

## CEO Opening Statement – Senate Estimates October 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

First, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and sea country in all the places that AIMS works, and affirm that their ancient knowledge of sea country is a vital part of understanding our marine environment in a time of profound change.

As the nation's marine science agency, 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.

All groups – including government, industry, coastal communities and the public, use and benefit from the research and knowledge that our science provides, and I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm that this science is underpinned by quality, independence and transparency.

AIMS is committed to research of the highest quality and integrity, and that's why we apply a multi-layered process of quality assurance which includes 10 key processes. I'd like to highlight a few of these:

1. Requiring our scientists to follow the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, and comply with our own internal research code of conduct policies in order to ensure our objectivity.
2. Subjecting all reports and papers to rigorous internal peer and supervisor review
3. Participation in the international peer review publication and acceptance process. This is the world-wide standard practice used in all science publishing.
4. An organisational credo of continuous improvement, including the use of red-on-blue challenges involving internal and external experts.
5. Five-yearly complete organisational science reviews by an independent panel of international experts.
6. Access to the very best marine science infrastructure available anywhere on the planet. This includes purpose-built modern best-in-class research vessels, the world's most sophisticated and capable research aquarium complex (The National Sea Simulator), and the best available experimental equipment and instruments.
7. The careful curation of long-term data sets and sample archives (some collected over decades) that allow us and others to revisit and review our science outputs, and to build our understanding of complex ecosystems as our knowledge base expands.
8. Participation in the international peer review publication and acceptance process. This is the world-wide standard practice used in science publishing. We participate by submitting work to respected, high quality, international journals, and also by acting as peer reviewers ourselves. Several of our staff also sit on the editorial boards of key high-quality journals. In all cases, we observe strict conflict of interest protocol.

9. An organisational credo of continuous improvement, including the use of red-on-blue challenges involving internal and external experts. This is a concept developed by the US military to challenge and test assumptions in the most robust way possible.
10. Five-yearly complete organisational science reviews by an independent panel of international experts.

Our understanding of the marine environment and its ecology is continually evolving and improving as we collect more data, observe long-term trends, and as new technologies allow us to peer more deeply into underlying processes. It is not perfect. But what we can say is that our understanding of the marine environment is better than it was a decade ago, and that was better than the decade before that.

AIMS is respected for the quality and relevance of our research. AIMS' research is high-quality, objective, independent, and transparent. We are not beholden to vested interests, we have no agenda; our science is about the facts.

As a result, we are currently ranked number 2 in the world in Marine Science. Not bad for a small Australian agency, and a credit to our people, some of the very best in the world in what they do.

AIMS has been studying the Great Barrier Reef, year in year out, for almost fifty years now. We hold the longest and most complete records on the health of the GBR. And our data tells a nuanced but compelling story. The reef is in decline from multiple stresses, including crown of thorns starfish, cyclones, inshore water quality, and the biggest threat of all, climate change. As our 2019 LTMP report shows, there are still plenty of amazing places on the reef. Places like Lady Elliot Island where I was just this weekend, where the coral is as good as you will ever see, the fish plentiful, turtles and sharks everywhere. It's amazing, and uplifting. But there are also parts of the reef that have been quite literally obliterated. Some parts hit by the 2016/17 bleaching events are showing signs of recovery. We gave the GBR a mixed bill of health for 2019.

It's a big resilient ecosystem, but it needs our help if it is to continue to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits to Australians over the coming decades. Due to the inexorable rise of GHG emissions, we are now only ever a season away from the next big bleaching event. On that basis, AIMS and its partners CSIRO, GBRMPA, JCU, UQ, QUT and the GBRF, have just delivered the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program feasibility study report to Ministers Andrews and Ley. The results of this 2 year \$6m study point to real hope for the reef. The next phase of RRAP is starting now. It will develop and test techniques to help reefs adapt to and recover from the effects of climate change. Funded through the government's contribution to the Reef Trust Partnership through the GBRF, leveraged by contributions by a host of others, including AIMS, this decadal effort aims to provide decision-makers with the ability to intervene on the reef, if they so choose, to extend its life and viability as the world works to reduce emissions.

AIMS is proud of the work we do, and the rigour and quality we bring to every bit of science we deliver, whether it's for our industry partners such as BHP and Woodside, our Traditional Owner partners such as the Bardi Jawi and the Woppaburra peoples, or the people and government of Australia. It is a sacred duty, and we treat it as such, every day.

Thank you