New Australian Antarctic Science (AAS) Portfolio Codesign FAQ

1. Understanding the New Portfolio

How do we ensure that the AAS portfolio is delivering on government priorities for Antarctic science?

Government priorities for Australian Antarctic Program science activities are set out in the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy 2025-2035, which was released in February 2025.

The Implementation Plan for delivering the Science Decadal Strategy was released in July 2026. The Implementation Plan sets out further guidance on the outcomes, goals and key questions for science activities that deliver on the priorities of the Science Decadal Strategy.

The Implementation Plan also sets out the framework for redesign of the AAS portfolio to support delivery of the Science Decadal Strategy.

Why are we sunsetting most of the existing AAS projects?

The need to redesign the AAS portfolio was identified early in development of the Science Implementation Plan. The Science Strategy and Implementation Plan were developed through extensive consultation with the Australian Antarctic science community, including AAD staff, major science partners, the Australian Antarctic Science Council, and AAD leadership.

The Science Implementation Plan (Section 6.2) explicitly notes that:

- the current portfolio is substantially oversubscribed relative to available operational and logistical capacity;
- all AAS projects would be re-evaluated;
- some projects, or components of projects, would cease; and
- opportunities would be sought to consolidate activities into larger, more integrated science programs.

The current co-design process (see Section 10) provides a further opportunity for the science community to help shape how existing activities are incorporated into the future portfolio.

When will the new AAS programs become operational?

We are co-designing now for the science programs that will be delivered in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean commencing from 2028-29 (i.e. in 2 years time). The existing AAS portfolio will continue for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 seasons.

How long will existing AAS projects continue for?

Existing AAS projects that were scheduled to end prior to 2028-29 will cease at their natural end date, and requests to extend will be considered for reporting and data management purposes only.

Some AAS projects that were scheduled to end after 2028-29 have been notified that they won't be considered for season support after the 2027-28 season. These projects will continue to be operational and considered for season support through the 2027-28 season. These projects can remain active to their natural end date where required to complete analysis, reporting and data management requirements, but won't be considered for season support from 2028-29 onwards.

How have the changes been notified to current CIs?

All CIs of existing AAS projects have received email notification as to whether their project will continue for season support into 2028-29 or if the project will cease to be considered for season support after 2027-28. The majority of current AAS projects will cease for season support after 2027-28 to enable the whole-of-program redesign of the AAS portfolio as described in the science Implementation Plan

Existing AAS project CIs and research teams are encouraged to participate in co-design activities for the new AAS programs.

What will and won't be considered through the co-design process?

The Implementation Plan articulated the outcomes, goals and key questions to guide science activities that deliver on priorities of the Science Decadal Strategy (Section 5). It also established the framework for the new AAS programs that will form the portfolio (Section 8), the framework for AAS program leadership teams (Section 10) and the guiding principles for implementation (Section 11). These are the established basis for implementation and are not part of the co-design process.

Co-design will shape the activities to be undertaken through the new AAS programs. The Implementation Plan provides guidance to help inform the co-design discussions (Section 8), but the AAS program plans will be developed by the research community and in consultation with strategy and enabling functions of the Australian Antarctic Program.

What AAS programs are currently being co-designed?

The immediate focus is on designing the elements of the AAS portfolio needed to support planning for the 2028–29 and 2029–30 seasons.

Future years of the programs will be refined progressively as funding arrangements, strategic priorities and delivery requirements become clearer.

