



# AusSeabed Executive Board Meeting

Geoscience Australia, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2019

## Participants

Barbara Musso (CSIRO), Fiona Freeman (AHO), Johnathan Kool (AAD), Kim Picard (GA, AusSeabed Steering Committee Chair), Richard Brinkman (AIMS), Trevor Dhu (GA), Aero Leplastrier (GA, secretariat support)

## Actions

1. GA to ask the Steering Committee (SC) to consider developing a value statement on the current levels of investment and contributions.
2. GA to finish editing the TOR and send out for endorsement.
3. Executive Board (EB) members to give feedback on revised TOR and meeting minutes at latest by Monday midday to accommodate for the AusSeabed SC meeting.
4. GA to look at sequencing for the 2020 meetings (in-person scheduled for March (IMOS), and online in September).

## Welcome

*Trevor Dhu (TD) opened meeting at 9:35 am and invited participants to introduce themselves.*

TD: Branch head for National Earth and Marine Observations (NEMO), GA.

Johnathan Kool (JK): Data Centre Manager at the AAD, Guiding Committee Member for GEBCO, member for AAD on the National Marine Science Committee (NMSC).

Kim Picard (KP): AusSeabed Steering Committee Chair, NMSC Deputy Chair, Team Leader National Seabed Mapping Section (NSMS), GA.

Barbara Musso (BM): Program Director for the Marine National Facility

Fiona Freeman (FF): National Hydrographer, Independent Panel Member for IMOS.

Richard Brinkman (RB): Research Program Director Sustainable Coastal Ecosystems & Industries, AIMS.

Aero Leplastrier (AL): AusSeabed Secretariat, AusSeabed program delivery, NSMS, GA.

*A call was made for any other business to add to the agenda but none was raised.*

## Overview and Update on AusSeabed

*Kim Picard gave an overview of the AusSeabed program to date. This included a video of the AusSeabed Data Hub Prototype progress and the vision and direction of the program.*

*The presentation will be made available via the AusSeabed website in the next week.*

TD: Before we discuss what role each agency sees AusSeabed playing, any are there any questions from the board?

*No questions were raised.*

TD: If anyone has concerns or any questions about where the program is going costs etc., please speak up!

JK: Things are on track (having been engaged with the progress). We do need to be mindful of how we appeal to industry. We know there is a strong case for them to be engaged (they are the link to the blue economy) and we need to make it clear of what is the value of the seabed data to the industry and this needs to be front and centre (maybe a companion piece to the video).

TD: FF are you comfortable with how this is being pitched?

FF: Yes, and increasingly so.

TD: RB, AIMS does a fair bit with industry, have you anything to add?

RB: Yes we have various levels of ability to release data from industry through our work. The majority of data we hold could probably be released, but there are many contractual obligations and constraints that need to be navigated first.

TD: Can I ask the corollary—what benefit would open accessible and comprehensive seabed data have for the industry players that you work with today?

RB: From an industry perspective the cost saving from getting their hands on free data that may help in terms of planning activities. Environmental permits require environmental assessments for which seabed data retains a five-year validity, so open data would assist initial proceedings—however, it is unlikely that the data would negate their requirement for very high-resolution data for specific activities.

JK: My mind gravitates to petroleum and gas exploration, but there is also the growing renewable energy industry – there will be a range of industries and we need to identify what these are in our various themes/areas and how AusSeabed will benefit them.

KP: Recently I met with the Western Australia Marine Science Institute, who have been working with industry (and will continue to do so) to establish how to meet new legislation challenges that are being brought in next year that will mandate that all data collected by industry be submitted to the WA Government. Industry are really behind this. Data has a five-year validity date for environmental plans, so they are super keen on getting hands on whatever data they can. Currently, there are three industry reps on the SC who are all hydrographers, they are great, and really involved, but I want to advocate for the other industries (oil, gas, renewables etc.) to be involved and at least have one on the SC.

## What role do you see the Executive Board playing?

### **Australian Hydrographic Office**

FF: Our position is challenging:

- From a national perspective, this is an essential way of coordinating business and ensuring data is shared.
- From a Defence perspective, it is difficult being an organisation that has not historically shared data or funded external programs. There will be specific challenges for me in addressing these two roadblocks. But I am sending the message that this is an integral part of the bigger picture from both the government and community perspective going forward.

### **Australian Institute of Marine Science**

RB: Part of my reason for being on this board is to help build the support from within my organisation that we need to be investing in this and generating a longer term commitment so that we can have a core multibeam team in AIMS.

### **Australian Antarctic Division**

JK: When we originally identified the need for an EB the underlying role we saw this body playing was:

- High level lobbying
- Soft messaging across our networks
- Driving whole government support

In terms of requirements, from the AAD perspective: data delivery capability

### **Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation – Marine National Facility**

BM: Not really much to add. We are grappling with questions about what the impacts of our data are and how to maximise them, to industry, the public, and academia. Looking for a way to do this better and this is a challenge as well. I see this program as coordinated way to deliver a significant part of our data—a very wise investment, from our perspective.

### **Geoscience Australia**

TD: We have announced an ambitious target in the GA Strategy 2028 that we will contribute seabed data to help the nation achieve the \$ 100 billion blue economy. Our goal is to help deliver and unlock national data to realise that economic benefit. Being a part of the DIIS we are very focused on that blue economy piece and are incredibly proud to have been a part of AusSeabed over the last three years but we need to increase our drive to go from what has a great intent and exists through in-kind contributions to a fully funded program. We see the EB having an important role in ensuring that the AusSeabed work program aligns with priorities across government.

*General discussion followed.*

TD: FF identified challenges, does anybody else see any specific challenges with the AusSeabed program? The one I'll put on the table is: we have two to three years, I think, to stand up a policy proposal to ensure this program becomes enduring.

