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Australia's national science agency,
on behalf of the nation

MNF Operations Rolling Plan 2026

Covering schedules 2025-26 to 2029-30

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Acknowledgement of Country

The CSIRO Marine National Facility and CSIRO research vessel (RV) *Investigator* call the shores of Nipaluna/Hobart their home. The Traditional Owners of this area were the Muwinina people. None of the Muwinina people survived the impact of European colonisation.

Today, the Aboriginal community of this area is made up of the Palawa people, who are custodians of Lutruwita/Tasmania. The Palawa people have an island culture, living, using and caring for its land and waterways. They are skilled boat builders and navigators of Lutruwita/Tasmania's inland and coastal waters. These waterways hold spiritual connections, stories and sacred pathways which are maintained by the Palawa people to this day.

From its home in Nipaluna/Hobart, RV *Investigator* journeys across Australia's vast marine estate and the wider region. CSIRO acknowledges the Traditional Owners of all the seas, waters and lands on which we live and work. We acknowledge their continuing connection to their culture and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We recognise the wealth of knowledge that has been continually maintained and continues to be created by our nation's first marine scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians.

View our [vision towards reconciliation](#).



1 Introduction

The Marine National Facility (MNF) released its decadal strategy, *MNF 2030*, to ensure that access to Australia’s dedicated marine research capability is broad and equitable, and that the research it enables is aligned with Australia’s national research priorities and in support of its mission:

To deliver safe, efficient and excellent marine and atmospheric research, aligned with national priorities, to address Australia’s grand challenges for society, the economy and the environment.

The primary vehicle for *MNF 2030* implementation is the annual *MNF Operations Rolling Plan* (hereafter known as ‘the Plan’). The Plan is updated annually and released with the call for Primary Applications for sea time on CSIRO research vessel (RV) *Investigator*.

The primary objective of the Plan is to help prospective users effectively engage in MNF processes, including developing and submitting applications for sea time that are aligned with Australia’s national research priorities (Figure 1).

The Plan provides the following for each schedule:

- Streams for which applications are sought and any associated allocation targets to guide granting of sea time across the streams
- MNF policy-driven priorities to define the focus for Stream 1 applications

- an overview of operations, research capabilities and investment, and innovation associated with the coming schedules
- annual operational performance targets.

2025-26 to 2029-30 schedule overview

The 2026 application call is designed to confirm MNF’s forward planning and outline research activities through to the 2029-30 financial year schedule. A key focus is the delivery of the application call that will determine the RV *Investigator* schedule for the year 2028-29.

In 2029-30, RV *Investigator* will undergo routine dry docking as part of its 5-yearly special service schedule. The first half of the schedule (July to December 2029) will be substantially allocated to this complex yet critical maintenance activity, reducing the days available for research projects in the 2029-30 schedule.

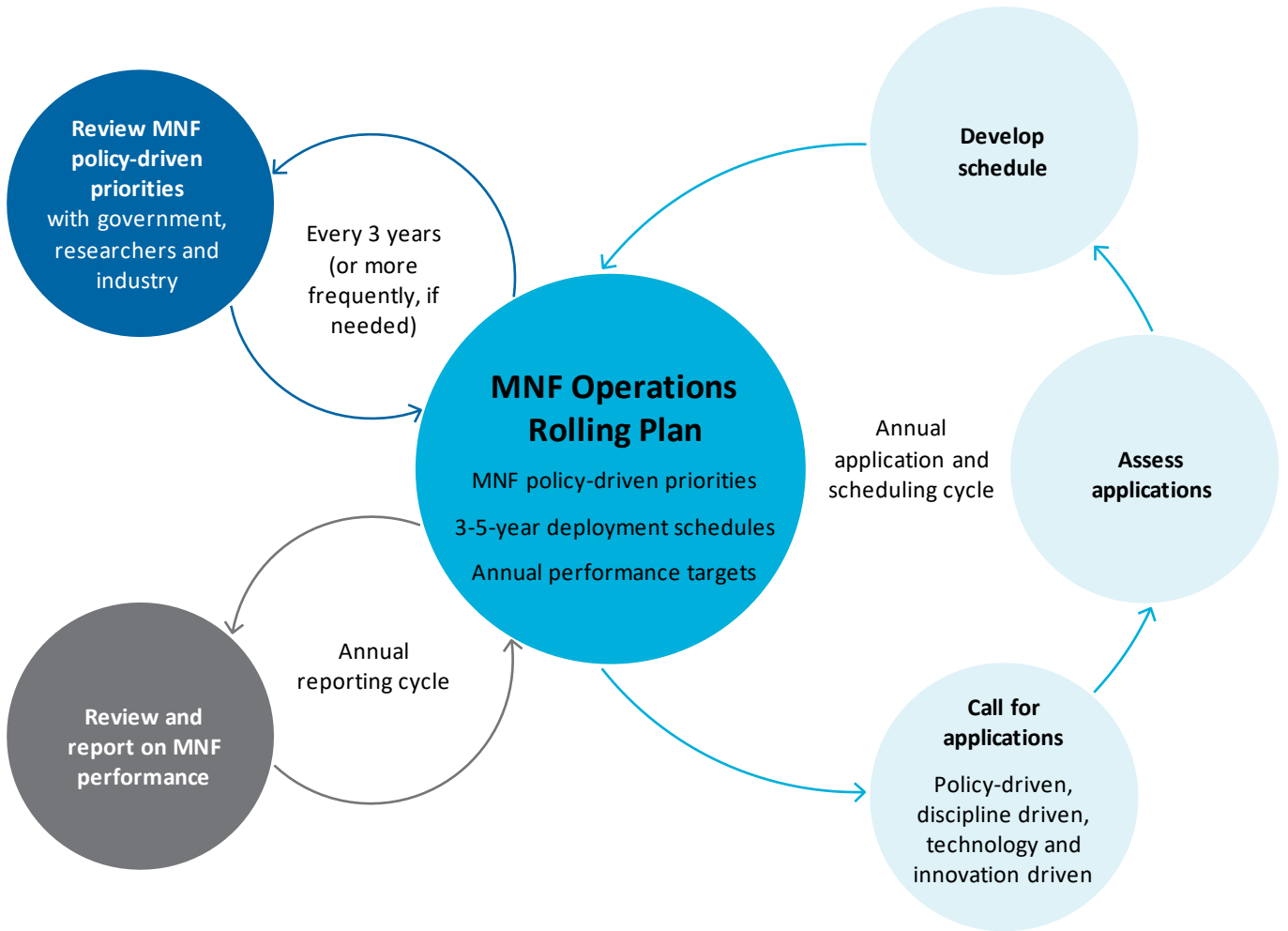


Figure 1 MNF Operations Rolling Plan in action.

2 2026 call for applications

Applications are for projects to be undertaken between July 2028 and June 2029. Allocation of sea time is subject to operational and funding availability.

