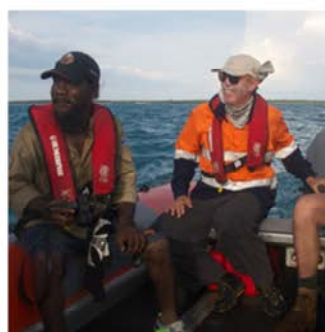


AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE  
OF MARINE SCIENCE

# AIMS Indigenous Partnerships Plan

## From Engagement to Partnerships

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AIMS: Australia's tropical marine research agency.

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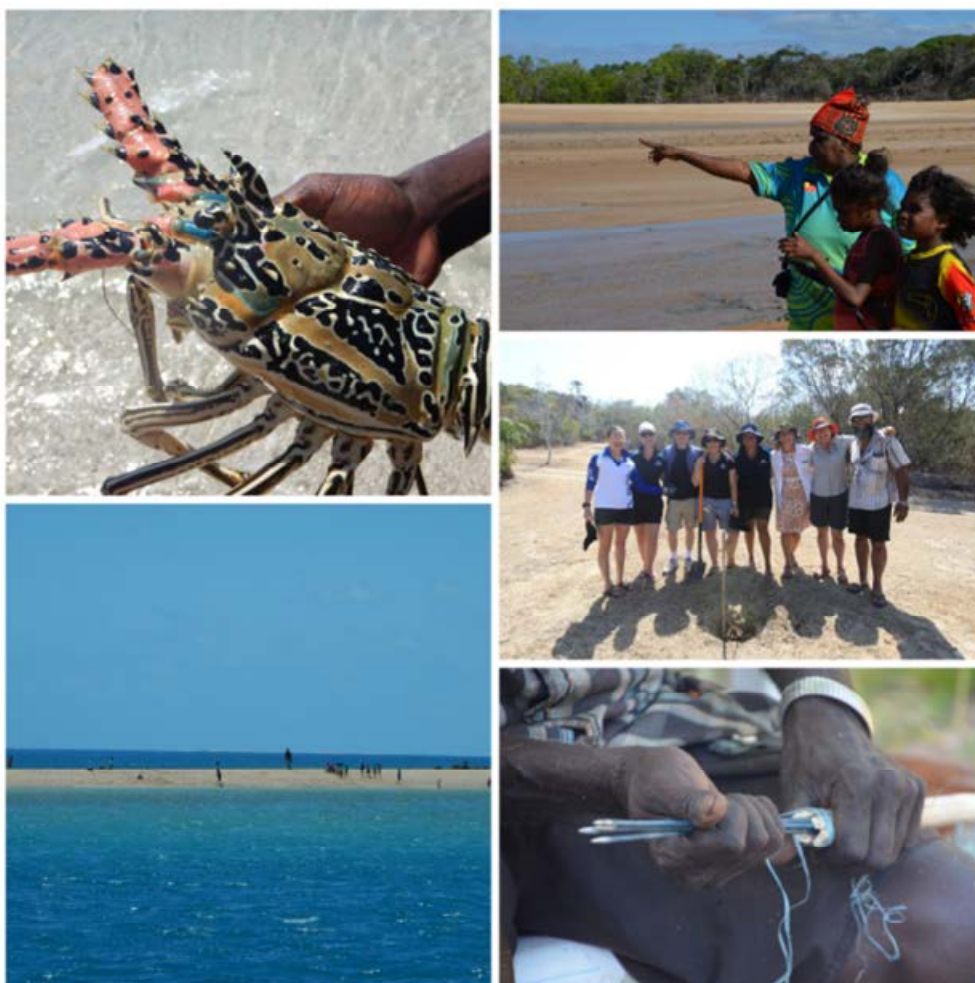




# 1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the Traditional Owners of the places where AIMS works, both on land and in the sea country of tropical Australia. We pay our respects to the elders; past, present, and future; and their continuing culture, beliefs, and spiritual relationships and connection to the land and sea. AIMS especially honours Traditional Owners as Australia's first marine scientists and carers of country, and we pay tribute to Traditional Ecological Knowledge, wisdom, and Indigenous perspectives passed from generation to generation, and successfully applied to sustainable environmental management over thousands of years. Through this ***Indigenous Partnerships Plan*** AIMS hopes to develop a strong foundation to work together with Traditional Owners, and to weave together two vast knowledge systems to generate the best possible solutions to current environmental challenges, as well as a sustainable world for future generations.

