

Principles of access to *RV Investigator*



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1. Purpose

This document articulates access principles for *Investigator's* annually available sea time.

2. Background

With two thirds of Australia underwater, at nearly 14 million km², we have the third largest marine jurisdiction globally and Australia has sovereign rights over much of this vast estate and associated fishing, mineral and petroleum resources. These resources and their associated industries underpin the vitality and sustained success of the Australian economy. For example, in 2009 the national value of production across all marine-based industries was valued at AU\$42.3 billion, contributing to more than 10% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product. This contribution is expected to increase significantly over the coming years to approximately AU\$100 billion by 2025 through the expansion of existing and new industries associated with renewable energy (e.g. waves, wind and tide) and food (e.g. aquaculture and fisheries). Underpinning the growth and sustainability of ocean-based industries for future generations, marine research supports and informs evidence-based decisions by all stakeholders.

3. Marine National Facility (MNF)

Funded by the Australian Government since 1984 and overseen by an independent Steering Committee, the MNF provides a keystone element of the nation's research infrastructure by providing a blue-water research capability to Australian marine researchers and their international collaborators for work in Australia's vast marine estate. Through merit based grants of sea time, research undertaken through the MNF contributes to Australia's national benefit by providing key information to government, industry and other stakeholders to support evidence-based decision-making. Research use is focused on challenges in environmental and fisheries management, geological resources, regional and global climate, coastal and offshore developments and marine operations.

4. RV *Investigator*

In 2014 the MNF commissioned a new purpose-built 94m multi-purpose research vessel *Investigator*, providing a step change in Australian marine and atmospheric research capability. *Investigator* has greatly increased capacity over the previous MNF vessel *Southern Surveyor* and can carry out voyages from the tropics to the Antarctic ice edge with up to 40 scientists on-board and spending up to 300 days per year at sea on voyages up to 60 days in duration. *Investigator* also hosts an extensive suite of state of the art scientific research equipment and is one of a handful of research vessels globally designed for very quiet operation with the ability to undertake acoustic mapping and sampling to the deepest parts of our oceans. Accordingly, the commissioning of *Investigator* has significantly increased the ability of the MNF to address rapidly increasing demand for research in the national interest.

4.1. MNF Granted Voyages (GV)

In May 2014 the Australian Government reaffirmed a commitment to the MNF, allocating AU\$65.7million over the next four years to operate *Investigator*. This funding allows approximately 180 research days at sea per year to be competitively funded on merit as Granted Voyages (GV) which is the fundamental principle underpinning the establishment of the Marine National Facility.

4.2. MNF User-Funded Voyages (UFV)

Given *Investigator's* capacity to provide up to 300 days per year at sea, the MNF can provide additional days through other arrangements to maximise research in the national interest. Currently, the MNF funding for 180 GV days creates significant opportunities to utilise up to 120 additional days at sea as UFV within each annual research schedule.

5. Types of use

The MNF recognise three types of use of the vessel which are listed in order of priority:

5.1. Type 1 use

Researchers based in Australia from Australian research organisations and their international collaborators who are successful through the competitive MNF GV applications process. Successful applications are highly ranked in terms of science excellence, national benefit and track record.

5.2. Type 2 use

Research organisations and their collaborators who charter the MNF research vessel to complete the ship-based components of their research. Voyages of this type are UFV.

