

Communique

Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #20, April 2024

The 20th meeting of the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board was held on 11th April 2024 and hosted by the Department of Primary Industry in Orange, NSW. Board participants included Catherine Byrne, David Cantrill, Robyn Cleland, Margie Jenkins, Toni Moate, Rebecca Pirzl & Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined online by Erin Roger, Shelley Rowell, Cam Slatyer and Ely Wallis.

Board Hosting by the Department of Primary Industry, Orange NSW

Our 20th meeting of the Advisory Board was kindly hosted by the Plant Biosecurity Research and Development group, in the NSW Department of Primary Industries in Orange NSW. It was the first of what we hope will be many meetings in regional areas of Australia and provided our Board with an excellent opportunity to learn more about the amazing biological collections supporting biosecurity surveillance and response. We are grateful to Dr Jordan Bailey, Institute Director and Leader of Plant Pathology Curation and her team for making our board feel so welcome. It was also inspiring to see the important role that a national biodiversity data system can play in partnering with state biosecurity programs.

New Board Appointments

We were pleased to welcome Ron Avery, Biodiversity Information Systems Team Lead, NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to his first board meeting. Ron's team has collaborated with the ALA for more than a decade and his experience managing operational biodiversity data systems will be invaluable in supporting our Advisory Board.

Director's Update

ALA's Director Andre Zerger provided an update on major activities, partnerships and progress since the last meeting. The ALA has been engaged in several major infrastructure upgrades including (a) re-architecting ALA's taxonomic names index, (b) continuing our UX/UI transformation which will see the ALA release a new biodiversity information explorer in mid2024, (c) and continued development of the [Australian Reference Genome Atlas](#).

ALA's partnership with Australia's biological collections sector remains a priority with notable progress made this year. A national working group has been formed and membership extended to several NCRIS partners who have an interest in advancing access and discovery of Australia's biological collections.

The Board were briefed on emerging drivers for data infrastructure from related programs, including ecoacoustics, camera traps, and eDNA and the challenges and opportunities this presents to the ALA. It was acknowledged that a partnership model will be essential to ensure the ALA infrastructure is sufficiently agile to address these.

National Biosecurity Surveillance Alerts Service

Home to more than 133 million species occurrence records of both native and introduced species, the ALA is often the first platform where invasive species incursions are publicly recorded. To leverage this extant capability, the ALA has partnered with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, CSIRO and national data partners to develop the ALA Biosecurity Alerts Service.

The service operates by performing weekly queries of the ALA database for occurrences matched against lists provided by biosecurity agencies. If a match is found, the ALA issues users with an email, alerting them to the record. Dr Andrew Turley and Dr Erin Roger briefed on project progress and expansion opportunities. It was noted that the emergence of the alert service serves to improve the breadth and quality of biosecurity data about introduced species accessible through the ALA to support research, decision-making and community engagement.

ALA Strategy Refresh

ALA's five-year strategy has an additional year of implementation (24-25) before requiring a refresh. The development of the current strategy was informed by the outcomes from ALA's Future

Directions National Consultation Process led by Dr Joanne Daly.

The Board was presented with several scenarios for strategy refresh, noting that our external environment has changed significantly since 2019, for example concerning data variety and volumes, emerging national and international policy drivers that will place a greater demand for trusted biodiversity data (e.g., Global Biodiversity Framework, Nature Positive), and increasing cyber security threat as just some examples. The board considered the three proposed models (*delta change, landscape review & delta change, extensive stakeholder consultation and re-baseline*) in the context of these external drivers.

In Conclusion

I'd like to thank our Advisory Board and the ALA management team for their contribution to Meeting #20. We are particularly grateful to Dr Jordan Bailey and the Orange Department of Primary Industry team for hosting our Board, and showcasing their research and remarkable biosecurity-related biological collections.

Professor David Cantrill
Chair, Atlas of Living Australia
Advisory Board,
May 2024