In some cases, sea time additional to these days might be offered on another fit-for-purpose platform.

Interested in applying?

We're here to help. If you're considering applying, we strongly recommend [contacting us](#) beforehand to discuss your project requirements and equipment needs, and learn more about the scientific services, capabilities, and support we provide. Early engagement ensures your proposal is well-prepared and aligned with MNF capabilities.

Please contact the MNF at:

mnf@csiro.au

To receive the latest MNF news and updates, including when application calls for sea time are made, subscribe to the MNF mailing list at:

www.csiro.au/mnf

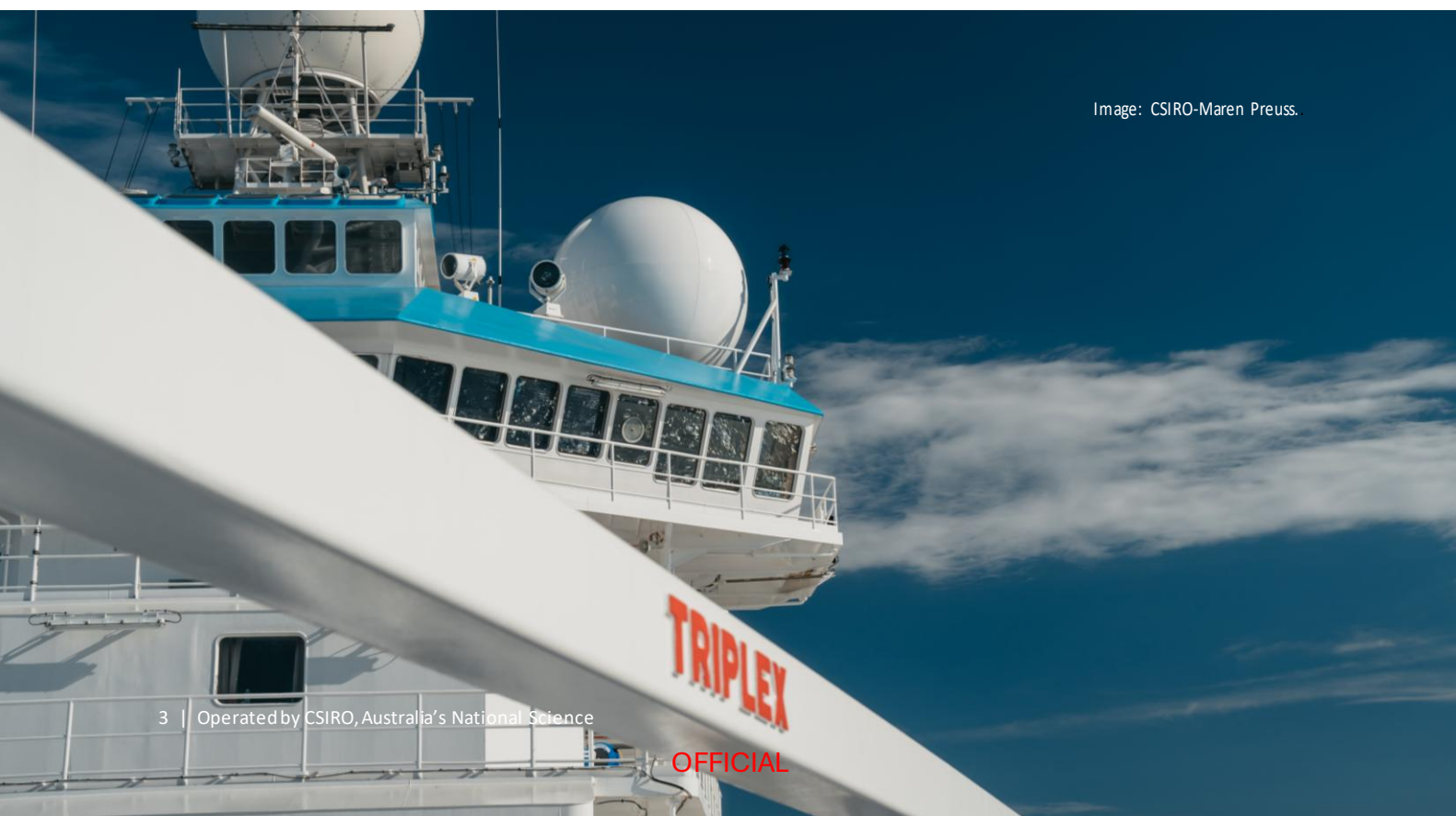


Image: CSIRO-Maren Preuss.

3 Streams of access

Under the *MNF 2030* strategy, the MNF offers multiple Streams of access for applications to reflect the breadth of needs and demands of the Australian research community and to encourage new users.

The MNF invites applications for sea time under five Streams:

Stream 1: Policy-driven research

Stream 2: Discipline-driven proposals

Stream 3: Strategic partnerships

Stream 4: Technology and innovation proposals

Stream 5: User-funded research

Application assessment

All applications, irrespective of Stream, are assessed against two merit principles:

1. Research Quality, assessed by the MNF Research Advisory Committee (RAC)
2. Research Benefit, assessed by the MNF National Benefit Advisory Committee (NBAC).

The MNF Steering Committee take advice from the two advisory committees and strike a balance across the Streams of access for each schedule.

Full details of the MNF assessment criteria and process, and guidance for filling out applications, can be found at:

