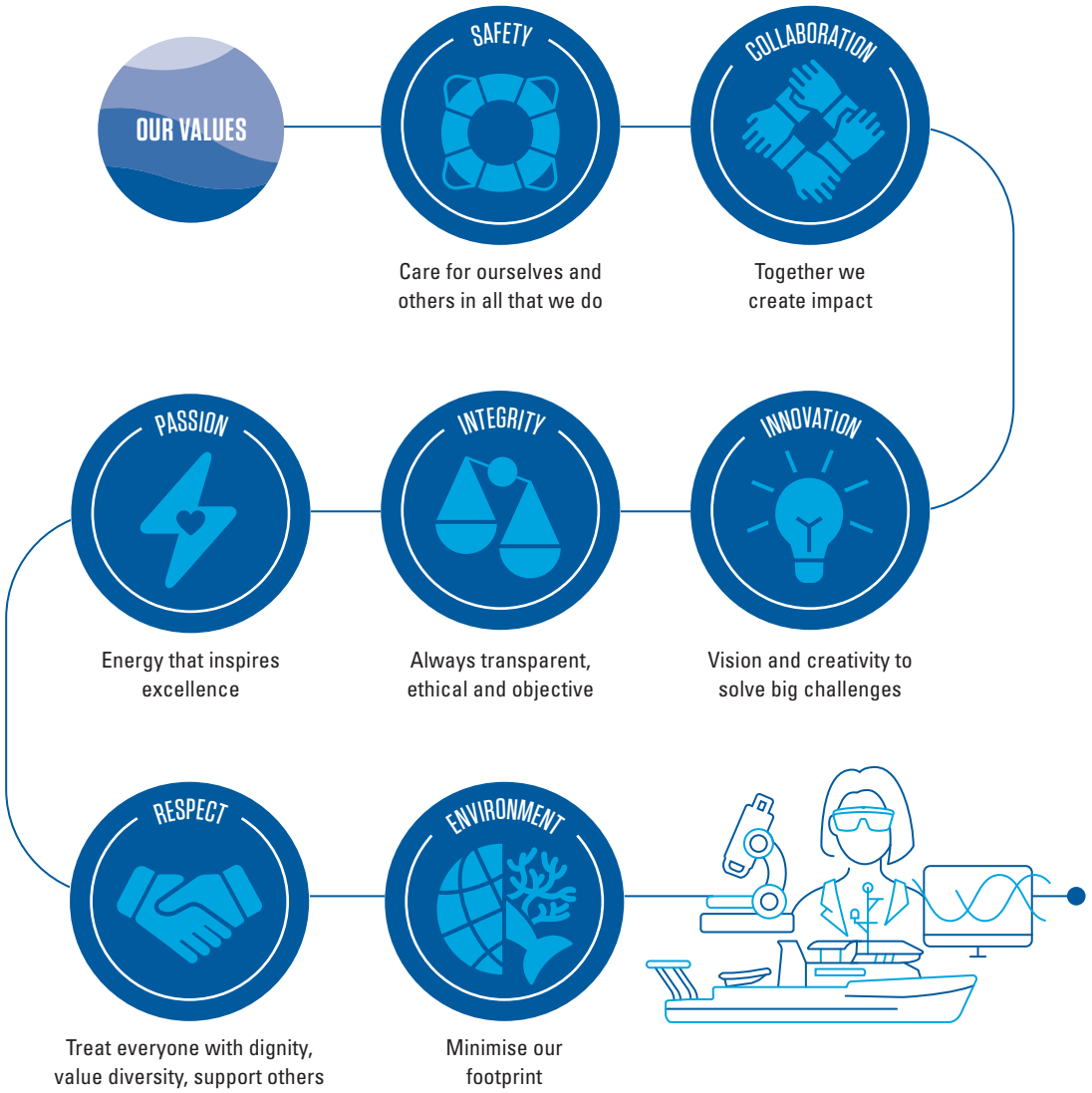
Australian Government

Australian Institute of Marine Science

Australian Institute of Marine Science Strategy 2030

THE WAY WE WORK



INTRODUCTION

This AIMS Strategy 2030 updates and replaces the previous AIMS Strategy 2025. It will guide our research and investments within AIMS and signal our strategic intent in the public domain. This updated strategy builds on and incorporates elements of Strategy 2025, recognising much has changed since that document was developed in 2018.