The authors acknowledge the AIMS staff and Traditional Owner partners who contributed to and reviewed earlier drafts, and shared ideas, advice and lived-experiences which have contributed to the development of this plan. We especially acknowledge the authors of the original ***AIMS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy*** which laid the foundation for this plan.

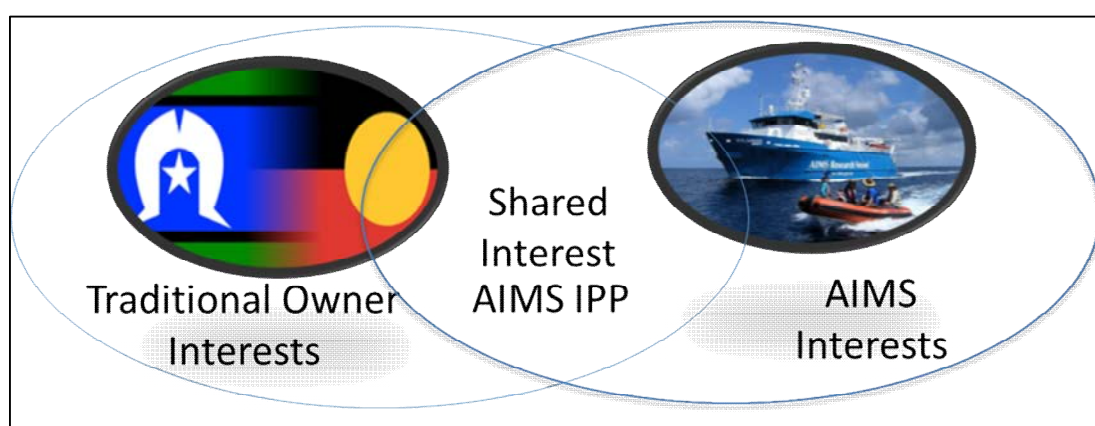


## 2 INTRODUCTION TO THE AIMS INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS PLAN (IPP)

This **Indigenous Partnerships Plan** (IPP) updates and replaces the previous **AIMS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy**. It is a roadmap for AIMS to achieve genuine marine science partnerships with Traditional Owners, and to meet a key target in [AIMS Strategy 2025](#) (1) – to *Undertake science collaborations with Traditional Owners in key projects focused on sea country (Enhanced Capability Target 3)*. By establishing this ambition, AIMS recognises that greater research impact and value can be created, and new insights gained when AIMS science is interwoven with the knowledge, intuition, capacity, and capability of this country’s original marine scientists – the Traditional Owners of sea country.

AIMS is Australia’s tropical marine science agency. Its mission 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’. AIMS’ research programs are built around core strengths and strategic capabilities that meet the knowledge needs of stakeholders including government, industry, the broader community and resource management organisations, and Traditional Owners (1).

Traditional Owners of sea country across northern Australia have documented their science and management priorities through place-specific Healthy Country Management Plans and regional syntheses for areas such as the Great Barrier Reef (2), Torres Strait (3), the Northern Territory (4), and The Kimberley (5). These plans clearly identify the increased capability and capacity required to meet these priorities, and express aspirations for greater Traditional Owner empowerment in sea country monitoring, research and decision making, and science partnering. There are many synergies in the aspirations of AIMS and Traditional Owners, and these areas of shared interest are the focus of this **Indigenous Partnerships Plan**.



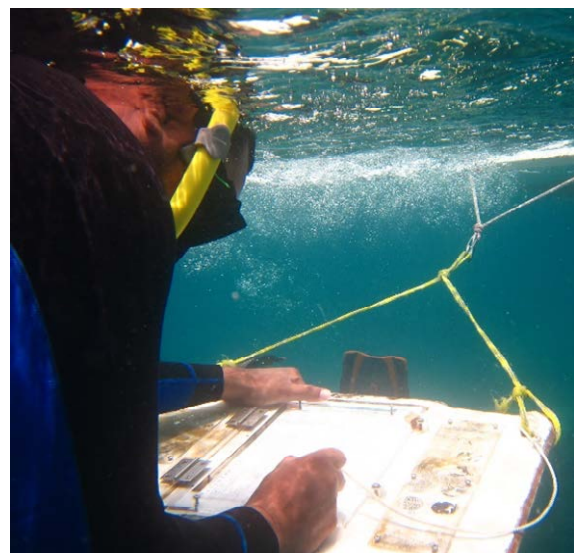
AIMS has embarked on this plan from a strong historical track record of successful Indigenous engagement and partnerships in science projects over the past 25 years. In seeking genuine collaborations between AIMS and Indigenous Australians, this new plan seeks to outline and facilitate an organisation-wide shift from engagement to partnerships as its primary goal. However,

the plan also recognises that partnerships may not be appropriate or possible for all AIMS projects, and flexibly accommodates a broad spectrum of engagement levels to encompass the range of projects in AIMS research portfolio.

