

COMMUNIQUÉ

MARINE NATIONAL FACILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING #79: Friday, 16 September 2016

The 79th Marine National Facility Steering Committee (MNFSC) meeting was held in Hobart on 16 September. Members reviewed MNF operations since their last meeting and discussed strategic developments as outlined below.

Applications process

Following the call for single year applications for sea time on *Investigator* in 2018-19, the MNF has received 17 new applications for approximately 544 days at sea. When combined with multi-year applications received in previous years, 23 applications for approximately 700 days at sea demonstrate continued strong demand for *Investigator's* capabilities.

National Benefit Assessment Panel

As previously advised, a new National Benefit Assessment Panel (NBAP) will be convened for the 2018-19 applications process. The Panel will assess the national benefit of proposed research through links to government, industry and other stakeholders.

To assist the marine community to understand these changes, the MNF hosted a series of information workshops around the country in the last quarter of 2015-16. The MNF also produced a video communication that has been published on the MNF [website](#). Further details about the roles and responsibilities of the NBAP and its members can be found on the MNF website.

2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap

In a bid to identify priorities for Australia's research infrastructure requirements over the next 5 to 10 years, the Australian Government has commissioned a National Research Infrastructure Roadmap report to support future investment decisions. The development of the Roadmap is being led by Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel, with support from an expert working group. The MNF hosted Dr Finkel and the working group on a tour of *Investigator* on 22 August providing opportunity to discuss the Roadmap process and discuss the MNF's role in the infrastructure system.

Consultations and submissions to the Roadmap were sought from across Australia's research community with the process closing on 9 September 2016. CSIRO's

broader response was supported by a submission from the MNF as exemplar landmark research infrastructure through operation of *Investigator*. The MNF also contributed to the National Marine Science Committee's response to the Roadmap which included a supplementary submission proposing a National Research Vessel Alliance including coastal research vessels. The submissions recommended an increase in funded marine research days from 180 to 300 on the Marine National Facility to enable full utilisation of funded infrastructure in line with established science demand, advancing research activities of national or international significance.

Voyage highlights

In the reporting period, *Investigator* has travelled from the Antarctic ice edge to the equator, including two visits to foreign ports.

The period commenced with the Heard Island voyage, which attracted worldwide media attention by a rare glimpse of the erupting Big Ben volcano and provided globally significant environmental data from this remote part of Australia's marine estate including the sources of essential micronutrients to Southern Ocean marine life.

Following a short Hobart port period, *Investigator* serviced the Southern Ocean Time Series moorings, which provide world-leading data on carbon cycling. Significantly, three primary projects were successfully included on this single voyage, demonstrating the step change research capability provided by *Investigator*.

The 170°W voyage from the ice edge to the equator successfully delivered to the international Go-Ship program which monitors decadal ocean variability and change.

A transit voyage returned the ship from Fiji back to Australia and included a project to sample areas of previously unmapped seafloor off Australia's east coast.

Hobart based equipment sea trials then delivered a complementary project to map and sample the East Tasman Plateau, followed by a transit voyage from Hobart to Sydney which included a supplementary iron fertilisation project and a short survey for the Australian Hydrographic Service east of Flinders Island.

Personnel Changes

Following 32 years with CSIRO, with mixed emotions the MNF Director, Ron Plaschke advised MNFSC of his retirement on 28 October. Ron joined CSIRO in 1984 as part of the then Division of Oceanography's seagoing chemistry team. After joining MNF Ships Group in 1998, Ron supported the operation of *Franklin* and *Southern Surveyor* and was appointed Director in 2011. Ron is pleased to have been involved in bringing *Investigator* into service and leading a large and diverse team, for the first time delivering a truly world-class capability to Australian marine researchers and their international partners. MNFSC would like to take this opportunity to thank Ron for his service and dedication and to wish him well for the future. CSIRO is currently in the process of seeking a new Director to join the team.

MNFSC would also like to take the opportunity to thank outgoing members Bob Quarrel and Graham Peachey. Bob has provided unique perspectives through his role with Woodside Energy and Graham a deep understanding of Australia's marine regulatory environment as ex-CEO of the Australian Marine Safety Authority. CSIRO's Board will consider options for replacement of these positions at its next meeting in December 2016.

In conclusion

The past six months has again demonstrated the capability and flexibility offered by *Investigator*, and the significant demand for the multi-disciplinary marine research platform the MNF provides.

Ensuring the MNF continues to demonstrate return on investment to the Australian Government and engagement in the 2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap process are key to an integrated approach to ensure Australia can address national marine research challenges so vital to sustainable development.

Dr Ian Poiner
Chair, MNF Steering Committee