

			
TITLE	PROCEDURE: Assessment of research proposals and allocation of time on the MNF POLICY: Assessing, and allocating time, to eligible research proposals (Policy 2004/5/v.1).		
Procedure Reference No:	Procedure: 2004/5.1/v.1		
Commencement date:	12-09-2004	Review date:	July 2006
Scope	MNFSC; SAC; Ship Management Group		
Group responsible	Ship Management Group		
Further advice	Captain Frederick R. Stein, Director, Research Vessel, ph: (03) 6232 5024 e-mail: Fred.Stein@csiro.au		

PROCEDURE STATEMENT	
Purpose:	<p>This procedure formalises the processes already in place to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess research proposals for the MNF; and • allocate time in the Voyage Schedule.
Definitions	<p>MNF: the Marine National Facility that includes: its management (Steering Committee and CMAR), staff, the sea-going research platform, its equipment and data products and services.</p> <p>MNFSC: Marine National Facility Steering Committee - the independent committee appointed by the Minister that assists CMAR in the management of the MNF.</p> <p>SAC: (Scientific Advisory Committee). Expert committee established by the MNFSC to provide advice on scientific and research matters.</p> <p>Research proposal: an application for MNF time to conduct a specified program of scientific work on the RV Southern Surveyor.</p> <p>Research Voyage: a single voyage by the Southern Surveyor to undertake a specified program of scientific work. It can include research programs approved by the MNFSC or research charters undertaken by CMAR or its research partners Geosciences Australia and the National Oceans Office.</p> <p>Voyage Schedule: the annual program of all research voyages undertaken by the Southern Surveyor.</p>

	<p>Assessment criteria: criteria used to score proposals for use of the MNF.</p> <p>Assessment process: annual cycle by which research proposals for time on the MNF are reviewed, scored and ranked against the three assessment criteria.</p> <p>Principal Investigator (PI): the leaders of the specified program of scientific work who are named in the application form. There may be more than one named, but only one can be designated as the contact for the proposal.</p> <p>Contact for application: the PI who is named as the contact for the application in the application form.</p> <p>Sponsoring organisation: that research organisation by which the Principal Investigators are employed. There can be more than one sponsoring organisation if the Principal Investigators are employed by different organisations.</p> <p>Appropriate Authority: a person, who by right of his/her position in a Sponsoring Organisation is legally responsible for committing the resources of that organisation.</p> <p>Voyage Schedule: the annual program of all research voyages undertaken by the Southern Surveyor.</p> <p>Research Charter: research voyage on Southern Surveyor paid for by CMAR and/or its research partners GA and NOO.</p>
<p>Links to related forms, records and electronic databases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy 2004/5/v.1: Assessing, and allocating time, to eligible research proposals. • Application Pack • Instructions to Assessors

Detailed steps, procedures and actions		
Procedure	Responsibility	Timeline
1. Set timetable for annual application cycle and decide Area of Operations (if required).	MNFSC	Last meeting of year.
2. Update MNF web page, include timetable for applications, Area of Operations (if decided), and any other changes to content.	Ship Management Group, CMAR Communications Group	November
3. Send out annual Call for Applications for use of the MNF. (The Australian; journals of scientific associations: AMSA, AMOS etc; e-mail to: past users; university Offices of	Director, Research Vessel	November

Research; and heads of university and government (Commonwealth and State) research organisations		
4. Deal with technical and administrative enquiries from potential applicants.	Ship Management Group	November – March (Deadline)
5. Receive and record research proposals, check for eligibility and completeness, update assessors' database.	Ship Management Group	March
6. Contact applicant if it is decided additional information is required, or if there are questions about eligibility.	Ship Management Group	March
7. Discard research proposals if incomplete or ineligible and applicant does not supply the requested information.	Ship Management Group	April
8. Seek advice from SAC members on suitable assessors for each application.	Ship Management Group	April
9. SAC members to identify at least six potential assessors for each research proposal and advise Ship Management Group in writing	Chair, members of the SAC	April
10. Assessors contacted with request to review proposal. At least four assessors should be used for each research proposal, two of whom should be overseas researchers.	Ship Management Group	May
11. Assessors provided (via e-mail) with a: copy of research proposal; 'Instructions to Assessors'; and	Ship Management Group	May

deadline for return of completed assessment pro-forma.		
12. Assessors complete assessment report giving scores out of 100 and written comments against each of the assessment criteria (see Attachment 1).	Assessors	June
13. Assessors comments received and collated. Any information that identifies assessors is removed from the assessment pro-formas. Missing comments are chased up.	Ship Management Group	June
14. Copies of relevant assessors' comments, along with 'Instructions to Assessors', sent to the applicants with request to respond. Applicants given deadline for response.	Ship Management Group	July
15. Applicants prepare responses to assessors' comments and return to MNF.	Applicants	July
16. Applications, assessors' reports and applicants' responses collated and packaged to send to SAC members.	Ship Management Group	July
17. Research proposals allocated to specific SAC members to lead discussion at SAC meeting.	Chair, SAC	July
18. Papers couriered to SAC members.	Ship Management Group	At least two weeks prior to SAC meeting.
19. SAC members assess each research proposal and assign scores against each assessment criteria for all proposals prior to the meeting.	SAC members.	July

