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IMOS EIF UPDATE #5 03 November 2009

Dear IMOS colleagues,

Before anything else, I just want to say “thank you” on behalf of the IMOS Office, Advisory Board and DIISR for the tremendous effort put in across Australia over the last six weeks in developing IMOS EIF Node and Facility Proposals.

I know there have been long hours, difficult discussions, and some confusion and frustration. However the package of Proposals submitted (on time!) provides us with an excellent basis upon which to progress IMOS EIF planning in line with the strategy of “building on our strengths”.

A consistent message that I have heard from across the community is how IMOS is enabling people to have really great conversations about science with colleagues in other disciplines, other institutions, and other locations. This is tremendously encouraging as it is the essence of our national, collaborative, integrative mandate. I’ve also heard that we need to further develop the management of our Nodes and establish some clearer policies about how IMOS operates, but the pleasing thing is that improving on these fronts is eminently doable. It’s getting the science conversations started that is so hard in the busy world we all inhabit, and I am very keen to find sensible, practical ways to keep this going in the years between new injections of investment.

The remainder of this Update details the next steps in the IMOS EIF process. It’s on the longish side, but my sense is that the community is looking for as much detail as possible about “what happens next”.

- **Timetable**

As per the Timetable, key dates between now and the end of the year are:

26 Nov 2009	National meeting of representatives of parties who have submitted Proposals, to reach consensus on items best responding to the IMOS Five Year Strategy and best addressing IMOS EIF funding requirements.
Mid Dec 2009	IMOS Office to develop a Draft Final IMOS EIF Project Plan.
18 Dec 2009	IMOS Advisory Board teleconference to consider the Draft Final IMOS EIF Project Plan.

- **Consolidation, Analysis and Review of Proposals by the IMOS Office**

Staff in the IMOS Office will now commence the process of consolidating, analysing and reviewing the package of Node and Facility Proposals in advance of the National Meeting. There will be four elements to this process, which we expect to guide the meeting agenda i.e.

a. Overview and synthesis of the Node Proposals as a package, including international peer review

- b. Consolidation and analysis of Facility Budgets against known parameters
- c. Review of interrelationships between Node and Facility Proposals using “Table 1”
- d. Overview and synthesis of the Facility Proposals as a package, looking at technical and operational feasibility, efficiency, synergy etc

Further detail is provided on each of these elements below, but a few general points first-up:

- All Node and Facility Proposals are in the process of being published on the IMOS website see - <http://imos.org.au/eif.html> . Most of them are there now, and once some details are sorted out with particular Facilities, the full set will be available. This is considered to be an important step in keeping the IMOS EIF planning process open and transparent across the community.
- We will also refresh the Wiki over the next day or so, and use it as a way of enabling ongoing discussion within the community about the package of proposals. This should not be seen as an opportunity to advocate or denigrate particular proposals, but rather to contribute to achieving national consensus on the IMOS Project Plan. The Wiki will be moderated by the IMOS Office and will be closed off around 19th November. A summary of any key issues will be provided as further input to the National Meeting.
- Strict version control of publicly-available documents will be maintained. Node and Facility Proposals available on the IMOS website will not be altered between now and the National Meeting on 26th November, subject to three caveats explained below (caveat #1, #2 and #3). Node and Facility Leaders will be given explicit advice about revising Proposals after this meeting, and will be expected to submit revised Proposals in advance of the Board Meeting on 18th December. N.B. None of this prevents Node and Facility Leaders from working on “Version 2” as it becomes clear that certain aspects of their Proposals will need to change, but the IMOS Office will not require an updated version until around 11th December.

a. Overview and synthesis of the Node Proposals as a package, including international peer review

The research questions being addressed by each of the Nodes will be pulled together into a whole-of-IMOS perspective, as will the observing strategies proposed. We anticipate that there will be a good level of cohesion given the foundations in place i.e. Initial IMOS Planning, Mid-Term Review, Five Year Strategy and a specific focus on integration by the “Steering Committee” of Node Leaders during September and early October. However there is a risk that integration (the “I” in IMOS) could break down in a complex, national, collaborative planning process with tight timeframes. So it will be important to ensure that from a national perspective, the research questions remain tractable and connected, and the proposed observing strategies plausible, and consistent where appropriate.

