



Communiqué

Marine National Facility Steering Committee

Meeting #98

The 98th meeting of the Marine National Facility Steering Committee was held in Hobart on 19 July 2024

Message from Steering Committee Chair – Ms Anne-Marie Lansdown

I am honoured and excited to be joining the Marine National Facility (MNF) Steering Committee for this 98th meeting as the new Chair and am keen to bring my enthusiasm for both science and universities in Australia to the Committee.

As an experienced executive director, I have had the privilege of working across both government and the university sector, which has provided me with a rich and diverse background. Most recently, I served as Deputy Chief Executive at Universities Australia and as Chief of Staff to Australia's former Chief Scientist, Dr. Alan Finkel. In these roles, I gained invaluable insights into the intricacies of higher education and research policy on both domestic and international stages. I have a particular affinity with CSIRO research vessel (RV) *Investigator* having been involved in the early funding and development process.



Anne-Marie Lansdown, MNF Chair

Throughout my career, including my time as a senior executive in the Departments of Industry and Education, I have always enjoyed the role of navigating the policy landscape and particularly the ongoing challenge of ensuring robust funding for research and essential research infrastructure.

My engagement with other National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) boards, the Australian Research Data Commons and the Australian National Imaging Facility has also broadened my perspective on the possibilities for collaboration on a range of areas but particularly data. As I take up the role of Chair, I am committed to helping the MNF navigate the changing waters of marine science research and contribute to solving Australia's greatest marine challenges with CSIRO. I expect I will continue to be astounded by the breadth and depth of powerful and impactful research contributing to Australia's outstanding science record.

2024 Application Call

The 2024 Application Call for sea time onboard RV *Investigator* 2026-27 is well underway. Reviews will be completed by the start of September and recommendations of support will be finalised by the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) and the National Benefit Advisory Committee (NBAC) at their respective meetings in September. The Steering Committee (the Committee) was happy to note the comments from Chairs of both RAC and NBAC regarding the very high standard of this year's applications in addressing the research quality and research benefit components of the application.

The Committee will meet to endorse the 2026-27 schedule in November 2024 with a draft public schedule expected in late January or early February 2025.



CSIRO hydrochemist Julie Janssens working on board RV *Investigator*. Image: CSIRO-Maren Preuss.

HSE reporting

The Committee noted how impressed they were by the HSE performance reporting statistics, in particular the significant reduction in the time taken to report safety incidents on RV *Investigator*. This substantial progress in hazard identification and reporting has been driven by the ongoing focus on health and safety by all onboard, an increased familiarity with Donesafe (CSIRO's HSE management system) and a stronger emphasis and consistent safety messaging from leadership.

The MNF uses a three-pronged approach to psychosocial risk management, emphasising proactive measures, clear expectations of mutual respect before boarding the vessel, and effective communication of psychosocial issues onboard and the framework used to manage the issues. Ongoing training in mental health and support for Voyage Managers and other key staff, improvements in fatigue management practices such as the wellbeing space, and plans for a soundproof, confidential conversation area onboard with video conferencing capabilities will

continue to build on these advancements and maintain the momentum in enhancing safety and operational efficiency.

The Committee commended the MNF team for their hard work and the improvements achieved in complex and difficult to manage areas.

Clinician supported voyages

The Committee discussed at length the benefits, costs and value of using a berth on board RV *Investigator* for a dedicated medical practitioner on every voyage. High level medical skills are essential for managing medical emergencies, particularly in the typical operating area of RV *Investigator*. The decision to have a clinician onboard every voyage directly supports the MNF's safety culture and commitment through investing in the health and safety of all onboard RV *Investigator*.

The Committee endorsed the MNF approach to adopt a clinician supported voyage model where a medical clinician (paramedic or Registered Nurse) will sail on all standard voyages, with two clinicians to sail on remote voyages, providing the very highest level of medical support for the vessel regularly operating in remote oceans.

Sea Country and marine science

The Committee held their first focused discussion on the intersection of Sea Country and Marine Science. MNF Director Toni Moate emphasised MNF's commitment to valuing Indigenous peoples' roles in Sea Country stewardship. She highlighted the importance of respecting traditional knowledge and cultural heritage while fostering genuine partnerships. Toni stressed the need for the MNF to reassess its governance frameworks to ensure inclusivity, emphasising that meaningful, ongoing dialogue is crucial for embedding cultural and systemic changes. This dialogue should start with making datasets accessible and ensuring cultural safety in the MNF's systems and spaces.

