

27 February 2026

Senator the Hon Murray Watt
Minister for the Environment and Water
Australian Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Australian Institute of Marine Science Statement of Intent

Dear Minister Watt,

Thank you for your letter dated 14 December 2025 outlining your Ministerial Statement of Expectations for the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS). I am pleased to respond with the AIMS Statement of Intent on behalf of the Council of the Institute of Marine Science (the AIMS Council).

As the Accountable Authority for the Institute under the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act), the AIMS Council is committed to ensuring that AIMS delivers the highest standards of performance and accountability, consistent with its functions under the Australian Institute of Marine Science Act 1972 (AIMS Act) and in line with the expectations of the Australian Government and the wider community.

AIMS welcomes the Australian Government's approach to protecting, repairing and managing our natural environment. AIMS is dedicated to delivering world-class marine science to safeguard Australia's tropical marine and coastal ecosystems in the face of environmental change. Guided by the AIMS Strategy 2040, we are committed to generating the knowledge, capability, and partnerships needed to ensure that tropical marine ecosystems continue to provide environmental, cultural, social, and economic benefits for all Australians. Our work is guided by five Research Themes – Future Reefs, Coastal Futures, Blue Economy, Digital Oceans and First Nations Innovation – and is driven by our vision to ensure thriving oceans through trusted science and innovation.

AIMS is undertaking a substantial program of work to implement the Government's \$163.4 million investment in the agency. This includes a significant recruitment program, enhancing our capabilities in cutting edge marine science and technology, delivering critical infrastructure upgrades and progressing the replacement of the small research vessel RV *Apollo*. We look forward to reporting on the continued implementation of this funding and the outcomes that we are achieving, including opportunities for you to join us in the celebration of key infrastructure restoration and readiness for hosting ongoing and future marine science.

We are committed to being an employer, collaborator, and partner of choice. Our strong safety record contributes to this, as does our commitment to equity and diversity. We maintain balanced gender ratios in all areas of the organisation, and we employ First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse people across our organisation. We strive to attract, support, retain, and celebrate an inclusive and diverse workforce, and where we see imbalances in our staffing profiles, we actively seek ways we can further encourage a diversity of applicants into these areas. We are proud of our staff diversity, the work of our Equity, Diversity and Gender (EDGE) team, and the progress that is being made to elevate our Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) accreditation.

AIMS engages closely with all relevant Government stakeholders, providing and sharing our research and knowledge for the benefit of all Australians. We maintain strong relationships with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and its portfolio agencies, Australia's Chief Scientist and other Government science and research agencies. We reaffirm our commitment to supporting the implementation of the National Science Statement and the revitalised National Science and Research Priorities. AIMS is also fully committed to its representational roles on the National Marine Science Committee and the Government Scientists Group.

Advancing the Government's policy priorities

AIMS is a dedicated partner in advancing the Government's policy priorities, including the National Science and Research Priorities, protecting Australia's tropical coastal and marine ecosystems and building a stronger Pacific family.

Aligning with National Science and Research priorities

The National Science and Research Priorities are closely aligned with the AIMS Strategy 2040 Research Themes:

- **Priority 1 - Transitioning to a Net Zero Future:** AIMS will support Australia's transition to a net zero future with our Blue Economy Research Theme. This will include advancement of Australia's blue economy – including sustainable offshore and coastal industries such as offshore renewable energy - by delivering the science, tools and advice that guide sustainable and equitable use of ocean resources. Our research will support these industries in protecting biodiversity and cultural values and facilitate understanding of blue carbon sequestration. We also reaffirm our commitment to deliver on our goal to reduce carbon emissions consistent with the targets in our corporate plan.
- **Priority 3 - Elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge Systems:** Our dedicated First Nations Innovation Research Theme will amplify Indigenous Leadership in marine science and stewardship by removing systemic barriers to recognising Indigenous Knowledge and sea Country custodianship. We reaffirm our commitment to seek Free, Prior and Informed Consent for all projects that have a strong intersection with sea Country or Traditional Owner interests. We will continue to use our research and operation platform to create and deliver pathways and opportunities for Indigenous people to develop skills in marine science, operations and sea Country stewardship. This will provide significant opportunities for two-way learning and improves the value and impact of our science, as well as creating meaningful on-country First Nation employment opportunities.
- **Priority 4 - Protecting and Restoring Australia's Environment:** AIMS will continue to deliver science and research to inform efforts to protect and restore tropical marine ecosystems under the effects of climate change. Three of our Research Themes – Future Reefs, Coastal Futures, and Digital Oceans – will contribute significantly to protecting and restoring marine and coastal environments. Our research will inform adaptive management and policy to ensure vital marine ecosystems remain resilient, productive and aligned with community and cultural values.

