

FMRI Science Advisory Group

Terms of Reference

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1. Context

This document sets out the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Future Marine Research Infrastructure (FMRI) Science Advisory Group. These ToR form part of the wider Governance Arrangements for the FMRI Programme.

2. Obligations and Remit

2.1 Role of the SAG

The role of the SAG is to provide the expert, independent, and timely strategic science advice and input on behalf of the research community to the FMRI Programme Leadership Team and FMRI Board.

The SAG will:

- a. Advise the FMRI Programme Leadership Team and FMRI Board regarding the scientific aspects of the Programme, seeking to maximise the benefits for the entire science community by ensuring that future capability aligns to current and expected future demands for oceanographic research and innovation across all disciplines.
- b. Highlight opportunities for complementarity with other initiatives, both nationally and internationally.
- c. Act as a channel for engagement between the wider science community and the FMRI Programme, including proactively raising community views.
- d. Provide any other such advice and support as may be reasonably requested by the FMRI Programme Leadership Team and the Board.

2.2 Responsibilities of SAG Members

Individual members of the SAG commit to:

- Maintain an understanding of the Programme, its objectives, and NERC marine science priorities, facilitated by timely and proportionate information sharing on progress of the Programme.
- Undertake the necessary review and horizon scanning activities to allow the SAG to provide informed scientific advice.
- Where necessary, seek additional advice from, and opinions of, the science community and other stakeholders to provide scientific advice that covers the full range of marine specialisms and is representative of the widest views of the community.

- Provide advice and recommendations in an independent and objective way, on behalf of the community and without prejudice to any future personal involvement in the Programme.
- Provide scientific advice with due consideration of sustainability, responsible research and EDI, complementing the [UKRI Sustainability Strategy](#), the [NERC Responsible Business Statement](#) and [UKRI EDI policy/guidance](#).
- Read SAG papers and prepare for SAG meetings so that these are constructive and efficient.
- Accept actions relevant to their own areas in support of the SAG's collective responsibilities.

2.3 Scope of the SAG

The SAG is an advisory body that will submit general observations and recommendations to the Programme Leadership Team and the Board. The scope of the SAG remit will vary through the life of the Programme in response to the current needs of the Programme Leadership Team and the Board. The SAG will not consider the delivery of individual FMRI projects / work packages once they are initiated except to address specific questions posed by the Programme Leadership Team.

3. Membership

FMRI SAG will include representatives from a wide-range of appropriate scientific and technical specialities, to ensure its advice is well-rounded.

SAG will include the most appropriate experts (i.e. those experts that are best placed to provide high quality, trusted and well-respected strategic advice).

SAG membership should have the right mix of:

- Expertise (i.e., appropriate knowledge of the group's remit, practical understanding of the area and its challenges, understanding of regulatory frameworks, etc.)
- Personal attributes (i.e., the ability to contribute to quality decision-making, history of constructive collaboration, integrity, etc.)
- Various career stages that would enable different viewpoints contributing to constructive discussions
- Ability to represent the marine scientific and/or technical community, visibility, and the ability to remain engaged and participate responsively and constructively over the term of the appointment.

The Membership of the FMRI SAG will comprise:

- a. Chair: The Chair is nominated by the SRO. The Chair shall preside over every meeting. The Chair will sit on the FMRI Board as a member to represent the SAG's advice and views and provide a link between the Board and SAG.
- b. Co-Chair: The Co-Chair will be nominated by the Chair and agreed by the SAG by simple majority. They will act as the Chair's designated alternate where required.
- c. Ordinary Members: The SAG must represent a broad range of expertise and experience relevant to the breadth of the programme. Membership of the SAG may evolve in accordance with the requirements of the Programme.
- d. Ex-Officio Members: Will comprise the SRO, Lead Scientist and UKRI staff. They will not have voting rights but may contribute to discussions.

Members are expected to conduct themselves in a way that ensures that UKRI's business is carried out efficiently and effectively and to adhere to the highest standards of professional and ethical practice, as outlined in the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#).

Members may serve for up to five years. Members of the SAG may resign their positions at any time by submitting notification in writing to the Chair with a copy to the Secretariat.

Due to the longevity of the FMRI programme, new perspectives may be required through the recruitment of new members. This can either be done through temporary co-option of specific expertise, at the discretion of the Co-Chairs, or via recruitment for a longer-term commitment.

4. Ways of Working

4.1 Overview

SAG Meetings

SAG meetings will be scheduled where possible to take place several weeks in advance of FMRI Board meetings, to ensure that SAG's advice can be considered and acted upon in developing decision points for the FMRI Board. This will be roughly three meetings per year.