csiro.au/en/about/facilities-collections/MNF/Apply-for-sea-time

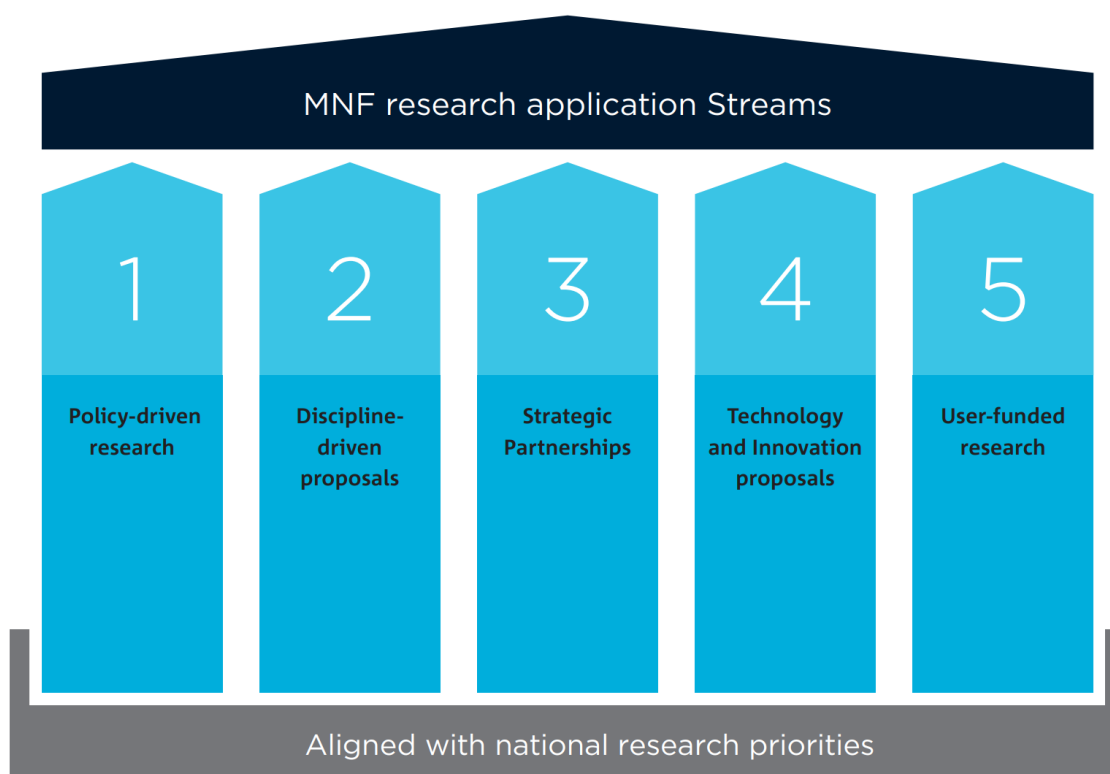




Image: CSIRO-Max McGuire.

Stream 1: Policy-driven research

Stream 1 supports research projects that directly address MNF policy driven priorities. These priorities are established through consultation with key government and industry end users to identify critical national needs for data, knowledge and research, such as:

- big-picture research questions to underpin national policy development
- a focus on an oceanic region to support sustainable growth of new and emerging industries
- contributions to global research programs of strategic national importance
- establishment of baselines and ongoing monitoring to directly inform government programs and regulation.

The objective of Stream 1 access is to catalyse the co-design of large, multidisciplinary, high impact research projects that are clearly aligned with national priorities (as articulated in Section 4 of this plan). Successful projects will inform and influence public policies and

programs while demonstrating strong research quality.

Projects in this Stream must be developed through a genuine end user co-conception and co-design approach with the Stream 1 end-user. Applicants are required to demonstrate meaningful engagement with end-users to ensure projects address identified priorities, fill relevant knowledge gaps, and deliver outcomes that meet end-user needs.

Applications must clearly articulate what will – and will not – be delivered, the expected research outputs and their intended use, the approach to facilitate uptake, and the anticipated timeframe for benefits to flow to nominated end users.

Accordingly, Stream 1 applications must:

- provide strong evidence of project co-design with the Stream 1 end-user
- clearly demonstrate the multidisciplinary nature of the proposed research
- clearly articulate the rationale for location-based or regionally-focused proposals

- clearly articulate the impact pathway of the research to the end-user
- clearly articulate plans for Indigenous engagement in the project design if the proposal includes research on Sea Country.

For general advice on what makes a strong application for sea time, visit the MNF website at www.csiro.au/mnf

Stream 1 allocation of sea days

With the primary objective of *MNF 2030* to facilitate research that delivers impact to areas of priority for government and the nation, the MNF Steering Committee has set an aspirational target for Stream 1 to encourage uptake of this dedicated avenue for sea-time on RV *Investigator* by the research community, and participation of end-users.

Subject to merit assessment (against the merit criteria of Research Quality and Research Benefit), the MNF Steering Committee will make up to 40 per cent of available days in the 2028–29 schedule available to Stream 1. This is the largest allocation to a single Stream across all five Streams of access.

This creates a significant opportunity for researchers to secure ship time by partnering with an end-user who can clearly demonstrate alignment with national research priorities and national benefit.

The 40 per cent allocation is not intended to be prescriptive and whether it is achieved will depend on the response from the research community and the quality of the proposals received.

This creates a significant opportunity for researchers to secure ship time by partnering with an end-user who can clearly demonstrate alignment with national research priorities and national benefit.

The 40 per cent is not intended to be prescriptive and whether it is achieved will depend on the response from the research community and the quality of the proposals received.

The Policy foci for Stream 1 may change year-on-year, and applicants are expected to address the priority areas.

If you are intending to apply for Stream 1 access in 2028–29, you are strongly encouraged to read Section 4 of this plan and approach the end-users at an early stage of proposal development.

Stream 2: Discipline-driven proposals

Stream 2 is to advance scientific knowledge and promote Australia's science excellence.

Accordingly, Stream 2 is for research projects that address important disciplinary, or multi-disciplinary, research questions of national or international standing that do not directly address priorities specified in other Streams but are directly or indirectly in Australia's national interest.

Successful projects in Stream 2 are expected to significantly advance the understanding of key features or processes in the ocean or atmosphere or Earth system, including human interactions.

Research undertaken through this Stream must be relevant to Australia or address key questions that are in Australia's national interest. Applicants should identify the national information need, policy area or public interests that their research is expected to inform, whether directly or through contributions to global knowledge on which Australia draws for its national interests.

You should identify agencies or sectors, including any relevant international research program in which Australia participates, which you expect to benefit from the research products you will produce. Clearly outline how your research aligns with priorities identified in national strategies (including, but not limited to, the Stream 1 policy-driven priorities in Section 4). Where appropriate, obtain letters of support to demonstrate the anticipated impacts and benefits your research will deliver.

Frontier, fundamental and basic research proposals fall under Stream 2. While the benefit delivered and the application of outputs from these types of proposals may be more difficult to articulate, applicants are required to identify potential next and end-users and

justify outputs. These proposals will need to be highly innovative and have objectives that, if achieved, may radically change the understanding of systems, processes or strategies. Applicants must articulate how the results may potentially influence changes to society, the economy or the environment if hypotheses are proven.

If you are intending to apply for Stream 2 access in 2028–29, you are strongly encouraged to include evidence, such as letters of support, of how your discipline-driven research will be useful for your end-users.

Stream 3: Strategic partnerships

Stream 3 supports publicly funded national programs that require regular access to MNF capabilities for data and sample collection, where deployment of a national research facility is appropriate.

Stream 3 research is expected to involve recurrent deployments over multiple years. The MNF will formalise partnership arrangements with publicly funded programmes seeking to participate in the Stream 3 partnership framework, provided there is capacity and an evident need.

Stream 3 research will need to have demonstrably credible prospects of delivering the outcomes nominated by partner programs directly reflecting the national interests for which they were funded.

Prospective partners should discuss their research requirements with the MNF at an early stage and ahead of merit assessment, to verify that the research is appropriate for a partnership arrangement with the MNF.

Part of the consideration will be the degree of reliance by the program on MNF capabilities.

If you are interested in applying for Stream 3 access in 2028-29, a partnership will need to be established with the program.

You are strongly encouraged to contact the Director, Ship Management Program (MNF), for an initial discussion on eligibility and feasibility.