20. At the meeting, SAC members indicate to the Chair if they have any involvement in any of the research proposals to be assessed. If so, SAC members absent themselves from discussion of that research proposal and take no part in its assessment.	SAC.	July
21. At the meeting, nominated SAC members speak to their allocated research proposals followed by a general discussion of each proposal. Final scores (out of 300) are allocated to each research proposal based on the average score of each SAC member against each criterion. These scores are used to rank all research proposals in descending order.	SAC	July
22. SAC determines which research proposals should not be supported and decides what other recommendations on scheduling of specific research proposals it will make to MNFSC.	SAC	July
23. SAC report to MNFSC prepared and presented to MNFSC and Chief, CMAR.	Director, Research Vessel, Chair, SAC	August
24. MNFSC decides which research proposals are to be included in the Voyage Schedule and advises Director, Research Vessel.	MNFSC	August
25. Deputy Chief, CMAR informs Director, Research Vessel of	Deputy Chief, CMAR	August

research charters to be included in the Voyage Schedule.		
26. Shipmanager, MNF, prepares draft Voyage Schedule including MNF voyages and research charters.	Shipmanager, MNF	September
27. Draft Voyage Schedule presented to MNFSC, Chief, CMAR for approval.	Shipmanager, MNF	September
28. MNFSC and Chief, CMAR approve draft Voyage Schedule with, or without, changes.	MNFSC, Chief, CMAR	September
29. Applicants informed of outcomes of MNF assessment. Successful applicants made offer of time in Voyage Schedule.	Ship Management Group	September
30. Applicants respond to offer.	Applicants	September
31. Sponsoring Organisations sign Voyage Agreement with CMAR.	Director, Research Vessel and Appropriate Authorities at Sponsoring Organisations.	Six months prior to voyage commencement

ACCOUNTABILITIES

Implementation	Ship Management Group
Compliance	Ship Management Group; SAC; MNFSC
Monitoring and Evaluation	Ship Management Group; MNFSC
Development and Review	Ship Management Group; MNFSC
Approval Authority	MNFSC
Group responsible	Ship Management Group

WHO SHOULD KNOW THIS PROCEDURE?

Ship Management Group; MNFSC; SAC, Office of the Chief

REVISION HISTORY

Revision Ref No	Approved/Rescinded	Date	Authority	Document Title
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2004/5.1/v.1	Approved	12-09-2004	MNFSC	Assessment of research proposals and allocation of time on the MNF
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EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS PROCEDURE	
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Performance Indicators	Number of complaints from applicants about process. Satisfaction of MNFSC with process.
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ATTACHMENT 1

Scoring against assessment criteria

The following is taken from the MNF's 'Instructions to Assessors'

BACKGROUND

Use of the RV *Southern Surveyor* is open to all scientists employed by Australian research organizations based in Australia and their international collaborators.

Applications for time on the research vessel's annual Voyage Schedule are assessed relative to one another using three selection criteria:

1. the scientific and/or technical excellence of the project;
2. the potential of the project to contribute to Australia's national benefit; and,
3. the ability of investigators (demonstrated or potential, relative to opportunity) to successfully undertake the project.

A minimum of three independent assessors are sought for each application for use of the Marine National Facility.

GUIDELINES

Assessors are asked to provide their assessments on the *pro forma* provided. Assessments comprise both written comments and numerical scores.

Written Comments

Written comments should be made against each of the three selection criteria and should take into account aspects of each of the criteria outlined below (See Selection Criteria). In general, good reports provide evidence to support each key element of the assessor's critique and also weight individual criticisms to make it clear to the applicant which of the criticisms are most important and should be addressed in the applicant's response to the assessor's report.

In making comments, assessors are asked to use their knowledge of the field involved to:

- place the application in the context of other similar research projects being undertaken either in Australian regional waters or internationally;
- draw the Committee's attention to other relevant references or research, not necessarily drawn on by the applicant;
- provide an opinion as to whether the amount of time requested is adequate to successfully undertake the research outlined in the proposal; and
- record any other matters which could help the Committee in reaching an equitable assessment of the application in comparison to other applications that it is assessing.