Strategy 2030 provides a concise, clear and compact description of AIMS' key research and development priorities for the next seven years. More detailed research plans will be provided in AIMS annual Corporate Plans and will link to our annual budget statements — all part of our mandated reporting requirements to government.

Each element of the strategy is accompanied by a specific strategic target that will allow AIMS, and the nation, to track progress towards our objectives. The targets are ambitious, but these are challenging times for the marine environment, and there is much to be done.

These targets add depth to the annual objectives established by the AIMS Budget Statements. Measurement methodology will support each target and enable standardised and transparent assessment. Some of these methodologies are widely used in other industries, while AIMS and others will need to develop further methodologies over the next few years.

In each case, the seven-year targets in Strategy 2030 will be broken down into annual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in our Corporate Plans, ensuring each measure can be clearly traced back to objectives established by the AIMS Budget Statements. These targets will serve as milestones for gauging progress and be referenced in our annual performance statement.

This updated strategy builds on and incorporates elements of Strategy 2025, recognising much has changed since that document was developed in 2018.

CEO MESSAGE

Australia is a marine nation. Our marine estate is the third largest in the world, with our exclusive economic zone covering 10 million square kilometres. This huge area is home to some of the most diverse and iconic ecosystems and species on the planet, and is of deep cultural significance to Australia's First Peoples. Eighty-five per cent of Australians also live on or near the coast, and the oceans have a special place in the national psyche.

Our blue economy, which includes, fishing, aquaculture, tourism, offshore oil and gas and naval activities makes a significant contribution to the nation's prosperity. But it can only do so if Australia's marine ecosystems are healthy and resilient. During the onset of the COVID pandemic, the economic contribution to Australia's GDP grew to over $100B per annum despite a downturn in international tourism to Australia. Collectively, marine industries contributing to the blue economy are the 12th largest industry in the Australian economy.

Despite its importance, too much of our marine estate remains virtually unexplored and poorly understood. And as our population grows, a combination of pollution, exploitation and the effects of climate change increasingly threaten the health of our oceans.

The challenge for the 21st century is clear: manage our oceans sustainably so we can continue to enjoy the economic, environmental, social and spiritual benefits they provide for generations to come.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) was established in 1972 by an act of Parliament, with headquarters in Townsville, on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Early on, the reef was a major focus of our work, and that has continued to this day. Along the way we have grown to include laboratories in Perth and Darwin, and a broad mandate as the nation's tropical marine science agency.

Fifty years since we began, our work now includes a significant portfolio of projects supporting offshore and coastal industries, working in deep partnership with First Peoples of the north to support their inherent responsibility to care for Country, and supporting policy development for state and Commonwealth governments. Mindful of Australia's place in the Indo-Pacific, we also increasingly engage internationally with a focus on our near region.

Our world-class research infrastructure includes two purpose-built coastal research vessels, and the expanded National Sea Simulator facility, the world's most advanced research aquarium complex. In the 2023/24 Budget, the Federal Government committed significant funds towards upgrading and updating our science and supporting capabilities and facilities, ensuring we can continue to deliver world-class science outcomes into the future. Our scientists are among the best in the world in their disciplines and AIMS routinely ranks as one of the top three marine science organisations in the world.

Because we focus on tropical marine science and systems, AIMS is uniquely placed to provide the expert advice and solutions required to help preserve our fabulously rich and diverse marine estate, and underpin its sustainable use. This document sets out a continued bold strategy for the nation's tropical marine science agency, building on our reputation as trusted advisor to government, industry and the community for more than 50 years.

The strategy is based on extensive surveys of our stakeholders' needs and the lived experience of implementing Strategy 2025. It aligns with key national and with international priorities such as the National Marine Science Plan, the Nature Positive Plan, the Reef 2050 plan, and with international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

For the rest of this decade, we will sharpen our focus on delivering real, positive impact to the nation and doing so in a measurable way. We will increasingly supplement our traditional monitoring role with a continued, strong focus on delivering science-based solutions to the key challenges faced by our oceans.

