

NOCA Steering Board 22nd June 2020

Attendees

Professor David Thomas (Chair, Bangor) (DT)

Dr Simon Brockington (Defra) (SB)

Professor Teresa Fernandes (Heriot Watt) (TF)

Professor Angela Hatton (NOC) (AH)

Dr Kate Hendry (Bristol) (KH)

Professor Ed Hill (NOC)

Dr Kerry Howell (Plymouth) (KHo)

Professor Mark Inall (SAMS) (MI)

Dr Mark James (MASTS) (MJ)

Profess Clare Mahaffey (Liverpool) (CM)

Professor David Paterson (MASTS) (DP)

Professor Ros Rickaby (standing in for Rob Goddard) (RR)

Professor Martin Solan (Southampton) (MS)

Jackie Pearson, Secretary (JP)

1. Welcome

- 1.1 DT welcomed the new members and advised he had been chair for a few months and had achieved gender balance for the Board.

2. Introduce the new members

- 2.1 Members introduced themselves.

3. Overview of NOC including National Capability – Ed Hill

- 3.1 MI asked whether the new NOC will transform the way it governs and operates. EH advised that NOC will be working with its Board to deliver the new governance structure. NOC will be accountable to a several different masters for day to day operations and is looking at some activities (e.g. data management) to see where engagement might be strengthened.
- 3.2 MI asked how the dissolution of the Department for International Development could affect NOC in terms of Official Development Assistance (ODA). EH said that this isn't yet known although there will be on-going commitment. NOC is interested to see if some ODA activity might be more allied to UK national interest; the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has supported a number of ODA activities.

4. Meeting minutes and actions from November 2019

- 4.1 The Board approved the minutes and these will now be posted on line. **Action: JP**

5. Looking forward to post-COVID 19, implications for marine science.

- 5.1 EH started this discussion. We have all reacted to the crisis and learnt from it. In terms of customers and funders of marine science – will we see major shifts in priorities? Or will marine science slip down the agenda? Attention may be directed to other areas now to help economic recovery. We have a Comprehensive Spending Review at the end of the year. What will that mean in terms of funding prioritisation? There should be a position piece to show that marine will be important in terms of enabling economic recovery. **Action WHO?**
- 5.2 Whereas formerly, scientists would fly around the globe to conferences, this no longer appropriate. Business has been conducted in new ways, however, what will the situation be like in the future? Will things ever return to normal? There are people issues in terms of how they have had to adapt e.g. engaging with colleagues remotely. There are issues on gender and diversity and the impacts are varied and won't be fully known yet.
- 5.3 In September, [Version 2.0 of the Ocean Decade \('Decade'\) Implementation Plan](#) will be submitted to the 75th session of United Nations General Assembly for ratification. The rules of the UN are based on face to face meetings so this has been a new challenge. The UK has identified the [International Working Group](#) of the Marine Science Coordination Committee (MSCC) as the UK National Committee for the Decade and it will be chaired by the FCDO. The Royal Society (RS) is taking an interest and was about to have a town meeting. At the next plenary of the MSCC, we need to discuss how to get the community together around the Decade's agenda. It will be necessary to generate fundable programmes through UKRI to contribute to the Decade and this would be discussed at the RS meeting. RR asked if the RS meeting would be conducted remotely? AH responded she is involved in helping to organise this and said it would re-organised, hopefully by September, and probably will be conducted virtually.
- 5.4 KH noted that one of the issues re: post COVID concerns Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and asked if it would be possible to achieve community engagement in the Decade through ECR activities? If there are funding opportunities, it would be good if these could involve ECR activities. DT thanked KH for the suggestion. MJ noted that at a meeting of the European Marine Board, the German Marine Research Consortium (KDM) had indicated they are preparing a launch event on the Decade that would have a focus around ECRs.
- 5.5 We can't just focus on the Decade being funding via Research Councils. There are other opportunities to explore and we should look beyond public funding. There is uncertainty about the mechanism for badging projects under the Decade - we need to recognise relevant projects and find ways to badge them. KH advised she has been involved in developing Decade projects for the last two years and in terms of 'badging', there is going to be a process announced shortly. There is a pro-forma to complete and submit and this will happen before December. The IOC is seeking a tranche of projects.

