



Communiqué

Marine National Facility Steering Committee

Meeting #101

The 101st meeting of the Marine National Facility Steering Committee (MNFSC) was held in Hobart on 24-25 November 2025.

Message from Steering Committee Chair – Ms Anne-Marie Lansdown

The 101st meeting of the Marine National Facility (MNF) Steering Committee was held in Hobart while research vessel (RV) *Investigator* was wrapping up its deep-sea biodiversity assessment of the Coral Sea Marine Park.

The meeting's primary focus was to discuss and endorse the 2027-28 RV *Investigator* Primary Voyage Schedule, as well as confirm membership appointments and reappointments for both the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) and National Benefit Advisory Committee (NBAC).



The meeting also discussed the MNF Indigenous Engagement Framework, a regional approach to allocating sea time, Technology and Innovation Advisory Group (TIAG) activities, MNF capabilities, and enjoyed presentations from Parks Australia and the MNF's Geophysical Survey and Mapping (GSM) team.

Approved voyage schedule

The Committee endorsed the 2027-28 voyage schedule based on applications received in the 2025 call for sea time.

The key objective of the MNF is to conduct the right research activity onboard the ship. Both RAC and NBAC reviewers dedicate their time to considering the applications with respect to their research quality and benefit to the nation. As well as supporting applications for scheduling, the RAC and NBAC recommend any conditions that applicants need to meet to improve the impact of the research conducted onboard.

The announcement of the draft Primary Voyage Schedule for 2027-28 will be undertaken in early 2026 alongside the opening of the Supplementary Application Call for 2027-28, which seeks to maximise use of the vessel's capacity in that voyage year.

The Committee also recognises and greatly appreciates the contribution made by the 23 experts from Australia and internationally that make up the RAC and NBAC. Their detailed reviews, discussions and decisions support an application assessment process essential to ensuring that *RV Investigator* enables high quality research of national benefit.

Indigenous Engagement Framework

The Committee considered and endorsed the proposed plan for an MNF Indigenous Engagement Framework aimed at strengthening collaboration with Traditional Owners (TOs) in relation to *RV Investigator's* marine science activities on Sea Country. This initiative seeks to establish best practice engagement standards and further Indigenous engagement within the national marine research space.

The Committee acknowledged resource constraints, the need for CSIRO-wide support, and the importance of involving researchers directly in engagement activities. Broader considerations encompassed truth-telling, historical collections, data sovereignty, and alignment with CSIRO's whole-of-organisation approach. The Committee reviewed risks and mitigation strategies and made recommendations to refine the approach to the Framework.

The Committee agreed that MNF should define engagement standards, build organisational capability for Indigenous engagement, and adopt Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a benchmark for best practice. Strategic partnerships, including with Parks Australia, will underpin implementation.

Regional strategy

The Committee endorsed the concept of regional campaigns, contingent on extensive consultation with the user community. This approach would focus ship time within specific regions during the schedule to achieve appropriate coverage of the Australian marine estate over a 3-5 year period. Via the Supplementary pathway, a regional approach was highlighted as a way to achieve outcomes more efficiently, broaden the ship-user base, and increase project delivery, while also offering shorter voyages and improved use of transits.

The Committee noted the need to define 'regional' for the identification of priority areas, and robust justification for the approach, particularly in relation to demand, resource allocation, and alignment with funding cycles. Broader considerations included community engagement, regional champions, and opportunities for Indigenous-led research. It was agreed that further consultation with the user community is essential before implementation, and the matter will be revisited following this engagement.

Technology and Innovation Advisory Group and capabilities upgrades

The Committee received an update from the Technology and Innovation Advisory Group (TIAG) on the process for prioritising new capability investments. A recent ongoing survey has captured research community input on desired equipment and capabilities, with TIAG providing prioritisation. Funding is available for capability uplift over the next two years, alongside development of a five-year strategic capital expenditure plan. Discussion focused on balancing ownership versus access to infrastructure, exploring autonomous systems, and aligning with national priorities such as net zero. Considerations include technical feasibility, capital and operational costs, vessel limitations, and the potential to collaborate on new capability with other agencies. Suggestions included shared pools of autonomous vehicles and hosting an industry day to engage stakeholders.

The Committee commends this continual work of calling for advice and prioritising user-community future needs through TIAG to be responsive to user needs and feedback.