Andrew Martini

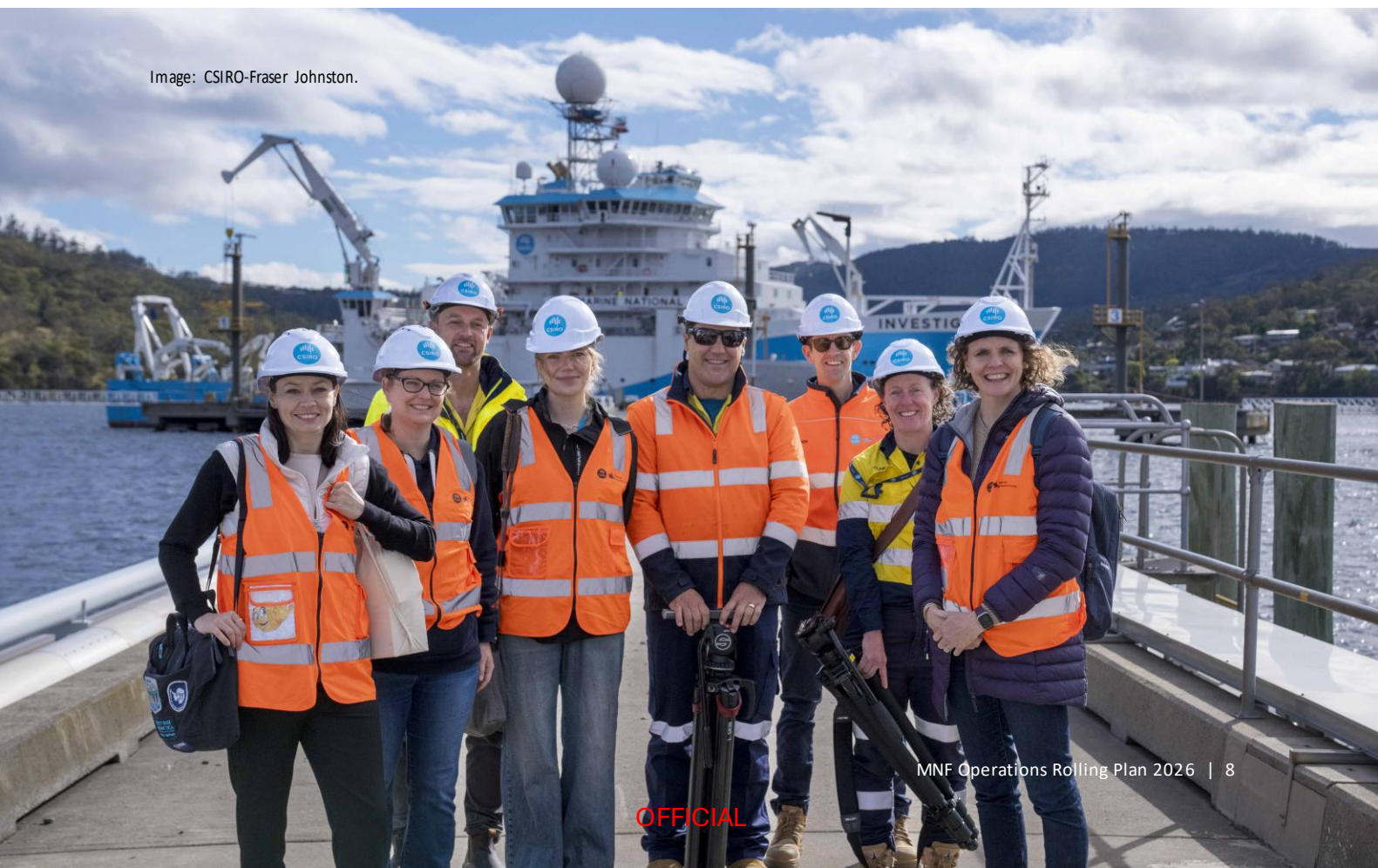
Director

Ship Management Program (MNF)

t +61 3 6232 5479

e andrew.martini@csiro.au

Image: CSIRO-Fraser Johnston.



Stream 4: Technology and innovation proposals

Stream 4 promotes development and innovation in marine research and industry technology.

This Stream is for projects that propose to undertake development and testing of technology that will advance Australia's capability or capacity for research and understanding of its marine environment, atmosphere, or the Earth System and may include societal dimensions.

Successful projects in this Stream will directly address areas in which development of new technologies or improvement of existing technologies will enhance the collection or delivery of research and data or build on Australia's reputation for innovation through contribution to marine industries of national interest. Projects in this space will need to demonstrate why deployment of RV *Investigator* is necessary to achieve the scope.

Stream 4 proposals should clearly identify the technological opportunity that is being addressed and demonstrate how delivering the proposed technology innovation or improvement will be in Australia's national interest.

Demonstration of the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of your project is required to enable an assessment of the risk associated with approving your project, noting that projects that have not reached TRL 4 (trial or validated in laboratory) would generally not be considered for granting of sea time on RV *Investigator*.

Discuss your technology research with those who you expect to use the resulting technology improvements or innovations and verify that the research is likely to fill important technology gaps in their operations, whether in

research, government or industry. You should also discuss how your results will be applied to develop or improve new research products and/or technologies for future use.

The MNF may incorporate successful Stream 4 applications into other ship activities, such as a partner project on a multi-project voyage, or within MNF trial and calibrations activities to ensure efficient and effective use of the platform

If you are intending to apply for Stream 4 access in 2027–28, you are strongly encouraged to contact the Group Leader, Operations (MNF), for an initial discussion on eligibility and feasibility discussion:

Gaby Marino Gomez

Group Leader

Operations (MNF)

m +61 424 043 064

e gaby.marinogomez@csiro.au



Image: CSIRO-Maren Preuss.

Stream 5: User-funded research

Stream 5 applies to user-funded applicants to support industry and other entities that require MNF capabilities and who deliver data and research of national interest.

Projects under this Stream will be funded by the applicant or supporting end-users and will be considered for MNF support based on *RV Investigator* availability, and if it is demonstrated in advance that the proposed work relies on specific capabilities of the MNF that are not otherwise reasonably available in Australia.

Ahead of submitting your proposal for merit assessment, you will need to satisfy the MNF that the research depends on the use of *RV Investigator* and could not be done from a reasonable available alternative platform and that you have the funding to pay for the use of

RV Investigator to the extent agreed with the MNF.

Where Stream 5 opportunities exist, the work will need to be of a research nature, meet MNF research quality expectations, and be demonstrably in Australia's national interest, directly or indirectly.

Enquiries about Stream 5 access can be made to the MNF at any time. To discuss eligibility, project feasibility and vessel availability, please contact the Director, Ship Management Program (MNF) for a preliminary discussion.