RB: We are not an organisation that has historically focused on multibeam or seabed data. This is something we have done as support for our primary research focuses. Seabed mapping is not currently seen as a core business function within AIMS. What this means in terms of ASB is that our commitment is unlikely to be delivered in bags of cash and more likely to be delivered in-kind e.g., for survey vessel operation.

JK: Our executives acknowledge there needs to be an investment to support our new data collection estimates and they need to know that this is a valuable investment. Also, easier to contribute to staff time than cash. Most of our funding goes into logistics for the Antarctic stations. We need to show the executives what our return on investment will be.

BM: From a CSIRO perspective, and MNF in particular, I cannot really say that we see any constraints/challenges. Our contribution is that we are currently funding a full-time position that goes directly towards this program. We are funded only up to 2022, in terms of full-year operations capability, so this might become a constraint if the Government doesn't continue an ongoing funding to the MNF program.

FF: Just echoing those sentiments: Whilst we are providing funding, there is the constant demand and requirements for funding justification and to advise what, ultimately, is going to be the value-add for us as contributors. I think the next six months will show us (as the AHO) what we need to be doing and how we can go about it. Funding for us, like other agencies, is year-by-year. Which makes it difficult to make long term commitments. But we will be the long term beneficiaries, so it is a bit funny. The next six months will help support some of this planning and there will be better arguments following the first stage of our engagement with industry and initial receipt of survey data.

TD: GA is in the same case, we are contributing a lot of staff and see the benefit in the program but we need to have clear cut messaging to demonstrate the value case of even our in-kind staffing allocations. We, as a board, can ask this of the SC: to deliver a value proposition of the contributions delivered, thus far (*Action 1*).

## Review Terms of Reference

TD: Did anyone have any strong objections to elements of the TOR?

*No objections raised.*

TD: What do we think the duration of the Chair role should be? Does two years sound reasonable?

FF: It provides continuity.

KP: And allows for staggering with the SC Chair role (currently one year, but likely to move to two).

TD: Do we see the EB as a group that is endorsing projects?

JK: We see this as a sanity check for projects, so that work doesn't become a runaway pet project of someone on the SC. A project should have a sound evidence base and the EB would then say: "Yes, we agree".

TD: Given how ASB works, what would happen if the EB says no—will this "endorsement" end up slowing progress?

JK: We did want to build that financial oversight into the role in the expectation of the AusSeabed program getting funded.

FF: What are our thoughts in regards to authority and decision making review?

TD: I think that we should be advisory?

BM: I agree

RB: Endorsement really only comes when we can make firm decisions over funding. Given that we currently don't have funding at this stage I think we would be providing guidance rather than firm endorsement—so, I am happy with being only advisory.

TD: I think endorsement of things like the strategic plan.

KP: We will be developing the forward work plan next week at the SC meeting and we will aim to confirm the various FTE/contributions etc. from partners and then we will send this out and people can work out budgets for March.

TD: Can I offer a change? Let's change point three from endorse to review/advise forward work plan.

BM: Yes agree that this wouldn't be at a project level, but rather at a strategic program level.

TD: We don't want to set this group up as a handbrake. But I think that having oversight of the annual work plan and any changes to the strategic plan would be an effective way of delivering program guidance and oversight.

FF: That sounds sensible from my perspective in terms of my capacity and time constraints.

RB: Same as FF. Broad brush sanity check of forward work plans and more the strategic elements of the program.

TD: No point in editing this TOR by committee. Taking this new direction GA will edit the TOR (*Action 2*) and send out today for your endorsement at latest by Monday midday (*Action 3*).

## Chair and Secretariat for Executive Board

TD: I've been asked by Kim to nominate myself for the role, but I'd like to encourage any of you to please advise whether you are interested in chairing this board (as collectively we have a lot of board experience).

*No other nominations were received so board decided to accept Trevor's nomination and instate him as Chair.*

TD: My position would be that the Chair also provides secretariat support. Unless anyone else disagrees?

All: Agreed.

KP: We have a term that non-voting members can participate as observers in the meetings?

TD: It is good to have the Chair of the SC in the meeting and this should be included in the TOR, and the Secretariat, for that matter.

## Next meeting

KP: I propose the next meeting should be in March to align with budgeting and work plan development for the SC. The SC meets three times each year. Once in November to set the work plan and agenda for the next year. Then again in April (via video conference) and finally at AMSA in July for the annual workshop. So it makes sense that the EB meets in March and September (six months apart) as this gives enough time to provide advice to the SC before both of those meetings.

RB: Are there any meetings that we are all on together that we can time our EB meetings around something bigger so that there is the opportunity to meet in person. Comfortable with last quarter of the year and second or third.

KP: IMOS is in March.

*General discussion established that the majority of EB members would be at IMOS.*

TD: It sounds like IMOS meets the majority (and is held in March). I think if we make the effort to have one face-to-face the other meeting can be a video conference. So let's aim to meet during IMOS.

TD: One thing I would like to include in these meetings is to get feedback from you on meeting documents, timing, location, frequency and progress, so that we can continually improve. On that note, is there anything else anyone wants to discuss before we close off?

*Nothing was raised.*

KP: The next meeting agenda you have will be covering off on the annual work plan and also a 10 year work plan that the SC is working on.

TD: I would suggest that carefully consider the level of detail that we as a board are asked to revise and advise on. High-level is better, we can't go through hundred page documents in half-day sessions!

TD: I think one of the things that would be good is that we capture what we as agencies are each contributing to the work plan (in terms of staffing and funding contributions) so that we can begin making the value judgements on program benefits. I think by capturing the staff time and contributions we will be able to give a very good message.

*TD thanked participants and closed meeting at 11:16 am.*