

AIMS Opening Statement to Senate Estimates February 21, 2019 – FINAL

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

First, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the sea country in all the places that AIMS works.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1972. With the Great Barrier Reef as an early focus, Townsville, in North Queensland, was selected as the site for AIMS' headquarters. Our mission is to provide the research and knowledge of Australia's tropical marine estate required to support growth in its sustainable use, effective environmental management, and protection of its unique ecosystems.

In the wake of the recent floods in and around Townsville, I would like to acknowledge the great work of the emergency services, including the Army, during a very difficult time. I would also like to thank AIMS staff who kept working even as flood waters threatened their homes, volunteered to keep our facilities at Cape Cleveland running even as the road was cut, and then banded together to help their colleagues whose homes were flooded clean-up and dig out.

Even as all this was going on, AIMS and its partners were working hard to wrap up the \$6 million reef restoration and adaptation (RRAP) feasibility study, which began last year with funding from the Commonwealth Government. The study, involving a consortium of over 100 experts from over 20 organisations, (including core partners CSIRO, GBR Marine Park Authority, James Cook University, University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, and GBR Foundation) has investigated the long term, at-scale potential of a wide variety of ways to help reefs recover from damage and adapt better to warming waters. The long term objective is to provide governments with options for at-scale reef restoration and adaptation. Currently, such options do not exist.

The report will be delivered next month. But I can share some high level conclusions from our work:

1. The potential economic, social and environmental benefits to Australia of at-scale restoration and adaptation of the GBR are significant – in the tens of billions of dollars – if it can be done right.

2. At scale restoration and adaptation of the GBR is technically possible, but at present there are no deployment-ready techniques. The RRAP feasibility study has identified techniques that with further research and development could be deployed over the coming 5 to 10 years.
3. A significant, collaborative and co-ordinated R&D effort is needed before at-scale intervention can be made technically feasible, affordable, safe, and acceptable to the public.
4. Achieving the mission will depend on deploying an integrated package of intervention measures designed to work together and reinforce each other over time. There is no *silver bullet*.
5. A comprehensive five-year R&D program to deliver such a package would cost at least \$300m (\$100m currently earmarked in the Commonwealth funding announced last year, and at least a further \$200m will be required in contributions cash and in kind from research providers and philanthropists)
6. There is a significant risk of not acting. There is now a window of opportunity to act. The longer we wait to develop feasible options, the more expensive and difficult it will be to intervene successfully, and the greater the risk that the window of opportunity will close.

The long-term objectives of RRAP are hugely ambitious. It aims to provide a new set of levers to help secure the future of the GBR and reefs across Australia and the world. Given the scale of the 2016/17 bleaching, and the extent of damage already suffered, making a positive impact at reef-scale will require interventions many orders of magnitude larger than any existing restoration efforts anywhere in the world. With the likelihood of more bleaching on the reef in the coming years, the situation is urgent. There is no time to waste. It is vital that the R&D work begin without delay.

AIMS will shortly release the latest edition of its biennial AIMS Index of Marine Industry, which measures the economic value of Australia's marine industries. In 2001-2002 total income based on the marine environment was \$26.8 billion. In 2015-16, it was \$68.1 billion, an increase of over 250%. For the first time in the history of the Index, tourism and recreational activities have eclipsed offshore oil and gas exploration and production as the main contributor to the Australian economy among marine industries.

As Australia's north continues to grow and develop, the marine estate will increasingly deliver more value and be subjected to mounting stresses. Vast

areas of our northern marine estate remain virtually unexplored. Meanwhile, key marine ecosystem such as coral reefs are in decline, and will require significant investment if we are to safeguard them and the economic and social benefits they represent for the future. There is much work to be done. Thank you.

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