Andrew Martini
Director
Ship Management Program (MNF)

t +61 3 6232 5479
e andrew.martini@csiro.au

4 MNF policy-driven priorities for Stream 1

Stream 1 is for access to sea time on RV *Investigator* for research projects that directly address the policy-driven priorities specified in the Plan.

Successful Stream 1 projects are expected to directly inform and influence critical public policies and programs.

This Stream requires a co-design approach to the development of project proposals, with applicants demonstrating engagement with relevant end-users and collaboration to ensure the project will deliver outcomes that meet identified needs and address gaps in the knowledge base relevant to those needs.

Stream 1 priorities for the 2026 Primary Application call, for voyages to be undertaken between July 2028 and June 2029, are outlined in the following pages.

Recognising the continual development of government policies and plans, for the 2026 call, applicants may also choose to address other government policy-driven priorities. Applicants must identify the policy driver and an appropriate end-user with which to co-design the project and identify the pathways to impact.

Stream 1 Priority Partners in 2026

Australian Antarctic Program (AAP)

Delivering the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy

Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)

Ecosystem baselines, reducing uncertainty and climate-ready fisheries management

Geoscience Australia

Resourcing Australia's Prosperity

Parks Australia

Biodiversity discovery, baselines and monitoring and management effectiveness

POLICY-DRIVEN PRIORITY:

Australian Antarctic Program (AAP) | Delivering the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy

Background

Australia has enduring national interests in Antarctica that are articulated in the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan*, including to conduct world-class scientific research.

To support Australia's continued leadership and excellence in Antarctic science, the *Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy* sits within the framework of the strategy and action plan to set the scene and the ambition for the scientific activities of the Australian Antarctic Program.

The decadal strategy reflects the highest priority scientific outcomes that advance Australia's national interests in Antarctica, the Southern Ocean and sub-Antarctic islands. The Australian Antarctic Science Program is delivered primarily through the specialised Antarctic logistics provided by the Australian Antarctic Division. It also relies heavily on infrastructure made available through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS), including the MNF.

Through policy-driven access in Stream 1, the MNF provides significant capability to support research delivering the decadal strategy.

Areas of focus

Under Stream 1, the MNF invites applications for sea time (July 2028 to June 2029) to undertake research projects that explicitly address priority areas for delivery of the Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy.

Priorities to support evidence-based assessments

Research that contributes to the key science priority and enabling areas articulated in the *Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy*:

- **Climate system and change:** The Antarctic ocean-atmosphere-cryosphere (ice sheet, ice shelves and sea ice) system is crucial to our understanding of global climate systems, including sea level rise, shifting weather patterns and extreme events.
- **Biodiversity:** Comprehensive protection, conservation and management of the unique environments, associated ecosystems and biodiversity of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.
- **Human impacts:** Impacts from past, present and future human activities are avoided or mitigated through best practice environmental stewardship that protects, manages and remediates Antarctica's unique environment.
- **Monitoring Antarctica and the Southern Ocean:** Long-term integrated monitoring and strategic, multidisciplinary field programs in East Antarctica and the Southern Ocean underpins Antarctic and Southern Ocean research, protection, conservation and management.
- **Data and technical innovation:** An Integrated Digital Strategy for East Antarctica.

Requirements for partnerships with Australian Antarctic Program (AAP) for Stream 1 projects

Co-design of projects with AAP

Genuine co-design is required to ensure that science priorities are addressed, and logistical effort is optimised across the AAP. The AAD Science Planning and Coordination Section can provide advice and facilitate project co-design with the AAD Chief Scientist and relevant science and policy Program Leaders. Projects should clearly demonstrate alignment with priorities and outcomes of the *Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy*.

Collaboration among researchers

The *Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy* emphasises the breadth of organisations, expertise and research infrastructure that is required to serve Australia's national interests in Antarctica. Maintaining and strengthening collaboration among national and international partners, including alignment and coordination of research effort, will be critical to achieving the outcomes identified in the decadal strategy.

Applications should consider and demonstrate their intention to maintain and strengthen collaboration across the AAP.

End-user specific outputs/deliverables

Project data should be handled in accordance with both the Australian Antarctic Program Data Policy and the MNF Data and Samples Management Policy. Data is to be archived and managed by the MNF Information and Data Centre, the Australian Antarctic Data Centre, or other domain-appropriate national or international repositories in accordance with the FAIR principles. Metadata for all data must be lodged with the MNF regardless of where the data is archived.

MNF limitations on embargo apply and embargoes must be requested from and approved by the MNF.

Publications arising from the project are to be lodged with both the Australian Antarctic Program Publications Database and MNF Publications Database.

Resources/funding

Funding to support activities and post-voyage analysis and reporting is to be provided by research partners in the form of in-kind or cash contributions.

Permits

Antarctica, the Southern Ocean and sub-Antarctic islands are unique and fragile environments. The Antarctic Treaty establishes Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science.

Australia is strongly committed to protecting the Antarctic environment, and Australian activities in the Antarctic region are administered and regulated by the AAD, in accordance with the *Antarctic Treaty (Environment Protection) Act 1980*.

Australian citizens, organisations and expeditioners must apply for environmental approval before conducting scientific, operational, recreational or any other activities in the Antarctic region.

Paths to impact

Data generated and delivered through the application should contribute to delivering on any of the key science priorities and/or enabling capabilities of the *Australian Antarctic Science Decadal Strategy*:

- climate system and change
- biodiversity
- human impacts
- monitoring Antarctica and the Southern Ocean
- data and technical innovation.

Applications should articulate their intended pathway to impact aligned with one or more of the outcomes that advance Australia's national interests in Antarctica through:

- leadership and influence in Antarctica
- leadership and excellence in Antarctic science
- leadership in environmental stewardship in Antarctica.

Further information

Detailed information regarding the *Australian Antarctic Decadal Strategy* is available at:

www.antarctica.gov.au/about-us/strategy-and-plans/australian-antarctic-science-decadal-strategy-2025-2035/

For further information, please contact planning@aad.gov.au

Image: Michael Watson.



POLICY-DRIVEN PRIORITY:

Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) | Ecosystem baselines, reducing uncertainty and climate-ready fisheries management

Background

AFMA is responsible for managing Commonwealth fisheries to achieve ecological sustainability while maximising net economic returns through adaptive, evidence-based management. Delivering this mandate is contingent on:

- robust stock status data
- comprehensive assessments of ecosystem and bycatch impacts
- climate-resilient harvest strategies
- complementary measures, such as spatial closures
- ongoing evaluation of management performance across a diverse portfolio of fisheries.

AFMA's research program is designed to strengthen this foundation by improving knowledge of fish stocks and marine ecosystems, advancing management tools such as bycatch reduction and harvest strategy refinement, and enhancing evaluation through indicators and monitoring.

RV *Investigator* provides a unique platform to deliver against these priorities by enabling multidisciplinary, large-scale data collection in offshore environments where AFMA-managed fisheries operate.

