

COMMUNIQUÉ

MARINE NATIONAL FACILITY STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING #76: 20 February 2015

The 76th Marine National Facility Steering Committee (MNFSC) meeting was held in Hobart on 20 February, just days after *Investigator* returned from a very successful cold water sea trial in the Southern Ocean to 65 degrees south. With the commissioning of the vessel well underway, Steering Committee discussed a range of strategic issues such as the development of a new business model to maximise use of *Investigator*, options for increasing student training on MNF voyages and changes to the applications process to ensure that all science undertaken through the MNF has more clearly defined national benefit. Here I provide an overview of these discussions, and highlight the key actions and activities that will be undertaken by the MNF in the future.

Investigator progress

The MNF officially took delivery of the *Investigator* on Monday 4th August 2014. Since that time the vessel has completed a period of scientific equipment installation and commenced a program of sea trials.



These trials have provided the first opportunity to test the full range of scientific equipment on the vessel and develop safe work procedures for future scientific voyages. During the sea trials to date, both the crew and scientists alike have been impressed with the stability of the vessel in rough seas and the effectiveness of the dynamic positioning system for

holding station, thus providing a safe and effective operational platform for scientific activities at sea. As expected, the sea trials have also uncovered a number of minor issues for repair or improvement, most of which have already been addressed through the warranty arrangements. The MNF is currently focussed on preparations for *Investigator's* first scientific research voyage to deploy deep sea Southern Ocean moorings in March 2015.

MNF scheduling

On 26th November 2014 the MNF publicly released a three year primary voyage schedule for 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17. Following the release of these schedules the MNF called for Supplementary Applications on 28 November 2014 which have since been assessed and considered by MNFSC. The outcomes of these deliberations will be made publicly available in the near future on the MNF website: (www.mnf.csiro.au).

National benefit of MNF research

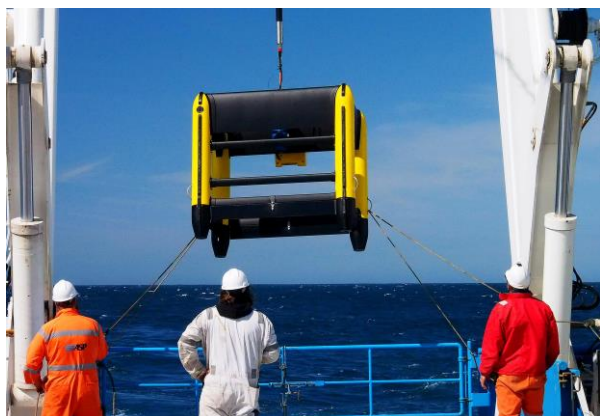
The MNF is a keystone element of the nation's research infrastructure, and as such, must be operated as efficiently as possible and in the best interest of the nation. To this end the MNFSC considered improved approaches for assessing the national benefit of primary applications for sea time. We want to ensure that scientific research undertaken through the MNF provides key information to government, industry and other stakeholders to directly underpin the conservation of our marine estate and the growth and sustainability of ocean-based industries for future generations. To achieve this, MNFSC will trial a new approach to assess the national benefit of applications via the establishment of a panel of key MNF end-users, including government and industry representatives.



Under MNFSC guidance, the MNF ships group will develop this process over the coming months to be trialled during the next call for primary applications for sea time later this year.

Calls for applications for sea time

Given the increased capacity and capability of *Investigator*, demand for sea time among the Australian and international marine research community has seen unprecedented highs. To maximise the utility of *Investigator*, MNFSC considered a range of options for improving the efficiency of the MNF applications process to ensure that the maximum number of highly ranked voyages could be undertaken. This included canvassing options such as amending the frequency of calls for applications for sea time, for example, by maintaining an annual call for single year primary and supplementary applications for sea time, while only calling for multi-year applications on a triennial basis. In considering the options, it was agreed the MNF would consult with the Australian marine scientific community prior to a final decision being made. Opportunities to provide feedback will be available via the MNF website in the near future.



MNF Business Model

Investigator has been designed for full-year operations and the Federal Government has encouraged the exploration of opportunities to utilise spare capacity around the MNF research schedule. MNFSC has considered a range of options to maximise the use of *Investigator* in Australia's national interest which will be announced when further developed.

Student training at sea

The MNF is an active facilitator of developing the next generation of Australian blue-water researchers by providing training opportunities, previously by the Next Wave Program and now through the MNF's Supplementary Application process. The MNF has also been invited to participate in a new national

cross-institutional endeavour to develop and establish a national postgraduate level sea-going training program. Led by Macquarie University and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science, the program aims to provide Australian marine post-graduate students with relevant experience and training on blue-water research vessels by establishing a national standard syllabus, with the incorporation of an AMSA approved sea safety and survival training certification. MNFSC has agreed to support this endeavour by participating in the pilot program through, for example, providing one dedicated transit voyage per annum for three years for the program. This will commence in the 2017-2018 voyage schedule, which is yet to be developed.

In conclusion

With the much anticipated arrival in Hobart of *Investigator* taking place in September 2014, the period since the last Steering Committee meeting has been very busy and exciting for the MNF. The MNF and its partners have risen to the challenge to ensure the successful and safe commissioning of the vessel. On behalf of the MNFSC, I would like to thank the MNF Ships Group, ASP Ship Management and all of those involved thus far.

The upcoming six months will continue to be a busy period for the MNF and our partners. Of particular note is the first scientific research voyage to be undertaken in March 2015, a new call for primary applications for 2017-18 and further trial voyages to finalise the commissioning of *Investigator*.

Dr Ian Poiner
Chair

Marine National Facility Steering Committee