The AAS programs currently under co-design are:

AAS Programs currently being co-designed	AAS program scope includes:
Science sustainment	
Southern Ocean marine science	Underway science, moorings and other instrument deployments from Nuyina that contribute to the East Antarctic Long-term Observing Network, as well as project activities carried out from Nuyina on resupply voyages (e.g. wet well sampling) and Vkits for science carried out from other vessels (with the exclusion of CCALMR-associated Vkits that will sit in the ECCO program)
Antarctic climate, ice and sea level	Contributions to the East Antarctic Long-term Observing Network and other project activities that are delivered at Antarctic stations or through field activities supported from Antarctic stations, including at Law Base. Does not include activities at the scale and complexity of strategic campaigns (e.g. MYIC and traverse).
Antarctic terrestrial and nearshore ecosystems	Contributions to the East Antarctic Long-term Observing Network and other project activities that are delivered at Antarctic stations or through field activities supported from Antarctic stations, including at Law Base. Includes, for example, CEMP monitoring. Does not include activities at the scale and complexity of strategic campaigns.
Environmental stewardship and management	Contributions to the East Antarctic Long-term Observing Network and other project activities that are delivered at Antarctic stations or through field activities supported from Antarctic stations, including at Law Base. Includes, for example, ASPA monitoring. Does not include activities at the scale and complexity of strategic campaigns.
Winter science	Contributions to the East Antarctic Long-term Observing Network and other project activities undertaken through the winter, delivered at Antarctic stations or through field activities from Antarctic stations.
Strategic campaigns	
ECCO program	Strategic marine science campaigns in the Mawson-Prydz Bay region beginning in 2029-30 addressing Ecosystems-CCAMLR, Climate and Ocean (ECCO) research priorities and designed to inform future repeat campaigns. The ECCO program provides the marine connection to terrestrial climate and ecosystems

	research activities in the Mawson, Law Base and Amery system regions. CCAMLR-associated fisheries research and V-kits to support voyages on other vessels are also within the scope of the ECCO program.
Million Year Ice Core	Continuation of MYIC activities under existing AAS 4632 with co-design only being undertaken for development of traverse science aspects (i.e. as described in the East Antarctic traverse program of the implementation plan).
Other science requirements	
Whole-of-Government commitments	Design process with government agencies, being led by Chief Scientist office

What is the difference between monitoring, sustainment science, and strategic campaigns?

Science implementation categories are described in Section 7 of the Implementation Plan and guidance on the key activities underlying the sustainment science and strategic campaign categories are detailed in section 8.1 and 8.2 respectively.

Sustainment science (section 8.1) includes both monitoring activities and research project activities.

Monitoring involves repeated observations over time to maintain long-term datasets, detect change, meet management obligations, and support modelling and decision-making. Examples include observations delivered through station support, voyage support, unattended or autonomous systems, and limited science beds/berths. *Monitoring Antarctica and the Southern Ocean* is one of the enabling capabilities outlined in the Science Strategy (see sections 4 and 5 of the Implementation Plan). Monitoring activities will be coordinated across all of the science sustainment programs to form the East Antarctic Long-term Observing Network (section 8).

Research project activities are discrete, targeted investigations developed within a science sustainment program that address specific scientific questions. These are typically delivered by small teams during program focus years and within the normal operating areas and capabilities of the Australian Antarctic Program.

Strategic Campaigns (section 8.2) are larger activities that require dedicated logistics, substantial vessel time, traverse support, aviation capability, or access to locations not routinely reached through Australian Antarctic Program operations.

Can you provide an illustrative example of how current activities map to the new AAS programs, for example using the science that contributes to Australia's science contributions to CCAMLR?

The Implementation Plan sets out the outcomes, goals and key questions for science activities that deliver on the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy (Section 5). For CCAMLR, these are primarily within the *Biodiversity* priority area, supported by the enabling capabilities. The design of science activities for contributions into CCAMLR would be expected to be aligned with the outcomes, goals and key questions in Section 5 of the implementation plan.

