



## Communique

### Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #21, July 2024

*The 21st meeting of the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board was held on 11 July 2024 and hosted by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) in Townsville. Board participants included Ron Avery, Kate Brandis, Marlee Hutton, Margie Jenkins, Toni Moate, Rebecca Pirzl, Stephen van Leeuwen, and Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined by Simon Checksfield, Kathryn Hall, Cam Slatyer, Dean Pigden, Kameron Christopher (AIMS), and Libby Evans-Illige (AIMS).*

#### Board Hosting by Australian Institute of Marine Science, Townsville, QLD

The Australian Institute of Marine Science hosted our 21st meeting of the Advisory Board, and we are grateful to Kameron Christopher and Craig Humphrey for their hospitality. Bringing our board to Townsville also allowed us to connect with stakeholders at James Cook University and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority regarding their biological collections and reef biodiversity monitoring programs. The board appreciated its tour of the NCRIS Sea Simulator facility hosted by AIMS. It also gained a lot from an introduction to AIMS's Indigenous Partnership Program provided by Libby Evans-Illige.

#### New Board Appointments

We were pleased to welcome Marlee Hutton to her first board meeting. Marlee is a Bardi Jawi woman and the Regional Ecologist for the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), based in Broome. Her experience in land management, working with Indigenous ranger groups, and establishing science partnerships will be invaluable as the ALA seeks to grow its Indigenous partnership programs.

#### Director's Update

Andre Zerger provided an update on major activities, partnerships, and progress made since the last meeting. Notably, the third year of the ALA Australian Biodiversity Data Mobilisation Program recently concluded with an additional \$150K co-investment from CSIRO's Catalysing Australia's Biosecurity initiative to mobilise pest and invasive data. The program continues to deliver significant value to Australia's biodiversity research and data community, with 20 projects now funded since inception.

The board was briefed on the National Approach to Biological Collections Step Change, which involves working with Australia's biological collections community. An extension of this is ALA's partnership with the Queensland Museum to host a side event titled Nationally Distributed Collections Infrastructure to Solve Global Research Challenges alongside the December 2024 International Congress on Research Infrastructure (<https://icri2024.au/>), which will be held in Brisbane.

The Director noted the ALA is in a relatively stable project delivery phase with several major transformations close to completion in the first months of 24/25, including the UX/UI project, which will see the launch of a new ALA website and the release of our operational biosecurity alerts service.

Finally, the board was briefed on ALA's industry engagement work and its partnership with the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand to offer training targeting environmental consultants. Demand for training is growing, leading to greater awareness of ALA capability within this important sector.

### **ALA Workplan 24-25**

The Director presented the draft ALA 2024-25 Workplan, noting this is the final workplan under the current five-year strategy. Priorities this year will include the production release of several important initiatives from 2023-24, including the (a) operational national biosecurity alerts service, (b) new ALA home page, species pages and global search interface under the UX/UI project, and (c) stage 2 of the taxonomic architecture project which will include improved species names matching.

In the coming year, the ALA will improve the reach and depth of its partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, working more closely with Indigenous ranger programs to co-design and deliver training programs.

### **Australian Reference Genome Atlas (ARGA)**

Genomics data are key sources of knowledge that inform Australia's responses to environmental and biodiversity management (including threatened species conservation efforts), biosecurity, and pest species incursions.

Kathryn Hall and Simon Checksfield briefed the board on progress regarding the ARGA platform, a collaboration with BioPlatforms Australia (<https://bioplatforms.com/>), BioCommons, and the Australian Research Data Commons to develop an indexing and data discovery tool to improve access to baseline genomic data for Australia's biodiversity. These critical data are typically stored in several international and domestic repositories, making discovery and access challenging for biodiversity researchers. The board were briefed on the transition to Phase 2 of the capability, which will operationalise the initial pilot capability.

### **In Conclusion**

I want to thank our Advisory Board and the ALA management team for contributing to Meeting #21. We are particularly grateful to AIMS for hosting our Advisory Board and showcasing their research infrastructure and remarkable Indigenous Partnership Program.

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