



Australian Government



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE  
OF MARINE SCIENCE

# IMOS Sea Country Initiative

TONYA GRANT

INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS COORDINATOR – IMOS

AIMS INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM



**IMOS**  
Integrated Marine  
Observing System

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, and pay our respects to elders past, present and future.**

We honour their continuing culture, knowledge, beliefs and spiritual relationship and connection to country.

We also recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land and sea country on which the Australian Institute of Marine Science works, and as Australia's first scientists.

**Through collaboration and two-way knowledge sharing, we can learn from each other.**

# FIRST NATIONS PARTNERSHIPS

## IMOS STRATEGY 2025 - 2035

IMOS Sea Country Initiative seeks to:-

- Establish linkages
- Create collaborative research designs
- Foster continuing and enhancing existing IMOS Indigenous relationships
- Foster new respectful and trustworthy long-term partnerships
- Identify and support ocean observing First Nations' priorities
- Provide guidance on cultural competency

# WHY AIMS IPP COLLABORATION?



**Indigenous Partnerships Policy**

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**PURPOSE**  
AIMS Strategy 2025 sets a target to undertake science collaborations with Traditional Owners in key projects focused on sea country. AIMS recognises that greater research impact and value can be created, and new insights gained when AIMS science is intertwined with the knowledge, perspectives, capacity, and capability of this country's original marine scientists – the Traditional Owners of sea country.

The Partnerships Plan to achieve this target was endorsed by AIMS Council in December 2020. It sets out the principles that guide the implementation of the Indigenous Partnerships Policy.

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## AIMS Indigenous Partnerships Plan From Engagement to Partnerships

Elizabeth Evans-Bligh, Tracye Foster, Marial Dępczyńska, Elzbieta Duggan and David Soutar



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## INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP PROCEDURE A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING THE INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP POLICY



REPORTS TEAM Email: [IP@AIMS.GOV.AU](mailto:IP@AIMS.GOV.AU)

AIMS: Australia's tropical marine research agency  
www.aims.gov.au

**STATEMENT**  
AIMS acknowledges that Traditional Owners have inherent rights and responsibilities and an ongoing spiritual and cultural connection with their land and sea country and all within it. These rights, responsibilities and spiritual and cultural connections are recognised in international instruments that have been adopted by Australia (eg United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), and accordingly in Australian domestic, legal, regulatory arrangements in state and Commonwealth marine parks, AIMS'50 Code of ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

AIMS also recognises that its mission is strongly aligned with Traditional Owners' responsibility for sea country. AIMS will establish genuine research partnerships with Traditional Owners in areas of mutual interest to build knowledge that supports the sustainable use, protection and management of Australia's marine estate for future generations.

**Traditional Owners are the first custodians of land and sea country**  
AIMS recognises that the interests, cultures and traditions (lore) of Traditional Owners have existed for millennia. They are inalienable and inseparable from their lands and sea country.

**Free Prior and Informed Consent**  
Recognising the enduring spiritual and cultural connections to and inherent responsibilities for their land and sea country, AIMS acknowledges that Traditional Owners have a central role in deciding which activities can be conducted on their sea country. AIMS will seek Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all projects that have a strong interaction with sea country or Traditional Owner interests. For example, this may include projects that involve the collection of samples, deployment of instruments, conduct of manipulative experiments, or operation within a culturally sensitive area. The scope of FPIC sought will include the use, storage and disposal of all samples collected. AIMS