5.6 Points raised about the Decade:

- what is the benefit for organisations to be involved?
- an ECR may ask, '*what's in it for me?*'
- should the NOCA link up with corporate businesses?

MJ commented that we are addressing Sustainable Development Goals so the issue is not about what is in it for us. MI agreed and noted that the Climate Change of the Parties (COP) 26 is a casualty of COVID. The global climate emergency will come back up the agenda and public interest will re-emerge. We need to think about COP26. The IPY is a good example of a 'Decade' programme.

- 5.7 MS felt that many of the discussions about the Decade have missed the point of the call. There seems to be a lack of understanding about the Decade in the community. We need to think about what we are going to do in the next decade. AH said that 2021 will be the start of the Decade, also COP26 and the G7 presidency. The agenda is still on the table and this is our opportunity to make something of it. As a group we can promote the Ocean. The FCDO and BEIS are thinking about this. This is a great opportunity and we need to make sure people know how important this is.
- 5.8 MI suggested that the NOCA Board pull the various concepts together about what might be done, as a proposition for the community. DT agreed that this is a good idea **Action (who?)**
- 5.9 KHo said that whatever the UK does under the Decade, it must be inclusive of the community. There are already people very engaged; whatever is being funded nationally, we need to ensure the community's views are represented.
- 5.9.1 DT said that the effects of COVID on careers is something to be discussed. We need to gain a wider view. Careers have been tangibly affected. e.g. failed PhDs, problems with submitting grant applications. MS – people have been affected in different ways e.g. caring for others at home. What about post-doctoral research assistants (PDRA) who have been close to finishing their term? Help that comes may be too late for some – we have already lost staff.
- 5.9.2 DP – is it necessary to understand what's happening at the different stages? Some students have failed because they can't get into their chosen field. This has been happening at undergraduate level where students haven't been able to do field work and this has led to some giving up.
- 5.9.3 MS – there is also the hidden impact of when we return in, potentially, in September. It will be hard to catch up. Some people have been delaying field work but later this year, in the autumn, won't be the right time. This doesn't seem to be something that people are aware of, however, DT reassured the group that had been noted at the last NERC Science Committee meeting.
- 5.9.4 EH - UKRI has been working on getting grant extensions, particularly where they have involved PDRAs. This activity has to go to BEIS and the Treasury.

The Research Councils are aware but it is challenging getting the funding issue resolved.

- 5.9.5 CM – it would be useful to map out the impact of the lack of field work and the lack of access to laboratories, from undergraduates to post-graduate researchers, for this calendar year, if possible. We have missed an entire season of fieldwork. Many student projects will now be delayed. Next year will be compromised too.
- 5.9.6 EH talked about the expeditions programme which has been suspended and needs to be re-planned. We met with the CPEB and there is a series of options for restarting the programme. This will start conservatively. In the future, we will be seeing minimal science parties – there is a programme to recover the programme in a gentle way. We can't risk beginning the virus onto a ship. Both ships need refit anyway in Amsterdam. This is a logistical headache at the moment. There are good signs that we will start to recover the programme from October. KH suggested starting science at sea with skeleton crews. We need to be mindful as to who is being cut out when science cruises are being cut.
- 5.9.7 MI – should we do a piece of work on this or has it been done? Re: losing field work? We need to put a positive on this too. DT said there are many in the community who are finding it difficult, for example, in terms of caring for relatives. There seems to be cases of male colleagues being able to submit large grants but female colleagues seem to be disadvantaged.
- 5.9.9 AH was supportive of the concept of considering ECRs with respect to the Decade and agreed that COVID is having a disproportional effect on groups and there are potential equality issues to consider. DT closed this section by agreeing that we need to find a way of taking these issues forward. We need to make some practical decisions now.

