

## **AIMS Opening Statement to Senate Estimates October 25, 2018**

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, headquartered in Townsville, North Queensland. With laboratories in Perth and Darwin, 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.

AIMS has just released its updated Strategy 2025, based on feedback from over 200 of our key stakeholders and clients. We asked them what they needed from their national marine science agency, and what the big challenges were for the marine environment over the next decade. Their messages were consistent and clear: 1) focus on delivering real, measureable environmental, social and economic impact for the nation; 2) shift more effort from defining the problems to developing solutions; 3) help protect tropical marine ecosystems and coral reefs from the effects of climate change; 4) improve engagement and collaboration with traditional owners of sea country; and 5) embrace the latest technological and data science developments to deliver more science, more effectively, for greater impact. Strategy 2025 enshrines these goals with a set of twelve specific targets with which we will measure our performance.

Our stakeholders were also very clear that the challenges facing the marine environment are significant. The AIMS Index of Marine Industry shows that Australia's blue economy is already worth over \$73 bn/year and is heading rapidly toward the \$100bn/year threshold. It has already eclipsed the value of the agricultural sector, and is the fastest growing part of the economy. 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 steep decline, and will require significant investment if we are to safeguard them for the future. There is much work to be done.

This strategy review has reaffirmed that AIMS holds a unique and irreplaceable position in Australia's marine science community. We focus on tropical marine

science. We do the difficult, often expensive job of putting people and equipment in the water to observe first-hand what is going on in our marine environment. That takes purpose-built vessels and the latest in monitoring technology. Our unique position is demonstrated in the leadership role AIMS has played in the design of the Reef 2050 Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program, which drew on the knowledge and experience of more than 70 experts and almost 20 different organisations. We also do real experiments on live samples collected in the wild, determine how species will react to changing conditions, and how we can develop solutions to the stresses they face. That takes world-class laboratories and facilities such as the National Sea Simulator, the world's largest and most sophisticated research aquarium complex. From this base, we produce world-leading science that has resulted in us being ranked number 1 in Australia, and 2 in the world, in marine science, based on the number of times our work is cited.

And while last financial year we set an external revenue record, beating the previous record by 30%, buoyed in part by a strong industry market, we face continuing downward pressure on willingness to pay for high-end infrastructure and services. The challenge for the future is to maintain and expand our capability and infrastructure in an increasingly cost-competitive market, so we can deliver more of the very best science for the nation.

The current Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP) Feasibility Study is a great example of our strategy at work. AIMS developed and is leading a consortium (which includes CSIRO, GBRMPA, JCU, UQ, QUT, GBRF and others) to investigate 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, should they choose to use them. Currently, such options do not exist. Outputs of the current study, to be delivered early next year, will include a comprehensive R&D plan, a proposed governance structure for implementation of the R&D phase, and a business case for investment of \$100 m of the Commonwealth's recent \$443 m grant to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. This is complemented by AIMS efforts on the GBR Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program (RIMReP) which will provide critical data on the health of the reef, and for guiding interventions going forward.

The long-term objectives of RRAP are hugely ambitious. The social, technical, scientific and regulatory challenges of intervening on the reef cannot be over-estimated. 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 possibility of an El Nino this summer growing, and the likelihood of more bleaching on the reef in the coming years, the situation is urgent. There is no time to waste. Progress on the feasibility study has been excellent, and we expect to deliver our draft report in February 2019. Collaboration among the partners has been exemplary, and we are working closely with the GBRF to position the work for the next phase of investment, so that the vital R&D work can begin as soon as possible.

AIMS focusses on delivering measurable impact for the nation, for its valuable marine ecosystems, and for the industries and communities that rely on our oceans. We recognise the trust that the Australian Parliament and people put in us, and are proud of our on-going contribution to the health and sustainable productivity of our marine estate. Thank you.

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