

NOC Association Steering Board
13 December 2024: 09:00 – 11:00 UK time
Microsoft Teams meeting

Present

Professor Mark Inall, (Chair) (MI)
Professor Icarus Allen (PML)
Professor Teresa Fernandes (TF) (Heriot Watt)
Dr Mark James (MJ) (MASTS)
Professor Kate Hendry (KH) (BAS)
Professor Kerry Howell (KHow) PML & University of Plymouth
Professor Maeve Lohan (ML) (Challenger Society)
Professor Claire Mahaffey (Liverpool) (CM)
Dr John Siddorn (NOC) (JS)
Professor Martin Solan (UoS) (MS)

Jackie Pearson (JP) Secretary

Item Two Minutes and actions from May 2024

- 2.1 The Board has received the minutes. Action 30, Doctoral Landscape Awards. NERC will publish the outcome shortly.
- 2.2 CM asked about the future of the NOCA. MI: There is a clear role for the NOCA to continue in its current form. The remit of the new 'UK Marine Science Scoping Group' (the Group) will be distinct from the NOCA. The Group, which will either be new or from an existing body, will undertake long-term horizon scanning scoping work, in relation to UK and devolved administration interests, and priorities in marine research. JS: the remit of the NOCA is to ensure that the community can interact with NERC NC-funded science, whereas the Group will involve a wider range of contacts, to enable the community to have access to, for example, industry and government contacts, and vice versa. The Group may provide the NOCA with a stronger voice outside the NERC community and will look at policy areas for government to support as well as long-term sustained monitoring.
- 2.3 JS: there will be discussion with Challenger Society about potentially taking on the role of the new Group. Also, NOC's Sarah Taylor has written a proposal to indicate how the Group might look, if set up as a separate body. Discuss in new year.
- 2.4 Action 34: complete. Related to the Decade Working Group, headed by Professor Angela Hatton.

Item Three: Update on the National Decade Committee.

- 3.1 MI: NDC website doesn't reflect the range of UK activity which comes under the UN Decade so we had asked Alan Evans how this might be remedied. This should be an action for the NDC. Although the update doesn't cover this, it does advise that the NDC is organising an event in March 2025 at the Royal Society and is looking to renew the membership. Defra will be advertising opportunity to host the UK NDC

Secretariat as the Cefas contract ends in March 2025. There is no mention of giving a broader representation of UK activities. MI: We have asked Professor Matt Frost, who chairs the NDC, for greater representation of UK marine science. KHow: there are five UK programmes endorsed by the UN, however, MI felt that this is too few and had asked Matt Frost if there is a better way to represent UK activity. Send Alan Evans update to whole board after meeting. **Action 36: JP**

- 3.2 MS: There is tension between the broad statements from the UN Decade. There are headline topics like biodiversity, for example, which basically means everything and then there are individual projects. It's not clear how they fit together; this lack of direction and budget means that there is a risk that the UK may miss this opportunity. MI: Hopefully, there will be opportunities for change at the midpoint of the Decade.
- 3.3 JS: what happens to all the 'Decade' coordination committees at the end of the Decade? What will the international coordination space look like at that point? The UK needs a view on this. The NDC is not about trying to align UK marine science with the Decade but is about gathering information about what the UK is doing. Its role is not to guide and this makes the UK vulnerable.
- 3.4 MJ: We need to decide if we should commit any more resource on the Decade or focus on something more valuable. KHow co-leads an ocean Decade global programme which has been a lot of work but has had no support from UK government. If government is not interested, then it should disengage. The carbon programme got funding from Defra for a secretariat. MI: asked if this was because of association with the Decade? KHow believes yes but may be wrong. The ocean acidification network (Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability Programme (OARS) received funding from Defra for a secretariat. IA: the support for the OARS programme, is based partly on the Decade and partly on historic government engagement with ocean acidification but support may not extend beyond the end of this financial year. MI: there isn't dedicated support for the ocean Decade. Maybe this should be fed back to Matt. IA: If nothing comes out of the spending review, the Decade will essentially be finished as far as government is concerned. It may be worth, however, maintaining the networks. MS: Do we need to ask NERC to fund something? There is no mechanism to explain our priorities and contribution to the Decade. The risk is that all we are doing is rebadging existing research as 'Decade' and this won't produce added value. MI: as there is no new money, it should at least reflect the on-going relevant UN Decade science. This isn't happening and funding isn't available either, so this doesn't look good internationally. MI suggested writing a letter to Matt Frost that summarise these thoughts. JS is supportive of this representing the NOCA view, but sceptical about what it may achieve. IA: this board is focused on NC so a letter would need to reflect this. Summarise thoughts to Matt Frost so this is registered. **Action 37: MI**

Item Four: Format and content for the NOCA AGM 2025

- 4.1 MI: The NOCA AGM is an important and well-run, highly appreciated by the community, although attendance is low (~ 50), compared to Challenger (~300) and MASTS events. The AGM doesn't take much time so we need to encourage attendance, by asking members to promote through their networks.