Science activities in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean that contribute to CCAMLR are operationalised through multiple approaches, and will sit across multiple AAS Programs. For example:

- Strategic campaigns from RSV Nuyina deliver major science activities that contribute toward the sustainable management of krill, krill predators, krill-centric ecosystems and East Antarctic MPA research. These include the 2027-28 Krill and Krill Ecosystems survey and the 2029-30 ECCO voyage. It is expected that some stream 1 applications for vessel time on RV Investigator will also deliver science contributions for CCAMLR and the IWC, in particular.
- Moorings form part of the East Antarctic Long-Term Observing Network and are delivered through science sustainment activities under the *Southern Ocean marine scienc*e program. This allows CCAMLR-associated moorings to be operationalised alongside other moorings as part of the AADs mooring plan and the broader annual science activities delivered from RSV *Nuyina*, to ensure operational supportability and strategic prioritisation of marine science activities across the program.
- CCAMLR Environmental Monitoring Program (CEMP) activities form part of the East Antarctic Long-Term Observing Network. CCAMLR-CEMP monitoring for Adelie penguin and other CEMP indicator species monitored from the continent is delivered through science sustainment activities from Australia's Antarctic stations, and for this reason will sit within the Antarctic Terrestrial and Nearshore Ecosystems Program as a discrete work package, ensuring strong interdependencies with the ECCO Program.
- Survey and monitoring for finfish and their fisheries are carried out via campaigns on other vessels. These CCAMLR-related Vkit-requests will sit as a discrete work package within the ECCO program.
- The *Southern Ocean Research Aquarium* will provide an important uplift in Australia-based science for CCAMLR. The SORA AAS program will be co-designed after the current phase of co-design activities.

AAS program co-design does not change that way that the outputs from these AAS programs are integrated through AAD core business and delivered into CCAMLR and/or the IWC and other fora.

How will the future science portfolio be managed to ensure it remains deliverable within available operational and logistical capacity?

Designing science activities to available capacity is a central principle of the Science Implementation Plan (Section 8.6).

Programs are being co-designed alongside planning and enabling sections within the AAD, with future activities assessed against realistic assumptions regarding logistics, personnel, infrastructure, technical support and funding.

This approach is intended to reduce oversubscription and improve certainty across the AAS portfolio.

Will activities from existing AAS projects automatically transition into new programs?

No. Existing AAS projects provide an important foundation for the future portfolio, and many contain activities, monitoring and expertise that are expected to contribute to future AAS programs.

An important part of the implementation of the Science Decadal Strategy is ensuring that all science activities going forward reflect the scope and priorities set out in the Implementation Plan.

The co-design process is intended to consider existing activities alongside new opportunities, identify priorities, and strengthen collaboration for effective delivery of the Science Decadal Strategy. Some existing activities may continue largely unchanged into the new AAS programs, others may be redesigned or integrated with related activities, and some may not continue.

How will existing commitments, long-term datasets, and critical scientific activities be protected during the transition to the new framework?

The transition process includes review of existing AAS projects to ensure long-term datasets, critical observing systems and important obligations are appropriately considered during the co-design of the new AAS programs.

Maintaining continuity of nationally significant observations and critical scientific capabilities is a key objective of the transition process. Chief Scientist, SPC and AAS program leadership teams will ensure they are considered during the co-design process.

How long will the Science Sustainment programs be managed under the new AAS portfolio?

The Science Sustainment programs are intended to operate through to the final season identified in the current Science Implementation Plan (2034-35). Work packages within science sustainment AAS programs will vary in length according to the monitoring and research needs. AAS programs will be subject to periodic review to ensure ongoing alignment with research priorities.

The initial co-design effort for AAS programs will be on developing high-level research plans and associated work packages including activities planned for seasons 2028-29 and 2029-30 to ensure that they can be entered into the AAD Integrated Planning Process that will commence in early 2027.

As the update to the Antarctic Strategy & 20 Year Action Plan and future funding arrangements continue to mature, and the AAS program detail will be progressively co-designed for later years of the decade.

How will modelling and Australia-only projects be accommodated under the new portfolio?

Australia-based science activities remain an important part of the Science Implementation Plan (Section 8.3) and include modelling, synthesis, analytics, digital innovation, mapping, use of legacy samples and the new Southern Ocean Research Aquarium (SORA).