Protecting Australia's tropical coastal and marine ecosystems

AIMS plays a critical role in delivering the research and knowledge to protect and steward Australia's tropical coastal and marine ecosystems, including the world heritage listed Ningaloo and Great Barrier Reefs, and will continue to inform the implementation of the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan. We value our partnership with the Reef Authority in delivering the Marine Monitoring Program and look forward to continuing that vital work in the future in support of water quality initiatives in Queensland. Our Long Term Monitoring Program has measured the status and trend of reefs in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area since 1986 and provides the longest unbroken data set of its type in the world. This critical program provides important qualitative data that enables informed Government decision making on reef investments and interventions as we continue to enhance data collection methods and analysis through the adoption of emerging technologies.

Our transformative investments in digital and data science will address the growing complexity of ocean science by integrating our data streams with advanced Artificial Intelligence and data visualisation. The resulting intelligence will provide the predictive foresight needed to inform dynamic marine spatial planning, conservation strategies and sustainable industry practices.

AIMS will continue to play a role as a delivery partner in the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP) as required by the joint venture. The research and development program has identified several transformational methods to propagate and deploy climate resilient corals with elevated heat tolerance, along with improved modelling tools, decision-support systems, ecological monitoring, engagement with Traditional Owners, and risk-assessment methods, to protect the Great Barrier Reef from climate change. AIMS, through the RRAP Pilot Deployment Program, is delivering two large-scale restoration methods—Coral Aquaculture and Slick Capture and Release—on the Great Barrier Reef at globally unprecedented scales, and in partnership with Traditional Owners and the tourism and fishing industries. The research derived from this program can deliver upscaled coral conservation aquaculture as we work nationally and internationally to develop and deploy technology to breed and seed corals onto reefs in environmentally and culturally safe and efficient ways.

Supporting a stronger Pacific family

AIMS is recognised as a global leader in tropical marine science, and we work extensively with international partners, including those across the Pacific. We hold the Global Coordination role of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) under the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI). Through our ReefCloud system we support our Pacific neighbours with training and technology that helps them map, understand, and protect their coral reefs as we do our own.

We are developing our partnerships with international collaborators to exchange information and bring broader expertise to bear on the global challenges facing the tropical marine environment, particularly those associated with the recovery, restoration, and adaptation of coral reef ecosystems. Our international collaborations represent an important mechanism for the promotion and export of Australia's marine science capability, and our engagements in this context are advancing national foreign policy objectives. We are committed to continuing to engage with your department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to build the tropical marine science capability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Managing national research infrastructure and AIMS' research vessel fleet

AIMS welcomes the Australian Government's investments in national research infrastructure and recognises the importance of ensuring that facilities hosted by AIMS are well utilised, benefit the community and lead to strong outcomes. The expanded National Sea Simulator (SeaSim) facility allows AIMS to conduct unique, cutting-edge research, accelerate existing projects in areas such as reef restoration and decommissioning, and promote future collaboration and open avenues for potential new research. The National Facility operating model will increase utilisation by making available a proportion of the experimental space within the SeaSim Facility to support the Australian and international research community on a merit access basis.

Our research vessel fleet is performing strongly, with the RV *Solander* and the RV *Cape Ferguson* ranking as two of the top three most utilised research vessels in the world. We are firmly committed to ensuring that the replacement of our research vessels is undertaken through a financially sustainable approach in close consultation with your department.

Promoting and sharing AIMS' science and research

We place a high value on the accurate, timely, and accessible communication of our research. We deliver open data for public good, publishing our research findings in reputable scientific journals, promoting our work through our webpage and social media channels, and providing access to our research data through our online data portal. Our leadership team is focused on research translation for impact, and we routinely monitor our reputational and impact standings in relevant, reputable international rankings against our peers.

Driving the agency's performance

We maintain a close relationship with your department and your office, and will provide direct briefings to you through submissions, reports, and meetings where required. We will also keep you informed in advance of significant announcements and events as we place great value on your role in promoting the scientific work of AIMS and the importance of evidence-based decision-making. We will maintain current, and develop new relationships across Government, universities, industries, Traditional Owner groups and philanthropy, ensuring that AIMS is known throughout the public sector and the wider marine science community as a trusted scientific advisor and partner.

We will provide you with our annual Corporate Plan and Annual Report (including performance statements) in accordance with the requirements of the PGPA Act. This will ensure you are fully informed about how we are meeting our statutory obligations and delivering on the Government's budgetary investments in the agency. While developing these documents we will consult with you and your department to ensure we are aware of the latest priorities and policies of the Government. The AIMS Council members will remain cognisant of their legal duties and will engage with the relevant areas of your department to ensure security clearances are maintained at the appropriate level.

We look forward to our ongoing work with you, your office, and your department, to deliver the objectives laid out in this statement of intent.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Elizabeth Woods OAM

Chair, Council of the Institute of Marine Science