

## Communique

### Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #17, April 2023, Canberra

*The 17th meeting of the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board was held on 6th April 2023. Board participants included Ron Avery, Kate Brandis, David Cantrill, Robyn Cleland, Bek Christensen, Stephen Van Leeuwen, Anthony Whalen & Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined by Aliza Levy, Cam Slatyer, Ely Wallis, Ed Wensing and Martin Westgate.*

#### Advisory Board

It was a pleasure to welcome two new board members to their first Advisory Board meeting. Dr Robyn Cleland has joined our board since recently retiring from her executive role with Commonwealth Government. We also welcomed Anthony Whalen, a/g Executive Director of the Australian National Botanic Gardens. The ALA has had a long association with both Robyn and Anthony and we are excited to have them contributing to the governance of the ALA. We also farewelled our remarkable Chair Dr Ian Cresswell after two years of stewardship and wish him all the best with his other national roles.

#### Director's Update

The ALA Director provided an update on major strategic activities, partnerships and progress since the last meeting in November 2023. Of particular note:

- Launching Round 2 of its Australian Biodiversity Data Mobilisation Program to support partners to provide open data to the ALA.
- Successfully concluding ALA's first Indigenous studentship program over the summer period.
- Noting the appointment of ALA's new Training and Outreach Officer.

- Updating on ALA's research impacts since the last board meeting - <https://www.ala.org.au/ala-cited-publications/>
- Security co-investment to grow ALA's biosecurity program & alerts capability, and the recent release of its biosecurity hub - <https://www.ala.org.au/biosecurity/>

#### Towards a National Approach to Biological Collections

The board were briefed on ALA's partnerships with CHAH, CHAFC, ABRS and CSIRO to support ongoing engagement with one of the Step Changes proposed under the NCRIS 2021 Roadmap, A National Approach to Collections. This has been initially enabled through a workshop held in May in Canberra. It brings together stakeholders across the biological collections sector to explore the key components of a national approach including strengths, gaps, science and policy drivers, and international trends that may help inform the development of a model for Australia. The board noted the importance of better understanding and communicating potential scientific impacts from adopting a national approach, relevance to government commercialisation policy priorities and industry drivers, and the importance of Indigenous data sovereignty in any national approach.

## **Framework for Expanding Indigenous Engagement with the Atlas of Living Australia**

Our Board welcomed Ed Wensing and Aliza Levy to present the finalised Framework for expanding Indigenous Engagement with the Atlas of Living Australia. The framework was developed through a consultative engagement process with Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, including researchers, contributors, and users of the ALA. The ALA presented an initial response against proposed actions that most appropriately balance existing capability and ALA's vision. The board discussed cultural competency training, pathways for establishing a reference group and establishing strategic partnerships with existing Indigenous organisations, communities and peak bodies to expand awareness and familiarity. ALA's formal response and action plan will be presented at Meeting #18.

## **ALA Science and Decision Support Function Overview**

Martin Westage joined the board to present on the vision, structure and projects being delivered by ALA's Science and Decision Support (SDS) team. Martin noted the team consist of eight staff with backgrounds primarily in quantitative biodiversity science whose remit is to advise on scientific aspects of core data and systems, build and maintain software tools required by science users, and to provide training and outreach to support more efficient use of the ALA. The board noted the importance of improving stakeholder ability to utilise and analyse ALA data given the increasing volume and complexity of the data and services being delivered by the ALA. ALA's investment in training and

outreach, and planned approach to training educators was welcomed.

## **GBIF Governing Board International Meeting – Canberra, October 23**

Finally, our meeting concluded with ALA's Director briefing the board on Australia's hosting of the Governing Board Meeting of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility in Canberra during the week of October 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>. It has been 20 years since Australia hosted a meeting of the Governing Board and as one of GBIF's most significant global partners, it provides a fantastic opportunity for the global biodiversity informatics community to engage with Australian stakeholders. The meeting will be hosted at the National Portrait Gallery with an event dinner hosted at National Museum of Australia. It was noted a side event will be held on Friday, October 20<sup>th</sup> and the board discussed possible themes. In-principal agreement was reached to develop a theme around international advances in biological collections management, digitisation and informatics.

## **In conclusion**

I'd like to thank our board members for travelling to Canberra as it was fantastic to return to face-to-face meetings.

**Professor David Cantrill**  
**Acting Chair, Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board**  
**May, 2023**