The current transition process is focused on activities requiring Antarctic and Southern Ocean operational support commencing from the 2028-29 season. Australia-based science activities, will be developed through subsequent phases of AAS portfolio implementation, including through future funding opportunities for Australian Antarctic science partnerships.

Researchers whose work is primarily Australia-based (e.g. modelling communities) are nevertheless encouraged to participate in co-design discussions, particularly where observations can help improve models and predictions.

How will current externally funded science activities be treated?

There will be no impact on the external funding arrangements already in place through the ARC and DCCEEW (ie SAEF, ACEAS and AAPP). These funding arrangements and research priorities remain unchanged.

Researchers receiving funding through programs such as ARC, NCRIS, IMOS or other organisations are encouraged to participate in AAS program co-design and should be considered alongside all other activities when determining priorities and assessing supportability.

Collaboration across research agencies and organisations remains a central principle of the future AAS portfolio, to deliver the priorities of the Decadal Strategy through the Implementation Plan.

What is the future of funding for external led science?

Future funding arrangements for Australian Antarctic science partnerships remain under development.

External science partner participation in the Australian Antarctic Program will be developed through co-design to support delivery of priorities of the Antarctic Strategy and 20-Year Action Plan, and the Science Decadal Strategy and its implementation plan. Further information will be provided as future funding arrangements become clearer.

2. Co-design Process

What does co-design mean?

Co-design is one of the guiding principles of the Science Implementation Plan (see Sections 8.6, 10, 11). It involves scientists, planners, policy staff, operational areas and enabling teams working together to design feasible and impactful science programs that deliver the Decadal Strategy.

I missed the workshops at the conference on long term monitoring. Can I still provide input on monitoring in the new Science Sustainment programs?

Yes. The discussion at the AARC was a starting point to provide some initial guidance to the program leadership teams. As the co-design process continues, there will be opportunities to provide further input to designing the new AAS programs.

Researchers who would like to contribute to program development but are not currently involved in a working group are encouraged to register their interest so they can be contacted to participate in co-design workshops. See Register your interest – Australian Antarctic Program.

Will workshops commence before the EOI process concludes?

The co-design process has already commenced through the Australian Antarctic Research Conference (AARC), and early workshop activities may continue while leadership appointments are being finalised. This approach is intended to maintain momentum and ensure projects are ready for inclusion in the 2028-29 planning cycle.

What is the timeline for the next 6-12 months?

Details will be communicated as schedules are confirmed. An approximate timeline for the next 6 months is shown below:

- EOI for program co-leaders: September 2026
- Program co-design (with a focus on 28-29 & 29-30): August – November 2026
- SPC register new AAS programs: Dec 2026 – Jan 2027
- Detailed scoping of program activities as part of 28-29 IPP: Dec 2026 – Jan 2027
- New program activities 2028-29 (and 2029-30 at higher level) assessed as part of IPP: Feb 2027 – Nov 2027

Later in 2027

- Continue program co-design, developing greater detail on later years of decade
- Commence EOI & co-design of other programs identified in Implementation Plan such as SORA, modelling and legacy sample work

How will AAD enabling sections and planning functions participate in co-design?

AAD enabling sections and planning functions will be engaged throughout the co-design process to help ensure that future programs are scientifically impactful, strategically aligned and operationally deliverable.

Planning and enabling areas will be consulted regularly throughout co-design to ensure proposed activities are developed with a realistic understanding of operational, logistical, technical, infrastructure and workforce constraints. A key objective of this engagement is to ensure that the design of the science program is achievable within the AAP's delivery capacity.

Early involvement will give transparency on planning parameters and improve the quality of information available to support future planning assessments. A workshop will be held for AAS Program leadership teams in mid-October to allow planning areas to provide insights into how the planning process functions and guidance on planning considerations that will support feasibility of science design.

Will co-designed AAS programs be guaranteed of season operational support?

