# Australian National Soils Information System (ANSIS)

# Terms of Reference for Science and Technical Reference Group (STRG)

## 1. Purpose

CSIRO is managing delivery of a significant program of activities ($15M over 2 years) that will develop the Australian National Soil Information System (ANSIS). ANSIS activities are being undertaken in the context of the overarching National Soil Strategy (NSS) governance and coordination mechanisms. The NSS’s vision is to ensure Australia’s soil resources are recognised and valued as a key national asset.

For the ANSIS project, the ANSIS Science and Technical Reference Group (STRG) is established to provide expert knowledge that informs the ANSIS Project Coordination Team, and relevant ANSIS Project Activity Teams, on scientific and technical aspects of project design and delivery. Their key role is to review, assess and provide scientific and technical assurance for ANSIS data services and the products that are delivered.

The STRG will also be responsible for supporting the ANSIS Consultative Group to review and refine these Terms of Reference (ToR) and all other ANSIS governance mechanisms to ensure they are fit-for-purpose for future implementations.

The STRG reports to the ANSIS Project Coordination Team.

## 2. Role

The role of the STRG is to provide:

1. Technical and scientific advice and recommendations of ANSIS deliverables providing assurances to the Project Coordination Team, and relevant ANSIS Project Activity Teams , on the needs and priorities of ANSIS technical and scientific matters.
2. Provide consultative support, advice and recommendations about technical aspects for the development and operation of ANSIS, including guidance on the data and systems alignment processes.
3. Expert advice as requested by the ANSIS Project Coordination Team, Project Activity Teams and ANSIS Consultative Group, on science and technology issues. These include:
   1. Quality assurance practices and processes.
   2. The publication of data through the ANSIS.
   3. Acceptable levels of FAIRness for publication.
   4. Acceptable levels of ANSIS Trusted Repository requirements.
   5. Identifying common information models (data structures) for ANSIS.
   6. Recommending semantics - provider specific and agreed community vocabularies and ontologies.
   7. The design and deployment of common infrastructure elements such as resource discovery mechanisms.
   8. The computational interfaces relevant for ANSIS.

## 3. Authority

The STRG reports to the ANSIS Project Coordination Team. The Project Coordination Team forms part of the ANSIS Project Management Committee which reports to the National Soil Information System (NSIF) Consultative Group – formed by the National Soil Strategy (NSS) Steering Committee under the auspices of Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF).

The ANSIS Project Coordination Team sets the scope of the STRG.

## 4. Decision rights

The STRG provides the ANSIS Project Coordination Team expert advice and recommendations for review and decision. This may also be referred to the ANSIS Consultative Group for their information.

The STRG is an advisory group with no decision-making rights. ANSIS Project Coordination Team refers to the STRG for “decision input” or “recommendations” in relation to technical or scientific matters.

## 5. Operating Procedures

### 5.1 Governance

The STRG is a standing body established to support ANSIS development, operating under the authority of, and reporting to, the ANSIS Project Coordination Team.

### 5.2 Chair

An inaugural Chair will be nominated by the ANSIS Project Coordination Team. The inaugural Chair will serve for a period of 12 months (or until completion of the contracted ANSIS project, whichever occurs earliest) and will convene meetings and be responsible for interacting and liaising with the ANSIS Project Coordination Team. The Chair may appoint a Deputy Chair from among its members to perform essential duties in the Chair's absence.

### 5.3 Membership

The Chair and members of the STRG serve in an advisory capacity. Each ANSIS Partner or key stakeholder will nominate one representative to the STRG. Appointment to the STRG will be based on the member’s experience and expertise, and their representation of a relevant body or stakeholder group.

Proxies or alternates for meetings are permissible and requested when a member is unable to attend a meeting. The size of the STRG will be determined by the scale and scope of ANSIS and may fluctuate depending on the work programme at any point in time.

### 5.4 Term of Office

The term of office for members is 12 months (or until completion of ANSIS project, whichever occurs earliest). The default is for members’ term to automatically renew. The ANSIS Project Coordination Team is able to terminate the operation of the STRG when the group’s activities are no longer required.

### 5.5 Group Meetings

* Meeting frequency – monthly, with a maximum duration between meetings of two (2) months.
* Quorum – greater than 30% of STRG’s membership.
* Pre-meeting – Unless otherwise agreed upon through discussion with the secretariat and other members of the STRG, STRG members should submit via the TEAMS site , any agenda items to the secretariat at least one week prior to the next scheduled meeting. One week before each scheduled meeting, the TEAMS site will be updated with the Agenda and any attachments for the meeting . These Agenda and any attachments should include:
  + any specific items where recommendations are being sort that will be asked to be made in session;
  + other documents to be considered at the meeting (if any – it is not a regular meeting requirement for members to provide business papers).
* On the TEAMS site the following information will be available:
  + Agendas
  + Minutes
  + Action Table
  + Papers
  + Other information beneficial to the Consultative Group
* During STRG meetings – the Chair will conduct the meeting according to the Agenda, encouraging all members to provide input throughout the meeting. Minutes will be taken for each meeting and be available on the TEAM site. The Chair will also ensure any recommendations are adequately resolved and confirmed by the members. At the first meeting of the STRG, a standing agenda should be agreed upon by STRG members that covers key recurring issues, while allowing time for general discussion and emergent issues. A standing agenda will include (but not be limited to):
  + reviewing the status of action items from previous meetings;
  + ANSIS progress report of key ANSIS deliverables and project risks on science or technical matters;
  + communication updates;
  + ANSIS matters of relevance to all represented groups at the meeting; This may include:
    - NSS Updates
    - DAFF Updates
    - Soil Advocate updates
  + discussion on other documents to be considered (if any);
  + confirmation of date, time and venue for next meeting.
* The first meeting of the STRG should also review, discuss, and determine key operational matters including (but not limited to):
  + the ToR for the group, and what additional items should be added to the ToR (if any);
  + who approves meeting minutes and meeting agendas;
  + the development of activities to provide long term confidentiality, conflict of interest, and privacy instruments for the STRG.

### 5.6 Confidentiality

STRG Group members will not directly or indirectly disclose to any person any Confidential Information which may have been presented to or discussed in the Group.

STRG Group members are required to abide by existing confidentiality requirements and definitions, as per contracts/agreements.

As ANSIS develops over time, the STRG must continue to develop and refine its confidentiality mechanisms, beginning at its first meeting.

### 5.7 Conflict of Interest

Individual members and the STRG as a whole undertake to, as soon as possible, disclose any direct or indirect pecuniary or other interest that they have, or may have, in a matter that is being considered, or about to be considered by the Group. To avoid any perceived or actual conflict of interest, they will disclose the nature of the interest at the Group’s meeting. Any conflict shall be recorded and the Chair will determine whether members remain present during discussion on that matter.

STRG Group members are required to abide by existing conflict of interest requirements and definitions, as per contracts/agreements.

As ANSIS develops over time, the STRG must continue to develop and refine its conflict of interest mechanisms, beginning at its first meeting.

## 6. Amendment, Modification or Variation

A formal review of governance arrangements will take place within twelve months of commencement of operations. These ToR may be amended, varied or modified at any time within that period, in consultation with the ANSIS Consultative Group members and the ANSIS Project Coordination Team.