Guidelines for  
Ethical Research  
in Australian  
Indigenous Studies

2012



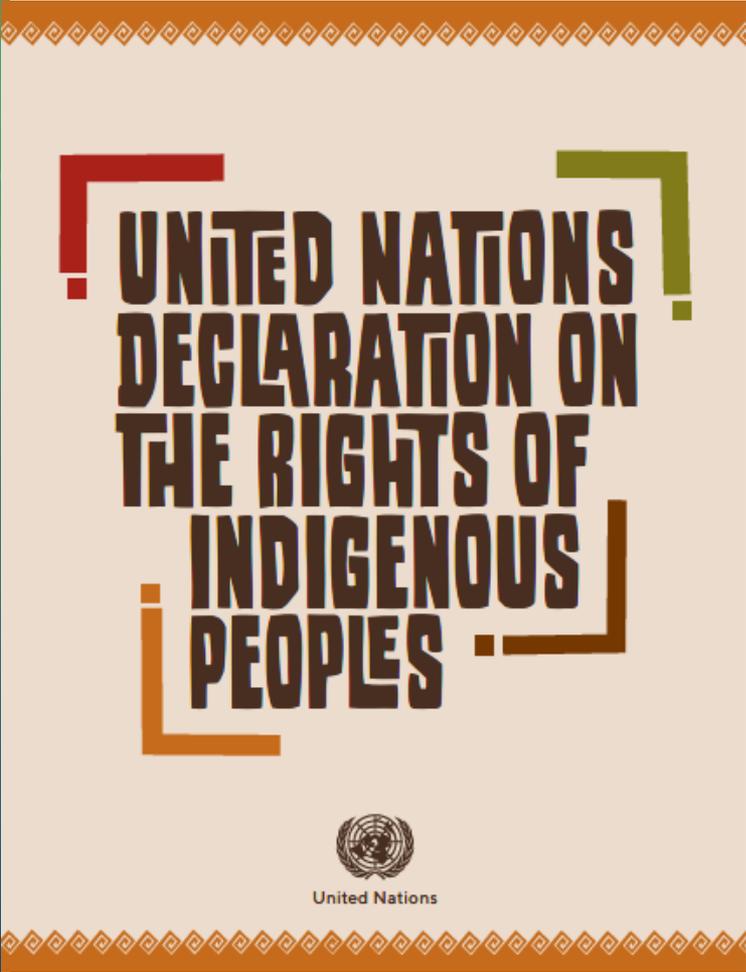
AIATSIS Code of Ethics  
for Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Research

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this document may contain sensitive information, names or images of people who have since passed away.

## Principles

- Rights, respect and recognition
- Negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding
- Participation, collaboration and partnership
- Benefits, outcomes and giving back
- Managing research – use, storage and access
- Reporting and compliance

*“... how to act in the right spirit, with integrity and with respect for Country and for all living things.”*

The image shows the cover of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The title is written in large, bold, brown capital letters, framed by a stylized border of red, green, and orange L-shaped brackets. At the bottom center, there is the United Nations logo and the text "United Nations".

# UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



- Adopted by UN General Assembly in 2007
- Initially - Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA voted against it's adoption.
- Adopted by Australia in 2009

# Article 19

“States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their **free, prior and informed consent** before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.”



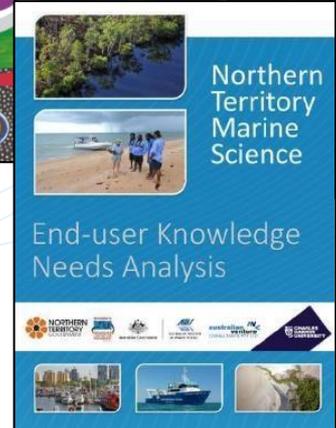
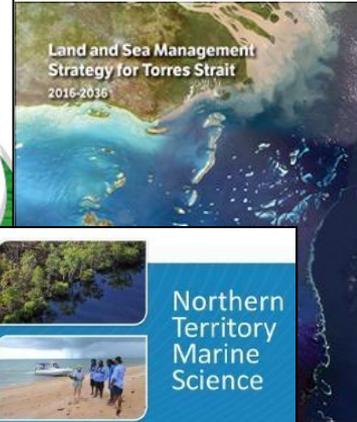
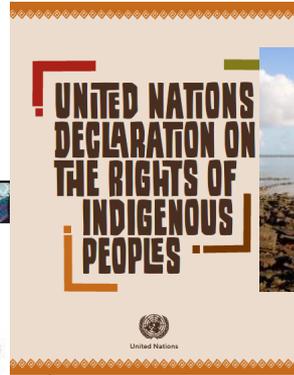
# AIMS IPP POLICY AND PROCEDURE

- Key IPP foundational documents:-
  - ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy approx. 2015 lead to
  - ✓ IPP Plan **Council** signed off 2019
  - ✓ IPP Policy signed off by **Council** 2021.
  - ✓ IPP Procedure signed off by **AIMS Leadership Team (ALT)** in 2022 and is currently being implemented



# AIMS Indigenous Partnerships Plan & Policy

- Ethical guidance (AIATSIS, UNDRIP)
- Traditional Custodians priorities in marine science
  - ✓ Read huge number of healthy country plans and regional syntheses
  - ✓ Asked Traditional Owners for input



## Article 19

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# COUNTRY (LAND, SEA AND SKY)