These capabilities allow integrated surveys that combine habitat mapping, biodiversity assessments, and ecosystem monitoring, generating the evidence needed to evaluate management effectiveness, inform adaptive harvest strategies, and build climate-ready systems for Commonwealth fisheries.

Areas of focus

Under Stream 1, the MNF invites applications for sea time (July 2028 to June 2029) to undertake research projects that directly address AFMA's Policy priorities and research needs, leveraging multidisciplinary capabilities, such as those provided by the MNF.

Priorities to support evidence-based adaptive management of, and decision making for, AFMA-managed fisheries

- Research that addresses AFMA's strategic policy priorities, including:
 - collect targeted data to strengthen stock assessments, reduce stock uncertainty and explore alternative assessment methods
 - assess the impacts of fishing on non-target species and broader marine ecosystems
 - integrate climate-related risks and drivers into fisheries management and harvest strategies.
- Research to improve understanding of habitats and biodiversity within key Commonwealth fisheries footprints using multidisciplinary surveys to fill gaps in mapping, community composition, and species distributions.
- Research to collect and integrate biological and ecosystem indicators – such as stock condition, recruitment patterns, species distributions, prey availability, predator interactions, and benthic habitat status – to build a comprehensive picture of ecosystem health and determine the impact climate change is having on species abundance and

distribution. These data will help determine whether current management measures are supporting sustainability objectives and identify where adaptive responses may be required in the face of environmental change.

- Research to collect climate-sensitive data at sea, including environmental variables such as temperature, currents, and marine heatwave signals, alongside biological observations of stock distribution and productivity. These data will underpin analyses that link environmental change to stock and effort dynamics, helping identify early signs of regime shifts and informing adaptive harvest strategies for fisheries already experiencing climate-driven changes.
- Research to understand the efficacy of spatial closures, including AFMA closures, marine protected areas (MPA), and areas affected by offshore energy development. This includes assessing how these closures contribute to risk mitigation, biodiversity protection, and stock resilience, and identifying where adjustments may be needed to improve ecological outcomes.

Requirements for partnerships with AFMA for Stream 1 projects

Co-design of projects with AFMA

Projects must be developed in close collaboration with AFMA to ensure they address priority research needs and deliver outputs that can be directly integrated into management processes. Early engagement with AFMA's advisory committees is essential to align objectives, data standards, and timelines with AFMA's decision-making cycles.

Funding

Primary funding for research activities, analysis, and reporting is expected to come from the research proponents. AFMA may consider

contributing to specific components, but this would require approval by the AFMA Research Committee and is not guaranteed.

Cross-fishery solutions

Proposals that deliver benefits across multiple fisheries are strongly encouraged. For example, projects that provide ecosystem indicators, reduced stock uncertainty, climate vulnerability assessments, or bycatch mitigation strategies applicable to more than one fishery will be prioritised.

Applied science

Research must produce practical outputs that inform management or adaptation. This includes data and analyses that feed directly into stock assessments, harvest strategy reviews, ecological risk assessments, and bycatch/protected species interaction mitigation measures.

Stakeholder engagement

Successful projects will demonstrate engagement with key stakeholders, including industry, science providers, Traditional Owners, managers, and policymakers. This ensures research is relevant, feasible, and supports adoption of outcomes.

Permits

Researchers must comply with any Government permit requirements, including AFMA's scientific permit requirements as outlined in Fisheries Management Paper 11 (FMP 11).

Scientific permit applications should be submitted well in advance, and proponents are responsible for ensuring compliance with all conditions.

www.afma.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/fmp11.pdf

Paths to impact

Science and data delivered through these AFMA-aligned Stream 1 projects will provide the basis for improved management of Commonwealth fisheries resources and the marine environment.

Researchers will be connected with relevant fisheries managers and be provided unique insight into decision-making processes. This may include involvement in AFMA's Resource Assessment Groups, which provide scientific advice and peer-review research that informs fisheries management.

Further information

AFMA Strategic Research Plan (2023-28) details AFMA's research programs and priorities.

AFMA Annual Report (2024-25) provides context on current operational challenges and directions.

Protected Zone Joint Authority Strategic Research Plan 2025-2029 sets out the strategic themes to guide policy-setting for the next five years of research related to commercial Torres Strait fisheries.

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Policy, Environment, Economics and Research Section

t 1300 723 621

e peer@afma.gov.au



POLICY-DRIVEN PRIORITY:

Geoscience Australia | Resourcing Australia's Prosperity: Offshore Energy, Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage, and Hydrogen Storage

Background

Resourcing Australia's Prosperity is a national initiative to cement Australia's position as a renewable energy leader, ensure a pipeline of resources for a Future Made in Australia, and enable responsible management of offshore environments.

Led by Geoscience Australia, the initiative leverages precompetitive geoscience to accelerate discovery, reduce risk, and support evidence-based decisions that advance Australia's net zero transition.

Areas of focus

Under Stream 1, the MNF invites applications for sea time (July 2028 to June 2029) to undertake research projects that explicitly address offshore energy priorities, particularly:

- offshore renewables: mapping seabed suitability and stability for offshore wind and related infrastructure.
- geological storage of carbon dioxide and hydrogen: assessing offshore formations for long-term sequestration and storage potential.
- onshore–offshore groundwater interactions: improving understanding of linked systems that influence offshore energy development.

Priorities to support evidence-based assessments

Projects should deliver data and insights that:

- improve understanding of seabed and sub-seabed conditions in areas with potential

for offshore renewables and/or geological storage

- contribute to seabed stability and suitability assessments for offshore energy infrastructure
- provide high-level offshore geoscience datasets and interpreted products, including:
 - foundational seabed and sub-seabed geophysical datasets (bathymetry, backscatter, sub-bottom profiling, sediment composition, seismic)
 - interpreted products on seabed topography, structure, and processes (geomorphology, sediment mobility, subsidence, geological constraints)
 - 2D and 3D geology (palaeogeography, depositional environments, stratigraphy, sediment thickness, geochemistry, geochronology, fluid escape structures).

Researcher benefits

Participation in Stream 1 projects offers researchers and institutions the opportunity to:

- access MNF capability: utilise world-class infrastructure for offshore geoscience data collection
- contribute to national datasets: generate foundational offshore data that directly informs carbon capture and storage, hydrogen storage, and renewable energy assessments
- shape policy-aligned science: codesign research questions with Geoscience Australia to ensure outputs have direct impact on Australia's net zero transition

- enhance visibility and collaboration: gain recognition in national initiatives, publish jointly with Geoscience Australia, and strengthen partnerships across academia, government, and industry
- support community outcomes: empower First Nations peoples and local communities through inclusive research and shared access to geoscience data.

Requirements for partnerships with Geoscience Australia for Stream 1 projects

Co-design of projects with Geoscience Australia

Genuine co-design is required to target priorities for the *Resourcing Australia's Prosperity* initiative.

