

SMMR – Notification of Intent to Submit (NoIS) Summary Generic Feedback to Applicants



The SMMR Programme has stimulated considerable interest across the research community with 70 NoIS being submitted. If most are developed into full proposals, then the anticipated success rate would be less than 10%.

Following discussion on the NoIS at a recent SMMR Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) meeting, the following Statement has been provided by Professor Sir Ian Boyd (Chair of the SAG) and Professor Colin Moffat:

“The Science Advisory Group (SAG) for the programme sees inter-disciplinary research as a crucial feature of the programme. All the themes will require an appropriate blend of social and natural science to meet the need to support policy outcomes and this is especially so for Themes 1 and 3. The SAG, therefore, advises all applicants to construct their proposals with these needs uppermost in their thinking. There is a need for this programme to break new ground when it comes to understanding how marine resources are used, how their use can be managed in future and what policies are needed to deliver good outcomes. The SAG believes that this topic can only be studied through considering both sides of this problem – the drivers of resource availability and the drivers of resource consumption, and by engaging with the policy community.”

Based on advice received from the SAG, the SMMR Programme Board would like to make it clear their expectation is that to meet programme requirements, most, if not all, modules within final proposals should be truly interdisciplinary with an explicit mixture of natural and socio-economic research.

Overview of the 70 NoIS

Table 1 provides summary statistics on the NoIS. The range and quality of NoIS was variable, some reflecting greater maturity in proposal development with some clearly acting as place markers. A total of 70 NoIS were submitted of which 69 were from eligible bodies. Applications were received from 43 different lead organisations and included ~500 named researchers. There was an even spread of projects across the Theme areas of interest with the majority of applications stating they were addressing all three Themes. The majority of applicants (60) requested assistance in liaising with policy stakeholders.

Subjective categorisation of the primary subject areas addressed by the NoIS is provided (Table 2). Natural capital, fisheries, marine management and marine spatial planning were strongly represented. In some areas, there were broad overlaps between subjects with multiple NoIS addressing similar categories. Further subjective sub-categorisation of the NoIS (Table 3) provided a general guide to the areas being addressed. As the categorisation were very subjective, different interpretations are possible.

Table 1. Summary

Total Nols	70
Total Lead HEIs	62
Total Lead PSRE	6
Total Lead IRO	1
Total Lead Industry	1
Theme 1	60
Theme 2	57
Theme 3	65
All Themes	42
Two Themes	28
Assistance with Policy Makers	60
Assistance with Academic Partners	28
Different Lead organisations	43
Named researchers	497

Table 2. Subjective Subject Categories

Subject_Category	% Total (Rounded to nearest %)
Natural capital projects	15
Fisheries projects	11
Marine management projects	11
Marine Spatial Planning projects	9
Aquaculture projects	8
Pollution projects	8
Terrestrial marine interface projects	8
Governance projects	6
Coastal communities projects	5
Cultural heritage projects	3
Marine management and conservation projects	3
Socio-ecology projects	3
Coastal erosion projects	2
Coastal resilience projects	2
Fisheries and Aquaculture projects	2
Habitat restoration projects	2
Marine Protected Areas projects	2
Policy development projects	2
Stakeholder engagement projects	2

