



Communique

Atlas of Living Australia Advisory Board

MEETING #26, April 9th, 2026

The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) Advisory Board met in Hobart on April 9th, hosted by CSIRO's National Collections and Marine Infrastructure Research Unit. Board members attending: Ron Avery, Robyn Cleland, Dieter Hochuli, Marlee Hutton, Toni Moate, Andrew Morison, Rebecca Pirzl, Stephen Van Leeuwen and Andre Zerger. We were also pleased to be joined by Jack Brinkman, Andrew Turley and Mark Wallace from the ALA.

Australian National Algae Culture Collection visit

Our Advisory Board meeting commenced with a tour of the [Australian National Algae Culture Collection](#), which provided a valuable insight into one of Australia's most significant biological reference collections and its connection to ALA's work. Thanks to Dr Anusuya Willis who hosted our Board. We were introduced to the scale, diversity and scientific value of the collection, including its role in taxonomy, biosecurity, environmental monitoring and emerging industries such as biotechnology and climate science. The tour highlighted the expertise required to curate and maintain both living and preserved algal specimens, as well as the importance of digitisation and data accessibility for national and international research. The visit reinforced the strategic importance of collections infrastructure and the opportunities for stronger integration between physical collections and national biodiversity data platforms.

Director's Update

The Director's update provided an overview of key operational, strategic and financial developments since the previous meeting, highlighting both progress and emerging challenges for the ALA. Major activities included the launch of the 2026 round of the Australian Biodiversity Data Mobilisation

Program, increased collaboration with national partners such as ARDC and Commonwealth biodiversity data initiatives, progress on significant projects, improvements to the ALA taxonomic names index, and international engagement with the Living Atlases community. The Director emphasised growing efforts in ALA product management, with work underway to establish clearer governance and prioritisation frameworks across the ALA's expanding suite of software products. Financially, the ALA remains stable but faces ongoing pressure from rising infrastructure and data hosting costs that are outpacing indexation. This reinforces the need for careful cost management and diversified funding pathways. The update also addressed workforce changes, leadership initiatives, and early progress on a staged AI and machine-learning roadmap focused initially on internal capability building. Overall, the update emphasised steady delivery, increasing demand for ALA services, and the importance of strategic positioning to support long-term sustainability.

Australian Seedbank Portal case study

Andrew Turley and Jack Brinkman presented an overview of the [Australian Virtual Seedbank](#), a national platform developed by the Atlas of Living Australia in partnership with the [Australian Seed Bank Partnership](#). The portal was designed to address the complexity of seed bank data,

which extends beyond simple species occurrences to include seed accession, storage conditions, germination trials and treatments over time. To manage this, the portal uses a hierarchical, event-based data model that captures the full seed lifecycle while standardising data from multiple institutions with differing practices. The portal provides open access to aggregated seed bank data and integrates existing ALA services such as taxonomy, mapping, species images, trait data and download tools. Andrew and Jack demonstrated how users can explore data by species, geography and conservation status, including dedicated summaries of nationally and state-listed threatened species. They emphasised the strong uptake and positive feedback from seed bank partners, highlighting the portal as a successful example of extending ALA infrastructure to support specialised, high-value conservation and research needs.

ALA Risk Deep Dive

The risk deep dive on financial sustainability and growth discussed the challenges organisations face when long-term funding does not keep pace with rising operating costs and increasing demand for services. The discussion focused on common pressure points, including constrained funding, higher infrastructure and technology costs, and the difficulty of investing in future capabilities while maintaining core operations. While short-term stability may be present, the board noted that these conditions can limit flexibility, innovation and the ability to respond to emerging opportunities. Potential mitigation strategies centred on strengthening the organisation's

value proposition, aligning activities with high-priority stakeholder needs, and ensuring services are embedded in critical delivery and decision-making processes.

International Corporate Governance & Nature Reporting

Andrew Morison's presentation examined the rapidly changing global and domestic context for biodiversity data, with particular emphasis on how emerging regulatory, financial, and market frameworks are driving new demands for trusted, interoperable data. He highlighted developments such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, and the [Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures](#), noting that these initiatives are accelerating public and private-sector requirements for biodiversity metrics, risk disclosure, and ecosystem condition data. Andrew noted Australia is likely to adopt comparable standards in the near term, creating a significant increase in demand for national-scale, authoritative biodiversity data. In this context, the ALA is ideally positioned to serve as critical enabling infrastructure, well aligned with national policy objectives such as the Nature Positive Plan.

In Conclusion

I want to thank our Advisory Board and the ALA management team for their contributions to Meeting #26.

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