And we will continue to develop our capabilities in critical areas such as coral reef restoration and adaptation, ecological modelling, blue carbon solutions, supporting the transition to renewable energy, decision science, incorporating traditional knowledge in Indigenous science partnerships, and the application of new technology to increase the reach and alacrity of our science.

This research takes us to challenging and distant environments, that's why AIMS focuses on developing our culture and systems to undertake such work safely. The safety of our people, collaborators, contractors and those with whom we share the oceans remains paramount.

AIMS Strategy 2030 contains high level targets which cascade down into our annual Corporate Plan, research plans and individual staff performance plans and assessments. Our performance against these will be reported in our Portfolio Budget Statements and Annual Report.

Perhaps, most importantly, this document reaffirms our dedication to our core values, including our commitment to safety, being a partner and employer of choice, applying innovation to achieve impact and providing the most objective, transparent and high-quality marine science available anywhere in the world, for the benefit of all.

Paul Hardisty

OUR MISSION

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.

ACHIEVING OUR MISSION

DELIVERING LONG-TERM IMPACTS

To accomplish our mission, AIMS will deliver three long-term impacts that improve tropical marine health, create national benefits and protect coral reefs from climate change. We will achieve this by using our core capabilities and enhanced capabilities to build on our legacy while aligning with national and international priorities.

AIMS is part of a team that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, research collaborators, clients, stakeholders and end-users. When governments, Traditional Owners, communities and industry adopt our science and solutions, it creates positive environmental, social and economic benefits for our marine estate. This is impact.

Impacts are usually realised years after the research is completed and are often beyond the researchers' ability to control. AIMS will work with the end-users of our science to ensure its appropriate implementation, and to track, document and communicate the positive impacts that result over time.

AIMS will deliver the science to help realise three key long-term **IMPACTS** for the nation:

Improve the health and resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems across northern Australia

- AIMS acknowledges that for some ecosystems, improvements in health and resilience may not be feasible. In such cases, maintaining current levels of health or reducing the rate of ecosystem decline will also create positive impact by lessening levels of damage over what they would have been without the use of science-based solutions.
- AIMS will work with partners to develop a set of indices designed to measure health and resilience of tropical marine ecosystems. This work will enable the measurement of progress and the attribution of AIMS' contribution to improvement.
- This impact is linked with responsibilities assigned to AIMS in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, and the Nature Positive Plan more broadly.

Create economic, social and environmental net benefits for marine industries and coastal communities

- Each year, the Australian government and other bodies invest a considerable amount of money into AIMS. The science we produce underpins real benefits to Australians, industries and ecosystems. The scale and breadth of these positive impacts justifies this investment.
- Measurement of economic, social and environmental benefits is widely practised in a range of industries and government sectors. AIMS will continue to track, measure and quantify the net benefits[1] produced by our science.
- Understanding and measuring these benefits will require AIMS to remain engaged with stakeholders long after our research outputs have been delivered. This will better enable AIMS to understand the future research needs of those stakeholders.

Protect coral reefs and other marine ecosystems from the effects of climate change

- Climate change is a major challenge and beyond the ability of any one organisation to solve. AIMS and its partners can contribute to helping marine ecosystems, such as coral reefs, better survive and recover from the effects of climate change.
- Unchecked, climate change will worsen the health of many valuable marine ecosystems. AIMS will continue to develop science that underpins practical solutions to lessen the scale, severity and pace of this decline. Our work in this area will complement and integrate with the other two impact areas.
- World-leading science focused on mitigation, adaptation and restoration designed for practical adoption will remain a key focus for AIMS to build resilience of marine ecosystems in Australia and abroad.