The key values of Safety, Collaboration, Passion, Integrity, Innovation, Respect, and Environment are enshrined in the AIMS Strategy 2025 and will underpin implementation of this IPP. This plan is also guided by additional values specific to the inherent rights, interests, and responsibilities for sea country that Traditional Owners have enjoyed and exercised for millennia, including the use of, practice of, and interest in marine resources, observations, and research. The IPP closely follows the principles enshrined in the national *'Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies'* (6), and the *'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples'* (UNDRIP) which Australia adopted in 2009 (7). It specifically addresses the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) – an obligation which is currently rarely supported in the statutory regulation of marine research (e.g. obtaining permits). The co-designed partnership approach described in the IPP was constructed from the outset through consultation with Indigenous colleagues and leaders through a process which began in 2015. It also aligns with, and will contribute to the Commonwealth's recently refreshed *'Closing the Gap'* Policy, particularly in relation to the targets in education; and land and water, as well as a number of cross-system priorities (8).

The IPP is structured in the following three parts (see next chapters):

1. *Preparing AIMS for Indigenous Partnerships:* This will provide a supporting framework for AIMS personnel to implement this plan within their projects;
2. *Initiating and undertaking engagement that will lead to new partnerships:* This plan provides a tiered approach to engagement that will guide AIMS staff in how to identify relevant Traditional Owner groups and undertake appropriate engagement; and
3. *Establishing AIMS' reputation as a reliable, trusted and ethical partner for Traditional Owners:* This part of the plan will help AIMS demonstrate integrity, trust, and respect, while celebrating successes.





### 3 PREPARE AIMS FOR INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS

#### *Getting Our House in Order*

AIMS will create the foundation necessary to establish the organisation and its staff as culturally competent, and will build rapport and science collaborations with Traditional Owners to become their trusted advisor and science partner of choice.

AIMS will:

- Improve the cultural competency of AIMS staff through training; celebration of significant Indigenous dates to raise awareness of critical issues; display of important symbols (e.g. indigenous flags and artwork), and establishment of culturally appropriate protocols (e.g. acknowledgements of country) to acknowledge and pay respect to Traditional Owners and Indigenous culture;
- Promote marine science and related careers to Indigenous people through measured improvements in recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff that exceeds the Commonwealth mandated employment targets in the public sector, through;
  - Introducing marine science or related careers at AIMS to young Indigenous people through work experience placements and participation in immersive programs such as the Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in Marine Science (9), Aboriginal Summer School for Excellence in Technology and Science (10), and junior ranger programs;
  - Promoting Indigenous training and capacity building within individual science projects;
  - Using Indigenous networks to actively encourage applicants to all advertised job vacancies. This will include new Indigenous identified positions; and
  - Professional development and career progression for all Indigenous staff.
- Assist AIMS staff implement the IPP and conduct culturally appropriate engagement and acknowledgement within their projects by:
  - Identifying the appropriate Traditional Owner group or cultural authority body/person/s for a particular geographic area, creating and maintaining on-line maps of sea country areas including Native Title Areas, Indigenous Protected Areas, Indigenous Land Use Agreements, and Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements;
  - Maintaining a database of key Indigenous contacts and community profiles alongside a library of key documents on culture and sea country management;
  - Developing guidelines that include assessment and allocation of the appropriate engagement levels (see next chapter), the proper use of images of Indigenous people, and methods to document consent and other formal agreement arrangements; and
  - Providing access for staff and Traditional Owners to an AIMS IPP team member with Indigenous engagement experience for advice and guidance.