- **Country is not just the biophysical**
  - *The place to which a Traditional Owner group is connected, encompassing all living, non-living, tangible and intangible elements and cultural obligations connected to that place.*
  - *Country is managed according to Culture (not just law).*
  - *Indigenous partnerships plan needs to do both*

ecological knowledge

mythology

traditional knowledge

cultural expressions -  
past, present and  
emerging

biodiversity knowledge

dance

cultural heritage  
(both tangible and  
intangible, living and  
non-living)

agricultural knowledge

languages

words

games

customs

music

literature

technical knowledge

# INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

designs

other oral traditions

performance

cosmology knowledge

RITUALS

lore

cultural practices

genetic resources knowledge

scientific knowledge

medicinal knowledge

narratives

song lines

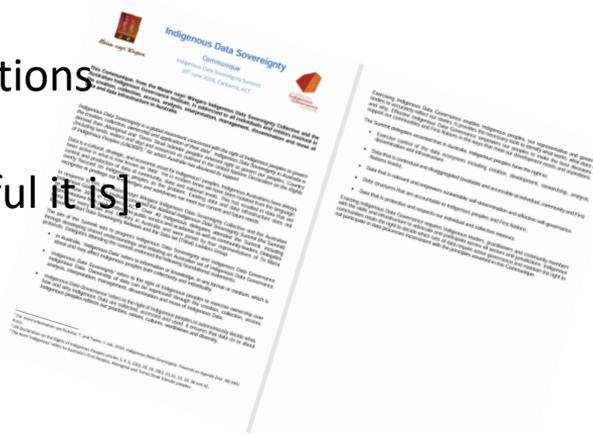
symbols

visual arts and crafts



# CARE PRINCIPLES

- Sea Country data management requirements;
- Data management for culturally significant areas;
- Data access for First Nations peoples;
- Data analysis [how useful it is].



Communique Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit

Maia naryi Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute 2018

# ENGAGEMENT TIERS APPLIED ACROSS AIMS RESEARCH



← IPC - IMOS



Currently engaging  
with 59 Groups

Thalanyji Baiyungu Kariyarra Murujuga  
Yawuru Bardi-Jawi Mayala Dambimangari  
Uunguu/Wunambal Gaambera Thamarrurr  
Tiwi Bawinanga Dhimurru Yirralka Gumurr  
Marthakal Crocodile Is Anindilyakwa Ipima  
Ikaya Ankamuthi Masigalgal Warraberalgal  
Porumaalgal Iama Mer Gedkem Le  
Erubam Le Ugar Wuthathi Kuuku Ya'u  
Lama Lama Cape Melville & Flinders Is  
People Nguurruumungu Thanill-warra  
Dhingaal Eastern Kuku Yalanji Gunggandji  
Manbarra Giringun Bandjin Djiru  
Girramay Nywaigi Jirrbal Wulgurukaba  
Bindal Ngaro Darumbal Woppaburra  
Gidarjil/PCCC Gurang Gooreng Gooreng  
Bunda Taribelang Gujaga Gamay Gunaikurnai



# GOLD - NAMMA EXAMPLE

- **Why is this important?**
  - Traditional and western learnings between rangers and experts of two knowledge systems
  - Building respect and trust in genuine partnerships
  - First Nations peoples leading research with technical and scientific support
  - Research based on First Nation peoples identified needs
  - Training and upskilling of local First Nation peoples
  - Developing systems and resources which are user friendly to First Nation peoples
  - Working together with First Nation peoples to bring greater understanding of the health of their sea Country
- <https://youtu.be/VFpvlfzG0k8>

# IPC IMOS SEA COUNTRY INITIATIVE JOURNEY



Start – March 2025 AIMS IP Team



Steering Committee/TOR



Promotional Resources/Events – Media/Website



AIMS IP Team Engagement Meetings



Marine Organisational Meetings



Roadshow IMOS Introduction



Roadshows 2026

# WHERE TO NEXT....



Events/Promotions 2026



Engagement Meetings 2026



Exploring Possible New  
Opportunities With Marine  
Science Organisations 2026



Continue Establishing Sea Country  
Initiative 2026



Steering Committee Meetings 2026



Traditional Owners  
Voices Workshop 2027



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AIMS: Australia's tropical marine research agency.

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ANY QUESTIONS



**IMOS**  
Integrated **Marine**  
**Observing** System