1 Net benefits are the accumulated positive environmental, social and economic benefits resulting from application of science and solutions, minus any associated negative implications.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS — IMPACT TARGETS

AIMS will work with stakeholders to track progress with two **IMPACT TARGETS**. By 2030 AIMS science will underpin:

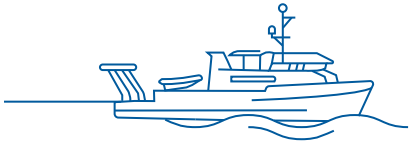
I1 At least $200m per annum in environmental, social and economic net benefits for tropical Australia

- We will assess the value to the nation of applying our research findings, and use these assessments to supplement impact stories.

I2 Marine ecosystems in northern Australia are being regenerated or repaired

- AIMS will lead the ongoing development of tropical marine health indices for key ecosystems, including coral reefs, which will be used to measure net improvements. This will include gauging the effectiveness of reef adaptation and restoration efforts, in line with the goals of the Reef 2050 plan and the Nature Positive Plan more broadly.
- Improvement will be measured against current and projected baselines for AIMS project sites. For instance, reducing the current rate of decline of an ecosystem or returning the system to stability are improvements.
- This target captures improvements related to better management of the cumulative effects of all stressors, including climate change.

APPLYING OUR CORE CAPABILITIES



To deliver impact, AIMS applies **CORE CAPABILITY** in:

Large-scale, high-tech and long-term ocean monitoring

- AIMS has been monitoring the state of Australia's tropical marine estate for more than three decades, with targeted programs on the Great Barrier Reef and the North West Shelf. Our approach has proven to be a template for similar programs in many tropical marine nations. AIMS' unique infrastructure capabilities have supported these large-scale, long-term programs, which include two purpose-built coastal research vessels, oceanographic moorings and reef observatories. AIMS is now the custodian of Australia's largest coastal ocean and reef-related data sets.
- Australia's marine environments are changing at an unprecedented rate. Traditional management regimes need to be strengthened, and new and innovative interventions must be developed to maintain their health and resilience. A commitment to long-term monitoring is essential to describe ecosystem status and trends across scales, to enhance understanding of processes that underpin system resilience, and to determine the effectiveness of management interventions.

Risk assessments of pollution and cumulative impacts

- Building on our unique data holdings, AIMS deploys specific scientific capability within dedicated research programs to investigate the cumulative impacts of acute and chronic pressures on Australia's marine environment, both in the field and laboratory.
- The state-of-the art National Sea Simulator facility gives AIMS unprecedented ability to quantify the impacts of single or multiple simultaneous pressures operating at local scales (e.g. dredging, nutrients, pesticides, sediment, metals) and global scales (sea temperature, acidification).

Analyses and prediction of ecosystem function and change

- Core to delivering impact is the ability to predict likely future ecosystem states in order to evaluate potential policy and management options that ensure the ongoing health and resilience of Australia's tropical marine systems. AIMS' understanding of these systems, underpinned by our unique scientific, data and infrastructure capabilities, enables AIMS to deliver end-to-end science for national and international benefit.

SUPPORTING OUR CAPABILITIES

World-class research infrastructure, unique data sets, high-performing and diverse teams, collaborations and continually improving systems support our core capability

- AIMS will continue to invest in maintenance and modernisation to ensure that we have safe, fit-for-purpose, world-class platforms and facilities for conducting marine science. We will continue to provide our collaborative partners with access to our vessels and laboratories.
- AIMS will maintain and further develop our marine observation infrastructure to integrate data into decision-support tools. We will build on our reputation for delivering timely and practical data products through continued development of data management systems, modelling capability and visualisation techniques.
- We will continue to invest in our people to ensure that we grow the breadth and depth of capability to address current and future marine science needs. Leadership development, stakeholder engagement and project management are key focus areas. We will also maintain our strong educational program, particularly through co-funded postdoctoral positions and PhD scholarships as part of joint ventures with some of Australia's leading universities, with strong focus on developing opportunities for First Nations Peoples.

ENHANCING OUR CAPABILITIES

To further improve our science quality and deliver impact, AIMS will develop **ENHANCED CAPABILITY** by:

Working with collaborators, stakeholders and partners to turn our science into solutions

- AIMS has a long history of monitoring the tropical marine environment. Increasingly, we are shifting our focus to developing practical solutions to achieve positive impact for the nation, and sharing our expertise to support partners in Australia and overseas.
- Solutions will range from developing new strains of temperature-resistant corals, innovative deployment methods for those corals during reef restoration, to developing new approaches to the challenges of growing the Blue Economy, developing novel blue carbon methods, and working to greatly improve the rigour and effectiveness of decision-making in the marine environment.