It is important to note that co-design is intended to improve feasibility, not guarantee operational support. Activities within AAS programs that are developed through co-design will still be subject to consideration through the AAD Planning Framework. This currently includes the Integrate Planning Process (2-3 years in advance of delivery) and Season Operational Program Plan (1 year in advance of delivery).

Through the processes of the AAD Planning Framework some activities may still be assessed as unsupportable or require modification as additional detail on season parameters emerge during planning processes.

Will the AAD's Science Technical Support and Australian Antarctic Data Centre teams be integrated into new AAS programs?

Yes. Science Technical Support (STS) and the Australian Antarctic Data Centre (AADC) will be active partners in co-design and delivery of the AAS programs. These teams provide expertise on opportunities to expand scientific capability through existing and emerging technologies such as autonomous systems, remote sensing, modernisation of ageing instrumentation, data integration, mapping products, as well as requirements for data management and reporting.

The early involvement of STS and AADC teams is critical as many of these capabilities require multi-year planning horizons, technical development, procurement pathways, technical workforce planning, and therefore need to be considered in the design of new AAS programs.

You talk about co-design making the science program more feasible and the agreed scope will be registered by SPC. Does this mean the AAD will commit to supporting the activities identified through co-design?

No. Co-design does not constitute approval or a commitment to provide operational support. All activities will still be subject to assessment through the normal planning processes, including operational feasibility, strategic priorities, available capacity, funding considerations and governance processes.

However, co-design should result in more realistic program scopes and improved alignment between expectations and available support. The framework established through the Implementation Plan to moving to larger AAS programs over existing smaller AAS projects is also designed to improve feasibility by allowing the scope of the AAS program leadership teams and the Chief Scientist to consider strategic science priorities and sequencing across multiple activities prior to operational support requests being submitted for consideration through the AAD Planning Framework.

3. Project Structure and Leadership

Will program leadership be limited to two Co-Leads and two EMCR Leads?

A core leadership team for each new AAS program will be filled through an Expression of Interest process. Program leadership teams will lead the co-design activities for their AAS program, including establishing how work packages within the AAS program will be arranged.

Leadership opportunities will exist within AAS programs through the work packages. Work Package Leaders will be responsible for delivery of the work packages, including scoping, delivery and data management requirements. The AAS program leadership teams will provide oversight across work packages, including contributing to prioritisation of AAS program activities in consultation across other AAS program leaders and the Chief Scientist.

How much time is expected from Program Leadership Team members?

The initial co-design phase is likely to require a greater time commitment than ongoing program leadership, particularly during development of the new AAS programs.

Over time, the role is expected to become more comparable to leadership roles within major research programs and centres, including coordination of discussions, engagement with work package leaders, and participation in planning and prioritisation activities.

How were the AAD Co-Leads appointed?

The AAD Co-Leads were drawn from existing AAD Program Leader roles. The AAD science branch is structured to deliver the Science Decadal Strategy with leadership roles already aligned to the research priorities and AAS Programs.

This approach also provides continuity during the transition process and reduces implementation risk while the broader leadership teams are established through the EOI process.

Can EMCR representatives also participate as researchers within the program?

Yes. The EMCR leadership positions are intended to provide leadership and development opportunities and do not prevent an individual from also participating in Work Packages within the program.

I am currently a Chief Investigator on an AAS project – what leadership opportunities are there for me if I'm not one of the 2 AAS Program co-leads?

In addition to the AAS Program leadership team, work packages developed within in each AAS program will have a Work Package Leader who is responsible for coordination, delivery and reporting for that work package. This will provide researchers an opportunity to lead activities aligned particularly with their area of expertise and gain career development experience.

Will the structure and composition of work packages be determined by program leadership teams, or guided by the Chief Scientist?

Work package structures for each AAS program will be developed collaboratively in the co-design process. The Chief Scientist will contribute to discussions during the co-design process.

The Chief Scientist will also be available to provide advice to the AAS program leadership teams as they lead the co-design of their AAS programs and associated work packages.