Assessors are also invited to make further comments they consider would assist in the assessment of the application.

Very broad, generalised comments, either supportive or critical of the application, are not particularly helpful to the Committee in competitive assessment of proposals for allocation of time on RV *Southern Surveyor*.

Numerical Scores

Assessors are asked to provide a score for the project, between one and one hundred, against each of the three criteria. So as to assist in this process, descriptions of the expected characteristics of projects falling into various score categories are provided below. Assessors should be careful to match the scores they give the application with these descriptions and with the tenor of comments they make. For example, a highly supportive assessment, accompanied by a relatively low score is not helpful.

Selection Criteria

Criterion 1: the scientific and/or technical excellence of the project.

This criterion is used to measure any or all of the following:

- the scientific originality or innovation of the project, including the methods it proposes to employ;
- the likelihood that it will produce meaningful results – please differentiate between the feasibility of producing results if the program is successfully completed and the significance of the results in advancing the store of knowledge of international and Australian marine science;
- the degree to which it tests fundamental hypotheses;
- the extent to which the project represents a development of new methods and techniques with potentially wide applications to the growth of Australian and international marine research.

The National Facility Steering Committee expects that all users of RV *Southern Surveyor* will publish the results of any research undertaken in refereed journals.

The following is a guide to scoring against this criterion:

Score range	Characteristics
81-100	Highly innovative research of very high quality likely to produce scientific results of international significance or lead to the development of new and important methods and techniques for studying the marine environment.
61-80	High quality research likely to produce significant results of interest to the international scientific community
41-60	Sound research likely to produce useful results of particular to the local scientific community.
21-40	Research likely to produce results of minor interest/value or a repetition of the results of previous studies; with some minor flaws apparent in the research objectives, research design and/or preparation.
1-20	Poor quality research unlikely to produce useful/interesting results; major scientific

and/or planning flaws.

Criterion 2: the potential of the project to contribute to Australia’s national benefit.

This criterion is used as a measure of the degree to which the results or outcomes of the proposal are likely to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Australian Government's Oceans Policy and the Marine Science and Technology Plan, and in particular to:

- contribute to a better understanding of Australia’s marine environment and its living, mineral and energy resources , and/or the processes that impact on it, including those of adjacent or regional oceanic regions;
- contribute significantly to Australia’s national ability to sustainably manage and/or develop its ocean resources;
- contribute significantly to the international national knowledge base and capacity and/or to science and technology transfer to Australia;
- enhance Australia's standing as a major contributor to the scientific understanding of the ocean, its resources and processes;
- provide other benefits, enhancing Australia’s environmental, social and economic well-being; and
- provide significant training and/or development opportunities for young Australian scientists to assist them in developing their careers as marine researchers.

The following is a guide to scoring against this criterion:

Score range	Characteristics
81-100	an outstanding proposal which will significantly advance the understanding of Australia’s oceans environment and/or provide significant other flow-on benefits and have international impact.
61-80	a proposal of high quality which will advance the understanding of Australia’s marine jurisdiction or its regional oceanic environment, have some flow-on benefits and be noted internationally.
41-60	a good proposal which will make a major contribution to advance the understanding of Australia’s oceans environment.
21-40	routine project with moderate impact on the understanding of Australia’s oceans environment.
1-20	a poor proposal likely to produce results which will go essentially unnoticed in Australia and internationally.

Criterion 3: the ability of investigators (demonstrated or potential, relative to opportunity) to successfully undertake the project.

This criterion requires an assessment of the likely ability of the Principal Investigators (PI) to undertake the project and achieve the stated scientific objectives. Assessment can be based on:



a personal knowledge of the PIs and their contribution to the development of marine research; their publishing record relevant to the application; and their CVs. Copies of the last two are included in the assessment papers.

In order to not discriminate against applicants who are relatively new to ocean research, or are commencing their research career, it is important that assessors frame their remarks in light of the opportunities the applicant has had to both conduct relevant research and publish the results.

The following is a guide to scoring against this criterion:

Score range	Characteristics
81-100	Highly experienced investigator/s of international standing with excellent relevant research and publication record, or new researchers showing outstanding promise relative to opportunities.
61-80	Experienced investigator/s with good research and publication record or promising post-graduate researchers .
41-60	Experienced investigator/s with moderate research and publication record or highly promising recently graduated researcher.
21-40	Investigator/s with poor research and/or publication record
1-20	Investigator/s not considered capable of undertaking the research and/or of producing the required results.