Embedding new technologies and the latest data science into our core capabilities

- AIMS will invest in the transformative application of technology and data science across the entire life cycle of our activities. This will further enhance automated data collection, data analysis, curation and storage. Big data, machine learning and artificial intelligence, and the mining of our already extensive data collections will be focus areas, all the while ensuring our data is ready for use by stakeholders.
- In deploying new technology to increase information output, AIMS will also improve the quality of that information and the rate of information generation, and we will work to drive down the unit cost of information.

Building effective, evidence-based decision-support systems

- AIMS will work with partners to create the next generation of decision-support systems and tools for reef interventions, integrating environmental, biological and ecosystem models with adaptation pathways and socioeconomic prioritisation models.
- Complex issues require sophisticated understanding of trade-offs; the costs of action; the benefits of action and where, when and to whom they accrue.
- Helping our stakeholders make optimal decisions, underpinned by science, is one of the key ways AIMS will deliver lasting impact.

Partnering with First Nations Peoples to create new shared research that integrates Indigenous knowledge of sea Country with other sciences

- AIMS will continue to build its internal cultural competence for developing meaningful partnerships with First Nations Peoples of northern Australia's sea Country to deliver impactful research.
- We will develop innovative ways to bring Traditional Knowledge together with other areas of science to create new shared insights into marine systems.
- We will respect appropriate Indigenous cultural and intellectual property protocols in the management of data and publication of research arising from Indigenous partnership projects.
- We will comply with our Indigenous Partnerships Policy and Plan and the tiered categorization of engagement expected in projects. Projects that intersect with sea Country will only proceed with the Free Prior Informed Consent of relevant Traditional Owners (Silver Tier), and we will develop more partnership projects that are genuinely co-designed and co-delivered (Gold Tier).
- We will make research methods and results more accessible to Traditional Owners and other Indigenous partners.
- Through partnerships with First Nations Peoples and local communities reliant on coral reefs, especially in the Pacific, AIMS will expand its scientific and Traditional Knowledge exchange and contribute to local capability building.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS — ENHANCED CAPABILITY TARGETS

By 2030, AIMS will meet these **ENHANCED CAPABILITY TARGETS**:

EC1 Deliver five iconic projects, greater than $20M in value, which demonstrate solutions for our stakeholders

- As an organisation, we have a long track record of delivering large, high-profile projects such as our 37-year uninterrupted monitoring of the Great Barrier Reef, and the Australian Coral Reef Research Initiative that spans east and west coast reefs and demonstrates the value of partnerships with industry.
- AIMS' mission is to deliver marine science for the national good. After several decades of focusing on understanding our marine estate, we are evolving into an organisation that is developing solutions to our stakeholders' challenges.
- We will deliver solutions to stakeholders by applying effective decision-support systems within major projects.

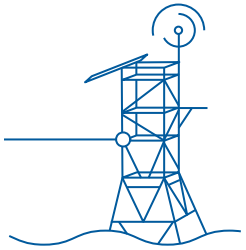
EC2 Employ breakthrough autonomous monitoring and assessment technologies to deliver the scientific knowledge to inform decisions on half of our major projects

- By applying autonomous technologies, AIMS will free up our scientists to focus on providing the science and solutions that will deliver impact for our stakeholders.
- By providing autonomous data collection and analysis technologies to reef stakeholders, Indigenous rangers and Traditional Owners will increase their empowerment and provide a low cost expansion in the delivery of required knowledge.

EC3 90% of AIMS projects on sea Country are Indigenous Partnership tier Silver, and 10% of projects are tier Gold.

- All AIMS projects that intersect with sea Country meet the requirements of the Silver engagement tier.
- At least 10% of AIMS projects meet the requirements of the Gold engagement tier.