Collaboration among researchers

Proposals will be co-conceived and designed to incorporate relevant priorities for Geoscience Australia. Proposals should ideally involve multiple research groups that address multiple needs within the same area.

End-user specific outputs/deliverables

Data and information products must be made available to Geoscience Australia, with collaborative communication products highlighting impact and benefits.

Resources/funding

Funding for activities and post-voyage analysis is expected to come primarily from research partners (cash or in-kind). Any reliance on Geoscience Australia must be agreed prior to submission.

Indigenous engagement

Proposals should engage Traditional Owners early, build partnerships with First Nations peoples, integrate traditional knowledge, and support economic self-determination in Sea Country.

Permits

The Principal Investigator will be responsible for obtaining relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory authorisations.



Image: CSIRO Alison Donnellan.

Paths to impact

Science and data delivered through the applications should directly inform any of the following:

- contribute to regional and national-scale offshore geoscience data compilations
- inform assessments of the potential for offshore geological storage of carbon dioxide and hydrogen, and suitability for offshore renewable energy
- empower First Nations peoples and local communities to increase economic and environmental self-determination through participation and increased access to and use of precompetitive geoscience.

Further information

Detailed information regarding the *Resourcing Australia's Prosperity* initiative is available at:

www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/resourcing-australias-prosperity

Please use the centralised email for all correspondence with attention to the relevant project lead.

e marinesurveys@ga.gov.au

For Carbon Capture and Storage:

Merrie-Ellen Gunning

For Hydrogen Storage:

Andrew Feitz

For Offshore Energy:

Sarina Bowyer

POLICY-DRIVEN PRIORITY:

Parks Australia | Biodiversity discovery, baselines and monitoring and management effectiveness

Background

The Australian Government has established 62 marine parks in Commonwealth Waters to protect, conserve and manage marine habitats, species and ecological processes to help maintain healthy and resilient oceans whilst allowing for ecologically sustainable use of ocean resources.

Parks Australia manages 60 of these parks which cover the largest area of Australia's national representative system of marine protected areas. Covering 3.8 million square kilometres or 43 per cent of our oceans, Australian Marine Parks make up one of the largest networks of marine protected areas in the world.

These marine parks encompass waters that are largely remote and deep, with over 85 per cent in depths greater than 100 metres. Parks Australia's ability to manage marine parks is impacted by the low levels of knowledge of many of them.

To undertake research in Australian Marine Parks, a well-equipped ocean research vessel capable of extended voyages, like *RV Investigator*, is required.

Areas of focus

Under Stream 1, the MNF invites applications for sea time (July 2028 to June 2029) to undertake research projects that explicitly address areas that are a priority for the management and protection of Australian Marine Parks and are dependent on the multidisciplinary ocean research capabilities provided by the MNF.

Priorities to support evidence-based adaptive management of, and decision making for, Australian Marine Parks

- Research that addresses policy priorities, including:
 - weaving knowledge to sustain nature and culture
 - understanding and responding to climate change
 - managing complex systems in the face of uncertainty
 - protecting and enhancing our natural and cultural environments
 - exploring and strengthening people's connections to the environment.
- Research to build priority baseline knowledge and holistic understanding of natural systems including understanding of the type and distribution of seafloor features and associated biodiversity (habitats, associated communities and species) in Australian Marine Parks subject to higher levels of pressures in the past, now or expected in the foreseeable future.
- Research to effectively protect and halt the loss of high conservation interest species and ecosystems including understanding of the effects of pressures and drivers on benthic habitats and associated communities and species within Australian Marine Parks, and ways to mitigate impacts of pressures on, or build resilience of, these habitats and species.
- Research to improve understanding of species ecology and population dynamics for important species which reside or have

breeding or feeding aggregation areas in Australian Marine Parks.

Requirements for partnerships with Parks Australia for Stream 1 projects

Co-design of projects with Parks Australia

Genuine co-design is required to target priorities of importance to Australian Marine Park managers. It should be transparent, inclusive, equitable and meaningful from the project design to the application of project outputs.

The proposed research needs to address problems and needs aligned with *Parks Australia Science Strategy*. It also needs to align with activities allowed within the park's regulatory requirements, engagement protocols and processes. Some extractive and destructive methods may not be permitted in Australian Marine Parks.

Collaboration among researchers

Ideally, individual proposals will include several priorities for Parks Australia and involve multiple research groups.

Multidisciplinary needs

Primary and supplementary projects that address multiple needs within the same marine park are encouraged as well as linkages between separate projects. This may include oceanographic process data and bathymetry mapping being combined with species specific data collection and habitat/species distribution modelling.

End-user specific outputs/deliverables

Reports will be lodged with Parks Australia at the conclusion of the research project and research highlight articles and imagery for Australian Marine Park websites and communication products will be collaborative outcomes of the project.

Please note that it is an expectation that media releases and social media articles are to be approved by Parks Australia prior to release.

Resources/funding

It is expected that funding to support activities and post-voyage analysis and reporting comes primarily from research partners in the form of in-kind or cash contributions. Parks Australia may contribute a small amount of funding towards outputs that support park management but if a project is reliant on any funding contribution from Parks Australia, it must be agreed by a relevant Parks Australia delegate prior to submission of the MNF application.

First Nations engagement

Parks Australia recognises and respects the ongoing cultural rights and responsibilities of First Nations people to care for Sea Country. Parks Australia aims for engagement with First Nations peoples and communities to achieve enduring relationships that are mutually beneficial.

Early in planning, Parks Australia engages with relevant Indigenous Corporations that represent Traditional Owners when the research will occur in Sea Country. Whenever research occurs in Sea Country, it is critical that Free, Prior and Informed Consent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occur throughout the research process and that Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights are protected

Permits

An authorisation is required to undertake research in Australian Marine Parks. Authorisation applications generally take eight weeks to assess. Therefore, applications must be submitted within a suitable timeframe and will be the responsibility of the Principal Investigator of the project.

Paths to impact

Science and data delivered through the applications should directly inform any of the following:

- digital catalogue of natural values within Australian Marine Parks
- assessment of environmental impacts of activities and pressures within Australian Marine Parks
- evidence about effectiveness of zoning and management arrangements
- decadal reviews of management plans for Australian Marine Parks
- strategic prioritisation of investment in management and further research.

Further information

Australian Marine Parks Management Plans are available at:
australianmarineparks.gov.au/management/management-plans/

Parks Australia Science Strategy:
www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/national-parks/parks-australia/publications/science-strategy

Australian Marine Park science plans provide further details of science priorities:
australianmarineparks.gov.au/science/

Free, Prior and Informed Consent guidelines:
First Nations Engagement the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent

Ally Lankester
Partnership Advisor
Conservation Science
Parks Australia

t +61 2 6208 2917
e ally.lankester@dcceew.gov.au

Image: CSIRO-Fraser Johnston.