Take the Survey here - [What new marine research capability do you require to meet your needs? - CSIRO](#)

Presentation – Geophysical Survey and Mapping

The Committee welcomed Matt Boyd, Team Leader for Geophysical Surveying and Mapping (GSM), who presented the 10-year evolution of delivering the acoustic suite of instrumentation to research voyages and the continuous improvement to best practice. His team's expertise extends beyond multibeam mapping to include sediment and sub-surface feature identification, reducing coring risks and supporting broader operations. Collaboration with oceanographers has strengthened, integrating seafloor data into ocean property studies, while delivering high-quality, reusable geospatial datasets for precise navigation and future research.

Discussion highlighted the value and reuse of collected data, current limitations, and future needs, including automated processing of water column acoustic data. International initiatives, such as the backscatter working group, aim to enhance dataset utilisation. The Committee commended the team's world-leading quality and passion, emphasising the importance of continued investment in automation and expertise to sustain long-term capability growth.

“The RV Investigator’s GSM team is, in my view, truly outstanding, and is performing at a level comparable with – and in many respects ahead of – teams on international research vessels despite operating with a team three to four times smaller.”

Dr Vanessa Lucieer, Outgoing MNFSC User Community representative, Chair of Scientific Steering Committee of Seamap Australia, and ship user.

Presentation – Parks Australia

RV Investigator continues to deliver data that supports national priorities.

The Committee welcomed Darren Phillips and Tristan Verhoeff from Parks Australia's Marine and Island Parks Branch, who presented on the Gascoyne Marine Park project and the value of

partnerships developed during voyages. The voyage on RV *Investigator*, IN2022_V09, was led by CSIRO in partnership with Parks Australia and the Western Australian Museum. The presentation highlighted the scientific significance of specimens collected in marine parks during RV *Investigator* voyages, including discoveries of new species, and discussed the minimal impact of trawl nets compared to the substantial research benefits. Such findings inform park management decisions and shape permitted activities.

Discussion focused on aligning applications with Parks Australia objectives, improving letters of support, and ensuring MNF attribution in communications. Tristan also shared insights from their graduate rotation and a passion for marine science, particularly invertebrates and genetics.

2026 application calls

The 2026 Primary and Supplementary Application Calls invite applications for fully funded grants of sea time on RV *Investigator* in the 2028-29 (Primary) and 2027-28 (Supplementary) financial years. With our Stream 1 Partners, the MNF will deliver webinars to describe their respective priorities and the opportunities for the research community to co-design projects with the end user directly. Separate webinars will be delivered for each priority partner, commencing on 23 February 2026.

All applications are to be completed and submitted in our online application portal, [MFP](#) (Marine Facilities Planning), by the **application period closing date**:

- **2028-29 Primary applications - 19 May 2026 at 11:59 pm (AEST)**
- **2027-28 Supplementary applications - 11 March 2026 at 11:59 pm (AEDT).**

If you're considering applying, it is strongly recommended that you contact the MNF beforehand to discuss your project proposal, requirements and equipment needs. Early engagement ensures your proposal is well-prepared and aligned with MNF capabilities. Please contact mnf@csiro.au

Steering Committee Membership: farewells and welcomes

MNF Steering Committee farewelled two members, with Dr Vanessa Lucieer and Mr Jason Mundy both coming to the end of their second and final term. Their contributions have been immense, and we share our sincere thanks for their participation in this important process.

Dr Nerilie Abram joins MNF Steering Committee as the recently appointed Australian Antarctic Division Chief Scientist. Many thanks to Dr Rhonda Bartley for holding this position for the last 12 months.

New User Community and Government representatives will be appointed by the CSIRO Board and will attend MNFSC Meeting #102 in July 2026.

Name	Role
Ms Anne-Marie Lansdown	Chair – Independent
Mr Greg Hood	Member – Government
Dr Vanessa Lucieer	Member – User Community (outgoing)

Mr Jason Mundy	Member – Government (outgoing)
Mr Keld Knudsen	Member – Industry
Dr Elizabeth (Beth) Woods	Member – Independent
Dr Nerile Abram	Ex officio – Australian Antarctic Division
Dr Lyndon Llewellyn	Ex officio – National Marine Science Committee
Dr Rob Hough	Ex officio – CSIRO Delegate
Prof Alex Brown	Observer – CSIRO Board
Ms Toni Moate	Observer – MNF Director
Prof Peter Steinberg	Observer – RAC Chair
Mr Peter Cochran	Observer – NBAC Chair

Anne-Marie Lansdown

Chair, MNF Steering Committee