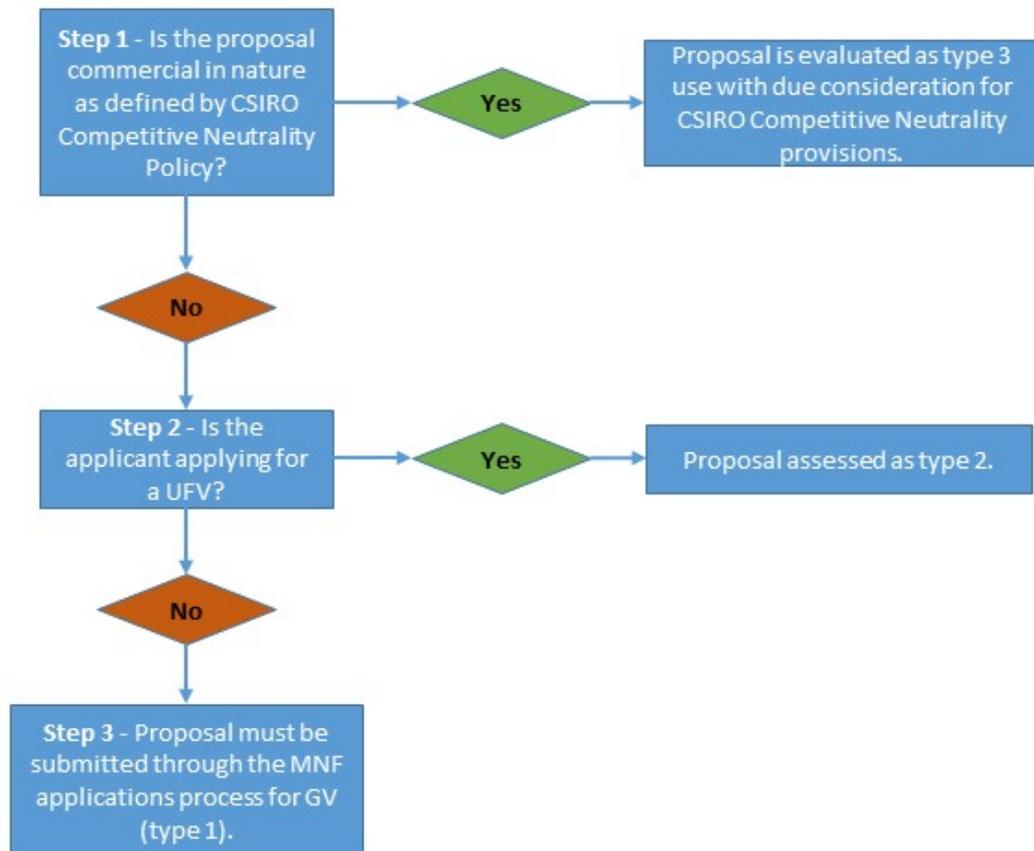
5.3. Type 3 use

Charter involving commercial charge arrangements subject to competitive neutrality policy. Voyages of this type are UFV.

6. Principles of access to *Investigator*

6.1. Establishing type of use

On receiving a proposal to use *Investigator*, the MNF first determines the most applicable type of use through the steps described in the diagram below:



6.1.1. Type 3 use

The first stage of the review aims to establish if the proposal is commercial in nature (type 3 use). Commercial proposals will be considered at commercial rates taking into account the guidelines for competitive neutrality published by the [Australian Department of Finance](#) and CSIRO's Competitive Neutrality policy which includes an assessment of the national interest value of a proposal.

In the *Competition Principles Agreement 1995*, the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments expressed a commitment to implement competitive neutrality (CN). The Commonwealth Government's CN policy aims to ensure that government business activities do not enjoy net competitive advantages over their private sector competitors simply as a result of their public ownership.

All of CSIRO's commercial activities are subject to CN principles and the CN complaints mechanism. CN principles apply to competition between CSIRO and its private and public sector competitors. It is CSIRO policy that:

1. All projects/activities should be costed to identify their full costs (including business unit and corporate overheads) to the Organisation.
2. The pricing of commercial activities must be based on the perceived value to the client and an estimate of their full costs.
3. **For technical and consulting services**, the price must cover the estimated full costs and include commercial pre-tax rate of return and tax equivalent regime components (*the competitive neutrality on-cost factor*).
4. **For research projects**, the price must cover the estimated full costs, unless there are national interest considerations, and include commercial pre-tax rate of return and tax equivalent regime components (*the competitive neutrality on-cost factor*) if tax and rate of return requirements are known to be incurred by competing bidders.
5. All pricing decisions, including the estimate of costs, must be fully documented and retained for audit purposes within the contract approval process.

Proposals for type 3 use will be treated as commercial-in-confidence by the MNF.

