

**NOC Association Steering Board  
6 November 2018, MRC Offices, London**

**Attendees**

Professor Peter Liss, CBE, FRS, University of East Anglia, Chair (PL)  
Professor Tony Clare, University of Newcastle (TC)  
Professor Ed Hill, OBE, National Oceanography Centre (EH)  
Dr Mark James, Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MJ)  
Jackie Pearson, Secretary, National Oceanography Centre (JP)  
Professor Steve de Mora, Plymouth Marine Laboratory (SdM)  
Professor Jon Sharples, University of Liverpool (JS)  
Professor Martin Solan, University of Southampton (MS)  
Professor Rob Upstill-Goddard, Challenger Society (RU)  
Professor Andrew Watson, FRS, University of Exeter (AW)

**Item 1 Chairman's welcome and apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Professor Gideon Henderson, Julie Pringle-Stewart, Professor Angela Hatton, Professor Rachel Mills and Professor David Thomas (new member from the University of Bangor).
- 1.2 Professor Martin Solan attended as the representative for Professor Rachel Mills. Professor Rob Upstill-Goddard attended as a new member, in his capacity as Chair of The Challenger Society.

**Item 2 Minutes and actions 30 April 2018**

- 2.1 PL had some corrections which he would advise off-line to the Secretary. No further comments were received. **Action: PL**

**Item 3 Progress on the NOC demerger from NERC**

- 3.1 The terms of separation are being negotiated before review by the Science Minister. The terms are broadly agreed, although ship operations are not concluded. The agreement went to NERC Council on 27 September with the major terms agreed in principle. It was submitted to the NOC Board in October and agreed. It will next go to the UKRI Financing Operations Board. Gateway Four is next and NOC is ready to go to the implementation stage. After Ministerial sign off, the agreement will require UK Treasury approval. There has been slippage on the Gateway Four process so this will not happen now until January 2019 and implementation will take six months after ministerial approval. An Office of National Statistics classification is needed and the new NOC will be outside the public sector.
- 3.2 The ships will remain in UKRI-NERC ownership and continue to be operated by NOC. NERC will bear the associated risk because this would be excessive for NOC. To reduce costs NERC is no longer fully funding ship operations. NOC has NC funding to maintain the ships, crew them and ensure they are certified, however, funding is being reduced, in real terms (flat cash). As

NERC is not inflation-proofing the cost of ship operations, a gap is starting to open. Though not obliged by NERC to do so, NOC is making the ships available for third party charter. (Existing barter arrangements will remain in place). NERC approval is needed to fund the ships via a third party. So far, NOC has identified two interested parties but these have not been approved by NERC because of a potential to disrupt the science schedule. This situation will be reviewed by the Cruise Programme Executive Board (CPEB). The CPEB includes the Chair of Marine Facilities Advisory Board (Professor Carol Robinson, UEA) and the Cruise Programme Review Group, chaired by Professor Paul Tyler, UoS), so the community is represented. The BAS ship is outside this issue as it has a protected budget.

- 3.3 Third party revenue will be important to ensure that the level of capability of ships and the National Marine Equipment Pool is maintained at a level to meet the UK science community expectations. When third party revenue is generated, it will be ring-fenced in National Marine Facilities to cover the gap. If more revenue is generated than is needed to fill the gap, this would be held as a buffer to offset any shortfall in future years. If significant revenue is generated, the excess would be shared between NOC and NERC. NERC has a mechanism for calculating the costs that will apply to third party charters and these must be signed off by NERC UKRI. For commercial charter, NOC will need to recoup the full economic cost. In the future, there may be opportunities to initiate a collaborative research programme with third parties. In these cases, the third party would be a contributor so this would not be a full commercial charter. CPEB will be in charge of this.
- 3.4 NOC is working to identify possible customers and presently, there are potentially three. Commercial charter activities can differ to those that the ships usually undertake so this situation will have to be monitored. It would be best if third party charters could be programmed in advance.
- 3.5 The lead-time to obtain access to a NERC ship is shortening, although there appears to have been a decline in requests to use ship time. It is important that the community continues to apply for ship time on proposals. JS referred to a cap on standard grants which makes it difficult to add ship time, although EH thought this had been resolved. MS said that applying to access ships adds a level of complication. Grants are being rejected on seemingly minor issues and so increasingly, applicants are reluctant to apply for ship time as the perception is that doing so is likely to reduce the likelihood of a success. A concern is that this has the potential to reduce the number of postdoctoral researchers and PhD students that have seagoing experience. EH said that scientists should not be worried as NERC does not want to cancel expeditions. It is difficult for NERC to fund everything fully which is why the ships may not be fully utilized. It will be important to bridge the funding gap to maintain capability. Responsibility for informing the community of this situation lies with the CPEB. SdM suggested PL writes a letter about this to the Chair of the CPEB. **Action: PL**
- 3.6 MS said that there are concerns about how the BAS ships and the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* will operate, especially in relation to demand at both