BUILDING ON A STRONG LEGACY



AIMS will enhance its **REPUTATION** as:

Trusted advisor to government, industry and the Australian public

- Government and industry need timely, accurate and relevant information to manage and operate in our marine estate. AIMS will continue to play a pivotal role in providing impartial authoritative advice on key issues, and thus build on our reputation as trusted advisor in matters of marine science.
- A better-informed public improves the quality of discourse about key issues in the marine environment. AIMS will build on its reputation for providing high-quality, easy-to- understand, definitive information on the health of our tropical marine environment, and on the options available to create improvements.

Partner of Choice

- AIMS will work with national and international research collaborators and partners across many sectors to deliver impactful science. Whether leading a project, or in a supporting role to another institution, AIMS will exemplify a spirit of teamwork and respect.

Employer of choice

- Delivering the best science requires dedicated teams of highly qualified and motivated people. AIMS will provide a workplace environment, culture and opportunities that will attract and retain the very best talent from around Australia and the world.

One of the top marine science research institutions in the world

- There are many ways to rank performance of research institutions. AIMS is already a national and global academic leader in marine science. Over the coming years, AIMS will maintain this distinction and also become a leader in marine science for impact.

PERFORMANCE TARGETS

AIMS will have:

P1 Year-on-year improvement in safety performance

- Our highest priority is the physical, psychosocial and cultural health and wellbeing of our staff, collaborators, volunteers and visitors. We operate in challenging environments and undertake tasks where active, focused care is required to manage the health and safety of our workers.
- AIMS responds to these challenges with an organisation-wide approach to risk management and a relentless focus on developing our safety culture and systems. We recognise that safety management and staff wellbeing are intrinsically linked with delivering quality science.
- We will use performance indicators comprising both lead and lag measures (including Total Recordable Injury Frequency Rate (TRIFR) and Injury Severity Rate (ISR) to monitor our safety performance as it relates to physical and psychological risks, injuries, illness and impacts.

P2 Build on AIMS' national science excellence to be in the top 5 international marine science providers

- Publication excellence and quality underpins scientific reputation and is indicated by peer recognition through citation, international co-authorship and publication in top tier journals.
- Using indicators for these three performance measures, AIMS is already a top 10 organisation in the field of marine science with the potential to reach the top five.
- AIMS will remain in the top three Australian marine science organisations, and globally for specialist marine science organisations, as the national and international focus on oceans increases during the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

P3 Year-on-year improvement in culture survey results

- An engaged culture, where organisational values are consistently on display, improves overall performance and makes AIMS a partner and employer of choice.
- AIMS will actively listen to our staff via a range of mechanisms, including culture surveys, and enact follow-up plans to ensure an engaged, healthy and continuously improving culture.
- AIMS' culture will be measured using survey techniques that allow internal and external benchmarking.

REPUTATION TARGETS

By 2030, AIMS will have a:

R1 A Net Promoter Score of 60 as trusted advisor among key stakeholders

- We want the partnership experience with AIMS to be such that our collaborators and partners become champions for our science and how we go about our business.
- The Net Promoter Score is a widely used method to measure a customer's willingness to recommend an organisation's products or services to others.

R2 A 50% increase in awareness of AIMS by the Australian public compared to 2022

- AIMS is one of Australia's publicly funded research agencies.
- Awareness of who we are and what we do helps the public understand the value that AIMS provides to the nation, and of our central role in tropical marine science.
- We will measure public awareness of AIMS and our research priorities through a familiarity score, media and digital metrics and the quality of our communication.

R3 Achieve net zero carbon emissions for all landbased activities, together with 25% reductions in solid waste to landfill and 10% reduction in fresh water use (2022 baseline)

- Many of the issues that AIMS deals with in the marine environment are a result of environmental pressures. We will show leadership in ensuring that we conduct our own operations in the most sustainable way possible. We will achieve net zero carbon emissions for all land-based activities by 2030, with a trajectory to organizational net zero by 2050.

ALIGNING WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES

AIMS' strategy aligns with and supports:

The Australian Institute of Marine Science Act (1972)

- As a publicly funded research agency, AIMS is tasked by our Act to respond to our Minister. Requirements of AIMS are set out in a statement of expectations, issued periodically by the Minister.