6.1.2. Types 1 & 2 use

If a proposal is determined as non-commercial in nature, it will be assessed in accordance with the processes outlined at 6.2 or 6.3 below depending if it qualifies as a GV or a UFV application.

6.2. Assessment of GV proposals (type 1)

Proposals for GV are only accepted through the MNF applications process following a call for applications. Applications are called two years in advance of an annual research schedule and are typically open for a two to three month period. GV applications are open to type 1 use, with applications nationally and internationally peer reviewed, then assessed by independent committee against three equally weighted Core Criteria:

- Criterion 1:** scientific and/or technical excellence;
- Criterion 2:** potential to contribute to Australia's national benefit; and
- Criterion 3:** the ability of investigators (demonstrated, or potential relative to opportunity) to successfully undertake the project.

For a detailed overview of the GV assessment process please visit the [MNF Website](#).

6.3. Assessment of UFV proposals (type 2)

UFV proposals for type 2 use are open year round and are assessed by the MNF against Criterion 2 as described at 6.2 above. In addition, a risk assessment is conducted on each proposal with a particular focus on:

- scientific and/or technical excellence (Criterion 1);
- the ability of investigators (demonstrated, or potential relative to opportunity) to successfully undertake the project (Criterion 2);
- legal risks including any proposed departures from the standard MNF Voyage Agreement;
- commercial risks;

- reputational risk to the MNF/CSIRO;
- any proposed departures from *Investigator's* policies;
- fit with MNF schedule; and
- operational constraints.

Proposals for type 2 use will be treated as commercial-in-confidence by the MNF.

7. Pricing

7.1. Type 1 use

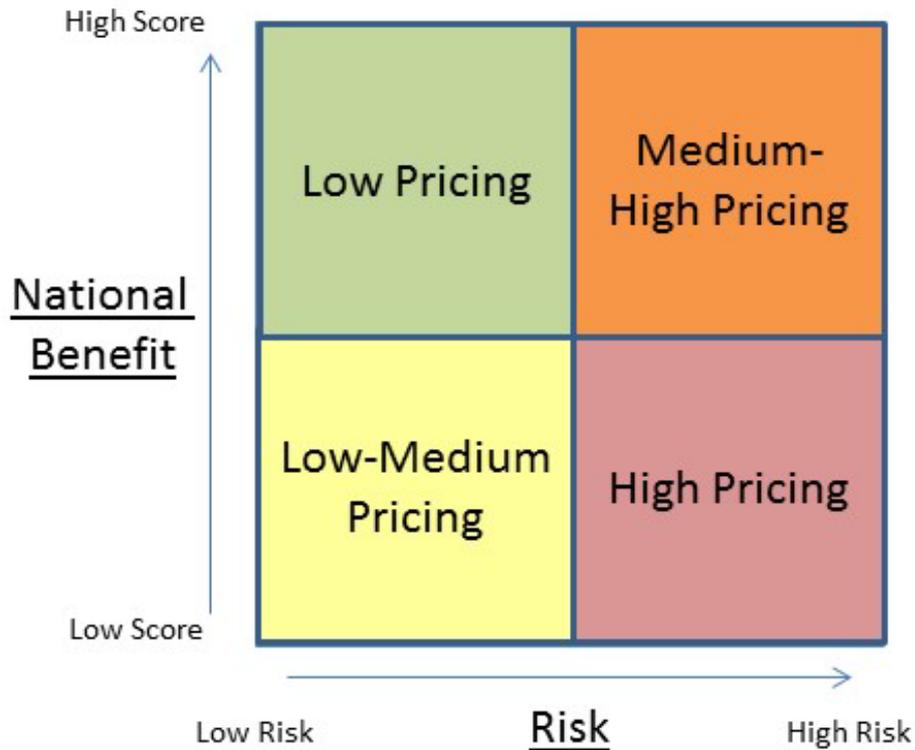
Successful GV applicants are not charged for the costs of operating the research vessel but must fund associated project costs such as research team salaries (pre, during and post voyage), travel and freight for the research team and their specific equipment.

