

Document Details

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PURPOSE

AIMS Strategy 2025 sets a target to *undertake science collaborations with Traditional Owners in key projects focused on sea country*. AIMS recognises that greater research impact and value can be created, and new insights gained when AIMS science is interwoven with the knowledge, perspectives, capacity, and capability of this country's original marine scientists – the Traditional Owners of sea country.

An Indigenous Partnerships Plan to achieve this target was endorsed by AIMS Council in December 2019. This policy sets out the principles that guide the implementation of the Indigenous Partnerships Plan.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all AIMS research that is conducted on or related to Australia's marine estate. It applies to AIMS staff (including casual and temporary staff), Council members, students, collaborators, and visitors including external contractors and those who utilise AIMS' facilities.

POLICY STATEMENT

AIMS acknowledges that Traditional Owners have inherent rights and responsibilities and an enduring spiritual and cultural connection with their land and sea country and all within it. These rights, responsibilities and spiritual and cultural connections are recognised in international instruments that have been adopted by Australia (eg United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), and increasingly in Australian domestic legal, regulatory and management frameworks (eg Native title, Indigenous Protected Areas, co-management arrangements in state and Commonwealth marine parks, AIATSIS Code of ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research).

AIMS also recognises that its mission is strongly aligned with Traditional Owners' responsibility for sea country.

AIMS will establish genuine research partnerships with Traditional Owners in areas of mutual interest to build knowledge that supports the sustainable use, protection and management of Australia's marine estate for future generations.

Traditional Owners are the first custodians of land and sea country

AIMS recognises that the interests, culture and traditions (lore) of Traditional Owners have existed for millennia. They are inalienable and inseparable from their land and sea country.

Free Prior and Informed Consent

Recognising the enduring spiritual and cultural connections to and inherent responsibilities for their land and sea country, AIMS acknowledges that Traditional Owners have a central role in deciding which activities can be conducted on their sea country. AIMS will seek Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all projects that have a strong intersection with sea country or Traditional Owner interests. For example, this may include projects that involve the collection of samples, deployment of instruments, conduct of manipulative experiments, or operation within a culturally sensitive area. The scope of FPIC sought will include the use, storage and disposal of all samples collected. AIMS

will abide by the decisions of Traditional Owners and will ensure that the scope of projects and use of any samples collected remains within the scope of FPIC granted. A project that would normally require FPIC may proceed without FPIC in exceptional circumstances.

Engagement through appropriate Indigenous governance structures

When engaging with Traditional Owners, AIMS will identify and engage with appropriate Indigenous governance structures to ensure that consultation occurs with parties that have the cultural authority for the relevant Traditional Owner group.

Traditional Owner interests endure in samples collected by AIMS

AIMS recognises Traditional Owners’ enduring cultural and spiritual connection extends to samples collected from their sea country. Samples held in perpetuity by AIMS remain subject to the scope of the FPIC originally granted.

Scientific standing of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

AIMS acknowledges that Traditional Ecological Knowledge and other Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property held by Traditional Owners is a valid a knowledge system as is western science. AIMS will only incorporate Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property into projects in accordance with the AIMS Intellectual Property Policy and associated Procedure.

Traditional Owners should be informed about AIMS research

AIMS will share knowledge and results from AIMS research (including with collaborators) conducted on sea country using culturally appropriate communication products.

Allocation of appropriate resources

AIMS will allocate sufficient resources to support appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners to ensure compliance with this policy and the Indigenous Partnerships Plan.

Holding our partners and collaborators to the same standard

AIMS will ensure that collaborators and users of AIMS facilities comply with this policy and related procedures when appropriate.

REFERENCES

AIMS Indigenous Partnerships Plan

AIMS Intellectual Property Procedure

[Ministerial Statement of Expectations](#)

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

DEFINITIONS

Country	The place to which a Traditional Owner group is connected, encompassing all living, non-living, tangible and intangible elements and cultural obligations connected to that place.
Sea Country	A particular area of Country that is currently within the marine environment.
Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property	The rights that Indigenous people have to protect their arts, culture, practices, stories and knowledge including Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
Traditional Ecological Knowledge	Knowledge acquired by Indigenous peoples over millennia of contact with the environment, including knowledge passed from generation to generation.
Traditional Owner	An Indigenous person (or group) with a spiritual or cultural affiliation to a site or area of Country.