poles. If expeditions are likely to be longer in duration, how will the academic community balance teaching and other commitments? There may now be more expeditions conducted in the Southern Ocean and the Southern hemisphere in general, which immediately places the field season in conflict with term time. There are also concerns about delivery and continuity of research. Post-doctoral appointments seem to be getting shorter and grant turnover seems to be increasing, shifting the burden of delivery to shorter timescales. In addition, as grant success rates are lower than they have been, staff are having to complete many more proposals a year in order to secure a grant, which is challenging.

- 3.7 MJ added that post-Brexit, the situation will become more difficult. Germany is building more ships and if the UK wants to continue to engage internationally, the government will need to support this. This is a general trend which is happening irrespective of Brexit. EH explained that at the moment, the funding gap is small (< 0.5 £m). It may be that the NOC starts to use the blue water ships more in the Southern Ocean. MS added that, if this is the case, there is a danger that location and other practical matters will influence which grants go forward for funding rather than scientific excellence. There is already some frustration in the community that announcements of opportunity give the impression that location, for example, is unconstrained, when in fact there are preferred regions of activity. Where this is the case, it should be made clear in the announcement of opportunity to avoid researchers wasting time putting together a proposal that has a slim chance of being selected.
- 3.8 MS expressed the worry that the UK is notably absent from some international programmes and funding opportunities, such as the recent Biodiversity call, reducing our international reputation and standing.

#### **4. Relationship with the Challenger Society**

- 4.1 PL commented that once NOC becomes independent of NERC, the role of the NOC Association must change. At the moment, there is not much contact with the Challenger Society. The President should be a member of the NOC Association Steering Board. Also to note, the NOC Association is not represented on the Challenger Society. PL was not sure if the new NOC will be able to give the NOC Association the resources it receives currently. For example, the NOC Association and the Challenger Society should respond to inquiries. RU agreed to raise the issue of interaction with the Challenger Society at the meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November. **Action: RU**
- 4.2 The focus of the NOC Association needs to be on the NC provided by NOC which is 50% of NOC's budget. The Association will have an observer status on the new NOC board. Historically the Association has taken on broader issues, e.g. MFAB and PhD student training but in the future, narrower world of NC, this would be beyond its remit. Thus reviewing the PhD studentships situation probably isn't appropriate for the NOC Association in the new configuration.

- 4.3 There has been criticism from the community on the difference between the NOC Association AGM and the Challenger Society meeting. It was queried whether the NOC Association and the Challenger Society could do a joint AGM. The Secretary agreed to send the link to previous NOC Association AGMs to RU. **Action: JP** and RU agreed to update Peter Liss. **Action: RU**