Members are expected to prioritise SAG meetings wherever possible. Should two or more of the meetings be missed within a year, NERC reserve the right to ask a member to step down.

The SAG will undertake its collective responsibilities by SAG members independently considering questions/materials set by the Chair and participating in a SAG meeting to reach a consensus recommendation.

The SAG will not meet in the absence of the Chair or Co-Chair except to address an urgent matter at the request of the FMRI Programme Leadership Team. In the latter case, the Secretariat may nominate another ordinary member of the SAG to chair the session.

As the SAG is not a decision-making body, there is no requirement for a quorum provided that there is useful representation.

Extraordinary Advice

The SAG may be requested to provide advice at short notice that cannot be delayed until the next meeting. In such cases, the Secretariat will ask SAG members to provide written advice to the Chair or Co-Chair who will prepare a consolidated summary.

Task Groups

For activities which require specific, targeted consultation or collaboration, the SAG may, with the agreement of the FMRI Programme Leadership Team, establish a Task Group to solicit additional advice and opinion from the community. The Chair or Co-Chair will nominate a member of the SAG to lead any Task Group that may be formed. The Task Group may include members of the SAG and, with the approval of the Chair or Co-Chair, additional members proposed by the Task Group lead. Task Groups will be facilitated by the Secretariat. Any cost implications must be authorised in advance by the PgD.

Secretariat

NERC will provide the SAG with a Secretariat that will support the Chair and Co-Chair, specifically advising them on key issues and being responsible for the day-to-day management of the SAG, including making practical arrangements for meetings, maintaining a forward plan of agenda items and liaising with the Chair and Co-Chair to prepare agendas and prepare, check and issue accurate meeting notes.

SAG meetings will be conducted in accordance with the following principles:

- The agenda and supporting documents will be circulated by the Secretariat at least 10 working days in advance of the meeting.
- Unless there is a clear justification for an in-person meeting, sessions of the SAG will be held virtually (Zoom) to minimise the Programme's carbon footprint.
- Meetings will be arranged and facilitated by the Secretariat provided by the NERC Research Capital and Place team.
- Members may be asked to read and comment on papers prior to meetings, or be prepared to discuss at the meeting, and confirm minutes following a meeting. Comments may also be sought from members that are not be able to attend a meeting.
- The Secretariat will circulate minutes of the meeting within 10 working days and any corrections must be proposed in writing to the Secretariat within 10 working days of their distribution after which time they will be considered approved.
- Where comments are requested from members either following a meeting, or outside a meeting (and falling outside of Extraordinary Advice), 10 working days will be given for responses.

4.2 Agenda

The forward agenda plan for the SAG will be determined by the Chair and Co-Chair through consultation with the Programme Leadership Team and, where necessary, the FMRI Board Secretariat. It will be prepared and distributed by the FMRI SAG Secretariat.

4.3 Confidentiality

To provide input and expertise, the SAG may be given access to confidential information. Members understand that the loss or inadvertent disclosure of such information might harm the interests of the person and/or organisation to whom it belongs, and/or the Programme. Where confidential documents are provided to the SAG, these will be clearly marked, and confidentiality must be respected on these occasions.

4.4 Conflicts of Interest

Members of the SAG each agree to uphold the highest values of ethical behaviour and to declare any conflict of interest at the earliest opportunity.

Every member must submit to the Secretariat a full declaration of any interests that could affect, or be perceived to affect, the independence and impartiality of the SAG. Members consent to their interests being recorded in a Register of Interests maintained by NERC. This register may be shared with the PgD and/or published.

Declarations of interest will be a standing item on the agenda at the beginning of each meeting of the SAG. If at any point in the meeting another conflict of interest becomes apparent, it is the responsibility of the SAG member to declare this immediately. It is the responsibility of the Chair to determine what action, if any, should be taken. If the Chair has a conflict of interest, the decision will be taken by the Secretariat.

Potential actions include:

- i. The member may be asked to withdraw from the meeting for the duration of discussion of the agenda item in question.
- ii. The member may continue to participate in the discussion but will recuse themselves from participation in the final decision-making process.
- iii. The member may continue to contribute as normal.

Declared conflicts of interest and actions taken will be recorded in the minutes.

4.5 Expenses

In the event of an in-person meeting, travel and subsistence on NERC business will be paid in line with the limits set down by [UK Research and Innovation](#).

No fee is available for meeting attendance.

5. Review of ToR

This document will be reviewed when required, taking account of NERC governance, policy and strategy. The current version of the ToR is taken to be that held by the FMRI SAG Secretariat.