The needs of our stakeholders

- AIMS consults on an ongoing basis with its key stakeholders in government, community and industry. We also conduct regular surveys of the science and research needs of a broad range of Australian and international organisations. These will continue to inform development of our strategy.

Australia's National Marine Science Plan

- AIMS has been a key leader in the National Marine Science Committee since its inception, and is a strong advocate of the plan it has produced. AIMS will continue to support and contribute to the Committee and ensure the plan continues to evolve to meet the needs of the nation and capitalises on synergies with nascent marine science plans of other tropical marine nations.

Australia's Nature Positive Plan

- AIMS will support the implementation of the Nature Positive Plan, the Australian Government's response to the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 to ensure these important reforms are backed by science.

The Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan

- This document sets out an integrated vision and action plan for maintaining and enhancing the health of the Great Barrier Reef through the next decades.
- It assigns AIMS and its partners responsibility for ecosystem health actions.
- The Reef2050 Traditional Owner Implementation Plan sets out specific actions and the role of Traditional Owners in the overarching plan.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Through the impact we help create, AIMS' research contributes to Australia's activities to meet the UN SDGs, most notably SDG 14 (life below water), and its obligations under ratified international treaties and conventions.

Australia's Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan

- Australia's whole-of-economy Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan is to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. AIMS' interim target for 2030 allows us to manage the unique challenges of our operations, while remaining on a trajectory of organisational net zero by 2050.
- Our emerging research focus on developing novel blue carbon methods will broaden options for climate mitigation and offsetting unavoidable emissions.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

We are a strategy-led organisation. The high-level directions and objectives set out in this document, and the over-arching budget statements, cascade down into detailed implementation plans and form the basis for our research and investment decisions. This strategy articulates the long-term vision for how AIMS will fulfil its remit under the guiding legislative and financial frameworks of the *Australian Institute of Marine Science Act 1972* and the *AIMS Budget Statements*.

This strategy links directly to our annual Corporate Plan, detailed research and business plans, and the annual performance appraisals of our staff. The strategy is reviewed every three years to ensure it is up to date and relevant, and progress towards targets and KPIs are reported yearly in our Annual Report.

CASCADING PLANNING
AIMS Strategy 2030 ▶ Portfolio Budget Statement & Annual Corporate Plan ▶ AIMS Annual Implementation Plan ▶ Research & Business Plans ▶ Staff Annual Performance Appraisal

RESOURCE INPUT ALLOCATION
AIMS Strategy 2030 ▶ Annual Corporate Budget ▶ Program Budgets and Staffing ▶ Team Budgets and Staffing ▶ Individual Staff Time Allocation

REPORTING AND ADJUSTMENT
AIMS Strategy 2030 ▶ Annual Report ▶ Program and Team Annual Reports ▶ Staff Individual Performance Appraisals

TRACKING OF PROGRESS
Strategic Targets ▶ Annual Corporate Objectives ▶ Program Research Output, Outcome and Impact Objectives ▶ Individual Staff Performance Targets

OUR TARGETS

AIMS ACHIEVEMENTS BY 2030

IMPACTS

I1 At least $200m per annum in environmental, social and economic net benefits for tropical Australia

I2 Marine ecosystems in northern Australia are being regenerated or repaired

ENHANCED CAPABILITY

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EC2 Employ breakthrough autonomous monitoring technologies to deliver the scientific knowledge to inform decisions on half of our major projects

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P2 Build on AIMS' national science excellence to be in the top five international marine science providers

