



THE HON TANYA PLIBERSEK MP
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

MS23-003054

Dr Elizabeth Woods, OAM
Chair, Australian Institute of Marine Science Council
PMB No 3
TOWNSVILLE MC QLD 4810

c.bona@aims.gov.au

Dear Dr Woods

I am writing to outline my expectations for the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS).

The Australian Government is committed to a nature-positive approach to protecting, repairing and better managing our natural environment for the benefit of all Australians. AIMS, as Australia's tropical marine research agency, is uniquely placed to deliver the research and knowledge that underpins the sustainable use, effective environmental management and protection of Australia's unique ecosystems.

Applying marine science to advance our national interests

Australia is lucky to be home to the best marine scientists in the world, it is important that they are supported to do this important work. That is why the Government provided an additional \$163.4 million in the 2023-24 Budget to ensure the long-term future of AIMS and to upgrade critical facilities. I look forward to hearing the positive outcomes AIMS will deliver with this funding. AIMS should continue to contribute its broad suite of scientific capabilities to improve the health of marine and coastal ecosystems and support sustainable Australian marine industries.

I expect AIMS to engage closely on tropical marine science issues with all relevant departments, including the Department of Industry, Science and Resources and Australia's Chief Scientist as they refresh and implement Australia's National Science Priorities and revitalised National Science Statement.

Advancing the Government's policy priorities

Australia's social and economic prosperity depends on a thriving environment. Science and research underpin informed policy and decision-making to protect, repair and manage our tropical marine and coastal ecosystems, and support sustainable communities and healthy Country.

Protecting the Great Barrier Reef

The Government is committed to investing in activities that protect, repair and inform the management of the Reef. AIMS will continue to play a critical role in implementing the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.

Furthermore, I expect AIMS to continue progressing its work to develop innovative solutions for reefs threatened by climate change, including supporting restoration of damaged and degraded reefs and controlling species such as the crown-of-thorns starfish. This includes AIMS's work with other partners in the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program.

Conserving our oceans and marine parks

The Government is committed to sustainably managing our oceans. This includes taking ambitious action on climate change and protecting and conserving 30 percent of Australia's marine area by 2030. I expect AIMS to continue partnering with First Nations communities to build our understanding of Australia's tropical marine and coastal ecosystems, develop innovative solutions, and collaborate with marine industries. AIMS's science should inform decision-makers to support sustainable development of the blue economy, thriving tropical environments and healthy coastal communities.

With this focus, AIMS should engage with my department as it leads the development of a Sustainable Ocean Plan for Australia, and contribute as appropriate, to key initiatives such as management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and tropical Australian Marine Parks, the Threatened Species Action Plan and the Saving Native Species program.

The Government is committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. AIMS can inform how Australia responds to and mitigates the impact of climate change in tropical marine and coastal ecosystems. AIMS is also well positioned to contribute to our understanding of coastal and blue carbon sequestration. I expect AIMS to deliver on its goal to reduce its carbon emissions by 25 percent by 2025, and work towards further reductions consistent with its strategy, noting the Australian Public Service goal of net zero emissions by 2030.

Partnering with First Nations people

The Government is committed to stronger and meaningful engagement with our First Nations. The Government has also committed to doubling the number of Indigenous rangers by 2030 and increasing support for Indigenous Protected Areas.

Our First Nations people were our first scientists and AIMS's approach to building authentic engagement with First Nations people is commendable. I expect AIMS to further strengthen its relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by continuing its work to bring together Traditional Knowledge of sea Country and western marine science; enshrine the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent within the agency's governance; and embed co-designed partnerships with First Nations people to be at the core of what the agency does.

AIMS should continue its work with First Nations Australians to support their management of Land and Sea Country, restore and protect cultural and biodiversity values, and provide a platform for meaningful training and skills development, capacity building and pathways to employment. Such initiatives will help maintain connection to Country, provide jobs in regional and remote communities, grow local economies, and contribute to Closing the Gap.