7.2. Type 2 use

With a fixed budget for 180 days of sea time grants, the MNF is unable to fund additional days at sea and must at least recover the incremental operating costs for the vessel. For user type 2 proposals with high national benefit which achieve a low risk rating, *Investigator* may be made available at low pricing to encourage maximum utilisation of the vessel. User type 2 proposals with limited national benefit and/or less desirable risk profiles will be priced at higher rates.

The pricing regime applied by the MNF is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 – Pricing regime assessment tool



7.3. Type 3 use

Commercial proposals will be considered at commercial rates taking into account the guidelines for competitive neutrality as per section 6.1.1 above.

8. Scheduling

8.1. Type 1 use

8.1.1. GV Primary Schedule

Each applications process begins two years ahead of the commencement of *Investigator's* annual research schedule. When the assessment phase is complete, the most highly ranked applications are considered within logistical constraints to develop the Primary research schedule. The Primary schedule may also include Transit voyages which are introduced to geographically link the preferred sailing and arrival ports of research voyages.

Primary schedule applications are assessed by the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and National Benefit Assessment Panel (NBAP) who make recommendations to the MNF Steering Committee (MNF SC) for final approval.

For a detailed overview of this process please visit the [MNF Website](#).

8.1.2. Supplementary Call

Once the Primary schedule is approved by the MNF Steering Committee, a Supplementary call for applications is made to fill spare berths that may be available on Primary research voyages and to populate Transit voyages. In addition to the core criteria for GV outlined above, the selection criteria for Supplementary applications also include training/educational opportunities and operational fit with the existing schedule. Once the Supplementary process is completed the final annual GV research schedule is released.

Supplementary applications are assessed by the Supplementary Scheduling Committee (SSC) who make recommendations to the MNF SC for final approval.

For a detailed overview of this process please visit the [MNF Website](#).

8.1.3. Piggyback Proposals

In the event any remaining spare capacity is identified in the GV research schedule, Piggyback proposals can be considered at any time and require approval by the MNF and Chief Scientist for the relevant voyage. Further details on the sea time grants process can be found on the [MNF Website](#).

8.2. Type 2 & 3 use

8.2.1. UFV Scheduling

Proposals for UFV are open year round. *Investigator's* annual 180 day GV schedule is generally available 12 months ahead of the commencement of each schedule, therefore UFV proposals lodged ahead of the MNF GV scheduling process will have greater opportunity of being integrated into *Investigator's* research schedule. In some circumstances the GV schedule may be revised to accommodate UFV proposals with specific timing constraints. However, any re-scheduling will be at the discretion of the MNF and will take into consideration logistical, geographical, resourcing and other factors noting the GV schedule takes priority.

UFV proposals are assessed as required by the SSC who make a recommendation to the MNF Director for final approval. The MNF Director may, at their discretion, consult with the MNF Steering Committee regarding approval of UFV applications that have implications for the GV schedule. In some cases, UFV applications received prior to release of the GV schedule may be offered sea time subject to any future amendments required by the MNF to accommodate the outcome of the GV scheduling process.

8.2.2. UFV Supplementary and Piggyback Opportunities

UFV proposals are not eligible to apply for Supplementary or Piggyback proposals on any voyage (GV or UFV). However, UFV proposals which allow the utilisation of any spare berths on the vessel for Supplementary or Piggyback projects for type 1 use will achieve a higher score for national benefit as part of the merit assessment. This relates to the additional opportunities for research, educational and/or training that would be available to Supplementary or Piggyback applicants.

8.2.3. Prioritisation of UFV applications

The prioritisation of UFV will occur according to the order proposals are received by the MNF. In the event that the MNF receives a number of mutually exclusive or competing UFV proposals, they will be prioritised according to those receiving a higher score for national benefit and lower risk rating. All other factors being equal, proposals from Australian based applicants will be favoured over international applicants.

On receiving an offer of sea time, UFV applicants will be required to enter a Voyage Agreement and pay a deposit to secure their voyage.

9. Voyage Opportunities

To make an enquiry regarding voyage opportunities, please contact Ron Plaschke, MNF Director on:

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