

Communique

Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #18, July 2023, Darwin – Larrakia Nation

The 18th meeting of the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board was held on 20th July 2023 in Darwin. Board participants included Kate Brandis, David Cantrill, Robyn Cleland, Bek Christensen, Margie Jenkins, Stephen Van Leeuwen, Matt Miles, Toni Moate, Anthony Whalen & Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined by Kirsti Abbott, Tania Laity, Tahsha Say and Cam Slatyer.

MAGNT

Our 18th Advisory Board meeting was kindly hosted by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) in Darwin, on the lands of the Larrakia people. We are grateful to Dr. Kirsti Abbott and Dr. Sue Horner for providing a tour of their remarkable biological collections, and detailing the role that they play in supporting science and environmental management in northern Australia. Understanding the challenges and opportunities managing these collections presents in supporting current and emerging science drivers was fascinating.

Thank you Larrakia Nation

In response to the ALA's recently completed review of Indigenous partnership pathways, our board had the honour in participating in a half day of First Nations Cultural Awareness training, generously provided by Larrakia Nation's cultural services team. (<https://larrakia.com/>). Learning about the history, connection to Country and the challenges confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Northern Australia provided important context for the engagements the ALA has identified as priorities in coming years.

Director's Update

Dr. Andre Zerger provided an update on major strategic activities, partnerships and progress since the last meeting in April 2023. Of particular note:

- In collaboration with the Australian Seedbank Partnership, completing the production release of the Australian Seedbank Portal (<https://seedbank.ala.org.au/>)
- Noting the change in ALA's workforce profile which is increasingly national with staff now located in six capital cities providing new opportunities for national engagement.
- Noting the significant ALA user-base which now exceeds 100,000 registered users and what opportunity this presents to engagement and managing demands.
- Briefing our board on ALA's research impact since the last board meeting- <https://www.ala.org.au/ala-cited-publications/>

Restricted Access Species Data Framework & Service Launches

Lack of access to and mobility of data on Australia's most sensitive species has been a major strategic issue since biodiversity data was first digitised. The Restricted Access Species Data Framework aims to respond to multiple government and non-government

calls to improve access to withheld or modified biodiversity data. This is achieved by streamlining processes and systems to enable the sharing of sensitive species data for users with the appropriate authority. Cam Slatyer and Tania Laity presented on progress, the recent release (www.rasd.org.au), and invited board perspectives for expansion. The board acknowledged the framework will deliver significant benefits to the Australian biodiversity research, policy and management community, noting the shorter-term priority should be on adoption.

ALA 2023-24 Work Plan Released

The board endorsed the release of ALA's annual Work Plan, which is a key element of ALA's strategic and operational annual planning process (www.ala.org.au/publications). The workplan is both an internal planning tool to guide the team's priorities and an external communication tool to provide stakeholders greater visibility into the operation of the ALA and how annual priorities align to strategy. The board were briefed on key priorities for 2023/24 in the context of emerging strategic partnership opportunities for the ALA, and risks. In regard to the latter the board agreed to more detailed deep-dive into ALA's risk framework at future meetings given the changing external environment, for example with regard to cyber risk.

Towards a National Approach to Biological Collections: Step Change

Our board was provided a briefing on progress towards identifying, defining and planning our sector's response to the Step Change identified in the National Research Infrastructure Roadmap around a national approach to collections. The board discussed

outcomes of the May national workshop which affirmed the potential to deliver greater benefit to Australia's research sector through a national approach around governance, resource allocation and accelerating digital transformation, particularly for smaller collections that are limited in their ability to partner and contribute nationally. The board discussed ongoing engagement with the Australian Academy of Sciences scoping process, and next steps with regard to engagement and development of a business case.

ALA Australian Biodiversity Data Mobilisation Program Round 2

Finally, we were briefed on successful projects from Round 2 of the ALA Australian Biodiversity Data Mobilisation Program noting that the program is now supporting 12 projects across the sector to make their biodiversity data FAIR. The board discussed the potential expansion of the program through co-investment and committed to exploring opportunities through their relationships. It was agreed the program is delivering significant value, and Round 2 implemented a more streamlined method to simplify the submission, and review process. On behalf our board I'd like to also acknowledge the universally stellar calibre of all applicants to our program.

In conclusion

Thank you again MAGNT for hosting the board and if you are travelling through Darwin, I thoroughly recommend a visit.

Professor David Cantrill
Chair, Atlas of Living Australia
Advisory Board, August 2023