

Communique

Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #25, November 13th, 2025

The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board met virtually on November 13th. Board members attending: Ron Avery, Kate Brandis, Cathy Byrne, Robyn Cleland, Dieter Hochuli, Marlee Hutton, Toni Moate, Stephen Van Leeuwen, Andrew Morison and Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined by Dean Pigden, Cameron Slatyer, and Martin Westgate.

Member Changes

I want to acknowledge the contribution Dr Kate Brandis (UNSW) has made to our board over the last three years, as her term ended at this meeting. Kate's experience in ecological monitoring and national-scale biodiversity assessment has been invaluable in guiding our board. Meeting #25 also saw us welcome Andrew Morison to our board, providing industry expertise to the governance of the ALA. Andrew brings a wealth of experience in the environmental consulting sector, having founded one of Australia's largest ecological consulting firms, Eco Logical, and I'm excited to be working with Andrew.

Director's Update

The Director reported on progress since the last meeting. The ALA has successfully launched its 2025–2030 Strategy and submitted three funding proposals under the National Digital Research Infrastructure Strategy to modernise its core systems, expand genomic data capabilities, and strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. New collaborations with CSIRO will integrate national koala monitoring data into the ALA and support a new national OneHealth program.

The team received international recognition through the prestigious Ebbe Nielsen Challenge award for its Galaxias data tool, and Dr Martin Westgate secured a Churchill Fellowship to advance

ALA's data quality program in 2026. Finally, work is underway to improve ALA's taxonomic backbone, with a scheduled release before Christmas, to establish three new Indigenous-led collaborations, and to finalise the 2024-25 ALA Year in Review, which the ALA expects to release in the coming weeks.

ALA Governance Review

The recent NCRIS Governance Review found that the ALA demonstrates strong governance practices, with most areas rated as "Established" or "Embedded." The review recommended several enhancements to strengthen governance, including processes for managing potential conflicts of interest and for assessing risk management maturity. While many practices are already in place through CSIRO policies and ALA frameworks, the Advisory Board will consider recommendations to ensure continued transparency and accountability, and continuous improvement in governance.

ALA Risk Deep Dive

Mr Dean Pigden, ALA's Business and Partnerships Officer, reported that the ALA's overall risk profile remains stable since the last review, with no significant changes to ratings across the 10 identified risks. While financial sustainability and infrastructure resilience remain high-priority risks, several mitigation actions are underway, including three major funding proposals to upgrade core systems, support for biodiversity genomic data, and strengthening Indigenous partnerships. Dean



emphasised that while current controls are effective, there are opportunities to enhance governance by clarifying the risk framework and considering benchmarking and a risk maturity roadmap. Emerging issues, such as sensitive data management and cybersecurity, are under close monitoring, with proactive measures in place to maintain trust and service reliability.

ALA Review of Industry & Government Usage

Mr Cameron Slatyer, ALA Program Manager, reported on the results of a recent analysis of industry and government use of the ALA, which has grown significantly over the past five years, with business downloads increasing by 55% compared to the previous period. Businesses now represent the largest organisational user group, accounting for nearly half of all downloads, with strong engagement from environmental consultancies; the mining, energy, and engineering sectors; and emerging sectors such as green energy and carbon accounting. Notably, training delivered in partnership with the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) has driven this growth, with over 500 business users trained since 2023. The analysis also revealed that while the number of individual users per company has declined, download volumes have surged, suggesting a shift toward increased use of R and Python, including Galah.

Cam emphasised that these results demonstrate the impact of sector-specific engagement strategies and the importance of improving ALA's user experience to support end users. Recommendations to increase engagement with such sectors

include prioritising UX/UI upgrades, continuing improvements in taxonomy and sensitive species data governance, and expanding targeted training to government and other key sectors.

Science and Decision Support Team Update

Dr Martin Westgate, Team Lead, briefed the Advisory Board on the role of the Science and Decision Support Team, providing an overview of the suite of tools developed and the stakeholders with whom the team partners. The presentation focused on the suite of open-science capabilities established by the ALA, including Galah, Galaxias and ALA Labs (<https://labs.ala.org.au/>). It was acknowledged that the use of software coding to download, extract and analyse biodiversity data has grown tremendously in our sector. The team's role is to better support these emerging needs. Martin also updated the board on the team's role in partnering with major national programs to directly support their biodiversity data needs, including the State of the Environment, Environmental-Economic Accounting, and State of the Forests reports, all of which are recent national programs supported by the team.

In Conclusion

I want to thank our Advisory Board and the ALA management team for their contributions to Meeting #25 and for their ongoing support through 2025.

Professor David Cantrill
Chair, Atlas of Living Australia
Advisory Board
January 2026