6. Marine Science Coordination Committee (MSCC) update

- 6.1 SB – spoke about the recent World Ocean Day. There has been continued commitment to the [Global Ocean Alliance](#) which is championing an international commitment for a minimum 30% of the global ocean to be protected through Marine Protected Areas by 2030 and we will continue to push this target through the UN Convention on Biodiversity in 2021.
- 6.2 The [Benyon review](#) into Highly Protected Marine Areas has been completed. Defra will look at making protecting areas from hazards such as fisheries and dredging, for example.
- 6.3 Abigail Marshall, is the new Executive Secretary to the MSCC and settling in extremely well, breathing new life into the Secretariat. Formerly the role was about minutes but we are encouraging Abi to help moving the agenda forward. Currently, she is looking at an inter-ministerial group. Other activities include the Communications Group which has started and is dedicating itself to marine literacy and the Research Vessels Working Group.

- 6.4 The [UN Decade of the Ocean](#) is facilitated through UNESCO. The Royal Society is going to facilitate a workshop and this will involve the MSCC. DT asked about the progress of the coordination of Decade activities. SB explained there is now an [International Working Group](#) which is the best place for that coordination task.
- 6.5 TF – in terms of Highly Protected Marine Areas, what discussion might be taking place in terms of Scotland? SB advised that as conservation policy is being devolved, this needs to be addressed by that particular government – Prof Colin Moffatt should pick this up.
- 6.5 MI – referred to the Isle of Man (IoM) and the waters of the Irish Sea and areas of zero fishing – does this group have any connection with the Isle of Man and their areas in the Irish Sea? SB said that conservation policy is devolved there and these areas are self-governing. There is the IoM scallop closure zones which is allowing biomass to build up on the sea floor. There are other examples of ecosystem recoveries where exclusion zones have operated. Government now needs to reply to the Benyon review, hopefully within the next six months.
- 7. The 10th Annual Meeting of the NOC Association – date, format, topics and speakers.**
- 7.1 We should schedule the next meeting in April or May 2021. Perhaps a mixed, blended type of forum, maybe something in London or Southampton. Or have a well thought out virtual meeting? AH suggesting establishing a couple of small working groups to talk about issues. e.g. the effect of COVID on Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and the Decade of the Ocean. We could share outputs, but on a smaller, virtual scale.
- 7.2 EH advised that the NOCA usually operates in spring time; there are two steering board meetings per year. We would be thinking of Spring 2021 – and decide topics now.
- 7.3 Should we do what we've always done or should we think about it differently now, either virtual or partially virtual? Perhaps something intermediate, smaller scale that is focussed around the two issues identified. A virtual meeting would mean that we could open up the event across more of the community. IA suggested a virtual meeting but before Christmas but MS said people will all be busy in the autumn. There are benefits of a virtual meeting as this could bring in more delegates and would also be at zero cost. Topics could include COP, G7, post-Covid-19 challenges as an interim and then have an AGM next year. We could have two working groups that would report to the plenary. Small working groups could come up with ideas that go then go to, for example the Challenger Society and the NOC association. AH said that in terms of a workshop, ECRs may have time to do this which may also help their career. DT – agreed to two working groups, two themes. This is something new for the Association. We now need to identify two people to lead. DT asked the group to think about this and email Jackie and David Thomas within a week.

8. Mapping our beneficiaries – an NC perspective - Ed Hill

- 8.1 DP noted that MASTS is now moving their annual science meeting on line which might make it easier for NOC to have a session. The meeting will be on-line now and will be an opportunity to make the case. Offer to discuss with EH off-line later, thank you. EH What is the timing? DP start of October and will be the week of 4th or 5th of October.

Any other business

- MI – talked about the getting feedback from the community – are we issuing a statement about what the NOCA is doing? JP said that in the past, the NOCA has undertaken many activities and agreed to send the link to these around the group. **Action: JP**
- MS advised that in October, the Global Environment Research Committee (GERC) will discuss areas of interest about the ‘Decade’. MS will keep group informed on when the document will be available. **Action: MS**
- EH – mentioned the paper on NC as this is not well understood and we going to turn this into something glossy as a guide to NC in the marine sector. This will be another resource that will come from this group. DT asked if the NC document could be added to the web? **Action: JP**