## 4 INITIATE AND UNDERTAKE ENGAGEMENT

### *Defining Tiers of Engagement to Achieve Partnerships*

Genuine collaborations with Traditional Owners are a central goal of the IPP and a key target of AIMS Strategy 2025. However, such partnerships can only occur if a solid relationship between AIMS and the Traditional Owner group exists first. Mutual trust and understanding is necessary for comprehensive 2-way communication to occur to identify areas of mutual research interest and, if applicable, develop the details of a co-designed and co-delivered project. This process takes time and so will not be immediately applicable to all AIMS projects. Indeed, a partnership approach is not always appropriate for many AIMS projects for a number of reasons. For example, some Traditional Owner groups may have other priorities or concerns and may not wish to partner with AIMS at a particular point in time; or the opportunities for partnering may be limited within some projects, such as desktop or laboratory-based studies. Nevertheless, all AIMS research will have implications for the Traditional Owners of relevant areas of sea country who have a right to negotiation through respectful communication.

Therefore, this IPP describes four tiers of engagement to guide staff in identifying the most appropriate level of engagement based on the specific characteristics of their project, and setting the corresponding engagement expectations. The appropriate tier will be determined during the planning stage of new projects, so that adequate resources for the required engagement can be identified and allocated to each project. The Indigenous Partnerships Team will work with AIMS staff to help them identify relevant Traditional Owners and Indigenous groups, understand any existing sea country priorities and sensitivities, develop an appropriate engagement and communications plan, and make culturally respectful and appropriate contact.

#### **Bronze to Platinum Engagement**

Engagement tiers are named after the commonly used value or merit hierarchy of precious metals: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. While the concept behind these names is not particularly Indigenous in origin, all who were consulted agreed that the concept is well understood and appropriate. As the hierarchy suggests, the amount of effort and investment in engagement progressively increases from bronze to platinum, and in addition, there is a shift along this continuum from AIMS driven projects, through to equal partnerships, through to Traditional Owner driven projects.





Bronze projects are AIMS-led projects with minimal expectations for Traditional Owner consultation and engagement. However, in all cases the relevant Traditional Owner group (for sea country) will be identified and acknowledged, and basic communication about the project will be provided.

Silver projects are also AIMS-led projects that have a higher expectation for Traditional Owner engagement because the project may be sensitive or important to the Traditional owners requiring free, prior and informed consent. Silver projects may also provide opportunity for Traditional Owner participation and capacity building in the project.

Gold projects are true equal partnerships that meet the requirement for target EC3 in Strategy 2025. These projects are co-designed and jointly led collaborations with extensive Traditional Owner involvement and ownership.

Platinum projects are Traditional Owner initiated and led with support from AIMS under Traditional Owner direction. The addition of this platinum tier was proposed by Traditional Owners and reflects their aspirations to conduct their own sea country monitoring, research and management.

While the tiers provide AIMS staff with stretch targets as their relationships with Traditional Owners establish and deepen, the framework is not intended to be a recipe for continual progression towards platinum and there is no expectation that 100% of AIMS projects will eventually be externally driven by Traditional Owners. The AIMS research program will always include a mixture across the full engagement spectrum, with the tier architecture providing a mechanism for performance measures to be set and progress monitored. Bronze will remain appropriate for many projects, but the framework provides guidance for development of the partnerships anticipated in the AIMS Strategy 2025 target.



## Identifying the Right Tier for a Project.

The following table summarises the key characteristics of each tier. This should be used as a general guide to assist in identifying the appropriate tier for a project in planning. Allocation of a tier to a project should be done on a case by case basis, subject always to advice of the Indigenous Partnerships Team and decisions of the AIMS Leadership Team.

Characteristics of the Project	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
The project is likely to come into contact with or be visible to TOs. (field work close to shore or community (yes) or remote and far offshore (no))	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
There will be extraction/ transfer of materials out of sea country, or translocation or manipulative experiments in sea country	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
A pre-existing significant relationship with deep mutual understanding exist between AIMS and the relevant TOs	No	Yes/No #	Yes/No #	Yes/No #
The value (>\$1M) and/or profile of the project is medium-high	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
The area has high cultural heritage significance or other special TO values, or is a known cultural hot spot (e.g. sacred sites)	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
TOs have advised AIMS they do not agree to the project occurring	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Minimum cultural competency of project staff ##	Basic	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced
There is an intention to provide for significant TO participation and capacity building	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
There is an intention for a partnership with TO co-design and co-delivery of the project	No	No	Yes	Yes/No
There is an intention for 2-way learning (AIMS science + Traditional Knowledge and science) embedded in the project concept	No	Yes/No	Yes	Yes/No
Project driver/leader	AIMS	AIMS	Joint AIMS and TOs	TOs

# Where a pre-existing significant relationship already exists between AIMS and the Traditional Owner group, there is both the opportunity and a likely expectation to establish a silver or above project. However, a project could proceed with a lower (bronze) engagement effort with Traditional Owner consent.