An important aspect of this element will be international peer review of two Node Proposals – Bluewater and Climate, and WAIMOS. As previously advised, all Node Proposals will be internationally peer reviewed on a rolling basis, and these two have been chosen in the first stage as they are most likely to be responding to the Federal Government imperative for EIF funding to provide enhanced monitoring capability in the Southern Ocean, and extended coverage in northern Australian waters. We have an excellent review team lined-up, and they have already been given relevant background material. Node Proposals will be sent to reviewers on Wednesday 4th November, and we’ve asked for their comments by Wednesday 18th November. Some are likely to overshoot this date a little, but we will aim to have all review comments available to the Office, Board and relevant Nodes in advance of the National Meeting. Reviewer comments provided to Nodes will be anonymous. Katy Hill is coordinating the review, so please contact her for further information. The Bluewater and Climate and WAIMOS Node Proposals will be looked at on 2nd – 3rd November, and some modifications may be required to prepare them for review. If so, revised versions will be posted (caveat #1).

b. Consolidation and analysis of Facility Budgets against known parameters

Facility and Sub-Facility Budgets will be pulled together into a first-cut, whole-of-IMOS Budget. We will then review proposed costs to extend NCRIS-funded activities in 2011-13, to extend “first \$8M” EIF-funded activities in 2010-13, and to enhance through new EIF-funded activities in 2010-13. The initial emphasis will be to ensure that proposed extensions have not been confused with enhancements, and that proposed costs are accurate and reasonable and in line with NCRIS/EIF funding requirements. We will also look at proposed co-investments.

It is expected that Facility Budgets will need amendment as a result of this review (caveat #2), and we will work with Facility and Sub-Facility Leaders, and Operator Representatives where appropriate, to agree on changes required. At present, our intention is to post revised Facility Budgets and a preliminary whole-of-IMOS budget summary on the IMOS website around 20th November, in advance of the National Meeting. However our ability to achieve this will depend on how robust the submitted Facility Budgets prove to be.

I have no doubt that, despite efforts by all Nodes to prioritise in line with the IMOS Five Year Strategy, the initial “ask” will be well in excess of what we can afford to do. A rigorous assessment of submitted budgets as outlined above is therefore fundamental to ensure we are supporting the creation and development of as much national research infrastructure as possible. I anticipate that we’ll need to do some very straight talking on this front in the coming weeks.

It should also be noted that negotiations about cash co-investment are continuing with several State Governments and other partners, and the success of these negotiations will be very important in determining just how much enhancement we can undertake.

c. Review of interrelationships between Node and Facility Proposals using “Table 1”

Observations required by Nodes need to be properly reflected in Facility Proposals, and observations planned by Facilities need to be those required by the Nodes. While every effort was made to keep the Nodes and Facilities in balance leading up to 30th October, it was always acknowledged that this would be impossible to achieve in the first stage. “Table 1” of the Node and Facility Proposals was intended to provide a mechanism for helping to manage the balance. A preliminary review of these Tables has highlighted gaps and inconsistencies, and we will work with Nodes and Facilities to update “Table 1” where necessary (caveat #3). This will assist in highlighting any duplications, and inconsistencies between Node and Facility expectations.

It should also be noted that it has been difficult for Facilities such as eMII and Satellite Remote Sensing to engage across all Nodes, and we need to ensure that these important elements of our national “backbone” are given due consideration.

d. Overview and synthesis of the Facility Plans as a package, looking at technical and operational feasibility, efficiency, synergy etc

I’m sure that all Nodes have tried to be realistic within their own context, but it is likely that the sum of their individual requirements will prove to be unrealistic when looked at in the context of certain Facilities. In particular, those Facilities that are broadly-based such as SOOP, ANMN and AATAMS. Even if we had more funds, in some cases we simply won’t have the people, equipment, vessel access or even time to successfully deploy and be delivering data streams within a June 2013 timeframe. A national ‘reality check’ will be required, taking into account the aspirations and

capacities of the Operators to grow in line with their own institutional strategies. We have learnt a lot over the first two years of IMOS implementation and we must use that experience, not ignore it or forget it.

