



Communique

Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #23, April 11th 2025

The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board met on 11th April 2025, hosted by Museums Victoria. Board members attending: Ron Avery, Kate Brandis, Cathy Byrne, Robyn Cleland, Dieter Hochuli, Margie Jenkin, Toni Moate, Rebecca Pirzl, Stephen Van Leeuwen and Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined by Dean Pigden, ALA's business and partnerships officer.

Thanks to Museums Victoria for Hosting

Our meeting was kindly hosted by one of the ALA's long-term partners, Museums Victoria. We are grateful to Dermot Henry, Head of Sciences, Museums Victoria Research Institute, for welcoming the board and providing an overview of the Museum's biological collections and biodiversity research programs.

Welcome to New Appointee

The Advisory Board welcomed Professor Dieter Hochuli from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Sydney. Dieter has joined the board as the President of the Ecological Society of Australia (ESA), representing an increasingly important user community for the ALA.

Advisory Board Skills Matrix

The ALA advisory board maintains a skills matrix that is periodically reviewed with members. In addition to skills, our board aims to be geographically representative with appropriate gender balance, and Indigenous representation. Current Advisory Board membership is detailed at <https://www.ala.org.au/governance>

Biodiversity Heritage Library Australia

The Melbourne Museum and the ALA co-host the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) Australia (<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/collection/bhlau>). BHL digitises Australia's biodiversity literature, making it easily accessible to support Australian and international biodiversity science. Our board enjoyed meeting the BHL team and learning more about its current work program. The board also learned about the museum's Library and remarkable rare book collection, including those covering biodiversity. We thank Nicole Kearney, Manager, BHL Australia, and Jack Eastaugh, Digitisation Coordinator, for supporting our Advisory Board visit to this amazing national infrastructure.

Director's Update

We were pleased to recently announce the fourth year of the Australian Biodiversity Data Mobilisation Program (<https://www.ala.org.au/abdmp/>). Kirsti Abbott, Head of Science, Museum and Gallery of the Northern Territory, will again chair the program's independent review panel. This year, we'll offer a smaller citizen science funding stream (4 x \$5K) to address the demand that has come through earlier rounds of the program that

could not be effectively addressed within the earlier program guidelines.

The leadership team has been engaging across the ALA to adopt a more bottom-up approach to developing the new ALA strategy. The leadership team met in mid-March for their annual planning workshop, which was held in Canberra over two days. A highlight was participating in an Indigenous cultural heritage tour of Black Mountain led by Tyronne Bell, a Ngunawal descendant from Thunderstone Aboriginal Cultural Services.

Finally, the board was briefed on ALA's training and outreach function, which has recently delivered several training programs to the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and stakeholders in Australia's environmental consulting sector. Training has focused on general ALA capabilities, with advanced training around using ALA's taxonomy services. Demand for such engagement is growing.

NRI Roadmap 2026

The board were briefed on Government planning around the delivery of the 2026 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap, which will build on priorities identified in the 2021 Roadmap. It was agreed that continued engagement with Australia's biological collections sector will be critical to prioritising the initiative to Accelerate Discovery and Access to Australia's Biological Collections. The board explored related priorities, including: transforming ALA data infrastructure to support the volume and variety of biodiversity data emerging from novel monitoring technologies (e.g. camera traps, eDNA, ecoacoustics), research and management needs for improved

access to sensitive species data, and more effectively managing cybersecurity risk to existing ALA products and services.

ALA Strategy 2025-30

Over the last six months, the board has supported designing ALA's new strategy. Following those conversations and input from the ALA team, the ALA director presented a consultation draft to the board.

In addition to affirming current strategic priorities such as data quality and IT system robustness, the consultation draft responds to several emerging drivers including the opportunity to support new biodiversity data types (e.g., camera traps, ecoacoustics and eDNA), sensitive data management, and ALA's commitment to improve its partnerships with Indigenous Australians, including partnering with Indigenous Ranger groups given the critical biodiversity stewardship role they play in remote regions of Australia.

The board discussed the draft and its alignment with national and international policy drivers. It was a moment to reflect on our five-year ambitions and ongoing operational priorities. We look forward to releasing the strategy in July 2025 after further consultation.

In Conclusion

I want to thank our Advisory Board and the ALA management team for contributing to Meeting #23. I'm particularly grateful to Dr Dermot Henry and Museums Victoria for hosting our meeting.

Professor David Cantrill
Chair, Atlas of Living Australia
Advisory Board,
May 2025