

Research Vessel Capacity – National Task Team

Objective: MEOPAR is committed to promoting a nationally coordinated approach to planning of Canada's seagoing research infrastructure i.e. research vessels. In order to move forward, MEOPAR is establishing a Task Team to help collate ideas and identify information needs and opportunities for research vessel capacity across Canada and across disciplines.

The Task Team will look at needs and opportunities for meeting immediate and future research vessel capacity needs in Canada, focusing especially on larger vessels suitable for offshore use but also considering coastal vessel capacity, and including consideration of the needs of users in academia and the private sector as well as government.

Background: Canadian ocean research is suffering from a lack of available research ship time. A recent report¹, commissioned by the Marine Environmental Observation, Prediction and Response Network (MEOPAR), outlines a serious gap between the amount of time researchers need to spend at sea and the availability of vessels that can be used to investigate Canada's vast ocean spaces.

While historically most ocean research took place on ships owned and operated by the federal government, Canada's ocean research capacity is limited by a rapidly aging and overextended fleet, with the already-limited ship time reduced further as vessels require extended maintenance or are retired from service. A program to replace the aging, government-managed fleet exists, but has been designed primarily with government's needs in mind and will not increase capacity or available days at sea for the Canadian research community and their students.

An opportunity exists now to address the need for vessel capacity for research through a national collaborative process based on cooperation and a willingness to do things differently than in the past. Such national-level processes are already implemented in several countries worldwide².

Membership: The Task Team membership is aimed at being broadly representative of the key players in the ocean research sector in Canada. Members have been selected because of their

¹ Assessment of Needs and Opportunities for Research Vessel Use in Atlantic Canada.
http://meopar.ca/uploads/MEOPAR_RV_needs_assessment_report_Final.pdf

² In France, research fleet planning and operations are coordinated nationally by Ifremer; <https://www.ifremer.fr/en/Research-Technology/Research-Infrastructures/Large-Research-Infrastructure-Flotte-oceanographique-francaise>; In Germany, a centralized process for shiptime applications and evaluation has been established, <https://www.portal-forschungsschiffe.de/en/start>, with long-term planning evaluated by the Wissenschaftsrat and based on community-wide planning. In the UK, a Marine Science Coordination Committee was established to assess needs, capacity and operations of research vessels (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263736/Research-Vessel-assessment.pdf)

understanding of current and future research vessel needs in Canada. Two members with experience of strategic planning of research vessel needs and operations in other countries are included. Membership will be adjusted, as needed, to accommodate particular requirements of the subject matter or strategic direction of the Task Team.

Roles and Responsibilities: The Task team will be responsible for developing a vision for the medium to long-term (5-20 years) future of Canada's vessel needs for coastal and offshore research, while proposing practical solutions to address the immediate research vessel capacity crisis. Specific tasks may include the following, as determined by the Task Team and available resources:

1. Ensure that the needs and interests of various ship-user communities are heard, including those who might potentially want to propose and lead research cruises in the future;
2. Act as resource for vessel operators, government agencies and research organizations to access information about needs and opportunities for ship-based, coastal and offshore research across Canada;
3. Consider and evaluate the potential, in terms of efficiency and innovation, of multi-disciplinary vessel infrastructure that can support research into the ocean, marine atmosphere and seafloor;
4. Consider and anticipate future needs and priorities of different science communities and advise on development of a concept for design, acquisition and management of Canada's sea-going infrastructure;
5. Help liaise and coordinate as necessary with relevant authorities, committees, task forces, networks and research stakeholders, including national and international organizations; and
6. Provide continuing advice to government and research funders on the planning of activities that can appropriately address the issue of research vessel capacity in Canada.

Meeting Frequency & Time Commitments:

- Participation will be primarily via tele or videoconference, 3-4 times per year
- Task team members will contribute to an issue white paper and asked to write a paragraph or two
- Discipline representatives will be asked to consult with their peers to ensure information is broad-based and complete
- One writing workshop or community-facing workshop may be required.

Secretariat: MEOPAR will provide overall coordination and support, ensuring that meetings are convened and well-prepared.