This will also be an opportunity to look for efficiencies and synergies across Facilities that would not have been visible during the Facility by Facility planning that has just been undertaken.

I would like to flag one cross-cutting issue that is already emerging (and there may be others to come). There seems to be a lot of interest in adding to the network of National Reference Stations. We're already planning to add ADCP's, at least some pCO₂, and move to real time. We're now proposing to add more pCO₂, bio-optics, sediment traps, AUV transects and microbial sampling, and in some cases extend across the shelf. As a national community we'll need to think carefully about this strategy given the scale of investment being proposed. Are we willing and able to use such a network to do national scale science, as opposed to having a series of NRS's that are valued by Regional Nodes but are not really enabling national synergy? And can the impressively multi-disciplinary nature of the NRS's can be scaled-up from nine points on the Australian coastline to support multi-disciplinary studies at regional and national scales? Engagement with the modelling and satellite remote sensing communities is likely to be important in this respect. Some early food for thought.

- **IMOS EIF National Planning Meeting (26th November)**

For those who have been involved with IMOS since the beginning, the "Sydney meeting" of 2006 has achieved somewhat legendary status. The "Melbourne Airport" meeting of 2009 will be a very different affair.

Unlike 2006, we now have an established IMOS with a critical mass of equipment in the water, delivering data streams through the Ocean Portal. We have an established Office and Advisory Board, and respected people from across Australian marine and climate science who have been in Node and Facility leadership positions for some time. We have an approved Five Year Strategy.

As a community, our decision-making process is now much clearer and easier, notwithstanding the fact that some individuals and groups within the community will be disappointed by the decisions we'll have to make.

The National Meeting will be attended by:

- Node and Deputy Node Leaders, and leaders of proposed new Nodes (i.e. TasIMOS)
- Facility and Sub-Facility Leaders, and leaders of proposed new Facilities and Sub-Facilities
- Operator Representatives, and
- Members of the Advisory Board and IMOS Office.

This will bring together approximately sixty people from across the various disciplines and institutions prominent in Australian marine and climate science. If there are any obvious gaps in the expertise base, they will be closed by invitation.

The meeting won't involve presentations of Node and Facility Plans. All attendees will be expected to come with sufficient knowledge of the package of proposals to enable them to participate in a discussion aimed at achieving consensus on a national plan. This is considered reasonable given the maturity of IMOS, the level of interaction and engagement during the proposal development stage, and the openness and transparency of the process, including ready access to all submitted proposals.

The discussion will be guided by strategy and priorities. The IMOS Office will provide an agenda and relevant background papers in advance of the meeting. As outlined above, the meeting will be structured around issues emerging from analysis and review of:

- a. the Node Plans as a package, including international peer review
- b. the sum of Facility Budgets against known parameters, including status of co-investment negotiations
- c. the interrelationships between Node and Facility Plans, and
- d. technical and operational feasibility, efficiency, and synergy across Facilities.

It is expected that review and analysis over the coming weeks will identify proposals or aspects of proposals that are:

- Clearly aligned with the approved strategy and highly-supportable,
- Poorly aligned with the approved strategy and unlikely to be supportable,
- Aligned but with questions about size, coverage, maturity, timing, integration etc.

The National Meeting will be focused on confirming that there is national consensus on “the obvious”, and using the collective wisdom of the community to grapple with the more difficult choices in “the grey zone”.

- **Next Steps after the National Meeting**

A written report will be produced and made available to the community as soon as possible after the National Meeting. This report will include explicit advice to Node and Facility Leaders regarding revision of their Plans for resubmission in advance of the Board Meeting on 18th December. Further detail about this stage of the process will be provided in due course.

I hope this Update provides sufficient clarity about “what happens next”. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or others in the IMOS Office, if you wish to discuss further.

Regards, Tim

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