

## COMMUNIQUÉ

### MARINE NATIONAL FACILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

#### MEETING #70: 26–27 April 2012

The Marine National Facility (MNF) Steering Committee recently met in Hobart to prepare for the arrival of the new MNF research vessel, RV *Investigator*. Issues considered by the committee included a range of new policies, including the assessment criteria for MNF proposals as well as *Investigator's* 2013-14 commissioning year schedule.

It is an exciting time for blue-water marine research and the Steering Committee is following the building of *Investigator* with great interest.

*Investigator* will greatly enhance our capability to carry out marine research, increasing the time we can stay at sea into areas down to the ice edge and being able to accommodate up to 40 scientific participants on multi-disciplinary research programs.

To manage these changes in preparation for the arrival of *Investigator*, all Marine National Facility operational processes are being reviewed and upgraded. This will firstly become evident through the application for sea time process.

The Steering Committee regards these changes as important to ensure the effective, efficient, and safe use of the new vessel.

#### **Commissioning year schedule for 2013-2014**

The Steering Committee would like to thank all proponents who participated in the Expressions of Interest process and those who subsequently submitted applications for the commissioning year period. There has been considerable interest and the quality of applications is very high.

The Steering Committee has now approved a draft commissioning year schedule for *Investigator* in 2013-2014. For the period ahead, this schedule will remain in draft to allow for any unplanned developments with the *Investigator* build, delivery and commissioning projects.

Commissioning year applicants have been advised if their application has progressed to the next stage as part of the draft commissioning year schedule, keeping in mind that any significant unplanned events may require the draft schedule to be revised and other applications which are not currently scheduled to be reconsidered.

#### **Application process for 2014-2015 and beyond**

The call for sea time applications will now occur in July, several months earlier than previous calls. So a call for applications for the 2014-15 research schedule will be made in July 2012 and applications for multi-year proposals of up to three years duration will be accepted.

Other changes in the sea time applications process have been driven by the additional complexity of developing a research schedule which will seek to fully utilise the vessel by:

- Having multiple and multi-disciplinary teams onboard.
- Utilising any additional berths available for student training and opportunistic science.
- Extending the range down to the ice edge.
- Maximising the vessel's increased operational days.

The first stage of *Investigator's* application process will include a requirement to submit a brief pre-proposal, prior to submitting a full application at a later stage. These pre-proposals will be posted on the MNF website so that opportunities for collaboration can be identified and explored by all applicants prior to submitting a final application. The final applications will then be peer reviewed and assessed through the MNF's usual Scientific Advisory Committee process. The outcome of this first stage process will be the development of a primary research schedule, which will provide the basis for the second and final stage.

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Given the step change in research capability made possible by *Investigator*, the second stage of the process is designed to utilise any unused vessel capability appearing in the primary schedule. This is expected to take the form of transit voyages and spare berths on primary schedule voyages. The criteria used to assess second stage applications will include opportunities for student training, opportunistic scientific work and “operational fit” with primary schedule voyages. As the integration of the first and second stage processes is expected to result in some degree of change to the primary schedule, offers of sea time to successful applicants will not be made until the Steering Committee has approved the second stage research schedule.

**National priorities**

The Australian Government’s Innovation Agenda, Science Frameworks and the National Research Priorities which are currently under review, will provide the basis for assessing national benefit when sea time applications are considered.

As the Research Priorities evolve they will be reflected in the applications process and it will be important for researchers to align their proposals accordingly.

**Multi-level medicals**

*Investigator* will be operating down to the ice edge and in more remote regions than RV *Southern Surveyor*.

The higher risk profile associated with voyages in remote regions will require more detailed medical screening to be undertaken than for “near-mainland” voyages.

**Collaboration**

National and international collaboration has been an important element of the Marine National Facility’s activities.

The Steering Committee seeks to further enhance collaboration, particularly with its activities in the Southern Ocean.

**Future Research Vessel (FRV) Project**

The Steering Committee would like to acknowledge the efforts of CSIRO, Teekay Holdings Australia (Project Managers), Sembawang Shipyards in Singapore, RALion (Robert Allan Ltd and Alion Science and Technology) from USA and Canada and all the organisations supporting this initiative in Australia and overseas. This is a complex project involving many people across many organisations.

The support for *Investigator* from the marine research community in Australia is to be commended and is very much appreciated.

**Prof Richard Arculus**  
**Acting Chairman**  
**Marine National Facility Steering Committee**