

COMMUNIQUÉ

MARINE NATIONAL FACILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING #78: Friday, 26 February 2016

The 78th Marine National Facility Steering Committee (MNFSC) meeting was held in Hobart on 26 February. Steering Committee discussed two strategic issues with implications for both the operation of the national facility and the assessment of MNF applications for sea time.

The first is a proposal to introduce a National Benefit Assessment Panel to improve the assessment of national benefit in the MNF applications process.

The second is a new policy document, Principles of Access to *Investigator*, which articulates the types of use *Investigator* can be engaged in and how proposals will be treated.

In addition, Steering Committee reviewed schedule options for single year applications in 2017-18 and multi-year applications from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

An overview of these discussions and key activities that will be undertaken by the MNF are included below.

National Benefit Assessment Panel

As a keystone element of the nation's research infrastructure, the MNF must be operated in the nation's best interests. To this end, additional questions were added to the papers in the recent application round to provide more information on national benefit, including how science teams intend to engage the end-users in their research. After feedback from the SAC at their meeting in November 2015, further amendments to the application papers have been made to address suggested improvements.

Furthermore, MNFSC has agreed an improved approach to assessing the national benefit of MNF applications through the establishment of a new sub-committee comprised of the Chairs of the MNFSC, SAC, the National Marine Science Committee and other independent members.

This National Benefit Assessment Panel (NBAP) will be convened for the 2018-19 applications process, with the aim of assessing the extent to which research proposed provides key information to government, industry and other stakeholders.

To assist the marine community to understand these changes, the MNF will host a series of information workshops over the coming three months, with times and dates to be communicated via the MNF blog (<http://blog.csiro.au/investigator/>). The MNF will also produce a video communication, accompanied by a Q&A and FAQ page to be published on the MNF website for those unable to attend a workshop.

Principles of Access to *Investigator*

Spare capacity available within *Investigator's* current 180 day research schedule provides opportunities to undertake additional research at sea in the national interest. MNF has recently delivered two research charters to scientific teams undertaking research in the Great Australian Bight which have increased *Investigator's* utilisation to 240 days in 2015-16. To assist with future charter enquiries, the MNF has developed a policy named 'Principles of access to *Investigator*'. The policy separates access opportunities into 2 streams with different eligibility requirements:

1. **Granted Voyages (GV)** – Australian researchers and their international collaborators that successfully apply for GV in the 180 day schedule.
2. **User Funded Voyages (UFV)** – all other proposals including international.



The Principles of Access to *Investigator* describe how receipt and prioritisation of proposals from each access stream will be conducted and the pricing principles which apply to UFV. Please note the GV schedule has priority and there are no changes to the ongoing GV applications process arising other than the aforementioned improvement in the assessment of national benefit.

The Principles of Access to *Investigator* will be published on the MNF website in due course

MNF scheduling

On Monday, 20 July 2015 the MNF issued a call for applications for single year applications in 2017-18 and multi-year applications from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

The SAC convened in Hobart on the 26-27 November to assess the 25 applications received, equating to approximately 752 days at sea, including 9 multi-year applications. MNF then considered the SAC rankings in the context of operational, geographical and temporal constraints and developed a number of primary voyage schedule options for 2017-18.

The MNFSC reviewed the options and approved a 2017-18 primary schedule which be published on the MNF website after offers of sea time are accepted by applicants. The Supplementary applications process for 2017-18 can then commence.

Voyage highlights

The MNFSC were briefed on the success of the two recent research charters to the Great Australian Bight (GAB). The first, sponsored by CSIRO as part of a collaboration with Chevron, aimed to understand geological processes since Australia's separation from Antarctica and the resulting benthic communities that currently reside there. The second involved a collaboration with BP which also visited the GAB as part of the GAB Research Program involving SARDI, University of Adelaide, Flinders University and CSIRO. This voyage aimed to characterise key elements of marine ecosystems across the GAB.

Given the challenges of accommodating research charter requirements with the MNF schedule, combined with operating a range of complex equipment on a single voyage on a new platform, this is a very good result for this type of industry collaboration on *Investigator*. The MNF will work to capitalise on these experiences to explore further opportunities for utilising spare capacity on the ship.

Investigator has also successfully completed the first remote research voyage to Heard and MacDonal Islands to study Southern Ocean volcanism and productivity. Challenged with severe weather, cold conditions and a medivac, the science team nonetheless enjoyed major achievements in this beautiful but remote region of Australia's marine estate.

Several quotes from various Chief Scientists include:

"It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be chief scientist on this voyage and the MNF and ASP should be congratulated for creating an environment so this is possible".

"The first thing to say is HURRAY! Its so much better than Southern Surveyor, and we are VERY VERY GRATEFUL".

"RV Investigator is a remarkable vessel. Our international scientists on board, some with extensive experience on European, US and South American vessels, place this vessel in one of the top few in the world".

In conclusion

The continued support by the marine science community for *Investigator* as demonstrated by the consistently high number, diversity and quality of applications for sea time is very encouraging. *Investigator* will also continue to offer enhanced training and development opportunities for early career scientists and students, building on the MNFs commitment to develop the next generation of blue water marine researchers in Australia's national interest.

Dr Ian Poiner
Chair, MNF Steering Committee