

COMMUNIQUÉ

MARINE NATIONAL FACILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING #71: 6-7 September 2012

The Marine National Facility (MNF) Steering Committee met in Hobart on 6–7th September 2012 to consider *Southern Surveyor* operations, progress with the construction of RV *Investigator*, voyage schedule changes, applications for sea time and transitional arrangements arising from the introduction of *Investigator*.

Progress with the construction of *Investigator*

Building a new research vessel is an exciting experience and has resulted in a high level of interest in the progress reports on *Investigator* blog. If you have not subscribed to the blog to see what is happening then visit <http://csirofrvblog.com/>.



Research vessels are purpose built vessels of considerable complexity due to the specialised work they need to carry out. As with any large and complex project, delays are always possible due to unforeseen issues arising during the design and build stages. For *Investigator*, one such issue emerged where a safety concern required re-design of the vessel's back deck arrangement. Whereas many design adjustments can be accommodated within the existing schedule, the back deck re-design required significantly more time to address and has resulted in a three month delay in the delivery of *Investigator*, which is now expected to be delivered to CSIRO in Singapore at the end of August 2013.

This has unfortunately changed some of the commissioning year arrangements. The Marine National Facility has been working through the flow on implications which also impact the timing of removing *Southern Surveyor* from service. As a result, vessel schedules are currently in second draft and remain subject to further developments. For Principal Investigators, some changes to planned commissioning year voyages have been required.

Public tours on *Southern Surveyor* in Darwin

Southern Surveyor will be open for public tours in Darwin in mid October. The MNF is working with local and interstate research organisations to provide an opportunity for locals to see what marine research is all about on an ocean going research vessel. There will also be a range of media activities planned to coincide with the public tours.

2014-15 application process goes smoothly

Operating the Marine National Facility is not only about today but what is happening several years in advance. The MNF's 2014-15 application process for sea time on *Investigator* opened on 9 July with a call for pre-proposals and applications for sea time.

The pre-proposal process involved submitting a short summary of the proposed voyage, with all pre-proposals then shared amongst applicants to facilitate scientific collaborations. The process went smoothly, with only a few points of clarification required. The MNF has noted the feedback and would welcome any further comments that would help to improve the process for next year.

Applications for sea time in 2014-15 closed on 24 August 2012. Twenty-eight applications for sea time were received representing over 836 days of ship time. Overall an excellent result!

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As this was the first call for full applications for *Investigator* following the 2013-14 commissioning year applications process, the MNF carried out a compliance check on each application received to provide applicants the opportunity to respond to any compliance issues raised. This also assisted the MNF to understand if there were any problems in completing the application for sea time which could be addressed for the next round.

Compliant applications will now be externally assessed, then ranked by the MNF's independent Scientific Advisory Committee to allow development of *Investigator's* primary schedule for 2014-15.

Once Steering Committee has approved the primary schedule, there will be a call for Supplementary applications for sea time early in 2013. The Supplementary process will be used to fill unused capacity on voyages and transits which become available in the primary schedule, with the final 2014-15 schedule being announced in mid 2013 before the call for sea time in 2015-16 is made.

With *Investigator* bringing a step change in ability to perform scientific work, especially down to the ice edge, the scientific community has clearly demonstrated the demand for the new MNF vessel.

Partners support Marine National Facility

The Marine National Facility is principally funded by the Australian Government to support marine research in the national interest. The facility is available to all Australian research organisations and their international collaborators.

Significant in-kind and capital support also comes from partner organisations, particularly in the form of management support through the various governance committees associated with the MNF and the supply of equipment to be used on the vessel.

An important example is the contribution CSIRO makes each year for capital expenditure. This may be equipment identified by users as being important for marine research, upgrades to existing equipment to provide added functionality and to cover loss or damage, and replacement of equipment at the end of its useful life.

In 2011-2012, CSIRO provided \$252,000 for MNF. This included a lowered Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (LADCP), in-situ ultraviolet spectrophotometer, expendable bathy thermograph system (XBT), fluorometer, salinometer, underway acoustic Doppler current profiler (ADCP) and various replacement parts and spares. Most of this equipment will be transferred to *Investigator* when *Southern Surveyor* is removed from service.

The Marine National Facility Steering Committee acknowledges this important contribution and greatly values the support provided by CSIRO and its partner organisations.

Upgrading operations to meet the new challenges

The Marine National Facility is undergoing many changes in preparation for the arrival of *Investigator*. While our current systems are suited to *Southern Surveyor*, *Investigator* will create new challenges. With the need to upgrade systems to meet these new challenges, it is also an ideal time to review MNF operations.

This process has already started with new policies and a new application system for sea time which will later go online. All MNF procedures and voyage documentation are being reviewed and internet services will be upgraded.

The Steering Committee is also keen to improve the discoverability and accessibility of data, samples and publications from voyages. Work is underway to identify more effective ways of achieving this in conjunction with partner organisations. Progress has been ongoing, particularly by making data products easier to discover and access through the Australian Ocean Data Network (AODN) portal.

The MNF needs to build on this work to maximise opportunities for research outcomes from the investment made by the Australian Government.

Prof Richard Arculus
Acting Chairman
Marine National Facility Steering Committee