#### **Item 5 Relationship with Marine Facilities Advisory Board (MFAB)**

- 5.1 MFAB provides advice to NOC by taking a five-year look ahead at the requirements for the National Marine Equipment Pool. This contrasts with the the Cruise Programme Review Group (CPRG) which looks back at completed expeditions. As the NOC Association becomes more focused on NC, MFAB may become a sub-group. Currently it reports to EH and is represented on the Cruise Programme Executive Board. MFAB will continue to report to the CEO of NOC and will not report to the new NOC Board, however, as the Association has observer status already on the NOC Board, this is a route for feedback. PL noted that the NOC Board had been made aware of the concerns of the Association.
- 5.2 MS referred to the Royal Society's Global Environment Research Committee report on 'Oceans' and agreed to send the link to the Secretariat for circulation to the Board. **Action: MS/Secretary**
- 5.3 The Secretary explained how MFAB works - its members represent different sections of UK marine science and suggestions from the community for new items of equipment are welcome. It was agreed to circulate the details of MFAB to the Board. **Action. Secretary** [*Post meeting note: this [link](#) explains how suggestions for new items of equipment can be made to MFAB*]

#### **Item 6 Relationship with MASTS**

- 6.1 MJ gave a presentation on MASTS (hyperlink)

#### **Item 9 MSCC update**

***Due to time constraints, MJ gave the MSCC presentation earlier than planned.***

- 9.1 MJ gave a presentation on the MSCC (hyperlink)

#### **Items 7 & 8 The future role and membership of the NOC Association Steering Board.**

- 7.1 The Board will need to focus on NC in the future. This implies that membership will be representational rather than based on expertise as had been the case in the early days of the Board. Thus the 'major players' in NC should be represented on the new NOC Association Board. AW agreed that NC providers should be representatives, however, how should the user community be represented? EH advised this would be the role of MFAB so the MFAB Chair should be a member of the Steering Board. It might also be

appropriate for the Chair of Climate Linked Atlantic Sector Science (CLASS) to be on the new NOC Association Steering Board. **Actions: Secretary**

- 7.2 The Steering Board will need a new Chair who can't be from NOC because the Chair also sits on the NOC Board. Membership should represent the major users of NC with a geographic and gender balance. It would be good to also have representation from early career researchers. Terms of appointment should be for four years. Perhaps there should be a mechanism for the Board to report back to the community? MS suggested inviting members of the community to come to Board meetings to raise any issues they may have. SdM suggested that this could be done at an AGM, perhaps by using break-out groups. PL agreed as conclusions could then be given to the Board for consideration and action. **Action: Secretary**
- 7.3 MJ said that there is still an issue on resource for the MSCC and the NOC Association. PL explained that this was why he has been trying to engage with the Challenger Society. AW added the NOC Association needs to be about more than just National Capability. EH said that NOC already provides support for the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. Most funding for NC science is awarded on a competitive basis.
- 7.4 SdM expressed his appreciation for some of the broader issues that the NOC Association had covered in the past, and felt that the Association was making progress. MJ was concerned, however, that the NOC Association may be trying to do too much – it should not make promises and make it clear that the AGM is a discussion forum. PL added that the Association has accomplished many useful objectives, for example, *Scanning the Horizon* and the DTP discussions although it won't have as much opportunity in the future because it will need to focus on NC.
- 7.5 There should be twelve members, representing the major centres and there needs to be enhanced interaction with the Challenger Society and MASTS. We should also talk to the MSCC. There is a need for one day per week of resource to support the Board. Currently both the NOC Association Steering Board and the MSCC are resourced by NOC. NOC is the only organisation that is supporting the MSCC although recently, NOC received some funding from Defra. NOC has also supported the Challenger Society in the past by providing the services of a member of the Directorate team. There should continue to be an AGM and two meetings per year. There is a role for strategy development and leadership for the NOC Association. AW added that the Challenger Society doesn't try to provide a leadership role as it is a scientific meeting. There are fewer big programmes like *Oceans 2025* and the community is more fractured and less coherent than it used to be. This may be why there has been a decline in the number of requests for expeditions.

## **Item 10 NERC Marine postgraduate studentships**

- 10.1 There have been no major changes. St Andrews has an allocation this time. Bristol's allocation has declined significantly and PL asked whether this had affected Exeter. AW confirmed that actually, Exeter has actually ended up

where it was before. SdM noted that PML has come down. Thus there hasn't been a big net change around the system as a whole, in terms of marine.