## Where sufficient cultural competency does not yet exist in the proposed project team, arrangements should be made to second into the project a member of the Indigenous partnerships team or other AIMS staff with the required competency.

## What are the Communication and Engagement Expectations for Each Tier?

The following table summarises the engagement components expected within each of the tiers. As with the previous table, this should be used as a general guide to assist in designing and assessing resources required for an appropriate communication and engagement plan for a project in planning, given the engagement tier allocated.

Communication and Engagement	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
Identify relevant Traditional Owners and key contacts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acknowledge TOs in all outputs (reports, publications, presentations, notices, videos, oral history recordings, media releases data sets, metadata records, etc), especially where they capture TO information gained from consultation and participation in the project	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communications plan to include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-project communication with information about the proposal in plain English, can be electronic.</li> <li>Pre-Notification about all field trips, can be electronic.</li> <li>On-country meeting during field work if practical.</li> <li>Plain English summary of project results delivered on conclusion, can be electronic</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communications plan to also include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-fieldwork on-country meeting(s)</li> <li>Discuss opportunities for Traditional Owner participation and capacity building</li> <li>Face to face delivery of project results</li> <li>Targeted communication products e.g. report card formats, posters, 2 way learning outputs</li> </ul>		✓ *	✓	✓ *
Obtain and document TO Free, Prior, and Informed Consent		✓	✓	✓
Document a formal project agreement		✓ *	✓	✓
Plan for and deliver TO participation/capacity building		✓ *	✓	✓ *
Plan for and deliver co-production of outputs		✓ *	✓	✓ *

\*Where applicable, subject always to discussion with Traditional Owners.





## 5 ESTABLISH AIMS AS A RELIABLE, TRUSTED, AND ETHICAL RESEARCH PARTNER FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS

AIMS wishes to be a good partner and trusted advisor to Traditional Owners and Indigenous collaborators. Accordingly, AIMS will take the following steps to be accessible to respond to sea country concerns of Traditional Owners through the following mechanisms.

### **Be a ‘Trusted Advisor’ and reliable partner to Traditional Owners:**

AIMS will encourage and be responsive to requests for information about marine science from Traditional Owners, and where necessary, provide relevant information through targeted communication products such as plain English fact sheets, and direct referrals to appropriate agencies and information sources. AIMS will always follow up on direct requests and joint activities and will encourage face to face meetings including on-country and AIMS-hosted meetings.

### **Sponsor platforms to discuss sea country business and celebrate partnerships:**

AIMS will seek opportunities amongst its relationships with other Government agencies for platforms to showcase Indigenous sea country issues and or achievements in national and international fora. AIMS will also sponsor opportunities to present partnership projects at conferences, particularly presentations by, or jointly presented with Indigenous collaborators. Fora and conferences will be strategically selected for their relevance and benefit to AIMS, Traditional Owners, and profile raising with the wider community. AIMS will also sponsor and/or participate in at least one Indigenous-led national forum on sea country management, monitoring, and research every two years. These fora will provide opportunity for AIMS to further understand Indigenous concerns/issues and achievements, and prioritise areas of mutual interest.

### **Measure and document the value and impacts of partnerships:**

AIMS will seek new projects to validate and quantify nett social and economic benefits in Indigenous communities as a result of partnerships with AIMS. To protect Traditional Knowledge, AIMS will ensure proper consent processes for knowledge shared, and bespoke mechanisms to protect confidential knowledge and data while ensuring access to knowledge holders. AIMS will also assist Traditional Owners to identify further opportunities arising from capacity and capability developed in AIMS partnerships, in any field of interest to the Traditional Owners (e.g. aquaculture, tourism, education, recording important stories, cultural heritage etc). Where fields of interest are outside AIMS interest, AIMS will connect Traditional Owners to other relevant agencies and organisations.



**Support Traditional Owners' aspirations for a greater role in sea country business:**

By implementing this IPP and abiding by the values and principles described earlier, AIMS will support Traditional Owner aspirations for greater empowerment in sea country monitoring, research and decision making, and science partnering. These aspirations are well documented in a plethora of sea country plans and regional syntheses (for example (2; 3; 4; 5)), and the table below summarises how AIMS expects to support them. Aspirations listed in this table are adapted from Dale et al 2018.