P3 Year-on-year improvement in culture survey results

REPUTATION

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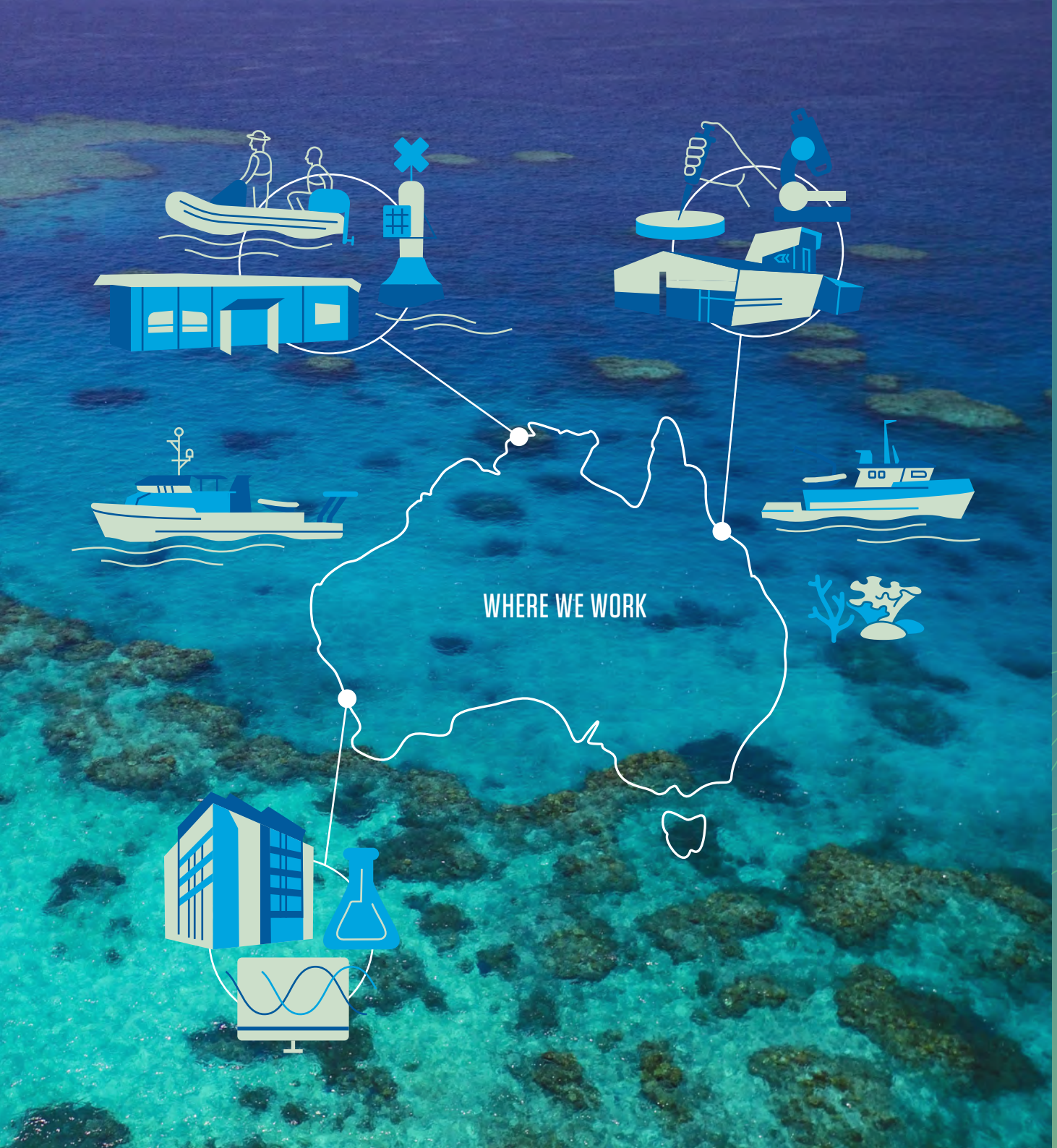

CONTACT AIMS

TOWNSVILLE (HEADQUARTERS)
PMB No.3
Townsville MC QLD 4810
TEL (07) 4753 4444
EMAIL reception@aims.gov.au

DARWIN
Arafura Timor Research Facility
PO Box 41775
Casuarina NT 0811
TEL (08) 8920 9240
EMAIL reception@aims.gov.au

PERTH
Indian Ocean Marine Research Centre
The University of Western Australia
M096 35 Stirling Highway
Crawley WA 6009
TEL (08) 6369 4000
EMAIL WAadmin@aims.gov.au

www.aims.gov.au

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