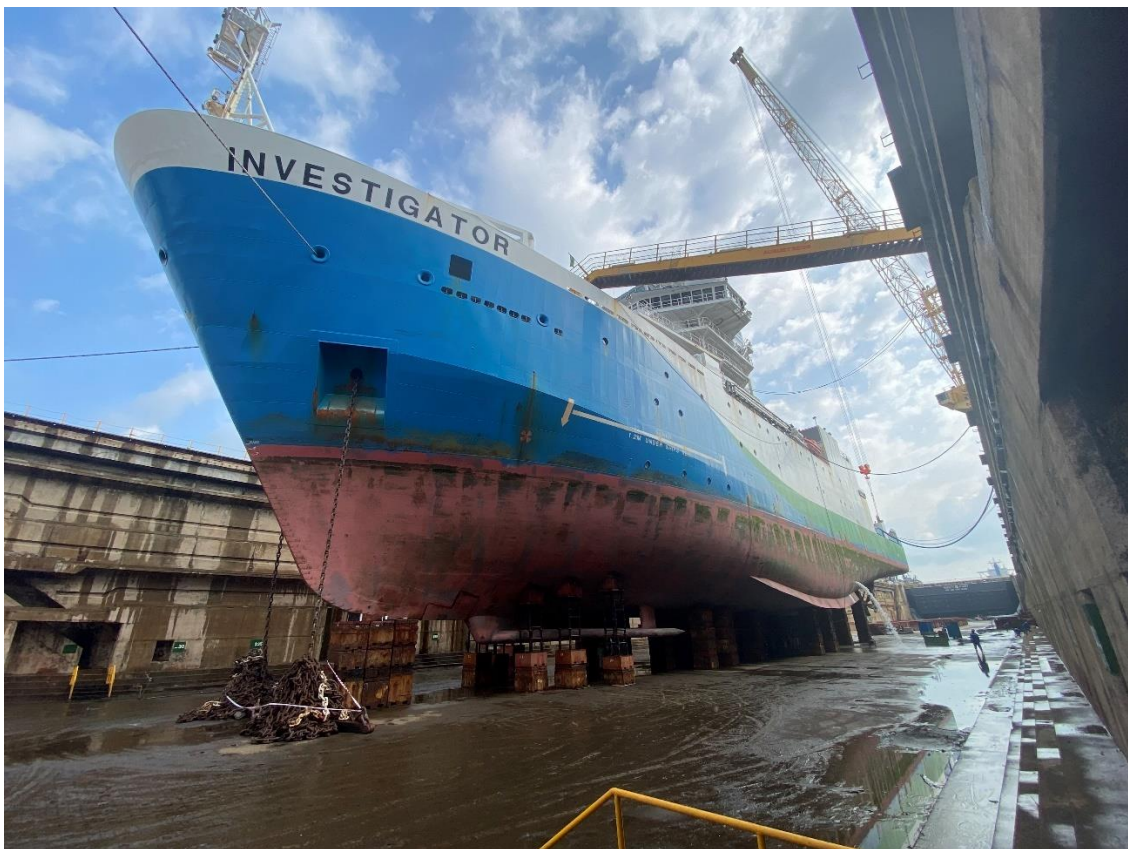
Louisa Warren, Executive Manager of CSIRO's Indigenous Engagement Office provided the Committee with insights into CSIRO's efforts to enhance engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Louisa further outlined the complex frameworks related to Indigenous rights, including Native Title and cultural agreements, and discussed programs like the Indigenous Protected Area Program.

The Committee discussed various strategies, including avoiding redundant layers of complexity in outreach to traditional owners for research voyages, facilitating Indigenous-led science, and developing guides for researchers to improve engagement and co-design of research with Traditional Owners. Key points included the need for an Indigenous data governance framework, creating exemplar approaches for engagement, and investing in Indigenous talent and projects. The Committee is eager to continue these conversations, with the upcoming inaugural Australian Sea Country Conference seen as a pivotal opportunity. Toni reaffirmed the MNF's commitment to resourcing and developing stronger relationships and engagement with Indigenous communities.

What's coming up for the MNF?

RV *Investigator* is currently undergoing its mid-life refit, and the Committee is closely following the delivery of this critical project and maintaining a strong focus on planned upgrades to scientific equipment. The MNF explained that the activities being undertaken now are essential works that must happen while the ship is out of the water, including a reapplication of paint and antifoul, and upgrades to the underwater acoustic systems.

RV *Investigator* will make its way back to Hobart for a three-month long maintenance period alongside to undertake the refit of laboratory and living spaces, including upgrades to the cabins, the mess, with consideration for fatigue management and creating quiet spaces onboard. This work will be followed by trials and calibration activities to ensure the ship is ready to recommence research activities later in 2024.



RV *Investigator* in the shipyard during its mid-life refit. Image: CSIRO-Jason Fazey.

Technical Innovation Advisory Group

The Committee was happy to report progress the MNF has made to stand up a new Technical Innovation Advisory Group (TIAG). TIAG will provide advice to the MNF to inform development of world class research technical capabilities within the MNF and any other matters requiring expertise as needed.

TIAG will incorporate user community representatives to ensure their feedback and expertise is incorporated into the ongoing management and building of future capability of the nation's only dedicated blue-water research vessel.

Committee membership changes: farewells and welcomes

Steering Committee membership

The Committee welcomed five new members: new Chair Anne-Marie Lansdown, new independent member Dr Beth Woods, AAD ex officio Rhonda Bartley, NMSC ex officio Dr Lyndon Llewellyn, and CSIRO Board Member and observer Professor Alex Brown.

Anne-Marie Lansdown

Chair, MNF Steering Committee