Traditional Owner Aspirations	How the IPP supports this aspiration
Establish greater capacity to do sea country business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Protocols and practice will respect traditional ownership of sea country, and any protocols and processes requested by TOs;</li><li>- Engagement with AIMS will support TO capacity and capability for discussion and negotiation with non-Indigenous organisations;</li></ul>
Establish regional governance frameworks to facilitate better engagement and negotiation between Traditional Owners and external parties (e.g. AIMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Protocols and practice will identify, support and reinforce TO led governance arrangements where they exist;</li><li>- Establish precedents for others to follow;</li></ul>
Normalise rights-based agreement making for sea country business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Develop templates to assist routinely formalising arrangements between AIMS and TOs;</li></ul>
Establish statutory arrangements that implement Australia's UNDRIP obligations (including Free, Prior and Informed Consent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Establish precedents and case studies to inform and support future regulatory reform;</li></ul>
Resources to underpin long term and sustainable support for achieving Traditional Owner aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Contribute to strengthening TO capacity and capability;</li><li>- Resources in projects with AIMS can be leveraged further by TOs in other funding opportunities;</li><li>- Development of skilled Indigenous personnel through employment and training;</li></ul>
Traditional Owner co-design in programs and procurement of marine research, monitoring and management programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Relationship and partnership development will support and normalise TO co-design;</li><li>- TO project participation will be funded;</li></ul>
Ensure all programs on sea country are fit-for-purpose and support social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations (e.g. country-based planning, meaningful employment, environmental improvements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- AIMS practice and protocols are built on the principle of FPIC and supporting TO aspirations and rights;</li><li>- Increase in TO capacity for research, monitoring and management may lead to future opportunity for service delivery and employment;</li></ul>
Establish marine research partnerships and collaborations with major research institutions (e.g. AIMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Meaningful and mutually beneficial research partnerships between TOs and AIMS, including 2-way learning, is at the core of the plan;</li></ul>
Embed Traditional Owners and their cultural heritage in all aspects of sea country monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Partnerships with AIMS that include monitoring and evaluation (e.g. NAMMA) will provide TOs with an opportunity to include cultural heritage.</li></ul>

## 6 IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

AIMS has established an Indigenous Partnerships Team which includes Traditional Owners with excellent cultural competency, communication skills, extensive networks, and lived-experience in coastal and marine matters. The team will work with AIMS staff to provide advice on all aspects of this plan, including identifying relevant Traditional Owners and Indigenous groups (including where no formal statutory arrangements exist), determining the appropriate engagement tier, and planning according to the engagement protocols set out here.

The IPP is now integrated with internal workflows for planning, approval, and management of all new AIMS' projects as of July 2020. This will ensure that all appropriate processes outlined in this document are identified and planned for (including resource allocation) at the earliest pre-proposal stages of all future projects. Pre-existing projects already underway will have a tier retrofitted to the extent practicable.

By 2025, we expect to achieve the following targets:

- 100% of AIMS research that involves place-based data or samples taken from sea country (even if desk-top or lab-based), meets minimum Bronze engagement;
- At least 50% of AIMS research meets minimum Silver engagement;
- At least 20% of AIMS research meets minimum Gold engagement;
- Increased cultural competency across all AIMS staff and especially field going research staff, achieved through formal cultural training, specialised induction videos, and institutional commemoration and knowledge of significant Indigenous days. Each research team has at least one person with advanced cultural competency and capable of Indigenous engagement leading to research partnerships (silver and above projects);
- A central database of information including map layers, for AIMS research staff to easily identify the sea country of Traditional Owners and Indigenous reference groups, their key contacts, and information about their sea country research priorities and knowledge needs;
- AIMS is well established within a comprehensive network of Traditional Owners and Indigenous representative groups who view AIMS as the research partner of choice and first point of contact for tropical marine research issues and concerns;
- An increase in recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff at all levels and across all functional areas, to exceed the Commonwealth Government's Indigenous employment targets;
- AIMS supported pathways to training and employment in marine science (school programs such as ATSIMS, apprenticeships, traineeships, higher education scholarships);
- A capability in collecting appropriate data and measuring the triple bottom line benefits (social, environment, and financial) from marine science engagement and partnerships with Traditional Owners; and
- AIMS has an exemplary reputation for Indigenous partnerships, and the IPP is seen as a model which other organisations follow.



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