- 4.2 Format is on-line, two, half days, (2.5 hr sessions) with a break. This works well and allows everyone to engage; numbers are steady once people join. MS had suggested non-consecutive days which we tried but we had to revert to consecutive. MI preferred consecutive days and recommended this continue.

4.3 Content

Last year, we discussed the Future of Marine Research Infrastructure (FMRI) and AtlantiS (NC). Prof Gideon Henderson's piece about COAST was well received. KH suggested a showcase of outputs from the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* which could involve representatives from the PICCOLO, BIOPOLE and KANG-GLAC projects. MI agreed, asking that NC elements be highlighted.

CM suggested item on the International Polar Year (IPY) in 2032 – 2033. This is a chance to think about what the UK will be doing as there will be a lot of international activity. MI agreed, adding that there are currently calls for membership for IPY committees. KH added in chat that IPY also links to the Fourth International Conference on Arctic Research Planning (ICARP IV) Process – 2025.

MJ: perhaps revisiting some activities from last year, to show what has been achieved since. MI: follow up on FMRI would be good.

JS: NOCA is about NC so an item on the SDA may not be appropriate; the same applies to the IPY. Our role is not to consider how the wider community will deal with the IPY as we are not the wider community, however, we could ask how the community feels about NC, through ships, autonomy and how the marine science component of NC contributes to the IPY.

JS: There will be more clarity about FMRI by the time of the AGM so include this. The role of lead scientist is advertised and there is also a technical lead role.

MS: we often assume that people know about NC, but a summary might be helpful, e.g. explain the challenges of providing training about NC for early career researchers (ECR). MI: we do always have an update on the NOC NC programmes to enhance focus. We should encourage attendance from ECRs.

IA: to increase attendance, rather than be a lobbying body, we should include some science topics. For example, what is the benefit of NC for UK marine science? A science showcase, e.g. ships, autonomy, marine programmes and how these link with HEI sector research – let's show where synergy and benefits have occurred. Let's show what NC delivers. This would help show strengths and weaknesses. IA expressed concern about an over emphasis on ECRs - there is an equality issue here. Researchers have issues at all stages of their careers. Senior people can be undervalued and don't always get support. MI doesn't consider that the NOCA is lobbying group and would be concerned about having just science talks - we need a forward look too so keep the mix but agreed to showing the benefits of NC.

KHow: The biology community is disconnected from NC so it would be useful to explain what is and what isn't NC science and also, it's not clear how universities can engage. These issues may be why engagement is not as strong as we would like.

ML: we need to know what NC is. BIOPOLE is a good example. Looking forward to IPY for example, NC should be involved so this could be a forward look topic, e.g. how NC is planned, how do HEIs engage, etc. Also, we need to know how the NOCA will engage with the Group and the FMRI programme. Availability of updates about this could boost engagement at the AGM. JP: we had some science talks last year and included update on Atlantis.

JS: NOCA is not a review body for NERC's NC – NC is also supported by CEH, BAS and BGS. BAS NC is not part of this conversation. We don't have control over what BAS includes in its NC. When referring to the NOCA, we mean the NC that is delivered through the marine delivery partners which includes the large-scale research infrastructure - the RRS *Discovery* and the RRS *James Cook* but not the RRS *Sir David Attenborough*. It includes the autonomous vehicles that are managed by the National Marine Equipment Pool and the NC science programme Atlantis and Class. Other NC is developed with other centres e.g. BIOPOLE but NOC doesn't have control. That said, there are other fora where the community can exercise influence NC, for example, the Marine Facilities Advisory Board and the Cruise Programme Executive Board. For Atlantis, there were workshops and stakeholder events etc. so there are many routes to enable the community to engage but perhaps the NOCA needs to advertise these more widely. **Action 38: JP**

MI: the NOCA doesn't use much time but has proved to be enormously informative; the event helps the community learn about what is going on. We have a remit around single centre NC, the ships and autonomy operated by NOC. JS would have no problem if NERC would like to have a wider conversation about NC and have a group like this for the wider NC. We are trying to be more interdisciplinary so this would be good. JS didn't think other NC centres have this sort of group so may not be engaging with HEI centres in the way that the NOCA does.