- 10.2 PL referred to the NERC news item on [Doctoral Training Partnerships 2](#) There are no obvious trends in marine. NERC did an analysis and designated which studentships were marine-orientated. Compared to the trend before the DTP, there's been a 'step down' which is concerning and should be monitored.

## **Item 11 Update on Compendium and IOC Global Ocean Science Report**

- 11.1 JP gave an update on progress with the Global Ocean Science Report and commented it had been difficult to get updated information from the community. Response from government bodies for data had been excellent. The closing date for submission was 18<sup>th</sup> November but unfortunately, the UK submission will have to be based on incomplete information.

## **Item 12 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

- 12.1 EH said that the [UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development](#) could be a key focus for the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. The MSCC had contacted EH with a request to initiate a meeting about the 'Decade'. The FCO have also asked about this. The NOC Association AGM is a good opportunity to discuss this. We should engage with the key players and see if a representative from the UN could join. We should also engage with the MSCC and UKRI. The meeting could focus on some of the key questions, e.g. what kind of research programmes could be built; how does the Decade fit with the new UK international ocean strategy? We need to try to plan what UK engagement will actually mean.

### 12.2 Potential topics:

- The Geospatial Commission. The Commission has a strong terrestrial focus and the UK Hydrographic Office is the only marine representative. We should invite the UKHO representative.
- Overview of the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology (MASTS)
- Eddystone Institute? This topic was subsequently rejected.
- The South Coast Marine Cluster. PML has received European funding for [OceansGate](#) which is being developed. SdM could give a talk on this – "The Plymouth Scene"
- Brexit and marine science in the UK
- Future Earth...SCOR? This topic was subsequently rejected.

### 12.3 Potential invitees

- Dr Thérèse Coffey, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

- FCO Minister, Chair of the Ocean Strategy Group
- Representatives from NERC and UKRI
- Professor Tim Wheeler, UKRI
- UKHO representative on Geospatial Commission

12.4 It was suggested to have a half day morning of Association business followed by an afternoon that would set the scene for the 'Decade'. There could be a science discussion on the morning of the next day that could focus on what the UK can contribute. If we opt for this, there could be a dinner on the evening before, for a small group, who would start the flow of ideas. The AGM should be held in London and EH favoured Central Hall, Westminster.

### 12.5 Draft AGM Agenda – 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Morning	NOC Association business
Afternoon <b>Presentations</b>	The Decade – Setting the Scene Overview from representative from the IOC The UK perspective Structural talk one about the Decade Structural talk two about the Decade Science presentation one Science presentation two Discussion

The afternoon could be joint with the *Challenger Society*. RU to suggest this to the next *Challenger Society*. **Action: RU**

Dinner                      Small group to initiate ideas

10<sup>th</sup> May 2019              Possible morning for follow-on discussion

Need to ensure there is no overlap with Coastal Futures programme. Next MSCC meeting is on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2019 and is an opportunity to raise this. We should make it clear that this is an open meeting and source a venue that could hold up to 100 people for a full day meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019. MS advised that MRC can cater so this option should be checked. **Actions: PL/EH/Secretary**

12.6 The Steering Board will meet on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019. If other members are not available on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> from the Board, the Secretary should issue a Doodle Poll for alternative dates. **Action: Secretary**

### Actions

Point	Action	Who
2.1	Advise minute corrections to Secretary	PL
3.5	Write letter to Chair of CPEB about position on ship-time	PL

4.1	Raise issue of interaction between NOC Association and the Challenger Society	RU
4.3	Send link on previous AGMs to RU	JP
4.3	Update PL with feedback from Challenger Society meeting	RU
5.2	Circulate Royal Society report on Oceans to the Board	JP
5.3	Circulate details of MFAB to the Board	JP
7.1	Complete actions on new membership of the new NOC Association Steering Board	JP
7.2	Note recommendations for future engagement with the community, for future Board meetings.	PL/JP
12.5	Draft agenda for AGM	PL/EH/JP
12.5	Check with Challenger Society on joint afternoon for the AGM	RU
12.6	Check dates for the AGM and Steering Board suit the whole Board membership. If not, arrange Doodle Poll.	JP