

AIMS Opening Statement to Senate Estimates

March 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the AIMS sites and all the places across the North where AIMS works.

Next year, in 2022, AIMS will celebrate its 50th Anniversary. Set up by an act of Parliament in 1972, when I was just a boy growing up in Canada, AIMS was established to advance our understanding of Australia's huge and valuable marine estate, and so better manage it for the benefit of all Australians. The Great Barrier Reef was one of our first areas of focus, and remains so today.

Fifty years later, it is an honour to serve as AIMS's CEO, in service of my adopted country. Much has changed over the last five decades. The value of the marine economy, as measured by the latest edition of AIMS Index of Marine Industry, has grown fourfold just since 2001. More and more people over the years have come to enjoy and benefit from our oceans.

But with growth, we have also seen degradation, and the emergence of new threats. Plastic pollution is now pervasive, at all scales. The overall health of Australia's coral reefs (steadfastly monitored by AIMS over the last four decades) has declined, particularly in the last decade as the oceans have warmed.

We are now at a key juncture. Projections suggest a business-as-usual approach to how we treat our oceans will have dire consequences for humanity. As we move into the World Decade of Ocean Science, and World Ocean Day this coming June 8th, now is the time to have meaningful discussions about solutions.

Just as dealing with the pandemic has shown us the value of science and fact-based decision making, so too must our ocean endeavours be guided by science. As one of the globe's powerhouses of marine science, Australia can play a leading role in this effort.

The encouraging news is that much good work is being done, and Australia, and AIMS, are at the vanguard. Our work on reef adaptation and restoration, funded by the commonwealth government's major investment in the Reef Trust Partnership, is leading the world in developing practical techniques that can be applied at scale to help coral reefs survive in warming oceans. Australian businesses, too, are investing in our research on reef protection, plastic pollution clean-up, off-shore decommissioning, and marine species conservation.

A great example of our marine science leadership came in December of last year, when Minister Andrews travelled to our Headquarters in Townsville to announce \$36.3 million for expansion of our world-leading National Sea Simulator, and to support its operation as a National Facility. This unique infrastructure will help underpin the nation's marine research for the next decade. Design work is now well underway, and construction of the new, expanded SeaSim will be a fitting way to celebrate our 50th Anniversary.

Thank you