KHo: there is confusion in the HEI community about how to engage in marine NC so the AGM would be a good opportunity to highlight opportunities here. MI: JP does already send a lot of information to the community, via a range of routes. JP referred to a document produced by NOC on NC which could be included in the papers. MI agreed to shorten this to four bullet points for the booklet **Action 39: MI**

JS explained the evolution of NOC. The Southampton Oceanography Centre (SOC) was a partnership between the University of Southampton (UoS) and NERC. Eventually, the partnership demerged and the organisation, now wholly owned by NERC, became the National Oceanography Centre. There was a concern that the new NOC might no longer have as much engagement with the university sector, so this led to the NOC Association - to ensure visibility for NERC's NC activities. This was explicitly about NOC's movement out of the HEI sector. NOC undertakes NC activities in collaboration with its delivery partners. It's not just NOC science that is part of the NC programme; NOC works with the MBA, PML and SAMS.

KHow: It is hard to understand how to engage from within the HEI. There is funding from NERC to fund science that HEIs can engage with so it would be good to understand this better. MI agreed that this is confusing. Maybe we should discuss our core function at the outset and include more of the marine elements of NC as a

discussion point. It would be good to refer to the IPY. JS suggested this could be framed in terms of NC engagement which would allow us to talk about it.

Include an FMRI update and try to encourage engagement from ECRs, accepting the point made by IA. JS suggested, in the chat, that we could ask BAS NC Science representatives to talk about how their NC will be used. MI agreed it would be good to have a discussion, on day two, about alignment of marine NC, which is the opportunity to highlight BAS NC, involving the new ship, as an example. Create plan for two-day event. **Action 40: MI**

In the chat: JS: I would love to see the wider community use of NC science / capability showcased, not just the NC science / capability itself.

MI: Ask representatives to highlight the NOCA meeting and to include slot at AGM on the marine science scoping group. **Action 41: JP**

Summary topics

Day One

- FMRI update
- AtlantiS update – **JP has already approached Professor Jason Holt**
- How the community feels about NC, through ships, autonomy; how the marine science component of NC contributes to the IPY – discussion
- The new marine science scoping group

Day Two

- National Capability and NC Science – what it is and how HEIs can get involved
- BAS NC, involving the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* – talk by BAS scientists.
- Alignment of marine NC - discussion

Item Five Membership – new chair and members

5.1 MI is coming to the end of his three-year term. There is draft advert for new chair. We invite Claire Mahaffey, Kate Hendy and Teresa Fernandes to continue, for the sake of continuity. Put this request in writing. **Action 42: JP**

JP: The ToRs advise that the new chair is appointed by the CEO, in consultation with the steering board members. As MFAB is a sub-group of the NOCA and we will be advertising for its new chair, JP thought that, for consistency, we should also advertise for the new chair of the NOCA. Although JS recommended advertising for new board members, he felt that we should elect a chair from the board. IA: normal practice would be to assemble a board and select a chair from within itself rather than advertise which creates more work. JS agreed with IA and would be concerned

to have someone with no experience on the board to become chair. JS agreed to advertising for new members, but chair should be elected from the board. JS was happy not to have the veto. MI had benefited from being on the board first prior to becoming chair, so decided that we should follow the terms of reference. Justifying the approach will be the role of the NOC CEO, JS. JP: the select and approach method had been an option for the new MFAB chair but now that post will be advertised, so we need to be able defend differences between the methods. JS had assumed that MFAB reports to CPEB as a NERC board. JP: MFAB was a NERC board but is now a NOC board which still reports to the NOC CEO. The change here resulted from concerns around overlap with the new FMRI programme. JS: This needs clarification. **Action 43: JS, JP**

ML agreed that we have a chair who has had experience of being on the board. MI: Recommended advertising for new members but it is the remit of JS to work out the interdependencies of the different bodies. We should maintain the principle, as before, by taking on a new chair from the existing board and we will consider a method, with some discussion with board members.

MJ asked about the selection process for new members. MI: we advertise, and applications are reviewed by the chair and NOC CEO. JP: A sub-set of the board selects the new members and announces these to the board. MJ wanted to ensure transparency. JP: we have person specifications and applicants are discussed on that basis. IA suggested creating an appointments committee, which is a sub-set of the board (which might be chair and the NOC CEO), so explain the selection process in the advert. **Action 44: JP**

Summary actions

#	Action	Who
36	Send Alan Evans update to whole board after meeting.	JP
37	Summarise concerns about the profile of Decade-related science to NDC chair, Matt Frost.	MI
38	Ensure that NC science events are advertised as widely as possible.	JP
39	NOC has a document about the various different types of NC. Suggest shortening to four bullet points and including as a paper for information in the NOCA AGM booklet.	MI
40	Create plan for two-day AGM.	MI
41	Ask representatives to highlight NOCA meeting.	JP
42	Invite Claire Mahaffey, Kate Hendy and Teresa Fernandes to extend their membership on the board.	JP
43	Clarify the situation of MFAB in relation to the NOCA.	JS & JP
44	Ensure that the advert for new members makes the selection process clear.	JP