Supporting a stronger Pacific family

The Government has stepped up Australia's leadership on the environment internationally and is positioning Australia as a partner of choice in our region. We have signed the Leader's Pledge for Nature and backed initiatives such as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions treaty (High Seas treaty), the Ocean Conservation Pledge and the Australian-led International Partnership for Blue Carbon. I expect AIMS to work closely with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to support and enhance Australia's international environmental leadership.

AIMS is well placed to maximise its existing national, regional and global networks by collaborating with peers, cross-sector leaders and industry on tropical marine issues. This includes assisting with the science and research needs of our Pacific neighbours.

Managing research infrastructure and national facilities

The Government wants to ensure that our major public research infrastructure hosted by our national science agencies is well used, benefits the community and leads to strong outcomes. This will enable the investment in this infrastructure to support broader economic, environmental and productivity strategies, as well as innovation in the wider economy.

I would like to see AIMS continuing to host tropical marine research infrastructure and encourage researchers to access and benefit from this infrastructure. AIMS supports marine science and innovation within Australia and throughout the Pacific, particularly the world-class National Sea Simulator (SeaSim) research aquarium and purpose-built research vessel fleet.

Promoting and sharing AIMS's science and research

AIMS is a trusted source of impartial scientific advice to the Australian and international community. I expect AIMS to uphold the high standards and regard in which it is held, as expected of a trusted advisor, by ensuring research projects are independent of commercial interests; the science knowledge is impartial and objective; and the findings are publicly accessible and provide benefit to the broader community. I expect AIMS to continue to be active in the community to communicate its activities and achievements.

Additionally, AIMS should continue to demonstrate its high international standing with reference to relevant international rankings based on science publication metrics and national and international peers.

Driving the agency's performance

Legislative requirements

I acknowledge the functions of AIMS as set out in the Australian Institute of Marine Science Act 1972 (AIMS Act). I expect AIMS to be an exemplar of the Government's commitment to the effective governance and performance of its agencies, in accordance with the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act).

In developing its annual report and corporate plan in accordance with the PGPA Act, I expect AIMS to take into account the priorities and policies of the Government, and to include reporting against matters articulated in this statement. I encourage AIMS to continue to work closely with my department on plans to track and report on the ambitious targets outlined in its Strategy 2030 and on its plans for long term infrastructure renewal.

I expect AIMS Council members to adhere to relevant legislation in the execution of their duties, including maintaining any security clearances as appropriate.

Operations, agency staff and health

It is important that AIMS take a strategic and disciplined focus on the delivery of its core responsibilities, driving enhancements to safety performance, financial management and the delivery of essential projects that support legislative functions.

I would like to see AIMS continue to be a collaborator, partner and employer of choice by providing a workplace environment, culture and opportunities that attract and retain the very best talent from around Australia and the world.

AIMS should continue to advance gender equality, ensure a workplace that is culturally, linguistically and neurodiverse; and build on its Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) accreditation to ensure an equitable workplace for all employees is maintained.

Furthermore, I encourage AIMS to build on and diversify its successful gender equity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs and drive initiatives that support First Nations people in these. This will help the agency continue to foster an inclusive workforce. AIMS should engage, as appropriate, in the independent Diversity in STEM review initiated by the Government.

I value the priority AIMS places on ensuring a safe and positive working environment, through compliance with its health and safety obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

Working with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and across Government

I expect AIMS to work closely with my office and my department. I ask that AIMS keeps me informed of strategic developments and opportunities for me to promote tropical marine science.

In addition to the core work AIMS contributes under my portfolio, I note that AIMS's expertise and outputs are important to other portfolios, particularly in the areas of climate, science, industry, resources, international engagement, First Nations partnerships, and data. I expect you to work collaboratively in supporting all relevant portfolios.

I look forward to continuing to work with AIMS to advance science for tomorrow's oceans. This science will help protect, repair and manage Australia's tropical marine environment to benefit all Australians and improve national wellbeing and prosperity. I look forward to receiving your response outlining how the AIMS Council proposes to deliver on these priorities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tanya Plibersek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'T' being particularly large and stylized.

TANYA PLIBERSEK

13.12.23