Table 3. NoIS Sorted by main subjective categories and subcategories

Subject_Category	Subject_Sub-Category (where possible to define)
Aquaculture	Algae
Aquaculture	Habitat restoration
Aquaculture	Health and Welfare
Aquaculture	Health and welfare
Aquaculture	Shellfish
Coastal communities	Recreation
Coastal communities	Socio ecological
Coastal communities	Socio ecological
Coastal erosion	Coastal communities
Coastal resilience	
Cultural Heritage	Marine conservation
Cultural Heritage	Marine management
Fisheries	Conservation and management
Fisheries	Governance
Fisheries	Shellfish
Fisheries	Shellfish
Fisheries	Shellfish
Fisheries	Spatial management
Fisheries	
Fisheries and Aquaculture	Marine management
Governance	Marine management
Governance	Socio ecological
Governance	
Governance	Offshore wind
Habitat restoration	Conservation and management
Marine management	Climate change
Marine management	Modelling
Marine management	Ocean literacy
Marine management	Socio ecological
Marine management	Socio ecological
Marine management	
Marine management	
Marine management and conservation	Marine mammals
Marine management and conservation	Offshore wind
Marine Protected Areas	Marine management and conservation
Marine Spatial Planning	Climate change
Marine Spatial Planning	Human health and wellbeing
Marine Spatial Planning	Socio ecological
Marine Spatial Planning	
Marine Spatial Planning	
Marine Spatial Planning	
Natural capital	Marine management

Natural capital	Marine management
Natural capital	Blue carbon
Natural capital	Marine management
Natural capital	Marine planning
Natural capital	Marine Planning
Natural capital	Marine planning
Natural capital	Socio ecological
Natural capital	Terrestrial marine interface
Natural capital	Terrestrial marine interface
Policy development	Marine governance
Pollution	General impacts
Pollution	Nitrogen
Pollution	Noise
Pollution	Plastics
Pollution	Chemical
Socio ecology	Climate change
Socio ecology	
Stakeholder engagement	Marine management
Terrestrial marine interface	Remote sensing
Terrestrial marine interface	Socio ecological
Terrestrial marine interface	Habitat enhancement
Terrestrial marine interface	Human health and wellbeing
Terrestrial marine interface	

Policy Stakeholder Feedback

A total of 8 Policy stakeholders representing Defra, Marine Scotland, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive were asked to provide general and proposal specific feedback on the NoIS. These stakeholders were, as far as possible, nominated by their respective organisations on the basis that they would be able to provide feedback relevant to the interests of their organisations and not just their own specialisms. The stakeholders were required to abide by a confidentiality agreement and were therefore not at liberty to share the NoIS, but they were able to seek advice from relevant colleagues where appropriate. The following is a collation of the general feedback received from these stakeholders.

NoIS specific feedback, where provided, will be returned to the respective applicants only. Feedback is in some cases limited and this may not necessarily be a reflection of disinterest on the part of the Policy stakeholders, but it may be that it is provided in the generic feedback or the insufficient information has been provided in the NoIS upon which to provide coherent feedback. The Champions have also added some additional observations based on a general overview of all NoIS.

Around 45 of NoIS were considered by Policy Stakeholder responders from Defra, Marine Scotland and Welsh Government to address areas relevant to their priorities and that fitted with the purpose of the SMMR Programme. We are awaiting feedback from Northern Ireland and this will be added to the generic feedback in due course as required.

Of ~45 NoIS that were relevant to Policy Stakeholder priorities, ~ 35 NoIS were considered by Defra and Marine Scotland align with their policy objectives. This figure was significantly lower for Welsh Government.

Generic feedback points, including perceived weaknesses that may need to be addressed when full proposals are developed:

1. Overall the policy stakeholders were pleased by the number and scope of proposals submitted.
2. Several proposals stood out and some others with a bit more clarity could deliver some really interesting and useful work.
3. There are some proposals that may fit with some Policy Stakeholder priorities, but they do not necessarily meet the interdisciplinary criteria for the SMMR Programme.
4. Some NoIS appeared to lack social science integrated into the proposed project.
5. Many of the project summaries lack specificity on exactly what outputs would be produced and how they can be applied for policy decision making. E.g. what would be delivered, at what point in the decision making process would it be applicable (local, regional, national, planning or application?), how it would support decision making (predictive scenarios?), and how interventions can be tested / demonstrated / monitored for effectiveness (e.g. case studies, adaptive management).
6. Most projects did not consider how uncertainty in outputs would be managed and translated in a useful way for decision makers and public understanding.
7. Whilst not all Themes need to be addressed in any given proposal, Theme 1 (understanding value systems) felt like it was 'tacked on' to some proposals rather than fully considered and integrated into the project and outcomes.
8. Projects lacked a full consideration of social value systems, which should feed into future policy to improve the marine environment and achieve net gain across social, economic and environmental metrics. For example:
 - a. Social capital - what is the value of e.g. industry, fishing, conservation to culture and identity?
 - b. Resilience of coastal communities - how vulnerable are communities to change (e.g. climate change, decline in fishing, change in main sources of income) and how can resilience be increased in the future?
 - c. Ensuring a just transition - making sure vulnerable groups are not disproportionately affected by changes/policies that are brought in.
 - d. Well-being economy - how can this be integrated into larger blue economy initiatives/modelling?
 - e. What are the priorities in communities about the future of their communities? And, how can this feed into policy decision making?
9. It would have been good to see more projects consider how best to engage with the public and interactions/engagement between policy, industry and the public in order to help people understand why decisions are being made, to support localised decision making, and understand how to build national priorities based around local priorities.
10. Projects tended to be England focused and would benefit by strengthening relevance to other parts of the UK, such as using case studies from across the UK and different communities (e.g. mainland vs island, applicability of interventions across devolved nations). For example, many projects had approached DEFRA and MMO but not Marine Scotland or Marine Scotland Science.

11. Projects that focused on a particular area (e.g. aquaculture) missed opportunities to consider how outcomes can feed into bigger policy initiatives such as blue economy, carbon capture, net gains etc. for decision making.
12. The projects with more advanced social science and interdisciplinary approaches appear more mature.
13. The use of academic and specialist language can be a barrier to interdisciplinary working and also communication with Policy Stakeholders. The clarity and accessibility of the language across fields needs to be carefully considered by all applicants.
14. Recognition of language used in existing policies and frameworks is helpful as these are familiar to policy makers and would help achieve their buy-in.
15. Proposals are likely to be reviewed by academics and experts from a range of backgrounds including social and economics specialists, natural scientists and those who may have been researchers but now work in relevant policy areas.
16. Tables 2 and 3 provide an indication of where there is potential overlap between proposals. Applicants developing proposals in these areas should recognise that if the SMMR Programme as a whole is only going to fund 6 projects, the likelihood of multiple projects in similar subject areas being supported is small.
17. There may be potential for some applicants to consider joining forces where there are clear synergies, but it will be for the applicants to explore this potential within their networks.
18. Although not a requirement and in some cases impractical, there are proposals that could potentially be of interest to policy stakeholders in different administrations, if it could be shown how the geographic scope or output from the project could be expanded across other parts of the UK.
19. Given the budgetary limitations on projects of £1.5m, some of the proposed project consortia seem to be very extensive and whether this is realistic needs to be considered.

Next Steps

All consortia that submitted NoIS will receive the project specific Policy stakeholder feedback provided to the Champions. Please reflect on the feedback in this document together with any project specific feedback before contacting the Champions with respect to seeking further Policy stakeholder feedback. There are likely to be a number of applicants seeking advice and support and the Champions will, as far as possible, address these requests in a timely manner, either by email or, if appropriate, through online discussions. Specific requests for further Policy stakeholder feedback should be sent to the Champions by email and they will field these requests to the relevant Policy stakeholder contact. Any Policy stakeholder response to the Champions will then be forwarded to the originator of the request. All generic information and feedback will continue to be shared with all applicants through the SMMR website (<https://www.smmr.org.uk/>). Proposal specific advice and feedback will be treated as confidential.

Please do not contact Policy stakeholders directly as it is important that all applicants have the opportunity to seek advice in a consistent and transparent manner.

If you are still seeking project partners within specific disciplines, please contact the Champions and we will make every effort to assist in strengthening your interdisciplinary team. Some applicants, after reflecting upon the feedback on their NoIS, may wish to consider joining with other project consortia. The Champions are happy to discuss this on a case by case basis with individual PIs who indicate to the Champions that they are open to this approach.

The deadline for the submission of full proposals is **16.00 on 6 October 2020**.