5 Key research capabilities

Through access to RV *Investigator*'s advanced multidisciplinary scientific equipment and instrumentation, along with expert operational and technical support personnel, the MNF can flexibly and safely cater for diverse and multidisciplinary oceanographic, biological, geological and atmospheric research needs.

As part of an ongoing program of works, RV *Investigator* has undergone several significant research system upgrades in the past two years, enhancing its ability to deliver cutting-edge capabilities to our research community. These improvements are detailed in the 2026 update of the *Marine National Facility Capability Prospectus*.

Marine National Facility Capability Prospectus

The *Marine National Facility Capability Prospectus (2026)* provides an overview of available MNF capability including vessel systems, equipment and instruments, technical expertise, and data products. Equipment and instrument capabilities are mapped to the main science disciplines of atmospheric, biological, geoscience and oceanographic research.

The prospectus contains a range of general information for planning purposes including an

overview of the vessel's information technology and data capabilities.

The prospectus is updated annually and is available at:

csiro.au/en/about/facilities-collections/MNF/Research-vessel-Equipment-Data/MNF-Capability-Prospectus

Key research support provided by the MNF currently includes:

- A team of dedicated, highly skilled and experienced hydrochemists, geophysical and survey mapping experts, instrumentation, calibration and engineered systems experts, data acquisition and processing, and information and data centre staff to ensure sample, mapping, technical services and data integrity are delivered from collection through to analysis and data processing.
- A suite of policies and information to ensure users are informed of their obligations, including the collection and management of samples and data, use of MNF supplied resources and acknowledging MNF support, and health, safety and wellbeing at sea.
- Access to MNF's unique and advanced capabilities and expert support personnel, which is a significant investment in marine science for the benefit of the nation. MNF's commitment to continually evolving as new equipment is added and technology is upgraded remains a key principle.

6 Capability investment, technology and innovation

The MNF is responsible for maintaining and upgrading its key research capabilities, and for expanding capabilities in response to new and emerging technologies and needs.

The MNF also offers significant opportunities for advancing technology development for novel marine research systems and, more broadly, technological solutions that can support the growing blue economy.

To ensure the MNF keeps pace with emerging capabilities, technologies and key research needs, and continues to play an active role in promoting and adopting marine technology innovation, it has:

- provided a dedicated technology and innovation access Stream (Stream 4) to foster the development of new marine technologies and innovation in marine systems
- developed a 25-year capability investment framework
- reviewed and prioritised MNF capital investment on key research capabilities
- instigated a Technology and Innovation Advisory Group (TIAG), with membership from the research and technology development communities, to advise MNF on strategic capability investment.

Each of these activities will ensure the MNF continues to provide capability and equipment that best fits the current and future needs of Australia's marine and atmosphere research users and is interoperable across the national research fleet, where possible.

7 Performance targets for 2025-26

The strategic objectives and key actions under each of the strategic pillars in *MNF 2030* are intended to keep the MNF on course to fulfil our mission.

We seek to facilitate safe, efficient and excellent marine and atmospheric research that is well aligned with strategic priorities and addresses Australia's grand challenges for society, the economy and the environment.

Alongside those, and to check our progress along the way, we monitor and report on key operational performance targets under each pillar.

The MNF operational performance targets for 2025–26 are listed overpage.

Image: CSIRO-Fraser Johnston.



Table 1 MNF operational performance targets for 2025-26

CSIRO PRIORITIES	COMMITMENT	PERFORMANCE TARGETS FOR 2025-26
CSIRO Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (2024-2027)	Increase access to science education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary students per year to join voyages of RV <i>Investigator</i> through the Indigenous Time at Sea Scholarship (ITSS).
	Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and promote a framework for engaging with Traditional Owners of Sea Country.
MNF 2030 PILLAR	MNF 2030 OBJECTIVE	PERFORMANCE TARGETS FOR 2025-26
Foundation: Protecting our people and the environment	To continue to improve our health, safety and environmental performance and strive for zero harm in all our operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver 3 new, fit for purpose Health, Safety and Environment training modules for RV <i>Investigator</i> users, improving understanding and application of risk management practices onboard.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve in our HSE leading indicators, through meeting or exceeding our organisational target for hazard-to-incident reporting rate for 2025.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish detailed baseline ground data within Marine Facilities Planning (MFP) system to inform future decarbonisation plan.
Pillar 1: Maximum impact	To deliver maximum return on public investment through strengthening the alignment of MNF-supported research to Australia’s policy, strategic, and research and innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and improve data delivery workflows, supporting sequential processing and the quantified delivery of data sets into national and global portals, no later than 12 months post-voyage.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline process to publish planned voyage areas into the AusSeabed Survey Coordination Tool to efficiently deliver key data to the Australian seafloor mapping community.
Pillar 2: Broad access	To offer broad access to the MNF to researchers from academia, government, museums and industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support users in preparing successful applications for sea time, by providing research quality and research benefit exemplars within the tools and resources available to applicants.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the application call widely to ensure the research community is aware of opportunities to engage with the MNF.
Pillar 3: Streamlined operations and optimal use	To optimise use of MNF resources and increase efficiency of our operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise efficiency and effectiveness of RV <i>Investigator</i> operations, by refining our processes and implementing the voyage planning module in the MFP system.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a minimum of 90% of planned science days for the 2025-26 voyage schedule.
Pillar 4: Advanced capabilities and innovation	To maintain and enhance the MNF research capabilities to accommodate evolving research needs and technology developments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver our 5-year strategic capital expenditure plan in 2025, to guide strategic investment decisions and promote innovation of our research systems.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed the role of the Technology and Innovation Advisory Group (TIAG) within the MNF governance framework, developing strategies for TIAG members to facilitate broader user community input and investment priorities.
Pillar 5: Training future generations	To deliver education and training activities that help encourage and develop future generations of blue-water researchers and technicians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver one Collaborative Australian Postgraduate Sea Training Alliance Network (CAPSTAN) voyage in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 schedules and schedule a CAPSTAN opportunity in the 2027-28 schedule year.
Pillar 6: Connecting with Australians and the world	Deepen the public’s understanding of marine and atmospheric research and of the MNF’s value and contribution to solving key challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve year-on-year increase (vs 3-year rolling average) in engagement metrics for conventional media, social media and MNF website.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the story of every voyage to increase awareness of the research we deliver and its impact and benefit to the nation.



As Australia's national science agency, CSIRO is solving the greatest challenges through innovative science and technology.

CSIRO. Creating a better future for everyone.

Contact us

1300 363 400
+61 3 9545 2176
[csiro.au/contact](https://www.csiro.au/contact)
[csiro.au](https://www.csiro.au)

For further information

Marine National Facility
General enquiries
+61 3 6232 5222
mnf@csiro.au
[csiro.au/mnf](https://www.csiro.au/mnf)