Why is there no EOI for Whole-of-Government Commitments Leadership?

The Whole-of-Government Commitments program differs from other areas of the AAS portfolio because it primarily coordinates activities undertaken to meet Australian Government obligations and national interests that are not directly driven by the Science Strategy.

The Science Implementation Plan (Section 8.5) states that essential monitoring for national interests should remain led by government agencies. For this reason, the Whole-of-Government Commitments program will be coordinated through the Chief Scientist's office and participating government agencies rather than through an open EOI process.

What happens if suitable applicants are not identified for all leadership roles?

The intent is to appoint leadership teams through the EOI process. If suitable candidates are not identified for a particular role, alternative approaches may be considered, including seeking interest from applicants to other programs or targeted discussions with potential candidates.

The objective remains to establish AAS program leadership teams that support effective program development and delivery.

I was not able to apply to the EOI for AAS program leadership team roles. Will there be other opportunities?

The AAS program co-leads and EMCR representatives will be appointed for 2 or 3-year terms. There will be future EOI calls as AAS program leadership team roles become available. Building opportunities for renewal with the AAS program leadership teams is an important career development mechanism aligned with the principles in the science Implementation plan (section 11).

4. Planning, Governance and Support

How will project registration differ from the previous project application process?

Unlike previous science rounds, there will not be an open call for new AAS project applications. Instead, agreed program plans will be developed through the co-design process and will be entered into Antarctic Applications Online (AAO) by the AAD Science Program Coordination team.

Will the Australian Antarctic Science Council still have a role in reviewing projects?

Yes. The Australian Antarctic Science Council will continue to provide scientific oversight and strategic advice to the AAD Chief Scientist and to Government. The Science Council will be involved in providing advice on new AAS program plans and leadership teams, and reviewing whether science activities are effectively delivering on the Science Decadal Strategy and its Implementation Plan.

Will sustainment science come with templated science berths?

Sustainment science aims to improve long-term planning and continuity of datasets, but berth/bed allocations will still be subject to operational capacity, prioritisation and budget considerations.

How will Program Leadership Teams interact with the AAD planning teams?

AAS Program Leadership Teams will work closely with Work Package Leads and participating scientists to develop detailed activities for consideration through the AAD Planning Framework. Where feasible, activities should be designed to deliver on multiple outcomes/work packages across the AAS program.

AAS program leadership teams will provide oversight on prioritisation of activities within their AAS programs to the Chief Scientist. The Chief Scientist will be available to provide advice and strategic guidance to AAS program leadership teams.

The responsibility for delivering final prioritisation of science activities across the AAS portfolio into the AAD Planning Framework, along with the associated scoping information for the Integrated Planning Process, lies with the Chief Scientist and Science Program Coordination team.

5. Specific Programs and Delivery Models

Will the winter science program support small project activities (e.g. PhD projects) or shared capability roles to deliver on a range of monitoring?

Both. Some winter science activities may support specific scientific objectives, while others may provide shared capability that supports multiple monitoring activities (e.g Davis engineer). The intention is to increase year-round scientific capability and improve continuity of monitoring and observations outside the traditional summer field season.

Why are CCAMLR science activities spread across several programs rather than grouped into a single CCAMLR program?

CCAMLR-related science is delivered through marine, terrestrial, monitoring and campaign activities and therefore naturally spans multiple programs. This approach enables activities to be delivered through the most appropriate operational pathway while still contributing to Australia's objectives within CCAMLR.

Do you expect any science-aligned non-science (5000 series) projects to also be sunsetted?

Potentially. We are currently reviewing which 5000-series projects are better aligned to transition into the new AAS programs and which are more appropriately retained as standalone projects.

SPC and the Chief Scientist will work with individual project leads to determine the most appropriate pathway for each project, with further advice to be provided once that review has been completed.

Investigators of science-aligned 5000 series projects are also encouraged to contribute to AAS co-design discussions to explore alignment and synergies of activities within the new AAS programs.